

READING GROUP
GUIDE

Boys I Know

by Anna Gracia

ABOUT THE BOOK

A high school senior navigates messy boys and messier relationships in this biting funny and much-needed look into the overlap of Asian American identity and teen sexuality.

June Chu is the “just good enough” girl. Good enough to line the shelves with a slew of third-place trophies and steal secret kisses from her AP Bio partner, Rhys. But not good enough to meet literally any of her Taiwanese mother’s unrelenting expectations or to get Rhys to commit to anything beyond a well-timed joke. While June’s mother insists she follow in her (perfect) sister’s footsteps and get a (full-ride) violin scholarship to Northwestern (to study premed), June doesn’t see the point in trying too hard if she’s destined to fall short anyway. Instead, she focuses her efforts on making her relationship with Rhys “official.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- June says that her mom seems to have a sixth sense about her. What are some direct quotes or scenes from the novel that illustrate her mother’s sense of June? How does June react to these moments? Discuss how June and her mother (and perhaps yourself) each show and process love.
- Contrast June and Wendy and their definition of what constitutes being “cool.” Discuss how June and Wendy’s parents’ expectations impact them both similarly and differently. How does this play out in the relationship between the sisters?
- The search for identity is a major theme in the book. How do Mrs. Chu’s constantly recited proverbs affect June, and how does her attitude toward them change throughout the book? What are some other examples of the divide between June’s first generation parents and her second generation experience?
- June and Rhys are partners in AP biology. Describe their relationship outside of school and how it might be misinterpreted by each of them. Why do they struggle to communicate with each other?
- What goes wrong for June at the cabin? Explain what June means, “Rhys and I were like a river with no source or a tree with no roots.” (p. 90) Why is she desperate to have a physical connection with Rhys?
- Discuss whether June “hooks up” with Brad because of what happened with Rhys. How does Brad react when June wants to go to Planned Parenthood for the morning after pill? Is his reaction justified? Why or why not? Why does it drive a wedge between the two of them?

- There are times that June doubts herself. Discuss her fear of not measuring up to her sister. June says, “I was terrified of wanting—of earnestly pursuing something only to watch myself fail.” (p. 274) Discuss the moment she overcomes her terror and begins to see a path forward.
- June agrees to a weekend in Washington over the Lunar New Year. How does she become enchanted by Gang, a Chinese piano student? How does she react when she learns that he has a girlfriend in China, and that they plan to be married one day? Does she have regrets about meeting him?
- What is June’s hesitation in choosing a college? Why does she have such a difficult time imagining herself somewhere new, even as she actively searches for it? Is this a common experience or is there a cultural aspect to it? How much say should parents have in where their kids go to college?
- Explain the following metaphor: “It was like I was a prisoner, chained to my instrument against my will, then being charged for the privilege of owning it.” (p. 75) Why does her mother feel compelled to point out how much her violin costs? At what point does June begin to realize that music is her ticket out of Iowa?
- What happens when June auditions for college in Washington? Discuss the praise she receives from the music director for experimenting with the music. Why is this important to her and how does it affect her going forward?
- Mrs. Chu wants June to follow in Wendy’s footsteps and attend Northwestern. June decides to chart her own course and accepts a full scholarship to a college in Washington. Discuss her mother’s reaction to this news and how it helps June better come to terms with her family dynamic.

ABOUT THE CREATOR

Photo Credit: Anna Gracia



Anna Gracia grew up biracial in the Midwest, spending her formative years repeatedly answering the question, “What are you?” Before finding her way as a YA author, she was a CPA, a public school teacher, a tennis coach, and for one glorious summer, a waitress at a pie shop. She now lives on the West Coast, raising three kids and writing stories about girls navigating a world full of double standards.