

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Celeste Ng is the author of two novels, *Everything I Never Told You* and *Little Fires Everywhere*.

Her first novel, *Everything I Never Told You* (2014), was a New York Times bestseller, a New York Times Notable Book of 2014, Amazon's #1 Best Book of 2014, and named a best book of the year by over a dozen publications. *Everything I Never Told You* was also the winner of the Massachusetts Book Award, the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature, and the ALA's Alex Award. It has been translated into over thirty languages and is being adapted for the screen.

Celeste's second novel, *Little Fires Everywhere* (2017) was a #1 New York Times bestseller, a #1 Indie Next bestseller, and Amazon's Best Fiction Book of 2017. It was named a best book of the year by over 25 publications, the winner of the Ohioana Award and the Goodreads Readers Choice Award 2017 in Fiction, and has spent over a year on the New York Times bestseller list. *Little Fires Everywhere* has been published abroad in more than 30 languages and has been adapted as a limited series on Hulu, starring Reese Witherspoon and Kerry Washington.

Celeste grew up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Shaker Heights, Ohio. She graduated from Harvard University and earned an MFA from the University of Michigan (now the Helen Zell Writers' Program at the University of Michigan). Her fiction and essays have appeared in the New York Times, The Guardian, and many other publications, and she is a recipient of the Pushcart Prize, a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, and a Guggenheim Fellowship, among other honors. "Celeste Ng."

– Author's website

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Shaker Heights is almost another character in the novel. Do you believe that "the best communities are planned"? Why or why not?
2. There are many different kinds of mother-daughter relationships in the novel. Which ones did you find most compelling? Do mothers have a unique ability to spark fires, for good and ill, in us?

3. Which of the Richardson children is most changed by the events of the novel? How do you think this time ultimately changes Lexie's life? Trip's? Moody's? Izzy's?
4. The debate over the fate of May Ling/Mirabelle is multilayered and heartbreaking. Who do you think should raise her?
5. How is motherhood defined throughout the book? How do choice, opportunity, and circumstances impact different characters' approach to motherhood?
6. Mia's journey to becoming an artist is almost a beautiful novella of its own. Mia's art clearly has the power to change lives. What piece of art has shaped your life in an important way?
7. Pearl has led a singular life before arriving in Shaker, but once she meets the Richardsons, she has the chance to become a "normal" teenager. Is that a good thing?
8. What ultimately bothers Elena most about Mia?
9. The novel begins with a great conflagration, but its conclusion is even more devastating. What do you think happens to Elena after the novel ends? To Mia and Pearl? To Izzy? Do you think Izzy ever returns to Shaker and her family? Why or why not?
10. Celeste Ng is noted for her ability to shift between the perspectives of different characters in her work. How does that choice shape the reader's experience of the novel?
11. We see how race and class underline the experiences of all the characters and how they interact with each other. In what ways are attitudes toward race and class different and the same today as in the late 1990s, when the book is set?
12. Izzy chooses "This Be the Verse" to sum up her life. Is what the poem says accurate, in the context of Izzy's experience?
13. What does the title mean to you? What about the book's dedication?

- <https://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/fiction/11085-little-fires-everywhere-ng?start=3>

## BOOK REVIEWS

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### Booklist

\*Starred Review\* Shaker Heights, Ohio, is a by-the-books kind of town. Longtime residents know the well-established rules of conduct. Newcomers, such as itinerant artist Mia Warren and her teenage daughter, Pearl, must find out for themselves what is acceptable and what is not. Renting an apartment from city-native Elena Richardson should give Mia and Pearl a leg up. Instead, it throws them into the midst of a fraught custody battle concerning a Chinese American baby; engenders fierce rivalries between brothers Moody and Trip Richardson for Pearl's attention; and

casts Mia as the unlikely confidant of the Richardson daughters, popular Lexie and outcast Izzy. There are secrets upon secrets within the families: Mia's past is hidden from Pearl, just as Pearl conceals her love affair with Trip. Lexie's abortion must be kept from her family, while only Izzy knows the subterfuge her mother is using to undermine Mia and Pearl's happiness. Ng's stunning second novel is a multilayered examination of how identities are forged and maintained, how families are formed and friendships tested, and how the notion of motherhood is far more fluid than bloodlines would suggest. Ng's debut, *Everything I Never Told You* (2015), was a book-group staple. Laden with themes of loyalty and betrayal, honesty and trust, her latest tour de force should prove no less popular.--Haggas, Carol Copyright 2017 Booklist

### **Publisher's Weekly**

This novel from Ng (*Everything I Never Told You*) is both an intricate and captivating portrait of an eerily perfect suburban town with its dark undertones not-quite-hidden from view and a powerful and suspenseful novel about motherhood. When the eccentric and itinerant artist Mia Warren and her 15-year-old daughter, Pearl, move into a rental house in Shaker Heights, Ohio, one summer, neither they nor their more conventional, affluent landlords, the Richardsons, have any reason to anticipate how dangerously enmeshed the two families will become. Before long, Pearl, enthralled by her first shot at a "normal" life, is spending every day with three of the four Richardson children, Lexie, Moody, and Trip, finding a best friend, a suitor, and a lover in turn. Meanwhile, Isabelle, the youngest Richardson teenager, starts heading over to see Mia, offering to work as her assistant but really looking for an escape. As both Mrs. Richardson and Mia Warren overstep their boundaries, Ng explores the complexities of adoption, surrogacy, abortion, privacy, and class, questioning all the while who earns, who claims, and who loses the right to be called a mother. This is an impressive accomplishment. Agent: Julie Barer, the Book Group. (Sept.) © Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved.

### **Library Journal**

The morning after Mia and daughter Pearl return the rental key in the Richardsons' mailbox, the youngest Richardson, Izzy, sets "little fires everywhere," destroying the family home. Following her magnificent debut, *Everything I Never Told You*, Ng's spectacular sophomore work again manipulates time (revealing the implosions backward) and perspectives (privileging the reader through multiple narrators). In Shaker Heights, OH, a pristine suburb where "there were rules, many rules," wealthy wife and mother of four Elena Richardson writes "terribly nice" articles for the local paper. Her tenants, Mia and Pearl, nomads who finally plan to "stay put," are soon integrated into the Richardsons' sprawling lives: teenager Pearl becomes like a fifth child, artist Mia something more than a part-time housekeeper. When Elena's close friend adopts an abandoned Chinese baby whose birth mother's return causes a community rift over custody, Elena and Mia find themselves on polarizing sides. "Everything beautiful and perfect on the outside" crumbles, observes Izzy, the family's barometer of truth about identity, parent/child bonds, and most of all, love. The consequences will be devastating and illuminating. VERDICT Shaker Heights native Ng writes what she knows into a magnificent, multilayered epic that's perfect for eager readers and destined for major award lists. [See Prepub Alert, 3/27/17.]-Terry Hong, Smithsonian BookDragon, Washington, DC © Copyright 2017. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

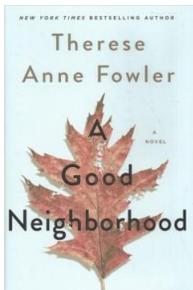
## READALIKES

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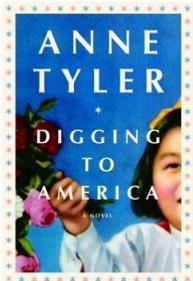
### ***Ask Again Yes* by Mary Beth Keane**

A profoundly moving novel about two neighboring families in a suburban town, the friendship between their children, a tragedy that reverberates over four decades, and the power of forgiveness.



### ***A Good Neighborhood* by Therese Anne Fowler**

The single mother of a mixed-race college student and a thriving business owner with a troubled daughter clash over a historic oak tree on their property line and the blossoming romance between their children.



### ***Digging to America* by Anne Tyler**

A chance encounter between two families--the Donaldsons, and the Iranian-born Yasdans--at the Baltimore airport, as both couples await the arrival of an adopted daughter from Korea, prompts an examination about what it means to be an American while the lives of the two families intertwine over the years.