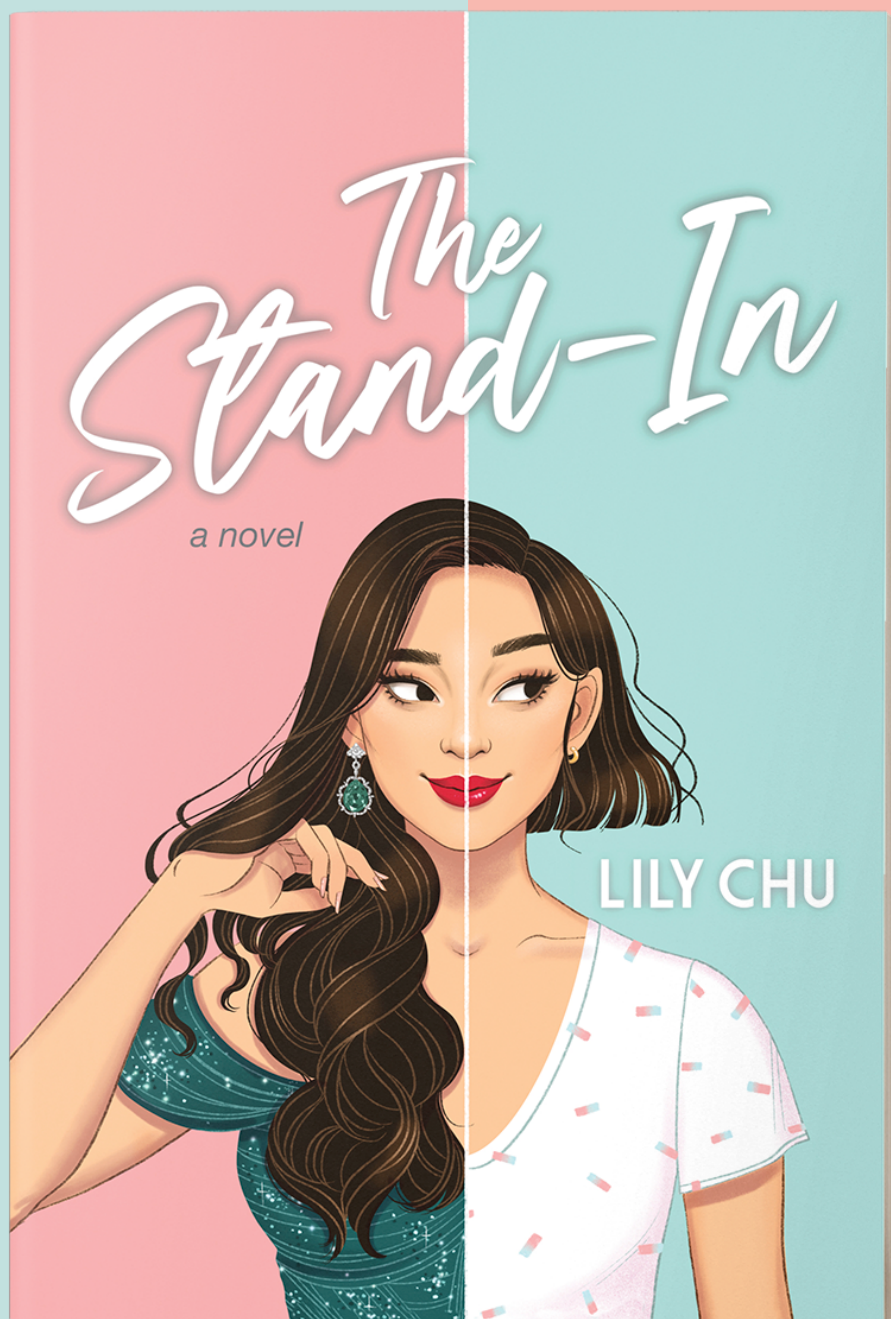


# Reading Group Guide



sourcebooks  
casablanca

# Reading Group Guide

1. Gracie is biracial and at times struggles with other people's perception of what that means. What preconceptions do you think you have about biracial identity, or what do you see in the media? How do you react when people discuss experiences that may not be familiar to you?
2. The author is also biracial. How much of an author's experience do you think is incorporated into a book? Would you feel differently about a book if the author is writing about an experience they have not had first-hand?
3. Gracie has a particular fondness for lists and organizational methods. Is this something you find useful in your own life? Which of the various methods Gracie explores would you most be interested in trying?
4. Gracie and Sam's mothers have different philosophical approaches to life: one cautious and one assertive. How has this impacted Gracie and Sam?
5. Why do you think it was so important for Gracie to get her mother into Xin Guang? What would you be willing to do in Gracie's place?
6. Gracie finds a moment of empowerment when she ditches her attempts to blend in and chooses her own specific power red lipstick—a shade distinct from Fangli's. Is there a personal token (whether it's makeup or some other item) that makes you feel powerful? What do you think it is that gives you that feeling?
7. If you were going to be mistaken for a celebrity—and then step into their life for a week—who would you want it to be? Why? Who would you least like to trade lives with?
8. Fangli reveals that she was discouraged from seeking help for her depression. Why was that? What do you think would have happened if she'd sought help anyway? Can you think of any moments in your or others' lives where mental health stigma kept you/others from seeking help?
9. Gracie is thrust into a far more glamorous life than she's ever known before. If you found yourself in her situation, what's the #1 luxury you'd most enjoy?
10. Gracie initially felt powerless in the face of her boss, Todd. What do you think was keeping her from facing him down?? What did you think of their final confrontation and the realization that he didn't have any power over her?

11. Sam clearly envies Gracie's ability to live a normal life without the eyes of the world on her. How do you think you would handle being famous? Would the trade-of luxury vs. loss of privacy be worth it?

12. Everyone assumes Sam and Fangli are either a couple or certain to become one someday. If you were in Gracie's position, would you feel jealous knowing so many people considered them endgame?

13. Gracie has to go through a lot of training and research to become Fangli. Do you think you would be able to convincingly pretend to be someone else for a few months?

14 Gracie and Fangli discover that the reason they look so alike is because they are sisters. Would you be able to forgive your parents for hiding a secret like that from you? If you were in Fangli's situation, would you be able to forgive your mother for leaving?

15. Gracie and Fangli's mother was put in an impossible situation when she realized she was pregnant with her second child, thanks to the one-child policy. Women's reproductive choices have often been politicized and controlled. This has put women around the world in impossible positions. What do you think the impact has been and how can women resist?

16. Why do you think Mei did what she did? Would you have been able to forgive her?

17. Gracie long wished for an organizational method that actually met her needs and, finally, decided to create one herself—becoming a huge success in the process. Is there a similar kind of problem in your life that needs solving, and what steps do you think you'd need to take to create your own kind of Eppy.

18. The future looks bright for Gracie, Sam, and Fangli, but there's a long road ahead of them. What do you think is in store for them? How will Sam's complicated relationship with his parents play into their future?

*The  
Stand-In*

# A Conversation with the Author

## **What was the inspiration for *The Stand-In*? What did you draw on as you developed the story?**

I wanted to write a book featuring a biracial main character who has similar experiences as I have. I also wanted to address issues that I think are important, namely questions of identity, love and friendship, and mental health.

On the lighter side, I wanted to create a fun, entertaining story as an escape for readers, like an emotional spa day. *The Stand-In* was written in the early months of the pandemic, so this became increasingly significant as I looked for a place to retreat from reality.

## **What comes first for you: the plot or the characters? Why?**

I usually get a plot idea based on a what-if scenario, and it evolves from there. In this case, I wondered: What if a woman was approached to be a celebrity double? What would she do? What kind of woman would say yes, and what would motivate her to agree? I then create the plot and characters at the same time, which means I go back often to check to see if my characters have had fundamental changes that need to be rethreaded through the draft.

## **Did anything about the story (characters, plot, etc.) significantly change from your first draft?**

Many things changed! I first planned *The Stand-In* with chapters that alternated between Sam and Gracie. The first chapter had Sam on a movie set dealing with his overbearing mother, when a very clueless Gracie walked through as they film. But that didn't feel right because I wanted more intimacy between the reader and the story. The next version was all from Gracie's point of view, but Fangli and Sam were there to film a corporate action spy movie instead of acting in a play. But in every draft, the characters remained who they are. They're the core of the story.

## **What is the most valuable piece of writing advice you've received?**

Of the very many pieces of writing advice I've heard over the years, the one that I come back to the most is that there is no such thing as perfect—there's only the best you can do right now. It's important to recognize that as you grow and learn, your writing will (hopefully) improve. I try to apply this to my non-writing life as well.

Oh, and don't read reviews. That's solid advice.

## **What are some of your favorite moments in the book? Are there any particular characters or situations that you most identify with or that were the most fun to write?**

I'm a huge fan of makeover moments, particularly if it's a montage set to a classic 1980s song. Although it doesn't have a soundtrack in the book, the most fun scenes to write were the ones where Gracie is exploring her new luxurious world. Even though I dress for comfort (read: sweatpants) I'd kill to have a walk-in closet filled with designer clothes like Gracie has in her hotel room. I'd just stand in the closet and admire them.



**What was the hardest scene to write?**

Spoiler alert, but I'm going to assume if you're reading this, you've finished the book. The hardest scene to write was Gracie's confrontation with Todd on the balcony. I personally wanted Todd to get a really brutal comeuppance, like a total knock-out. I also needed it to be realistic to Gracie's character. Balancing the two to make it emotionally satisfying took multiple rewrites.

**On its release as an audio original, there was an amazing response from listeners. What are some things fans of the story enjoyed that you were excited to see?**

I was thrilled at the response from readers. I was moved to see how many people resonated with the mental health themes of the book, and how the characters deal with it in their individual ways.

Mental health issues are still stigmatized, hidden or endured in isolation because people are ashamed to ask for help or scared to express their feelings. I'd love to see mental health discussions normalized and as a writer, the way I do this is through my characters. I wanted Gracie, Fangli, and Sam to represent how some people might approach those often incredibly important but difficult conversations.

**What was it like to first hear Phillipa Soo narrate the audiobook?**

It was extraordinary. A performance like Phillipa's brings an additional layer of brightness and depth to the characters. I have a huge amount of respect for her performance and gratitude for how careful she was in her interpretation of the text.

**You balanced social issues in this novel with humor and heart. Why did you feel it was important to push the boundaries of the traditional love story to include more complexity and nuance?**

Good characters have multi-faceted lives. They work, they have friends. They get overwhelmed by big problems and aggravated by small ones. It makes sense to me to reflect that in the story as well, since when we fall in love, we fall in love as whole people, bringing with us all of the intertwined joy and pain and confusion of our lives. Characters should, too.

**How did your own experience as a bicultural author inform your characters' stories? How else has your background and lived experience influenced your work? Are there any scenes that you pulled from real life?**

Experiences of racialized people depend on so many factors: family, gender, geography, dominant culture, and ethnic background being only a few. But at the same time, I think there are common moments for many of us. Straddling two cultures shapes how we perceive our identity, the world, and our place in it. There are definitely some elements of real-life reflected in Gracie's story. Her attempt to learn Chinese is identical to my own. I use an app, too!

**What are you hoping readers will walk away from your book thinking about or talking about?**

I hope there are enough elements that will resonate with different readers. Some may wish there's a real Eppy app available (I do) or come away finally feeling seen in a book that features characters like them. My overall goal was that people could lose themselves in a different world for a few enjoyable hours. If I achieved that, I'm happy.

**There is a lot about family and how that is defined in the book. Why did you want to tackle that issue?**

I like to write multi-dimensional characters and family is a huge component of who we are and how we're shaped as people. To have a story without family, or that didn't incorporate the impacts of family, both good and bad, would be like having a sandwich with- out bread.

**What do you think are the most important elements of good writing/storytelling?**

When I look back at stories I've enjoyed versus stories I've adored, the main difference is that the enjoyable stories have had strong plot or strong character elements. The incredible ones have had both. Having that mix, and then layering on themes and threading through motifs build stories that people want to keep reading.

**If you were to write a spin-off about a secondary character, who would it be?**

Wei Fangli. We're not all movie stars, but I think most people can relate to her longing for connection, her battle with balancing her professional and personal lives, and her struggles with coping with her mental health. She's a very rich character who I could see going in many different directions.

**What can we expect from you next?**

My next book is another rom-com that tells the story of an ambitious lawyer who falls in love with a K-pop idol. It was a huge amount of fun to write, and I had the best time researching K-pop boy bands.

# The Eppy app

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DAILY LOG LINE **THE STAND-IN BY LILY CHU**

DAY TASKS MONTH TASKS

**WORK** ○ ○ ○

**LIFE** ○ ○ ○

**FUN** ○

**EVERYDAY** ○ ○

**DON'T THINK. DO.** ○ ○

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