



**Discussion Questions for  
TOFU QUILT**  
by Ching Yeung Russell

1. Ying spends a summer living with her uncle and cousins before she starts kindergarten. How old were you when you first spent time away from your parents? How did you feel about being away from home? What did the experience teach you?
2. In "A Bowl of *Dan Lai*," Ying says *dan lai* "looks like a big, round moon / has fallen into my bowl." What does one of your favorite foods look like? Can you come up with a simile to describe it?
3. What do you think *dan lai* tastes like? Try to describe the taste of *dan lai* by comparing it to a food you know.
4. In "Our Next-Door Neighbor Mrs. Ho," Mrs. Ho peeks into her neighbors' apartments at mealtimes. Why does she do this? What does the food the families eat indicate to Mrs. Ho? How do you think Ying's mother feels about Mrs. Ho and what she does?
5. What is a *kwailo*? What does the word mean? In "Thousands of Colorful Flags," do you think the tourist fits this definition? Why or why not?
6. Ying and her siblings laugh at the tourist photographing their laundry. Do tourists visit your hometown? What about them has surprised you?
7. In "Typhoon," why are Ying and her siblings happy about a high-level typhoon? How do they celebrate?
8. What is a tofu quilt? Why did Ying give it this name?

9. In “First Cup of Coffee,” when Ying tries her first cup of coffee, after begging to drink it for years, she discovers that she doesn’t like the taste. Has there been anything (a food or something else) you were excited to try, only to be disappointed when you did try it? What was it? How did you feel after trying it?
10. In “Mr. Wong’s Wonton Stand,” what does Mr. Wong do for Ying and her family? Why is it important to Ying?
11. What did Ying spend all her money on? Why? What did her friends think of her actions?
12. Why was Ying’s wish to become a writer so strange to Uncle Three? Find a passage in the book that shows how Uncle Three felt.
13. Ying was a good writer, and she dreamed about becoming a writer one day. What things are you good at? How do they relate to something you might want to be or do when you grow up?
14. Ying wishes that there were no math class, only reading class. Why? Find some passages in the poems that show how Ying felt about both subjects.
15. What happens to make Ying stop wishing to be a boy?
16. Ying grows up in Hong Kong in the 1960s. How is her life different from yours? How is it similar?
17. In the Author’s Note, Cheung Yeung Russell says, “Who would have thought that a person’s entire career could start with an innocent love of a dessert?” What does she mean by this? Look for places in the book that support this statement.
18. Why do you think Ching Yeung Russell chose to tell this story using poetry?

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Ching Yeung Russell** grew up in mainland China and Hong Kong. She began writing letters for her relatives at the age of eight and was inspired to become a writer by her desire to eat more *dan lai* (milk custard)—a special treat she was once rewarded with for reciting classical Chinese poetry. Russell is the author of a series of middle grade novels beginning with *First Apple*, winner of a Parents’ Choice Award and the New York State Reading Association’s Charlotte Award. She often travels in the United States and abroad to share her books with students. Russell lives in South Carolina with her husband, a social worker and avid photographer. They have two grown sons. Her Web site is [chingyeung.homestead.com](http://chingyeung.homestead.com).

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