

RETURN TO ME

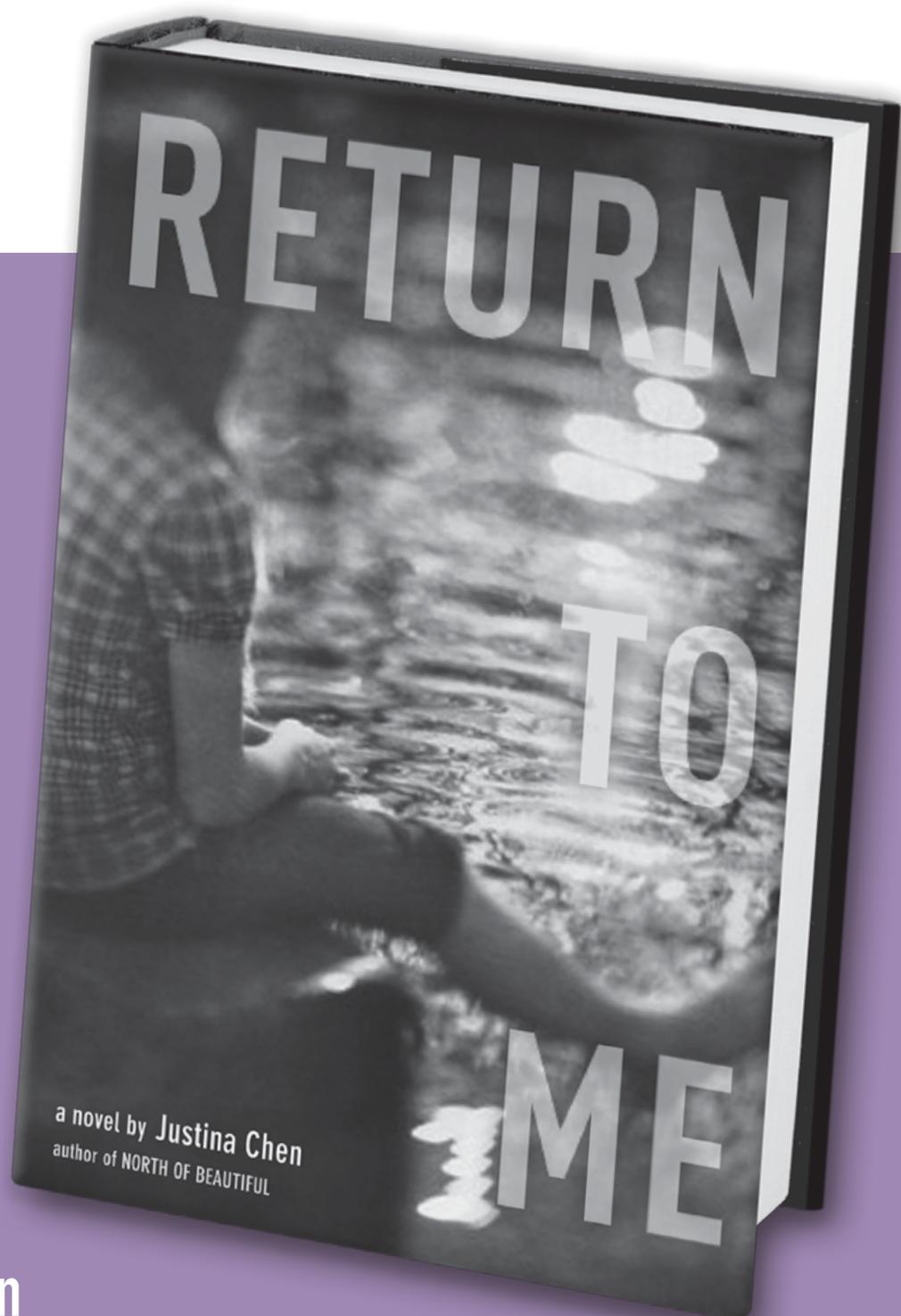
Curriculum connections

- ❖ Family
- ❖ Marriage
- ❖ Girls

Thematic connections

- ❖ Family Dynamics
- ❖ Relationships
- ❖ College and Career Planning

Ages: 12 & Up



by Justina Chen

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

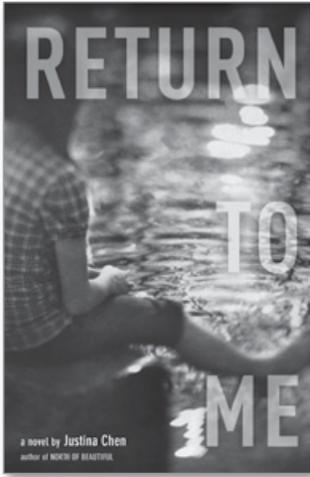
1. At the start of the novel, Reb is a self-proclaimed “Thom girl,” conspiring with her father against her mother. Describe how Reb views Elizabeth, including how she is physically characterized. To what extent has Reb’s father shaped this view of her? Identify several significant moments over the course of the novel that shift Reb’s perception of her mother. How is their relationship changed as a result?
2. Jackson’s personal motto is “ask for forgiveness, not permission.” How do you interpret this saying? Why does it upset Reb? Describe how her feelings about forgiveness change over the course of the novel. How does Grandpa George’s explanation of Hawaii’s ancient Places of Refuge influence this change? Do you think it’s wise to live by Jackson’s motto? Why or why not?
3. The dissolution of her parents’ marriage is told from Reb’s point of view; however, these events greatly impact her brother Reid as well. Imagine that Reid were the narrator. How would his age and gender affect the tone of the story? Considering his imaginative prowess, what additional story elements might you expect?
4. “If you cut a part of yourself off—especially to please someone else—do you think that you’re really being celebrated for who you are?” Grandma Stesha asks her granddaughter, called alternately Rebecca, Reb, and Rebel. Describe how each name makes Reb feel and how each plays a role in her attempt to please others. How does the name she ultimately embraces reflect her process of becoming “authentically [her] self”?
5. The theme of coming home is prominent as the novel moves from the Muirs’ home on Lewis Island to their new home in New Jersey, to their grandfather’s home on the Big Island. Compare and contrast how each setting affects Reb, who has a keen “ability to feel space.” How does the novel demonstrate that homecoming can be experienced in people as well as places?
6. How does her father’s behavior in relationships affect Reb’s view of her relationship with Jackson? Are her ensuing actions justified and to what extent do they mirror her father’s? What does this tell us about human nature after experiencing hurt and betrayal?

**“ASK FOR FORGIVENESS,
NOT PERMISSION.”**

7. Compare and contrast the characterizations of Peter Nakamura and Sam Stone. How do the architects' differing philosophies represent each side of Reb's internal conflict? How does each shape the career path on which Reb ultimately finds herself?
8. Reb struggles to accept her gift of intuition. What prompts her to begin to trust her instinct? How does "heeding [her] inner voice" affect the story? Would you consider Reb's inner voice a supernatural power? Have you had moments of intuition similar to Reb's and, if so, what do you make of them?
9. "Everywhere I looked, verdant green bloomed in lavish defiance of the very real, very persistent volcanic threat underneath us." Explain the symbolic significance of the landscape on the Big Island. What does it teach Reb about the aftermaths of devastation in her own life?
10. Reread the epigraphs dividing the book into four parts. How does each architectural quotation speak to the section of the book it precedes? Do you believe that architecture, the art of designing and building structures, is an apt metaphor for life? Explain your thinking.
11. Keeping in mind the relationship Reb and the women in her family have with water, study the cover of *Return to Me*. What is the mood evoked by the image? What is the significance of this image to the meaning of the novel as a whole?
12. What was your initial interpretation of the title *Return to Me*? After finishing the novel, what additional meaning does the title have for you?
13. *Return to Me* is largely about discovering your calling: "when what you love intersects with what you're good at." Take some time to ponder: where do your passion and power collide?

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LAVISH DEFIANCE
OF THE VERY REAL,
VERY PERSISTENT
VOLCANIC THREAT
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about the book



RETURN TO ME by Justina Chen

HC 978-0-316-10255-1

Daddy's girl Rebecca Muir has long known exactly what she wants to do after high school: attend the prestigious architecture program at Columbia University, 3000 miles away from her home. But as the end of school nears, things are no longer so clear cut—she's just fallen in love with the perfect guy, Jackson; her dad has gotten a new job in New York, so her whole family is following her to the east coast; and she's having trouble ignoring her premonition that something terrible is coming.

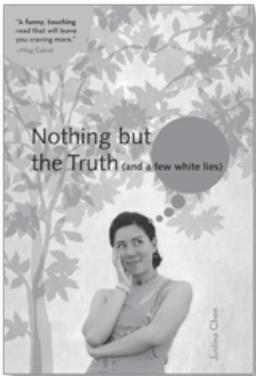
And it soon becomes clear why: shortly after the move, her father reveals that he's leaving them, and Rebecca is left to pick up the pieces of her former life. When everything can change in an instant, Reb doesn't know what path to follow or whom to trust—and she must begin to search for what she *really* wants to do with her life.

about the author



Justina Chen is the author of three young adult novels, including *North of Beautiful*, which received three starred reviews, and *Nothing but the Truth (and a few white lies)*, which won the 2007 Asian Pacific American Award for Youth Literature. She is a co-founder of *readergirlz*, the online book community for teens, and lives in the Seattle area with her two children.

also by Justina Chen



Nothing but the Truth (and a few white lies)

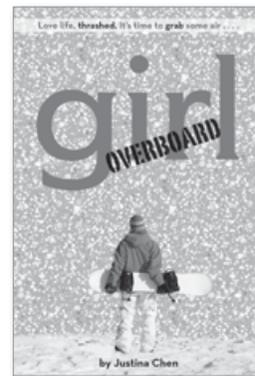
PB 978-0-316-01131-0



North of Beautiful

PB 978-0-316-02506-5

HC 978-0-316-02505-8



Girl Overboard

PB 978-0-316-01129-7

★ “Finely crafted,
artfully written.”

—Booklist

★ “Witty, intimate novel.”

—Publishers Weekly

★ “A tale that will stand out
in the crowd.” —Publishers Weekly



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