

study guide for Patricia Park's novel *Re Jane* (2015)

1. Pay attention to **firsts**: the first time we or the narrator, Jane Re, encounters a new place and the first time we or Jane meet a new character. How does Park handle these firsts, these **introductions**?

**NYC/Queens--Flushing (718 Gates St & Food); Astoria (917 Helen St)**

Uncle Sang

Aunt Hannah

Mary

George

Workers and shoppers at Sang's store, Food

Eunice Oh and Jane's other friends from Flushing

Re Myungsun (Jane's grandfather visiting from Seoul)

**NYC/Brooklyn (646 Thorn St)**

Ed Farley

Beth Mazer

Devon Xaiu Nu Mazer-Farley

Nina Scagliano

Sam Surati

**Korea--Seoul (Gangnum, Zenith Academy, Itaewon) and Busan**

Emo

Big Uncle

Changoon/Chandler

Monica

Rachel

2. Notice what Jane **learns** from these characters. Notice how her perception of them and her relationship with many of them **changes** throughout the novel. What do these changes reveal about Jane? How do they contribute to the novel's themes? How do your perceptions of other characters compare to Jane's? How and why do your perceptions change as the novel progresses?

3. Early in the novel, Jane defines a word that appears throughout the text, the Korean word *nunchi*: "the ability to read a situation and anticipate how you were expected to behave" (5). Her friend Eunice Oh has a complex attitude toward *nunchi*. She believes that it can cause you to worry about making social missteps and that it can help you get your way. As the novel progresses, what else does the author reveal or ask about *nunchi*? How does the novel's stance

toward this concept compare to your own? Is there a single English word that conveys the concept of *nunchi*?

4. Another important Korean word that gets defined in the first chapter is *tap-tap-hae*: “an overwhelming discomfort pressing down on you physically, psychologically” (8). Throughout the novel, what seems to cause Jane to feel *tap-tap-hae*? How does she cope with it? What is its importance?

5. In the opening chapters, what do we learn about Jane’s parents and their history? How does this knowledge impact Jane and her self-concept?

6. What does the chart on page 24 reveal about Jane? How does it impact you as a reader?

7. How does Jane compare the world of Sang and Flushing with the world of Brooklyn and the Mazer-Farleys? How do these comparisons impact Jane? What do they tell us about her?

8. What other **comparisons** does Jane make throughout the novel? What is their significance? What comparisons does Park the author invite us, as readers, to make? When, if ever, do your comparisons differ from Jane’s?

9. Sang’s grocery store is named Food. It plays an important role in the novel, as does **food** with a lower case f, cooking, eating, and restaurants. Keep track of the many times they are depicted and consider what Park is attempting to convey with all these portraits of food.

10. What is a primer? What do you make of the fact that the word appears in the titles of Chapters 6 and 7?

11. In Chapter 8, Jane states that Sang and Hannah have “*jung* for each other—a deep-seated regard” (85). She also defines *jung* as a bond that formed equally between a mother and her child, a student and his beloved mentor, a woman and the dreadful mother-in-law she grows to cherish over time” (86). At this point in the novel, does Jane have *jung* with any of the other characters? Or is she on her way toward developing *jung* with any of them? Why or why not?

12. What is the significance of the events that occur the night Jane goes out in Chapter 9?

13. What do you make of Jane’s decision at the end of Ch 10? What does this decision reveal about her? How does it impact her?

14. What do you make of Jane’s decision to go to Korea? What does she mean when she says, “I came back to atone” (134).

15. What are some of Jane’s other important **decisions**? What do they say about her? How do they impact her? Contribute to the novel’s themes?

16. Why does Park include 9/11 in the novel? How does it impact Jane?
17. In Korea, Jane learns a new word, *gyopo*, which refers to “a Korean raised overseas” (153). How does this word impact her? How does her sense of belonging in Korea compare to her sense of belonging in New York City?
18. In Chapter 16, Emo and Big Uncle discuss *Don't Throw Me Away and Leave Me*, a soap opera that asks whether you should follow your head or your heart (what is more important, duty or passion?). These questions are two of the major themes in *Jane Eyre* (1847), the classic Charlotte Bronte novel that Park reimagines in *Re Jane*. How does Park's novel explore or answer these questions?
19. If you've read Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, what do you see as some of the other significant ways that Park reimagines Bronte's novel? How does knowledge of Bronte's novel impact your understanding and interpretation of Park's? What does Park's novel imply about Bronte's?
20. How does Jane's relationship with Changoon compare to her relationship with Ed?
21. How does Nina's visit to Seoul impact Jane?
22. While in Korea, what does Jane learn about her parents? How does this knowledge impact her?
23. Why does Jane decide to return to NYC? What does this decision reveal about her?
24. At the end of Chapter 25, consider Jane and Ed's conversation about his dissertation. How does it relate to other parts of the novel?
25. Which events in the novel's final chapters and epilogue seem especially important to Jane's growth and the novel's themes?
26. Park's novel starts and ends with the English word *home*. The Epilogue ends with the Korean word *jung*—a Korean word that is explored throughout the novel, like *nunchi* and *tap-tap-hae*. What do you make of these word patterns?