Discussion Questions

1. How do you think the letters, the photos, and the slips of paper work together or against each other in *Dear Memory*?

2. In “Dear Grandmother,” Chang writes “That is what Mother feels like: an enormity. My history feels even larger. The size of an atmosphere.” (6) What is the significance of Chang writing about her mother to her grandmother? Where else can you feel the generational ties and struggles in the book?

3. As the child of immigrants, Chang expresses shame for lost moments and pride for her heritage. How do these juxtaposing feelings appear in the chapters? In the photo and poem collages?

4. Memory acts as an antidote to silence in the collection, but memory can also fuel grief: “Memory isn’t something that blooms but something that bleeds internally, something to be stopped.” (49) Can memories reclaim what’s lost? What happens as our memories shift and change? As Chang ponders, “I wonder how memory can become larger and larger.” (22)

5. “Poets live between a fire and great fire” Chang writes (37). How does Chang’s work as a poet shape your experience reading *Dear Memory*? Which lines of prose read like poetry to you?

6. “You meant for me to listen to the questions and into the absence” Chang writes to a former teacher (59). What role do questions play in *Dear Memory* as a work of nonfiction, a genre fit for giving answers?

7. “Maybe we inherit generations of shame. Of trauma. Of silence. Even of joy.” (71). Where do you see expressions of shame, trauma, silence, and joy throughout the collection?

8. Chang writes several “Dear Daughter” chapters detailing her own struggles with assimilation and racism. How do her hopes and promises for the future cut through these stories?

9. How would you describe Chang’s journey throughout the book or the arc of memory and silence? Do you think Chang’s perspectives changed as she wrote?

10. What memories do you hold dearly in your family? Do you have the privilege of saved family photos and documents?

11. How does Chang reclaim and reinvent the letter-writing format? Which letters are more traditional? More experimental?

12. Who do you wish you could write a letter to and why? What do you wish you could say to or ask them?
Reading Reflections

VICTORIA CHANG is the author of Dear Memory. Her poetry books include OBIT, Barbie Chang, The Boss, Salvinia Molesta, and Circle. OBIT received the Los Angeles Times Book Prize, the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, and the PEN Voeckler Award; it was also a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Prize and the Griffin Poetry Prize, and was long-listed for the National Book Award. She is also the author of a children’s picture book, Is Mommy?, illustrated by Marla Frazee and named a New York Times Notable Book, and a middle grade novel, Love, Love. She has received a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Sustainable Arts Foundation Fellowship, the Poetry Society of America’s Alice Fay Di Castagnola Award, a Pushcart Prize, a Lannan Residency Fellowship, and a Katherine Min MacDowell Colony Fellowship. She lives in Los Angeles and is the program chair of Antioch University’s low-residency MFA program.

Tell us about your book club or classroom! Email Shannon at shannon_blackmer@milkweed.org to share your group’s experience with this Readers Guide.