

Rebecca F. Kuang is the #1 *New York Times* and #1 *Sunday Times* bestselling author of the *Poppy War* trilogy, *Babel: An Arcane History*, *Yellowface*, and *Katabasis* (forthcoming). Her work has won the Nebula, Locus, Crawford, and British Book Awards. She has been named to the 2023 Time100 Next list and the Forbes 30 Under 30 Class of 2024. A Marshall Scholar, she has an MPhil in Chinese Studies from Cambridge and an MSc in Contemporary Chinese Studies from Oxford. She is now pursuing a PhD in East Asian Languages and Literatures at Yale, where she studies Sinophone literature and Asian American literature.



R. F. Kuang

About the Author

From the 1967 essay by French literary theorist Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author” questions how the author’s identity and biography are relevant to the text.

- What does “death of the author” mean to you and do you agree or disagree?
- How does the author’s identity and life story impact your interpretation of a text?
- Does it make a difference if the author is alive or dead?

June feels betrayed by Athena, who wrote a story about a traumatic experience she suffered in college.

- Do you believe Athena’s actions were inappropriate?

American journalist and best-selling author Robert Kolker’s article, “Who Is the Bad Art Friend? (2021)” sparks inquiries into the ethical consideration surrounding publication of fiction directly inspired by another individual’s life.

- What obligations do authors bear towards individuals who serve as inspiration for their stories? Are there any obligations at all?
- Is there a valid argument for determining whether someone possesses the right to narrate a particular story? How do we differentiate between this and censorship?
- What defines “poor” literary portrayal? What defines the “damage” caused by inadequate literary representation?

June’s anxiety regarding her writing career largely stems from her paranoia about how fellow authors perceive her and measure up against her. Irish novelist and short story writer John Banville once offered the following advice to other writers, “I remind them, as gently as I can, that they are on their own, with no help available anywhere.”

- Does writing inherently require solitude?

Discussion questions:

The text frequently references imagery related to masks and skin. June visualizes unzipping Athena’s skin and wearing it as her own. Examining recent movies such as *Get Out* (2017), directed by Jordan Peele, and *Avatar* (2009), directed by James Cameron, delves into varying levels of critical exploration regarding White inclination to assume different identities.

- In what manner does this trope stand out as significant in comprehending the process of racialization within our society?

June rationalizes completing Athena’s manuscript by asserting that it is more beneficial for her story to reach a wider audience than to remain unpublished or to be released in an incomplete state after Athena’s death.

- Do you agree or disagree?

June and Athena’s friendship seems to be defined by the way they constantly hurt each other.

- How do you define their relationship? Why do you think they keep seeing one another?

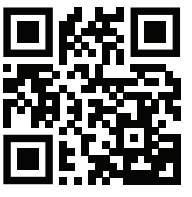
Athena, in numerous aspects, rebels against her established status as an Asian American author. She expresses frustrations about being pigeonholed and refuses advances from younger Asian American writers.

- What reasons might contribute to her feeling resentment toward her own community?



Kalamazoo
Public Library

Visit online



rfkuang.com



readingtogether.us

“Addictive and slightly sickening, like reading transcripts of someone else’s catty group chat, or watching *Succession*.”
—*The New York Times*

“Wickedly funny.”
—*The Guardian* (UK)

“At once a brilliant satire that mixes horror and humor; a nuanced exploration of race, heritage, identity, and diversity in publishing; and an honest look at the hell that is social media, this might just be Kuang’s best.”
—*The Boston Globe*

Book Discussions:

March 4

Parchment Comm. Library
6 pm | 401 S. Riverview Dr.

March 7

Portage District Library
7 pm | 300 Library Ln

March 12

Reading Race Book Group
6:30 pm | 315 S. Rose St.
Central: Board Room

March 15

Waldo Library
12 pm | 1090 Arcadia Loop
WMU Campus

March 20

Kalamazoo Institue of Arts
2 pm | 314 S. Park St.

Scheduled events were accurate at the time of printing, but changes are possible. Kindly verify details online at:

readingtogether.us



Events:

Cultural Appropriation vs. Cultural Appreciation

Feb. 28 | 6 pm

Central | Van Deusen Room | 315 S. Rose St.

Denise Miller, Nathan Nguyen, and Namita Sharma will share their experiences central to the plot of *Yellowface*. Moderated by Aimee Jachym, Miller Johnson.

Publishing from the Inside

March 6 | 6:30 pm

Virtual presentation | Online at readingtogether.us

Get an insider's view into the publishing industry with R.F. Kuang's agent Hannah Bowman, Liza Dawson Associates and others.

The Chinese American Experience

March 13 | 6:30 pm

Portage Zhang Senior Center | 203 E. Centre Ave.

Dr. Ying Zeng, Director of Asian Initiatives at the Haenicke Institute for Global Education of Western Michigan University, will provide historical context in this discussion of the Chinese American experience. In partnership with Portage District Library.

The Subtlety of Satire

March 19 | 6:30 pm

Central | Van Deusen Room | 315 S. Rose St.

Local author Andy Mozina, *Tandem*, *Contrary Motion*, *Quality Snacks*, will discuss satire in *Yellowface* and other works, and share writing techniques to try at home.

Yellowface Through an Ethic Lens

March 21 | 6:30 pm

Fetzer Center | WMU Campus | 2251 Business Court

This multidisciplinary panel discussion will explore major themes including personal responsibility, morally compromised cultures, and questionable social norms. Presented by the Center for the Study of Ethics in Society in partnership with University Libraries at Western Michigan University.

Meet the Author: R.F. Kuang

March 23 | 3 pm

Chenery Auditorium | 714 S. Westnedge Ave.

Join us to hear the author's prepared remarks, followed by an audience Q&A session and booksigning opportunity. Copies of *Yellowface* will be available for purchase from Michigan News Agency.

Kalamazoo Public Library would like to acknowledge the support and guidance of the following individuals and organizations that have participated in the selection and programming process for Reading Together 2024.

Zoey Blake
Nina Boismier
Sandra De La Cruz Tello
Vun Doubblestein
Theodore Gill
Lisa Godfrey
Asia Haywood
Caitlin Hoag
Aimee Jachym
Denise Miller

Andy Mozina
Nathan Nguyen
Pamela Rups
Namita Sharma
Sara Volmering
Sakhi Vyas
Sara Weyenberg
Karen Woodworth
Ying Zeng



WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
College of Arts and Sciences
Center for the Study of Ethics in Society



PARCHMENT
Community Library



WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
University Libraries



Portage District
LIBRARY



Thank you!

readingtogether.us



YELLOWFACE

2024
Reading
Together



Kalamazoo
Public Library