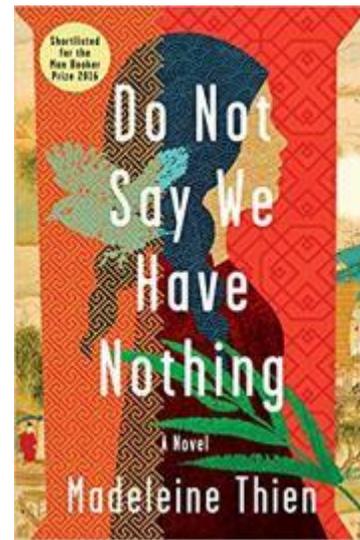


Journey Within the Pages

When there's a lull in travel plans, like say when I've just gone back to my job at a high school and I'm planning a wedding, my next best way to get out of my own experience and environment is to read. I don't need to read books about women like me—not only am I one, but I know a fair number more. I like reading about people whose experience is different from mine and places and times that are unfamiliar.

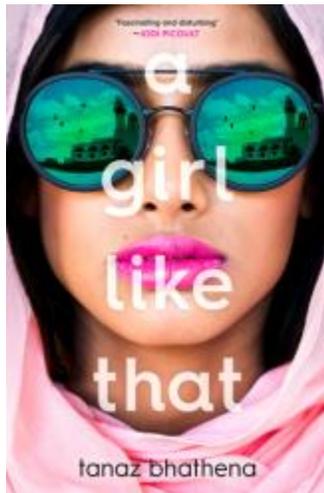
Right now, I am in the middle of “Do Not Say We Have Nothing,” by Madeleine Thien and “A Girl Like That” by Tanaz Bhathena. The Thien novel was short-listed for the Man Booker Prize in 2016, so if you like those selections, you will like this. It travels from the eyes of a young Chinese-American girl in recent-day Vancouver back through the Cultural Revolution to its far-reaching repercussions. I have been to China once, I suspect you could spend a lifetime in China and still feel you've barely scratched the surface. I like seeing things through the eyes of a woman—Li-Ling or her English name, Marie—remembering her 10-year-old self dealing with the suicide of her father, a classical musician who was treated as enemy of the people during the Cultural Revolution. Through family friend who briefly comes to live with her and her mother, Li-Ling begins to figure out her father's story and we experience the trauma of the Cultural Revolution. I am about third of the way through and whenever I pick this book up, I as though I am truly with Li-Ling on her journey.



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Because I work with teens, and try desperately to get them to read, I often read YA (young adult for those of you who don't know any) literature during the school year. “A Girl Like That” takes place in a South Asian community in Saudi Arabia. It begins when Zarin Wadia and a boy named Porus die in a car crash. No one is surprised because Zarin has a reputation as a bad girl. She was born in Mumbai to unmarried parents, one Parsi and one Hindu. Plus, her father was a gangster who disappears and then dies. When her mother dies, she is forced to live with her uncle and aunt. Zarin's background marks her from the start in the restrictive Saudi environment and she rebels. I'm only about 60 pages in, but the glimpse into a community I don't know much about and a girl's reaction to it, makes me feel like I'm not sitting in a classroom in suburban Chicago.

Sometimes, the journey happens all in your mind and on the page and that's OK. For a month or two, anyway.