

"Brimming with insights while being unputdownable and just plain fun. Simply brilliant!"

—David Yoon, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Frankly in Love*

IMPOSTER SYNDROME

*and other confessions
of Alejandra Kim*



PATRICIA PARK

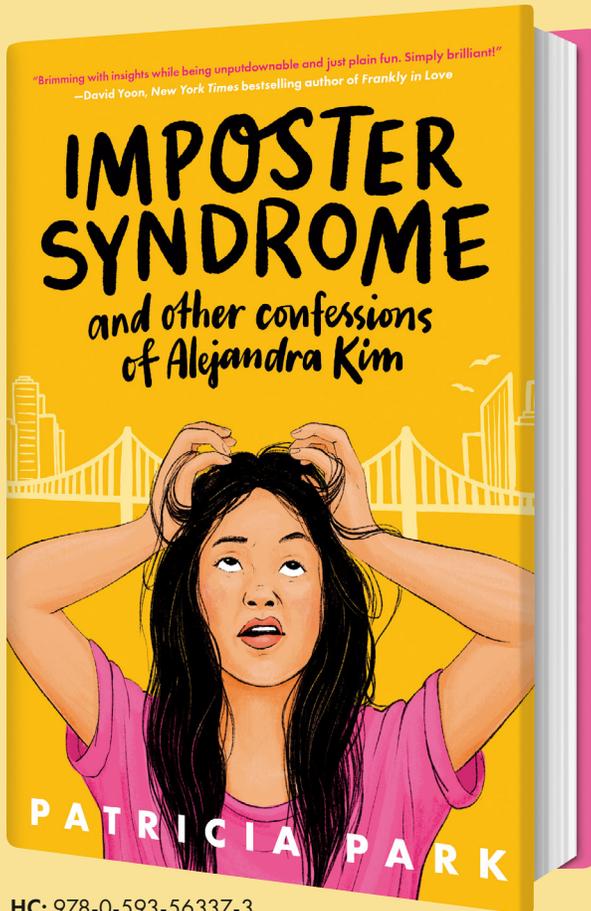
Discussion Guide

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CULTURAL DIVERSITY • CONTEMPORARY ISSUES/SOCIAL PROBLEMS
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About the Book

ALEJANDRA KIM

doesn't feel like she belongs anywhere. At her wealthy Manhattan high school, her súper Spanish name and súper Korean face do not compute to her mostly white "woke" classmates and teachers. In her Jackson Heights neighborhood, she's not Latinx enough. Even at home, Ale feels unwelcome. And things at home have only gotten worse since Papi's body was discovered on the subway tracks.

Ale wants nothing more than to escape the city for the wide-open spaces of the prestigious Wyder College. But when a microaggression at school thrusts Ale into the spotlight—and into a discussion she didn't ask for—Ale must discover what it means to carve out a space for yourself to belong.

About the Author

PATRICIA PARK

is an assistant professor of creative writing at American University, a Fulbright Scholar in Creative Arts, a Jerome Hill Artist Fellow, and the author of the acclaimed adult novel *Re Jane*. The Korean American reimaging of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* was named an Editors' Choice by the *New York Times Book Review*; a Best Book of 2015 by the American Library Association; an *O, The Oprah Magazine* pick; and an NPR "Fresh Air" pick, among other honors. Her writing has also appeared in the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, *Salon*, and others. Patricia lives in Brooklyn, NY, and online at patriciapark.com.



Pre-Reading

What is imposter syndrome? Who does it affect? How? Why? As a group, discuss the concept of imposter syndrome and the ways it can manifest and affect individuals.

Discussion Questions

1. How did Ale end up at Anne Austere Preparatory School, AKA Quaker Oats? What does she like about it? How does she hope it will affect her future? What are some of the difficulties it poses for her? Why has she stayed despite those difficulties?
2. Discuss differences between Ale's life at school and her life in Queens. How does school disconnect Ale from her life at home? Who is Billy, and how does he fit into her life? Talk about Ale and Billy's conversation about using the words *Spanish*, *Latino*, and *Latinx*. Discuss the idea of political correctness and how it affects Ale in different areas of her life. Why do you think the author included the anecdote about Mr. McFadden? (pp. 65–66)
3. Even though he has died, Papi is an important character in the novel. What did Ale love about him? How did he die? How do Ale and her mother differ in their beliefs about and attitudes toward his death? What are some hardships he faced?
4. Explain why Ale thinks, "In my family, immigration just seems to be the American dream killer." (p. 37) Talk about how their Korean background and appearance combined with the fact that they are from Argentina and speak Spanish affected her parents' lives. How does it affect Ale?
5. Ale has a complicated relationship with her mother. Talk about her mother's background and what her life is like during the novel. What does she hope for herself? What are her hopes for her daughter? How does their relationship change by the end of the story?
6. Why does Ale struggle to write her college essay? Compare her first attempt with what she ends up sending. How are they different? Which one do you prefer, and why? What made her change her approach?
7. Describe the friendship between Ale and Laurel. How did they become friends? What are some of the similarities between them? What are some differences? Why is Laurel so intent on going to Whyder, and how has that influenced Ale?
8. Why does Ale feel betrayed by Laurel at the Diversity Assembly? What is Laurel's college essay about, and how does Ale react when she finds out? What is an ally? Why does Dr. Van Cortlandt say that Laurel is the "text-book definition of an 'ally'"? (p. 86) Do you agree?
9. Who is Claire? What does Ale initially think about her? Why does Ale feel that they have so little in common? How does that change? What do you learn about their friendship in the final chapter?
10. Claire describes code-switching to Ale as "when you switch to a different language based on what culture you're surrounded by." (p. 132) Does Claire have to switch between home and school? Why? What are some of the ways that Ale has to code switch, and how does it impact her emotionally?
11. Who is Dr. C, and how does she end up at Ale's school? How does she influence Ale? Describe Ale's internship and why it matters to her. Discuss how the book's title is related to Dr. C's research. What effect does imposter syndrome have on Ale?
12. Why are college admissions so important at Ale's school? How do acceptances affect students' self-image and views of one another? Why does Ale want to go away to a small college rather than stay in New York City? How does Ale's visit to Whyder change her view?



Extension Activities

Threats and Boosts

Discuss Dr. C's explanation of "stereotype threat" and "stereotype boost." (pp. 134–135) What example does Ale give of a stereotype threat? What are some examples of stereotype boost? Ask students to complete the activity Dr. C assigns in chapter 18, noting what they put out and what they hold back as they move through the world and why. Students should consider how the expectations relate to their gender identity, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and other factors.

Fast-Forward Again

Ale ends her narrative by fast-forwarding five years, which gives a sense of what she chose to do after high school. Have students write an essay from Ale point of view in five more years. Letters should include what Ale has been doing in the preceding five years in terms of school or career, romance, friendships, living situation, and similar topics. What's happened to the important people in her life? What does she hope for next?



PRAISE FOR

IMPOSTER SYNDROME

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★ "Park's work paints an educational but entertaining portrait of what it is like to be a person of color in today's world. . . . A fantastic read."

—*School Library Journal*, starred review

★ "An entertaining, well-paced story. . . . Ale is a thoroughly appealing protagonist."

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

"Alejandra's powerful story will leave readers with much to think about."

—*The Horn Book*

Guide prepared by Kathleen Odean, a school librarian for more than fifteen years, who now presents workshops for educators on books for young people. She chaired the 2002 Newbery Award Committee.



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