

MICHIGAN HUMANITIES'
GREAT MICHIGAN READ

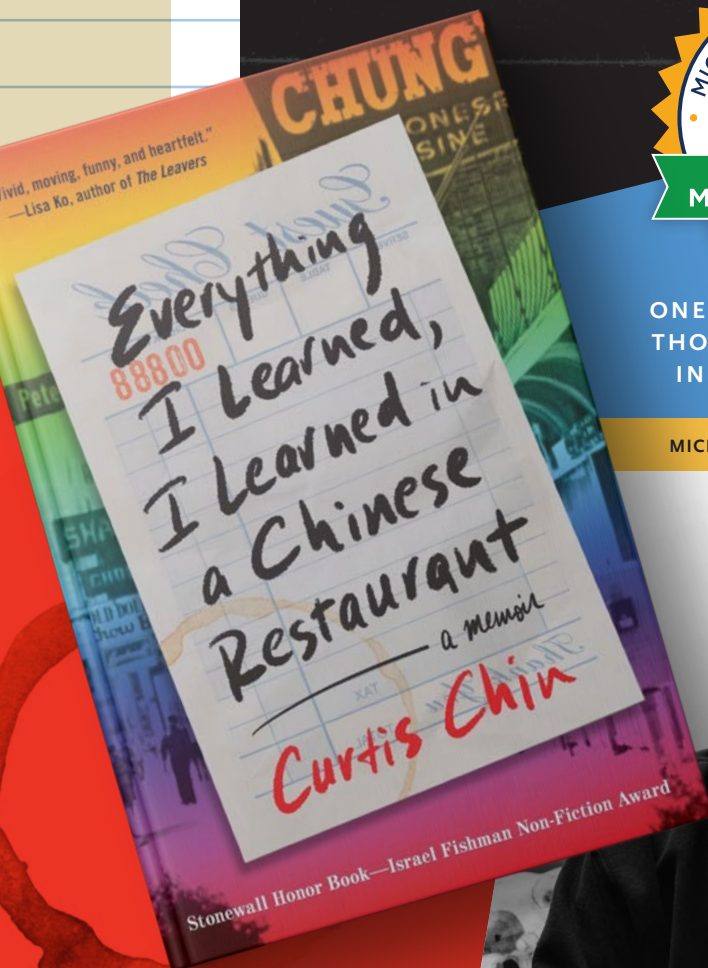
READER'S
Guide

2025-26



ONE TITLE. ONE STATE.
THOUSANDS ENGAGED
IN CONVERSATION.

MICHIGANHUMANITIES.ORG



WHAT IS THE GREAT MICHIGAN READ?

One title, one state, and thousands engaged in conversation.

Since 2007, the Great Michigan Read has bridged communities across the state with Michigan-based titles that spark dialogue among diverse perspectives, encourage a deeper understanding of the humanities, and connect tens of thousands of readers with authors and engaging educational programming. The 2025–26 title, *Everything I Learned, I Learned in a Chinese Restaurant* by Curtis Chin, is Michigan Humanities’ tenth Great Michigan Read and was selected in fall 2024 by seven regional selection committees representing the entire state of Michigan.

About *Everything I Learned, I Learned In A Chinese Restaurant*

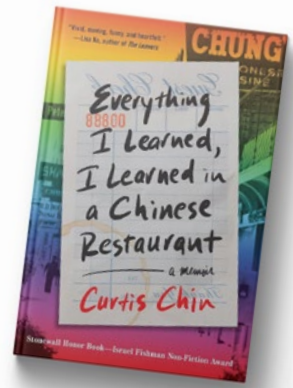
From publisher Little, Brown and Company:

“Nineteen eighties Detroit was a volatile place to live, but above the fray stood a safe haven: Chung’s Cantonese Cuisine, where anyone—from the city’s first Black mayor to the local drag queens, from a big-time Hollywood star to elderly Jewish couples—could sit down for a warm, home-cooked meal. Here was where, beneath a bright-red awning and surrounded by his multigenerational family, filmmaker and activist Curtis Chin came of age; where he learned to embrace his identity as a gay ABC, or American-born Chinese; where he navigated the divided city’s spiraling misfortunes; and where—between helpings of almond boneless chicken, sweet-and-sour pork, and some of his own, less-savory culinary concoctions—he realized just how much he had to offer to the world, to his beloved family, and to himself.

Served up by the cofounder of the Asian American Writers’ Workshop and structured around the very menu that graced the tables of Chung’s, *Everything I Learned, I Learned in a Chinese Restaurant* is both a memoir and an invitation: to step inside one boy’s childhood oasis, scoot into a vinyl booth, and grow up with him—and perhaps even share something off the secret menu.”



The 2025–26
Great Michigan
Read begins in fall
2025 and concludes
in August 2026.



HOW CAN I PARTICIPATE?

Find a copy of *Everything I Learned, I Learned in a Chinese Restaurant*, or a kit with multiple copies and supporting materials at a partnering location near you. Read the book, share and discuss it with your friends, and take part in Great Michigan Read events in your community. Register your library, high school, college or university, book club, or other organization as a lending or participating partner to receive copies of the book, educational and promotional materials, and program and funding opportunities.

For upcoming event dates, educational resources, and additional program details, visit michiganhumanities.org/great-michigan-read

Curtis Chin in conversation at a Michigan Humanities event.



Get Connected & Follow Us!

Find Michigan Humanities on social media and join the conversation!

#GreatMichiganRead
#MIHumanities



TAG US
AT YOUR
EVENT

TAG THE
AUTHOR
CURTIS
CHIN



SHARE
WITH
A FRIEND

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A SPECIAL THANKS

Michigan Humanities is grateful to the following individuals, groups, and organizations for their collaboration during the development of the 2025–26 Great Michigan Read: the regional selection committee members and committee chairs, including Trisha Baker, Jane Garver, Jessica Luther, Claire Meeker, Neil Shepard, Lloyd Wescoat, and Valerie Wright; Curtis Chin and publisher Little, Brown and Company; the Library of Michigan; designer Dottie Zimmerman (I am Dottie); the Michigan Humanities Board of Directors and staff team; and the statewide network of Great Michigan Read partners.

Curtis Chin in conversation at Michigan Humanities partners' events.



QUESTIONS?

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Learn more about
 Michigan Humanities'
 grants and programs:
michiganhumanities.org



"Welcome to Chung's.
Is this for here
or to go?" — CURTIS CHIN —

ABOUT THE AUTHOR, CURTIS CHIN



Curtis Chin is the author of the award-winning memoir, *Everything I Learned, I Learned in a Chinese Restaurant*. A co-founder of the Asian American Writers' Workshop in New York City, Chin served as the nonprofit's first executive director. He went on to write comedy for network and cable television before transitioning to social justice documentaries. Chin has screened his films at over 600 venues in 20 countries. He has written for CNN, *Bon Appétit*, the *Detroit Free Press*, and *The Emancipator*.

A graduate of the University of Michigan, Chin has received awards from ABC/Disney Television, New York Foundation for the Arts, National Endowment for the Arts, and more. His essay in *Bon Appétit* was selected for Best Food Writing in America 2023, and his newest documentary about artist Warren King will be available on PBS in spring 2026.

Industry Accolades

Stonewall Book Award

Israel Fishman Non-Fiction Award

American Library Association

Excellence in Book Writing Award

Association of LGBTQ+ Journalists

2024 Michigan Notable Book

Library of Michigan

Creative Writing: Prose, Honorable Mention

Association for Asian American Studies

Best Nonfiction Books of the Year

Kirkus Reviews

Best Books of the Year

Apple Books

TIME's Most Anticipated Books of Fall 2023

Q&A WITH CURTIS CHIN

In your book, you write, “Other parents may have warned their kids not to talk to strangers, but my dad encouraged it. Thanks to him, I learned not to be afraid of people who were different from me.” How has that lesson informed your career?

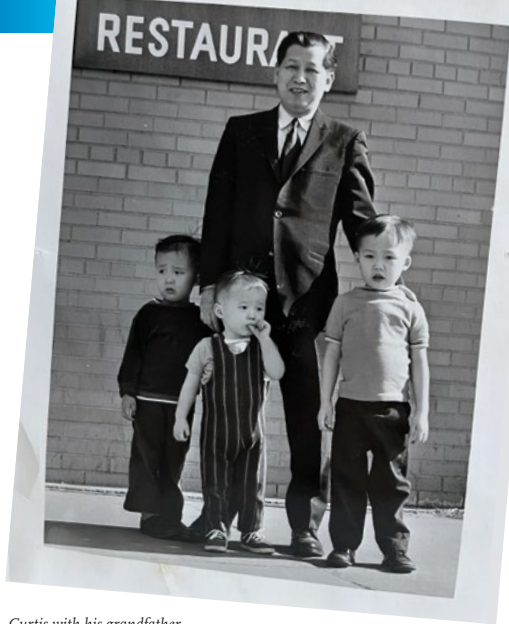
My career has taken me across the world. I’ve screened my films and given book talks at over 1,000 venues in 20 countries. It’s not easy being thrown into new situations and to meet so many different people. But thanks to my parents, I learned how to connect with other people. It’s all about listening and understanding where they are coming from. That’s how I’ve been able to make connections.

Why is it important for Michiganders to read *Everything I Learned, I Learned in a Chinese Restaurant*?

My family has been in Michigan since the 1800s. That’s not a story that you hear from Asian Americans very often. I wanted to show how deep our roots are to this state. I also wanted to show the beauty of Detroit. The city is often maligned in the national media. I wanted to show that despite the hardships, there were plenty of great things about the city and state.

Can you tell us about the way you organized your book and how it’s important to the story?

I organized the book as if you were going out to a Chinese restaurant for a meal. The opening line—“Welcome to Chung’s.”—is how my dad greeted our customers,



Curtis with his grandfather and older brothers | Photo credit: Curtis Chin

and the final line is “See you again soon.” The chapters are labeled like a Chinese menu. The stories are a mix of sweet, sour, savory, salty, and funny.

Your book so expertly weaves together themes of race, immigration, sexuality, religious faith, class, and multilingualism. All these identities, as you show in the book, can intersect in a single person, family, neighborhood, or restaurant. Was it challenging to write about and make sense of these identities in a way that engages readers?

It was very fulfilling and fun to write this book. I got to revisit things in my childhood that I had long forgotten, and even brushed over in the past. It’s given me even more appreciation for what my parents gave to me and my siblings while growing up in that Chinese restaurant!

For more information about Curtis Chin:
curtisfromdetroit.com

SETTLING IN

Overview

Whether you're with familiar faces or have the opportunity to meet new people through a discussion group, it's helpful to learn more about who you're talking with. The questions in this section can help you get to know each other as readers.

Questions

Q1	What Great Michigan Read titles have you read in the past, if any?
Q2	Where are your favorite places to read?
Q3	What book format (e.g., print, e-book, audiobook) do you prefer?
Q4	What is your favorite type of book to read?
Q5	What book has left the most lasting impression on you?
Q6	What books are on your bedside table or in your to-be-read pile?
Q7	What character from a book you've read would you like to befriend?
Q8	What setting from a book would you like to be transported to right now?

ABOUT THESE SECTIONS

The questions in this reader's guide are from the Great Michigan Read Convo Cards deck. They are designed to help you settle in and have a meaningful, engaging conversation about *Everything I Learned, I Learned in a Chinese Restaurant*. If you're reading and reflecting solo, you can still use the questions to guide and shape your experience with the book.



CONNECTING

Overview

As one of Michigan Humanities' pillars, connection is at the heart of the Great Michigan Read. The questions in this section will prompt conversation about the ways the book's content and themes connect with you, your family, your community, and our world.

Questions

Q1

Throughout his book, Curtis Chin describes Chung's role in the city of Detroit. Is there a restaurant like that in your community? What role does it play? Who does it bring together?

PODCAST: PROOF

How Almond Boneless
Chicken Took Over Detroit

EXPLORE MORE *Did you know?*

Over the last 100+ years, Detroit has been home to two Chinatowns. The first was established in 1917 near the corner of Third and Porter Streets, just west of downtown Detroit. After being forced to relocate during the construction of the Lodge Freeway, Chinatown was rebuilt in the Cass Corridor in the 1960s.



Detroit's Chinatowns map | Photo credit: Detroit Historical Society

CONNECTING

Questions (continued)

Q2	How are social issues described in the book relevant in today's world, and what parallels can you draw between the book and current events?
Q3	Curtis Chin writes, "Other parents may have warned their kids not to talk to strangers, but my dad encouraged it. Thanks to him, I learned not to be afraid of people who were different from me." Does this quote resonate with you? Does it remind you of any life lessons you learned as a child?
Q4	Throughout his book, Curtis Chin describes his relationship with Mr. Mah, the fry cook at Chung's. How did Mr. Mah impact Curtis' life? Have you had a similarly pivotal relationship in your life?
Q5	Curtis Chin develops Detroit as a character throughout his book and describes the relationship he had with the city. How would you characterize the place where you grew up? How did the community and its history shape you?
Q6	In a section about Curtis Chin's elementary school experiences, he writes, "Years later, I learned that what I was doing was called code-switching—consciously speaking and acting differently depending on the background of the people around me—but at that age, it was called survival." Did Curtis' description bring back memories or remind you of similar experiences you've had?
Q7	Have you traveled to any of the locations mentioned in the book? How were your experiences similar to or different from what Curtis Chin described?
Q8	Migration to and across Michigan has shaped our state for centuries. What do you know about your region, city, or town's immigration history? What do you want to learn more about?

SHARING

Overview

Michigan Humanities' programs and grants are centered on the ways we share stories, cultures, and histories with one another and engage in conversation. The questions in this section will provide an opportunity for you to voice your opinions and listen to others' perspectives.

Questions

<p>Q1</p>	<p>Read the first chapter's opening sentence: "Welcome to Chung's. Is this for here or to go?" Why do you think Curtis Chin chose this as his opening? How is the question important to him throughout the book?</p>
<p>Q2</p>	<p>Curtis Chin has organized his book like the sections of a Chinese menu. What sections did you find the most interesting? What sections were you least engaged with?</p>



Chung's restaurant sign | Photo credit: Curtis Chin

SHARING

Questions (continued)

Q3	What is your favorite memory or story that Curtis Chin shares in his book? Why do you think Curtis included that specific memory or story in his book?
Q4	Throughout his book, Curtis Chin describes the ways his family relationships evolved. What do you think changed the most as everyone grew older? What stayed the same? What examples stood out to you?
Q5	What do you think of the book's cover? How well does it convey what Curtis Chin is writing about?
Q6	As Curtis Chin grows more aware of his sexuality, what challenges does he face? How did this intersect with his identity as a Chinese American?
Q7	What do you think compelled Curtis Chin to tell this story? What do you think about the book's relevance and timeliness?
Q8	As he describes coming out to his friend Mimi, Curtis Chin writes, "I was so concerned with hiding my own sexuality that I had forgotten that other people were on their own journeys." How did reading about this interaction with Mimi make you feel? How do our assumptions impact relationships and community?



Chung's menu and placemat from the 1970s | Photo credit: Curtis Chin

EXPLORE MORE

Did you know?

Over the course of six decades, Chung's sold an estimated 10 million egg rolls.

GROWING

Overview

Michigan Humanities' vision is a more thoughtful, connected, engaged, and informed Michigan. As you consider ways you've become more informed through reading and discussing Curtis Chin's book, the questions in this section will help identify what you knew, what you wanted to know, what you learned, and what future learning opportunities exist.

Questions

Q1	What questions did you have about <i>Everything I Learned, I Learned in a Chinese Restaurant</i> before you started reading it? How were those questions addressed? Not addressed?
Q2	Did Curtis Chin exclude parts of his experiences you would like to know more about?
Q3	Complete the following sentence: This book made me want to learn more about _____.

EXPLORE MORE *Did you know?*

In 1910, Houghton County in the Upper Peninsula had the largest Chinese population in the state of Michigan.



Calumet, Michigan (circa 1900) | Photo credit: Detroit Publishing Co.

GROWING

Questions (continued)

Q4	What is one lingering question that you'd like to ask Curtis Chin if you had the chance?
Q5	What lessons from the book might you carry into your daily life?
Q6	What challenged your existing knowledge or surprised you the most as you were reading?
Q7	Which of your family stories or food traditions would you like to learn more about and document if you had the opportunity?
Q8	What did you already know about the murder of Vincent Chin in June 1982? What related questions do you still have after reading <i>Everything I Learned, I Learned in a Chinese Restaurant</i> ?



A parade makes its way through Detroit's Chinatown at Cass and Peterboro in 1963.
Photo credit: Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University

EXTENDING

Overview

Your conversation doesn't have to end now! There are many ways for you to extend your Great Michigan Read experience. The ideas in this section can help you continue to engage with the program, other readers, and additional resources.

Questions

Q1	Take a selfie of you and/or your conversation group, then post and tag it with #GreatMichiganRead on social media.
Q2	Share your favorite quote with a family member, friend, or colleague.
Q3	Consider who in your life might connect with <i>Everything I Learned, I Learned in a Chinese Restaurant</i> . Then, recommend it!
Q4	Compile a playlist that could serve as a soundtrack for the book.
Q5	Look up recipes for a meal inspired by the book.
Q6	Watch an interview with Curtis Chin or read an article about his work at curtisfromdetroit.com .
Q7	Read another book from the same time period or with a similar setting.
Q8	Visit the Michigan Humanities website for information about related books, films, exhibits, and more.

EXPLORE MORE *Did you know?*

In Chinese culture, the number eight is considered very lucky and associated with success and prosperity.

THE GREAT MICHIGAN READ IS PRESENTED BY MICHIGAN HUMANITIES

Michigan Humanities strives to bring people together through stories, histories, cultures, and conversations. In carrying out this mission, Michigan Humanities builds awareness and excitement for humanities in everyday life, achieves best practices and sustainability for all humanities programs and services in Michigan, and upholds the following key values: uplifting all Michiganders; discovery and understanding; authentic conversation; respectful collaboration; and meaningful experiences. Michigan Humanities' vision is a more thoughtful, connected, engaged, and informed Michigan.

Learn more at michiganhumanities.org.

Find Michigan Humanities on social media and join the conversation!

#GreatMichiganRead #MIHumanities



Supporters

The 2025–26 Great Michigan Read is presented by:



Additional support is provided by national, statewide, and local partners, including:



Share your feedback!

If you checked out a book kit, took part in a class or book club conversation, or were part of a Great Michigan Read event, we want to hear from you! Complete the brief program survey and let us know about your experience! tinyurl.com/GMRfeedback

