

**Journeys: Moving Forward, Looking Back**  
**Close Reading Guide: “I Ask My Mother to Sing”**

Answer the following questions about Li-Young Lee’s poem, “I Ask My Mother to Sing.”

1. What do you learn about the speaker’s family from the first stanza? Who is present and who is missing?
2. What are the women singing about? Cite evidence in the text that supports your answer.
3. How does the speaker feel about the subject of their song? How might the speaker’s feelings be different from those of his mother and grandmother? Cite evidence in the text that supports your answers.
4. Reread the last stanza. What do you think has caused the women to begin to cry? What does it mean that neither one stops singing?
5. Li-Young Lee’s parents were forced to leave China before Lee was born. Lee was born in Indonesia, but his family had to flee that country as well because of the political situation. They lived in Hong Kong, Macau, and Japan before coming to the U.S. What does this information add to your understanding of the poem?