

Americanah (Adichie)

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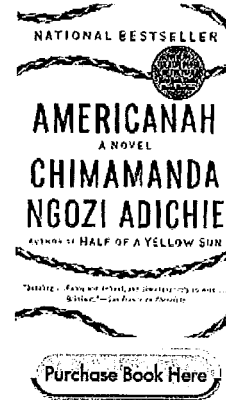
Americanah

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, 2013

Knopf Doubleday

588 pp.

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Summary

From the award-winning author of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, a dazzling new novel: a story of love and race centered around a young man and woman from Nigeria who face difficult choices and challenges in the countries they come to call home.

As teenagers in a Lagos secondary school, Ifemelu and Obinze fall in love. Their Nigeria is under military dictatorship, and people are leaving the country if they can. Ifemelu—beautiful, self-assured—departs for America to study. She suffers defeats and triumphs, finds and loses relationships and friendships, all the while feeling the weight of something she never thought of back home: race. Obinze—the quiet, thoughtful son of a professor—had hoped to join her, but post-9/11 America will not let him in, and he plunges into a dangerous, undocumented life in London.

Years later, Obinze is a wealthy man in a newly democratic Nigeria, while Ifemelu has achieved success as a writer of an eye-opening blog about race in America. But when Ifemelu returns to Nigeria, and she and Obinze reignite their shared passion—for their homeland and for each other—they will face the toughest decisions of their lives.

Fearless, gripping, at once darkly funny and tender, spanning three continents and numerous lives, *Americanah* is a richly told story set in today's globalized world: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's most powerful and astonishing novel yet. (*From the publisher.*)

Author Bio

- Birth—September 15, 1977
- Where—Enugu, Enugu State, Nigeria
- Education—B.A., Eastern Connecticut State University; M.A. (creative writing), Johns Hopkins University; M.A. (African Studies), Yale University
- Awards—Orange Prize; Best First Book Award from the

- Commonwealth Writers' Prize; O. Henry Prize
- Currently—divides her time between the US and Nigeri

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a Nigerian writer. She is Igbo, one of the largest and most influential ethnic groups in Nigeria. Adichie has been called "the most prominent" of a "procession of critically acclaimed young anglophone authors" that have succeeded "in attracting a new generation of readers to African literature."

Education

Born in the town of Enugu, she grew up in the university town of Nsukka in southeastern Nigeria, where the University of Nigeria is situated. While she was growing up, her father was a professor of statistics at the university, and her mother was the university registrar.

Adichie studied medicine and pharmacy at the University of Nigeria for a year and a half. During this period, she edited *The Compass*, a magazine run by the university's Catholic medical students. At the age of 19, Adichie left Nigeria and moved to the United States for college. After studying communications and political science at Drexel University in Philadelphia, she transferred to Eastern Connecticut State University (ECSU) to live closer to her sister, who had a medical practice in Coventry. She received a bachelor's degree from ECSU, where she graduated summa cum laude in 2001.

In 2003, she completed a master's degree in creative writing at Johns Hopkins University. In 2008, she received a Master of Arts in African studies from Yale University.

Adichie was a Hodder fellow at Princeton University during the 2005-2006 academic year. In 2008 she was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship. She has also been awarded a 2011-2012 fellowship by the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University.

Adichie, who is married, divides her time between Nigeria, where she teaches writing workshops, and the United States.

Writing

In 1997 Adichie published *Decisions*, a collection of poems, and in 1998, a play *For Love of Biafra*. She was shortlisted in 2002 for the Caine Prize[for her short story "You in America."

In 2003, her story "That Harmattan Morning" was selected as joint winner of the BBC Short Story Awards, and she won the O. Henry prize for "The American Embassy." She also won the David T. Wong International Short Story Prize 2002/2003 (PEN Center Award), for "Half of a Yellow Sun."

Her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), received wide critical acclaim; it was

shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction (2004) and was awarded the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book (2005). Her second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, named after the flag of the short-lived nation of Biafra, is set before and during the Biafran War. It was awarded the 2007 Orange Prize for Fiction.

Her third book, *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009), is a collection of short stories. In 2010 she was listed among the authors of *The New Yorker's* "20 Under 40" Fiction Issue. Adichie's story "Ceiling" was included in the 2011 edition of *The Best American Short Stories*. Her third novel *Americanah* was published in 2013. (From Wikipedia. Retrieved 2/22/2013.)

Book Reviews

Adichie...is an extraordinarily self-aware thinker and writer, possessing the ability to lambaste society without sneering or patronizing or polemicizing. For her, it seems no great feat to balance high-literary intentions with broad social critique. *Americanah* examines blackness in America, Nigeria and Britain, but it's also a steady-handed dissection of the universal human experience—a platitude made fresh by the accuracy of Adichie's observations.... *Americanah* is witheringly trenchant and hugely empathetic.... It never feels false.

Mike Peed - New York Times Book Review

Adichie's new novel takes root in the vagaries and murmured promises of a love story like much of her other work.... Her writing hits a nerve. [She] doesn't hold back on criticizing [Nigeria's] culture that fosters widespread government corruption. Or what she perceives as the excessive, neutered politeness of "political-correct language" in the U.S.

Jon Gambrell - Philadelphia Sunday Sun/Associated Press

Americanah is one of the freshest pieces of fiction of the year...and the fact that its subject isn't instantly recognizable does not make it any less of an engrossing, all-encompassing read. *Americanah* is quite explicitly a book about race and African identity, but there are many moments when it transcends these themes. Adichie's style of writing is familiar and personal, and her depiction of the African diaspora scathingly casts many of her main characters as a particularly loathsome type of East Coast intellectual. . . . Her success comes at the level of sentences, the way she can bring a character to life on the strength of a few words.... This book is absolutely essential.

Drew Grant - New York Observer

Adichie has written a big knockout of a novel about immigration, American dreams, the power of first love, and the shifting meanings of skin color.... *Americanah* is a sweeping story that derives its power as much from Adichie's witty and fluid writing style as it does from keen social commentary.... *Americanah* works in so many

different genres—coming-of-age novel, romance, comic novel of social manners, up-to-the-minute meditation on race, as well as the aforementioned immigrant saga—that I’m shortchanging its bounty by only mentioning some of the main characters’ adventures here. Like Ifemelu’s hairdo, Adichie’s novel tightly braids together multiple ideas and storylines. It’s a marvel of skilled construction and imagination.

Maureen Corrigan - NPR

Powerful.... If you think racism expired when President Obama was elected, this is perhaps not—or absolutely is—the book for you. [*Americanah*] is a story of relocation, far-flung love and life as an alien, spread across three continents. It’s also about the lonely but privileged perspective a stranger gains by entering a new culture. Ifemelu experiences America both as a black woman and as an African woman. In the U.S., those two identities combine, for experiences dark and light that Adichie skillfully renders in gray scale.... Adichie’s evocative power, transporting my imagination while keeping my feet firmly on the ground, has me looking forward to [her] books for years to come.

Rosecrans Baldwin - NPR

Americanah is that rare thing in contemporary literary fiction: a lush, bighearted love story that also happens to be a piercingly funny social critique. . . . Adichie writes with insight. A scene in a braiding salon, which unfolds over the course of the book, has more to say about the politics of self-image than any novel in recent memory.... Both for Adichie and [Ifemelu], her alter ego, coming in to oneself is ultimately about coming home, and to the place that—and to the person who—understands you, no explanation required. And love remains the last great hope for solving America’s complicated relationship with race.... A love story for our time.”

Megan O’Grady, Vogue

Glorious...a saga of a young couple’s efforts to escape their troubled homeland and seek their fortune abroad that bears comparison to the classical canon of the social novel.... *Americanah* provides Adichie with a fictional vehicle for pithy, sharply sensible commentary on race and culture—and us with a symphonic, polyphonic, full-immersion opportunity to think outside the American box and commune with the wholly global sensibility of Adichie, an author who truly contains multitudes.

Ben Dickson, Elle

(*Starred review.*) Adichie[‘s]...compelling and important new novel follows the lives of that country’s postwar generation as they suffer endemic corruption and poverty under a military dictatorship. An unflinching but compassionate observer, Adichie writes a vibrant tale about love, betrayal, and destiny; about racism; and about a society in which honesty is extinct and cynicism is the national philosophy. She broadens her canvas to include both America and England, where she illuminates the precarious tightrope existence of culturally and racially displaced immigrants.... [A]

touching love story and an illuminating portrait of a country still in political turmoil.

Publishers Weekly

MacArthur fellow Adichie is a word-by-word virtuoso with a sure grasp of social conundrums in Nigeria, East Coast America, and England; an omnivorous eye for resonant detail; a gift for authentic characters; pyrotechnic wit; and deep humanitarianism. *Americanah* is a courageous, world-class novel about independence, integrity, community, and love—and what it takes to become a "full human being." —*Donna Seaman*

Booklist

(*Starred review.*) Ifemelu, the Nigerian expat and Princeton lecturer at the heart of this novel....writes biting, dead-on blog posts taking aim at the cultural schism between non-African blacks, Africans, and everyone else.... But one day...Ifemelu senses that she has lost her way.... *Verdict:* Witty, wry, and observant, Adichie is a marvelous storyteller who writes passionately about the difficulty of assimilation and the love that binds a man, a woman, and their homeland. Her work should be read by anyone clutching at the belief that we're living in a post-racial United States. — *Sally Bissell, Lee Cty. Lib. Syst., Estero, FL*

Library Journal

Ifemelu, beautiful and naturally aristocratic, has the good fortune to escape Nigeria during a time of military dictatorship.... Ifemelu's high school sweetheart, Obinze...has been denied a visa to enter post-9/11 America,...and now he is living illegally in London, delivering refrigerators and looking for a way to find his beloved.... The years pass, and Ifemelu is involved in the usual entanglements, making a reunion with Obinze all the more complicated. Will true love win out? Can things be fixed and contempt disarmed?... Soap-operatic in spots, but a fine adult love story with locations both exotic and familiar.

Kirkus Reviews

Discussion Questions

1. The first part of Ifemelu's story is told in flashback while she is having her hair braided at a salon before she returns to Nigeria. Why might Adichie have chosen this structure for storytelling? What happens when the narrator shifts to Obinze's story? How conscious are you as a reader about the switches in narrative perspective?
2. The novel opens in the Ivy League enclave of Princeton, New Jersey. Ifemelu likes living there because "she could pretend to be someone else, ...someone adorned with certainty" (3). But she has to go to the largely black city of Trenton, nearby, to have her hair braided. Does this movement between cities indicate a similar split within Ifemelu? Why does she decide to return to Nigeria after thirteen years in America?

3. How much does your own race affect the experience of reading this or any novel? Does race affect a reader's ability to identify or empathize with the struggles of Ifemelu and Obinze? Ifemelu writes in her blog that "black people are not supposed to be angry about racism" because their anger makes whites uncomfortable (223). Do you agree?

4. Aunt Uju's relationship with the General serves as an example of one mode of economic survival for a single woman: she attaches herself to a married man who supports her in return for sexual access. But Uju runs into a serious problem when the General dies and political power shifts. Why, given what you learn of Uju's intelligence and capabilities later, do you think she chose to engage in this relationship with the General instead of remaining independent?

5. Ifemelu feels that Aunt Uju is too eager to capitulate to the demands of fitting in. Uju says, "You are in a country that is not your own. You do what you have to do if you want to succeed" (120). Is Uju right in compromising her own identity to a certain extent? How is Dike affected by his mother's struggles?

6. In the clothing shop she visits with her friend Ginika, Ifemelu notices that the clerk, when asking which of the salespeople helped her, won't say, "Was it the black girl or the white girl?" because that would be considered a racist way to identify people. "You're supposed to pretend that you don't notice certain things," Ginika tells her (128). In your opinion and experience, is this a good example of American political correctness about race? Why does Ifemelu find it curious? Do you think these attitudes differ across the United States?

7. For a time, Ifemelu is a babysitter for Kimberly, a white woman who works for a charity in Africa. Adichie writes that "for a moment Ifemelu was sorry to have come from Africa, to be the reason that this beautiful woman, with her bleached teeth and bounteous hair, would have to dig deep to feel such pity, such hopelessness. She smiled brightly, hoping to make Kimberly feel better" (152). How well does Kimberly exemplify the liberal guilt that many white Americans feel toward Africa and Africans?

8. Ifemelu's experience with the tennis coach is a low point in her life. Why does she avoid being in touch with Obinze afterward (157-58)? Why doesn't she read his letters? How do you interpret her behavior?

9. In her effort to feel less like an outsider, Ifemelu begins faking an American accent. She feels triumphant when she can do it, and then feels ashamed and resolves to stop (175). Which aspects of her becoming an American are most difficult for Ifemelu as she struggles to figure out how much she will give up of her Nigerian self?

10. Ifemelu realizes that naturally kinky hair is a subject worth blogging about. She notices that Michelle Obama and Beyoncé never appear in public with natural hair.

Why not? "Because, you see, it's not professional, sophisticated, whatever, it's just not damn normal" (299). Read the blog post "A Michelle Obama Shout-Out Plus Hair as Race Metaphor" (299–300), and discuss why hair is a useful way of examining race and culture.

11. What does Ifemelu find satisfying about her relationships with Curt and Blaine? Why does she, eventually, abandon each relationship? Is it possible that she needs to be with someone Nigerian, or does she simply need to be with Obinze?

12. Ifemelu's blog is a venue for expressing her experience as an African immigrant and for provoking a conversation about race and migration. She says, "I discovered race in America and it fascinated me" (406). She asks, "How many other people had become black in America?" (298). Why is the blog so successful? Are there any real-life examples that you know of similar to this?

13. Obinze goes to London, and when his visa expires he is reduced to cleaning toilets (238); eventually he is deported. On his return home, "a new sadness blanketed him, the sadness of his coming days, when he would feel the world slightly off-kilter, his vision unfocused" (286). How does his experience in London affect the decisions he makes when he gets back to Lagos? Why does he marry Kosi? How do these choices and feelings compare to Ifemelu's?

14. While she is involved with Curt, Ifemelu sleeps with a younger man in her building, out of curiosity. "There was something wrong with her. She did not know what it was but there was something wrong with her. A hunger, a restlessness. An incomplete knowledge of herself. The sense of something farther away, beyond her reach" (291–92). Is this a common feeling among young women in a universal sense, or is there something more significant in Ifemelu's restlessness? What makes hers particular, if you feel it is?

15. When reading Obinze's conversations with Ojiugo, his now-wealthy friend who has married an EU citizen, did you get the sense that those who emigrate lose something of themselves when they enter the competitive struggle in their new culture (Chapter 24), or is it more of a struggle to maintain that former self? Does Adichie suggest that this is a necessary sacrifice? Are all of the characters who leave Nigeria (such as Emenike, Auntie Uju, Bartholomew, and Ginika) similarly compromised?

16. Auntie Uju becomes a doctor in America but still feels the need to seek security through an alliance with Bartholomew, whom she doesn't seem to love. Why might this be? How well does she understand what her son, Dike, is experiencing as a displaced, fatherless teenager? Why might Dike have attempted suicide?

17. Is the United States presented in generally positive or generally negative ways in *Americanah*?

18. The term "Americanah" is used for Nigerians who have been changed by having

lived in America. Like those in the novel's Nigerpolitan Club, they have become critical of their native land and culture: "They were sanctified, the returnees, back home with an extra gleaming layer" (408). Is the book's title meant as a criticism of Ifemelu, or simply an accurate word for what she fears she will become (and others may think of her)?

19. How would you describe the qualities that Ifemelu and Obinze admire in each other? How does Adichie sustain the suspense about whether Ifemelu and Obinze will be together until the very last page? What, other than narrative suspense, might be the reason for Adichie's choice in doing so? Would you consider their union the true homecoming, for both of them?

20. Why is it important to have the perspective of an African writer on race in America? How does reading the story make you more alert to race, and to the cultural identifications within races and mixed races? Did this novel enlarge your own perspective, and if so, how?

(Questions issued by publisher.)

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Discussion Guide: *Americanah*, Everybody Reads 2019

This guide is a tool to enhance your group's conversation about *Americanah*, Chimamanda Ngozi Acichie's insightful story of a young love, migration, exile, and homecoming.

Questions:

1. Adichie is herself somewhat of an outsider in America, as is her character, Ifemelu. Is there an advantage to telling this story from an outsider's perspective?
2. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Adichie said she thinks there is "a tendency in American fiction to celebrate work that fundamentally keeps people comfortable." How does Adichie reject or embrace keeping the reader comfortable in *Americanah*?
3. At the Frankfurt Book Fair, Adichie commented on likable characters in fiction, saying, "women writers are expected to make their female characters likeable, as though the full humanity of a female person must in the end meet the careful limitations of likability." Did you find the characters in *Americanah* likeable? Why or why not? Are there some characters you liked more than others? If we demand likeable characters, what does this need say about us as readers?
4. The first part of Ifemelu's story is told in flashback as she's having her hair braided at a salon before returning to Nigeria. Ifemelu interacts with the women in the salon, and makes judgments about them. How does her identity and her long stay in America affect her perception of the women around her?
5. In *Americanah*, hair is often a focal point for discussing race and culture. Re-read Ifemelu's blog post "A Michelle Obama Shout-Out Plus Hair as Race Metaphor (p. 299.)" How does the attention and judgment paid to a woman's hair reflect American society's greater issues with race and feminism?
6. Ifemelu says, "I discovered race in America, and it fascinated me (p. 406)." She wonders, "How many other people had become black in America?" (p. 209) What does she mean by these statements?
7. Obinze's has a complicated relationship with Ojiugo, his now-wealthy friend who has married an EU citizen. How does Obinze balance the need for support from his friend with the sense that Ojiugo represents someone who has given up his cultural identity? Are all of the characters who leave Nigeria (such as Emenike, Auntie Uju, Bartholomew, and Ginika) similarly compromised?
8. When Ifemelu is hired to speak on race relations in America, she gets a hostile reaction at first. She changes her presentation to say, "America has made great progress for which we should be very proud", and gets a better reaction; however in her blog, she writes "racism should never have happened and so you don't get a cookie for reducing it." (p. 378). How do these two approaches reflect how Americans navigate questions of race and bias? Within your own circles, are you able to have frank conversations about race?
9. Kimberly, the white woman who employs Ifemelu as a nanny, seems to exemplify the white liberal guilt many Americans feel in relation to Africa and Africans. How did you respond to this character and her relationship with Ifemelu?
10. Ifemelu's experience with the tennis coach is a low point in her life. Why does she avoid being in touch with Obinze afterward (157–58)? Why doesn't she read his letters? How do you interpret her behavior?
11. How would you describe the qualities that Ifemelu and Obinze admire in each other? How does Adichie sustain the suspense about whether Ifemelu and Obinze will be together until the very last page? What, other than narrative suspense, might be the reason for Adichie's choice in doing so? Would you consider their union the true homecoming, for both of them?

*Some questions suggested by or adapted from the Penguin Random House Reader's Guide for *Americanah*

Themes and topics:

Nigeria, Lagos, young women, coming-of-age, feminism, racism, race and class, identity, romantic love, belonging, separation vs. connection, cultural critique, microaggression, power, Black American/African cultures, cross-cultural relationships, bloggers, corruption, immigration, fear of immigrants, the concept of assimilation.

READERS GUIDE

The questions, discussion topics, and other material that follow are intended to enhance your group's conversation about *Americanah*, Chimamanda Ngozi Acichie's powerful, moving story of a young man and woman from Nigeria who trace the difficult paths of migration, exile, and homecoming in a rapidly changing, globalized world.

Introduction

From the award-winning author of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, a dazzling new novel: a story of love and race centered around a young man and woman from Nigeria who face difficult choices and challenges in the countries they come to call home.

As teenagers in a Lagos secondary school, Ifemelu and Obinze fall in love. Their country is under military dictatorship, and people are leaving if they can. Ifemelu—beautiful, self-assured—departs for America to study. She suffers defeats and triumphs, finds and loses relationships and friendships, all the while feeling the weight of something she never thought of back home: race. Obinze—the quiet, thoughtful son of a professor—had hoped to join her, but post-9/11 America will not let him in, and he plunges into a dangerous, undocumented life in London.

Years later, Obinze is a wealthy man in a newly democratic Nigeria, while Ifemelu has achieved success as a writer of an eye-opening blog about race in America. But when Ifemelu returns to Nigeria, and she and Obinze reignite their shared passion—for their homeland and for each other—they will face the toughest decisions of their lives.

Fearless, gripping, at once darkly funny and tender, spanning three continents and numerous lives, *Americanah* is a richly told story set in today's globalized world: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's most powerful and astonishing novel yet.

Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. The first part of Ifemelu's story is told in flashback while she is having her hair braided at a salon before she returns to Nigeria. Why might Adichie have chosen this structure for storytelling? What happens when the narrator shifts to Obinze's story? How conscious are you as a reader about the switches in narrative perspective?
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3. How much does your own race affect the experience of reading this or any novel? Does race affect a reader's ability to identify or empathize with the struggles of Ifemelu and Obinze? Ifemelu writes in her blog that "black people are not supposed to be angry about racism" because their anger makes whites uncomfortable (223). Do you agree?

4. Aunt Uju's relationship with the General serves as an example of one mode of economic survival for a single woman: she attaches herself to a married man who supports her in return for sexual access. But Uju runs into a serious problem when the General dies and political power shifts. Why, given what you learn of Uju's intelligence and capabilities later, do you think she chose to engage in this relationship with the General instead of remaining independent?

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Fearless, gripping, at once darkly funny and tender, spanning three continents and numerous lives, *Americanah* is a richly told story set in today's globalized world: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's most powerful and astonishing novel yet.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE...

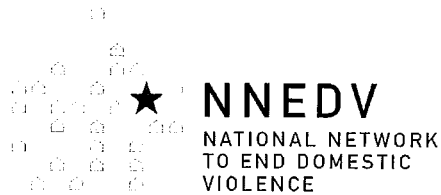
The questions, discussion topics, and other material that follow are intended to enhance your group's conversation about *Americanah*, Chimamanda Ngozi Acichie's powerful, moving story of a young man and woman from Nigeria who trace the difficult paths of migration, exile, and homecoming in a rapidly changing, globalized world.

ABOUT THIS AUTHOR...

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie grew up in Nigeria. Her work has been translated into thirty languages and has appeared in various publications, including *The New Yorker*, *Granta*, the *O. Henry Prize Stories*, the *Financial Times*, and *Zoetrope: All-Story*. She is the author of the novels *Purple Hibiscus*, which won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize and the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award, and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, which won the Orange Prize and was a National Book Critics Circle Award Finalist, a *New York Times* Notable Book, and a *People* and *Black Issues Book Review* Best Book of the Year; and, most recently, the story collection *The Thing Around Your Neck*. A recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship, she divides her time between the United States and Nigeria.

<http://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/878/americanah-by-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie/9780307455925/readers-guide/>

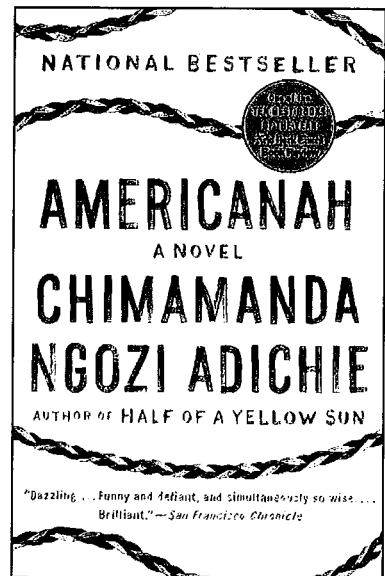
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Discussion Questions for Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

These discussion questions were prepared by the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) for the *Reader with a Cause* book club on Goodreads.

If you like our questions please feel free to use them – and don't forget to join the conversation online at: https://www.goodreads.com/topic/group_folder/285239



1. Overall Impressions

What did you think of the book?

2. Financial Stability in Americanah

The relationship between Auntie Uju and the General is one where Auntie Uju has access to financial stability, but no control over it. How does Auntie Uju navigate a world in which her economic stability is completely at the discretion of the General?

We know that financial abuse is a significant problem for victims of domestic violence (it occurs in 99 percent of domestic violence cases). Financial abuse is a significant barrier for victims attempting to escape abuse and is one of the main reasons a victim may return to an abusive partner. Did Auntie Uju and the General's relationship seem financially abusive to you?

After her experience with the General, Auntie Uju becomes a doctor in America, but is still burdened by the need to maintain security through her relationship with Bartholomew – despite her seeming disinterest in him. Why might this be the case?

3. Looking for Love (Ifemelu)

Though Ifemelu found happiness in her relationships with both Curt and Blaine, she leaves both of them. What did Ifemelu initially find satisfying about both of these relationships?

“She rested her head against his and felt, for the first time, what she would often feel with him: a self-affection. He made her like herself. With him, she was at ease; her skin felt as though it was her right size.” (73)

What component does Ifemelu’s relationship with Obinze have that may have been lacking in the other two?

4. Racism in America

“If you have braids, they will think you are unprofessional.” (146)

“Laura shrugged, as though to say that it would, of course happen in Brooklyn but not in the America in which she lived.” (203)

Americanah laid bare many, many examples of entrenched racism in modern-day America. Did any of these examples resonate with you? Surprise you?

5. Intersectionality in Americanah

The intersectionality between race, sex, and gender is pervasive throughout *Americanah*. Ifemelu’s focus shifts between sex and gender and race through her experience and is greatly affected by her location. Why is it that Ifemelu focuses heavily on sex and gender during her time in Nigeria and on race during her time in America?

6. Physical Violence in Americanah

“People were saying, Oh, why did he slap her when she’s a widow, and that annoyed her even more. She said she should not have been slapped because she is a full human being, not because she doesn’t have a husband to speak for her. So some of her female students went and printed Full Human Being on T-shirts. I guess it made her well-known.” (71)

To make the case for ending domestic violence, sexual assault, and other crimes of violence against women, it is often said, “Imagine if she were your daughter, sister, mother, etc.” In response, a meme was created that says, “She’s someone’s ~~sister / mother / daughter / wife.~~”

Why do you think a victim’s potential relationship with a man (as someone’s mother, sister, etc.) is emphasized instead of her personhood in order to increase awareness and support for anti-violence causes?

7. Human Migration in *Americanah*

“[They] all understood the fleeing from war, from the kind of poverty that crushed human souls, but they would not understand the need to escape from the oppressive lethargy of choicelessness. They would not understand why people like him, who were raised well fed and watered but mired in dissatisfaction, conditioned from birth to look towards somewhere else.” (341)

Several of the characters in *Americanah* moved from home seeking a better life – to other parts of Nigeria, to Europe, to the United States – illuminating the circumstances that hundreds of thousands of immigrants and refugees around the world face every single day.

How does the identity of each migrating character shift between Nigeria and Europe or the United States? How, if at all, does Adichie suggest that a sacrifice or compromise of self is necessary for migrating to a new country?

Did this book change the way you think about human migration? Why or why not?

8. “Sweet Girl” vs. “Cool Girl”

“Ifemelu thought about the expression ‘sweet girl.’ Sweet girl meant that, for a long time, Don had molded Ranyinudo into a malleable shape, or that she had allowed him to think he had.” (512)

The “sweet girl” trope that Adichie references here stands in contradiction with the “cool girl” trope used in *Gone Girl* (see here: <https://www.goodreads.com/topic/show/1647854-diary-amy-vs-real-amy>) – these two examples make it clear that women are expected to be virgins or whores, or embody both of these contradictory roles at once.

What do these roles tell us about gender socialization and expectations of women? How do these expectations of gender stir our emotions towards or against a character’s misfortune (i.e., Why might we be more inclined to feel empathetic towards a character who fits the “sweet girl” trope vs. the “cool girl” trope?)