

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?

Additional questions available at <http://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/13-fiction/9256-americanah-adichie?start=3>.

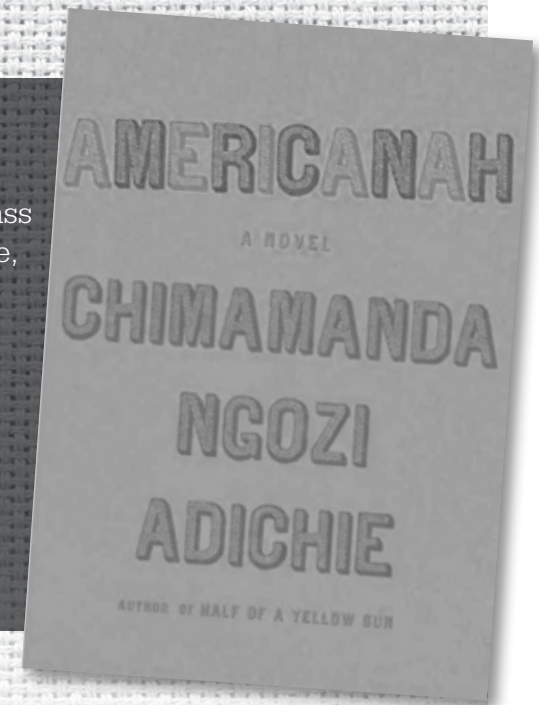
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Book Club in a Bag

Discussion Questions

"... a courageous, world-class novel about independence, integrity, community, and love and what it takes to become a "full human being."

- *Booklist*



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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.”

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.

Book 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.)

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?
