

AMERICANAH

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**BOOK CLUB**  
**READING GUIDE**



Part 7



**NYC**  
Office of the  
Mayor

Media &  
Entertainment  
Julie Menin  
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NYC MAYOR'S OFFICE FOR MEDIA & ENTERTAINMENT

The Center for the Professional Education of Teachers

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**TEACHERS COLLEGE** COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

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Ways to use the

# BOOK CLUB

## READING GUIDE

One Book, One New York is the largest community reading program in the country, bringing together book-loving New Yorkers to read the same book at the same time. The Center for the Professional Education of Teachers, Teachers College, Columbia has put together this reading guide, specifically focused for Book Clubs.

For each chapter of *Americanah*, you will find a set of **Invitations** and a set of **Discussion Prompts**. Between the invitations and the prompts, you have rich resource which you can use whether you are a facilitator or participating reader in a book club. Some ways you can use the guide:

- **While reading:** Following each chapter, or chapters you find most interesting, review the invitations and choose one or more to respond to, whether to Connect, Question, Contemplate, or Create.
- **In preparation for your book club gathering:** prepare a response to one invitation and bring with you –or– read discussion questions in advance to get your mind (re)engaged with the material.
- **During book club:** Facilitators can choose a few of the discussion prompts as starting points for conversation. The goal is to share, to listen and to be heard, during the meeting, so there’s no need to stick to the questions once the conversation gets going. Use the questions you like and skip the ones that don’t work for you and your group.
- **Following book club:** Consider an Invitation to Create from one of the chapters – perhaps after a rich conversation, you and your group want to make something in response to the reading and discussion. Bring it to the next meeting to share!

Whatever ways you find work best for you and your group, enjoy the flexibility of the guide. Whether reading, reflecting, or discussing, questions and invitations await to increase your enjoyment of reading and connecting with the text. Be sure to let us know how it’s going using Twitter, Instagram, Facebook or emailing us directly [cpet\\_admin@tc.columbia.edu](mailto:cpet_admin@tc.columbia.edu) with questions or comments. Visit our [One Book One New York](#) page for more resources.

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## AMERICANAH • PART 7 • CHAPTER 44



### INVITATIONS

**Connect:** “So which Nigerian channel do you watch?’ ‘I don’t even really watch any o. I watch Style and E! Sometimes CNN and BBC.” (p.479) Many of the most popular brands of the world are American (e.g. McDonald’s, Coca-Cola, Nike), and the same is true of media brands, as Ranyinudo shows us. Is this colonialism by another name? A “cultural colonialism,” perhaps?

**Question:** Share a question about chapter 44. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

**Contemplate:** “Ifemelu was struck by how arresting, how attractive, she was. No longer a ropy mass of gangly arms and gangly legs, but now a big, firm, curvy woman, exulting in her weight and height, and it made her imposing, a presence that drew the eyes.” (p.476)

**Create:** “She felt suddenly, guiltily grateful that she had a blue American passport in her bag. It shielded her from choicelessness.” (p. 481) While “White privilege” and “male privilege” have taken hold (even if they are hotly disputed) in our popular discourse, here we see an instance of what might be called “citizenship privilege,” the comfort Ifemelu feels that if she dislikes conditions in Nigeria, she can simply return to the United States. Each of these privileges (and many, many others) overlap and reinforce each other. Using whatever media seem best to you, create an expression about the different type(s) of privilege enjoyed by one particular person.

### DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. “At first, Lagos assaulted her.” (p. 475). Have you ever returned to live in a place you have before? How did you feel when you returned - did it feel the same or so very different? Can you imagine how Ifemelu feels?
2. What does the fact that the bridesmaids had to wait outside the church during the ceremony tell us about the church’s take on modesty? What do you think about the easy acceptance of this?
3. Discuss Ifemelu’s comment that she can’t breathe. (p. 481). How is this also a metaphoric comment of her being Americanah?
4. What else do you want to talk about?



## INVITATIONS

**Connect:** “‘I do not rent to Igbo people,’ he said softly, startling her. Were such things now said so easily? Had they been said so easily and had she merely forgotten?” (p.485) Which of Ifemelu’s unspoken questions do you think is more likely to be the case?

**Question:** Share a question about chapter 45. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

**Contemplate:** “She wrote a check for two years’ rent. This was why people took bribes and asked for bribes; how else could anyone honestly pay two years’ rent in advance.” (p.486)

**Create:** “Ifemelu had not noticed. And it piqued her. This was what a true Lagosian should have noticed: the generator house, the generator size.” (p.485) In Lagos, the size of a home’s generator is the true mark of its owner’s status. What is the equivalent for a home in New York (or wherever you live)? Create a visual caricature of a high-status home that deliberately exaggerates that feature for satirical effect.

## DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. The owner of Zoe Magazine, Auntie Onenu, has a light facial complexion but her knuckles were dark. What does this tell us about her and then also the definition of beauty and affluence in Nigerian society?
2. What has made it that Ifemelu could recognize “kitsch” (p. 485). How is she no longer a true Lagosian?
3. Explain her reaction when her bathroom is poorly finished. Why had she surprised herself?
4. Why do you think Ifemelu doesn’t reach out to Obinze? What is holding her back?
5. What else do you want to talk about?



## INVITATIONS

**Connect:** “And so she used Blaine as armor.” (p.490) What do you use as armor?

**Question:** Share a question about chapter 46. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

**Contemplate:** “Her father [talked] about he could not understand the news because Americans now used expressions like ‘divvy up’ and ‘nuke’ in serious news. ‘It is the final infantilization and informalization of America! It portends the end of the American empire, and they are killing themselves from within!’ he pronounced. (p.489)

**Create:** “There was, also, a strained nostalgia in those reunions... because she struggled to find, in these adult women, some remnants from her past that were often no longer there.” (p.490)  
Create a portrait of a person (or people) from your past that draws attention to those things that are no longer there.

## DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Ifemelu spends weekends at her parent’s house. How is it both different and the same from when she was a young girl growing up there?
2. This chapter explores Ifemelu’s re-acquaintance with her childhood girlfriends. What is the theme that runs through these reunions? What does this say about womanhood and the perception of what a successful woman is?
3. Why does Ifemelu continue the lie about Blaine coming to Nigeria? What does her snarky comment about Shan tell you about her Ifemelu’s resentment towards her; even in her made up story?
4. What are your interactions with like women in your circles; family, work and even religious communities? Do you wish they were better or different? What would you change if you could?
5. What else do you want to talk about?



## INVITATIONS

**Connect:** “Doris... spoke with a teenage American accent that made her sentences sound like questions.” (p.495) In criticizing Doris’ use of uptalk, in what ways, if any, does Ifemelu begin to sound like her father, who bemoaned American English, which he considered informal and a sure sign of the nation’s decline?

**Question:** Share a question about chapter 47. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

**Contemplate:** “I discovered race in America and it fascinated me.” (p.499)

**Create:** “[Zemaye’ asked, ‘Why is only black people that are criminals over there?’ Ifemelu opened her mouth and closed it. Here she was, a famous race blogger, and she was lost for words. ‘I love COPS. It is because of that show that I have DSTV,’ Zemaye said, ‘And all the criminals are black people.’” Make a list of the stereotypes others have applied to you; describe or draw a superhero that overcomes those stereotypes.

## DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Ifemelu is invited to church by the receptionist who says the pastor is a miracle maker. What does this take on religion mean to you? What do you think Ifemelu thinks of this invitation - especially how she was raised with her mother’s religious views?
2. Discuss what is meant by “even Esther expected her to play the madam” (p. 495).
3. Why do you think Ifemelu is drawn to and fascinated by Zemaye?
4. Ifemelu tells Zemaye that she “discovered race in America and it fascinated” her. (p. 499). And then Zemaye asks Ifemelu why only Black people are criminals in the USA. What does this mean to you? How do you consider race and stereotyping in the USA?
5. What else do you want to talk about?



## INVITATIONS

**Connect:** “An unease crept up on Ifemelu. She was comfortable here, and she wished she were not.” (p. 503) What are your guilty pleasures? Should we feel guilty for the things that bring us joy?

**Question:** Share a question about chapter 42. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

**Contemplate:** “‘But Hollywood makes equally bad movies. They just make them with better lighting,’ Ifemelu said.” (p.504)

**Create:** “She wondered what he was like beneath that practiced layer.” (p.505) In the style of anatomy books that used overlays to show the systems of the body, create a visual representation of a person like one described in this quote.

## DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Ifemelu goes to the Nigeropolitan Club meeting. What are your thoughts of this gathering?
2. “They have the kind of things we can eat. An unease crept over Ifemelu” (p. 503). Why is she uneasy?
3. Have you ever lived away from where you were born and bred, and upon return to you home place you missed the things of the other place and were dissatisfied about food and services in your hometown or country?
4. Even as Ifemelu is talking to Fred, she sees a man who looks like Obinze across the room. Her thoughts are preoccupied with him. Do you think this is why she is almost distant when Fred talks to her? And why do you think she tells Fred to call her?
5. What else do you want to talk about?



## INVITATIONS

**Connect:** “Okay, let’s calm down? No need to get all activist?” (p.514) Why don’t more people “get all activist?” What would the world look like if they did?

**Question:** Share a question about chapter 49. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

**Contemplate:** “Ma? I think you have the spirit of husband-repelling. You are too hard, ma, you will not find a husband. But my pastor can destroy that spirit.” (p. 517)

**Create:** “This isn’t your American race blog where you provoked everybody, Ifemelu. This is like a wholesome women’s magazine?” Create a satirical mash-up of a “wholesome” magazine and a provocative blog. Give it a title, a cover photo, and short teasers of the articles inside.

## DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Discuss why Ifemelu is frustrated by her work at *Zoe*.
2. “She was attractive and alone, and by the laws of their universe, he had to make a pass at her.” (p. 509) What does that sentence mean. Discuss in detail; and why does Ifemelu feel she needs to tell Ranyinudo about it?
3. In the office Doris and Zemaye argue about the quality of instant versus brewed coffee. But what does this disagreement really show about their personality and life experiences?
4. This chapter highlights again the relationship women have to men in Nigeria - as described to us in this book - where men’s attention is vied for and they provide material comforts and are dominant in relationships, and often have multiple relationships with women - (and the women know it too). What are your thoughts about this?
5. What does the fact that Esther’s medication has no name on it, and that medication can be bought at the market tell us?
6. What else do you want to talk about?



## INVITATIONS

**Connect:** A friend of Ifemelu’s complains that readers will be able to recognize Ifemelu’s description of her in a blogpost. What are your boundaries or practices when posting on social media about others?

**Question:** Share a question about chapter 50. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

**Contemplate:** “The way of life here is assorted.” (p. 520)

**Create:** What’s on your mind? What would you blog about in this moment? Write down the first few lines of your blogpost. Include a visual if you like.

## DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Dike comes to visit Ifemelu in Nigeria. It is the first time he returns since his mom took him to America. What do you think of his surprise when he exclaims: “I’ve never seen so many black people in the same place!” (p. 518). What does this say about his experiences in the USA?
2. Ranyi is angry at Ifemelu for telling her story in the blog post. Ranyi makes a point of calling Ifemelu out on her judgement of Nigerian women using men for their material comforts; she makes the point that Ifemelu herself got her US citizenship, and extensive travels through her relationship with Curt. She asks how they are so different? What are your thoughts on that?
3. Dike is wistful that he does not speak Igbo. Why do you think he is? Can you relate in some way; like there may have been a part of your family culture or language you had never known, or lost?
4. Why do you think Ifemelu does not voice to Dike that he can live with her in Nigeria?
5. When Ranyi states that Dike’s suicide is “Foreign behavior” (p. 524), for an African boy living in the USA, Ifemelu is outraged. What is it about Dike’s life and feelings that Ranyi does not understand?
6. What else do you want to talk about?



## INVITATIONS

**Connect:** Spontaneously, Ifemelu calls Obinze and they meet up. When have you called someone spontaneously? What happened? Do you regret having done it? Why/why not?

**Question:** Share a question about chapter 51. We'll add it to our reader's guide!

**Contemplate:** "She was inside this silence and she felt safe." (p. 543)

**Create:** Ifemelu was facing down her past, and "Her head was filled with ghosts." (p. 527) Who or what are your ghosts? Create a photo collage to share. Let your collage embody the ghosts as you experience them: hazy or startlingly clear, haunting or comforting.

## DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. When Ifemelu thinks she sees Obinze at the bank, she then leaves the bank and calls him. She finally makes contact and they see each other within a half hour. What are the things that stand out to you about their reunion?
2. "'You like your life', she said. 'I live my life'". (p. 534). When Obinze says he lives his life, what does this say about how Obinze views his life in Nigeria?
3. In talking about the American dream, Ifemelu tells Obinze that it's a lie, "but you buy into it and that's all that matters." (p. 536). How is indicative of Ifemelu's experience and why she has decided to return to Nigeria.
4. Ifemelu finally tells Obinze about the tennis coach. "She paused. "And you.'" (p. 542). They sit and she starts crying and he tells her he wishes that she had told him. She feels safe and cocooned by "an ancient silence that they both knew." Did this confession play out the way you had imagined it would? What would you have imagined differently, if anything?
5. What else do you want to talk about?



## INVITATIONS

**Connect:** “Excuses don’t win a game. You should try strategy.” (p. 544) What strategy could you apply to overcome a challenge you are facing?

**Question:** Share a question about chapter 52. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

**Contemplate:** “She found it so attractive, his shortness, his solid firm shortness. She saw in his shortness, a groundedness; he could weather anything, he could not easily be swayed.” (p. 552)

**Create:** “I want to interview him. I want to start this weekly feature, ‘Lagos from an Insider’...” (p. 545) Design your own weekly feature. Include your title and a description of what your readers can expect. Challenge: write your first article of this weekly feature!

## DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. After a week of playful dates, Ifemelu brings up having sex and then becomes angry with Obinze when she thinks of “his other life, his real life.” What fears is she struggling with?
2. Did you think of Kosi at all during this chapter? What ran through your mind?
3. “This memory too, she would store” (p. 547). Why do you think Ifemelu is making a scrap of memories in her head? Does she think this new-found relationship with Obinze will be forever? Why or why not?
4. What do you think runs through both Ifemelu and Obinze’s minds as their relationship progresses? What do you think they fear? Or want? Or need?
5. What else do you want to talk about?



## INVITATIONS

**Connect:** “I think it has been a little too fast between us, and I want to take some time to put things in perspective.” (p. 557) When have you sped ahead and when have you taken time?

**Question:** Share a question about chapter 53. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

**Contemplate:** “This was love, to be eager for tomorrow.” (p. 553)

**Create:** “There’s a lot of pretending in my marriage...I married her when I was feeling vulnerable; I had a lot of upheaval in my life at the time.” (p. 555) Write a fictitious journal entry by a person in this situation.

## DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Although Ifemelu is crazily happy she is held aware by the fact that Obinze is married and is not free to be with her. Talk about how this plagues her.
2. Obinze tells Ifemelu that he loves her; yet is clouded with the knowledge that he is married. How do they struggle through the knowledge in this chapter? Have you ever been in a situation where you are in a relationship but trying to get out because you are in love with someone else?
3. Ifemelu calls Obinze a coward. Do you think she is right or wrong to do so? Why do you think so?
4. What else do you want to talk about?



## INVITATIONS

**Connect:** “And it struck Obinze that, a few years ago, they were attending weddings, now it was christenings, and soon it would be funerals. They would die. They would all die after trudging through lives in which they were neither happy nor unhappy.” (p. 574) What does, or what would, a neither happy nor unhappy existence look like for you?

**Question:** Share a question about chapter 54. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

**Contemplate:** “The wealthy don’t really care about tribe. But the lower you go, the more tribe matters.” (p. 576)

**Create:** “He tried to shake of the morose shadow that was enveloping him” (p. 574) Create something to express both shadow and light.

## DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. In Abuja, “The air smelled of power...it dripped too, of sex.” (p. 559) Describe a city that you know well by its smells, sights, sounds, tastes and feelings.
2. What do you think Obinze’s respect for the self-made man, Edusco, reveals about him? (pp.560-2)
3. In this chapter Obinze compares the two women in his life--one a practical choice and the other a passion. Have you ever had to choose between passion and practicality in a relationship, a job, or family? How has that decision shaped your life today?
4. When Obinze tells Kosi he wants to leave her, it highlights the public and private faces of marriage. In his context, some things are sacred and others not. What is your reaction to this and what do you think of Kosi’s actions?
5. What else do you want to talk about?



## INVITATIONS

**Connect:** “For a long time she stared at him. He was saying what she wanted to hear and yet she stared at him.” (p. 588) What is it you want to hear? What might you do if you heard it today?

**Question:** Share a question about chapter 55. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

**Contemplate:** “She was reaching back to her past.” (p. 586)

**Create:** “Each memory stunned her with its blinding luminosity.” (p. 583) What are your luminous or stunning memories? Represent one of these memories in the way you that seems best to you.

## DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. What have the peacocks in Ifemelu’s courtyard come to represent? What does their representation foretell?
2. Ifemelu starts distancing herself from Obinze. Why do you think she does this and is it necessary?
3. Why do you think Ifemelu reaches back to her past and even calls Blaine and Curt? What is she hoping to achieve with this?
4. Ifemelu starts to date Fred. But it is not what she wishes it would be. Have you ever been in a similar situation - where the person is near perfect - but you’re not feeling the same as them?
5. When seven months after Ifemelu last saw him, Obinze appears at her door and says: “I want to act. I want this to happen”...what are your thoughts about what may have happened to him since they last each other?
6. “‘Ceiling,’ she said finally. ‘Come in.’” What does the last line of the book mean to you? Where do you think it will take Ifemelu and Obinze? Do you like the way the book ends? Why or why not?
7. What else do you want to talk about?