

AMERICANAH

BOOK CLUB
READING GUIDE



Part 3



NYC Media & Entertainment
Office of the Mayor Julie Menin
Commissioner



NYC MAYOR'S OFFICE FOR MEDIA & ENTERTAINMENT

The Center for the Professional Education of Teachers

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 with questions or comments. Visit our [One Book One New York](#) page for more resources.

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INVITATIONS

Connect: What are some of the complications you can imagine of marrying to offer or gain legal residency? What are some of the reliefs?

Question: Share a question about chapter 23. We'll add it to our reader's guide!

Contemplate: "You are legal, you are visible, and you don't even know how lucky you are." (p. 281)

Create: "[Obinze] spent a lot of time with her, determined to make amends, to return to their former relationship, but first to attempt to map the boundaries of their estrangement." Draw a map to visually represent an important and/or complicated relationship in your life.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. *You work, you are legal, you are visible.* Obinze is struggling to survive and adjust in England. Discuss his understanding of being visible or invisible.
2. Why does he need an arranged marriage? What will he gain and lose by going into this transaction?
3. Explain Cleotilde's wistfulness when she talks about Africa.
4. Why does Cleotilde make Obinze feel whole again? Why do you think he needs healing?
5. "Truth telling has become a luxury that they could no longer afford." (p. 290) The relationship between Obinze and his mother begins to erode. Why is that? And what was lost and gained as this relationship evolves into something other than it used to be?
6. What else do you want to talk about?



INVITATIONS

Connect: Why do you think someone might stop communicating with a person s/he loves?

Question: Share a question about chapter 24. We'll add it to our reader's guide!

Contemplate: "They had not fought, their love was as sparkling as always, their plan intact, and suddenly there was silence from her, a silence so brutal and complete." (p. 293)

Create: What does a "brutal and complete silence" feel like? Represent the feeling in the way that seems best to you.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. In this chapter, we follow Obinze as he adjusts to life in the UK. In what ways does his experience mirror Ifemelu's adjustment to America? How is it different?
2. Obinze finally hears from Ifemelu. Why do you think he decides to delete her email?
3. Like Ifemelu, Obinze is embedded in a family when she first comes to London. How has this new life changed his cousin Nicholas?
4. What are some cultural pieces of themselves that Nicholas and Ojiugo give up as they strive to give their children a "better life"?
5. "London is a leveler," says one of Ojiugo's friends at the kitchen table. (p 303) What are some ways status and expectations can change for those who immigrate--both positively and negatively?
6. What else do you want to talk about?

AMERICANAH • PART 3 • CHAPTER 25



INVITATIONS

Connect: “Sharp, the word everyone used to describe Eminike in secondary school. Sharp, full of the poisoned admiration they felt for him. Sharp Guy. Sharp Man.” (p. 305) What word would have been used to describe you in secondary school?

Question: Share a question about chapter 25. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: “He knew many stories of friends and relatives who, in the hostile glare of life abroad, became unreliable, even hostile versions of their former selves.” (p. 307)

Create: How different do you think you are now than when you were in secondary school? More or less the same? Quite different? Post a photo of yourself then and now and/or post your thoughts about the you then and the you now.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Eminike is the epitome of being “Sharp”. Explain.
2. How has Eminike moved out and above his humble beginnings, but at the same time lost so much of who he is culturally?
3. How similar are Obinze and Efemelu’s experiences in trying to find a work authorization card?
4. How has making compromise to themselves and their culture been necessitated by coming to England, and being to survive the transition - both emotionally and materialistically?
5. What else do you want to talk about?



INVITATIONS

Connect: What is the hardest job you or someone you know has had? What made it so difficult?

Question: Share a question about chapter 26. We'll add it to our reader's guide!

Contemplate: "Once a sad-looking woman had offered Obinze a small pot of homemade jam, and he had hesitated, but he sensed that whatever deep unhappiness she had would be compounded if he said no, and so he had taken the jam home and it was still languishing in the fridge unopened." (p. 316)

Create: A coworker asks Obinze advice on what to say to a woman he likes: "You look like you know what to say to the birds, mate." (p 316) Make a list of other words used to refer to women besides "birds." Create a response to that list that makes sense to you.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. What cultural norms does Obinze get introduced to at his new job?
2. Why does Roy's attitude surprise him? "...in Obinze's mind, Englishmen were not smiling men." (p 312) How do you think he imagined Englishmen to be?
3. In spite of the men's friendliness towards him, what discrimination does he experience at work that he is not able to call out?
4. Obinze has to act out a false identity. Do you think this affects him? Why?
5. What else do you want to talk about?

AMERICANAH • PART 3 • CHAPTER 27



INVITATIONS

Connect: "...he thought of...the life he imagined for himself, and the life he now had, lacquered as it was by work and readying, by panic and hope. He never felt so lonely." (p. 321) When you think of the life you imagined for yourself and the life you are living now, what thoughts or feelings rise up?

Question: Share a question about chapter 27. We'll add it to our reader's guide!

Contemplate: "It filled him with possibility, this chance meeting with a stranger, and the thought of the paths on which it might lead him." (p. 318)

Create: On the train, Obinze thinks, "Was she wondering whether he was one of those illegal immigrants who were overcrowding an already crowded island?" (p. 320) Write a letter to someone you see on the subway or bus. What would you like to tell them? Ask them?

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Explain why Obinze's ritual of going into a bookstore and ordering a caffeinated drink and baked goodie is therapeutic to him? Why is it important to his sanity?
2. Why did he choose to read American newspapers over British?
3. Discuss his interaction with the woman he thought was either Bangladeshi or Sri Lankan. What does he see glimmering in the woman's eyes? What does that make him think of and why was that both dangerous and sad?
4. "The wind blowing across the British Isles was odorous with the fear of asylum seekers..."(p. 320) Elaborate.
5. What else do you want to talk about?



INVITATIONS

Connect: Why do some people exert power over other people while others never would? Have you ever been in a situation over which you felt you had no control? What was your response?

Question: Share a question about chapter 28. We'll add it to our reader's guide!

Contemplate: "Somebody called yesterday. Said you're not who you say you are, that you're illegal..." (p. 323)

Create: In what ways are people "illegal" if at all? Capture your thoughts in film by making a short video or song that connects with this "illegal" discussion.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Have you ever been afraid that you'd be discovered as an imposter? How did you experience the fear of discovery that occurs on Obinze's "birthday"?
2. What are the complexities that working as undocumented bring to Obinze?
3. How do we understand Obinze's bodily feelings of safety and danger? What has made you feel in danger? What makes you feel safe?
4. How do Roy and Nigel's friendship bring lightness to his situation?
5. What else do you want to talk about?

AMERICANAH • PART 3 • CHAPTER 29



INVITATIONS

Connect: Emenike tells the story of when a cab driver did not stop for him and then picked up two white women further up the street. When have you felt that someone was clearly prejudiced against you? What was your response?

Question: Share a question about chapter 29. We'll add it to our reader's guide!

Contemplate: "Alexa and the other guests, and perhaps even Georgina, all understood the fleeing from war, from the kind of poverty that crushed human souls, but they would not understand the need to escape the oppressive lethargy of choicelessness."
(p. 341)

Create: Class. Gender. Race. Pick one word or respond to all three. Create a response in the medium that seems best to you: post an equation, a sketch, a list, a letter . . .

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Emenike seems to be Obinze's last resort. How is this problematic? What is dichotomous about Emenike now and how he grew up in Nigeria?
2. When Emenike gives Obinze the money he suggests he count it - how is this a change in traditional discourse and Nigerian mannerism?
3. Emenike says: "it's not a loan." What does this say about him?
4. What does Obinze think of Georgina initially, and how does the assessment of her and Emenike's life deepen the next night at the house party?
5. What are some of the issues around immigration that plague both America and Britain?
6. Discuss: "the oppressive lethargy of choicelessness." (p. 341)
7. What else do you want to talk about?



INVITATIONS

Connect: This chapter includes arrests for immigrants who do not have a legal visa. What are your thoughts on our country's immigration policy, what, if anything, would you change, and what are the considerations that need to be made when enacting an immigration policy?

Question: Share a question about chapter 30. We'll add it to our reader's guide!

Contemplate: "A policeman clamped handcuffs around his wrists. He felt himself watching the scene from far away, watching himself walk to the police car outside, and sink into the too-soft seat in the back." (p. 344)

Create: "Removed. That word made Obinze feel inanimate. A thing to be removed. A thing without breath and mind. A thing." (p. 345) Respond to these words and images—"removed" "inanimate," "a thing" in image--a drawing, painting, video, photograph, collage, etc.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Did it surprise you that Obinze gets deported? Why or why not?
2. There is an 'immigration game' (p 347) that many people are playing. Why doesn't Obinze decide to do the same?
3. What emotions did you feel as Obinze was arrested and sent back to Nigeria? How is the deportation process intended to be dehumanizing?
4. What is it like for him to return home to Nigeria? What realizations do you think he has about himself and his life once he is back?
5. What else do you want to talk about?