AMERICANAH

BOOK CLUB
READING GUIDE

Parts 1 – 7

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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Connect: In chapter 1, we see how the main character is caught between two lives. Have you ever felt divided between two cultures? How so?

Question: Share a question about chapter 1. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: “Will you be able to cope? ... the suggestion that she was somehow irrevocably altered by America, had grown thorns on her skin.” (p. 20)

Create: Ifemelu feels divided between two different lives. Imagine what this feels like, looks like? Represent a divided life in a drawing, painting, poem, or ...

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. On page 1, Ifemelu describes the distinct smells of several American cities: Philadelphia, New Haven, Baltimore and Brooklyn. Is there a smell to New York City that you can talk about? What words would you use to describe your specific neighborhood’s smell?

2. “Princeton smelled of nothing . . . it was this, the lack of smell, that most appealed to her.” What most appeals to you about New York City? About your neighborhood?

3. What connections do you have with Ifemelu?

4. Aisha, from Senegal, shares with Ifemelu that two Igbo men have refused to marry her because, “Igbo marry Igbo, always.” What are some of the “rules” of your culture, family, tribe, or community?

5. What else do you want to talk about?
AMERICANAH • PART 1 • CHAPTER 2

INVITATIONS

Connect: Why is it so hard to follow the advice, just be yourself? What are we really afraid of?
Question: Share a question about chapter 2. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!
Contemplate: “He felt a hollow space between himself and the person he was supposed to be.” (p. 33)
Create: Obinze does not feel like his true self, like there’s a gap between who is actually is, and how he acts. What fears live in the gap between how he acts and who he is? Make a mini-poster representing fears and the gap between how you act and who you are.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Obinze is struck by that Ifemelu calls him “Ceiling” in her email. He mentions that in her last email she had called him “Obinze.” What is the difference between these two names for Obinze? What names do you have? What do they mean to you? To those who use your name(s)?

2. What do you make of Obinze’s relationship with Chief? What do you predict will happen in the chapters ahead?

3. What connections do you have with Obinze?

4. Chapter 1 introduces us to Ifemelu, Chapter 2 to Obinze. What conclusions do you draw about each character? About their relationship? How do you know?

5. What else do you want to talk about?
Connect: Ifemelu’s father describes her as being “recalcitrant, mutinous, intransigent...” What words has a family member used to describe you? Do you agree? Why or why not?

Question: Share a question about chapter 3. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: Ifemelu had grown up in the shadow of her mother’s hair. It was black-black, so thick it drank two containers of relaxer at the salon, so full it took hours under the hooded dryer, and when finally released from pink rollers, sprang free and full, flowing down her back like a celebration. (p. 49)

Create: What does it mean to be a “country starved of hope”? Respond with drawing, painting, poem, song, video, poster, photograph or other creative response.

Discussion Prompts

1. In the hair salon, Ifemelu has brought healthy and organic snacks to eat. Why do you think Mariama thinks these snacks are not food? What does this portray about a Western and African understanding of what food is?

2. Ifemelu has been told by hair braiders that her hair “cut them like a knife”. How does this comment offer a starting point to commentary around ethnic hair and how thicker, coarser hair cannot be perceived as beautiful by Western standards?

3. Ifemelu’s mom fasts and prays to purge her spirit. Have you ever done, or still practice, rituals to affect your spirit? What are they and what started you off on these practices?

4. When Ifemelu’s dad loses his job because he would not call his new boss “mommy”, it hurts the whole family. What are your thoughts on what he should have done differently, if anything? How does the losing of a job influence not only that person but also those closest and dearest to them?

5. Aunty Uju tells Ifemelu that she doesn’t have to SAY everything? What does she mean by this? What are your thoughts on this advice from Aunty Uju?

6. What else do you want to talk about?
INVITATIONS

Connect: “Sometimes she worried that she was too happy... and her joy would become a restless thing, flapping its wings inside her, as though looking for an opening to fly away.” (p.76) Even as Ifemelu is full of bliss, the fear of loss creeps into her consciousness and steals some of her shine. What metaphor would you use to describe this phenomenon?

Question: Share a question about chapter 3. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: “She had caramel skin and wavy hair that, when unbraided, fell down to her neck instead of standing Afro-like. Each year, she was voted Prettiest Girl in their form.” (p.67)

Create: “She said she should not have been slapped because she is a full human being ... some of her female students went a printed Full Human Being on T-shirts.” (p.71) Design a t-shirt that features a concise, expressive quote and protests an injustice.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Obinze’s mother takes a break from the university over a dispute. How do her actions empower others? Whose actions have empowered you?

2. When Ifemelu meets Obinze, “something strange happened. A quickening inside her, a dawning.” What do you think she recognizes in him?

3. This chapter indirectly points to traditional roles played by men and women in relationships. Do you think Obinze and Ifemelu’s relationship breaks any expected cultural roles?

4. Is it possible be ‘too happy’ in a relationship?

5. What else do you want to talk about?
Connect: Does traveling to other places change a person’s identity or personality?

Question: Share a question about chapter 5. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: “This regime is treating us like sheep and we are starting to behave as if we are sheep. I have not been able to do any real research in years, because every day I am organizing strikes and talking about unpaid salary and there is no chalk in the classroom.” (p. 77)

Create: “She did not know what ‘own yourself a little more,’ meant.” (p. 87) In a poem, song, or a few sentences, describe a moment or experience when you owned yourself a little more.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Ginika and Ifemelu were close friends before they met Obinze. What do you think about how Ifemelu and Ginika deal with the tension between them?

2. Emenike lies about having affluent parents - Have you ever made up an aspect of your life so that you could fit into a group? Why, when and how? What were the results?

3. This chapter references the title for the first time, when Ranyinudo says, “She’ll come back and be a serious Americanah like Bisi,” and everyone roars with laughter (p. 78). What do you think she means by “serious Americanah” and why is this so funny?

4. At the end of the chapter, Obinze’s mother asks Ifemelu to tell her when they’re ready to become intimate, and Ifemelu agrees. What does this tell us about their characters?

5. What else do you want to talk about?
Connect: “At the flat, Aunty Uju handed Ifemelu’s father a plastic bag swollen with cash. ‘It’s rent for two years, Brother’...She did not look him in the face as she spoke and he did not look her in the face as he thanked her.” (p. 95) How have you felt vulnerable when receiving or giving a gift, material or otherwise?

Question: Share a question about chapter 6. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: “Ifemelu wondered if Aunty Uju ever looked at herself with the eyes of the girl she used to be.” (p. 89)

Create: “Ifemelu would remember the final moments in a blur...The room upstairs had grown unbearably hot; the air conditioners had suddenly stopped working, as though they had decided in unison, to pay tribute to the end.” (p. 106) Write about an ending in your own life; how clear are the memories, how like the blur described here?

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. What are some symbols of family, manliness and/or social status in this chapter?
2. Ifemelu is frightened by Auntie Uju’s relationship with the General. What causes this discomfort?
3. How does Ifemelu’s view of her father change during this chapter?
4. When Auntie Uju becomes pregnant, what are some of the unspoken undercurrents from the other characters?
5. What else do you want to talk about?
Connect: In Chapter 7, Ifemelu starts university in Nsukka. She says she was, “looking forward to being away from home, to the independence of owning her own time...” (p.108)
Describe a time when you have felt this way.

Question: Share a question about chapter 7. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: “University was bigger and baggier, there was room to hide, so much room; she did not feel as though she did not belong because there were many options for belonging.” (p. 110)

Create: The effects of the sharp winds of the harmattan (a dusty winter wind) is described as making the world, “suddenly fragile and breakable.” (p. 113) Represent this image in a drawing, painting, poem, song, video, or ...

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. When Obinze changes his choice from Ibadan to Nsukka, Ifemelu changes hers too. Have you ever changed your mind and plans just to be with the person you were in a relationship with?

2. Have you ever been “curious” - while in a relationship - about someone outside of that relationship? How did that make you feel?

3. What are your thoughts on Ifemelu reaching out to her aunt first when she thinks she is pregnant?

4. What does the fact that Ifemelu blurting out the truth to Obinze’s mother tell us about her character?

5. How does Ifemelu’s parents’ reaction to Obinze’s mother tell us about social structure at that time? Why does she manage to impress them so?

6. What else do you want to talk about?
INVITATIONS

Connect: “‘Make small, small braids that will last long, it’s very expensive to make hair here,’ Aunty Uju told her.” What are some pieces of advice you have been given when planning for the unknown?

Question: Share a question about chapter 8. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: “Obinze’s mother said, ‘And make sure you and Obinze have a plan. Have a plan.’ Her words, so unexpected and so right, lifted Ifemelu’s spirits...In the following years...she would sometimes remember his mother’s words -- make sure you and Obinze have a plan -- and feel comforted.” (p. 124)

Create: “To her, America was America.” (p. 122) What is America? Respond with drawing, painting, poem, song, video, poster, photograph or other creative response.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Leaving Nigeria is a big step for Ifemelu. What influences her to go to America the most?

2. What shapes Ifemelu’s idea of America, and what expectations does she has of her life there?

3. Was there ever a time when you felt you might leave your home country? What was the reason?

4. At the end of the chapter, she says there will come a time when she and Obinze will lose touch. What do you think will be the cause of their separation?

5. What else do you want to talk about?
INVITATIONS

Connect: Things aren’t always what they seem after a big move. Have you ever been disappointed that a new place is different than your expectations?

Question: Share a question about chapter 9. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: When Ifemelu first arrives in the United States, she “stared at buildings and cars and signboards, all of them matte, disappointingly matte; in the landscape of her imagination, the mundane things in America were covered in a high-shine gloss.” (p. 127)

Create: “...the mundane things in America were covered in high-shine gloss.” (p. 127) Represent something you consider mundane (photo, painting, drawing). Now represent it in high-gloss. What will you use to make the mundane glossy?

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Have you ever changed your name or the pronunciation of your name so that it made it easier for other people to address you?

2. Comment on the definition of “Hispanic” as explained on p. 129.

3. Dike is extremely kind to Ifemelu when she arrives and on the first night offers her his pillow. How does this contrast with his mother’s attitude towards Ifemelu? Why is this contrast so stark and unsettling?

4. Discuss Uju’s state being described as “her spirit bleached of color”. (p. 132).

5. “America had subdued her” (p. 135) - Comment.

6. What else do you want to talk about?
Connect: Simple choices make a big difference in how our lives turn out. What was one simple choice you’ve made that put your life on a new path?

Question: Share a question about chapter 10. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: “The real America, she felt, was just around the next corner she would turn.” (p 136)

Create: It was Ifemelu’s first summer in the United States: “It was, also, her summer of eating.” (p 118) What are you eating this week? Share a picture of a new food you are trying or a comfort food you can’t imagine leaving behind.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Summer could represent a honeymoon in Ifemelu’s adjustment to America. What are the contrasts the author highlights?

2. How does the media shape her view of what Ifemelu calls “the real America?” (p 139)

3. Ifemelu and Dike have a unique and warm relationship. What are some of the roles she and Dike play in each other’s lives over this summer?

4. What do you make of her friendship with Jane?

5. What else do you want to talk about?
**AMERICANAH • PART 2 • CHAPTER 11**

**INVITATIONS**

**Connect:** Have you ever been intimidated by your environment? A big city? A new town? How did you overcome your fears?

**Question:** Share a question about chapter 11. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

**Contemplate:** “You are in a country that is not your own. You do what you have to do if you want to succeed.” (p 146)

**Create:** “The first time she took the subway from Brooklyn to Manhattan, her palms sweaty, she walked the streets, watching, absorbing.” (p145) Walk your streets. Absorb. What are the sights, sounds, smells, and tastes? Post words or pics from your walk, from your watching.

**DISCUSSION PROMPTS**

1. There is an interesting portrait drawn of Bartholomew, Aunty Uju’s new boyfriend. What is it about him that makes him an unsuitable match in Ifemelu’s view?

2. How has being in America changed the way Auntie Uju, Bartholomew and Ifemelu each engage with Nigeria?

3. What are some American cultural norms Aunty Uju accepts without question once she passes her medical exam?

4. Discuss why the relationship is so poignant between Dike and Ifemelu: She thinks of him as a treasure already lost as she prepares to go to Philadelphia.

5. “All of us look alike to White people.” What do you think of a homogenous understanding of race and culture?

6. What else do you want to talk about?
INVITATIONS

Connect: Ifemelu is an outsider. When have you been an outsider? What, if anything, did you do or say about the experience?

Question: Share a question about chapter 12. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: “As they walked out of the store, Ifemelu said...‘Why didn’t she just ask, Was it the black girl or the white girl?’ Ginika laughed, ‘Because this is America. You’re supposed to pretend that you don’t notice certain things.’” (p 155) What are the things you’re not supposed to notice in your family or community?

Create: “Ginika recounted anecdotes about her own early experiences in America, as though they were all filled with subtle wisdom that Ifemelu would need.” (p 151) Share an anecdote (short account of a real event or incident) you think could benefit someone else.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. In this chapter, Ifemelu and Ginika rekindle their friendship. How does Ginika become a ‘cultural guide’ to Ifemelu?

2. The author gives some jarring descriptions of women’s appearances in this chapter. What are some assumptions or criticisms made about women and beauty here?

3. How does confusion about the meanings of words, humor and music highlight Ifemelu’s feelings that she is different? (pp 151-153)

4. What else do you want to talk about?
Connect: Have you ever really needed a job? What goes through your mind while you’re waiting?

Question: Share a question about chapter 13. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: “That credit card preapproval, with her name correctly spelled and elegantly italicized, had roused her spirits, made her a little less invisible, a little more present. Somebody knew her.” (p 162)

Create: “The world was wrapped in gauze; she could see the shapes of things but not clearly enough, never enough. She told Obinze that there were things she should know how to do, but didn’t, details she should have corralled into her space but hadn’t.” (p 160) Using whatever method you think best, share your experience of not seeing clearly or not yet organizing, to your standards, certain details of your life.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Ifemelu goes for interviews for jobs she has applied for. They are angst laden. Why is she nervous and anxious - what are some of her concerns?

2. “The world was wrapped in gauze.” Discuss how Ifemelu must be feeling at this point.

3. Discuss the nature of Ifemelu and Obinze’s relationship. “He calmed her.” (p. 161)

4. Dike offers Ifemelu companionship despite their age difference. Why do you think this is so?

5. What else do you want to talk about?
Connect: “To accept one's past - one's history - is not the same things as drowning in it. An invented past can never be used; it cracks and crumbles under the pressures of life like clay in a season of drought.” — James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time  What does this mean to you?

Question: Share a question about chapter 14. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: Ifemelu discovers a hunger for reading American books, devouring The Fire Next Time by James Baldwin in one sitting. What words do you devour? Why do you hunger for them?

Create: Using paint, pen, or your favorite medium, create a jumble of words that represents what it looks like to “drown in one’s history.”

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. What do you think Cristina Tomas’s intentions are towards Ifemelu? (p 163) What unintentional impact does Ifemelu feel from the way she speaks to her?
2. What do you make of Ifemelu’s quest to learn everything about America?
3. Ifemelu continues to relate her experiences to Obinze and Auntie Uju through letters and phone calls. What role do you think they play in her life, even now?
4. Who do you think will become Ifemelu’s long term friends in America?
5. What else do you want to talk about?
**INVITATIONS**

**Connect:** Traumatic events can spark a sadness or depression. Close friends can help bring us out. Tag one of your close friends and tell them how much you appreciate them in your life.

**Question:** Share a question about chapter 15. We'll add it to our reader’s guide!

**Contemplate:** “Nobody in Kinshasa had panic attacks. It was not even that it was called by another name, it was simply not called at all. Did things begin to exist only when they were named?” (p195) What are your thoughts on the (possible) power of naming?

**Create:** “...she liked Kimberly, her breakable beauty, her purplish eyes full of the expression Obinze often used to describe the people he liked: *obi ocha. A clean heart.*” (p181) Look around you. Locate an expression of *obi ocha.* Take a picture or represent what you see in whatever way you think best.

**DISCUSSION PROMPTS**

1. When Ifemelu goes to the tennis coach’s house for the interview, her skin prickles upon meeting him. What are the feelings these words conjure in your mind as you imagine the proposition he has for her?

2. As Ifemelu leaves the tennis coach’s home she is struck by a sense of homesickness so sharp that she starts crying. Have you ever been so homesick that you cried in a public place? Talk about how you imagine she may have felt.

3. Talk about Obinze sending her money - knowing the exchange rate - and how he must be feeling about her.

4. The house and family she goes to see about the babysitting job lives a life so starkly different from hers and what she is used to - speak to the disparity of wealth as it is portrayed here.

5. Ifemelu wakes up every day “at war with the world and woke up each day feeling bruised.” Discuss her descent into depression, and the ultimate desolation she must feel as she takes the tennis coach up on his offer.

6. What else do you want to talk about?
Connect: “Ifemelu knew that for a long time afterwards, she would not unwrap from herself the pashmina of the wounded.” (p208) What makes you feel safe when scared or wounded? What’s your pashmina made up of?

Question: Share a question about chapter 16. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: “She believed in other people’s happiness because it meant that she, too, might one day have it.” (p 202)

Create: “She would reply, too, she told herself...but a week later, the letter still lay there. She placed a book on top of it, then another book, and one day it was swallowed beneath files and books. She would never read it.” (p 197) Using household objects, represent what gets, or has been, buried in your life.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Ifemelu is introduced to the Turner family in this chapter. How is she able to see the relationship dynamics so clearly? How is she a more mature “parent” to the children than Don and Kimberly?

2. Which of the family’s actions give Ifemelu a specific kind of position in relation to themselves?

3. Ifemelu’s relationship with Obinze continues to disintegrate. Why can’t she bring herself to read his emails and letters?

4. Ifemelu confronts Laura about a misconception she has and Laura is offended. (p 207) What is the misconception and why does Ifemelu feel she has to apologize instead of Laura?

5. What else do you want to talk about?
INVITATIONS

Connect: “That’s a pretty strong opinion.” / “I don’t know how to have any other kind.” (p 220) Do you have strong opinions? How do you express them?

Question: Share a question about chapter 17. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: “Sometimes I feel that [people with graduate degrees] live in a parallel universe of academia speaking academese instead of English and they don’t really know what’s happening in the real world.” (p220)

Create: “‘My group leader, Haley? She gave sunscreen to everyone but she wouldn’t give me any. She said I didn’t need it.’ ...She didn’t know what to say. ‘She thought because you’re dark you don’t need sunscreen. But you do. Many people don’t know that dark people also need sunscreen.’” Represent, in the way you think best, assumptions people have made about you.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Explain why Ifemelu decided to stop faking her American accent.

2. What is Ifemelu’s “Mr. Agbo Voice”? Why do you think she reserves it for certain people and certain occasions? Why do you think it works?

3. How had Ifemelu learned to discern where Black people were from? How did she know the difference between people of African or Caribbean descent as opposed to someone who was born and raised in the USA?

4. Ifemelu feels it odd that she meets Blaine on the day she decides to give her voice back to herself. What do you think of their meeting? And of her calling and calling him, and he never answering?

5. Discuss how Dike’s wanting to fit in by wanting sunscreen is shrouded in racism?

6. What does the commentary about race and class at the end of the chapter mean and signify?

7. What else do you want to talk about?
Connect: A budding romance is always an exciting time. What characteristics do you look for in a good match?

Question: Share a question about chapter 18. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: “She could have blogged about...this girl who somehow believed that she was miraculously neutral in how she read books, while other people read emotionally.” (p234) What would reading from a neutral position feel and look like? In what ways do we read neutrally and/or emotionally?

Create: “She was aggressively friendly.” (233) Represent an “aggressively friendly” conversation in emoji.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. We return to Ifemelu at the hairdresser in this chapter. What, if anything, surprises you about the conversations that go on there between the different women this time?

2. Ifemelu says about Curt: “She had always been able to sense the desire of men, but not Curt’s, at first.” What differences do you see about this relationship, and why do you think she gets involved with him?

3. Ifemelu compares Curt with many things. Which comparison is most striking to you?

4. What else do you want to talk about?
**INVITATIONS**

**Connect:** Sometimes, we get opportunities because of our status or our network. Even when we’re deserving, these privileges aren’t given to everyone. In these situations, are you more likely to feel gratitude, or guilt?

**Question:** Share a question about chapter 19. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

**Contemplate:** “... and here she was, a pink balloon, weightless, floating to the top, propelled by things outside of herself.” (p 250)

**Create:** There is no escaping the importance of hair in *Americanah*: style, length, fullness, and texture. Several women drastically change their hair in the story. Talk with your friends and family or strangers on the bus. What is their relationship with their hair? Create a collage, montage or simple photograph representing the role of hair in your community.

**DISCUSSION PROMPTS**

1. Why does Curt’s mother feel it necessary to explain to Ifemelu what kind of Republicans they are? Why is Ifemelu’s response both funny and serious?

2. Discuss the sharp contrast in Ifemelu’s life now with Curt as opposed to how it was when she was struggling to find work and pay her bills? How has her disposition changed too?

3. Why do you think she does not speak to her parents of Curt? What do you think their reaction would be?

4. Talk about the idea that relaxed hair is professional vs natural hair being unprofessional. How does the burn and pain she endures affect Curt? Do you think she would have gotten the job if her hair was in braids or an afro?

5. Her parents are clearly happy that she got the job. How do they each, differently, express their joy at her success?

6. What else do you want to talk about?
Connect: “I don’t want my hair to be brave.” (p 248) What is it that makes our hair an extension of our identity?

Question: Share a question about chapter 20. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: “You’re always battling to make your hair do what it wasn’t meant to do.” (p248)

Create: “He was always thinking of what else to do and she told him that it was rare for her, because she had grown up not doing, but being.” (p257) Quick Pic: Post a pic of what you are doing, or how you are being, during a reflective or fun moment this week.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. In this chapter, Ifemelu gets to know Curt better, and yet she realizes that he could never be fully knowable to her. (p 255,6) Why does she say this--is it because he is white, American, or because of something else?

2. How do you think Curt sees their relationship?

3. Ifemelu cuts her hair short and develops a whole new relationship with it--and herself. What makes this relationship with hair is so central to how women feel about themselves?

4. What more do the blog posts tell us about Ifemelu than we know already?

5. What else do you want to talk about?
INVITATIONS

Connect: After being mistreated in relationship, sometimes the smallest thing can make it clear that enough is enough. For Uju, it was toothpaste in the sink. What has it been for you?

Question: Share a question about chapter 21. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: “These people, they make you become aggressive just to hold your dignity.” (p 270)

Create: “Ifemelu liked the name of the town, Willow; it sounded to her like freshly squeezed beginnings.” (p 273) Represent the names of towns you like and what they sound like to you in paint, animation, drawing or another medium you prefer.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Why does Aunty Uju worry so much about Dike wearing appropriate clothes to church? What does it say about Ifemelu and Dike’s relationship that she still can influence and cajole him?

2. What does Uju’s reaction to Ifemelu’s hair say about how other Black women may consider Black women who wear her hair naturally?

3. What does Uju’s feelings towards Bartholomew’s understanding of her money say about her character? And to why she eventually decides to leave?

4. “With him she breakable, precious”. Discuss how the visit to Uju with Curt somehow cemented Ifemelu’s understanding of him and their relationship?

5. What does Dike’s lack of mentioning Bartholomew say about how he felt about him?

6. In her blog post, Ifemelu talks about the stereotypes of the danger of being the angry Black woman or the violent Black man. What are your thoughts?

7. What else do you want to talk about?
INVITATIONS

Connect: It can be hard to summon the courage to reconnect with a long-lost friend or lover. What would motivate you to reach out after many years of silence?

Question: Share a question about chapter 22. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: “There were things scattered inside her that she needed to gather together.” (p 277)

Create: “He sensed very well that she had made the choice to shut him out. She was already walking away...She was supposed to exchange phone numbers, talk for longer, behave in all the expected ways. But emotions were rioting inside her.” (p 277) It’s a challenging time, across our country, around the world. Collect or create images that represent rioting emotions to you.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. What is it about running into her old classmate, Kayode that is so unsettling for Ifemelu?
2. Why does this meeting suddenly enable her to reach out to Obinze after all this time?
3. What do you make of Curt’s sudden declaration: “I want to be the fucking love of your life”?
4. What else do you want to talk about?
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?
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. Emenike is the epitome of being “Sharp”. Explain.
2. How has Emenike 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?
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?
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?
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?
**AMERICANAH • PART 3 • CHAPTER 30**

**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?
**INVITATIONS**

**Connect:** “I only became black when I came to America.” (p.359) Would a version of that statement ring true for a white immigrant (i.e. “I only became Irish when I came to America.”)? If not, what is it about America that makes people “black?”

**Question:** Share a question about chapter 31. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

**Contemplate:** “‘Who is he?’ She told him the man’s name. Rob. ‘He’s white?’ She was surprised that he would ask her this, and so soon.” (p. 356) Are you surprised that Curt would ask her this, and so soon?

**Create:** If you haven’t ever done so, try out Ifemelu’s “magazine challenge” from pages 364-366. Document your findings in the medium that feels most appropriate.

**DISCUSSION PROMPTS**

1. Ifemelu has cheated on Curt and their relationship is over. Why did she do it?

2. “There was something wrong with her. A hunger, a restlessness. An incomplete knowledge of herself.” (p. 358) Explain what is meant by that.

3. Explain why Ifemelu challenges the woman at the party who says that race is never an issue for her and her white boyfriend? Why do you think the French hostess is happy at the turn in conversation?

4. What does Curt learn after Ifemelu takes him to the bookstore to look at magazines? Have you ever thought of the representation of Black women in magazines and what their representation means to different people? Explain.

5. How often do we choose silence over confrontation? Can you share a story?

6. What else do you want to talk about?
AMERICANAH • PART 4 • CHAPTER 32

INVITATIONS

Connect: “Remember that a woman is like a flower. Our time passes quickly.” (p. 373) What is a woman’s “time”? Once that time passes, is she no longer a woman?

Question: Share a question about chapter 32. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: “Is race an invention or not?” (p. 374)

Create: “Remember that a woman is like a flower. Our time passes quickly.” (p. 373) What is a woman’s “time,” and what happens to her after it “passes?” As you craft your response, try playing with time as a medium. What sort of work can you create that chronicles or perhaps even captures time?

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. “For weeks, Ifemelu stumbled around, trying to remember the person she was before Curt.” (p. 370) Have you ever felt lost after a break-up, unable to locate yourself again or the life you had before? How did you anchor yourself again?

2. How has the relationship with Curt changed Ifemelu and her expectations for her life?

3. Is it the break-up that accounts for her mixed feelings towards her parents or is it something else?

4. Ifemelu experiences a lot of longing and loss in this chapter. What do you think she is longing for and what has she lost?

5. What else do you want to talk about?
Connect: What would it take for you to feel safe enough to truly “unzip yourself?” (p. 380)

Question: Share a question about chapter 33. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: “The point of diversity workshops, or multicultural talks, was not to inspire any real change but to leave people feeling good about themselves.” (p. 377)

Create: If you were to “unzip yourself” (p. 380) what would people see? What would they hear? What would they read?

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

7. What are some of the emotions Ifemelu’s blog drew from her and from people around her?

8. She realizes after her first diversity talk in Ohio that people did not really want to be challenged, but rather, they wanted to feel good about themselves. What does she decide to do henceforth? Do you agree or disagree with her decision?

9. Have you ever tried an online dating site? Tell about your experience, and is it similar or different to Ifemelu’s experience?

10. What do you think of Ifemelu’s invitation in her blog where she invites folk to “Unzip” themselves?

11. What else do you want to talk about?
INVITATIONS

Connect: “Later, when she came to know of the letters he wrote to Congress about Darfur, the teenagers he tutored at the high school on Dixwell, the shelter he volunteered at, she thought of him who did not have a normal spine but had, instead, a firm reed of goodness.” (p. 383)

How might the partner, friend, or family member who knows you best describe your spine?

Question: Share a question about chapter 34. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: “He knew about everything; she was intimidated by this and proud of this and slightly repelled by this.” (p. 384)

Create: “I’m not saying you have to be academic or boring. Keep your style but add more depth.” (p. 386) Revisit something you’ve created recently and, as Blaine instructs Ifemelu above, “add more depth.” What did you change? Why hadn’t you done in that way the first time? Is it better now? Is it possible to add still more depth? If so, why haven’t you done that yet?

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. On page 384, Ifemelu says about Blaine: “He knew about everything; she was intimidated by this, proud of this and slightly repelled by this.” Which of these emotions do you think are going to become stronger in the relationship as they stay together?

2. Blaine tries hard to be a good person. As in other relationships with men, she shifts towards his expectations--this time of goodness. How does this affect the way she sees herself?

3. Ifemelu’s parents want her boyfriend to be ‘Nigerian’ and ‘Christian’. What family pressures have you faced in choosing a partner?

4. What do you think of the statement in Ifemelu’s blog that in America, “Here’s the thing: the manifestation of racism has changed, but the language has not.”? What do you see or experience living in New York City?

5. What else do you want to talk about?
Connect: “Blaine stopped to chat with the doorman, as he had chatted with their taxi driver from Penn Station, in that unforced manner that he had, forming alliances with janitors, with cleaning staff, with bus drivers.” (p. 392) In your estimation, why does Blaine behave this way?

Question: Share a question about chapter 35. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: “I’ve told him he needs to write terrible things about his own people if he wants to do well. He needs to say Africans alone are to blame for African problems, and Europeans have helped Africa more than they’ve hurt Africa, and he’ll be famous and people will say he’s so honest!” (p. 394)

Create: “Shan had the air of a person who was somehow chosen.” (p. 393) Using images from old magazines, create a collage that depicts a “chosen” person and their environment.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Even though Ifemelu and Shan are both Black women - their ways of life is so different. How does Blaine treat each of them? How does Ifemelu react to his treatment of his sister? Do you think Black women are a homogenous group? Why?

2. Ifemelu is slighted by Shan when they first meet. Has that ever happened to you? How did it make you feel?

3. “Shan had the air of someone who was chosen.” (p. 393) Discuss.

4. Ifemelu and Shan have an interesting discussion about white and black men - what do you think about it?

5. Discuss Ifemelu’s blog where she refers to Barack Obama as the “Magic Negro”.

6. What else do you want to talk about?
Connect: “He was left-leaning and well-meaning, crippled by his acknowledgement of his own many privileges.” (p. 401) Why would someone so privileged feel so crippled? Should he feel this way?

Question: Share a question about chapter 36. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: “Try listening, maybe. Hear what is being said. And remember that it’s not about you. American Blacks are not telling you that you are to blame. They are just telling you what is.” (p. 406)

Create: “The fried chicken you eat is not the fried chicken I eat, but it’s the fried chicken that Paula eats.” (p. 409) Ifemelu’s comment hints at intersectionality, the notion that none of us is merely of a race or a gender or a class or any other single category. Rather, our subject positions exist at the intersection of all of these (and many other) axes of self-identification. In this case, Ifemelu believes the fact that Blaine and Paula’s shared American-ness (citizenship & culture) is more significant than Blaine and Ifemelu’s shared blackness (race). At what intersection do you find yourself? How do you self-identify? Create a representation of that intersection that appeals to one of the senses...

**DISCUSSION PROMPTS**

1. Ifemelu says she “did not quite belong with his friends,” speaking of Blaine. (p. 399) What does she see in them that they cannot see in themselves?

2. Ifemelu’s blog posts feature as a commentary that sandwiches a conversation about Barack Obama’s potential as a presidential candidate. Looking back on his election, how might the conversation be different (or the same) today?

3. Paula says her liberal parents “tick all the right boxes.” It may not be about race, but have you ever felt that you were ticking all the right boxes but somehow failing to “get it”? Tell about your experience and how you see it now.

4. What else do you want to talk about?
Connect: “’Omar doesn’t touch women to whom he is not related,’ Shan said. ‘Which is very sexy, no?’ And she tilted her head to look up suggestively at Omar.” (p. 414) Is Shan fetishizing Omar’s otherness? Is she orientalizing him?

Question: Share a question about chapter 37. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: “In America, you don’t get to decide what race you are. It is decided for you.” (p. 419)

Create: “’Nuance’ means keep people comfortable so everyone is free to think of themselves as individuals and everyone got where they are because of their achievement.” (p. 416) Create two representations of the same phenomenon, and have one of them be more nuanced in the way Shan defines it.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. It seems as if Dike has become Americanized completely. Name some of the things you notice that are different to his childhood as from Ifemelu’s childhood described earlier in the book. What are the characteristics that would make parents consider him being a model young man?

2. “It does not matter what was said; it mattered that it was Shan who said it.” (p. 413). What does this say about her personality? How do others around her, including Ifemelu, play into that conception?

3. The movements of Shan and the people at her Salon seem like pantomime and parody. What does Ifemelu mean by that observation?

4. “His wife must feel worse knowing you’re black” (p. 416). What does say about Black womanhood in relation to White womanhood?

5. Discuss the use of the word “nuance” (p. 416).

6. On page 416 Shan’s smile holds the “possibility of great cruelty.” What does this say about the sibling relationship between her and Blaine?

7. Ifemelu’s blog discusses the profile of the “Black Man”. Discuss this blog entry in the American context.

8. What else do you want to talk about?
Connect: “Mr. White was, after all, an old black man beaten down by life and she wished she could overlook the liberties he took.” (p. 424) Even if she could overlook the unwantedly sexualized way in which Mr. White interacted with her, should Ifemelu? Should she, as a woman, take as vocal and as principled a stand against this harassment as Blaine does against Mr. White’s being racially profiled? Isn’t that what Blaine would want her to do?

Question: Share a question about chapter 38. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: “The actual tragedy of Emmett Till, he had told her once, was not the murder of a black child for whistling as a white woman but that some black people thought: But why did you whistle?” (p. 425)

Create: “A student called to ask him for suggestions about what to write on placards.” (p. 426) Make a placard that is meant to protest against or advocate for something. Now, if you’re feeling safe enough and up for it, take your placard for a walk in public...

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Blaine does not like the West African academic, Boubacar, but Ifemelu is reminded of her past and fortified by conversations with him. How does his friendship steady her?

2. The incident with Mr. White on campus sparks a new activism in Blaine that Ifemelu doesn’t share, although she feels bad for the security guard. By not going to the protest, what is Ifemelu testing in her relationship with Blaine? In herself?

3. Have you ever been in a relationship where a ‘principle’ came between you? Were you able to overcome it?

4. After reading the blog on white privilege, what was your first impulse: to share it on Facebook, or ask yourself the questions? Why did you feel this way?

5. What else do you want to talk about?
Connect: “She felt a momentary anger and wanted to say that it was unfair of him to hold out forgiveness like this.” (p. 435) Under what circumstances would you withhold forgiveness from someone you loved?

Question: Share a question about chapter 39. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: “She watched the coconut crumble into white dust; it saddened her to think that it would never be a whole coconut again…” (p. 435)

Create: “Can I come this weekend so we can cook coconut rice? I’ll do the cooking.” (p. 434) If someone wanted to make you feel good, what could they cook you? What would you cook for a special person to make them feel good? If you have the means, cook that meal for them...

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Dike gets blamed for hacking into the school's computer. What is the significance of Aunty Uju saying: They have to blame the Black kid first? What are some of the other stereotypes that Dike shares with Ifemelu about his life experiences in school, with friends and even in church?

2. What do you think of Blaine refusing to take Ifemelu’s calls for nine days? Have you ever had an argument and been met with silence and refusal to be forgiven? How did you feel? How did you respond?

3. Ifemelu holds onto Blaine but he “eases away” (p. 435). What does this forebode?

4. In her blog post Ifemelu says that Americans are most uncomfortable talking about race. Discuss her definition and exploration of the words: Diversity, Culture, Urban and Racially Charged.

5. What else do you want to talk about?
INVITATIONS

Connect: “She tried to imagine the people who wrote those [racist] posts, under monikers like SuburbanMom231 and NormanRockwellRocks, sitting at their desks, a cup of coffee beside them, and their children about to come home on the school bus in a glow of innocence.” What’s the best way to deal with people who anonymously spew hate speech online?

Question: Share a question about chapter 40. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: “Ifemelu liked to watch Clinton on television, in her square trouser suits, her face a mask of resolve, her prettiness disguised, because that was the only way to convince the world that she was able.” (p. 437)

Create: “She first read, on the Internet, the breaking news that Barack Obama would give a speech on race, in response to the footage of his pastor, and she sent a text to Blaine, who was teaching a class. His response was simple: Yes! (p. 443) If you had the opportunity to tell all of America your thoughts about race, what would you say?

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. After their fight, Ifemelu and Blaine’s relationship cools, but they reconnect over Obama’s campaign. Has passion ever fizzled out for you in a relationship? Did your relationship survive—— why or why not?

2. We see tensions of race in America playing out over Obama as a candidate for president in this chapter. Were you living in New York then? What highs and lows did you feel during his first campaign?

3. Shan makes small intrusion into this chapter and shows her true colors more than ever. Do you have a ‘Shan’ in your life? How do you relate to them?

4. “Barack Obama’s voice rose and fell, his face solemn, and around him the large and resplendent crowd of the hopeful. Ifemelu watched, mesmerized. And there was, at that moment, nothing that was more beautiful to her than America.” (p. 448) How did you experience this moment in America?

5. What else do you want to talk about?
Connect: “A sacrilege, that question; immigrants did not ask other immigrants how they got their papers, did not burrow into those layered, private places; it was sufficient simply to admire that the papers had been got, a legal status acquired.” Why is it that we don’t talk about the things that we aren’t supposed to talk about?

Question: Share a question about chapter 41. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: “‘Oh,’ Aisha said, as though she had just realized that Ifemelu belonged to a group of people whose green cards simply fell from the sky. People like her could not, of course, get theirs from an employer.” (p.451)

Create: “She kept twisting Ifemelu’s hair, her hand movements unchanged, while her face, as though it did not belong to her body, continued to crumple, tears running from her eyes, her chest heaving.” (p. 451) Think on this image. Represent, in whatever way seems best to you, this idea that we can express such a strong emotion in one part of ourselves while the other part(s) continue on, seemingly unaffected.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. “Why couldn’t these African women keep their salon clean and ventilated?” How does Ifemelu position herself as different from the hairstylists? How does she realize that she is in fact, not so different? How does her promising Aisha that she would go speak to Chijioke absolve her?

2. When Ifemelu is asked about her green card she is firstly affronted, but then explains kindly, as she realizes her privilege. What are your thoughts around immigration in the USA and how people deal with it in different ways?

3. Why do you think Aisha stops herself from embracing Ifemelu as she leaves the salon?

4. Aunty Uju frantically calls Ifemelu to tell her that Dike was hospitalized because he attempted suicide. What is your gut reaction to this news?

5. What else do you want to talk about?
Connect: “He had at first been excited by Facebook, ghosts of old friends suddenly morphing to life...But he began to be appalled by the air of unreality, the careful manipulation of images to create a parallel life, pictures that people had taken with Facebook in mind...” (p. 458) How do you manage your expectations and/or your understanding of life on social media?

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

Contemplate: “He had discovered that grief did not dim with time; it was instead a volatile state of being. Sometimes the pain was as abrupt as it was on the day...she was lying unbreathing on her bed; other times, he forgot that she had died and would make cursory plans about flying to the east to see her.” (p. 458)

Create: Obinze begins to email Ifemelu: “He had never told himself his own story, never allowed himself to reflect on it...Writing her also became a way of writing himself. He had nothing to lose.” (p. 461) Write an email or letter to someone you haven’t been in touch with. Tell them your story of a significant moment or memory.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Obinze is concerned, waiting for Ifemelu’s reply. Talk about your own experiences with waiting. Obinze Googles and Facebooks to tend to his curiosity/concern. What are some of your ways of coping with this discomfort?

2. What about the funeral of Obinze’s mother rings true to you? What do you make of Obinze’s question, “Why do our funerals become so quickly about other things that are not about the person who died?”

3. What is at the root of Isioma’s question, “Are they teaching children that a Christmas is not real Christmas unless snow falls like it does abroad?”

4. How do you imagine Obinze is affected by allowing himself to reflect on his own story -- to tell it to Ifemelu, to himself?

5. What else do you want to talk about?
Connect: Ifemelu makes “...the kind of jollof rice he liked, flecked with bits of red and green peppers...” (p 469) to cheer Dike. What is it about food that can comfort or change a mood? What would someone make to cheer you?

Question: Share a question about chapter 43. We’ll add it to our reader’s guide!

Contemplate: “‘This is the life,’ he said, lying with his face to the sun.” (p 471) Where would you be if you uttered these words?

Create: “You told him what he wasn’t but you didn’t tell him what he was.” (p 470) Often we focus on what we are not or what others are not. What words would you use to describe who you are? Dig deep! Write all the words that fit...then write some more.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. For the first few days Ifemelu slept on Dike’s floor, her thoughts spinning on all the possibilities of what might have happened. Have you ever had a life experience where you were so afraid to let someone go for fear of losing them? Tell us about it.

2. What do we understand by depression? How is Ifemelu trying to come to terms with it? Why does Ifemelu feel like her own guilt is “spreading and sullying her?” (p. 471)

3. Can you explain what the “shrill, silent aftermath” is?

4. On the last page of this chapter, Dike tell Ifemelu that she should go back to Nigeria, that he promises that he will be OK. Do you believe and trust that promise? Why or why not?

5. What else do you want to talk about?
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, Aunty 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?
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

13. 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?

14. 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?

15. 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?

16. 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?

17. 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?
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 Nigerpolitan 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?
INVIATIONS

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

9. 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?

10. 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?

11. 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?

12. Why do you think Ifemelu does not voice to Dike that he can live with her in Nigeria?

13. 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?

14. What else do you want to talk about?
Connect: Spontaneously, Ifemulu 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?
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 the 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?
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

6. 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.

7. 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?

8. Ifemelu calls Obinze a coward. Do you think she is right or wrong to do so? Why do you think so?

9. What else do you want to talk about?
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?
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?