

## Further Reading

**Exit West**  
**Mohsin Hamid (2017)**  
**HAMID**

Presents the story of two young lovers whose furtive affair is shaped by local unrest on the eve of a civil war that erupts in a cataclysmic bombing attack, forcing them to abandon their previous home and lives.

**We Need New Names**  
**Noviolet Bulawayo (2013)**  
**BULAWAYO**

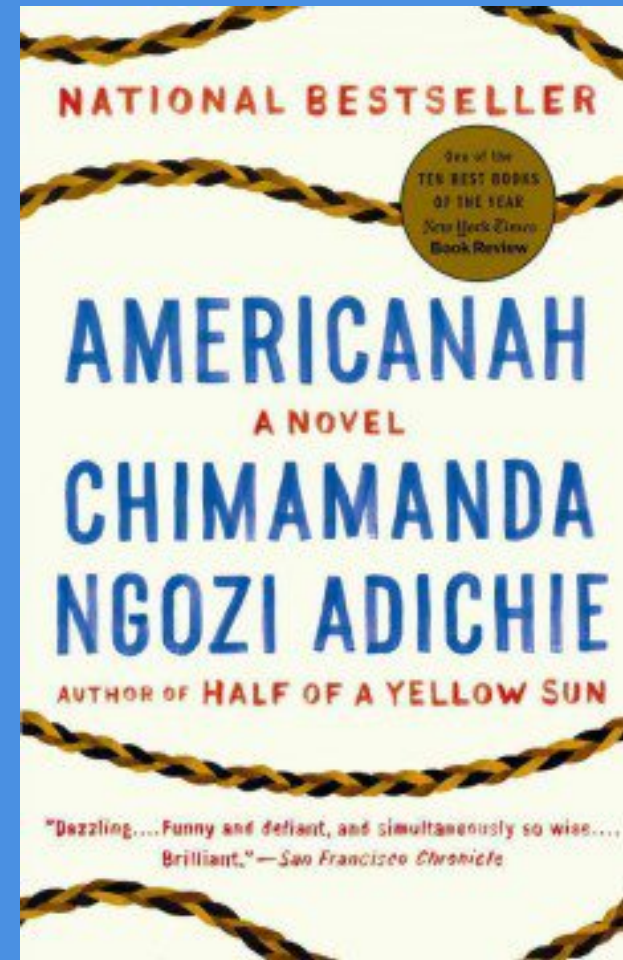
Follows 10-year-old Zimbabwe native, Darling, as she escapes the closed schools and paramilitary police control of her homeland in search of opportunity and freedom with an aunt in America.

**Queenie**  
**Candice Carty-Williams (2019)**  
**CARTY-WILLIAMS**

Constantly compared to her white middle-class peers, a young Jamaican-British woman in London makes a series of questionable decisions in the aftermath of a messy breakup before challenging herself to figure out who she wants to be.

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## Book Discussion Guide



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## Discussion Questions

1. The novel opens in the Ivy League enclave of Princeton, New Jersey. Ifemelu likes living there because “she could pretend to be someone else, ...someone adorned with certainty” (3). But she has to go to the largely black city of Trenton to have her hair braided. Does this movement between cities indicate a similar split within Ifemelu? Why does she decide to return to Nigeria after thirteen years in America?

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

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

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

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

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

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

10. Ifemelu realizes that naturally kinky hair is a subject worth blogging about. She notices that Michelle Obama and Beyoncé never appear in public with natural hair. Why not? Why does Ifemelu see hair as a useful way of examining race and culture?

13. Obinze goes to London, and when his visa expires he is reduced to cleaning toilets (238); eventually he is deported. On his return home, “a new sadness blanketed him, the sadness of his coming days” (286). How does his experience in London affect the decisions he makes when he gets back to Lagos? Why does he marry Kosi?

16. Aunt Uju becomes a doctor in America but still feels the need to seek security through an alliance with Bartholomew, whom she doesn’t seem to love. Why might this be?

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

18. The term “Americanah” is used for Nigerians who have been changed by having lived in America. Like those in the novel’s Nigerpolitan Club, they have become critical of their native land and culture. Is the book’s title meant as a criticism of Ifemelu, or simply an accurate word for what she fears she will become?

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

*Courtesy of [litlovers.com](http://litlovers.com)*