

## Discussion Questions for Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

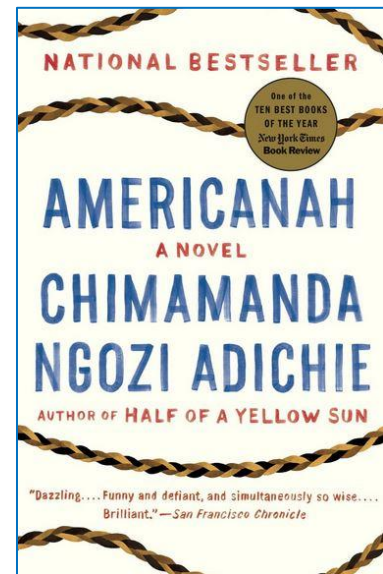
These discussion questions were prepared by the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) for the *Reader with a Cause* book club on Goodreads.

If you like our questions please feel free to use them – and don't forget to join the conversation online at:

[https://www.goodreads.com/topic/group\\_folder/285239](https://www.goodreads.com/topic/group_folder/285239)

### 1. Overall Impressions

What did you think of the book?



### 2. Financial Stability in Americanah

The relationship between Auntie Uju and the General is one where Auntie Uju has access to financial stability, but no control over it. How does Auntie Uju navigate a world in which her economic stability is completely at the discretion of the General?

We know that financial abuse is a significant problem for victims of domestic violence (it occurs in 99 percent of domestic violence cases). Financial abuse is a significant barrier for victims attempting to escape abuse and is one of the main reasons a victim may return to an abusive partner. Did Auntie Uju and the General's relationship seem financially abusive to you?

After her experience with the General, Auntie Uju becomes a doctor in America, but is still burdened by the need to maintain security through her relationship with Bartholomew – despite her seeming disinterest in him. Why might this be the case?

### 3. Looking for Love (Ifemelu)

Though Ifemelu found happiness in her relationships with both Curt and Blaine, she leaves both of them. What did Ifemelu initially find satisfying about both of these relationships?

*“She rested her head against his and felt, for the first time, what she would often feel with him: a self-affection. He made her like herself. With him, she was at ease; her skin felt as though it was her right size.” (73)*

What component does Ifemelu’s relationship with Obinze have that may have been lacking in the other two?

#### 4. Racism in America

*“If you have braids, they will think you are unprofessional.” (146)*

*“Laura shrugged, as though to say that it would, of course happen in Brooklyn but not in the America in which she lived.” (203)*

Americanah laid bare many, many examples of entrenched racism in modern-day America. Did any of these examples resonate with you? Surprise you?

#### 5. Intersectionality in Americanah

The intersectionality between race, sex, and gender is pervasive throughout *Americanah*. Ifemelu’s focus shifts between sex and gender and race through her experience and is greatly affected by her location. Why is it that Ifemelu focuses heavily on sex and gender during her time in Nigeria and on race during her time in America?

#### 6. Physical Violence in Americanah

*“People were saying, Oh, why did he slap her when she’s a widow, and that annoyed her even more. She said she should not have been slapped because she is a full human being, not because she doesn’t have a husband to speak for her. So some of her female students went and printed Full Human Being on T-shirts. I guess it made her well-known.” (71)*

To make the case for ending domestic violence, sexual assault, and other crimes of violence against women, it is often said, “Imagine if she were your daughter, sister, mother, etc.” In response, [a meme was created](#) that says, “She’s someone’s ~~sister~~ / ~~mother~~ / ~~daughter~~ / ~~wife~~.”

Why do you think a victim’s potential relationship with a man (as someone’s mother, sister, etc.) is emphasized instead of her personhood in order to increase awareness and support for anti-violence causes?

## 7. Human Migration in *Americanah*

*“[They] all understood the fleeing from war, from the kind of poverty that crushed human souls, but they would not understand the need to escape from the oppressive lethargy of choicelessness. They would not understand why people like him, who were raised well fed and watered but mired in dissatisfaction, conditioned from birth to look towards somewhere else.” (341)*

Several of the characters in *Americanah* moved from home seeking a better life – to other parts of Nigeria, to Europe, to the United States – illuminating the circumstances that hundreds of thousands of immigrants and refugees around the world face every single day.

How does the identity of each migrating character shift between Nigeria and Europe or the United States? How, if at all, does Adichie suggest that a sacrifice or compromise of self is necessary for migrating to a new country?

Did this book change the way you think about human migration? Why or why not?

## 8. “Sweet Girl” vs. “Cool Girl”

*“Ifemelu thought about the expression ‘sweet girl.’ Sweet girl meant that, for a long time, Don had molded Ranyinudo into a malleable shape, or that she had allowed him to think he had.” (512)*

The “sweet girl” trope that Adichie references here stands in contradiction with the “cool girl” trope used in *Gone Girl* (see here: <https://www.goodreads.com/topic/show/1647854-diary-amy-vs-real-amy>) – these two examples make it clear that women are expected to be virgins or whores, or embody both of these contradictory roles at once.

What do these roles tell us about gender socialization and expectations of women? How do these expectations of gender stir our emotions towards or against a character’s misfortune (i.e., Why might we be more inclined to feel empathetic towards a character who fits the “sweet girl” trope vs. the “cool girl” trope?)