

Americanah – Discussion Questions

by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

1. The first part of Ifemelu's story is told in flashback while she is having her hair braided at a salon before she returns to Nigeria. Why might Adichie have chosen this structure? What happens when the narrator shifts to Obinze's story?
2. The novel opens in Princeton, New Jersey. Ifemelu likes living there because "she could pretend to be someone else . . . someone adorned with certainty." Yet she must go to Trenton to have her hair braided. Does this movement between cities indicate a similar split within Ifemelu?
3. How much does your own race affect your experience reading this book? Ifemelu writes that "black people are not supposed to be angry about racism" because it makes whites uncomfortable. Do you agree?
4. Aunt Uju's relationship with the General highlights one way women survive economically. Why do you think she chose this path, and what does it say about gender and power?
5. Uju tells Ifemelu, "You are in a country that is not your own. You do what you have to do if you want to succeed." Is she right?
6. Ifemelu notices Americans avoid racial identifiers to be "polite." How does this differ from Nigerian openness about race?
7. Ifemelu's experience with the tennis coach is a turning point. Why does she stop communicating with Obinze afterward?
8. Why does Ifemelu adopt an American accent, and what does her eventual rejection of it symbolize?

9. Why does hair become a central metaphor for race and identity in this book?

10. Compare Ifemelu's relationships with Curt and Blaine. What does she gain or lose in each?

11. Why is her blog so successful? How do you interpret its social impact?

12. How does Obinze's experience as an undocumented worker in London contrast with Ifemelu's in America?

13. When Ifemelu cheats on Curt, she feels "a hunger, a restlessness." What does this reveal about her sense of identity?

14. What sacrifices do immigrants like Uju and Emenike make to succeed abroad?

15. Why might Dike attempt suicide, and what does his struggle say about identity and belonging?

16. How does Adichie portray the United States overall – positively or negatively?

17. What does the word *Americanah* signify – pride, irony, or both?

18. How does Adichie sustain suspense about Ifemelu and Obinze's reunion?

19. Why is it important to have an African perspective on race in America?

20. Did reading *Americanah* change or expand your understanding of identity and culture?