

BOOK CLUB KIT

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) At the beginning of the novel, Dara reveals that she's dedicated the last six years of her life to work, prioritizing her career over personal relationships. Did you admire Dara's unwavering commitment to her career? Or did you find yourself questioning her prerogatives? In your own life, where do you prefer to channel your energies?**
- 2) Before Dara moved to London to live with her mother, she lived in Lagos with her maternal grandparents. Other than a respect for formality, what do you believe Dara inherited from Granee and Grandad? How do you think being raised by grandparents who loved Nigeria, and then a mother who rejected her Nigerian identity, impacted Dara's perception of her heritage?**
- 3) Amaka buys luxury items to temporarily relieve the pain and resentment she feels toward her family, but the consolation is always short-lived. When did you realize that Amaka's coping mechanism was having its own detrimental effects? Have you ever had a friend or family member fall into a similar situation? How did they work through it?**
- 4) Discuss the mixed feelings Lillian has about her piano—the reasons she played and stopped playing, the connections it gave her to her parents and her past, her resentment and appreciation for it, etc. Symbolically, what did the piano represent?**
- 5) Amaka's mother, Ugo, was constantly worried that Amaka would "repeat her mistakes" and find herself in a situation that would force her to rely on a man's generosity. Even as Amaka made a significant amount of money as a credit risk officer, this apprehension never went away. Do you think Amaka ever internalized this worry? How would this have impacted her relationship with Rohit, despite his kindness and reliability? Considering Amaka's childhood, do you think her anxiety regarding men stemmed more from her father or her mother? Why?**

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6) Lillian moved to Singapore with her husband, Warren, when he was transferred for work. Leaving Philadelphia, however, made her feel unmoored, lonely, and isolated. Have you ever made a similar move in your life, one that forced you completely out of your comfort zone? How did you handle the stress and uncertainty? By contrast, how did you handle the excitement? Explain.

7) At her therapist's office, Lillian admits that, since she was young, she's struggled to make life-altering decisions, like whether to have a child or not. Have you ever similarly struggled? Who do you lean on when you have to make difficult choices? If you had met Lillian in real life at this stage in her journey, what advice would you have given her?

8) Lillian and Amaka (and an initially reluctant Dara) take part in an expat book club in Singapore. How did the book club foster a sense of community among its members?

9) Out of all the book club members (Kike, Yemisi, Nana, and LeToya), which character did you respond to the most? At the first meeting, what book would you have recommended that everyone read next?

10) Because Ugo's traditional marriage to Chukwu was dissolved, and he legally married another woman, Amaka and Ugo lived apart from him, which put a great strain on the family. How did you feel, learning the details of Amaka's family dispute? Did you find yourself leaning toward the side of Amaka and Ugo or the side of Amaka's half-siblings? Why? How would you have navigated such a conflict?

11) In Kike's dressing room, Dara makes the following remark: "That Kike Ibusun was not the sharpest tool in the box was what Dara suspected she wanted you to believe. Dara had spent too long as an outsider at school and at Oxford not to recognize the sharpness behind that public-schoolgirl insouciance. Pretending to be thick was a privilege only girls

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whose parents had spent half a million pounds on their education could afford.” Unpack the implications of this observation, accounting for Kike’s unique family circumstances. Why do you think a privileged, highly educated young woman like Kike would deliberately hide her intelligence? What purpose would it serve?

12) Dara also finds it ironic that Kike—the well-connected daughter of a former governor—disapproves of the fact that Lani “had help” getting his role in Geneva: “Maybe when you [stand] on a mountain for so long, the ground [starts] to feel flat.” Discuss the many ways in which the author calls attention to nepotism and class divides throughout the novel. Did you agree with Dara that Kike was unaware of her privilege in this scene?

13) The author describes the atmosphere and topography of Singapore throughout the novel, imbuing the story with real-world charm. As you were reading, what setting piqued your interest the most? Fort Canning, where Dara and Amaka went for their run? Sentosa, where Amaka and Lani had their first date? The Botanic Gardens, where Lillian and Warren had their conversation? Yishun, where Lillian moved to and had dinner with Amaka at the open-air market? Why?

14) Discuss Lillian’s research into reincarnation and the events that prompted her to pursue this line of inquiry. If Lillian had shared her speculations with you directly, how would you have responded? What are your own thoughts on reincarnation?

15) Discuss the ways in which the author highlights the economic disparities in Singapore, such as Amaka’s comment to Lani about the gap between the wealthy and the underserved; the cost of rent that Lillian considers when moving to Yishun; or the fact that residents are surrounded by luxury brands but also migrant workers, laborers who sacrifice time with their families in order to make a living in Sing dollars, often residing in cramped living quarters with extremely controlling managers.

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16) At Kike's party, Nana reprimands Dara for not reading books authored by writers like Teju Cole, Helen Oyeyemi, and Noviolet Bulawayo: "You're basically reading a bunch of books by dead white men and leaving no space to discover your own writers." Did you agree or disagree with Nana in this moment? When you're choosing new books or new writers to read, what factors do you take into consideration? While reading, what is most important to you?

17) Discuss how friendships grew and changed throughout the course of the novel between Dara, Amaka, and Lillian. How did the women lean on one another? How did they hurt one another? How did they rebuild trust after it had been broken? How have friendships in your own life been ruptured and mended, and what have you learned about yourself—and others—navigating these experiences?

18) Throughout the novel, Lillian has a recurring dream where she's drowning. What elements of her past were folded into the dream, and how did you feel reading the hypnotherapy scene in which Lillian worked through these memories with Dr. Geraldine?

19) The author weaves Greek mythology throughout the text, especially in Dara's point of view. How did the mythological references parallel the plot of *The Sun Sets in Singapore*? Did the allusions enhance your experience of reading the book? Why or why not?

20) How did you feel about the end of the novel and the resolutions that were offered for each character? Ultimately, did events play out differently than you expected? Why or why not?

A CONVERSATION WITH KEHINDE FADIPE

What inspired you to write *The Sun Sets in Singapore*?

I was inspired to write *The Sun Sets in Singapore* after completing my first fully drafted novel, which was dark and heavy. I'd just had my first child and I wasn't looking forward to revisiting the bleak world I'd created. I needed something light and fun but textured, a story that reflected some of what I was seeing and experiencing living in Singapore. I had a travel and lifestyle blog at the time (blackgirlinspire), so I would post an excerpt a week, which helped motivate me to write. I got a couple messages from readers who were loving the story, which boosted my confidence, so I decided to really work on crafting it as a full-length manuscript.

Take us through some of the choices you made while writing in terms of structure, voice, plot, and scene setting. Were there any major changes to the novel between your first draft and the last? Any “behind-the-scenes” details that didn't end up making it into the book?

I wrote *The Sun Sets in Singapore* on and off over six years, so it went through many drafts and changes! The structure was always linear, and I always had three voices, but I cut subplots, such as a friendship between Lillian and one of her students, and scenes of Dara revisiting her grandparents' house in Lagos. In the end, I decided that the symbolism of Dara's return was enough, and any developments that didn't significantly alter where the characters ended up or the choices they made had to go.

The focus of later drafts centered on fleshing out relationships and events rather than editing things out. For example, being clear about why Amaka was drawn to Lani and developing their sexual chemistry. I took out the entire Bali section early on and then, when working with my agent, realized how pivotal that trip was and put it back in again. In the final drafts with my two editors, there was a lot of revisiting deleted scenes and lines (which they had never seen before) in order to solve problems they'd raised. I learned a lot about my style and process by working on this book and receiving such valuable feedback; hopefully those lessons have been learned for the next one!

When you started writing, did any character feel fully formed in your mind? Or did Dara's, Amaka's, and Lillian's personalities crystalize later on in the process? What did you want to convey with their lives—and their struggles?

All three women remained much the same from the first draft to the last, although I had to work on communicating their motivations and inner stumbling blocks more clearly. Dara was inspired by the corporate women I met in Singapore who are driven and successful and seem to me to be two very different creatures in and out of their work clothes. One of them told me about the microaggressions she experienced at work, and it made me so angry, but then not long after, I went along to an event where she and the “aggressor” were chatting and laughing away! That's when I realized how clueless I was about how difficult it is to navigate and stay afloat in that world.

Amaka came to me after spending time with someone completely unapologetic about her incredible shoe collection and I “saw” Lillian at a barbecue: she was quiet, graceful, and shy, surrounded by a lot of boisterous laughter. We said hello and that was it: I was fascinated by her mysteriousness.

All three women were swimming in my head from the start. While I didn't have any kind of agenda when I began, I knew I wanted three distinct personalities to explore what it's like to make friendships in a foreign environment, with people you might not normally gravitate toward. Conflict arose naturally from their internal and external struggles but writing about something that drew them together—books—made me enjoy writing the novel even more.

***The Sun Sets in Singapore* is based, in part, on your own adventures living as an expat in Singapore. Can you talk us through the ways in which your experiences informed the book?**

I've experienced life as an expat in different ways. Most people come to Singapore for work and then leave as soon as their job comes to an end, but over ten years, I've been a tourist, a part- and full-time teacher, an "expat mummy," a jobbing actor, and a writer. I drew on the different worlds I've been plugged into over the years, so I understood Lillian's boredom and disconnection, Amaka's feelings of insecurity, being surrounded by so much ostentatious wealth, and Dara's lack of belonging.

There are a number of powerful themes explored in *The Sun Sets in Singapore*, such as female friendship, careerism, motherhood, and what it means to be true to oneself in the face of hardship, whether that be professional, financial, or personal. Why was it important to you to explore these issues in fiction, and what are you hoping readers will take away from Dara's, Amaka's, and Lillian's experiences?

I wanted to explore how interconnected all those areas of life are: money, career, friendships, and ambition. Something that's become very clear to me is that women can either help each other do the hard, necessary things in life, or hold each other back. Each woman is looking for a pseudo family within their friendships, but their own baggage and issues with their biological families prevents them from making the best decisions for themselves and makes it difficult for them to trust one another. I think the ultimate type of friendship is one in which you can embrace your friends' flaws and be entertained by them, whilst at the same time wanting the best for them and pushing them to grow. Authentic.



Author: Kehinde Fadipe
Credit: Vinod Rai Sharma

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[READ THE REST HERE!](#)

MORE RESOURCES FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB

Listen to Lillian's piano playlist on Spotify, featuring Frederic Chopin, Alicia Keys, and more!

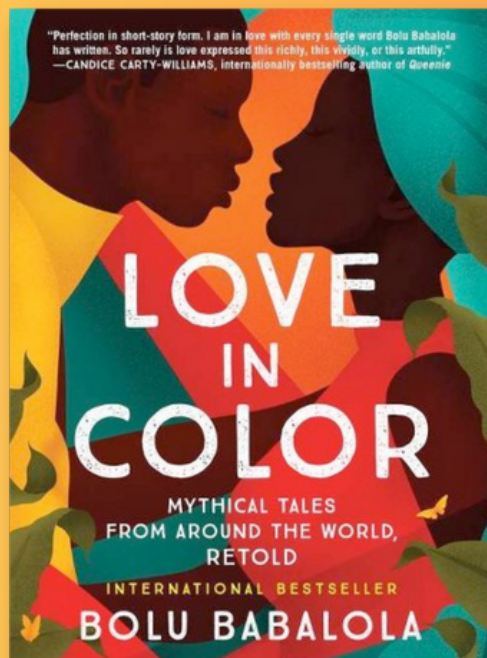
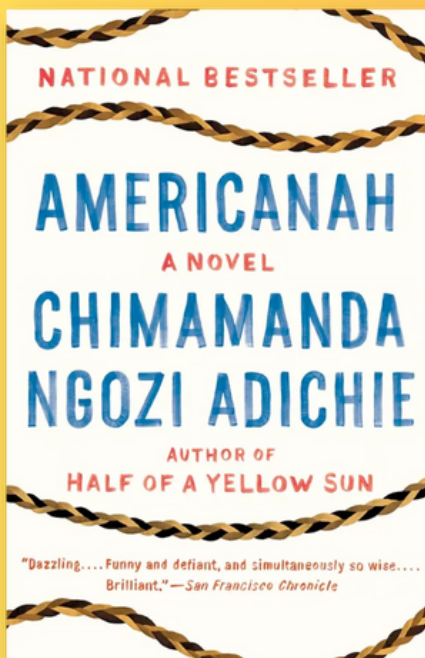


Follow in Dara's, Amaka's, and Lillian's footsteps with Kehinde Fadipe and this interactive walking tour of Singapore.

Kehinde Fadipe at Botanical Gardens
Photo © Kehinde Fadipe

THE SINGAPORE BOOK CLUB'S READING LIST

- *Purple Hibiscus*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
- *Homegoing*, Yaa Gyasi
- *The Sympathizer*, Viet Thanh Nguyen
- *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*, Taylor Jenkins Reid
- *Love in Color*, Bolu Babalola
- *The Joys of Motherhood*, Buchi Emecheta
- *The Bride Test*, Helen Hoang
- *Americanah*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
- *The Vegetarian*, Han Kang
- *Nothing to Envy*, Barbara Demick
- *The Fishermen*, Chigozie Obioma





BOOK CLUB RECIPE

This tartly refreshing cocktail is the perfect accompaniment for basking in Singapore's nonstop sunshine—even if it's just vicarious basking with your book club.



SINGAPORE SLING

Recipe adapted from [Liquor.com](https://www.liquor.com)

INGREDIENTS

- 3/4 ounce gin
- 1/4 ounce Benedictine
- 1/4 ounce Grand Marnier
- 1/4 ounce cherry liqueur
- 1 ounce pineapple juice
- 1/2 ounce lime juice, freshly squeezed
- 1 dash Angostura bitters
- Club soda, chilled, to top
- Garnish: orange slice
- Garnish: cherry

DIRECTIONS

- Add the gin, Benedictine, Grand Marnier, cherry liqueur, pineapple juice, lime juice and bitters into a shaker with ice and shake until well-chilled.
- Strain into a highball glass over fresh ice, and top with the club soda.
- Garnish with an orange slice and a cherry.