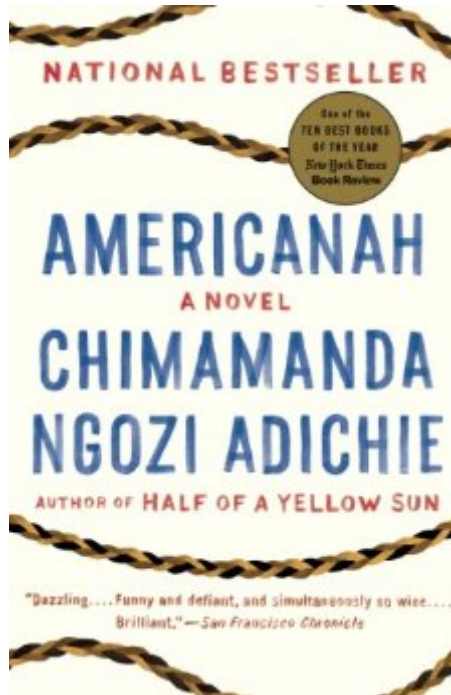


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Americanah (Ala Notable Books For Adults)



Synopsis

One of The New York Times's Ten Best Books of the Year Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction An NPR "Great Reads" Book, a Chicago Tribune Best Book, a Washington Post Notable Book, a Seattle Times Best Book, an Entertainment Weekly Top Fiction Book, a Newsday Top 10 Book, and a Goodreads Best of the Year pick. A powerful, tender story of race and identity by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the award-winning author of *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Ifemelu and Obinze are young and in love when they depart military-ruled Nigeria for the West. Beautiful, self-assured Ifemelu heads for America, where despite her academic success, she is forced to grapple with what it means to be black for the first time. Quiet, thoughtful Obinze had hoped to join her, but with post-9/11 America closed to him, he instead plunges into a dangerous, undocumented life in London. Fifteen years later, they reunite in a newly democratic Nigeria, and reignite their passion for each other and for their homeland. From the Trade Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

Americanah is a wonderful epic saga of love, hair, blogs, racism in America, and life in Nigeria. It takes place over a period of about 15 years and is primarily about a Nigerian woman named Ifemelu

and her first love, Obinze. The word Americanah refers to a person who returns to Nigeria after time abroad. The main part of the story takes place in a hair salon in Trenton, New Jersey. Ifemelu is on a fellowship at Princeton and the nearest place to get weaves is in Trenton. As she is getting her hair done she goes back in time and the reader gets filled in with her life story. Ifemelu grew up in poverty in Lagos. She managed to go to university there and won a scholarship to Wellesley, a college in Philadelphia. There, she struggles with money and finds it very difficult to get a job. She knows little about the culture and "she hungered to understand everything about America, to wear a new, knowing skin right away." When she does work, she sends money back home to her parents. Ifemelu's primary job is as a nanny. She describes the dynamics of her employer's marriage as 'she loves him and he loves himself'. She is introduced to her employer's cousin Curt and Ifemelu and they have a relationship for quite a while. His being white and rich cause some difficulties for them. Ifemelu has cut off all contact with Obinze despite the fact that they had planned to be together. She had made a choice to do something that left her shamed and abashed and she is unable to tell Obinze about it. So, rather than tell him, she severs their contact. He is distraught and does not know what to do. He continues to write to her for months but there is no answer from Ifemelu. Meanwhile, Obinze goes to London where he lives underground after his six month visa expires.

I am probably biased towards this novel, *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, not only because Adichie's first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, which I read as a very young girl, awoke in me the possibility of good writing and beautiful prose by a Nigerian like me, but because of the familiarity of the book. In Nigeria, we are brought up on foreign movies, sitcoms and TV shows, foreign books and foreign news, we know how English should be spoken, and many of us who bother to read a lot, are very familiar with the colloquialisms of the west. This is perhaps why, we do not recognize how much we miss our own particularly Nigerian way of expression, in the literature we read. It is perhaps why, when we read a phrase that is essentially Nigerian, in a novel like *Americanah*, "Tina-Tina, how now?" "Why are you looking like a mumu?" "How will you cope/how are you coping?" all familiar Nigerian modes of speech, we are infinitely grateful. It's like the word *Americanah*, such a Nigerian word, used to describe someone who had lived abroad for so long, they no longer understand the nuances of being Nigerian. They use American swearwords, or complain that the fries at KFC Onikan are limp, even though you see nothing wrong with them. This is when you turn to someone who understands and say, (No mind am, na *Americanah*), Don't mind him, he is an *Americanah*. Adichie's latest follows Ifemelu, a bright, sharp and observant girl, from

her early years in 1990's Nigeria, to a life in America, where after the first rude shocks of culture change in a new world, where 'fat' is a bad word and not merely a statement of fact, where colour is such a big issue that it can rule people's lives, and where everything is different, she slowly and surely starts to become an Americanah.

At the opening of this long and too, too solid novel, Ifemelu, its protagonist is about to return to Nigeria when her fellowship at Princeton ends. After fifteen years in America, she has learned enough to write a lifestyle blog called "Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black." A mouthful, but she has eyes in her head and a savage wit. Before it even develops as a story, Adichie's book is likely to interest us in much the same way that a blog would, whether to convey Ifemelu's first impressions of America (starting with tipping, dressing down for parties, and how to get a job on a student visa), or her flashbacks to her native land. Watching her grow up in Lagos, for example, we meet her father who is sacked from his civil service job for his refusal to address his superior as "Mummy," and her cousin Uju, a fully-qualified doctor who nonetheless lives as the kept mistress of a prominent General. Simply on the level of information and what can be gleaned from a different viewpoint, the book is fascinating. But what about the story? If you read the summary inside the cover (presumably to become the book-flap blurb), you will see that it starts with two high-school sweethearts in Lagos, Ifemelu and Obinze. You read that Ifemelu will obtain a visa for the USA and move there for fifteen years, but that Obinze, who stayed to finish his degree in Nigeria, was excluded by an America fearful after 9/11 so instead spent several years living illegally in London. Finally, you will be told that Ifemelu and Obinze meet up again on her return and "face the toughest decisions of their lives.

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