Reading guide

Queenie

By Candace Carty-Williams
Discussion questions

- Why do you think the book contains flashbacks to Queenie’s relationship with Tom? Why not start the narrative earlier in Queenie’s life rather than using flashbacks?

- Queenie and Tom have different families, with different interrelationships. What do you think Queenie likes most about Tom’s family? Why?

- Queenie says that her friends Darcy, Cassandra, and Kyazike each represent a different part of her life. Which part of Queenie’s life do you think each woman represents?

- Why does Kyazike’s name make such an impression on Queenie? Where does Queenie’s name come from? Is it meaningful that the Welsh doctor is named “Guy” — is he intended to represent what Queenie expects of most guys? And why do you think that Queenie’s coworker Ted has “Noman” (no man) as his last name?

- When one of Queenie’s coworkers says that “All lives matter” at the end of Chapter 16, why does Queenie respond the way that she does?

- Queenie thinks: “I just wanted my old life back. I wanted my boyfriend, and I wanted to not be f**king up at work; I wanted to feel good about myself. I was so far from that, so far from being who I was, but I couldn’t seem to stop myself from self-destructing” (chapter 16). What does she mean about being far from being who she was?

- In chapter 23, Janet asks Queenie: “what do you see, when you look in the mirror, when you think about yourself as a person?” Why is this question so difficult for Queenie to answer?

- Why do you think the book ends the way it does?
Passages to read more closely

Queenie explains her emotional state to her therapist, Janet. How do you understand the metaphor that she uses?

“Like, I feel a bit like for a while I’ve been carrying ten balls of wool. And one ball fell, so I dropped another to catch it, but still didn’t catch it. Then two more started to unravel, and in trying to save those I lost another one.” Chapter 23, p. 289

What does Queenie’s mother mean by this?

“‘Being brave isn’t the same thing as being okay,’ my mum said quietly.” Chapter 12, p. 178

Compare these two quotes, and think about whether people can change habits or beliefs as they age, and what it takes to do so.

“Maybe if all ah we had learned to talk about our troubles, we wouldn’t carry so much on our shoulders all the way to the grave.’ He turned to walk out, his stick hitting the floor with purpose. ‘Maybe we haffi learn from this new generation, Veronica.’” Chapter 22, p. 284

“You know what my uncle is like, he’s from a generation where they said the n-word quite a lot.” Chapter 3, p. 45

“‘That’s the thing about people who love to play devil’s advocate!’ I shouted. ‘There’s no emotional involvement for you, there’s nothing at stake!’” Chapter 27, p. 357

Queenie is exasperated with feeling like she has so much at stake in ways that are specific to being a black woman. After reading this quote, think about issues in which you are heavily emotionally invested. Is it frustrating for you when others treat those issues lightly, or as if little is at stake? How might you be able to get those people to see your perspective on such topics?

What do you think Candace Carty-Williams means by “enough” in the book’s dedication page?

“‘To all the Queenies out there — you are enough. Trust me.”

This passage ends with Queenie asking a question. How do you think the book wants readers to answer this question? How would you answer this question? And, if you want a different perspective, ask someone you know who has a different gender identity than you how they would answer this question.

“I did actual work for the rest of the day with only one very small break to arrange a house viewing, asking for one of the women estate agents to show me round this time and bringing Kyazike with me. Is this what growing into an adult woman is, having to predict and accordingly arrange for the avoidance of sexual harassment?” Chapter 28, p. 365

All page numbers are given for the English paperback edition published by Trapeze, 2020.
Book circle rules
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**R = respect / risk**
Treat each other with respect, even if – especially if – you disagree. No insults or putdowns are allowed.

**O = openness / ouch**
Speak honestly. The most respectful thing we can do together is to be truthful. Be willing to say what you really think about each topic – this will help everyone learn from each other. That also means that if something offends you, it is your responsibility to say “ouch.” Let the speaker finish, and then tell the group how and why you were hurt or angered.

**P = participation / pass**
Speak briefly so everyone has a chance to participate. Stay on the topic at hand. If you have already spoken quite a bit, pass your turn to someone who has not yet spoken as much. If you have not spoken, please do share your thoughts so that the group can expand its range of discussion.

**E = education / escuchar (Spanish: to listen)**
Everyone has come here to learn, grow, and share, so listen – really listen – to what others have to say. The facilitators are not experts, but are only here to aid the discussion process.

**S = sensitivity / safety**
Use “I” statements, which means that you should speak only for yourself, not as a representative for any group. Remember, also, that others are only speaking for themselves.
Create your own book circle

The OBOC committee hosts several book circles, and anyone in the Chalmers community is welcome to join. For the schedule, see [http://www.lib.chalmers.se/en/our-libraries/one-book-one-chalmers/](http://www.lib.chalmers.se/en/our-libraries/one-book-one-chalmers/). However, if you would like to create your own book circle, here are some aspects to consider:

1. 5-7 people is a good number. If there are more people than that, that is fine but don’t expect everyone to get involved in the same discussion. Larger numbers of people can be grouped into smaller conversation clusters.

2. Use Facebook or Twitter to start a book circle, or just ask the person from class! Alternatively, consider starting a book circle with members of a club in which you participate.

3. Meeting in person is fun, but for added safety, you might consider hosting a virtual meeting on Zoom, Skype, Slack, or the platform of your choice.

4. First rule of book club? You decide, but here are some examples:
   - Agree to disagree. There is no discussion if you all agree on everything, but there is no fighting in the book club.
   - You must have finished the book. This is not a necessary rule for all book circles, but you should talk about your expectations.
   - Alternatively, set a “no spoilers” rule, and check to see how far the circle members have gotten. Agree not to discuss plot points that all members have not read.

5. To get the discussion going, use the questions we have provided in this guide. Hopefully you also have your own questions from your reading that you would like the others’ take on. There’s also lots of more general book circle questions online.

6. Whether you are the one usually doing all the talking or the one trying to get a word in edgewise, practice saying “Let’s hear from some others” in front of the mirror. If you are the one who invited the others, maybe you can try to lead the discussion and help everyone get a chance to speak.
What to read next

**Homegoing by Yea Gyasi (2016)**
Half-sisters born in eighteenth-century Ghana lead radically different lives. This novel follows their descendants, each unable to escape the force of history. Available through the Gothenburg City Library.

**The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas (2017)**
In a novel inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement, Starr sees her unarmed childhood best friend fatally shot by police, and everyone wants her to tell what happened. Available through the Gothenburg City Library.

**The Color Purple by Alice Walker (1982)**
A now-classic novel about African-American women in Georgia (USA) in the early 20th century. Available through the Gothenburg City Library.

**Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race by Reni Eddo-Lodge (2017)**
An account of one journalist’s experience as a black woman in contemporary Britain, this book talks about how to acknowledge and oppose racism. Available through the Gothenburg City Library.

**Intersectionality: Origins, Contestations, Horizons by Anna Carastathis (2016)**
An examination of the effects of racial, gendered, and class power on people’s lives. Available as an ebook through Chalmers Libraries.

**Einstein on Race and Racism by Fred Jerome and Rodger Taylor (2005)**
A book about Albert Einstein’s antiracism work, which shows how the preeminent scientist spoke out against prejudice. Available as an ebook through Chalmers Libraries.
One Book, One Chalmers (OBOC) and Jämlikhetskomittén (JämK)

One Book, One Chalmers (OBOC) is a book club where all of Chalmers - students as well as employees - have the opportunity to read the same book, and to join activities related to that book.

This year (2021-22), OBOC has paired with Jämlikhetskomittén (JämK), the campus student equality committee at Chalmers, to spur discussion about the diversity and equality issues in Candice Carty-Williams’ book.

Read more about OBOC at: https://www.lib.chalmers.se/en/our-libraries/one-book-one-chalmers/

Read more about JämK at: https://jamk.se/