



2007 WINNER

HALF OF A YELLOW SUN BY CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is the author of award-winning and bestselling novels, including *Americanah* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*; the short story collection *The Thing Around Your Neck*; and the essay *We Should All Be Feminists*. A recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship, she divides her time between the United States and Nigeria.

PLOT SUMMARY

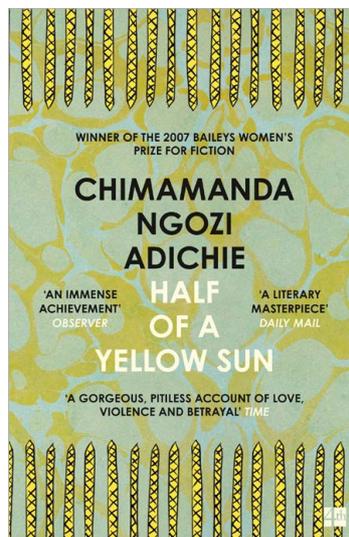
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie recreates a seminal moment in modern African history: Biafra's impassioned struggle to establish an independent republic in Nigeria during the 1960s. Adichie weaves together the lives of five characters caught up in the extraordinary tumult of the decade. Fifteen-year-old Ugwu is houseboy to Odenigbo, a university professor who sends him to school, and in whose living room Ugwu hears voices full of revolutionary zeal. Odenigbo's beautiful mistress, Olanna, a sociology teacher, is running away from her parents' world of wealth and excess; Kainene, her urbane twin, is taking over their father's business; and Kainene's English lover Richard forms a bridge between their two worlds. As we follow these intertwined lives through a military coup, the Biafran secession

and the subsequent war, Adichie brilliantly evokes the promise, and intimately, the devastating disappointments that marked this time and place.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie deftly describes the multiple layers of class and privilege in Nigerian society at the time the novel is set, from Ugwu's daily life to Olanna's 'nouveau riche' background, and Odenigbo's life in university intelligentsia, contrasted to the life of his mother. When the war breaks out, Adichie considers how those positions and statuses change – whilst also including the presence of two British characters, one of whom (Susan) represents a particularly toxic colonialist view, and Richard, who is sympathetic to African culture.

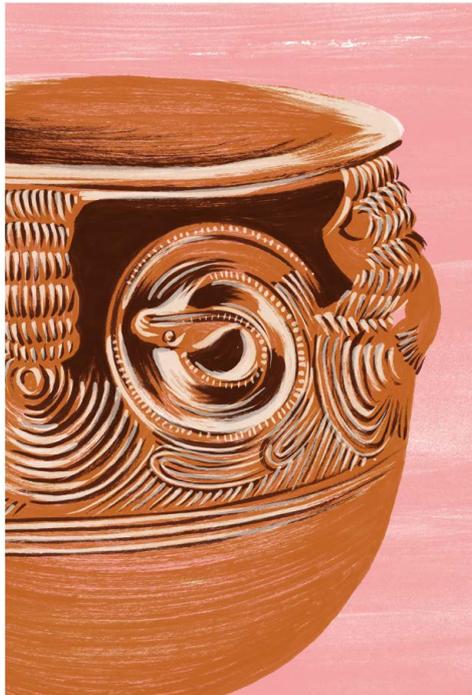
Adichie also presents us with a number of intertwined human stories inside a traumatic, idealistic and pivotal historical period. In telling Odenigbo, Olanna, Kainene, Richard and Ugwu's stories, she is able to explain the context of their lives while making the events around them relatable and understandable for readers who may or may not be familiar with that part of Nigerian history. Conversely, the historical context allows Adichie to create characters that act in different ways in reaction to those specific external pressures.



DISCUSSION POINT

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie includes short sections from a fictional non-fiction book called *The World Was Silent When We Died*. The book seems to be a record of the colonial history of Nigeria and the events leading to the Biafran war. Discuss what you learn from these sections - did you previously have any knowledge about Nigerian history? What is Adichie suggesting with the title of her invented non-fiction book?

What does the inclusion of these sections lend the novel? Is it useful for a work of fiction to include some (apparently) 'non-fiction' segments, especially when this novel is set at a specific time and place in history? Do they detract from the story, or add to your appreciation of it? Is it good to be reminded that the events you are reading about in a story really happened? How does that reminder make you feel?



NEXT STEPS

Use the title *The World Was Silent When You Died* as the inspiration for a poem. Who or what will be the focus of your piece? Who has died? Your poem may be about a group of people in history, someone in current times or someone you knew personally. Why was the world silent when they died? It may be that you interpret this as a reverential silence, or a silence which was bad because nothing was said or done.

If you were writing a non-fiction book about modern British politics, what would you write about and how would you write about it? You might, for instance, try and write a non-fiction piece explaining Brexit, which in its own way might be seen as a move towards independence. You might like to write a number of short segments like the text from *The World Was Silent When We Died*.

QUESTIONS

Adichie has described her book as 'a story about love'. Do you agree? Why? Why not?

What are the tensions between Olanna and Kainene about? How are they different to each other?

Olanna is disgusted at the cockroach eggs in her cousins' house and reluctant to let Baby mix with village children because they have lice. How is her privileged outlook changed by the war?

What do you think about Ugwu's participation in the rape scene?

Is reading Susan's character difficult? Are there still people holding the same views as Susan now? How do you interact with them, if at all?

“ HALF OF A YELLOW SUN IS A MOVING AND EXCITING BOOK BY AN INCREDIBLY EXCITING AUTHOR. IT'S ASTONISHING, NOT JUST IN THE SKILFUL SUBJECT MATTER BUT IN THE BRILLIANCE OF ITS ACCESSIBILITY ”

MURIEL GRAY
CHAIR OF JUDGES 2007

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

AMERICANAH BY CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE
STAY WITH ME BY AYOBAMI ADEBAYO