



READING GROUP GUIDE

*This reading group guide for **I AM A GIRL FROM AFRICA** includes an introduction, discussion questions, and ideas for enhancing your book club. The suggested questions are intended to help your reading group find new and interesting angles and topics for your discussion. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.*

INTRODUCTION

In this “profound and soul-nourishing memoir” (*Oprah Daily*), Elizabeth Nyamayaro tells the story of her life, from when she nearly starved after a drought hit her village in Zimbabwe, to founding HeForShe, one of the world’s largest movements for gender equality. Grounded by the African concept of ubuntu—“I am because we are”—*I Am a Girl from Africa* charts Elizabeth’s quest in pursuit of her dream from the small village of Goromonzi to Harare, Zimbabwe; London; and New York, where she eventually became a senior advisor at the United Nations. For over two decades, Elizabeth has been instrumental in creating change in communities all around the world, uplifting the lives of others, just as her life was once saved by a UN worker. The memoir brings to vivid life one extraordinary woman’s story of persevering through incredible odds and finding her true calling, all while delivering an important message of hope and empowerment: you, too, can fight for equality and equity in your community.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. On page 11, Elizabeth has just landed in London and reflects, “I immediately felt anxious, remembering that I had no friends or family in the UK, and only two hundred and fifty pounds to last me until I got a job.” What did she do next? Can you imagine what you might have done in that situation?
2. What qualifications can you find online for an entry-level job at the United Nations? Do you think that Elizabeth would still have pursued this dream job if she had known at the start how hard it would be to get?
3. Elizabeth refers to her faith many times in her memoir. In what ways does she practice her religion? How do you think it helps her to continue her work—particularly when she’s new in London and trying to get a job at the UN?
4. On page 45, Elizabeth meets her amai, her mother, for the first time. She says to her grandmother, Gogo, “How could she [amai] send me away [when I was young]? What did I do wrong?” Gogo responds, “You have a special shinga—strength—that will always protect you. Me, I think that when God created us Africans, he knew that life wasn’t always going to be easy, so he gave us all this special shinga.” What do you understand shinga to be? What are other instances in the book where Elizabeth draws on this special strength?

5. On page 80, Elizabeth is cruelly bullied by another girl at school and is so distressed that she develops a stutter. When her Uncle Sam sees that she is upset, he says, “You should never let anyone make you feel ashamed of who you are or feel embarrassed of where you are from.” How do you think this experience affected Elizabeth’s view of herself?
6. Starting on page 95, Elizabeth has an interview with the United Nations project office in London. She understands the interview to be a “pity” interview, and sees that Dr. Julia Cleeves is done with her, but, instead of leaving, she finds a way in. Have you done something similar for a dream job? Did it work?
7. Dr. Cleeves says, “When everyone is involved, everyone will be invested” when talking about community approaches to the AIDS epidemic on page 102. How do you think that philosophy impacts Elizabeth’s approach to her later work? Can you give an example?
8. Elizabeth experiences the death of several important people in her life. How does this affect her? How do these special people continue to inspire her?
9. The structure of *I Am a Girl from Africa* weaves between scenes in Elizabeth’s past and her present. How does this narrative structure provide deeper insight into her life?
10. Starting on page 142, Elizabeth writes the stories of people she meets in her work with the World Health Organization, from Chicago to the Republic of the Congo. Many of these people have lost someone because of lack of access to healthcare. How has your understanding of healthcare inequity grown since the Covid-19 pandemic, and what do you think would be some effective ways to combat the dysfunction in America’s healthcare system?
11. List a few of the occasions in *I Am a Girl from Africa* when Elizabeth could have simply quit. What do you think kept her motivated?
12. On page 157, Elizabeth ponders, “*Why is it that despite all the progress made by the women’s rights movement, no country or company or institution in the world can yet claim to have achieved gender equality?*” What do you think the answer to that is in your own country, workplace, and community? What do you think will need to change in order for the spaces you occupy to achieve gender equality?

13. Elizabeth experiences backlash against HeForShe from the broader public, after she already had to fight to get it approved in the UN. Why do you think people are upset, and do you understand or sympathize with some of their fears?
14. On page 242, we find out how much Gogo sacrificed to help Elizabeth get to London, even when Elizabeth didn't have a very detailed plan. How do Gogo's sacrifices affect Elizabeth's relationship with her work?

BOOK CLUB ACTIVITIES

1. Gogo and Elizabeth's life together is centered in the small village of Goromonzi in Zimbabwe. As a group, research Goromonzi. How hard is it to travel to? How many people live there? What are the main industries or occupations?
2. In Chapter 2, Gogo tells Elizabeth the story of the Zimbabwe War of Liberation (also called the *Second Chimurenga*). Research these events as a group and discuss how involvement in this liberation struggle would have affected Gogo's perspective on life.
3. As a group, watch Elizabeth's TED Talk "An invitation for men who want a better world for women" and discuss.