

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think Adunni's comparison of her mother to a rose flower ("a yellow and red and purple rose with shining leaves") symbolizes? She also remembers her mother having a sweet smell like a rosebush. Why do you think she compares her mother to this particular type of flower? And how do you think our five senses play into our memories?
2. Adunni dreads her upcoming marriage to Morufu, but her friend Enitan is genuinely excited for Adunni, believing that her life will be improved after the wedding. Why do you think there is a disconnect between Adunni's and Enitan's points of view? Can you draw any comparisons between cultural attitudes toward marriage in America and Nigeria?
3. Compare and contrast Khadija with the glimpses we get of Adunni's mother. How were their lives similar or different from one another?
4. Why do you think Bamidele doesn't return for Khadija? What do you think he whispers in her ear before leaving her for the last time?
5. Why do you think Adunni is closer with Kayus than Born-boy? What is it that makes their sibling bond so deep?
6. Why do you think bathing is such an important symbol in Nigerian folklore and in the novel? Discuss the similarities and differences between the bath that Kadija believes will save her and her baby's life, and the bath that Ms. Tia's mother-in-law believes will help her get pregnant.
7. Adunni has dreamed of leaving Ikati and seeing "the big, shining city" of Lagos since she was young, though when she actually arrives it's not under the circumstances she envisioned. How do you think her perception of the city changes once she is there? And how does her experience of Lagos relate to Big Madam's or Ms. Tia's? Compare and contrast the ways all three women view the city and experience the opportunities it offers.
8. Though they have dissimilar personalities, are not close in age, and have lived very different lives by the time they meet, Adunni and Ms. Tia have an instant connection that deepens over time. What do you think it is that drew each of them to the other? How do you think their friendship will evolve after the book is over? Will they continue to be friends even though their worlds seem incompatible?
9. What is the significance of the moment when Ms. Tia turns to look at Adunni right after the bath ceremony is over? Why do you think it affects Adunni so strongly?

10. After Ms. Tia's bath, Adunni wants "to ask, to scream, why are the women in Nigeria seem to be suffering for everything more than the men?" What specific moments have brought her to this question? What do the events of the book reveal about cultural attitudes toward women?

11. Adunni remembers her mother saying, "Adunni, you must do good for other peoples, even if you are not well, even if the whole world around you is not well." How do you think this factors into the choices she makes and her dreams for the future?

12. The first time Big Madam hears Adunni singing she slaps her and says, "This is not your village. Here we behave like sane people." Later, when Adunni is comforting Big Madam after she has forced Big Daddy out of her house, Big Madam wants Adunni to sing to her. Discuss the significance of that moment. Why do you think Big Madam's attitude toward Adunni's singing has changed?

13. At first, knowing and reading English is a source of pride for Adunni. But later, she says, "English is only a language, like Yoruba and Igbo and Hausa. Nothing about it is so special, nothing about it makes anybody have sense." What do you think she means by this?

14. How do you feel about the ending? Do you think it is a happy ending for Adunni? Despite the fact that she gets to follow her dream of returning to school, there are bittersweet moments, too—she must contend with the fact that she's left her family behind, her husband might have stopped supporting her family, and the mystery of what happened to Rebecca remains partially unsolved. How do you think these loose ends will affect Adunni as she grows into adulthood?

15. After embarking on this journey with Adunni, what does a "louding voice" mean to you and how does one achieve it? What sort of future do you imagine for Adunni?