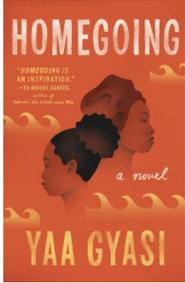


Books by the Stack



Homegoing by Yaa Gyasi

Two 18th-century West African sisters whose fates could not be more different: Effia, who becomes the mistress of a British slave-trader, and Esi, who survives the Middle Passage only to live out her days in bondage on an American plantation.

Why you'll like it: *Family sagas. Historical fiction. Complex. Issue-orientated.*

About the Author: Yaa Gyasi was born in Ghana and grew up in Huntsville, Alabama. She is a graduate of Stanford University with a BA in English and an MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Her debut novel, *The Homegoing*, became a New York Times best seller. In 2016, she was selected as one of the U.S. National Book Foundation's 'five under 35' new writers to watch. (Bowker Author Biography)

Questions for Discussion

1. Evaluate the title of the book. Why do you think that the author chose the word Homegoing? What is a homegoing and where does it appear in the novel?
2. What forms of belief are depicted in the book and what purpose do these beliefs seem to serve for the characters? Does the author reveal what has shaped the characters' beliefs? Do these beliefs seem to have a mostly positive or negative impact on the believer and those around them?
3. What perspective does the book offer on the subject of beliefs and otherness? For instance, does the book delineate between superstition and belief? Why does Ma Aku reprimand Jo after he is kicked out of church? What do the Missionary and the fetish man contribute to a dialogue on beliefs and otherness? Does the book ultimately suggest the best way to confront beliefs that are foreign to us?
4. What role does marriage play within the cultures represented in the novel and how are the women treated as a result? Likewise, what significance does fertility and motherhood have for the women and how does it influence their treatment? In the chapter entitled, "Effie," what does Adwoa tell Effia that her coupling with James is really about? In its depiction of the collective experiences of the female characters, what does the book seem to reveal about womanhood? How different would you say the treatment and role of women is today?
5. Why do you think the author assigned a chapter to each of the major characters? Why do you think that the author chose these particular settings? What points of view are represented therein? Does any single point of view seem to stand out among the rest or do you believe that the author presented a balanced point of view?
6. What time periods are represented and what places are adopted as settings? Why do you think that the author chose these particular settings? What subjects and themes are illuminated via these particular choices? How does the extensive scope of the book help to unify these themes and create a cohesive treatment of the subjects therein?

7. In the chapter entitled “Quey,” Fiifi tells Quey that “[the] village must conduct its business like [the] female bird” (53). What does he mean by this and why do you think that Fiifi chooses the approach?
8. Why was Quey sent to England? After his return home, why does Quey say that it was safer in England? Why might he feel that what he faces at home is more difficult than the challenges he faced in leaving home and living abroad?
9. James’ mother, Nana Yaa, says that the Gold Coast is like a pot of groundnut soup (89). What does she mean by this?
10. Why does Akosua Mensah insist to James, “I will be my own nation” (99)? What role do patriotism, heritage, and tradition play in contributing to the injustices, prejudices, and violence depicted in the book? What other characters seem to share Akosua’s point of view?
11. What are some examples of complicity found in the novel? Who is complicit in the slave trade? Where do most of the slaves come from and who trades them? Who does Abena’s father say is ultimately responsible (142)? Do you agree with him? Explain why or why not?
12. How would you characterize the relationships between parents and children? Do the children seem to understand their parents and have good relationships with them and vice versa? Do the characters’ view of their parents change or evolve as they grow up? How do the characters relationships with their parents influence the way that they raise their own children?
13. What significance does naming have in the book? Why do some of the characters have to change or give up their names? Likewise, what do the characters’ nicknames reveal both about them and about those who give or repeat these names? What does this dialogue ultimately suggest about the power of language and naming?
14. Who are the storytellers in the book and what kinds of stories do they tell? Who is their audience? What might these examples suggest about the purpose and significance of a storytelling tradition?
15. According to Akua, where does evil begin? Where else in the book do readers find examples that support her view? What impact does Akua’s opinion have on Yaw’s lifework? Does he agree with Akua’s view or refute it? Do you agree with her?
16. What is history according to Yaw? What does he tell his students is “the problem of history” (226)? Who does Yaw say we believe when reading historical texts and what does he say is the question we must ask when studying history?
17. Sonny says that the problem in America “wasn’t segregation but the fact that you could not, in fact segregate”(244)? What does he mean by this? What does Sonny say that he is forced to feel because of segregation? Which of the other characters experience these same feelings and hardships?
18. What is Marcus studying and why isn’t his research going well? What feeling does he indicate that he hopes to capture with his project? Why does Marcus go to Ghana and what does he learn from his experiences there?

(Questions from the publisher)

