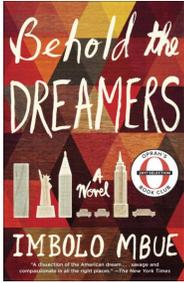


Books by the Stack



Behold the Dreamers by Imbolo Mbue

An immigrant working class couple from Cameroon and the upper class American family for whom they work find their lives and marriages shaped by financial circumstances, infidelities, secrets, and the 2008 recession.

Why you'll like it: *Fast-paced. Compelling. Lyrical. Thoughtful.*

About the Author: Imbolo Mbue was born in Limbe, Cameroon in 1982. She has been a resident in the U.S. for more than 10 years. She earned her B.S. from Rutgers University and an M.A. from Columbia University. She won the PEN/Faulkner Award for her novel *Behold the Dreamers* in 2017 which was also chosen by Oprah Winfrey to be in her book club. (Bowker Author Biography)

Questions for Discussion

1. Immigration plays a huge role in this novel. For the Jongas, America is a place of hope and promise, a place where you can “become somebody,” but the machine and policies are anything but welcoming and clear, and the road to citizenship is jagged. How does this shift the traditional representation of America?
2. In Jende's job as a driver for the Edwards family, he often transcends the boundaries between their public personas and their private lives. Behind the safety of a closed car door, the Edwardses show their truest selves, and Jende is often a silent witness to much of what they would not show to the world: marital issues, the crumbling of Lehman Brothers, infidelity, family arguments. How does this affect Jende's understanding of this family? How does it inform our interpretations?
3. Though both the Edwardses and the Jongas have their own individual worries, so much of what concerns both of these couples is the well-being and success of their children. How are the parenting styles similar? How are they different? How can our own pathways in life inform the way we direct our children? How do our parents affect our futures and our view of the world?
4. On the surface, it would seem that Cindy and Neni are two extremely different women. Cindy, in particular, is a conflicted person, sometimes ignorant, conniving and self-centered. However, it soon becomes clear that, in their own ways, Cindy and Neni are bonded, both women struggling to understand their roles as wives and women, and as the novel progresses, their identities seem to merge. How else are they similar? How are they different? What do they gain from each other?
5. Though they moved to America to find a better life as a couple and as a family, both Jende and Neni are inevitably affected by the way America shapes their personal identities. What are some of the ways they change as individuals over the course of the novel? How does their marriage change? Do you feel this is for the better or worse? How does it speak largely to the way America's ideals affect the members of its society?

- 6.** How do dreams drive the plot of the novel? What kinds of dreams do these characters wish to achieve? What dreams are deferred?
- 7.** Though external forces drive the plot of the novel, the marriages of both the Edwardses and the Jongas fuel a lot of the drama as well. How do these marriages differ? How are they similar? How do both of these relationships influence the events of the story?
- 8.** though Jende and Neni are outsiders in American Society, they also seem to have the clearest observations and insight into American culture. What are some examples of this? How does the role of an outsider provide a unique vantage point?
- 9.** The Jendes often reflect on their home of Cameroon with both nostalgia and negativity; though they have left their homeland for a better country, Cameroon still remains in their hearts and minds. However, it is clear that even for Clark and Cindy, who are American citizens, it is very difficult to forget where you came from, the history that made you who you are. Discuss the concept of home in this novel. How does it affect the central characters?
- 10.** Perhaps one of the saddest moments of the novel is the Jongas' return to Cameroon. What do you think of this decision? How do you envision their lives if they had tried to stay in America?
- 11.** Consider the theme of power in the novel. How do some of the characters hold power over others? How do they yield this power?
- 12.** Discuss the choice to set this novel in an America on the brink of recession and the Wall Street collapse. How would this story have looked different without this moment in American history? What would these characters' journeys have looked like?
- 13.** Discuss the character of Clark Edwards, a man who seems to have many different sides. What is his culpability in the collapse of Lehman Brothers? What type of husband and father is he? Would you consider him a good or a bad man?
- 14.** Consider the role of the American dream in the novel. How is this ideal defined in the story? In what ways is it manifested in the central men and women of this story? How does it fail them?

(Questions provided by the publisher)



www.grpl.org/BookClub