

# READ GLOBAL BOOK GROUP

## *We Need New Names*, by NoViolet Bulawayo

### Questions

(adapted from Hachette Book Group)

Warm-up: On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate this novel?

1. As a young child, Darling lives in a close knit community of extended family members and friends. When she moves to Detroit, Michigan she lives in a smaller family unit, and perhaps a more conventional one. Does living with fewer people in probably more middle class circumstances give Darling a more intimate family life? Or was her family life in Zimbabwe more supportive or affirming for her?
2. How do Bulawayo's descriptions of Zimbabwe diverge from other portrayals of Africa? In some of the tragic moments in the book—for example when Darling and her friends try to remove the baby from Chipso's belly—there are unexpected moments of levity. Does Bulawayo's method of depicting tragedy make the harrowing elements more resonate with you in an unexpected way?
3. We see through the lives of young Darling and her friends that lots of American pop culture makes its way firmly into the imagination of these young people—from Beyoncé to McDonald's to the television show ER. How are Darling's ideas about American pop culture affirmed or challenged when she arrives in Detroit, Michigan?
4. The scene in which the aid workers visit Darling's village gives insight into the sometimes dehumanizing impact of charity: "The man starts taking pictures with his big camera...they don't care that we are embarrassed by our dirt and torn clothing...we don't complain because we know that after the picture-taking comes the giving of gifts." If this scene were written from the point of view of the aid workers, how do you think it would be different?
5. How do you think your country of residence affects the way you read and interpreted the novel?
6. The title of the book refers to the choice that many immigrants make to give their children names that, as Darling says, "make them belong in America." How important is a name? How much weight do names hold in your family or in your culture?
7. In what ways does America change Darling's personality? Is America the reason for this shift or is it Darling herself? Does your personality change depending on where you are or who you are with?
8. When Darling is living in America, she Skypes with Chipso, who tells her that she can't refer to Zimbabwe as her country anymore. Do you think this is a fair accusation? Does Darling owe anything to Zimbabwe? And is she still entitled to a sense of ownership over the place she left behind?

9. How would your reading experience have been different if the novel hadn't been written in Darling's voice? Are there places you think you would have understood more about the story? What role did her voice play in establishing the moments of humor and cultural insight in this story?

## Notes

BBC News. (2019, March 19). Zimbabwe Profile – Timeline.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14113618>

BAM.org. (2014, March 19). *NoViolet Bulawayo on names, the limitations of language, writing from a distance* [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjOGa5BH8Ok>

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