



BOOK CLUB KIT

Q&A with **TOMI OBARO** *author of* **DELE WEDS DESTINY**



You said you started writing DELE WEDS DESTINY during the summer of 2019. Could you paint a picture of that summer for you? How did your world at that time draw you into the lives of Funmi, Enitan, and Zainab?

Toni Morrison had just died and, like a lot of other people, I was feeling sad and so I started rereading a lot of her interviews. I was struck by what she said in a 2014 interview with the National Endowment of the Arts. Asked to comment about the failures of contemporary American writing, she replied: “When I taught creative writing at Princeton, [my students] had been told all of their lives to write what they knew. I always began the course by saying, ‘Don’t pay any attention to that.’”

At that moment, I had recently finished a draft of a novel about a young Nigerian American woman who was not me but was kind of me and I knew it wasn’t very good.

I already had a story idea about three Nigerian women in their 50s and how their friendship evolves when one of them elopes with a foreigner back when they met in college. But I had been reluctant to begin it, very much aware

of the fact that I was not a woman in my 50s and had not grown up in Nigeria. That was also part of the excitement to me; the idea of inhabiting characters and points of view that weren’t necessarily my own; of claiming authority I felt I hadn’t earned and making it all compelling to a reader.



You’ve mentioned that the novel is loosely based on the relationship your mother had with her two college friends. Could you tell us a bit more about that? Was there a particular story from her that helped give life to the women—the mothers and daughters— you are writing about here?

Yes, my mother’s two best friends are women she met in college and they have kept in touch ever since, though none of them live in Nigeria now. I must stress that my mother and her friends are quite different from the characters in the book; the only big parallel is that one of my aunts did elope! But that’s her story to tell.

The book is split into two timelines—one set in 2015 Lagos and the other throughout the 1980s while the three women are in college in Northern Nigeria. Why was it important for you to show what Funmi, Enitan, and Zainab were like growing up?

I wanted to give a fuller sense of the characters' history with one another and I knew I didn't want to limit myself to staying in modern day Lagos. I grew up spending time in Kaduna as a child during summer vacations so I was also interested in writing about that part of the country.



Two other central characters in the novel are Funmi's daughter, Destiny, and Enitan's daughter, Remi, who often seem at odds with their mothers. How would you describe the relationship between Funmi and Destiny? Enitan and Remi?

I think the relationships between Funmi and Destiny and Enitan and Remi are fraught in different ways. The mothers love their daughters but don't always understand them. I'm more curious to hear what readers think about those relationship dynamics!

Who was your favorite character to write? Why?

Funmi was the character who came to me first. There's something about her bluntness that I found tremendously fun to write.



Most (if not all) of your writing currently on the internet is nonfiction— did you always want to write a novel? What do you think fiction can do that nonfiction can't?

I grew up reading and writing fiction but didn't think becoming a novelist was remotely practical, so for a long time the desire to write fiction was one I didn't admit to myself. I think reading fiction and nonfiction can be equally compelling but writing fiction is so much more rewarding than writing nonfiction. It's just so freeing. You get to live in your imagination and you have complete autonomy; you're not beholden to facts or quotes or someone's else story the way you are when you're reporting. I also don't plan or outline when I write fiction and that freedom is blissful (though quite stressful when editing!).



Were there any authors or books that inspired you while working on DELE WEDS DESTINY?

I deliberately sought out domestic fiction by African women. I read Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*, Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* and Flora Nwapa's *Women are Different*. They were all mostly self-taught writers who wrote after having children and there's something about their determination to tell the truth about their experiences and the experiences of women they knew in a very jarring, deliberately unromantic way that I found inspiring.



Reading Group Guide

DELE WEDS DESTINY

a novel by TOMI OBARO



Introduction

Full of heart and brimming with emotion, *Dele Weds Destiny* is a moving story about the enduring bonds of friendship among women by debut novelist Tomi Obaro.

Set in Lagos, the vibrant metropolis of Nigeria, *Dele Weds Destiny* follows the lives of Enitan, Zainab, and Funmi, a trio of college best friends who are reuniting for the first time in thirty years. Coming together for the wedding of Funmi's obedient daughter, Destiny, a young medical student with a private passion for photography, and her classmate, the "innocuous-looking" Dele, the three women are brought face-to-face with the events that solidified their friendship and later sent their lives hurtling in different directions.

Beautifully written and interspersed with gripping flashbacks to 1980s Nigeria, *Dele Weds Destiny* gives readers an intimate and nuanced view of its central characters as they navigate sex, love, and motherhood, and ultimately learn the empowering strength of friendship. As the novel builds to a surprise ending, Enitan, Zainab, and Funmi must use everything they've learned together to support their daughters when they need them most.

The following questions are designed to accompany your reading of *Dele Weds Destiny*. We hope they spark thoughtful reflection, encourage lively discussion, and enrich your experience of this radiant debut.



QUESTIONS & TOPICS

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Revisit the novel's prologue. What were your earliest impressions of the three main characters, Enitan, Zainab, and Funmi, and what did you originally predict for their reunion? How do your initial thoughts compare to what you now know?

2. *Dele Weds Destiny* serves as a backdrop for issues such as race and ethnicity, gender and reproductive rights, mental health, socioeconomic status, and religion. Discuss these issues in the context of the novel. What viewpoints and arguments does the author provide?

3. Describe Enitan and Remi's journey to Nigeria. Which images or scenes stand out to you most from their travels? What do they reveal about Enitan and Remi's relationship with the country and with each other? Share your own memories from a family trip.

4. In chapter 2, Zainab bravely faces armed thieves to protect her notebook, leaving behind her wallet and clothes. What is the significance of her notebook and what does this act illuminate about her character?

5. Both Enitan and Funmi stress the importance of giving their daughters, Remi

and Destiny, the luxuries they never got to experience as young women. How do you think this has impacted the relationships between these mothers and daughters? Has it helped or hindered their ability to connect with each other?

6. *Dele Weds Destiny* is filled with vibrant descriptions of Nigerian food, fashion, and customs. Discuss the use of these aspects of Nigerian culture in the art of the novel's storytelling.

7. Despite being college-aged, this is the first time Remi has ever been to Nigeria. Why has Enitan never brought her there before? Do you think this cultural divide has affected their ability to fully understand each other?

8. Reflect on the character of Destiny. As the wedding approaches, is she in control of her own destiny, or do external forces shape her fate?

9. After a failed dialogue between Destiny and Funmi, the novel takes a sudden turn, rewinding to 1983, when Funmi, Enitan, and Zainab were teenage girls. How are time and memory used in the narrative? What truths are the flashbacks able to reveal?

QUESTIONS & TOPICS

FOR DISCUSSION

10. In the earliest chapters of part II, Enitan, Zainab, and Funmi describe their relationships with their parents as young girls. How might these experiences have shaped their own marriage and parenting choices as adults? Do you think that their family backgrounds explain their actions in the 2015 sections of the novel?

11. Discuss the first meeting among Enitan, Zainab, and Funmi in college. Did you expect them to become friends based on their early interactions? Over the course of part II, what events solidify their bond with one another?

12. The novel makes historical references to student uprisings in Nigeria. How do youth activism and police violence impact the lives of each character? What events are set in motion for Funmi in the aftermath of the protest?

13. How does Yinka gain Funmi's affection during her first visit to Lagos?

14. Charles explains his early fascination with Africa in colonialist literature and how it has influenced his "tendency to romanticize Africa" (page 195), making references to Ernest Hemingway's "The

Snows of Kilimanjaro" and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. How did this change your perception of Charles and Enitan's relationship and the problems that arose later in their marriage?

15. How would you describe the engagement ceremony and the events that immediately followed? Joyous and celebratory? Tense and distressing? A bit of both? What repercussions must the women come to terms with as a result of encouraging the union?

16. What was your reaction to the novel's ending and Destiny's confession?

17. Funmi repeats the sentence "She had to do what she had to do" (page 76, etc.) at multiple key points in the novel. Where do you think this sentiment comes from? How does it open up possibilities of acceptance for herself, her best friends, and ultimately her daughter, Destiny?



RECOMMENDED READINGS

Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Sula by Toni Morrison

The Wedding by Dorothy West

Red at the Bone by Jacqueline Woodson

The Vanishing Half by Brit Bennett

Half of a Yellow Sun by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

