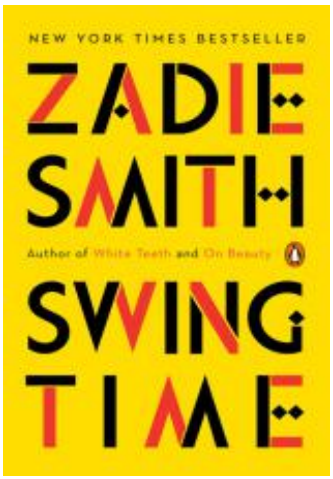
Swing Time

by Zadie Smith



About the Book

An ambitious, exuberant new novel moving from North West London to West Africa, from the multi-award-winning author of WHITE TEETH and ON BEAUTY

Two brown girls dream of being dancers --- but only one, Tracey, has talent. The other has ideas: about rhythm and time, about black bodies and black music, what constitutes a tribe, or makes a person truly free. It?s a close but complicated childhood friendship that ends abruptly in their early 20s, never to be revisited, but never quite forgotten, either.

Tracey makes it to the chorus line but struggles with adult life, while her friend leaves the old neighborhood behind, traveling the world as an assistant to a famous singer, Aimee, observing close up how the one percent live.

But when Aimee develops grand philanthropic ambitions, the story moves from London to West Africa, where diaspora tourists travel back in time to find their roots, young men risk their lives to escape into a different future, the women dance just like Tracey --- the same twists, the same shakes --- and the origins of a profound inequality are not a matter of distant history, but a present dance to the music of time.

Discussion Guide

1. At what point in SWING TIME did you realize the narrator?s name hadn?t been revealed? She is nameless throughout. Why do you think the author did this?

2. Similarly, what does this story gain from being told in first person, despite the narrator?s name never being revealed? What?s lost?

3. This book focuses heavily on female friendship. Why do you think Tracey and the narrator had such lasting effects on

each other, even after they grew apart?

4. What is the significance of the title, SWING TIME?

5. The narrator?s mother and father are very different from Tracey?s parents. What do you think Smith is trying to explore with these many different models of motherhood and fatherhood?

6. Aimee is a favorite popstar of Tracey and the narrator?s as they are growing up. When we meet her years later, she is still performing, but also working to open a school in Africa. Why do think Aimee plays such an important role in both the narrator?s childhood and adulthood, and what is Smith trying to get at through her character?s words and actions?

7. The book has a very powerful line: ?You want to believe there are limits to what money can make happen, lines it can?t cross.? What is the significance behind each characters? very different relationship to money?

8. Describe the epilogue. Based on what you?ve learned about each of the characters, what do you believe happens after the narrator sees Tracey dancing with her children?

9. The narrator of this story often lets other people?s lives and choices dictate where she goes in life. Can you pick out a few moments when she made decisions entirely on her own?

10. What?s one thing about the writing style of this book that surprised you? What themes stood out the most?

Author Bio

Zadie Smith is the author of the novels WHITE TEETH, THE AUTOGRAPH MAN, ON BEAUTY, NW, SWING TIME and THE FRAUD; as well as a novella, THE EMBASSY OF CAMBODIA; four collections of essays, CHANGING MY MIND, FEEL FREE, INTIMATIONS and DEAD AND ALIVE; a collection of short stories, GRAND UNION; and a play, THE WIFE OF WILLESDEN, adapted from Chaucer. She is also the editor of THE BOOK OF OTHER PEOPLE. Zadie Smith was born in North West London, where she still lives.

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