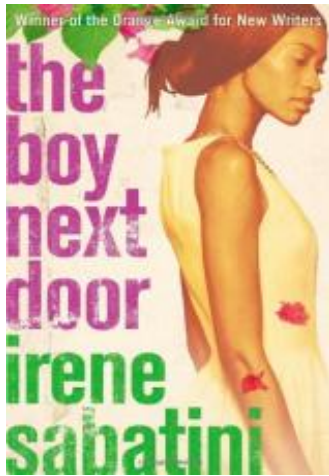


# The Boy Next Door

by Irene Sabatini

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## About the Book

In Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, there is a tragedy in the house next door to Lindiwe Bishop --- her neighbor has been burned alive. The victim's stepson, Ian McKenzie, is the prime suspect but is soon released. Lindiwe can't hide her fascination with this young, boisterous and mysterious white man, and they soon forge an unlikely closeness even as the country starts to deteriorate.

Years after circumstances split them apart, Ian returns to a much-changed Zimbabwe to see Lindiwe, now a sophisticated, impassioned young woman, and discovers a devastating secret that will alter both of their futures, and draw them closer together even as the world seems bent on keeping them apart. **The Boy Next Door** is a moving and powerful debut about two people finding themselves and each other in a time of national upheaval.

## Discussion Guide

1. Despite her mother's warnings, Lindiwe is fascinated with Ian. What do you think of their love story? Do you think there was a pivotal moment that drew them together, or was it love from the start?
2. Race relations play a significant role in **The Boy Next Door**. In what ways do the interactions among races in Zimbabwe as portrayed in the novel reflect those in the United States? In what ways are they unique? What do you make of the distinction here between 'black' and 'colored'?
3. After the fire, Lindiwe spots a lighter by the fence, and instead of turning it in to the police, she pockets it. Why do you think she does this?
4. Early on, Lindiwe mentions 'the terrorists,' and her father corrects her: 'Nationalists, Lindiwe, Freedom Fighters' (page 42). But her mother scolds him for saying it. What do you make of this semantic argument? What parallels might

you draw with other societies and world events that echo this distinction?

5. Maphosa claims at one point that 'there is no such thing as a white African' (page 46). What do you make of his statement? What drives Maphosa's later militarism?

6. Lindiwe discovers that she will have a half sister - her father has a child with Rosanna. In the aftermath, the family is put under heavy strain, and Rosanna is shunned. Is Lindiwe's mother's reaction to the child justified?

7. What do you make of the character of Bridgette? How might things have ended differently for her?

8. Ian half jokingly calls Lindiwe a 'fundie' and seems a bit off-put by her education. This is just one difference between the two of them - what other seemingly problematic incongruities do they face? Which are the most difficult to overcome?

9. Lindiwe's mother raises Lindiwe's son, David, very strictly, and he has trouble adjusting to his 'new' parents when Lindiwe and Ian take him away. Do you think that Lindiwe did the right thing in taking David so abruptly? Was she right to have her mother watch over him in the first place?

10. How would Lindiwe and Ian's relationship have been different if David weren't in the picture? Lindiwe returns home to a much-changed Bulawayo. What role do home and homeland play in the novel?

11. Robert Mugabe came to power in the 1980s, and he is still a controversial figure. What do you think of his role in the novel?

12. Should Ian have accepted the job when he was asked to take Mugabe's portrait?

13. David inadvertently witnesses soldiers committing atrocities and takes a photo (page 388). Afterward, Ian is proud of his son, even though the boy is traumatized. What do you make of Ian's pride? How is 'bearing witness' a theme of the book?

14. In the afterword, Ian, Lindiwe, and David are now far away from Zimbabwe. Why do you think they have chosen exile? Will they return, do you think, or continue their lives away from home?

## Author Bio

Irene Sabatini spent her childhood in the laid back city of Bulawayo in Zimbabwe, gobbling up books from the Public Library. After University in Harare she ventured across continents to Colombia, excited by the chance to live in, learn from, and be inspired by a new culture.

One early morning she found herself in the lush countryside outside Bogotá, sitting on the veranda of a former Dominican monastery: in the quiet, she opened a red notebook and started writing.

She has yet to stop.

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