



Swing Time by Zadie Smith

About the author:

Zadie Smith originally Sadie Smith (born October 27, 1975, London, England), British author known for her treatment of race, religion, and cultural identity and for her novels' eccentric characters, savvy humour, and snappy dialogue. She became a sensation in the literary world with the publication of her first novel, *White Teeth*, in 2000. She is also the author of *The Autograph Man*, *On Beauty*, *Changing My Mind*, and *NW*. Smith edited and contributed to the short-story collection *The Book of Other People* (2007) and published a collection of essays, *Changing My Mind* (2009).

Smith, the daughter of a Jamaican mother and an English father, changed the spelling of her first name to Zadie at age 14. She began writing poems and stories as a child and later studied English literature at the University of Cambridge (B.A., 1998).

Source: Author's website: <http://www.zadiesmith.com/about-zadie/>

Source: Encyclopedia Britannica: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Zadie-Smith>

About this book:

Finalist for 2016 National Book Critics Circle Awards

An ambitious, exuberant new novel moving from northwest London to West Africa, from the multi-award-winning author of *White Teeth* and *On Beauty*

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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, about what constitutes a tribe, or makes a person truly free. It's a close but complicated childhood friendship that ends abruptly in their early twenties, never to be revisited, but never quite forgotten, either.

Dazzlingly energetic and deeply human, *Swing Time* is a story about friendship and music and stubborn roots, about how we are shaped by these things and how we can survive them. Moving from northwest London to West Africa, it is an exuberant dance to the music of time.

Source: Random House Canada:

<http://penquinrandomhouse.ca/books/529304/swing-time#9780143196372>

Discussion Questions:

1. How did you experience the book? Were you engaged immediately, or did it take you a while to "get into it"? How did you feel reading it—amused, sad, disturbed, confused, bored...?

2. Describe the main characters—personality traits, motivations, and inner qualities.

- Why do characters do what they do?
- Are their actions justified?
- Describe the dynamics between characters (in a marriage, family, or friendship).
- How has the past shaped their lives?
- Do you admire or disapprove of them?
- Do they remind you of people you know?

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3. Are the main characters dynamic—changing or maturing by the end of the book? Do they learn about themselves, how the world works and their role in it?

4. Discuss the plot:

- Is it engaging—do you find the story interesting?
- Is this a plot-driven book—a fast-paced page-turner?
- Does the plot unfold slowly with a focus on character?
- Were you surprised by complications, twists & turns?
- Did you find the plot predictable, even formulaic?

5. Talk about the book's structure.

- Is it a continuous story...or interlocking short stories?
- Does the time-line move forward chronologically?
- Does time shift back & forth from past to present?
- Is there a single viewpoint or shifting viewpoints?
- Why might the author have chosen to tell the story the way he or she did?
- What difference does the structure make in the way you read or understand the book?

6. What main ideas—themes—does the author explore? (Consider the title, often a clue to a theme.) Does the author use symbols to reinforce the main ideas?

7. What passages strike you as insightful, even profound? Perhaps a bit of dialog that's funny or poignant or that encapsulates a character? Maybe there's a particular comment that states the book's thematic concerns?

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8. Is the ending satisfying? If so, why? If not, why not...and how would you change it?

9. If you could ask the author a question, what would you ask? Have you read other books by the same author? If so how does this book compare. If not, does this book inspire you to read others?

10. Has this novel changed you—broadened your perspective? Have you learned something new or been exposed to different ideas about people or a certain part of the world?

Source: <http://www.litlovers.com/run-a-book-club/questions-for-fiction>

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