

ONE MARYLAND ONE BOOK 2017

# Purple Hibiscus

READER'S GUIDE



BY CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE

## WHAT IF EVERYONE READ THE SAME BOOK AT THE SAME TIME THEN CAME TOGETHER TO TALK ABOUT IT?

When we read a great book, we can't wait to share the experience and talk about it with others. That's one of the joys of reading.

In this spirit, Maryland Humanities created One Maryland One Book to bring together diverse people in communities across the state through the shared experience of reading the same book. Now in its tenth year, One Maryland One Book remains Maryland's only statewide community reading program. Each year, the selection process is guided by a theme. The theme for 2017 is "Home and Belonging."

The Maryland Center for the Book at Maryland Humanities partners with public libraries, high schools, colleges and universities, museums, bookstores, correctional facilities, and other organizations to bring book-centered discussions and other related events to communities across Maryland. But One Maryland One Book is not just about reading or literature; it is also about bringing people together for meaningful dialogue.

The book selected for 2017 is *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

### GRAB YOUR COPY

Find a copy of *Purple Hibiscus* at your local library or bookstore and get reading!

What if a copy of *Purple Hibiscus* finds you? If you're out and about, you might find copies of the book in unexpected places. Our Wandering Books can be found in a myriad of public spaces from bus stops to county fairs. If you find a copy, it's yours for a short time. Register the book online so we can see how far it travels (instructions are included inside the book), read it, review it, and then leave it for someone else to find and enjoy.

### REACH OUT

Each year, more than 10,000 Marylanders read the One Maryland One Book selection. How many of those people are your friends or family? How many are perfect strangers you sit next to on the train or stand in line with at the grocery store? Use the book to jump-start a meaningful conversation with an old friend or to make a new one.

### PULL UP A CHAIR

We invite you to join Maryland Humanities and thousands of Marylanders at one of the many book discussions and related events happening around the state in September and October, including an author tour.

To find One Maryland One Book programs in your area, go to [www.onemarylandonebook.org](http://www.onemarylandonebook.org) and click on Events.

For all the latest information, "like" or follow us:



Look for Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie at several venues in late September, including the Baltimore Book Festival on Sunday, September 24.



### LETTER FROM MARYLAND HUMANITIES BOARD CHAIR AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Thank you for joining Maryland Humanities as we embark on the tenth year of One Maryland One Book, our state's largest reading and discussion program. Since the program's launch in 2008, readers across Maryland have embraced our annual tradition of bringing people together from across the state through the reading of one book, selected by a dedicated group of literary enthusiasts. Each year we explore the power of literature with fellow readers—from book clubs at workplaces and libraries to students in high school and college. This shared experience lies at the heart of One Maryland One Book. Whether you've read with us every year or are new to the program, welcome!

This year's book offers Marylanders a glimpse into the lives and home of a post-colonial Nigerian family. The first novel by acclaimed author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus* weaves a gripping tale through the teenage narrator, Kambili, who takes us into the life of a prominent and wealthy Nigerian family with a private secret—a successful and devoutly religious yet physically and psychologically abusive father. While a continent away, the story of Kambili and her family is wretchedly familiar. In the U.S., it's not difficult for any of us to identify someone we know who has experienced the fear and oppression of abuse. As Kambili comes of age, she and her brother experience respite at their aunt's house, where there is a freedom and warmth absent under the strict dictates of their father. The contrasts between those homes is striking, but a glimmer of hope remains as the siblings discover more about themselves and about life as the story builds to a dramatic crescendo.

We encourage you to pick up a copy of *Purple Hibiscus* and join the conversation at one of our many public discussion programs across the state. A program of the Maryland Center for the Book at Maryland Humanities, One Maryland One Book is made possible each year through the generosity of our sponsors and community partners. We greatly thank them for their support. Find out how to get involved at [www.onemarylandonebook.org](http://www.onemarylandonebook.org).

Sincerely,

Stephen Sfekas, Board Chair  
Phoebe Stein, Executive Director

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie** is the leading African writer of her generation. She grew up on the campus of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and left Nigeria for the U.S. at the age of 19.

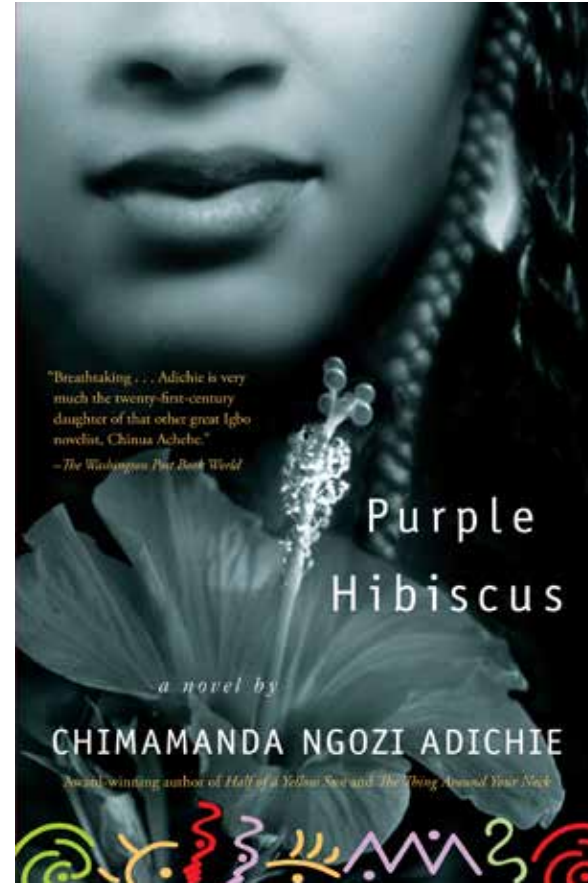
Among her many accolades, Ms. Adichie has been awarded a Hodder fellowship at Princeton University (2005-2006) and a fellowship at the Radcliffe Institute of Harvard University (2011-2012). In 2008, Ms. Adichie earned a coveted MacArthur Genius Award.

Ms. Adichie's work is read around the world, and has been translated into over thirty languages. Her first novel *Purple Hibiscus* won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize, and her second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, won the Orange Prize (now the Bailey's Women's Prize), which is the world's top prize for female writers. Her 2013 novel *Americanah* has received numerous accolades, including the National Book Critics Circle Award. It was named one of *The New York Times* Top Ten Best Books of the Year.

Ms. Adichie has been invited to speak around the world. Most notably her 2009 TED Talk, *The Danger of A Single Story*, is now one of the top ten most-viewed TED Talks of all time, with over five millions views. Her 2012 TED talk, *We Should All Be Feminists*, has started a worldwide conversation about feminism, especially after it inspired a song by Beyoncé. It was published as a book in 2014.

Her most recent book, *Dear Ijeawele, or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*, was published in March 2017.

Ms. Adichie is committed to assisting young aspiring writers. As one of her commitments, she leads an annual Writers Workshop in Nigeria, for which applications come from around the world.



## ABOUT THE BOOK

Fifteen-year-old Kambili and her older brother Jaja lead a privileged life in Enugu, Nigeria. They live in a beautiful house, with a caring family, and attend an exclusive missionary school. They're completely shielded from the troubles of the world. Yet, as Kambili reveals in her tender-voiced account, things are less perfect than they appear. Although her Papa is generous and well respected, he is fanatically religious and tyrannical at home—a home that is silent and suffocating. As the country begins to fall apart under a military coup, Kambili and Jaja are sent to their aunt, a university professor outside the city, where they discover a life beyond the confines of their father's authority. Books cram the shelves, curry and nutmeg permeate the air, and their cousins' laughter rings throughout the house. When they return home, tensions within the family escalate, and Kambili must find the strength to keep her loved ones together. *Purple Hibiscus* is an exquisite novel about the emotional turmoil of adolescence, the powerful bonds of family, and the bright promise of freedom.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 What does the purple hibiscus represent in the book? Does it represent only one thing?
- 2 How would you describe the emotional atmosphere in the Achike home?
- 3 There is a significant discrepancy between Eugene's public image and the abuse that he perpetuates at home. How does the family cope with this discrepancy?
- 4 When Kambili moves in with Auntie Ifeoma, she experiences a different sort of home life. How does our environment shape our worldview and serve to either empower or silence us? Have you been in a situation where a move or change of environment has impacted your perspective, either positively or negatively?
- 5 Discuss silence as a theme in the book. What is its significance, especially as it pertains to Kambili?
- 6 Religion influences all of the characters in some way. Discuss the different ways in which religion influences each of them.
- 7 Eugene is extremely devout yet physically and psychologically abusive to his family. Is Eugene a bad man?
- 8 Kambili's mother keeps returning to her abusive husband. Why and how does she justify his behavior?
- 9 What role does the political climate in Nigeria play in the book? What influences/impact does it have on the characters?
- 10 What are the effects of colonialism on the families? How did colonialism shape Eugene and Ifeoma differently?
- 11 Do Kambili, her mother, and her brother ever experience freedom?



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Each year we hope that your participation in One Maryland One Book inspires you to explore themes and topics examined in the selected book. This year's selection offers an excellent opportunity to explore Africa's rich literary history through some of its best-known writers as well as films and music. The following list of books and movies might be of interest after reading *Purple Hibiscus*. While we include suggested age groups for the readings, they are just a guide. Feel free to choose based on your interests.

### ADULT FICTION

#### *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe

The first book in the critically acclaimed African Trilogy, this is a classic novel dealing with European colonization in Africa. Achebe illustrates life in a pre-colonial African village and conveys the tragic loss of that world and its impact on history.

#### *Stay with Me* by Ayobami Adebayo

Yejide and Akin fall in love at university and marry. Despite polygamy being an accepted practice, the two decide it is not for them. When, after four years of marriage, the couple remains childless, her family takes matters into their hands by arranging for a second wife for Akin sending Yejide spiraling out of control to get pregnant and save her marriage.

#### *What It Means When a Man Falls From the Sky* by Lesley Nneka Arimah

In this powerful debut, Arimah threads humor and horror through 12 stories of love, home, peace, and pain.

#### *Blackass* by A. Igoni Barrett

Sharp Kafkaesque satire is the hallmark of this ambitious debut novel, which takes on skin color and societal expectations based on appearance. Furo, a Lagos native, wakes up on the morning of a competitive job interview to discover he's turned into an oyibo—a white man—on all but his backside. Will a charmed life ensue?

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

Six friends find themselves in mischief during a time of war in Zimbabwe. This crew only seeks to fill their bellies with the sweet guava from the neighboring town of Budapest and play their war games. But the ugly circumstances of war force them to grow up quickly.

#### *Every Day is for the Thief* by Teju Cole

An unknown narrator recounts his experience during his return to Nigeria. The narrator examines with dismay the corruption and harsh realities of life in Nigeria. Cole includes his original photographs adding a sense of real life to the novel.

#### *Into the Go-Slow* by Bridgett M. Davis

Angie is in mourning and in an unfamiliar Nigerian city retracing her sister's final steps. She navigates the chaos to find self and love.



*Born on a Tuesday* by Elnathan John

In this coming of age story, a homeless boy is taken in by a Muslim community in rural Nigeria and must decide which Islamic path to pursue: peaceful co-existence while working for change or upending the status quo with a violent jihad.

*Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi

Effia is the daughter of a master and his slave; Esi is the daughter of the same slave who has since escaped. Though the half-sisters never meet, their family life is intertwined with the histories of Ghana and America and race and slavery. This family saga takes place in both countries, beginning during the height of the slave trade and continuing to the present day.

*The Fishermen* by Chigozie Obioma

In 1990s Nigeria, four brothers are being raised by their strict father. With the father out of town, the boys skip school and head to the fishing hole, where a run-in with the local madman changes their lives. At once atmospheric and visceral, Obioma's debut novel has been met with resounding praise.

*Under the Udala Trees* by Chinelo Okparanta

Passion collides with religion and politics in Nigeria following the Biafran War, as Igbo girl Ijeoma struggles to establish her own identity in a country that criminalizes her sexuality and relegates her ethnicity to second class.

*This House is Not for Sale* by E.C. Osondu

This thoughtful collection of short stories revolves around the residents of a grand house owned by the Godfather-like Grandpa, a patriarchal figure whose word is law and who renders final judgment on issues ranging from workplace embezzlement to soul-stealing. Osondu is a past winner of the Caine Prize for African Writing.

*Boy, Snow, Bird* by Helen Oyeyemi

Boy Novak flees New York City and her abusive father, finding refuge in New England as a newlywed and safety in a new life. She also finds that race and gender can be slippery constructs that hide secrets, threatening the foundations of her beloved home and family.

## ADULT NONFICTION

*A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* by Ishmael Beah

Beah chronicles his time spent wandering Sierra Leone as a child conscripted into the government army to fight in the civil war in this harrowing yet surprisingly poignant memoir.

*Madame President: the Incredible Journey of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf* by Helene Cooper

In 2005, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf became the first female elected head of state in Africa when she became president of Liberia. More than just a simple biography, Cooper contextualizes her experiences by folding in Liberian history and culture.

*The Chibok Girls: The Boko Haram Kidnappings and Islamist Militancy in Nigeria* by Helon Habila

In 2014, international attention was focused on the abduction of 274 schoolgirls from Chibok, Nigeria by insurgent group Boko Haram, whose name loosely translates to "western education is abhorrent." Habila returned to Nigeria to tell the story of the missing girls and examines the historical roots of a culture that allows an extremist group to flourish.

*Never Look an American in the Eye* by Okey Ndibe

Culture clash: Nigerian native Ndibe deftly uses humor to illustrate his experiences as a new American, taking on anything from the plethora of grooming supplies available to the puzzling and very non-African concept of "personal space," while paying homage to both his birth and adopted countries and the African literary giants who inspired him.

*Bright Continent* by Dayo Olopade

Olopade turns the tables on the assumption that Africa is in need of rescue. The people have kanju, determination stemming from desperate situations resulting in life sustaining solutions.

*The Rift: a New Africa Breaks Free* by Alex Perry

Africa is a massive continent, often misunderstood or mislabeled by those in the West. Though Perry too is a Westerner, he tries to explain the monolith of Africa from a Western perspective but with Africa's own voices. The result is epic, rich and complex, depicting experiences and explaining historical perspective from South Africa to Somalia.



## CHILDREN AND TEENS

### *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in Peoples' Ears* by Verna Aardema

This retelling of a West African cautionary folktale is about the consequences of lying and how lies affect others. Diane and Leo Dillon's vibrant woodcut illustrations, which won them the 1976 Caldecott Medal, capture both the dramatic and playful sides of this story. (folktale)

### *Anna Hibiscus* books by Atinuke

This series of chapter books feature African child Anna who lives in a compound with her extended family and is a gentle introduction to traditional customs, race, class, and hardship in Africa. (early chapter book)

### *I Just Want to Say Goodnight* by Rachel Isadora

On the African veld, the sun is setting and mothers are gathering their children for bedtime. But Lila waits for her fisherman father before she can fall asleep. Once he returns, she can go through her nightly good nights to the fish, the cat, the goat, and finally the moon. Dramatic oil and ink artwork enhance this gentle lullaby of a story. (picture book)

### *Inside Out and Back Again* by Thanhha Lai

Young Ha has lived in Saigon her whole life, but the Vietnam War has arrived at her home. Forced to flee, she lands in Alabama and must create a new life. This coming-of-age story is based on the author's real life experiences. (children's fiction)

### *Never Forgotten* by Patricia McKissack

Set in West Africa, this is a lyrical, generational story in verse about a young boy who is kidnapped and sold into slavery and his father who is left behind to mourn. This is a powerful story about family, grief, and freedom that is enriched by Diane and Leo Dillon's dramatic illustrations. (children's fiction)

### *Nelson Mandela's Favorite African Folktales*

Mandela selected these 32 tales with the hope that these rich stories, which illuminate the storytelling history of his beloved continent, will be appreciated by children throughout the world. These "beloved stories, morsels rich with the gritty essence of Africa," represent the region from Morocco and Kenya to Swaziland and Nigeria and are complemented with illustrations of varying style by South A

### *Akata Witch* by Nnedi Okorafor

Sunny was born in America, but lives in Nigeria. Her features are African, but she's albino. She feels like a misfit until she discovers she has magical power and joins a group of students with similar skills, studying invisibility and learning to alter reality. But what happens when they are tasked with catching a dangerous criminal who knows magic too? (teen fiction)

### *Shadowshaper* by Daniel Jose Older

A stunning fantasy adventure told through Caribbean folklore, art, and culture. Sierra Santiago paints beautiful murals. One day she finds that the murals come to life and have a great purpose. (teen fiction)

### *Climbing the Stairs* by Padma Venkatraman

In Colonial India during the 1940s, Vidya had a charmed upbringing. Well-read and educated, she planned on attending college. But then her father is injured in an accident, and suddenly she finds her family has reverted to traditional ways, and the opportunities she had counted on have gone. Will a rash decision cost her family more than she realizes? (teen fiction)

### *Brown Girl Dreaming* by Jaqueline Woodson

Woodson uses poetry to tell the story of her life growing up African American in the 1960s. She reflects on Jim Crow and the Civil Rights movement from her perspective as a young girl. *Brown Girl Dreaming* is a moving story of heartache and growth. (children's nonfiction)

### *I Am Malala: How One Girl Stood Up for Education and Changed the World* by Malala Yousafzai with Patricia McCormick (Young Readers Edition)

Malala, a 15-year-old Pakistani teen, was targeted by the Taliban and shot in the face for her outspoken support of girls' education. Undaunted, she continues to advocate for the right of all children to attend school. (children's nonfiction)



## TELEVISION AND MOVIES

### *An African City* (TV Series, 2014 & 2016, unrated, YouTube)

Stylish. Vibrant. Hilarious. This Ghanaian web series features five friends who return to “the continent” after growing up abroad to set roots in their birthplace.

### *District 9* (2009, 1 hr. 52 mins., rated R) — Directed by Neill Blomkamp

A startlingly original science-fiction thriller where alien refugees, stranded on Earth, are exiled to a slum on the fringes of Johannesburg.

### *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2013, 1 hr. 52 mins., rated R) — Directed by Biyi Bandele

Adichie’s follow up to *Purple Hibiscus* was this sweeping story set in 1960s Nigeria. It is the story of two sisters caught up in the events of the Nigerian Civil War, ending in chilling violence which shocked the world.

### *The No. 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency* (TV Series, 2008-2009, rated R)

Alexander McCall Smith’s best-selling novel was brought to life for television by the BBC and HBO. This inspiring story introduces us to Precious Ramotswe, a Botswana woman who fulfills a longtime dream by opening her country’s first and only female-owned detective agency.

### *Queen of Katwe* (2016, 2 hrs. 4 mins., rated PG) — Directed by Mira Nair

This film is based on the true story of Phiona Mutesi, a young girl from the streets of rural Uganda whose world changes when she is introduced to the game of chess. This uplifting drama about family, community, success, and determination will appeal to teens too.



## MUSIC

### Aşa

<http://asa-official.com/>

Aşa’s music is soulful, powerful, and unapologetically honest in confronting social issues.

### Fela

<http://FELA.net>

Fela is likely the most widely known Nigerian musician. This source for all things Fela online has links to Fela’s YouTube channel and much of his music on streaming services.

### Somi

<http://www.somimusic.com/>

Rhythmic beats and vibrant tunes. Somi masterfully mixes her Nigerian roots with the richness of Jazz.

## WEBSITES

<http://caineprize.com/>

The Caine Prize for African Writing is awarded to an African writer of a short story published in English. The prize was created to encourage and showcase the depth and diversity of African writing by bringing it to an international audience while highlighting the African storytelling tradition.

<http://en.childrenslibrary.org/>

The mission of the International Children’s Digital Library Foundation (ICDL) is to support the world’s children in becoming effective members of the global community by making the best in children’s literature available online free of charge. Ultimately, the ICDL Foundation aspires to have every culture and language represented so that every child can know and appreciate the riches of children’s literature from the world community.

<http://www.okayafrica.com/>

Okayafrica is a one-stop shop for the culture of Africa and the African diaspora. News, fashion, music, and video from a variety of international sources are all showcased on this lively site.

NOTES

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The content and resources of this guide were created and compiled in part by the staff of the Baltimore County Public Library. Portions have been reprinted with permission from Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill and the National Network to End Domestic Violence.

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Maryland Humanities is an educational nonprofit organization. Our mission is to create and support educational experiences in the humanities that inspire all Marylanders to embrace lifelong learning, exchange ideas openly, and enrich their communities. To learn more, visit [www.mdhumanities.org](http://www.mdhumanities.org).





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