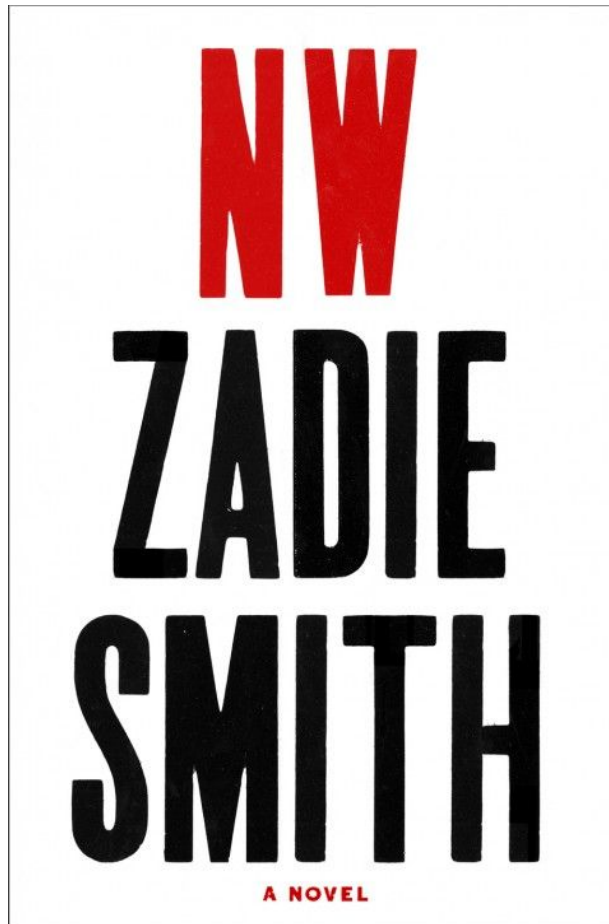


# *NW* by Zadie Smith

## Social Literati Book Club Reader's Guide

Research Compiled by kYmberly Keeton, M.L.S.



## Author Bio

Reference Source: <https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/zadie-smith>

**Novelist Zadie Smith was born in North London in 1975 to an English father and a Jamaican mother. She read English at Cambridge, graduating in 1997.**

Her acclaimed first novel, *White Teeth* (2000), is a vibrant portrait of contemporary multicultural London, told through the story of three ethnically diverse families. The book won a number of awards and prizes, including the *Guardian* First Book Award, the Whitbread First Novel Award, and the Commonwealth Writers Prize (Overall Winner, Best First Book). It also won two EMMA (BT Ethnic and Multicultural Media Awards) for Best



Book/Novel and Best Female Media Newcomer, and was shortlisted for the *Mail on Sunday*/John Llewellyn Rhys Prize, the Orange Prize for Fiction and the Author's Club First Novel Award. *White Teeth* has been translated into over twenty languages and was adapted for Channel 4 television for broadcast in autumn 2002.

Her tenure as Writer in Residence at the Institute of Contemporary Arts resulted in the publication of an anthology of erotic stories entitled *Piece of Flesh* (2001). She also wrote the introduction for *The Burned Children of America* (2003), a collection of eighteen short stories by a new generation of young American writers. Zadie Smith's second novel, *The Autograph Man* (2002), a story of loss, obsession and the nature of celebrity, won the 2003 *Jewish Quarterly* Literary Prize for Fiction. In 2003 she was nominated by *Grantamagazine* as one of 20 'Best of Young British Novelists'.

Her third novel, *On Beauty*, was published in 2005, and won the 2006 Orange Prize for Fiction. She has also written a non-fiction book about writing - *Fail Better* (2006); and *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays*(2009).

Zadie Smith became a tenured professor of fiction at New York University in 2010 and lives between New York City and London. Her latest novel is *NW* (2012), set in north west London.

## Book Summary

Reference Source: <http://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/13-fiction/8981-nw-smith>

NW  
Zadie Smith, 2012  
Penguin Group USA  
416 pp.  
ISBN-13: 9781594203978

This is the story of a city.

The northwest corner of a city. Here you'll find guests and hosts, those with power and those without it, people who live somewhere special and others who live nowhere at all. And many people in between.

Every city is like this. Cheek-by-jowl living. Separate worlds.

And then there are the visitations: the rare times a stranger crosses a threshold without permission or warning, causing a disruption in the whole system. Like the April afternoon a woman came to Leah Hanwell's door, seeking help, disturbing the peace, forcing Leah out of her isolation...

Zadie Smith's brilliant tragi-comic new novel follows four Londoners—Leah, Natalie, Felix and Nathan—as they try to make adult lives outside of Caldwell, the council estate of their childhood. From private houses to public parks, at work and at play, their London is a complicated place, as beautiful as it is brutal, where the thoroughfares hide the back alleys and taking the high road can sometimes lead you to a dead end.

Depicting the modern urban zone—familiar to town-dwellers everywhere—Zadie Smith's NW is a quietly devastating novel of encounters, mercurial and vital, like the city itself. (From the publisher.)



## Read Excerpt:

Reference Source: [http://www.penguin.com/static/pages/features/zadie\\_smith/](http://www.penguin.com/static/pages/features/zadie_smith/)

1

The fat sun stalls by the phone masts. Anti-climb paint turns sulphurous on school gates and lampposts. In Willesden people go barefoot, the streets turn European, there is a mania for eating outside. She keeps to the shade. Redheaded. On the radio: I am the sole author of the dictionary that defines me. A good line—write it out on the back of a magazine. In a hammock, in the garden of a basement flat. Fenced in, on all sides.

Four gardens along, in the estate, a grim girl on the third floor screams Anglo-Saxon at nobody. Juliet balcony, projecting for miles. It ain't like that. Nah it ain't like that. Don't you start. Fag in hand. Fleeshy, lobster-red.

I am the sole

I am the sole author

Pencil leaves no mark on magazine pages. Somewhere she has read that the gloss gives you cancer. Everyone knows it shouldn't be this hot. Shriveled blossom and bitter little apples. Birds singing the wrong tunes in the wrong trees too early in the year. Don't you bloody start! Look up: the girl's burned paunch rests on the railing. Here's what Michel likes to say: not everyone can be invited to the party. Not this century. Cruel opinion—she doesn't share it. In marriage not everything is shared. Yellow sun high in the sky. Blue cross on a white stick, clear, definitive. What to do? Michel is at work. He is still at work.

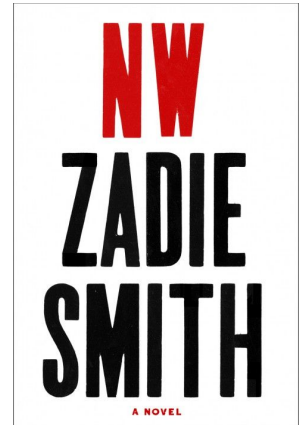
I am the

the sole

Ash drifts into the garden below, then comes the butt, then the box. Louder than the birds and the trains and the traffic. Sole sign of sanity: a tiny device tucked in her ear. I told im stop takin liberties. Where's my cheque? And she's in my face chattin breeze. Fuckin liberty.

I am the sole. The sole. The sole

She unfurls her fist, lets the pencil roll. Takes her liberty. Nothing else to listen to but this bloody girl. At least with eyes closed there is something else to see. Viscous black specks. Darting water boatmen, zig-zagging. Zig. Zag. Red river? Molten lake in hell? The hammock tips. The papers flop to the ground. World events and property and film and music lie in the grass. Also sport and the short descriptions of the dead.



## Book Club Discussion Topics

(From [bookrags.com](http://bookrags.com))

Who is the true Leah Hanwell? Why do you think she decides to not tell Michel that she is pregnant? Do you think Leah is struggling with her sexuality? What do you think happens to Leah after Michel finds out she's been taking birth control pills?

Relationship between Leah and her mother: How does Leah feel about her mom? How does her mom feel about Leah? How do Leah's feelings change after her father dies?

Relationship between Leah and Natalie: Are they best friends, acquaintances or something else? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Leah feel about Natalie? How does Natalie feel about Leah? Why don't the best friends confide in each other about their secret lives?

Relationship between Natalie and Frank: Are they in love or did they marry for other reasons?

## Zadie Smith's Guides to NW

An interactive tour through the real-world locations of Zadie Smith's NW, narrated by the author.

<https://chapmanchapman.wordpress.com/2012/09/20/zadie-smiths-guide-to-nw/>

"I ain't in your dream Keisha. You're in mine.": Spectral Communities and "More than Social" Consciousness in 21C London Literature

<https://prezi.com/y5xfocvnpark/i-aint-in-your-dream-keisha-youre-in-mine/#>

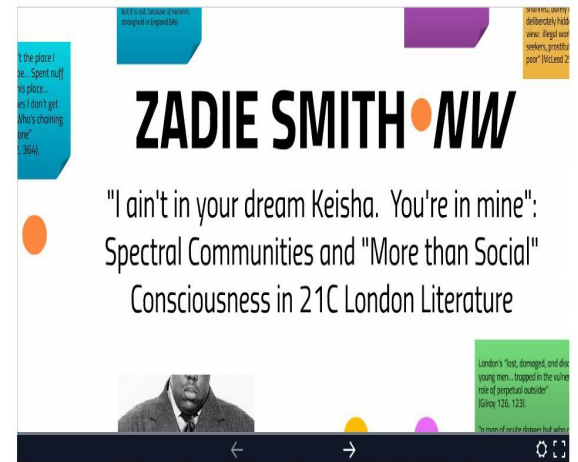
## Zadie Smith Quotes, NW

"Favorite Quote of Zadie Smith's NW"

By [She's.Got.The.Mic](http://She's.Got.The.Mic).

### 21. Jane Eyre

"When being bullied Keisha Blake found it useful to remember that if you read the relevant literature or watched the pertinent movies you soon found that being bullied was practically a sign of a superior personality, and the greater the intensity of the bullying the more likely it was to be avenged at the other end of life, when qualities of the kind Keisha Black possessed—cleverness,



will-to-power– became ‘their own reward,’ and that this remained true even if the people in the literature and movies looked nothing like you, came from a different socio-economic and historical universe, and– had they ever met you– would very likely have enslaved you, or at best, bullied you to precisely the same extent as Lorna Mackenzie who had a problem with the way you acted like you were better than everyone else.” – from *NW*, by Zadie Smith

## 5 Great Essays to Read by Zadie Smith

[Joy](#)

[ZADIE SMITH ON THE RISE OF THE ESSAY](#)

[Speaking in Tongues](#)

[Fail Better](#)

[Generation Why?](#)