

<p>Description of the writer, context, form and genre of the text</p>	<p>Bernardine Evaristo was born and raised in London to a Nigerian father and English mother. Evaristo is a prolific writer who has written for theatre, radio, print media and has authored 11 books and 7 plays. Evaristo’s Booker Prize-winning novel <i>Girl, Woman, Other</i> was published in 2019. The postmodern novel pushes the boundaries of stylistic and narrative conventions and explores female characters’ experiences across generations. Like a lot of her other work, Evaristo explores the African diaspora and the social and political complexities that migration creates. In the novel, Evaristo illustrates the various ways these Black women respond to the consequences of migration, for example, she highlights the hostility towards marginalised people in Western society. Evaristo also explores the complexity of family, sexuality, and romantic relationships. The main thread of the novel is Amma and Dominique’s play being staged in the National Theatre - a triumph for these black women. While their stories converge in the closing chapter at the After-Party, the novel comprises insights into 12 separate stories about Black British women who are connected.</p>
<p>Book review as a form of recommendation</p>	<p><i>Girl, Woman, Other</i> is featured on the OCR A Level specification list, with Evaristo’s novel being the only one written by an author of colour that is set in the United Kingdom (UK). Considering the core texts within this section: <i>Mrs Dalloway</i> and <i>Sense and Sensibility</i>, this makes for a rich point of comparison across time in the same location. <i>Girl, Woman, Other</i> explores the ways that race, and gender intersect to influence 12 Black British women’s experiences in the UK and she explores themes such as: identity, community, resistance, and assimilation throughout. If teachers are thinking about teaching this as an NEA option, students can select books like <i>Homegoing</i> by Yaa Gyasi, <i>Americanah</i> by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie or <i>Wuthering Heights</i> by Emily Brontë, <i>Much Ado about Nothing</i> by Shakespeare or even the Penelope episode from James Joyce’s <i>Ulysses</i> as a point of comparison (of course, the appropriate text depends on your exam board guidelines). The novel is both shocking and hilarious, and Evaristo presents the characters and their experiences in a thoroughly creative and complex way. This certainly is an entertaining and appropriate read to inspire interesting discussions in your A Level classes.</p>



Five themes illustrated with three quotations each

HOME

'Bummi complained that people viewed her through what she did (a cleaner) and not what she was (an educated woman) they did not know that curled up inside her was a parchment certificate proclaiming her a graduate of the Department of Mathematics, University of Ibadan just as she did not know that (...) her first class degree from a Third World country would mean nothing in her new country especially with her name and nationality attached to it' (Bummi).

'LaTisha ended up in emergency accommodation for young mothers, how could her mum do this to her when she had a baby to look after, and it meant she'd lost the one person who could show her how to raise him' (LaTisha).

'Carole is curious to visit Nigeria, hasn't been sent there for work yet, her desire to act on it isn't a priority at the moment, she'll take her mother back one day, maybe with Kofi for support, Freddy too Carole loves Kofi, he's perfect for her mother' (The After-Party).

IDENTITY

'she wore men's black shoes, black lace-ups, liked how comfortable they were, how powerful she felt when she walked in them, loved that men didn't eye her up any more which was liberating' (Megan/Morgan).

'Bummi did not subsequently expect Carole to return home after her second term speaking out of her nose like there was a sneeze trapped up it instead of using the powerful vibrations of her Nigerian vocal power, all the while looking haughty around their cosy little flat as if it was now a fleapit' (Bummi).

'Yazz recently described her style as 'a mad old woman look, Mum', pleads with her to shop in Marks & Spencer like normal mothers, refuses to be spotted alongside her when they're supposed to be walking down the street together Yazz knows full well that Amma will always be anything but normal, and as she's in her fifties, she's not old yet, although try telling that to a nineteen-year-old; in any case, ageing is nothing to be ashamed of' (Amma).



FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

`you are not our daughter in the biological sense, her father told her at lunch on her sixteenth birthday (great timing) she'd been left in a cot on the steps of a church they'd waited until she was old enough to understand she'd been mysteriously deposited without certification, no note, no clues, nothing (Penelope).

`a few of the great-grandchildren in their twenties and thirties are here too, God knows what most of them do great great-grandchildren are seated at a separate table, can't remember most of their names, a couple of adults are acting as minders to stop them using food as missiles instead of fodder for their mouths then there's the newly-borns she's only just met - Riley, Zoe, Noah she'll remember their names for a few hours' (Hattie).

`ever since she landed the National gig she's got very snooty about struggling theatre mates, as if she alone has discovered the secret to being successful as if she hasn't spent way too many years of her life watching crap television while waiting for the phone to ring this is a problem with having a daughter with X-ray vision she can see through the parental bullshit' (Yazz).

RACISM

`Amma was shorter, with African hips and thighs perfect slave girl material one director told her when she walked into an audition for a play about Emancipation whereupon she walked right back out again in turn a casting director told Dominique she was wasting his time when she turned up for a Victorian drama when there weren't any black people in Britain then. She said there were' (Amma).

`classroom walls are decorated with flow charts and diagrams, anatomy drawings, planets orbiting the sun, posters of extinct mammals and a map of the world that makes Britain rival Africa in size, testament to the colonial cartographers who got away with it for centuries, even now, it seems, as she approaches her very own classroom on the second floor' (Shirley).

`you have too much personality, Mrs Langley said from behind the desk in the office, staring at Grace from behind halfpenny-round spectacles (... too much personality is unseemly in a girl Grace sat upright on the other side of the desk.... feeling very scared... she wasn't the only one being naughty, but she was the only one who was caught' (Grace).



	<p>ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS</p> <p>'a while, Carole replied, oh and he's white, English, she mumbled, we've been dating for ages and I'm really in love with him, so there you have it (...) why you like to dey like cause so much wahala for me, eh? na play you dey play, abi? you don spit ontop your papa life! you don spit ontop your people! which kain shame you wan bring on this family? you don disgrace me! I no sabi you at all, at all at all' (Bummi).</p> <p>'the tension between us is electrostatic, Ams, it's like I'm being charged up with electric volts, we can't bear to be apart, not even for five minutes, Nzinga is so wise and knowledgeable about how to be a liberated black woman in an oppressive white world that she's opening my eyes to, well, everything, it's like she's Alice and Audre and Angela and Aretha rolled into one, seriously, Ams' (Dominique).</p> <p>'she reassured herself her attraction to Lennox wasn't a betrayal of Clovis or Shirley because it wasn't acted upon if it was, that would be different if he turned up on her doorstep one day when Clovis was out and pounced on her she would not have been able to resist' (Winsome).</p>
<p>Five classroom discussion questions</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Research the experiences of women in the Kingdom of Dahomey. Why do you think Amma and Dominique stage a play about this history in the novel? 2. Although the men are not central to the novel, and Evaristo presents these women's experiences within a patriarchal society, how does Evaristo present masculinity within the novel? 3. The novel deals with the impact, consequences and nostalgia of migration. How does migration affect the older characters featured in the novel? 4. 'Sexuality runs through the heart of the novel and it is the source of the character's freedom'. To what extent do you agree with this statement? 5. Who is your favourite character in the novel and why? Select an extract that best represents the character of your choice and analyse how Evaristo uses language and structure to present the character



<p>Three character descriptions</p>	<p>Freddy Freddy is Carole’s white husband from a privileged background. Both of their parents were dissatisfied with their marital choice. Although Freddy brings his racial biases into their relationship, Carole is still satisfied with him as her husband.</p> <p>Giles Giles is Penelope’s first husband. They meet in high school, and he is a source of emotional support to Penelope when she finds out she is adopted. Giles attempts to enforce his traditional values on Penelope: insisting that she remain a housewife and forgo her teaching career. Penelope eventually leaves him.</p> <p>Lennox King Lennox is Shirley’s husband. He is a doting and supportive father. As a second-generation Afro-Caribbean, he becomes a lawyer to tackle systemic racism. He has a short, passionate affair with Shirley’s mother and Shirley never discovers the truth.</p>
<p>Two assesment questions</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ‘Work seems to shape the female characters’ experiences.’ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - By comparing at least two texts prescribed for this topic, explore how far you agree with this view. - In your answer you must include discussion of either <i>Sense and Sensibility</i> or <i>Mrs Dalloway</i> and <i>Girl, Woman, Other</i>. 2. ‘The secretive romantic interests the female characters have, always lead to heartbreak.’ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - By comparing at least two texts prescribed for this topic, explore how far you agree with this view. - In your answer you must include discussion of either <i>Sense and Sensibility</i> or <i>Mrs Dalloway</i> and <i>Girl, Woman, Other</i>.

