

Penguin



Readers

Bernardine Evaristo

Girl,
Woman,
Other

Penguin  Readers

GIRL, WOMAN, OTHER

BERNARDINE EVARISTO

LEVEL

7

RETOLD BY SAFFRON ALEXANDER

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Contents

Note about the story	5
Before-reading questions	5
PART ONE	
Chapter One – Amma	7
Chapter Two – Yazz	15
Chapter Three – Dominique	22
PART TWO	
Chapter Four – Carole	31
Chapter Five – Bummi	39
Chapter Six – LaTisha	47
PART THREE	
Chapter Seven – Shirley	54
Chapter Eight – Winsome	60
Chapter Nine – Penelope	67
PART FOUR	
Chapter Ten – Megan/Morgan	74
Chapter Eleven – Hattie	83
Chapter Twelve – Grace	90
PART FIVE	
Chapter Thirteen – The after-party	98

Chapter Fourteen – Epilogue	105
During-reading questions	110
After-reading questions	113
Exercises	114
Project work	120
Essay questions	121
Glossary	122

VICENS VIVES

PART ONE
CHAPTER ONE
Amma

Amma is walking along the path next to the river. It is early in the morning; the sun has begun to rise and she can hear a violin being played somewhere in the distance.

Amma's new **play**, *The Last Amazon of Dahomey*, opens at the National Theatre in London tonight.

As she walks, Amma thinks back to when she first started working in theatre. She remembers how she and her friend Dominique would go to shows and shout insults at the actors and actresses on the stage if the play offended them. Amma remembers once pouring a pint of beer over the head of a director and quickly running out of the theatre, laughing loudly.

When she was younger, Amma had found herself on the outside of what was popular in the theatre world. She was a black **lesbian** and, for a long time, she felt like she did not **fit in** with the people around her, but recently things had started to change. Three years ago, a woman was named the **artistic** director of the National, and after so many years of being on the outside, Amma had received a phone call from her.

"Hello, Amma?" she said. "I love your new play. I want to show it at the National, and I want you to direct it too."

Amma walks towards the National and remembers how she felt when she first walked through its doors many years ago. She had expected to be kicked out as soon as she arrived. Back then,

people wore their smartest clothes to the theatre, but not Amma. She had dressed casually in jeans and hats, and large jewellery, in clothes that matched her personality and revealed her politics and **sexuality**. She wore special buttons on her clothes to show people that she was a lesbian.

Amma's style has changed since then, but it still makes her noticeable in a crowd. She wears trousers with patterns on them, bright shirts and coats, and has even coloured her **dreadlocks** blonde. Her daughter, Yazz, recently told her that she has a "mad old woman look", before begging her to dress more like normal mothers.

Amma pauses her walk to light a cigarette. She is nervous about tonight. She has written and directed plenty of plays in her career, but she is still worried. What if she gets bad reviews? What will people say about her?

At times like these Amma misses Dominique, who moved to America many years ago.

Amma and Dominique met in the 1980s at an **audition** and quickly became friends after they realized they both hated having to try for parts in plays where black people had to be **slaves** or servants.

"Look at me?" said Dominique. "Do I look like I should be a slave or a servant?"

Amma shook her head.

"Can't they see I'm a goddess?" Dominique shouted.

Dominique was tall, beautiful and cool. She wore leather clothes and kept her hair cut short.

After the audition, Dominique and Amma went to a café and told each other about their lives. Dominique was a lesbian, like Amma. She was born in Bristol and had nine brothers and sisters. She was the oldest. When she was 16, she moved to London to try and become an actress. Life was difficult for her at first. She did not have anywhere to live so she lied and told a government worker that she was running away from her violent father. The government gave her a flat after that.

“I did what I had to do,” said Dominique. “And nobody got hurt. My father never found out about the lie.”

After she got her flat, Dominique decided it was time to educate herself in black history, politics and **feminism**. When she **eventually** went to drama school, she was the only person of colour in the whole school.

“I challenged them on everything,” said Dominique. “I asked the difficult questions, like why can’t male parts in Shakespeare be played by women? Or why is it OK for a white person to play a black character but not the opposite way? Nobody ever agreed with me. I realized I was on my own.”

“I understand,” said Amma. “You have to fight for what you believe in. My dad taught me that.”

Amma’s father, Kwabena, was a journalist who had fought for Independence in Ghana. The government wanted to arrest him for speaking against them, so he ran away to London where he met Amma’s mother, Helen.

Helen was **mixed-race** and was born in Scotland. She had light skin and loose, curly hair. The white men in Scotland did not like her, but the black African men she met in London

thought that she was beautiful.

“Do your parents know you’re a lesbian?” asked Dominique.

“Mum does,” said Amma. “But not Dad. Mum told me not to tell him. Even she thinks I’ll change my mind one day.”

Amma told Dominique about Elaine and the first black women’s group she had gone to during her last year at her school in Brixton. The women there spoke about feminism and **racism** and how it affected them. Amma listened to them speak and soon, she started to feel like she had found somewhere where she belonged.

Elaine was a member of the group. She was beautiful. Once everyone else had gone home for the night, Amma and Elaine kissed on the couch. Amma thought they had something special together, but at the next meeting, Elaine ignored her completely.

Amma did not go back to the group.

Amma and Dominique stayed at the café drinking wine until the owner told them to leave. They had decided that they needed to start their own theatre company because they did not want to have parts as slaves and servants. They called it “Bush Women Theatre Company” and decided they would use it to tell black and Asian women’s stories.

Starting a theatre company was not an easy job. Amma and Dominique were good friends, but they could not work together well. Amma upset Dominique when she was late to their planning meetings, and Dominique annoyed Amma when she did not deliver her **scripts** on time.

“We need to work together better,” said Amma one evening.

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	CEFR level	Story word count	Headwords
S	Pre-A1	400-600	350
1	A1	1,000-1,600	550
2	A1+	3,000-5,000	700
3	A2	7,000-10,000	1,000
4	A2+	11,000-14,000	1,200
5	B1	15,000-18,000	1,600
6	B1+	18,000-22,000	2,000
7	B2	22,000-26,000	2,500

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