

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Jessica George was born and raised in London to Ghanaian parents and studied English Literature at the University of Sheffield. After working at a literary agency and a theatre, she landed a job in the editorial department of Bloomsbury UK. *Maame* is her first novel.

Us.macmillan.com.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the meaning of the word *Maame* evolve throughout the story, and how does Maddie's relationship to it change?
2. Google search results appear frequently throughout the novel. In what kind of situations does Maddie turn to Google for answers, and why do you think she does so? How did the inclusion of her search results affect your reading experience?
3. Maddie misses out on several social experiences because she is taking care of her father. How does this affect the way she views herself, particularly in relation to other young people her age?
4. How does religion and God play a role in this story? Are the two distinct at any points? Does their role in Maddie's life shift after her father passes away?

5. Maddie's mother tells her to "keep family matters private" (page 1). How does this affect Maddie's personal life and/or her ability to connect with people? How does this same directive affect how Maddie's mum lives her life?
6. At times, Maddie doesn't feel like she meets the expectations of her English environment or her Ghanaian culture. Have you or anyone you know struggled with a similar conflict?
7. Maddie is often the only Black person in the room at both of her jobs with CGT and OTP. This environment makes Maddie hyperaware of things like her hair or the food she eats. How does Maddie's race, gender and culture affect her experience in the workplace? Compare and contrast Katherine's and Maddie's experiences in the workplace.
8. On page 14, Maddie explains that CGT hired her when they were focusing on "reflecting diversity." Months into the job, Maddie realized that the only other Black people she worked with "were mainly front of house, serving staff." What are your thoughts on this observation, and how companies in general treat diversity in the workplace? Do you notice any performative diversity in the story or in your own life?
9. On page 167, Shu says, "You don't want a boyfriend who isn't racist, Maddie. You need a boyfriend who is actively anti-racist." How does Maddie experience the lower layers of the lasagna of racism --- like microaggression and unconscious bias --- in her dating experience? What about within the workplace? In your own life, what steps, if any, do you take toward being anti-racist, and why is it so important to do so?
10. Maddie's brother and mum have been absent most of her life. Discuss their family dynamic, and how secrets and guilt play a role in it. How do Maddie, James and their mum each deal with regret, and does this affect the way they choose to live, moving forward?
11. Maddie explains that she and her dad never spoke to each other much, but they clearly have a deep, genuine relationship. Why do you believe they are so close? What do you think brings them together?
12. To what extent does Maddie's relationship with her mother evolve over the course of the novel? What do you imagine for their dynamic in the future?
13. How does Maddie grieve the loss of her father? How does her perspective on how she's "supposed" to grieve evolve over the story? Does Maddie grieve the loss of her father at all before his death? What role does Nia's and Shu's friendship play?
14. The author dedicates the novel "For Dad." For both Maddie and Jessica George, writing proves to be an emotional outlet. How does knowing that Maddie's experiences are partially inspired by Jessica's own loss of her father affect your understanding of the story? What kinds of outlets have you turned to in your own instances of grief or heartbreak?
15. How did this book impact you, and what emotions did it leave you with?

BOOK REVIEWS

Booklist

For the past eight years, Maddie has been the primary caretaker for her father, who is suffering from a severe case of Parkinson's. She sacrificed her chance to move away to college, chase her dream career, and pursue a romantic relationship while her mother spent year-long stints in Ghana managing the family business, and her brother did his own thing. But when her mother returns and suggests Maddie move out while she takes care of her husband, Maddie is confronted with an adolescence's worth of milestones and no guidance on where to start. George's first novel is a new adult coming-of-age story written for a generation who has grown more accustomed to seeking out advice from strangers on the internet than from those they see every day. While there are moments when the plot feels predictable, George illustrates the complexities of navigating two cultures and rising from the pressure of other people's expectations beautifully. This is a clever and deeply moving debut.

Publisher's Weekly

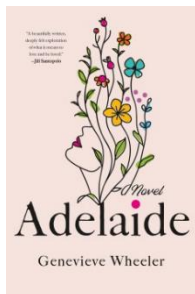
In this pitch-perfect debut, George captures the uncertainty, freedom, and anxiety of a London woman's mid-20s. Narrator Maddie Wright is a people pleaser who earns the nickname Maame ("the responsible one") from her family. She has an unsatisfying theater admin job where she is often "the only Black person in the room," and while her older brother, James, lives his life as he wants and her mother spends most of her time in her homeland of Ghana, Maddie steps up as the main caregiver for her Parkinson's afflicted father. Between her mother hitting her up for money and her incommunicative father, Maddie searches on Google for career guidance and dating advice, as well as remedies for panic attacks and grief. As her social life further dwindles and she worries she'll always be a virgin, Maddie begins the "slow descent into a dull existence." Then her mother finally comes back to take care of Maddie's father, and Maddie moves into a flat with two roommates who are determined to help her live a larger life, starting with a list of actions to turn her into "The New Maddie." But just as she's getting a taste of independence, tragedy strikes at home and at work, and she's forced to confront the microaggressions she faces in daily life, as well as ask herself how she deserves to be treated. The work's ample magnetism resides in the savvy portrayal of Maddie as a complicated, sharp, and vulnerable person who is trying to figure out adulthood. Readers will revel in this. Agent: Jemima Forrester, David Higham Assoc. (Jan.)

Kirkus Reviews

After a loss, a young British woman from a Ghanaian family reassesses her responsibilities. Her name is Maddie, but the young protagonist in George's engaging coming-of-age novel has always been known to her family as Maame, meaning woman. On the surface, this nickname is praise for Maddie's reliability. Though she's only 25, she works full time at a London publishing house and cares for her father, who's in the late stages of Parkinson's disease. Maddie's older brother, James, has little interest in helping out, and their mother is living in Ghana and running the business she inherited from her own father. When she needs money, she always calls Maddie, who shoulders these expectations and burdens without complaint, never telling her friends about her frustrations: "We're Ghanaian, so we do things differently" is an idea that's ingrained in her. Her only confidant is Google, to whom she types desperate questions and gets only moderately helpful responses. (Google does not truly understand the demands of a religious yet remote African-born mother.) But when Maddie loses her job and tragedy strikes, she begins to question the limits of family duty and wonders what sort of life she can create for herself. With a light but firm touch, George illustrates the casual racism a young Black woman can face in the British (or American) workplace and how cultural barriers can stand in the way of aspects of contemporary life such as understanding and treating depression. She examines Maddie's awkward steps toward adulthood and its messy stew of responsibility, love, and sex with insight

and compassion. The key to writing a memorable bildungsroman is creating an unforgettable character, and George has fashioned an appealing hero here: You can't help but root for Maddie's emancipation. Funny, awkward, and sometimes painful, her blossoming is a real delight to witness. A fresh, often funny, always poignant take on the coming-of-age novel. Copyright (c) Kirkus Reviews, used with permission.

SOLITO READALIKES - FOOTNOTES



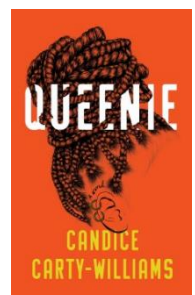
Adelaide by Genevieve Wheeler

Adelaide Williams is in the emergency room. She's made an attempt on her own life. When a nurse asks her why, Adelaide reflects on the past few years. She's an American expat in London with a family history of mental illness, but it's her trauma that has shaped her: a terrible boyfriend abused her repeatedly. When Adelaide found Rory Hughes on a dating app, everything changed. Adelaide had actually met Rory before, and she'd called him a literal Disney prince. Of course they were fated to be together, but Adelaide tried too hard to craft their happy ending. This is a portrait of a woman struggling with her empathic desire to be all things to all people and realizing that she is allowed to put herself first.



Ghosts by Dolly Alderton

Thirtysomething Nina Dean, a food writer, joins the dating app Linx under the guidance of Lola, her terminally single but hilarious friend with a self-anointed "PhD in dating." When Nina matches with Max, they hit it off immediately and begin a whirlwind romance. After three blissful months, he professes his love to Nina but then falls off the face of the earth, ghosting her.



Queenie by Candice Carty-Williams

Constantly compared to her white middle-class peers, a young Jamaican-British woman in London makes a series of questionable decisions in the aftermath of a messy breakup before challenging herself to figure out who she wants to be.