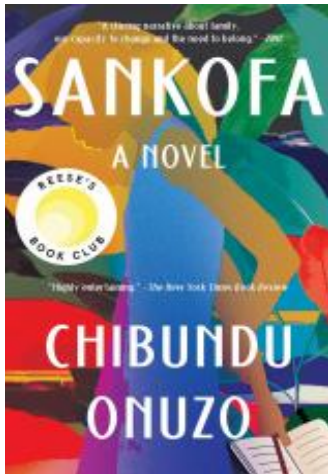


Sankofa

by Chibundu Onuzo



About the Book

A woman wondering who she really is goes in search of a father she never knew --- only to find something far more complicated than she ever expected --- in this moving and hopeful novel of self-discovery for readers of AN AMERICAN MARRIAGE.

Examining freedom, prejudice, and personal and public inheritance, SANKOFA is a story for anyone who has ever gone looking for a clear identity or home, and found something more complex in its place.

Anna is at a stage of her life when she's beginning to wonder who she really is. She has separated from her husband, her daughter is all grown up, and her mother --- the only parent who raised her --- is dead.

Searching through her mother's belongings one day, Anna finds clues about the African father she never knew. His student diaries chronicle his involvement in radical politics in 1970s London. Anna discovers that he eventually became the president --- some would say dictator --- of a small nation in West Africa. And he is still alive.

When Anna decides to track her father down, a journey begins that is disarmingly moving, funny and fascinating. Like the metaphorical bird that gives the novel its name, SANKOFA expresses the importance of reaching back to knowledge gained in the past and bringing it into the present to address universal questions of race and belonging, the overseas experience for the African diaspora, and the search for a family's hidden roots.

Discussion Guide

1. How does being mixed race impact Anna's experience growing up in the UK? Do you think Bronwyn and Caryl treat Anna differently because of it?

2. What do you think of the diary format in the early chapters? Do you keep diaries? Have you ever read someone else's? Compared to a standard narrative, what does it reveal about the diary's writer, and what does it conceal?
3. In Chapter 8, Anna recalls an incident when she smacked Rose in public and a woman asks, "Does her mother know you hit her?" Anna responds, "Yes, she does." Why do you think the woman asks this? Why do you think Anna responds the way she does?
4. Why does Anna meet with a divorce lawyer, and what does she learn from the meeting?
5. Who was Francis Aggrey? Who is Kofi Adjei? How does Anna feel about the two sides of her father? How do you feel?
6. Why do you think Anna tries to dig up the stake of Abena, the child imprisoned after being accused of witchcraft? How does meeting Abena impact Anna?
7. How does Afua's relationship with their father differ from Anna's relationship? What does Anna learn about her father from her siblings?
8. How did you feel when Anna's father sent her to jail? How did Anna feel?
9. Anna creates art for an exhibition where none of her paintings have faces. Why do you think she painted them this way? What do you think of Anna's art?
10. At the end of the novel, Anna goes through an initiation rite in Banama. What happens during this ritual? Why do you think it happened? How do you think Anna was affected?
11. Did Anna's trip to Banama match her expectations of the place? How so, or how not?
12. In Chapter 29, Kofi tells Anna, "There is a mythical bird we have here, Anna. We call it the Sankofa. It flies forwards with its head facing back. It's a poetic image but it cannot work in real life" (pages 280-281). Why do you think SANKOFA was chosen as the title for the novel? How does it make you reflect on your own family history?

Author Bio

Chibundu Onuzo was born in Lagos, Nigeria, and lives in London. A Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and regular contributor to *The Guardian*, she is the winner of a Betty Trask Award, has been shortlisted for the Dylan Thomas Prize, the Commonwealth Book Prize, and the RSL Encore Award, and has been longlisted for the Desmond Elliott Prize and Etisalat Literature Prize. The author of WELCOME TO LAGOS, SANKOFA is her third novel.

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