

Women's Prize for Fiction 2019

Reading Group Guide

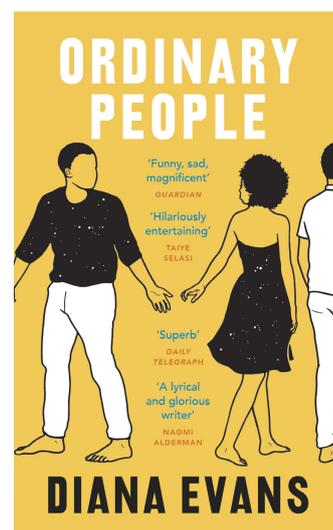
Ordinary People by Diana Evans

Vintage: Chatto & Windus

Also by Diana Evans:
26a (2007)
The Wonder (2009)

About the book

South London, 2008. Two couples find themselves at a moment of reckoning, on the brink of acceptance or revolution. Melissa has a new baby and doesn't want to let it change her but, in the crooked walls of a narrow Victorian terrace, she begins to disappear. Michael, growing daily more accustomed to his commute, still loves Melissa but can't quite get close enough to her to stay faithful. Meanwhile out in the suburbs, Stephanie is happy with Damian and their three children, but the death of Damian's father has thrown him into crisis – or is it something, or someone, else? Are they all just in the wrong place? Are any of them prepared to take the leap?



About the author

Diana Evans is a British author of Nigerian and English descent. Her bestselling novel, *26a*, won the inaugural Orange Award for New Writers and the British Book Awards deciBel Writer of the Year prize. It was also shortlisted for the Whitbread First Novel, the Guardian First Book, the Commonwealth Best First Book and the Times/Southbank Show Breakthrough awards, and longlisted for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. Her second novel, *The Wonder*, is currently under option for TV dramatisation. She is a former dancer, and as a journalist and critic has contributed to among others Marie Claire, the Independent, the Guardian, the Observer, The Times, the Telegraph, Financial Times and Harper's Bazaar. *Ordinary People* is her third novel, and received an Arts Council England Grants for the Arts Award. She lives in London.

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Questions and discussion points

1. Mentions of celebrities and key moments such as Obama's election run throughout the novel. How important are these cultural signifiers and key events?
2. How does the author show the importance of race to the characters' identities?
3. Much of the tension that arises between the characters is from small, everyday things, such as texts about grocery shopping. Why do you think the book focuses on these small, domestic details when looking at the relationship between a married couple, rather than some of the bigger problems such as infidelity?
4. The house takes on a character of its own throughout the novel. How does it reflect the issues within the family?
5. Evans' descriptions create a rich and vivid image of London. Do you think the setting is important for the story? How might events be different if it was set elsewhere, for example in the countryside?

Suggested reading

NW by Zadie Smith

Queenie by Candice Carty-Williams

Revolutionary Road by Richard Yates

Heartburn by Nora Ephron

Rabbit, Run by John Updike

Useful links

[Ordinary People by Diana Evans review – magnificence and marital angst](#)

[In Ordinary People, Diana Evans blends domesticity and celebrity, with a gothic twist](#)

[Ordinary People by Diana Evans – reviews: 'If you're a London parent in your mid-thirties, approach Ordinary People with caution'](#)

[Diana Evans's Ordinary People looks at what happens to love after infatuation](#)

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