



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

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UCF Alumni Book Club

The Black Flamingo by Dean Atta

Book Discussion Guide

Book Description

Michael is a mixed-race gay teen growing up in London. All his life, he's navigated what it means to be Greek-Cypriot and Jamaican—but never quite feeling Greek or Black enough.

As he gets older, Michael's coming out is only the start of learning who he is and where he fits in. When he discovers the Drag Society, he finally finds where he belongs—and the Black Flamingo is born.

Told with raw honesty, insight, and lyricism, this debut explores the layers of identity that make us who we are—and allow us to shine.

About the Author

Dean Atta is a British author hailing from London and living in Glasgow. He is a Malika's Poetry Kitchen member, National Poetry Day ambassador and LGBT+ History Month patron. Dean's poems have been highly commended by the Forward Prizes for Poetry and shortlisted for the Bridport Poetry Prize and Oxford Brookes International Poetry Competition. His books have been praised by the likes of Bernardine Evaristo, Benjamin Zephaniah and Malorie Blackman. things represent a kind of hunger that comes with being raised in a place like this."

More on the author's website: <https://www.sites.google.com/site/deanatta/cv>

General Questions

- What were your initial thoughts of the book?
- Do you usually read this genre?
- If this isn't the type of book you usually read, did it change your opinion? Do you think you'll read more novels in verse?
- Which scene stuck with you the most?
- What surprised you most about the book?
- Are there lingering questions from the book you're still thinking about?
- Which characters did you like best? Which did you like least?
- Which character did you relate to, or empathize with, the most?
- What are your thoughts on the book's structure?
- Why do you think the author chose to write a story in poetry instead of prose?
- What's a reader's job reading a story in verse? How is it different than reading prose?

Discussion Questions

<https://www.hachette.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Black-Flamingo-Discussion-Questions.pdf>

- Michael has different names at different points in his life—some he is given, some he chooses for himself.
 - How do the different names relate to Michael and his relationships?
 - What different names or nicknames do you have for different parts of your life?
- Identity impacts Michael in so many ways—his mixed heritage, his sexual identity, his family roles (son, brother, grandson, etc.).
 - Which identities impact your life the most and how so?
 - Despite his mother insisting that he isn't "half anything" (pg. 35), Michael often feels he doesn't neatly fit into his identities. When does he feel this way? When have you?
- When Daisy asks Michael to protect her from the lesbians (pg. 176) at the club, Michael angrily calls out her homophobia; yet he is far less decisive about calling out her racism.
 - What do you make of this difference in response?
 - Later when Daisy apologizes and comes out to Michael (pg. 247), she admits to internalized homophobia. How else does internalized oppression impact Michael's relationships and identity?

- Look at ways that Michael uses flamingos in his story and his poems, including his stage name.
 - What makes this an effective metaphor in his story?
 - What other metaphors and similes does Michael use to write about his experiences?

- In “Men Are Sandcastles” on pg. 240, Michael compares men to pebbles and the patriarchy to the bucket that gives them rigid but unstable form.
 - Have you heard of the patriarchy? Describe it.
 - How does it shape Michael and the other men in the book?
 - Why do you think this poem appears between Michael losing his virginity (pg. 225-227) and buying his first pair of heels (pg. 243)?

- When Michael cuts his locs (pg. 268), he says “I’m shedding / something other / people use to define / me, falling to my feet.”
 - How do people in the book use Michael’s locs to define him?
 - What parts of you (how you present, activities you do, places you’re from) do people use to define you positively or negatively?

- In the poem “How to Do Drag” (pg. 330-331), Michael writes in one stanza “Don’t punch / or kick downward at groups in society / with less power or privilege than you” (pg. 331).
 - What does he mean by this?
 - Where have you seen Michael or other characters “punch down” in the book?
 - Why is it important not to “punch down,” specifically for a drag performance?

- Performance is a major theme in Michael’s story.
 - What different kinds of performance are happening and how do they impact Michael’s life?
 - In his two poems “How to Do Drag” (pg. 330) and “What It’s Like to Be a Black Drag Artist” (pg. 334), Michael writes about how performance can be more authentic than reality. Do you agree? What kind of performance is a part of your life?

Additional Questions

- Share your thoughts on Michael’s poetry mixed in with the novel also written in verse.

- Did you have a favorite poem or line that you would like to share?

Resources

Discussion Questions

<https://www.hachette.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Black-Flamingo-Discussion-Questions.pdf>

<https://www.oprahdaily.com/entertainment/a31047508/book-club-questions/>

Author Website

<https://www.sites.google.com/site/deanatta/home>

Audiobook Excerpt

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZdLoGu_Fmko

Author Poetry Reading

<https://youtu.be/cf6JIA6hA>

Interview with the Author

<https://thenerddaily.com/dean-atta-author-interview/>

National Poetry Month

<https://poets.org/national-poetry-month>

More Novels in Verse

<https://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/novels-in-verse>