

## Discussion Guide for Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*

1. What impact do gender norms and roles have on characters behavior? How do these gender norms and roles impact how characters navigate their roles in relation to the identities/roles of others? To elaborate, how do feelings or attractions complicate the roles characters are playing?
2. What compels Kiki and Clare to develop a friendship beyond their husbands' rivalry? How does their friendship conform and deviate from the norms of female friendship represented in other literary works or other female relationships in the novel?
3. Many of the characters have ulterior motives. When does this manipulation go too far?
4. In *On Beauty*, Levi says to his father, *'Well, someone thought I was robbin' you again.'* *'Surely not,' said Howard cautiously. He disliked and feared conversations with his children that concerned race, as he suspected this one would.* In this conversation between Levi and Howard, there is a disconnect about race and masculinity. How have perceptions of Black masculinity changed since 2005? How are we still not talking about the intersection of race and masculinity in our families and communities?
5. The novel explores generational wealth, especially between women (for example, Kiki inherited her house from her mother). How does inheritance shape the choices of women and their families?
6. The novel explores several examples of high vs popular culture. How has this dichotomy changed since 2005? Specifically, what is the role of popular culture in the academy today?

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