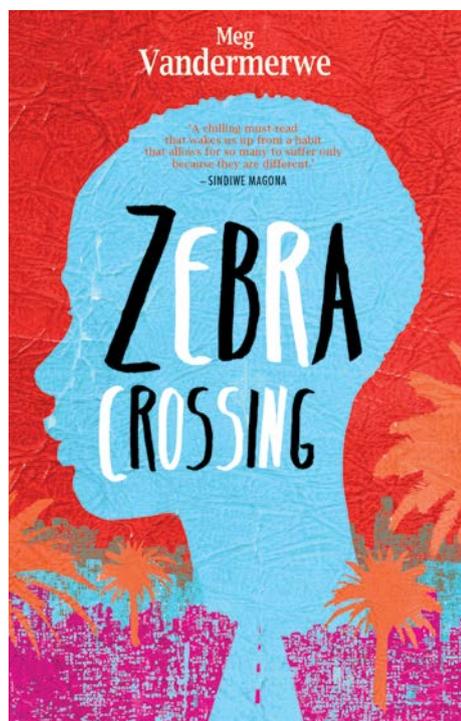




Oneworld Readers' Guide

Zebra Crossing



Zebra Crossing

Meg Vandermerwe

Ghost. Ape. Living dead. Young and albino, Chipo has been called many things, but to her mother – Zimbabwe's most loyal Manchester United supporter – she had always been a gift.

On the eve of the World Cup, Chipo and her brother flee to Cape Town, hoping for a better life and to share in the excitement of the greatest sporting event ever to take place in Africa. But the Mother City's infamous Long Street is a dangerous place for an illegal immigrant and an albino. Soon Chipo is caught up in a get-rich-quick scheme organised by her brother and the terrifying Dr Ongani. Exploiting gamblers' superstitions about albinism, they plan to make money and get out of the city before rumours of looming xenophobic attacks become a reality. But their scheming has devastating consequences.

Set in the underbelly of a pulsating Cape Town, Meg Vandermerwe's *Zebra Crossing* is an arresting debut and a bold, lyrical imagining of what it's like to live in another person's skin

Questions for Discussion

1. Chipo explains that borders point to places where you are not welcome, but nonetheless must go. Do other characters in the novel share this view? Do you share this view?
2. In the prologue and epilogue Chipo speaks to the reader from beyond the grave. How does this affect your experience as a reader?
3. Chipo is harassed because she is albino, George must hide his homosexuality, and immigrants are met with xenophobia. How does a fear of difference affect relationships between characters and various ethnic communities in the novel?
4. George's unrequited love is another harsh reality that Chipo must face. How do her attempts to win him over shape your understanding of her character?
5. The South African government argued that the Football World Cup would be a force for good in



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the country. To what extent does this seem true having finished the novel?

6. Many residents in President's Heights are refugees, but some, like Jean-Paul, fled political repression. To what extent does the novel deal with wider, socio-economic and political issues, rather than issues that could be considered to be specifically South African? Can the two be differentiated?
7. What did you feel about Chipó's two-sentence rhymes?
8. David has aspirations beyond his immediate surroundings – for example he goes to church and becomes a student. However, he is ultimately unable to escape his surroundings. How does his experience compare with George's?
9. Whereas Chipó, George, David and Peter all struggle to make a success of their time in Cape Town, we learn that Jean-Paul will prosper. What do you make of this?
10. Dr Ongani is a devious person but how much is he to blame for Chipó's death? Who, or what, is responsible for her death? Why do you think Vandermerwe chose this ending?
11. The phrase 'Zebra Crossing' does not appear in the story. What might it refer to?

About the Author

Meg Vandermerwe was born in South Africa in 1978. She read English at Oxford University and holds Masters degrees from the universities of Sussex and East Anglia. She teaches English Literature and Creative Writing at the University of the Western Cape, and lives in Cape Town, South Africa.