

AMERICANAH BY CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE

Ifemelu's story is full of flashbacks in chronological order, starting with her childhood in her home country. She grows up in Nigeria but leaves her high school sweetheart, Obinze, and goes to America to finish college. Her image of the “American Dream” quickly vanishes as she and her family in America struggle with economic and mental health issues. She grapples with racial views in America as a black outsider and copes by writing her blog, Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black.

PLOT SEQUENCE / USE OF FLASHBACKS

WHAT'S THIS ELEMENT?

Varied plot sequence is when the author does not use beginning-middle-end structure. This author uses flashbacks to create a different order.

The author uses the section to the right to vary the plot sequence, creating an end-beginning-middle-end pattern.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie creates a rich backstory by incorporating many extensive flashbacks in chronological order. She uses the transition of a common theme, hair, to move from the setting of a present day braiding salon in Trenton to a braiding salon at home in Nigeria during Ifemelu's childhood.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

This stylistic choice affects the whole book because of what we learn from it. Ifemelu's story becomes apparent to us as the book goes on using this strange plot sequence. We are confused by her blog, her setting, her American black boyfriend, and her weight in part 1 because we have no context.

Eventually, flashbacks reveal the origin of her blog, that she came to America to finish college, her struggle with depression and weight gain from it, and also how she came to know her boyfriend.

"Take it easy!" she added, because Aisha had pulled a tiny-toothed comb through a section of her hair.

"Your hair hard," Aisha said.

"It is not hard," Ifemelu said firmly. "You are using the wrong comb." And she pulled the comb from Aisha's hand and put it down on the table

Ifemelu had grown up in the shadow of her mother's hair. It was black-black, so thick it drank two containers of relaxer at the salon, so full it took hours under the hooded dryer, and, when finally released from pink plastic rollers, sprang free and full, flowing down her back like a celebration. Her father called it a crown of glory. "Is it your real hair?" strangers would ask and then reach out to touch it reverently. Others would say "Are you from Jamaica?" as though only foreign blood could explain such bounteous hair that did not thin at the temples. Through the years of her childhood, Ifemelu would often look in the mirror and pull at her own hair, separate the coils, will it to become like her mother's but it remained bristly and grew reluctantly; braiders said it cut them like a knife. One day, the year Ifemelu turned ten...(pg 49)

WHAT'S THE IMPACT ON THE READER?

This element starts by confusing the reader, which can be engaging. It then takes a step back and gives one all they would want to know about the main characters. The author used this mysterious start to hook readers in and then used backstory to make them more comfortable with the characters and to build for an eventual understanding in the end.

PARTS

WHAT'S THIS ELEMENT?

The use of parts in a book usually happens every couple of chapters, to break up different sections of content.

Adichie's book, *Americanah*, has a total of 7 parts and 55 chapters. Each part does not have a specific amount of chapters

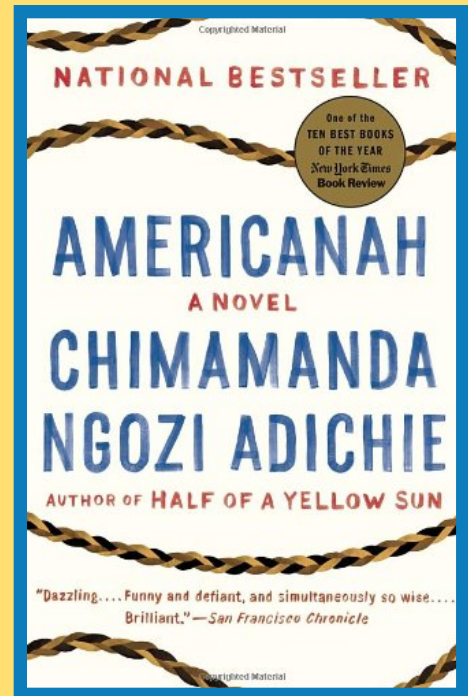
The author uses parts to differentiate the setting, or which character the story will be following. In this example, the third person narration stops following Ifemelu in America and begins following Obinze in London as part 2 ends and 3 begins.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Breaking up the text into parts is important because this book is written in third person and the characters are widespread. The author has to take time to acknowledge other characters that are in other countries to keep up with them before the characters are united again. It is important to the book itself because it links distant events.

WHAT'S THE IMPACT ON THE READER?

This system of parts creates a clear understanding of what is to come, aka a switch in perspective. The reader immediately knows there will be a change in the setting or current characters. It is a smooth way to transfer between very different situations.



USE OF COMMAS WITHIN LONG SENTENCES

"Everyone joked about people who went abroad to clean toilets, and so Obinze approached his first job with irony: he was indeed abroad cleaning toilets, wearing rubber gloves and carrying a pail, in an estate agent's office on the second floor of a London building. Each time he opened the swinging door of a stall, it seemed to sigh. The beautiful woman who cleaned the ladies' toilet was Ghanian, about his age, with the shiniest dark skin he had ever seen. He sensed, in the way she spoke and carried herself, a background similar to his, a childhood cushioned by family, by regular meals, by dreams in which there was no conception of cleaning toilets in London." (pg 292)

WHAT'S THIS ELEMENT?

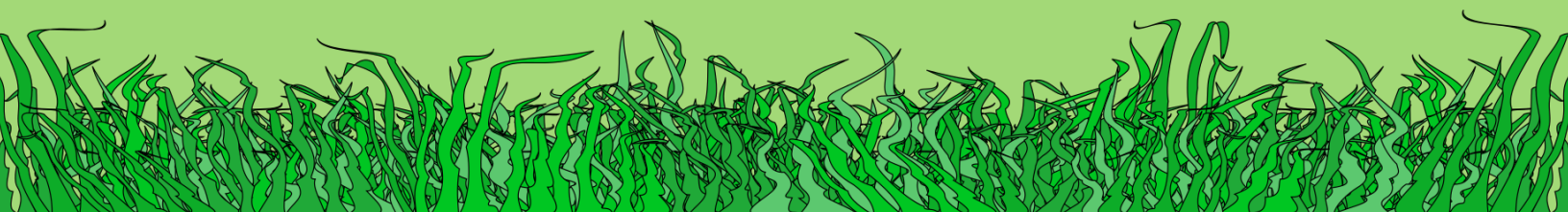
The author crafts very long and detailed sentences which include very informative lists. These descriptive lists act as sort of a staircase to understanding; each detail is like a step and the next builds on it, and this continues to the end. Though these sentences may be many lines long, the author uses a lot of commas to avoid run ons.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

This is a very important element because many of the settings and situations are very unfamiliar to the reader and the author needs a way to convey all of these details. In addition, these extra embedded details make for a richer story. They can help paint a picture of the setting or clarify information that wasn't given earlier.

WHAT'S THE IMPACT ON THE READER?

These detailed lists within sentences paint a more specific picture in the reader's head. Because of the setting changes and constant new characters, many readers may struggle to comprehend some scenes. However, with almost excessive details, the author offers anything and everything one might need to know about. This can help readers make connections from past chapters or draw conclusions about the character or situation.



MY EMULATION: NOT ACCORDING TO PLAN

PART 1

It was a stormy Sunday: the trees swayed and gave in to the strong winds, waving their branches, gently brushing against the window, they would have woken the people in the house, if there was anyone who could be woken.

Carla usually slept in on Saturdays, a recent delight of hers, letting the sunlight slowly overpower her curtains and the bird's chatter ease her awake just before noon. However, this was an exception, as she was already standing in the front door taking a call, letting the cold 5:30 AM air raise goosebumps on her skin. Her voice was steady and seemingly rehearsed, she was ready for today, and a slight Italian accent slipped through, "Yes, I will be there to receive the shipments."

PART 2

Marco leaned against the window, pressing his phone to his face, impatiently tapping his feet, his international minutes were running out this month. His view was a currently toy-sized Air Italia plane which was soaring far above his view. He eagerly strained his eyes, imagining his contraband cargo, just starting its journey to America. "Be sure to meet Antonio at the airport at precisely 8:30 PM." He heard sounds of approval in response, and a ping that meant his minutes were up. "Thank you Carla," he hung up.

This sentence mimics a sentence directly from the book, "*...Obinze approached his first job with irony: he was indeed abroad cleaning toilets, wearing rubber gloves and carrying a pail, in an estate agent's office on the second floor of a London building.*" My sentences are long, and have a strange but working flow. The commas allow me to move through time (in scenes) quickly and also allow me to elaborate on small details.

I start with the end of the story and then flash back and work my way from there. I use a common theme, of waking up, to smoothly transition between these scenes. I am hoping to intrigue the reader with a vague start to interest them in what is to come.

Each part is third person, but follows a different character in a different place. It allows me to transition between 3 different experiences and situations, those of Carla, Marco, and Antonio. This creates a clear change and helps the reader connect characters in Italy and America.

CONTINUED

PART 3

Antonio sat at the shuttle entrance, his legs crossed, forehead beady, hands tightly gripping a red suitcase that had narrowly escaped TSA scans, eyes flicking between his watch and the cars whizzing past the airport. He waited until the headlights flicked on and the parking lot began to empty, almost 11:30 PM, but Carla did not come.

PART 4

Carla's Prius turned right on the highway, not left towards the airport where Antonio would be waiting. She pressed on the gas pedal angrily as her phone chimed, a call from Marco. She was tired of Marco calling in for favors, constantly putting her life in danger. She threw her disposable cell phone out of the car window, her last glimpse the gleaming clock on the front, relaying the switch to a new day, midnight. She drove towards the looming dark clouds that Sunday threatened, leaving her old life behind. Back at her house: the trees swayed and gave in to the strong winds, waving their branches, gently brushing against the window, they would have woken the people in the house, but there was no one who could be woken.





CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE is a Nigerian author who has written a number of novels, short stories, and essays. She is also the woman behind "The danger of a single story" and "We should all be feminists" Ted Talks. Her feminist views are known to have inspired lines in the song *Flawless* by Beyonce, where Adichie is mentioned as a featured artist, however she does not follow the singer's form of feminism. She believes women should not base their feminism, or even their lives on the actions or desires of men. She is a truly amazing author and an inspiring speaker.

I am SOFIA POWERS, a high school student from a neighborhood in which Ifemelu once lived, Powelton Village. I am a tenth grade student at Science Leadership Academy and I aspire to be a midwife.



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