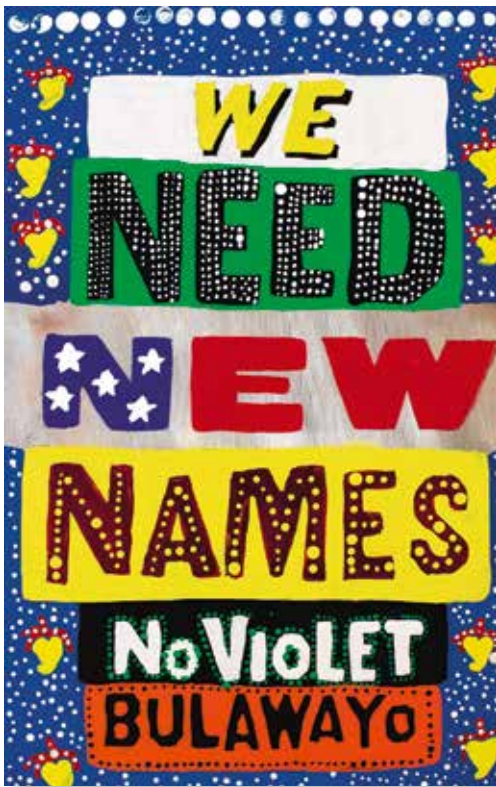




# Reader's Guide



*We Need New Names*  
is NoViolet Bulawayo's first novel

## We Need New Names NoViolet Bulawayo

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## About the author

NoViolet Bulawayo was born in Tsholotsho. She earned her MFA at Cornell University, where she was also awarded a Truman Capote Fellowship, and she is currently a Stegner Fellow at Stanford University in California.

She is the author of the short story *Hitting Budapest* (2010), which won the 2011 Caine Prize for African Writing, and *Snapshots* (2009), shortlisted for the South Africa PEN Studzinski Award.

## We Need New Names

Ten-year-old Darling has a choice: it's down, or out...

*We Need New Names* tells the story of Darling and her friends Stina, Chipo, Godknows, Sbhho and Bastard.

They all used to have proper houses, with real rooms and furniture, but now they all live in a shanty called Paradise. They spend their days stealing guavas, playing games and wondering how to get the baby out of young Chipo's stomach. They dream of escaping to other paradises – America, Dubai, Europe. But if they do escape, will these new lands bring everything they wish for?

## Discussion points

*We Need New Names* is set in Zimbabwe and then America, did you find one setting more compelling than another?

The title *We Need New Names* highlights the link between names and identity. Discuss how NoViolet Bulawayo uses the characters' names to explore themes of identity and reveal ironies: 'What exactly is an African? Godknows asks'.

'Forgiveness is not a friend-friend because her family just recently arrived in Paradise'. Discuss how Bulawayo portrays the relationships and hierarchies between children and young people. Is *We Need New Names* as much about the complexities of growing up as it is about themes of nationality, displacement and identity?

Discuss the ways in which Bulawayo explores reactions to trauma and psychological breakdown through the characters of Chipo, Prince and Uncle Kojo.

Discuss Darling's sense of displacement in America. Why does she have such conflicting feelings about her own national identity? Do you agree with Sbhho's comment 'if it's your country, you have to love it to live in it and not leave it'?

## Themed reading

Stephen Kellman *Pigeon English*  
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie *Americanah*  
Chinua Achebe *Things Fall Apart*  
Binyawanga Wainana *Some Day I Will Write About This Place*  
Christina Lamb *House of Stone*

## Useful links

### Author's website

<http://novioletbulawayo.com/>

### Observer review

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2013/jun/16/debut-author-noviolet-bulawayo-names>

### Telegraph review

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/hay-festival/10087546/Hay-Festival-2013-NoViolet-Bulawayo-returns-to-her-homeland.html>