

SANTA MONICA

CITYWIDE READS

JOIN A 2010

CITYWIDE BOOK CLUB

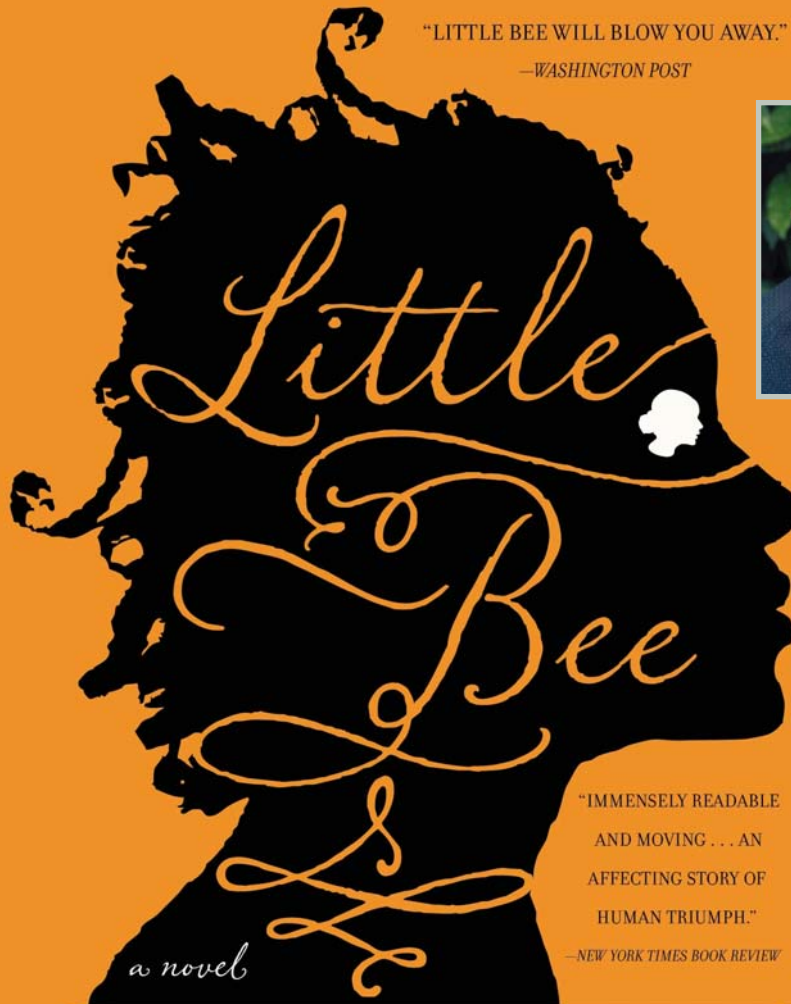
FEBRUARY 12
THROUGH MARCH 13

For free public book discussion groups and other events, check the Santa Monica Citywide Reads website at www.smpl.org/cwr, call 310.458.8600, or visit our blog at www.santamonica-citywiderreads.blogspot.com

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

"LITTLE BEE WILL BLOW YOU AWAY."

—WASHINGTON POST



"IMMENSELY READABLE AND MOVING . . . AN AFFECTING STORY OF HUMAN TRIUMPH."

—NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW

CHRIS CLEAVE
AUTHOR OF INCENDIARY

WELCOME

Welcome to the eighth annual Santa Monica CITYWIDE READS program. This community reading program encourages people who live, work in, or visit Santa Monica to read and discuss the same book at the same time in discussion groups and other events held around the city.

This year's book is *Little Bee* by English author Chris Cleave. *Little Bee* is the harrowing and beautiful story of a teenage Nigerian refugee, and a married pair of disaffected British journalists, whose lives and destinies collide in unexpected and shocking ways. The novel touches on themes of immigration, family, infidelity and loyalty. It deftly examines the intricacies of human connection and the sacrifices we all make to get by in life. It is certain to provide a framework for dialogue in our community.

Little Bee is available from the Santa Monica Public Library or your local bookstore. Plan on attending one of the many free, public events being held around the city from February 12 through March 13.

I hope that your participation in CITYWIDE READS is a rewarding experience that brings us together as a community through literature.



Greg Mullen, Library Director
City of Santa Monica

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

"I enjoy the process of writing. Novels are incredibly intricate engines...you spend half your time with tweezers and a jeweler's eyepiece, and the other half with safety goggles and a lump hammer. And eventually, usually around three in the morning, the thing just clicks into gear and runs. It's the most uplifting feeling. I get it about once every three years."

Chris Cleave ["Behind the Scenes of *Little Bee*" – www.chriscleave.com]



CHRIS CLEAVE was born in London, England in 1973, and spent his childhood in Buckinghamshire and the West African nation of Cameroon. A graduate of Balliol College, Oxford, he studied psychology, then explored a few different career paths, including sailing the Mediterranean, bartending in Melbourne, Australia, playing guitar in various bands, and three years working at an Internet start-up. His career in writing began with three years at London's *Daily Telegraph* and continues now with a weekly column on parenting for *The Guardian* newspaper in London.

In 2005, his first novel *Incendiary* was published and drew immediate attention and critical praise for its intimate and sensitive treatment of one of the most troubling issues of our time—terrorism. The story of a London wife and mother whose life is thrown into chaos when her husband and son are killed in a terrorist attack at an English football match, *Incendiary* was nominated for numerous literary prizes and won the Somerset Maugham Award and Book-of-the-Month Club First Fiction prize.

His second novel, *Little Bee*, was released in 2008 in Great Britain under the title *The Other Hand*, and easily matched its predecessor in critical praise and readers' attention. Published in the United States in 2009 by Simon and Schuster, *Little Bee* continues to enthrall readers with its compelling characters and thrilling storyline.

Mr. Cleave lives in London with his wife and three children. He is currently at work on his third novel.

ABOUT NIGERIA

- Nigeria was a British Protectorate from 1900 through 1959. British colonialism and Christian influence impacted the nation greatly, especially in the south. Today, roughly half of Nigerians are Christians and half are Muslims, with Islam predominant in the north.
- Nigeria became a sovereign nation in 1960 and a federal republic in 1963. The country has gone through numerous changes in leadership in the decades since and has seen much political upheaval.
- There are 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria with over 4000 dialects. The major Nigerian ethnic groups are Igbo (pronounced Ee-bow), Yorubas, and Hausas. Intertribal conflicts are common, even among expatriate.
- With a population of over 140 million people, one of every five Africans is Nigerian.
- Nigeria took its name from the River Niger, which runs through the western half of the country. The name is said to have been coined by Flora Shaw, the wife of British colonialist Baron Shaw, in the late 19th century.



ABOUT THE BOOK

"I ask you right here to agree with me that a scar is never ugly. That is what the scar makers want us to think. But you and I, we must make an agreement to defy them. We must see all scars as beauty. Okay? This will be our secret. Because take it from me, a scar does not form on the dying. A scar means, I survived."

Little Bee

Chris Cleave's *Little Bee* is the story of two women—Little Bee, a 16-year-old Nigerian refugee, and Sarah O'Rourke, a thirty-something journalist living in London—and the shocking way in which their lives intersect. Their fateful meeting, two years prior to the novel's start, impacts both of their lives in profound ways and sets off a gripping story of redemption and human connection. Deftly weaving personal themes of survival and sacrifice with broader and more combustible topics of immigration and asylum, *Little Bee* is both riveting and accessibly humane.

Fifteen years prior to writing *Little Bee*, while still in college, Chris Cleave worked for three days as a casual laborer at Campsfield House, a British detention center for asylum seekers.

Cleave was not only struck by his own ignorance of the center, despite its close proximity to his home, but also inspired by the unexpected humor of the detainees. Determined to tell their stories, Cleave turned to fiction, due to its power to restore humanity to its subjects in a way that news reporting does not.

Following on the success of his first novel, *Incendiary*, Chris Cleave garnered literary awards attention for *Little Bee*, including making the shortlist for the Costa Book Award and the Commonwealth Prize for Fiction. A *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* best seller, *Little Bee* was recently optioned for a film adaptation by Oscar-winning actress Nicole Kidman.

RECOMMENDED READS

***The Other Side of Truth* by Beverley Naidoo**

Winner of the 2000 Carnegie Medal for Literature, this sophisticated young adult novel is a compelling read for adults as well. One of the closest parallels to *Little Bee*, Naidoo's book is the heart-pounding story of Sade, a 12-year-old Nigerian girl, who escapes to London with her youngest brother after they witness the murder of their mother in Nigeria. Their lives are further thrown into turmoil when their father, an outspoken journalist, follows them to London and is detained as an illegal immigrant.

***Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe**

Regarded by many as the finest modern African novel written in English, *Things Fall Apart* traces the impact of British colonialism on Nigerian tribal life through the prism of Okonkwo, an Igbo tribesman struggling to be a better man than his father. Quietly unsentimental in its rendering of pre-colonial Nigerian life, the novel is a rich and rewarding read for anyone looking to gain insight into the culture and traditions of Nigeria.

***Say You're One of Them* by Uwem Akpan**

A recent selection for Oprah Winfrey's Book Club, this collection of short stories by Akpan, a Nigerian Jesuit priest, illuminates the harsh reality of life in modern Africa—pervasive poverty and violence, intertribal warfare—and still manages to reveal hidden flashes of joy and light. Told from the perspectives of children from five African nations—Nigeria, Kenya, Rwanda, Benin and Ethiopia—the stories reveal the dignity and tenacity of its young protagonists to survive and thrive.

***A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* by Ishmael Beah**

This engrossing autobiography tells the story of a 12-year-old boy who, during Sierra Leone's civil war, was forced to become a member of the rebel army that had taken over his country. Rehabilitated by UNICEF at 15, Beah developed into an exceptional spokesman for the agency's work. After fleeing to the United States at 17, Beah earned a college degree, and published this moving account of war and the continuing plight of child soldiers around the world.

***Spirit of Survival* by Gail Sheehy**

This biography by Gail Sheehy chronicles her adoption of Phat Mohm, an 11-year-old Cambodian refugee whose family had been slaughtered by the Pol Pot regime. As much a riveting history of Mohm's life story and a portrait of her instinct to survive, Sheehy's book is also a heartfelt examination of her own journey of self discovery and the rewards reaped by her efforts to help Mohm recover a life of dignity and love.

THANKS TO

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BOOKSELLERS



FOR SUPPORTING BOOK DISCUSSIONS AND PROGRAMS.

THANKS TO THE FRIENDS OF THE SANTA MONICA PUBLIC LIBRARY
FOR THEIR ONGOING SUPPORT FOR CITYWIDE READS.

SPECIAL CITYWIDE READS EVENTS

The Voices of *Little Bee*

Saturday, Feb. 20 at 1:30pm | Main Library, MLK Jr. Auditorium

A special onstage reading of passages from *Little Bee*, in which the voices of Sarah and Little Bee are brought to life by gifted local actresses, Rosalyn Landor and Petal d'Avril Walker.

An Afternoon with Chris Cleave

Saturday, Feb. 20 at 2pm | Main Library, MLK Jr. Auditorium

The award-winning author of *Little Bee* presents a reading and discussion, followed by a book signing.

City TV Call-In Show

Wednesday, Feb. 24 at 7pm | Tune in to Channel 16

Can't make it to a book discussion? Looking for more perspective on *Little Bee*? Tune in for a live, moderated discussion of the book and call 310-458-4950 to ask questions of your own.

Incendiary Book Discussion

Monday, Mar. 1 at 7pm | Main Library, Community Room

Published to controversy and acclaim in 2005, Chris Cleave's first novel traces the tumultuous fallout for a London woman when her husband and young son are killed in a terrorist attack.

Movie Screening: *The Visitor*

Tuesday, Mar. 2 at 7pm | Main Library, MLK Jr. Auditorium

The story of Walter Vale (Oscar nominee Richard Jenkins), who returns home after a conference to find two illegal immigrants living in his apartment. These disparate characters come to know each other and affect each other's lives in a story that is very similar to the themes of *Little Bee*.

The Art of Storytelling with Michael D. McCarty

Saturday, Mar. 6 at 2pm | Main Library, MLK Jr. Auditorium

Storytelling lies at the heart of *Little Bee*. As Little Bee states, even a sad story offers proof that "this storyteller is alive." Through the art of storytelling, Michael D. McCarty has been entertaining audiences with stories that inform, educate, inspire and amuse.

RESOURCES

Chris Cleave's Website

The author's frequently-updated website. www.chriscleave.com

Down With the Kids

Chris Cleave's columns on parenting for London's *The Guardian*. www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/series/down-with-the-kids

Global Detention Project

"An inter-disciplinary research endeavour that investigates the role detention plays in states' responses to global migration, with a special focus on the policies and physical infrastructures of detention." www.globaldetentionproject.org

Human Rights First

An international human rights organization whose goal is to "build respect for human rights and the rule of law to help ensure the dignity to which everyone is entitled and to stem intolerance, tyranny, and violence" and to safeguard the rights of refugees. www.humanrightsfirst.org/asylum/asylum.aspx

BOOK DISCUSSIONS

Trained volunteer facilitators lead these free public book discussions. No registration is required.

Saturday, February 13 at 11:00am

Café Bolivar, 1741 Ocean Park Blvd.
(no permit required for Saturday parking)

Wednesday, February 17 at 7:00pm

Montana Branch Library, 1704 Montana Ave.*

Monday, February 22 at 2:00pm

Tudor House, 1403 Second St.

Saturday, February 27 at 11:00am

Fairview Branch Library, 2101 Ocean Park Blvd.*

Saturday, March 6 at 11:00am

Ocean Park Branch Library, 2601 Main St.*

Monday, March 8 at 7:00pm

Main Library, 601 Santa Monica Blvd.*

Thursday, March 11 at 1:30pm

Senior Recreation Center, 1450 Ocean Ave.*

*City of Santa Monica facilities are wheelchair accessible. To request a disability-related accommodation, call Library Administration 310-458-8606 (TDD 395-8499) at least 5 working days (Monday-Friday) in advance.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Little Bee* was titled *The Other Hand* upon its release in Britain. Which title do you prefer? Why?
2. Chris Cleave opens *Little Bee* with a typographical error quoted from Britain's official citizenship manual for immigrants. What is the significance of this?
3. *Little Bee* is narrated by two characters. How did this dual narration affect your reading experience?
4. How successful was Chris Cleave, a male writer, in evoking his narrators' feminine voices?
5. *Little Bee* tells her story in precise Queen's English. Why do you think language is so important to her?
6. The story unfolds in a non-linear fashion. Was this effective for you as a reader?
7. Much is made of a secret plot point in *Little Bee*. Do you think this secret helps the story? Were there other secrets in the story you found compelling?
8. Chris Cleave chose fiction as a vehicle to humanize the topic of immigration and asylum. Is fiction an effective way of exploring hot-button issues? Can you think of other novels that have done this well?
9. *Little Bee* and her sister choose new names for themselves, as does Charlie in his own way. Why did they do this?
10. How did you respond to the supporting characters in the book? Charlie? Andrew? Lawrence? Yvette?
11. How would you characterize the ending of the novel?
12. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the book?