



**Georgetown Township Public Library  
Book Discussion Guide**  
*Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*  
Alexandra Fuller (2001)

**About This Book**

In *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*, Alexandra Fuller remembers her African childhood with candor and sensitivity. Though it is a diary of an unruly life in an often inhospitable place, it is suffused with Fuller's endearing ability to find laughter, even when there is little to celebrate.

Fuller's debut is unsentimental and unflinching but always captivating. In wry and sometimes hilarious prose, she stares down disaster and looks back with rage and love at the life of an extraordinary family in an extraordinary time. (*From the publisher.*)

**From:** <http://litlovers.com>

**About the Author**

Alexandra Fuller was born in England in 1969. In 1972 she moved with her family to a farm in Rhodesia. After that country's civil war in 1981, the Fullers moved first to Malawi, then to Zambia. Fuller received a B.A. from Acadia University in Nova Scotia, Canada. In 1994, she moved to Wyoming, where she still lives. She has two children. (*From the publisher.*)

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## Discussion Questions

1. Fuller compares the smell of Africa to "black tea, cut tobacco, fresh fire, old sweat, young grass." She describes "an explosion of day birds...a crashing of wings" and "the sound of heat. The grasshoppers and crickets sing and whine. Drying grass crackles. Dogs pant." How effective is the author in drawing the reader into her world with the senses of sound, smell, and taste? Can you find other examples of her ability to evoke a physical and emotional landscape that pulses with life? What else makes her writing style unique?
2. Given their dangerous surroundings in Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Zambia and a long streak of what young Bobo describes as "bad, bad luck," why does the Fuller family remain in Africa?
3. Drawing on specific examples, such as Nicola Fuller's desire to "live in a country where white men still ruled" and the Fuller family's dramatic interactions with African squatters, soldiers, classmates, neighbors, and servants, how would you describe the racial tensions and cultural differences portrayed in *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*, particularly between black Africans and white Africans?
4. *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight* is rich with humorous scenes and dialogue, such as the visit by two missionaries who are chased away by the family's overfriendly dogs, a bevy of ferocious fleas, and the worst tea they have ever tasted. What other examples of comedy can you recall, and what purpose do you think they serve in this serious memoir?
5. Fuller describes the family's move to Burma Valley as landing them "right [in] the middle, the very birthplace and epicenter, of the civil war in Rhodesia." Do her youthful impressions give a realistic portrait of the violent conflict?
6. The *New York Times Book Review* described Nicola as "one of the most memorable characters of African memoir." What makes the author's portrait of her mother so vivid? How would you describe Bobo's father?
7. Define the complex relationship between Bobo and Vanessa. How do the two sisters differ in the ways that they relate to their parents?
8. Animals are ever present in the book. How do the Fullers view their domesticated animals, as compared to the wild creatures that populate their world?
9. Of five children born to Nicola Fuller, only two survive. "All people know that in one way or the other the dead must be laid to rest properly," Alexandra Fuller writes. Discuss how her family deals with the devastating loss of Adrian, Olivia, and Richard. Are they successful in laying their ghosts to rest?

*Discussion questions continued next page*

10. According to Bobo, "Some Africans believe that if your baby dies, you must bury it far away from your house, with proper magic and incantations and gifts for the gods, so that the baby does not come back." Later, at Devuli Ranch, soon after the narrator and her sister have horrified Thompson, the cook, by disturbing an old gravesite, Bobo's father announces that he is going fishing: "If the fishing is good, we'll stay here and make a go of it. If the fishing is bad, we'll leave." What role does superstition play in this book? Look for examples in the behavior and beliefs of both black and white Africans.

11. Consider Fuller's interactions with black Africans, including her nanny in Rhodesia and the children she plays "boss and boys" with, as well as with Cephas the tracker and, later, the first black African to invite her into his home. Over the course of *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*, how does the narrator change and grow?

12. By the end of the narrative, how do you think the author feels about Africa? Has the book changed your own perceptions about this part of the world?  
(*Questions issued by publisher.*)

**From:** <http://litlovers.com>

**Resources for additional information about book discussion choices and authors:**

**Books & Authors** (Access through links to MeL Databases on Library's webpage.)  
<http://bna.galegroup.com/bna/>

**LitLovers.com**  
[www.litlovers.com](http://www.litlovers.com)

**Overbooked.com**  
<http://www.overbooked.com>

**Penguin.com (USA)**  
<http://www.us.penguin.com/static/pages/bookclubs/index.html>

**Reading Group Center**  
<http://reading-group-center.knopfdoubleday.com>

**Reading Group Guides**  
<http://www.readinggroupguides.com>

**Suggested print resources:**

*The Book Club Companion: A Comprehensive Guide to the Reading Group Experience*  
Diana Loevy  
**374.22 Loevy 2006**

*The Book Group Book: A Thoughtful Guide to Forming and Enjoying a Stimulating Book Discussion Group*  
Ellen Slezak (editor)  
**374.22 Book 2000**

*Good Books Lately: The One-Stop Resource for Book Groups and Other Greedy Readers*  
Ellen Moore and Kira Stevens  
**374.22 Moore 2004**

*Read It and Eat: A Month-by-Month Guide to Scintillating Book Club Selections and Mouthwatering Menus*  
Sarah Gardner  
**028.9 Gardner 2005**

*The Reading Group Handbook: Everything You Need to Know, From Choosing Members to Leading Discussions*  
Rachel W. Jacobsohn  
**374.22 Jacobsohn 1994**

*What Do I Read Next?* (Multi-volume set, annual editions)  
Gale Research Inc.  
**R 016.813 What**