

The Subir and Malini
Chowdhury Foundation
Distinguished Speakers Series

An Evening with ZADIE SMITH

Tuesday, November 2, 2021, at 7 p.m.
Bovard Auditorium
University of Southern California

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- Zadie Smith is an award-winning British author equally renowned for her fiction and her nonfiction.
- Smith's debut novel, *White Teeth*, was published in 2000, when she was 24, and instantly launched her to literary stardom.
- Her most recent book, *Intimations*, is a series of short essays written early in the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Smith teaches creative writing at NYU.

“Writing is routinely described as ‘creative’—this has never struck me as the correct word. Planting tulips is creative. To plant a bulb (I imagine, I’ve never done it) is to participate in some small way in the cyclic miracle of creation. Writing is control. The part of the university in which I teach should properly be called the Controlling Experience Department.”

—Zadie Smith, in *Intimations*

ZADIE SMITH

Zadie Smith (b. 1975) is the award-winning author of novels including *White Teeth*, *Swing Time*, and *On Beauty*, as well as essay collections including the recent *Intimations*, which was written during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. She was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 2002 and named one of *Granta*'s 20 Best Young British Novelists in 2003 and 2013. Among her many honors, Smith has been awarded the Orange Prize for Fiction, a National Book Critics Circle Award, and a Langston Hughes Medal. *White Teeth* was included in *Time* magazine's list of the 100 best English-language novels from 1923 to 2005. Smith is a tenured professor of fiction at New York University and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.



Photo: Dominique Nabokov

Smith's debut novel, *White Teeth*, was published when she was 24. (She finished writing it while still in school at Cambridge.) It drew immediate critical acclaim, won numerous awards, and became a best seller, launching the author to fame.

Smith was born in North London to an English father and a Jamaican mother. She is married to the Northern Irish novelist and poet Nick Laird; they have two children.

ZADIE SMITH'S RULES FOR WRITERS (FROM 2010)

1. When still a child, make sure you read a lot of books. Spend more time doing this than anything else.
2. When an adult, try to read your own work as a stranger would read it, or even better, as an enemy would.
3. Don't romanticise your "vocation." You can either write good sentences or you can't. There is no "writer's lifestyle." All that matters is what you leave on the page.
4. Avoid your weaknesses. But do this without telling yourself that the things you can't do aren't worth doing. Don't mask self-doubt with contempt.
5. Leave a decent space of time between writing something and editing it.
6. Avoid cliques, gangs, groups. The presence of a crowd won't make your writing any better than it is.
7. Work on a computer that is disconnected from the internet.
8. Protect the time and space in which you write. Keep everybody away from it, even the people who are most important to you.
9. Don't confuse honours with achievement.
10. Tell the truth through whichever veil comes to hand—but tell it. Resign yourself to the lifelong sadness that comes from never being satisfied.

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/feb/22/zadie-smith-rules-for-writers>

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

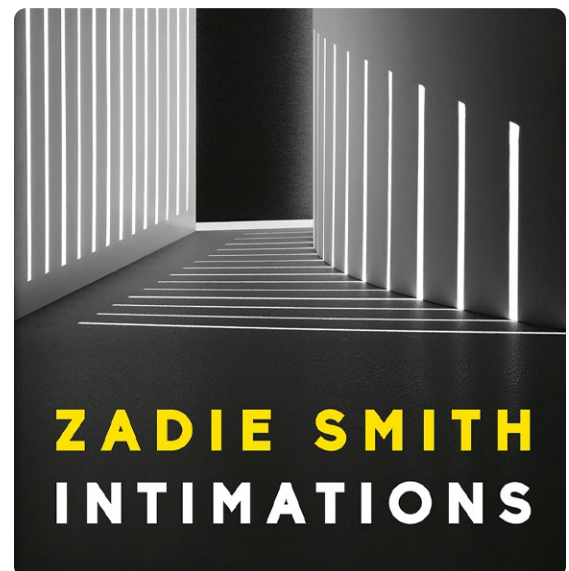
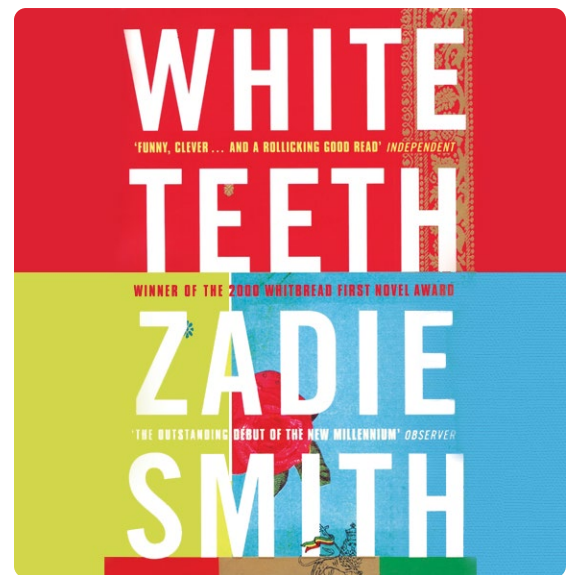
- Do you agree that "ethical life depends on the meaningfulness of [the] effort" to lengthen "the distance between the dates on our birth certificates and the ones on our tombstones"? What does this mean to you?
- What do you think Smith means by "America has rarely been philosophically inclined to consider existence as a whole"?
- Did anything Zadie Smith shared shift or enhance your perception of the COVID-19 pandemic or any other current events?
- What do you think of the idea that writing is more about control than creation?

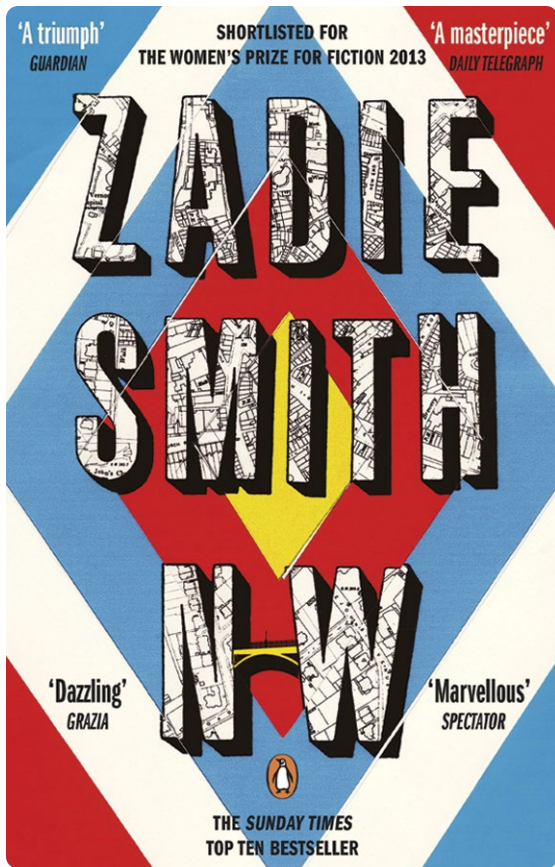
IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- Zadie Smith | zadiesmith.com
- A 2016 interview with Zadie Smith by Sophie Elmhirst in *The Gentlewoman* | thegentlewoman.co.uk/library/zadie-smith
- Zadie Smith's articles and short fiction in *The New Yorker* | newyorker.com/contributors/zadie-smith

"Death absolute is the truth of our existence as a whole, of course, but America has rarely been philosophically inclined to consider existence as a whole, preferring instead to attack death as a series of discrete problems. Wars on drugs, cancer, poverty, and so on. Not that there is anything ridiculous about trying to lengthen the distance between the dates on our birth certificates and the ones on our tombstones: ethical life depends on the meaningfulness of that effort. But perhaps nowhere in the world has this effort—and its relative success—been linked so emphatically to money as it is in America."

—Zadie Smith, in *Intimations*





DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

EIMMY SOLIS of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about this event. Electronic resources are accessible through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at libraries.usc.edu but may require the user to log in using their USC credentials.

BOOKS

- ◉ Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (New York: Random House, 2000).
- ◉ Zadie Smith, *The Autograph Man* (New York: Random House, 2002).
- ◉ Zadie Smith, *On Beauty* (New York: Penguin, 2005).
- ◉ Zadie Smith, *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays* (New York: Penguin, 2009).
- ◉ Zadie Smith, *NW* (New York: Penguin, 2012).
- ◉ Zadie Smith, *Grand Union: Stories* (New York: Penguin, 2019).
- ◉ Zadie Smith, *Intimations: Six Essays* (New York: Penguin, 2020).

DATABASES

- ◉ [Literature Criticism Online](#)

STREAMING VIDEOS

- ◉ "Female Writers and Characters," section 12 from *The Great American Read, Fall Kick-off episode* (PBS, 2018).

