



*Citizen* Discussion Questions:

1. What words, definitions, or ideas do you associate with the word “citizen”? Do these associations line up with one group of people?
2. Rankine addresses “you” throughout the book. Where do you recognize yourself in the encounters described in *Citizen*, if at all? What perspectives or angles of experience were you surprised to inhabit, and why?
3. Look up “lyric” in the dictionary, or do an internet search for “lyric poetry.” How does Rankine’s use of “lyric” in the subtitle of *Citizen* both adhere to and challenge these definitions and usages?
4. How do the visual images in *Citizen* affect your reading of the text? What does the image of Caroline Wozniacki on page 37 express that can’t be expressed by words alone? Would you react differently without the image? What does the work of art on page 19 evoke in relation to the text about the experience on the therapist’s doorstep?
5. On page 131, Rankine narrates the act of sitting down in an empty seat next to a man on a train, a seat others have avoided. What does this kind of close attention to the human body have to do with race and racism? How has your perception of your own body, of the way you physically occupy space, shifted after reading *Citizen*?
6. *Citizen* narrates many instances of micro-aggressions—individual acts of racism that collectively form the crushing experience of racism in America. Is racism a singular action, or is it a series of acts? What is the difference between the singular action and the accumulation of them?
7. As *Citizen* has been reprinted, the different editions have incorporated changes to the text, most notably the inclusion on page 134 of the names of African Americans killed since previous printings. How does this evolution align with the book’s core questions and preoccupations? Are there other ways in which *Citizen* feels like a book that has changed in light of more recent events?
8. Many readers and critics have pointed out that *Citizen* defies established genre distinctions (it was even nominated for National Book Critics Circle Awards in both the Poetry and Criticism categories). Reading *Citizen*, did you think of it as poetry? As prose? Does it matter?
9. *Citizen*’s discussion of Serena and Venus Williams includes the Zora Neale Hurston quote, “I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background.” How

does this quote encapsulate the Williams sisters' experience in the world of professional tennis? How does this quote relate to *Citizen* as a whole?

10. Referring again to Serena Williams, Rankine states, "Yes, and the body has memory. The physical carriage hauls more than its weight." How do sports in particular encourage spectators and officials to assume influence or even ownership over the bodies of the players? Does this have parallels to other arenas of American life?
11. How does *Citizen* portray and address the privileged position of white Americans? How does Rankine also show the effects of a racist system *on* those white Americans?
12. What associations does the image on the cover of book bring up for you? Is it surprising that the work of art it depicts, *In the Hood* by David Hammons, was first exhibited in 1993? How does *In the Hood* relate to the death of Trayvon Martin in 2012? What does this seemingly disjointed timeframe say about the deadly effects of racism in America?
13. How do you interpret the choice to use of J.M.W. Turner's painting *The Slave Ship* as the concluding image in *Citizen*? Why is it important that the detail is pictured alongside the full painting?