

Sophomore English Summer Reading Assignment

A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier

By Ishmael Beah

https://www.amazon.com/Long-Way-Gone-Memoirs-Soldier/dp/0374105235/ref=tmm_hrd_swat_ch_0?_encoding=UTF8&qid=1589218882&sr=1-1

ALL English II Students: For your Summer Reading, 2020, you will read *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, by Ishmael Beah.

Complete the questions below in preparation to take a test over the book on the second day of school.

Additional HONORS Assignment: Read *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, by Marjane Satrapi.

https://www.amazon.com/Persepolis-Childhood-Pantheon-Graphic-Library/dp/037571457X/ref=sr_1_2?crid=16OTG2J4CJCOT&dchild=1&keywords=persepolis&qid=1589218986&s=books&sprefix=persepo%2Cstripbooks%2C229&sr=1-2

Take notes and be prepared to take a quiz and write an essay about the book during the first week of school.

A Long Way Gone Test Study Questions

Chapter 1:

What does Ishmael Beah's grandmother mean when she tells him: "we must strive to be like the moon" (16)?

Why has Ishmael remembered this saying ever since childhood?

Chapter 2:

At the beginning of Chapter 2, we flash forward to Ishmael's new life in New York City. He relates a dream of pushing a wheelbarrow. What is in the wheelbarrow, and where is he pushing it?

What do you think the wheelbarrow dream means?

What does Ishmael mean when he says, "I am looking at my own" (19)?

Chapter 3

“That night for the first time in my life,” writes Ishmael, “I realized that it is the physical presence of people and their spirits that gives a town life” (22). **WHY** does Ishmael believe this?

With whom does Ishmael flee at the end of this chapter?

Chapter 4

Why, after their escape, do Ishmael and the other boys sneak back into the village of Matru Jong?

Was the trip back to Matru Jong worth the boys' trouble? **Why** or **why not**?

Chapter 5

Commenting on how a rebel soldier's treatment of an old man, Ishmael writes: “Before the war a young man wouldn't have dared to talk to anyone older in such a rude manner. We grew up in a culture that demanded good behavior from everyone, and especially from the young” (33). Where else in *A Long Way Gone* do you encounter the brutal, thuggish, or even sadistic behavior of young people?

Chapter 6

How and why do Ishmael and his companions start farming in the village of Kamator?

Why is farming so difficult for Ishmael?

Chapter 7

After Kamator is attacked and the two boys are cut off from the others, Ishmael and Kaloko sneak out of the bush and back into Kamator, bringing along brooms every time. Why do they bring brooms?

Why does Ishmael set out on his own later in the chapter?

Chapter 8

What is the “most difficult part of being in the forest” (52) for Ishmael?

Who are the six boys Ishmael encounters after wandering and surviving in the forest on his own for more than a month?

Where does Ishmael know some of these boys from?

Chapter 9

Describe the anonymous man the boys encounter.

How does the fisherman soothe and heal the severely scalded feet of Ishmael and the others?

After they are discovered, how are the lives of all seven boys saved by rap music—specifically the music of LL Cool J?

Chapter 10

Describe Ishmael’s “name-giving ceremony” (75).

Who attended the ceremony?

What did the ceremony entail in the way of preparation, purpose, ritual, and food?

What do we learn in Chapter 10 about the various backgrounds of Ishmael’s companions?

How does Saidu die?

Chapter 11

Who is Gasemu?

Why does Ishmael befriend Gasemu and then later try to strangle him?

Chapter 12

At the village of Yele, a pivotal shift in this memoir begins when Ishmael goes from being an observer and victim of savage, war-triggered violence to being a perpetrator of such violence. **HOW** and **WHY** does this shift happen?

Do Ishmael and his companions have any choice in becoming soldiers? **WHY** or **WHY NOT?**

Chapter 13

The boy soldiers are given white tablets by their army superiors. What are these tablets?

Why are the tablets being handed out?

Chapter 14

What do Ishmael and the other boy soldiers do when they're not out on a mission?

What movies do they like to watch? Why do the boys like these movies?

At one point, the lieutenant tells the boys, "We are not like the rebels, those riffraffs who kill people for no reason" (123). Is this true?

How/why is Ishmael promoted to junior lieutenant?

Chapter 15

By this time, a dreadful, nightmarish routine is firmly in place. Ishmael writes, "In my head my life was normal" (126). How long has Ishmael been a soldier?

What happens to Ishmael and Alhaji, and a few other select boys, in the town of Bauya?

Where are the boys taken, and by whom?

Who is Mambu?

Why does Ishmael take a liking to Mambu?

Who is Esther?

Why does Ishmael eventually take a liking to Esther?

Chapter 16

At Benin Home, where Ishmael receives counseling and medical attention, Ishmael keeps hearing, “this isn’t your fault,” from various staffers and professionals. Does Ishmael ever *really* accept this mantra?

Why does Ishmael accept or not accept “this isn’t [his] fault”?

Chapter 17

Ishmael dreams of his family for the first time since running away from the war. Describe the dream.

How does the dream differ from the many other dreams Ishmael has described throughout the book.

Explain how the dream illustrates Ishmael’s inner conflicts.

Chapter 19

As he is leaving Benin Home, Ishmael's friend, Alhaji, salutes him and whispers, "Goodbye, squad leader." Why didn't Ishmael salute Alhaji in return?

Who does Ishmael live with after his eight-month rehabilitation at Benin Home?

How does Ishmael feel about his host family?

Is Ishmael entirely honest with his new family? **WHY or WHY NOT?**

Which members of his new family is Ishmael closest to? **WHY?**

What is the "open metal box" (186) that Ishmael is so confused by?

Why and where does he encounter this box?

Chapter 20

How does Ishmael's experience of New York City differ from what he had imagined?

What does Ishmael like most about New York?

What doesn't Ishmael like about New York?

Why is Ishmael visiting New York in the first place?

Identify some of the meaningful personal and professional contacts Ishmael makes in New York.

Chapter 21

How does Uncle Tommy die?

Is Uncle Tommy's death related to the civil war fighting that has reached Freetown? **WHY or WHY NOT?**

Ishmael's memoir ends with his telling of a story from his childhood where an elder of his village asks all of the village children an impossible question. The flashback touches on several of the key thematic topics of this book: violence, family, storytelling, and childhood, but it also carries a message of sacrifice. Explain how the topic of sacrifice reverberates throughout *A Long Way Gone*.

Explain Ishmael's answer to the monkey problem. Why would he choose to sacrifice his mother on behalf of strangers?

Re-read the Prologue, "New York City, 1998," that begins this memoir. Why do Ishmael's friends think his past is "cool"? After reading this book, do you think his friends would still feel that way? **Why or why not?**