

English 10 • *A LONG WAY GONE* Study Guide & Discussion Questions

Instructions

BELOW ARE QUESTIONS you will answer as we read *A Long Way Gone*. You should record your responses in your journal as you read. Responses should be thorough—at *least* one paragraph in length—but more importantly, *fully answer all parts of each question*.

Chapter Questions

CHAPTER ONE

1. What did the old man in Kabati mean when he said, “We must strive to be like the moon”? Is this advice that could apply to you? Why or why not?

CHAPTER TWO

2. Beah moves around in time as he tells his story, flashing forward and backward. What is the effect of this technique? Do you appreciate it, or would you prefer that he stuck to strict chronology? Why or why not?

CHAPTER THREE

3. Why did the rebels attack the towns so fiercely? What was their goal? Does it make sense to you? (p. 24)

CHAPTER FOUR

4. In this chapter and the next, the boys steal food because they are starving. We usually consider this “acceptable” theft, but the boys stole from other people who didn’t have much food either. How do you judge what they did?

CHAPTER FIVE

5. When the rebels overtake Beah and his brother and friends, they submit them to two selection processes. Why? What were the rebels selecting for? What did they see in Beah and his brother, Junior.

CHAPTER SIX

6. On page 37, Beah writes, “This was one of the consequences of the civil war. People stopped trusting each other, and every stranger became an enemy.” Can you relate to this feeling? If so, when and why have you felt that every stranger is an enemy?
7. Describe the role that music is playing in this story so far.

CHAPTER SEVEN

8. In this chapter, Beah identifies his age as twelve years old. What were you doing when you were twelve years old? You were probably in middle school. Imagine being on your own at that point in your life.

CHAPTER EIGHT

9. Was Beah better off on his own or with the group of boys he found in this chapter? Explain your answer.
10. Beah reminisces about his family while he is alone. He looks for medicinal leaves his grandfather showed him, for the soapy leaves he discovered during a summer with his grandmother, and thinks about the story of the wild pigs his grandmother told him. He remembers that his father used to say, “If you are alive, there is hope for a better day and something good to happen. If there is nothing good left in the destiny of a person, he or she will die.” Did these thoughts help Beah or make him more lonely and depressed? What makes you think so?

CHAPTER NINE

11. Why did the man with the fishing hut help the boys after the villagers stole their shoes and their feet burned?
12. How did the boys avoid death when the villagers on the coast found them? Is Beah developing a theme? What is it?

CHAPTER TEN

13. On page 70, Saidu, one of the boys says, “How many more times do we have to come to terms with death before we find safety?” He goes on to say, “Every time people come at us with the intention of killing us, I close my eyes and wait for death. Even though I am still alive, I feel like each time I accept death, part of me dies. Very soon I will completely die and all that will be left is my empty body walking with you. It will be quieter than I am.” The old saying is that that which does not kill us makes us stronger. Are there some things that just kill us slowly instead of building our strength? Explain your answer.
14. What is the usefulness and significance of a story like Bra Spider to the culture that tells and retells it?
15. What is the significance of Beah’s name-giving ceremony? Why does he share that story at this point in the book?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

16. Why does Beah take his anger out on Gasemu? Does Gasemu deserve it at all? What is the significance of this shift in Beah’s demeanor?

CHAPTER TWELVE

17. Who do you believe killed the man and the boy who decided to leave the village? Was it the rebels or the soldiers, in order to make a point? Explain your answer.
18. What is the significance of Beah’s music being destroyed in this chapter?
19. The boys were trained to be soldiers with this mantra: *Visualize the enemy, the rebels who killed your parents, your family, and those who are responsible for everything that has happened to you.* Why was this training so effective?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

20. Why did the army get the child soldiers hooked on drugs?
21. Describe the transformation that happens to Beah on pages 118-120.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

22. Why did the army attack villages in its own country? Was their motive/strategy any different from the rebels? How?
23. The corporal always said (p. 124), “This gun is your source of power in these times. It will protect you and provide you all you need, if you know how to use it well.” Does this line remind you of aspects of American culture today? Is this statement true sometimes and under some circumstances? Explain.

(continued on back)

CHAPTER FOURTEEN (continued)

24. Also from page 124: "We were always either at the front lines, watching a war movie, or doing drugs." Why? Does this line have anything to teach us about American teenagers and their vulnerabilities?
25. Describe the contest Beah wins in order to be promoted to junior lieutenant. Try to describe the things that are motivating Beah at this point in the story.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

26. On page 128, the soldiers start singing the Sierra Leone national anthem. The words Beah reprints are "High we exalt thee, realm of the free, great is the love we have for thee..." Why does he include that line in his story? If most countries, despite evidence to the contrary, consider themselves free, what exactly does it mean to live as a free person in a free country? Does the U.S. meet that standard?
27. Does it surprise you that Beah spends a relatively small portion of the book describing his time as a soldier in the war? Why might he have decided to devote much more time to his life before and after his time in the army?
28. Did you ever trick-or-treat for UNICEF? Does this documentation of their work affect how you think about collecting for them on Halloween?
29. Adult men seem to have been available in Sierra Leone at the time Beah was recruited into the army. Why recruit middle-school age boys instead of adult men to fight?
30. Describe the scene between the various groups of boys who are brought to the rehabilitation home. Would you consider these boys beyond hope of rehabilitation? Would the U.S. juvenile justice system consider them beyond hope?

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

31. Describe the children's initial response to rehabilitation. Given the chance, would you work with children in this rehabilitative setting? Why or why not?
32. Why did it make the child soldiers so angry when the staff repeatedly told them the things that happened weren't their fault?

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

33. Beah writes on page 153, "I had come to believe that people befriended only to exploit one another." Does it make sense that he feels this way? What about the boys who were his friends before he joined the army?
34. Music comes back as Beah goes through rehabilitation. What role does it play? Is its role different than earlier in the story? Explain your answer.
35. What purpose do the flashbacks to wartime serve in this chapter and chapter sixteen?
36. Why did Beah change his mind about Esther?
37. What is the significance, on pages 164-165, of Beah's first dream about his family?

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

38. Describe Beah's transition from child soldier back to child as he describes it. Discuss the steps that Beah takes to recapture his humanity.
39. Beah finally writes on page 169, "I believe children have the resilience to outlive their sufferings, if given a chance." Do you agree? Why or why not?
40. Beah meets his uncle in this chapter. Are you nervous for him or hopeful that Beah will finally move in with stable family members?

CHAPTER NINETEEN

41. Why didn't Beah date girls for very long once he moved in with his uncle, aunt, and cousins? (p. 184)
42. Why didn't Beah's uncle believe he was going to the United States?

CHAPTER TWENTY

43. Describe Beah's trip to New York City. What shaped his impressions? What influenced him during his time there?

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

44. The civil war reaches Freetown in this chapter. After the death of Beah's uncle, he writes on page 209, "I have to try to get out, I thought, and if that doesn't work, then it is back to the army." Does this surprise you? Try to make sense of this statement.
45. On page 212, Beah writes, "It sickened me to see that Sierra Leoneans asked money from those who had come from the war. They were benefiting from people who were running for their lives." Can you think of other examples of people who should be supporting one another instead of exploiting one another? Why does this happen?
46. The ending is abrupt. Beah isn't out of danger yet, and he ends with a conundrum about a monkey? What's the significance of the monkey story? How does it relate to the themes present in Beah's story? Describe how you feel about the ending of the book?

General Questions about Beah's Writing Style

47. Describe the writing style of this book. Is it formal? Informal? Spare? Complex? How does it handle dialect and dialogue (the distinctive ways that the people Beah interacted with spoke)? Are the sentences and paragraphs simple or complicated? Consider why Beah wrote the book the way he did and why he wrote it in first-person.
48. Reconsider the flash-forwards and flashbacks one last time. Why didn't Beah just tell the story straight through chronologically?
49. Is there information that Beah omitted that you are curious about? Why might Beah have left some parts of the story vague?
50. Knowing where to begin and end a story is critical. Why did Beah begin and end where he did?