

SUMMER ASSIGNMENT

Dear Rising Tenth Graders,

Congratulations on completing your first year of high school. Tenth Grade English will focus on building the skills that you have already begun developing with Mr. Stein. We will be embarking on a journey in which we read and analyze literature closely, and find our writing voice and style. It will be fun and wonderful! You will be amazed!

To prepare for these tasks, your summer reading assignment will be *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, by Ishmael Beah. Beah recounts his experiences as a boy soldier in Sierra Leone in this horrifying and important memoir. Now living in Brooklyn, NY, Beah's unique autobiography addresses a twenty-first-century international nightmare: the heartbreaking way in which war and childhood collide.

You must complete reading the entire text by Thursday, September 8, 2016. In addition, I ask that you answer the questions on the following pages. If you do not see me to garner a copy of the text for yourself before school concludes for the summer, *it is your responsibility to get a copy of the book yourself.*

Should you be particularly interested in this topic, other texts that you might consider are:

Books

Chinese Cinderella: The True Story of an Unwanted Daughter,
by Adeline Yen Mah

What is the What, by Dave Eggers
Children of Cambodia's Killing Fields, by Dith Pran

I am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban,
by Malala Yousafzai and Christian Lamb

Films

Blood Diamond,
Released 2006,
Directed by Edward Zwick

Beasts of No Nation,
Released 2015
Directed by Cary Fukunaga

Girl Rising,
Released 2013,
Directed by Richard E. Robbins

Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to email me at psingh@tcs-nyc.org. Happy summer reading!

Sincerely,

P. Singh

1. How did Beah's grandmother explain the local adage that "we must strive to be like the moon" (16)? And why has Ishmael remembered this saying ever since childhood? What does it mean to him?
2. "I could no longer tell the difference between dream and reality" (15), Ishmael writes early in his tale. Indeed, memories, dreams, and troubling or inescapable thoughts are perhaps even more important to this book than firsthand events and actions are. How is *A Long Way Gone* a psychological memoir? Compare and contrast it with other works you have experienced in this vein.
3. As chapter 2 begins, we flash forward to Ishmael's new life in New York City. He relates dream of pushing a wheelbarrow. What is in the wheelbarrow, and where is he pushing it? What does Ishmael mean when he says, "I am looking at my own" (19)?
4. Commenting on how a rebel soldier had interrogated 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, especially the young" (33). Where else in *A Long Way Gone* did you encounter the brutal, thuggish, or even sadistic behavior of young rebels—or of other young people?
5. Review the tale of the wild pigs (53) that Ishmael learned about from his grandmother, and the bra spider (75) that Musa tells Ishmael and the other boys. What other myths and legends did you come across in this book? After naming a few, explain the particular narrative and cultural purposes of each.
6. Describe the name-giving ceremony (75) that Ishmael recollects his grandmother telling him about. Who attended this ceremony, and what did it entail in the way of preparation, purpose, ritual, and food?
7. 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 bring both of these things as well as a perpetrator of violence. How does this shift happen? Do Ishmael and his companions have any choice in making it?
8. What do Ishmael and the other boy soldiers do when they're not out on a mission? What movies do they like to watch, and why? What else do they do with their spare time? At one point, the lieutenant tells them, "We are not like other rebels, those riffraff who kill people for no reason" (123). Is this true? Why or why not?
9. Benin Home, where Ishmael undergoes psychological, emotional, and social counseling, as well as physical and medical attention, is where he keeps hearing the "this isn't your fault" remark from various staffers and professionals. Does he ever really accept this mantra? Explain.
10. In Chapter 17, Ishmael describes "the first time [he'd] dreamt of [his] family since [he] started running away from the war" (165). Paraphrase

this nightmare, explaining how it differs from the many other dreams we've heard about from Ishmael. How does this dream illustrate his inner conflicts?

11. This memoir ends with a striking image, as Ishmael sees a mother telling her two children a story that he had also heard as a child. It's a memorable fable that touches on several of the key motifs of this book, including violence, family, story telling, childhood, and African village life. But it also carries a message of sacrifice. Explain how this last message also reverberates throughout *A Long Way Gone*.
12. Look back to the short "New York City, 1998" prologue that begins this memoir. What is it, exactly, that Ishmael's friends find so "cool" about his past? Do you think his friends, after reading this book, would still feel that way? Why or why not?
13. Nature is often personified in *A Long Way Gone*. Point out several instances of this—from throughout the memoir—and then write a short poem or story that employs anthropomorphism in a similar manner.
14. Select 3-5 moments in the text that you consider the most memorable.