*A Long Way Gone: Themes to Watch For*

*Write down the page #s when you encounter these themes:*

* Village Life
* Life as a soldier
* The moon
* Dreams
* Past memories
* Western Culture/Pop Culture
* Fear
* Hope & Love
* Shakespeare
* Nature
* Refusal to give someone your name/importance of names

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Analysis Questions – Chapters 1 & 2

1. How did Ishmael Beah’s grandmother explain the local adage (saying) that “we must strive to be like the moon” (p. 16)? And why has Ishmael remembered this saying ever since childhood? What does it mean to him?

2. As Chapter 2 begins, 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 does Ishmael mean when he says, “I am looking at my own” (p. 19)?
* Even after we know that Ishmael has re-entered “normal” life, what does this dream tell us about how he is coping with his past?

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Analysis Questions – Chapters 3, 4 & 5

3. “That night for the first time in my life,” writes Ishmael in Chapter 3, “I realized that it is the physical presence of people and their spirits that gives a town life” (p. 22).

* What prompts him to observe this?
* How old is he at the time?
* Who are the five boys with whom Ishmael flees at the end of this chapter?
* What are the characteristics (places, people, events) of Bedford/Hammond Plains that makes your town “alive”.

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

* What can you learn about the desperation that Ishmael felt with this act?
* What do you now understand about hunger based on the way Ishmael describes it?

5. 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, and especially from the young” (p. 33).

* Why would the young people in the book break from this tradition?
* What is the behaviour expected of you by your elders?

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Analysis Questions – Chapters 6 – 12

6. After Kamator has been attacked (page 46), and the two boys have been cut off from the others in fleeing, Ishmael and Kaloko sneak out of the bush and back into Kamator, bringing along brooms every time.

* Why do they bring brooms?
* Why, later, does Ishmael set out on his own?

7. What does Ishmael tells us was the “most difficult part of being in the forest” (page 52)?

* Describe what your ‘survival skills’ would have been at 12 years old. What could you do (or not do) in order to survive.
* Who are the six boys Ishmael encounters after wandering and surviving in the forest on his own for more than a month?

8. Chapter eight closes with the image of villagers running fearfully from Ishmael and his friends, believing that the seven boys are rebels.

* How do the boys overcome these negative assumptions in communities that have begun to associate the boys’ appearance with evil?
* What *lessons* could world leaders learn from them about overcoming distrust, and the importance of judging others individually rather than as stereotypes?

9. Describe the “name-giving ceremony” (p. 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?
* Why/how did you get your name? What is the story behind why your parents named you what they did?

10. How does Saidu die? Think about the *literal* reasons (page 80-81) and possible *figurative* ones (page 70) that we discussed in class.

11. A day after the Lieutenant announces that the inhabitants of Yele must stay and help out or leave the village, a villager and his son conveniently leave and are shot before the villagers must make their decision (page 107).

* What do you make of this situation? Think about the convenience and timing of what happened.
* What do you discover about the way Ishmael began his military career? Did he have a choice?

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Analysis Questions – Chapters 13 – 18

12. At one point, the lieutenant tells them, “We are not like the rebels, those riffraffs who kill people for no reason” (p. 123).

* Is this true? Explain your answer with details.
* What do Ishmael and the other boy soldiers do when they’re not out on a mission?

13. As Chapter 15 begins, a dreadful, nightmarish routine is, by now, firmly in place—“In my head my life was normal,” Ishmael writes (p. 126).

* How long has he been a soldier?
* How do Ishmael and Alhaji, and a few other select boys, get removed from the front lines? Where are they taken, and by whom?

14. “It hadn't crossed their minds that a change of environment wouldn't immediately make us normal boys; we were dangerous, and brainwashed to kill” (p. 135).

* What process does Beah need to go through in order to become “normal”?
* What is “normal” by your standards?

15. Ishmael recounts how he received his bullet wounds to Esther, and during that story he says that the sergeant doctor, “…tenderly brought my hand down” (p. 157-158).

* If he was considered to be a “real” soldier and not just a boy do you think he would have been treated differently by the sergeant doctor?
* Why do you think the lieutenant wanted to make sure that Ishmael’s wounds were treated so that he would live?

16. “‘None of these things are your fault,' she would always say sternly at the end of every conversation. Even though I had heard that phrase from every staff member – and frankly I had always hated it – I began that day to believe it.” (p. 165).

* Why does the repetition of this phrase anger Beah?
* To what extent *do you think* Ishmael should be held responsible for his actions while performing his duties as a child soldier? Explain in detail.