

A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier by Ishmael Beah Study Guide Questions

Directions: While reading A Long Way Gone by Ishmael Beah, answer the following study guide questions. Complete your answers on notebook paper. Be sure to **title each set of questions** with the appropriate **chapter heading** and **number the questions** appropriately. Also, be sure to answer **ALL** parts of the question using **COMPLETE SENTENCES**. Refer to the A Long Way Gone Calendar for due dates and question sets.

Ch. 1

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

Ch. 2

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?

Ch. 3

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?
4. Who are the five boys with whom Ishmael flees at the end of this chapter?

Ch. 4

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

Ch. 5

6. 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). Where else in A Long Way Gone did you encounter brutal, thuggish, or even sadistic behavior of young rebels- or of the other young people?

***Question set due!**

Ch. 6

7. In Chapter 6, how and why do Ishmael and his companions start farming in the village of Kamator?
8. Why is farming difficult for Ishmael?

Ch. 7

9. After Kamator has been attacked, 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?
10. Why does Ishmael set out on his own?

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Ch. 8

11. What does Ishmael tell us was the “most difficult part of being in the forest” (p. 52)?
12. Who are the six boys Ishmael encounters after wandering and surviving in the forest on his own for more than a month? Where does he know some of these boys from?

Ch. 9

13. Who is the anonymous man with the fishing hut near the ocean?
14. How does he help to soothe and heal the severely scalded feet of Ishmael and the others?
15. How are the lives of all seven boys saved by rap music- specifically the music of LL Cool J?

Ch. 10

16. Describe the “name-giving ceremony” (p. 75) that Ishmael recollects his grandmother telling him about. Who attended tis ceremony, and what did it entail in the way of preparation, purpose, ritual, and food?
17. What do we learn in Ch. 10 about the backgrounds of Ishmael’s companions? How does Saidu die?

***Question set due!**

Ch. 11

18. Who is Gasemu? Why does Ishmael befriend him and then later try to strangle him?

Ch. 12

19. 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 violece to being both of these things as well as a perpetrator of such violence. How does this shift happen? Do Ishmael and his companions have any choice in making it? Explain.

Ch. 13

20. The boy soldiers are given white tablets by their army superiors. What are these? Why are they being handed out?

Ch. 14

21. What do Ishmale and the other boy soldiers do when they’re not out on a mission? What do they do with their spare time?
22. What movies do they watch?
23. At one point, the lieutenant tells them, “*We are not like rebels, those riffraffs who kill people for no reason*” (p. 123). Is this true? Why?

Ch. 15

24. 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?
25. What happens to Ishmael and Alhaji? Where are they taken? By whom?

***Question set due!**

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Ch. 16-18

26. Who is Mambu? Why does Ishmael take a liking to him?
27. Who is Esther?
28. Benin Home is where Ishmael keeps hearing the, “this isn’t your fault” remark from various staffers and professionals. Does he accept this mantra? Why?
29. Ishmael describes “the first time he dreamt of his family since he started running away from the war” (p. 165). Paraphrase this nightmare, explaining how it differs from the many other dreams we’ve heard about from Ishmael. How does the dream illustrate inner conflicts?

Ch. 19-21

30. As he is leaving Benin Home, Ishmael says farewell to his friend Alhaji, who salutes him while whispering, “Goodbye, squad leader.” “I couldn’t salute him in return,” Ishmael writes (p. 180). Why?
31. Describe the family Ishmael goes to live with after his eight-month rehabilitation. Who are they? How is he related to them? What does he think of them?
32. What is the “open metal box” (p. 186) that Ishmael is so confused by? Where has he encountered this box?
33. How does Ishmael’s experience of New York City differ from what he had pictured beforehand?
34. How does Uncle Tommy die?
35. This memoir ends with a striking image, as Ishmael sees a mother telling her two children a key story that he had also heard as a child. It’s a memorable fable that touches on several of the key themes of this book, including violence, family, storytelling, childhood, and African village life. But it also carries a message of sacrifice. Explain how this last message also reverberates (echoes) throughout A Long Way Gone.
36. Look back to the short “New York City, 1998” Prologue that begins this memoir. What is it 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?

Prologue

MY HIGH SCHOOL FRIENDS have begun to suspect I haven’t told them the full story of my life.

“Why did you leave Sierra Leone?”

“Because there is a war.”

“Did you witness some of the fighting?”

“Everyone in the country did.”

“You mean you saw people running around with guns and shooting each other?”

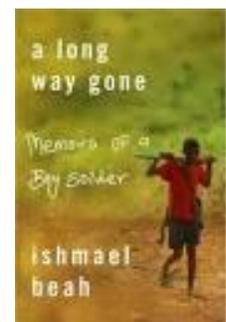
“Yes, all the time.”

“Cool.”

I smile a little

“You should tell us about it sometime.”

“Yes, sometime.”



***Question set due!**