

Sophomore Summer Reading Questions 2011

A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier

by Ishmael Beah

While you don't have to have formal answers written out to these questions, please be prepared to discuss them in class when you return to school.

1. What have you learned about the civil war in Sierra Leone? How was your experience of learning this material through Ishmael's personal account different from your experience of learning historical accounts from more factual sources?
2. While Ishmael is a victim of the violence in his country in numerous ways, he is also a perpetrator of violence. Reread page 119 and page 159. In what ways was Ishmael affected the horrific acts he performed as a boy soldier?
3. What techniques are used, as examined in the memoir, to motivate boy soldiers to stay with the group and keep fighting? Do you think the psychological effects of these techniques are permanent or merely transitory?
4. Consider the role of music in the memoir. How does music save Ishmael's life at one point, and why does he turn to music in the rehabilitation center?
5. Reread the tales of the wild pigs on page 53-54 and of the spider on pages 74-75. Explain the larger meaning of these myths within the context of Ishmael's story.
6. Finally, reread the story Pa Sesay tells about the hunter on pages 217-18. Why do you think Pa Sesay says this is a "very important story"? What kind of answer do you think he is looking for? Why does Ishmael Beah end his disturbing memoir with his unique answer to this question? What does he mean by it?