

A Long Way Gone Socratic Seminar Preparation

Directions: Choose a minimum of five quotations from the reading that you want to share and that will be relevant to our discussion questions. In the left-hand column, write the page number of your quotation. In the right-hand column, write the quote and explain the significance of your quotation.

<u>Page #:</u>	<u>Quote and Explanation:</u>

Page #:	Quote & Explanation:
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Discussion Questions: (Look over and try to select quotes that would work as evidence for these questions)

General Questions (*Choose 2 to 3 from this section*):

1. What did Beah's experiences teach you about the consequences or after effects of violence?
2. What was the main character's catalyst for change?
3. What was the author's message (theme)?
4. Which events best reveal the character of the protagonist?
5. How much power do the characters have to change their world?
6. How did the characters change from the beginning to the end of the book?
7. Which specific details or descriptions helped you understand the setting and mood of the book?
8. What does this book have to say about forgiveness?
9. What symbol or metaphor is most prevalent and revealing?
10. Does the main character gain or lose power?
11. What does this book tell you about how the world works?
12. How do the people in this story comfort themselves and others?

Questions Specific To *A Long Way Gone* (*Choose 2 to 3 from this section*):

13. Ishmael Beah opens his memoir with a dialogue between his American high school friends and himself in New York. What is their perspective on war? How does it compare to the perspective that Beah provides in the book? Are there similarities in how they view war?
14. What role do parables and storytelling play in the community? Can you identify any themes or messages in the parables that the author included? Consider the following parables and discuss what lessons the author learned from the stories. What lessons can we learn from these stories?
15. Throughout the book, Beah discusses the impacts of child soldiering in villages throughout Sierra Leone. What are they? What impacts do you think child soldiering have on the international community? Discuss both the short-term impacts as well as the future consequences.
16. Nature plays a predominant role in Beah's life and throughout the book. For example, the moon is very important to young Ishmael. Consider the conversation he recalls with his grandmother (p. 15-17) where she tells him that "we must strive to be like the moon." What does she mean by this? How does Beah try to achieve this in his past and present life? How can we? What other aspects of nature does Ishmael notice? What roles do they play? Consider crickets, trees, the sky, and animals.
17. In Sierra Leone, old men are symbols of wisdom and respect. However, early on, Beah encounters a

rebel threatening an old man and says: “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. Young people were required to respect their elders and everyone in the community.” (p. 33). The disrespect of elders shows to young Ishmael that the foundation of his community is being broken by war. What other parts of the community are affected by the war?

18. When Beah is at the rehabilitation center, Esther helps him discuss what had happened. At the end of every discussion, she always sternly tells him that “none of these things are your fault.” Why does she say this to him? What does she mean when she says these things are not his fault? Does he believe her right away? Why or why not? Did young Ishmael have any choice in what he did? Did any of the children?
19. Do you feel Beah has told you his full story? Why or why not?
20. Violence is, of course, a major theme in these pages—physical, psychological, social, and otherwise. Indeed, some of the more violent passages in this book make for very difficult if not unsettling reading. Reflect on what Ishmael’s many violent experiences taught you about the consequences or aftereffects, both intended and unintended, of violence.
21. Music saves Beah more than once in our story (chs. 1, 6, 9, 12, and 17, among others). What kinds of music does Ishmael like, and why? What is it about music that matters to Ishmael, or that moves him so? Why is it important to him, especially during his rehabilitation at Benin Home? Explore the healing power of music.
22. “I could no longer tell the difference between dream and reality” (p. 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. Talk about *A Long Way Gone* as a psychological memoir, comparing and contrasting it with other works you have experienced in this vein.
23. Early in his account, Ishmael laments how “the war had destroyed the enjoyment of the very experience of meeting people” (p. 48). Where else does he express this fact, or else suffer from its consequences? Discuss the book’s ongoing struggle between trust and survival. Can these two phenomena coexist?
24. *A Long Way Gone* is a book with much to say on the subject of family: family life, family relationships, and family environment. Catalog and characterize the many different families that Ishmael has belonged to over the course of his young life.
25. 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.
26. Reconsider the flash-forwards and flashbacks one last time. Why didn’t Beah just tell the story straight through chronologically? Is there information that Beah omitted that you are curious about? Why might Beah have left some parts of the story vague?
27. Knowing where to begin and end a story is critical. Why did Beah begin and end where he did?

Socratic Seminar Instructions & Guidelines

1. You will be assigned a number when you arrive in class.
2. **If you’re a one** you will be in the “inner circle” for the first round.
3. **If you’re a two**, you will be in the outer circle and it’s your job to evaluate your inner circle partner. Make sure you pay attention and take notes on the discussion. The evaluation sheet will be a classwork grade and it helps me determine the quiz grade for each student. Please be honest with your evaluation.
4. We will have a **20 minute discussion session** and then we will switch roles.

5. You must speak a minimum of two times to receive a passing score. Your overall grade will be a combination of your peer evaluation and my teacher notes.

Guidelines for Participants in a Socratic Seminar

1. Refer to the text when needed during the discussion. Your goal is to understand the ideas, issues, and values reflected in the text.
2. Do not stay confused; ask for clarification.
3. Stick to the point currently under discussion; make notes about ideas you want to come back to.
4. Don't raise hands; take turns speaking.
5. Listen carefully.
6. Speak up so that all can hear you.
7. Talk to each other, not just to the teacher.
8. You are responsible for the seminar; it will be as interesting or as dull as you make it.

Expectations of Participants in a Socratic Seminar

When I am evaluating your Socratic Seminar participation, I ask the following questions about participants. Did they...

- Speak loudly and clearly?
- Cite reasons and evidence for their statements?
- Use the text to find support?
- Listen to others respectfully?
- Stick with the subject?
- Talk to each other, not to the leader?
- Paraphrase accurately?
- Ask for help to clear up confusion?
- Support each other?
- Avoid hostile exchanges?
- Question others in a civil manner?
- Seem prepared?

Your Name: _

Partner Name: _

Socratic Seminar Peer Evaluation Sheet

Directions: Each time your partner does one of the following put a check in the box. These will serve as your notes for your final evaluation.

Speaks in the discussion

Refers to the text

Asks a new or follow-up question

Responds to another speaker

Engages in side conversation

Dominates the conversation

Overall Peer Evaluation

- | | | | |
|--|-----|-----------|----|
| 1. Were his/her answers reasonable? | Yes | Sometimes | No |
| 2. Were his/her answers supported by specific details from the book? | Yes | Sometimes | No |
| 3. Did he/she use text support for one or more response? | Yes | | No |
| 4. Did he/she respond thoughtfully to peers? | Yes | Sometimes | No |

5. Did he/she listen respectfully throughout the discussion? Yes Sometimes No

Yes = 20 points

Sometimes = 15 points

No = 10 points

AFTER the discussion: What is the most interesting thing your partner said?

AFTER the discussion: What would you like to have said in the discussion?