

Summer Reading  
World Literature and Composition Honors  
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Dear Student,

Welcome to World Literature and Composition Honors!

This summer our reading selection will be *A Long Way Gone* by Ishmael Beah. It is autobiographical in nature and much different from your prior summer reading assignments. Let me summarize a little about the book for you by using this quote from Sebastian Junger, author of *A Death in Belmont* and *The Perfect Storm*, “*A Long Way Gone* is one of the most important war stories of our generation. The arming of children is among the great evils of the modern world, and yet we know so little about it because the children themselves are swallowed up by the very wars they are forced to wage. Ishmael Beah has not only emerged in tact from the chaos, he has become one of its most eloquent chroniclers. We ignore his message at our peril.”

To acquaint you with the necessary background knowledge for this assignment please refer to the links below. Read them prior to reading the book.

<http://www.un.org/peace/africa/Diamond.html>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/correspondent/1604165.stm>

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/special\\_report/1999/01/99/sierra\\_leone/251251.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/special_report/1999/01/99/sierra_leone/251251.stm)

Book marking of this novel is not necessary; however, I do recommend using post-it notes to mark passages that refer to either Shakespeare’s plays *Macbeth* or *Julius Caesar* and be prepared to discuss the literary connection between Beah’s novel and the references to soliloquy’s he uses from these plays. To assist you in understanding the political turmoil in *Julius Caesar*, please view the play and pay special attention to Cassius and Marc Antony’s speeches as well as Julius Caesar’s. Recommended viewing is: [Julius Caesar](#) with Marlon Brando or [Julius Caesar](#) with Charlton Heston. If those are not available for rental any other version may be viewed.

Please also use the vocabulary with page numbers listed to assist in understanding the African terminology used. You are responsible for knowing the meaning of each word. Keep a journal of the definitions and answer the guided reading questions. The journals will be collected when school begins.

These page numbers refer to the hard cover text.

Vocabulary  
crapes (p.7)  
kamor (p.8)  
lorry (p.10)  
cassava (p.17)  
RUF (p.21)  
palampo (p. 23)

RPGs (p. 24)  
sleepers (p. 27)  
imam (p.44)  
sura (p.44)  
waleh (p.51)  
Nessie (p.51)  
Temne (p.55)

Mende (p.55)  
Soulous (p.59)  
jerry cans (p.59)  
Sherbro (p.63)  
carseloi (p. 71)  
spirogyra (p. 73)  
pestles (p.76)

lappei (p.76)  
leweh (p.76)  
Ngor (p. 91)  
gari (p. 91)  
wahlee (p.98)  
brown brown (p.121)  
tafe (p.137)  
kalo kalo (p.150)  
repatriate (p.171)

kule (p.177)  
sackie thomboi (p.181)  
ablution (p.182)  
raggamorphy (p. 183)  
upline (p. 184)  
poda podas (p. 185)  
SLPP (p. 188)  
groundnut (p. 188)  
CAW (p.188)

United Nations First  
International Parliament (p.  
195)  
NGOs (p. 196)  
UN ECOSOC (p. 199)  
“Sobels” (p. 203)  
G3 (p. 207)  
Conakry (p.209)

### Guided Reading Questions

1. How familiar were you with the civil wars of Sierra Leone prior to reading A Long Way Gone? How has Ishmael’s story changed your perception of this story and of current wars in general?
2. Chapter seven begins with the story of the imam’s death, followed by Ishmael’s recollections of his father and an elder blessing their home when they first moved to Mogbwemo. How do the concepts of faith and hope shift throughout this memoir? What sustains Ishmael emotionally and spiritually?
3. Chapter eight closes with the image of villagers running fearfully from Ishmael and his friends, believing that the seven boys are rebels. How do they 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?
4. Discuss the role of American hip-hop culture in creating a “soundtrack” for Ishmael’s life. Why are rappers so appealing to him?
5. The boys’ discovery of the Atlantic Ocean and their encounter with a cheerful fisherman who heals and feeds them is followed by the tragedy of Saidu’s death after a bird falls ominously from the sky. Discuss Ishmael’s relationship with the natural world. In what way is he guided by the constancy of the earth and sky?
6. When Ishmael arrives at the fortified village of Yele in chapter twelve, what do you discover about the way he began his military career? Was his service and that of his equally young friends necessary? What made his conscription different from that of drafted American soldiers serving in previous wars?
7. Ishmael tells us that some of the boys who had been rehabilitated with him later became soldiers again. What factors ensured that he could remain a civilian?
8. Ishmael describes his use of Krio and many tribal languages to communicate, as well as his ability to quote Shakespeare’s Elizabethan English. What communities and empires are represented in his styles? In which “villages,” from the relatively new UN to the centuries-old Mende and Temne settlements, does the greatest wisdom lie?
9. How does Ishmael’s concept of family change throughout the memoir, from his early life in Mattru Jong, to the uncle with whom he is reunited, to his American family with Laura?
10. What universal truths does Ishmael teach us about surviving loss and hunger and overcoming isolation?
11. After reading the chronology of Sierra Leone’s history, what reasons can you propose for the coups in Ishmael’s homeland? Did the arrival of Portuguese slave traders, or the later colonization by the British, contribute to Sierra Leone’s twentieth-century woes? What did you discover about the motivations of the

army soldiers versus those of rebels? In your opinion, what made the leaders of the RUF so ruthless for so long?

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Our second text is a collection of essays written which are the personal philosophies and core values of a fascinating group of Americans. The book is entitled This I Believe: the Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women by Jay Allison.

In the 1950's, Edward R. Murrow –hosted a radio program This I Believe, which prompted Americans to briefly explain their most cherished beliefs be they religious or purely pragmatic. Since the program's 2005 renaissance as a weekly NPR segment, Allison (the host) and Gediman (the executive producer) have collected some of the best essays form This I Believe then and now. "Your personal credo" is what Allison calls the book's introduction, noting that today's program is distinguished from the 1950's version in soliciting submissions from ordinary Americans from all walks of life. These make up some of the book's most powerful and memorable moments, from the surgeon whose illiterate mother changed his early life with faith and a library card to the English professor whose poetry helped him process a traumatize childhood event. And in one of the book's most unusual essays, a Burmese immigrant confides that he believes in feeding monkeys on his birthday because a Buddhist monk once prophesied that if he followed in this ritual, his family would prosper. There are luminaries here, too, including Gloria Steinem, Warren Christopher, Helen Keller, Isabel Allende, Eleanor Roosevelt, John Updike, and (most surprisingly), considering the books more liberal bent) Newt Gingrich. This compilation of thoughts should be an interesting read for all of you.

Your assignment for this book is to read and enjoy. We will incorporate a writing assignment when you return to school which will focus on this text and its numerous personal philosophies.