

M K S M C

Genre: Autobiography, Memoir

Themes: Resilience
Children in War
Self-Esteem
Physical Disabilities
Family

THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITY IDEAS ...

... are only a start. There are many possibilities for helping students construct meaning from text.

BEFORE STARTING THE BOOK

Activities to build the context and introduce the topic of the book, and to establish prior knowledge and interest.

1. Ask students if they know where Sierra Leone is located. Have students locate it on a map of Africa.
2. Brainstorm with students to discover what they know about Sierra Leone, and what they know in general about Africa. Have students record their thoughts so that they can compare them with what they know and feel after reading the book.
3. Ask students what they know about wars have been fought in Africa in the past 15 years. What is similar about all these wars? What is different?
4. Is there ever justification for war? Discuss.
5. Ask students what they think about their dreams. Why do they think they dream? Do they believe dreams have a special meaning or importance in real life? Can dreams foretell your destiny?
6. Ask students to discuss what stereotypes people with physical disabilities face and what they think might help dispel these stereotypes.
7. Brainstorm with students why they think people write an autobiography. Have them compare their thoughts with what they observe by reading Mariatu's account of her life.

WHILE READING THE BOOK

Activities to check on comprehension, stimulate interest, involve readers in reflection as they read, and encourage consideration of other readers' reactions.

A) RESILIENCE

The seeds of resilience lie in the belief that life can make sense, that one's actions can have value,

C) INJUSTICE, BETRAYAL, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY

1. Bookmark and track the extent to which characters — both adults and children — in the book demonstrate integrity and/or social and political responsibility.
2. As you read the book, record questions you may have regarding the history of the conflict in

3. What does Mariatu miss most about Sierra Leone?
4. Do you think that Mariatu has integrated well into Canadian society? Explain your answer.
5. Pick a country anywhere in the world where you neither speak the language nor know much about its customs, history, geography, etc. Now imagine that you are going to immigrate there. What would you do to prepare yourself? How would you feel about making such a move? What would you miss most about your home here?

F) AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS A GENRE

1. From your reading of Mariatu's memoir, draw examples of how the story is:
 - an account of the events of her life
 - an account of the history of Sierra Leone
 - a condemnation of war
 - a condemnation of, or an apology for, the perpetrators of the crimes committed
 - a message that the human spirit is strong enough to overcome any trial.

G) READER'S THEATER

Have students work in groups to select a key conversation or dialogue they would like to bring to life through Reader's Theater. Explain to students that they will read aloud the section in "theater" style, i.e., with drama and feeling, as if they were on stage reading to an audience. Students need to find a suitable segment that will take about two to three minutes to read. Photocopy the section each group selects. Ask students to use a different color to highlight the direct speech of each character. The text that is not highlighted becomes narration. Students may choose to omit tags such as "he said" or "she said," which will become redundant when a different person reads aloud the words of the character.

Students may present their segment to the class individually, or they can work as a group to create a tableau from which speakers emerge using background music, character masks they make, or simple props they bring from home.

AFTER READING THE BOOK

1. At the end of the book, Mariatu describes her reunion with her grandmother. Her grandmother tells her, "... many things have changed because of the war. And witchcraft can't change the past. I wish a spell could have stopped the attack on you. But you have turned your hurt and pain into something positive. When those demons reappear, think about all the angels who have come into your life since then." (p. 204)

Mariatu goes on to name some of her angels: Fatmata, Kadi, Adamsay, Abibatu, Mohamed, and Sulaiman. Summarize how each of them contributed to her life.

In your life, who are your angels? How does "counting one's angels" contribute to developing a resilient outlook?

2. Discuss why the book is entitled *The Bite of the Mango*. Do you think this is a good title? Do you have suggestions for other titles? Explain your choices.

3. Examine the book cover. Explain how the images encapsulate and symbolize the content and themes of the book.

4. What social and political challenges do we face here in North America? What can young people do to help make a difference?

5. Read another autobiography by an African figure and compare the challenges and achievements of the principal characters. Some suggestions are:

A Long Way Gone by Ishmael Beah

Desert Flower and Desert Dawn by Waris Dirie

Long Walk to Freedom by Nelson Mandela

Unbowed by Wangari Maathai

6. Is reconciliation possible after violent armed conflicts? Discuss with reference to Mariatu Kamara's account of her life. Find out more about attempts to bring peace and reconciliation after other conflicts in Africa and in other parts of the world. (Consider reading about the Nuremberg Trials after World War II, the writing of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, Gacaca Courts in Rwanda,

images like those provided in films such as *King Kong* or *Blood Diamonds*. (NB: *Blood Diamonds* is rated "R"; do not use this as an example for students under 17 years of age.)

8. Have a look at your notes from before you read the book regarding your knowledge of Sierra Leone and Africa in general before and after reading the autobiography. Have your views remained the same? Changed? Developed? Discuss the reasons with reference to the book.

9. Compare your understanding of people with physical disabilities before you read the book with what you now. Have your views remained the same? Changed? Developed? Discuss the reasons using examples from the book.

To read more about Mariatu, go to www.mariatufoundation.com.