

TEACHER'S GUIDE



The Heaven Shop

PRODUCED BY



Canadian International
Development Agency

Agence canadienne de
développement international



Fitzhenry & Whiteside

The Heaven Shop

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Produced by

**UNICEF Canada
Fitzhenry & Whiteside**

Copyright © UNICEF Canada and Fitzhenry & Whiteside

Teachers have permission from UNICEF Canada and Fitzhenry & Whiteside to make copies of this guide for personal classroom use, personal reference, and student use. To reprint or use this material for other purposes, written permission must be obtained from UNICEF Canada and Fitzhenry & Whiteside.

Contents

Introduction	1
Curriculum Links	2
Chapter 1 Getting Acquainted	3
Chapter 2 Binti's Hometown	5
Chapter 3 Sisters	7
Chapter 4 Dear Agony Aunt	9
Chapter 5 Priorities and Values	11
Chapter 6 Complete the Thought	13
Chapter 7 Who Said It?	16
Chapter 8 What the Future Holds	18
Chapter 9 Myths About HIV/AIDS	20
Chapter 10 Making Decisions	22
Chapter 11 Moral Dilemmas	24
Chapter 12 HIV/AIDS: Peer Education Poster	26
Chapter 13 On the Move	28
Chapter 14 An Outsider Tableau	30
Chapter 15 Inner Thoughts	32
Chapter 16 HIV/AIDS: Role-Play	34
Chapter 17 Internal Dialogue: Corridor of Voices	36
Chapter 18 Love Poem	38
Chapter 19 Rest in Peace: Character Epitaph	40
Chapter 20 Then and Now	42
Chapter 21 Postcard Home	44
Appendix 1 Facts About Orphans and Families Affected by HIV/AIDS	47
About the Author	50

Introduction

The Heaven Shop is appropriate for grades 7 to 9, reluctant high school readers, and ESL students as a text for independent reading, guided reading, or literature circles. It can also be used as a whole class novel to teach reading strategies and to explore the issue of orphans and families affected by HIV/AIDS.

The Teacher's Guide is divided into 21 sections. Each section contains a plot summary, guiding questions for pre- and post-reading discussion, and an extension activity. The pre- and post-reading questions are meant to assess literal comprehension, as well as extend thinking and encourage inference. The extension activities are designed to help students develop effective reading strategies, appreciate the literary elements found in the text, and develop understanding and compassion for children affected by HIV/AIDS.

Curriculum Links

The Heaven Shop and accompanying Teacher's Guide can be used in the classroom to achieve the following curriculum aims:

Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop an awareness of a culture in a different part of the world • understand the world as a system in which all elements – people, events, trends, places – are interconnected • know that some world systems operate in ways that favour certain groups or countries, while placing others at a disadvantage • understand the global implications of local decisions and actions • know ways in which HIV/AIDS is transmitted • know the impact of HIV/AIDS on individuals, families, and communities • know common stereotypes that exist about people who are HIV+ • understand the source of stereotypes about people who are HIV+ • understand that personal, institutional, and societal behaviours, attitudes, and structures can have the effect of either promoting or denying social justice • know current situations in which human rights are not recognized and social justice is not available to all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • read independently, selecting appropriate reading strategies • read for specific purposes using a variety of reading strategies • interpret a written work with evidence from the text and from personal knowledge and experience • listen to and communicate connected ideas and relate carefully constructed narratives about real and fictional events • express and respond to a range of ideas and opinions concisely, clearly, and appropriately • communicate ideas and information for a variety of purposes and to specific audiences using features appropriate to the form • produce pieces of writing for various purposes and in a range of contexts using a variety of specific forms • organize information and ideas creatively as well as logically • respond to written text through art and drama to communicate a variety of thoughts, feelings, and experiences for specific purposes and to specific audiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • value cultural diversity, alternative points of view, equality, and justice • respect and develop openness towards those who appear to be different • appreciate the commonalities that exist between peoples • critically evaluate images that are presented in text and media • be willing to find out more information about the images one is presented with • develop empathy with those who have been denied justice

Chapter 1

SYNOPSIS

We are introduced to Binti, the 13-year-old child star of a popular radio program in Malawi called “Gogo’s Family”. Binti lives in Blantyre, Malawi’s largest city, with her 16-year-old sister, Junie, her 14-year-old brother, Kwasi, and her father, Bambo. Bambo owns and manages a shop called Heaven Shop Coffins, where he makes and sells coffins to the community. The family lives in the back of the shop. Binti’s mother died six years ago of a mysterious illness.

VOCABULARY

Gogo: Malawian expression for grandmother

standard seven: seventh year of basic education

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Introduction to the novel:

- Look at the cover of the novel. Where do you think this novel takes place?
- What kind of person does the girl on the cover seem to be? How do you know?
- Why do you think this novel is entitled *The Heaven Shop*?
- What do you think this novel is about?
- What do you think the bird on the front cover signifies?

Pre-reading:

- Do you have a job after school?
- What type of work do you do?
- What does your job give you (money, sense of accomplishment, pride, etc.)?

Post-reading:

- Where does this story take place? (Find Malawi on the map.)
- What kind of job does Binti have after school?
- What issues does the radio program, “Gogo’s Family”, deal with?
- In this episode of “Gogo’s Family”, what particular issue is being dealt with?
- According to Binti’s character in the radio program, what kind of person dies of AIDS?
- Describe Binti’s family.
- Binti’s mother died of a mysterious illness. Describe the symptoms of the illness.

Getting Acquainted

In the first chapter of *The Heaven Shop*, we are introduced to the main characters. Complete the table with information we know about the main characters so far (not every square can be filled). Be prepared to explain your answers with evidence from the text.

	Relationship to Binti	Age	Job	Hobbies/ Interests
Binti				
Mr. Wajiru				
Stewart				
Kwasi				
Kettie				
Junie				
Noel				
Gogo				

Chapter 2

SYNOPSIS

We are given a vivid description of Binti's environment in Blantyre, Malawi. On her way home from taping an episode of "Gogo's Family", Binti encounters a new coffin shop that has recently opened up in her neighbourhood. At first, Binti is worried about the competition this new shop will bring to her father's business. However, Bambo eases her fears by telling her that, unfortunately, there is more than enough business in their community for the two shops.

Bambo is losing weight, suffering frequent illnesses and struggling to meet the physical demands of his carpentry work. Binti rejects Kwasi's drawing of their father, because he has depicted him as "skin and bone". When Binti shows concern for Bambo's lack of energy at work, he denies that he is seriously ill and tells his daughter to carry on with her household chores.

VOCABULARY

Blantyre: largest city in Malawi

mzungu: white person

Bambo: Malawian expression for father

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Pre-reading:

- Change happens to all of us. Give examples of changes that sometimes happen in the life of a young person growing up (parents' divorce, illness and death of a family member, falling in love, etc.)
- Does a person always have control over the changes in his or her life?
- Which changes are usually beyond a person's control?
- How do you feel when changes in your life are beyond your control? Why?

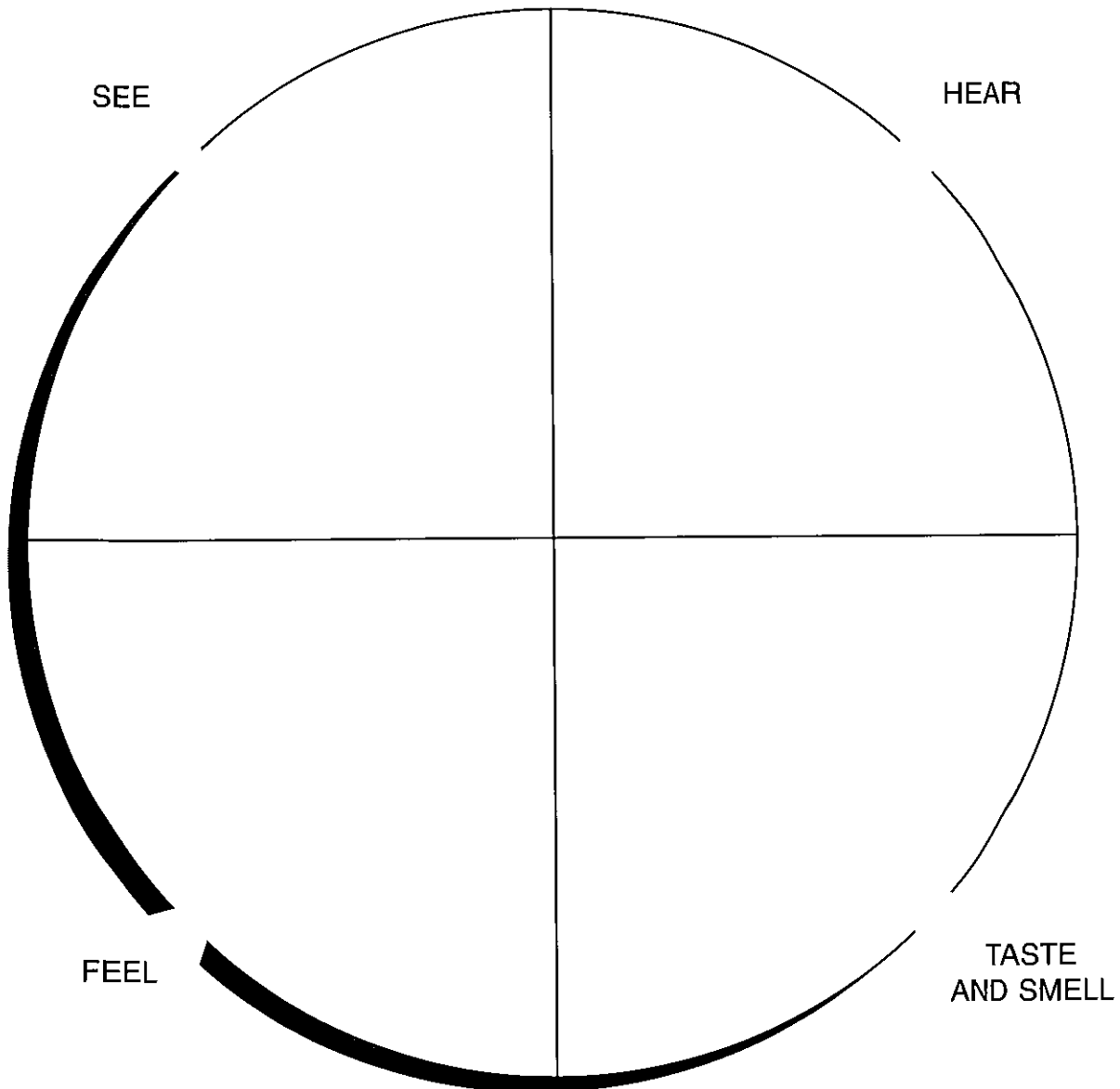
Post-reading:

- On her way home from taping an episode of "Gogo's Family", Binti discovers that a new business has opened up in her neighbourhood. What is it?
- How does Binti feel about this new business? Why?
- Why is Binti's father not too worried about the competition from the new coffin shop?
- Binti is happy being a radio star and living with her family in the back of her father's coffin shop, but things are changing. What changes are happening in Binti's community? What changes are happening in Binti's family?
- How does Binti feel about these changes? How do you know?

Binti's Hometown

Binti lives in Blantyre, Malawi. Use the following chart to describe all the things that Binti sees, hears, feels, tastes, and smells on a typical day in Blantyre. Be prepared to explain your answers with evidence from the text.

Now, write a letter to a pen pal describing all the things that you see, hear, feel, taste, and smell on a typical day in your hometown.



Chapter 3

SYNOPSIS

Binti and her sister, Junie, attend St. Peter's School for Girls, one of the best private schools for girls in Blantyre. Binti is proud of wearing her school uniform and the privilege of delivering the Junior Prefect's Captain's report at the school assembly, almost as much as she likes being the star of "Gogo's Family". Junie, however, is beginning to worry about family finances. Bambo's health has not been good, and she is anxious to put money aside and plan for the future when he is no longer able to provide for the family.

VOCABULARY

chiperoni: cold winter wind

school prefect: student president

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Pre-reading:

- Do you have an older sibling? How does your older sibling treat you?
- How do you treat your older sibling? Why?
- Do you have a younger sibling? How does your younger sibling treat you?
- How do you treat your younger sibling? Why?

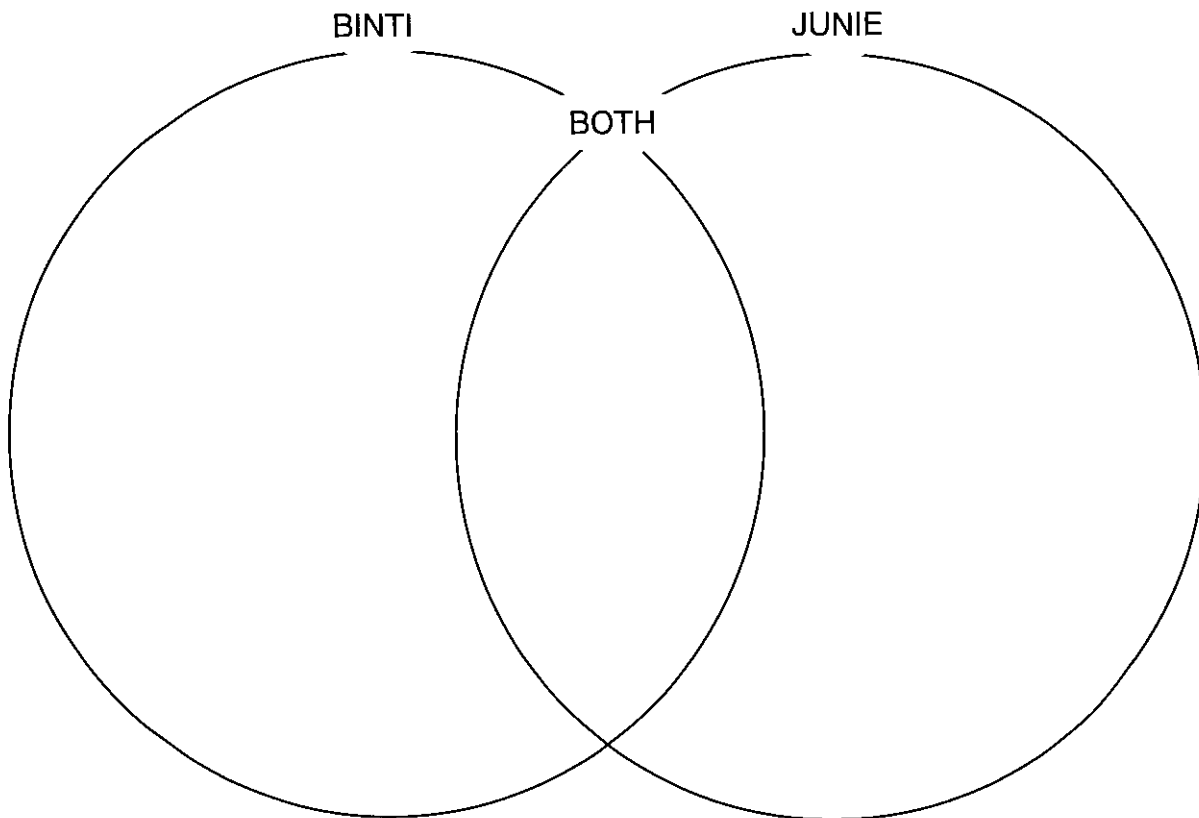
Post-reading:

- What is Binti most concerned about? Why?
- What is Junie most concerned about? Why?
- Do you think the sisters understand each other? Why or why not?
- Which sister do you most identify with? Why?

Sisters

Binti and Junie are sisters, but they are different in many ways. Look at the list of words below. Then put them into the Venn diagram, indicating whether this character trait applies to Binti alone, Junie alone, both girls or neither girl. Be prepared to explain your answers with evidence from the text.

Now, write a paragraph comparing yourself with a member of your family or your best friend using the vocabulary you have learned.



Character traits

Responsible
Optimistic
Humorous
Resourceful
Stubborn
Caring
Loyal
Carefree

Unselfish
Self-confident
Successful
Cooperative
Conceited
Bossy
Proud
Neat

Ambitious
Studious
Hard-working
Dreamer
Negative
Leader
Determined
Humble

Serious
Selfish
Generous
Lazy
Disagreeable
Impulsive

Chapter 4

SYNOPSIS

Bambo's health is rapidly deteriorating, and Junie, Binti, and Kwasi are starting to feel the strain of his illness. Tempers are running high between the siblings as they fear for their father's life and their own future. They suddenly find themselves caring for their sick father, managing the household chores, and taking care of the family business — all while trying to juggle their school work and individual pursuits.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Pre-reading:

- What things does a typical 13-year-old in Canada worry about?
- What things do you think a typical 13-year-old in Malawi worries about?
- What effect do you think these worries might have on their opportunities in life?
- What effect do you think these worries might have on the choices they make?

Post-reading:

- Bambo has been sick for a long time. Why is Binti just noticing his illness now?
- How is Bambo's illness affecting Binti?
- How is Bambo's illness affecting Junie?
- How is Bambo's illness affecting Kwasi?
- How is Bambo's illness affecting relationships between the siblings?

Chapter 5

SYNOPSIS

“Story Time” has now been on the air for six months and is celebrating its anniversary at the posh Meridian Mount Soche Hotel. Funders, potential funders, and even some foreign dignitaries are in attendance at the anniversary party. When the cast members of “Gogo’s Family” are introduced to the audience, they are greeted with thunderous applause. Binti couldn’t be more proud. However, one thing is detracting from her perfect evening. Her cast mate, Stewart, has just remarked that her father has “the Slim” (AIDS). Binti adamantly denies Stewart’s pronouncement but is forced to face the reality of it when Mr. Wajiru notices the deteriorating condition of her father in the audience and asks Binti to escort him home.

VOCABULARY

chintje: Malawian traditional cloth

Chichewa: the most widely spoken language in Malawi

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Pre-reading:

- What is the most important thing in your life (i.e., personal accomplishments, family, money, etc.)?
- How would you feel if you lost it?
- Do people’s priorities change? Why or why not?

Post-reading:

- How does Binti’s appearance at the anniversary party make her feel?
- Why does Binti deny Stewart’s claim that her father has AIDS?
- At the end of the chapter, Binti is sitting alone with her copy of the *Youth Times* listening to her father breathing in the background. How do you think Binti feels about her father at this moment? Why?

Priorities and Values

In this chapter, Binti is forced to evaluate her priorities and values. Rank (from 1 to 10) the priorities and values that she holds at this point in the novel. Be prepared to explain your answers with evidence from the text.

Now, rank your own values and priorities at this point in your life and compare them with those of a classmate.

Priority or value	Rank Binti's priorities and values from 1 to 10	Rank your priorities and values from 1 to 10
Family	_____	_____
Public image	_____	_____
Personal accomplishments	_____	_____
Well-being of others	_____	_____
Personal goals and dreams	_____	_____
Friends	_____	_____
Health	_____	_____
Money	_____	_____
Material possessions	_____	_____
Status in the community	_____	_____

Chapter 6

SYNOPSIS

Bambo's illness is growing more serious. Unfortunately, he is not the only one who is sick. Many people in the community are falling ill and dying, and the supply of coffins at the Heaven Shop is dwindling. Binti, Junie, and Kwasi take turns staying home from school to care for Bambo and manage the family business. Their attempts at making coffins are unsuccessful, and many customers are going to the competition.

At Mr. Tsaka's urging, Binti takes her father to a public hospital. Because of the nursing shortage and large number of patients needing care, Binti and Bambo are forced to wait in a long line at the hospital. When Bambo is finally admitted to see the doctor, Binti learns that he has pneumonia and needs to be hospitalized. Binti is hopeful that the doctor's diagnosis means that her father doesn't have AIDS.

The hospital is crowded with patients, and Bambo is forced to lie on a mat on the floor between two beds. Junie and Kwasi arrive at the hospital with Mr. Tsaka. Bambo tells Junie to take Binti home to get some rest because she has to tape her radio show in the morning. The following day, Binti returns to the hospital to read this week's script of "Gogo's Family" for Bambo. Other patients and caregivers listen in and clap when she is finished reading. Later that evening, a pastor visits the ward. Patients and caregivers join in his song of prayer and praise. Some time during the song, Binti's father passes away.

VOCABULARY

nsima: staple food made from pounded maize

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Pre-reading:

- What are the things that your parents or caregivers provide for you?
- At your age, do you think you would be able to take care of yourself and survive on your own without support from your parents or caregivers? Why or why not?

Post-reading:

- Until now, Binti has always been very self-confident and sure of herself. What has been the source of her self-confidence?
- Binti is not so self-confident anymore. Give examples from the text that illustrate how Binti's self-confidence is slipping away.
- Why does Binti assure the doctor that her father doesn't have AIDS?
- When Binti's father dies, the pastor tells her that "Many are the Kings whose death was not as good" (p. 62). What does he mean?
- In Canada, there are "safety nets" for children whose parents are sick or have died. What are they?

- According to the text, what safety nets exist for children in Malawi whose parents are sick or have died?
- Binti, Junie, and Kwasi have all had to take turns staying home from school to care for their father and manage the family business. What effect do you think this will have on their education and their future?

Complete the Thought

In this chapter, Binti, Junie, and Kwasi experience tremendous emotional upheaval due to Bambo's illness, hospitalization, and death. Complete Binti's thoughts below. Be prepared to explain your answers with evidence from the text.

1. "What do I think about Mr. Tsaka? At first... _____

but now... _____

2. "My source of self-confidence has always been... _____

but now... _____

3. "I know Stewart is wrong. Bambo can't have AIDS because... _____

4. "The doctor told me everything would be all right. How can she say that? _____

5. "Taping an episode of 'Gogo's Family' while Bambo was sick in the hospital made me feel... _____

6. "Bambo died on the floor. I feel... _____

Chapter 7

SYNOPSIS

As a result of Bambo's death, relatives descend upon the family house. Binti, Junie, and Kwasi are called upon to cook for them and prepare a place for them to sleep. Binti and Kwasi resent the fact that relatives they don't even know are filling the house, claiming their family property, and showing interest in their savings. Junie, on the other hand, is consumed with worry over the pressures of offering the relatives hospitality and preparing for Bambo's funeral.

Kwasi tries to make a coffin for Bambo but is stopped by one of the uncles who doesn't want the valuable lumber to be wasted in the hands of a school boy who doesn't know what he is doing. In response, Binti takes her radio money from its hiding place and asks Mr. Tsaka for a coffin for Bambo. Mr. Tsaka shows them how to assemble one of his coffins themselves, and Kwasi paints one of his signature birds on the edge of the coffin.

When the family arrives at the church with Bambo's coffin for the funeral, they have to wait outside as another funeral finishes before them. When Bambo's funeral service finally gets underway, the people in the congregation rise to their feet out of respect at the entrance of Gogo, the family matriarch. Gogo walks to the front of the church and looks at her son, Bambo, lying in the coffin. Then she turns to the congregation and dramatically announces that she has just come from the hospital, where she was told by the doctor that her son had AIDS. Gogo tells the congregation that she has already lost two sons and three daughters to complications arising from AIDS. Gogo compares AIDS to a lion terrorizing the village, and she passionately admonishes the community not to remain silent but to speak out and drive AIDS out of their community.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Pre-reading:

- People often feel that they have to behave according to other people's expectations of them. What do you think are some of the things expected of young people in Canada by...
 - teachers?
 - family members?
 - the community? Why?
- Do you think these expectations are always fair? Why or why not?

Post-reading:

- In this chapter, Binti, Junie, and Kwasi feel the pressure of their relatives' expectations. What do their relatives expect of them? Why?
- Are the relatives' expectations different for Binti, Junie, and Kwasi (i.e., age, gender)? Why?
- Do you think these expectations are fair under the circumstances? Why or why not?
- How do Binti and Junie react differently to their relatives' expectations? Why?
- Why does Gogo tell the congregation that Bambo died of complications related to AIDS?
- How do you think Binti feels about this announcement? Why?
- When Bambo is being lowered into the ground, Binti sees "a large bird, its wings spread, soaring high into the sky" (p. 71). What does this symbolize?

Who Said It?

After Bambo's death, Binti, Kwasi, and Junie find themselves at the mercy of their relatives. Read the following quotes, and guess who said what, to whom, and why. Be prepared to give evidence from the text.

Quote	Who said it?	To whom?	Context
1. "They can all sleep in the road. I don't know them, and I don't want them here."			
2. "If I try harder, I can build one, a good one. So that's what I'm going to do."			
3. "You should put more respect in your voice when you talk to us."			
4. "Your father had many strong opinions. I enjoyed disagreeing with him."			
5. "Wear your best dress. It's not Sunday, but we will be in church."			
6. "There is a lion in our village now. It is called AIDS."			

Chapter 8

SYNOPSIS

Binti, Junie, and Kwasi overhear their relatives talk about separating them and taking them to live in different parts of Malawi. At first, the relatives are hesitant to take the children in because they are already financially burdened, they have no extra room in their homes, and they fear that the children might also have AIDS. In the end, the relatives agree to take the children in to meet Gogo's expectations and because it is the local custom. The relatives decide that Bambo's house and the Heaven Shop will be sold and that Binti, Junie, and Kwasi will have to drop out of school. Kwasi is to be sent to live with an uncle in Monkey Bay to help out with his fishing business, and Junie and Binti are to be sent to live with Uncle Wysom in Lilongwe to help out with household chores. Noel breaks off his engagement with Junie because of pressure from his parents, who fear that Junie will bring AIDS into the family. Binti records her last episodes of "Gogo's Family" and bids Mr. Wajiru and the cast an emotional farewell.

VOCABULARY

Lilongwe: capital city of Malawi

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Pre-reading:

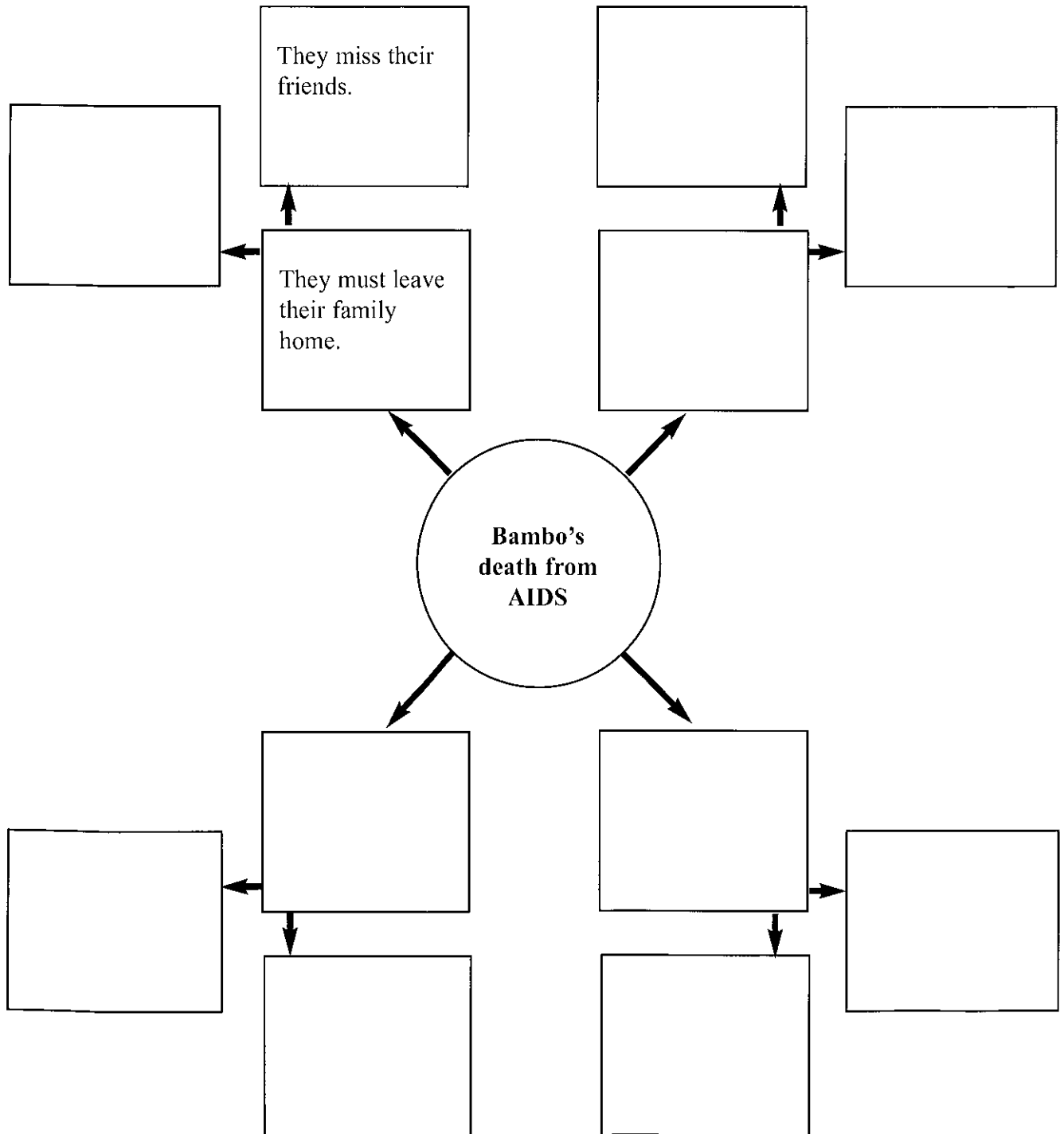
- Think of a time when you had no control over events, circumstances, or decisions that affected you. How did you feel?
- How did you react to your feelings of powerlessness?
- What are some other ways that people may react when they feel powerless?

Post-reading:

- Why are the relatives initially hesitant to take Binti, Junie, and Kwasi to live with them? Do you think these are good reasons? Why or why not?
- Why do the relatives prefer to take Kwasi in rather than Binti and Junie? What do you learn about the position of girls, as compared with boys, in this society?
- Why does Junie tell Binti and Kwasi to tell other people that their father had pneumonia and their mother had TB?
- Do you think the relatives had any right to sell Bambo's house and property and keep the money? Why or why not?
- Do you think the relatives had any right to read Junie's letter from Noel before she read it? Why or why not?
- Do you think the relatives had any right to take the money Binti made from taping the last episodes of "Gogo's Family"? Why or why not?
- Do you think the relatives' actions indicate they have the best interests of the children in mind? Why or why not?
- Why are the children forced to leave school?
- Binti is struggling with losing her special status as a student at St. Peter's School and as the star of "Gogo's Family". Find evidence from the text to support this.

What the Future Holds

After Bambo's death, Binti, Junie, and Kwasi find that their lives are falling apart. Use the following chart to predict what consequences Bambo's death from AIDS is likely to have on Binti and her siblings. Be prepared to explain your answers with evidence from the text.



Chapter 9

SYNOPSIS

Uncle Wysom's wife, Aunt Agnes, and their children are not happy to receive Binti and Junie into their home for fear that they might transmit AIDS to family members through touching, preparing food, or sharing the same plates and dining utensils. Aunt Agnes divides up Binti's and Junie's property to give to her own daughters and to sell in the market. The girls are given a mattress in the storeroom to sleep on and put to work doing laundry, washing supper dishes, and cleaning the kitchen and diner. Uncle Wysom and Aunt Agnes decide to transform their diner into a "bottle shop", or bar, and have Junie become a waitress and serve the men who come to drink. Binti argues, to no avail, that Junie should stay in school to prepare for her departmental exams. Uncle Wysom says to Binti, "You are orphans with no status. Be thankful for what you have." Junie keeps silent, but Binti reacts, in protest, by sweeping all of the dust under one of the rugs.

VOCABULARY

bottle shop: local bar

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Pre-reading:

- What is the difference between HIV and AIDS?
- What are some of the myths people believe about how the HIV virus is spread?
- How is the HIV virus actually spread?

Post-reading:

- Both Aunt Agnes and Uncle Wysom are afraid to touch Binti and Junie, have them prepare food, or share their plates and utensils with them because of AIDS. Do they have any reason to be afraid of contracting AIDS this way? Why or why not?
- If Aunt Agnes and Uncle Wysom believe these myths about how the HIV virus is transmitted, how do you think this will affect the way they treat Binti and Junie?
- How do Aunt Agnes and Uncle Wysom treat Binti and Junie differently than their own children? Why?
- How do you think Aunt Agnes and Uncle Wysom feel about Binti and Junie?
- How do Binti and Junie react differently to their present circumstances? Why?
- Are you more like Binti or Junie in your response to being powerless? Give examples.

Myths About HIV/AIDS

Uncle Wysom and Aunt Agnes believe many myths about HIV/AIDS and how the HIV virus is spread. Complete the table below to distinguish between myths and facts about HIV/AIDS. Be prepared to explain your answers with evidence from the text.

Myth believed about HIV/AIDS	Believed by what character	Action taken by that character	Fact
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			

Chapter 10

SYNOPSIS

Binti and Junie are kept busy working in the house and in the bottle shop. Aunt Agnes and Uncle Wysom's children torment Binti and Junie because they are orphans and have no status in the home. When Binti accepts the invitation of a customer in the bottle shop to come and sit next to him, Junie reacts strongly and orders Binti to leave the bar. Encouraged by Junie's outburst, and feeling that her sister has somehow regained her strength, Binti stops being so sad at their circumstances and becomes angry.

One morning, cousin Mary orders Binti to move away from her because she is standing too close. Binti refuses to move away, and Mary responds by taunting Binti that her parents died of AIDS. Binti becomes angry and moves closer to Mary, who is afraid that she will contract AIDS if Binti touches her. Finally, Binti corners Mary and touches her. Mary screams for Aunt Agnes to come and rescue her from Binti. Aunt Agnes raises her arm to hit Binti, but her hand remains suspended in the air. Binti realizes that Aunt Agnes is also afraid to touch her for fear of contracting AIDS. Although Aunt Agnes picks up a fly swatter and repeatedly hits Binti with it, Binti refuses to cry in front of her and Mary. When Binti goes outside to help Junie with the laundry, the tears start to flow. Junie tells Binti to keep quiet and to be thankful that they have food to eat and somewhere to sleep. Binti reminds Junie that she used to say having food and somewhere to sleep wasn't enough – that they must plan for the future. At this, Junie falls silent.

VOCABULARY

Chibuku brew: locally brewed alcohol

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Pre-reading:

- Think of a time when someone picked on you or treated you unfairly. How did you feel?
- How did you respond to being picked on or treated unfairly?
- What are some other ways that a person could react to being treated unfairly? Do you think these ways of responding are positive or negative?

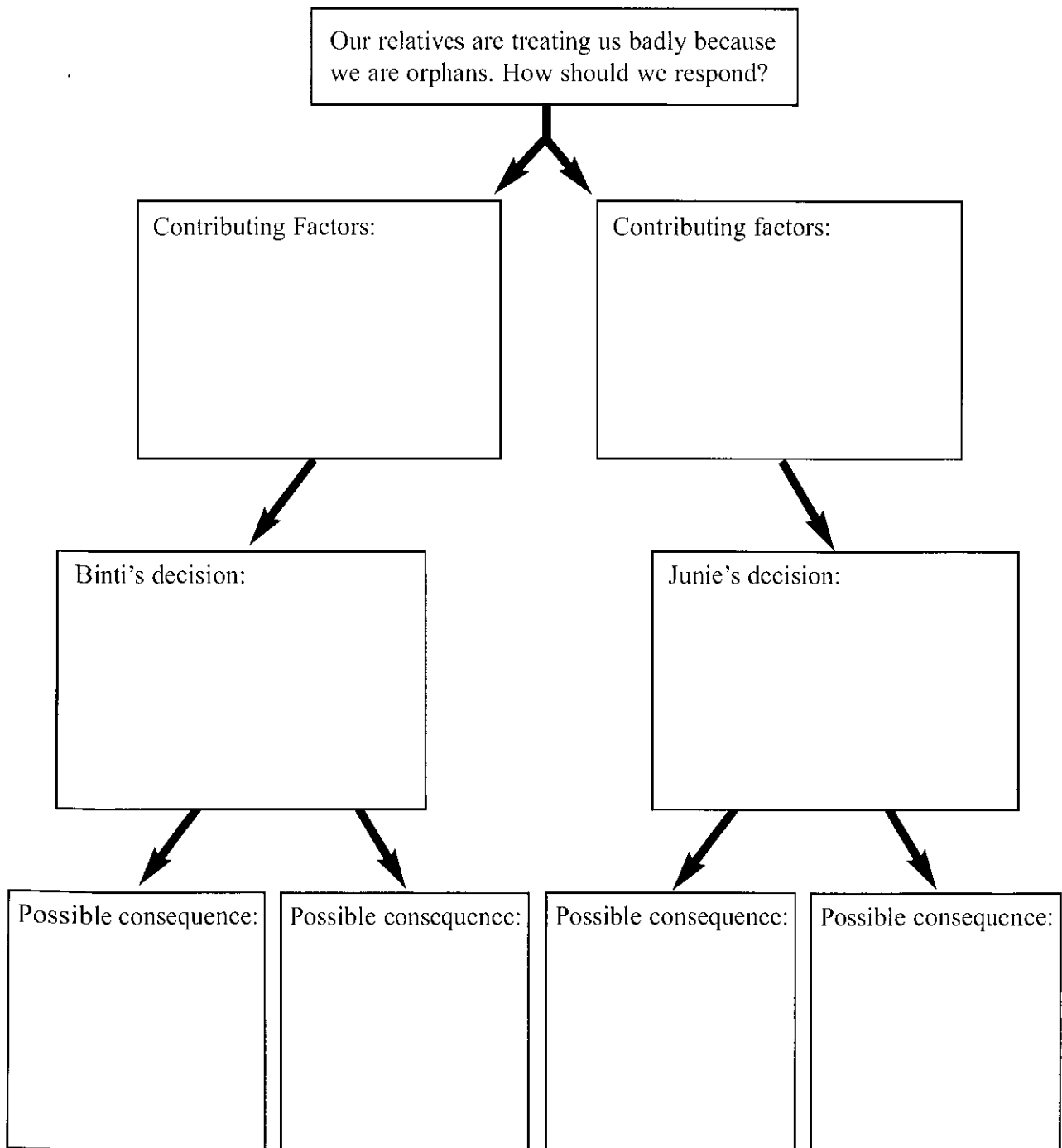
Post-reading:

- How do Aunt Agnes, Uncle Wysom, and their children treat Binti and Junie? Why?
- Mary is afraid of Binti. Why?
- What does Binti do when she discovers Mary and Aunt Agnes are afraid of her? Why?
- Do you think Mary and Aunt Agnes have any reason to be afraid of Binti? Why or why not?
- What does Binti do when Aunt Agnes beats her with the fly swatter? Why?
- How has Junie changed? Why does she no longer plan for the future?

Making Decisions

In chapter 10, Binti and Junie must choose how to respond to the poor treatment they are receiving from their relatives. Write down the different ways in which Binti and Junie respond to their situation with the consequences that you think will most likely ensue from their decisions. Be prepared to explain your answers with evidence from the text.

Now, choose the decision that you think is the best one, and role-play what you think will happen next.



Chapter 11

SYNOPSIS

Junie is determined to rescue Binti, Kwasi, and herself from the life they are now leading, and she resorts to sex work with the customers at the bottle shop to make money for their future.

One day, cousin Mary runs into the room and announces to Aunt Agnes that she has found money in the storage room where Binti and Junie sleep. To protect Junie, Binti claims that she earned the money on the radio show, “Gogo’s Family”. Aunt Agnes doesn’t believe Binti’s story, and she goes to discuss the matter with Uncle Wysom. Uncle Wysom thinks Binti and Junie have stolen the money from his family. He tells Binti and Junie that, because they are his brother’s children, he will not turn them out on the street or call the police for stealing from him. Instead, in the morning he will find another place for them to live.

Binti wakes up in the middle of the night to find Junie gone and a note from her saying that she has gone away to make money. She advises Binti to go to Mulanje to live with their grandmother, Gogo. Binti gets up, dresses herself, gathers her few remaining belongings, grabs some Kwacha notes from the diner cash box, and then leaves the house before the others wake up.

VOCABULARY

Mulanje: town in Malawi

Kwacha: currency of Malawi

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Pre-reading:

- Sometimes people do things they know are wrong in order to survive or to protect their loved ones. Describe a situation when you did something you knew was wrong in order to protect someone you loved.
- Do you think you made a wise decision? Why or why not?

Post-reading:

- Junie has resorted to sex work with the customers of the bottle shop in order to make money. How do you think she feels about what she is doing?
- How do Aunt Agnes and Uncle Wysom think Binti and Junie got the money?
- Why don’t they believe Binti’s story that she earned the money on the radio show?
- What does Uncle Wysom do next? Why?
- Where do you think Junie will go to make money? Does she have many options? Why or why not?
- How does Binti get the money to travel to Mulanje? Do you agree with her actions? Why or why not?

Moral Dilemmas

In this chapter, Binti and Junie face several moral dilemmas. Look at the following actions and decide if and when you think they are ever justifiable. Compare your answers with those of your classmates.

	Never justifiable	Justifiable when...
Lying		
Cheating		
Stealing		
Prostitution		
Violence		
Murder		

Now, refer back to the text and find examples of these actions carried out by Binti and Junie. Indicate whether or not you think that these actions are justifiable considering the circumstances the sisters find themselves in. Compare your answers with those of your classmates.

	Binti	Junie	Circumstances	Justifiable?
Lying				
Cheating				
Stealing				
Prostitution				

Chapter 12

SYNOPSIS

Binti arrives in Mulanje and sets out to find her grandmother. She encounters a young man named Jeremiah who knows Gogo and promises to take her to find her grandmother. As they are walking, Jeremiah inquires about Junie. Now that she is safe, Binti becomes angry and tells Jeremiah that it is Gogo's fault that Noel broke off his engagement with Junie, and that their aunt and uncle treated them badly because she lied to everyone at Bambo's funeral and told them that he had AIDS. Jeremiah tells Binti that, in fact, he was with Gogo at the hospital when the doctor told them that Bambo had AIDS, and that there was a good chance that her mother had also had AIDS. Binti questions why Gogo had to tell everyone that her father had AIDS, and Jeremiah responds by telling her that lies hurt more than the truth.

Jeremiah tells Binti that Gogo is a very powerful woman in the area, and Binti begins to imagine that she may get to live in a big house with her own room and reclaim her life as a radio star. Jeremiah motions for Binti to sit on the supply box on the back of his bicycle for the journey to Gogo's house. Binti asks Jeremiah what supplies he has in the box, and he opens it to reveal condoms, brochures about HIV/AIDS, and blood-testing kits. He tells Binti he is a peer counsellor for HIV/AIDS. Jeremiah tells Binti that there is no cure for AIDS, although people in developed countries have access to anti-retroviral drugs, which can help them live longer. However, he says that these drugs are too expensive for most Malawians to afford. Jeremiah reveals to Binti that he himself is HIV-positive. At first, Binti is afraid to put her arms around Jeremiah's waist as they ride on the bicycle, because she recounts how her aunt and uncle always said, "Don't touch my children", and "Don't drink from our cups". However, Jeremiah feels as normal as anybody else, and Binti soon forgets he is HIV-positive.

When they reach Gogo's house, Binti is surprised, and disappointed, to find out that she lives in a very humble dwelling. Gogo warmly embraces Binti and welcomes her to her new home.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

Pre-reading:

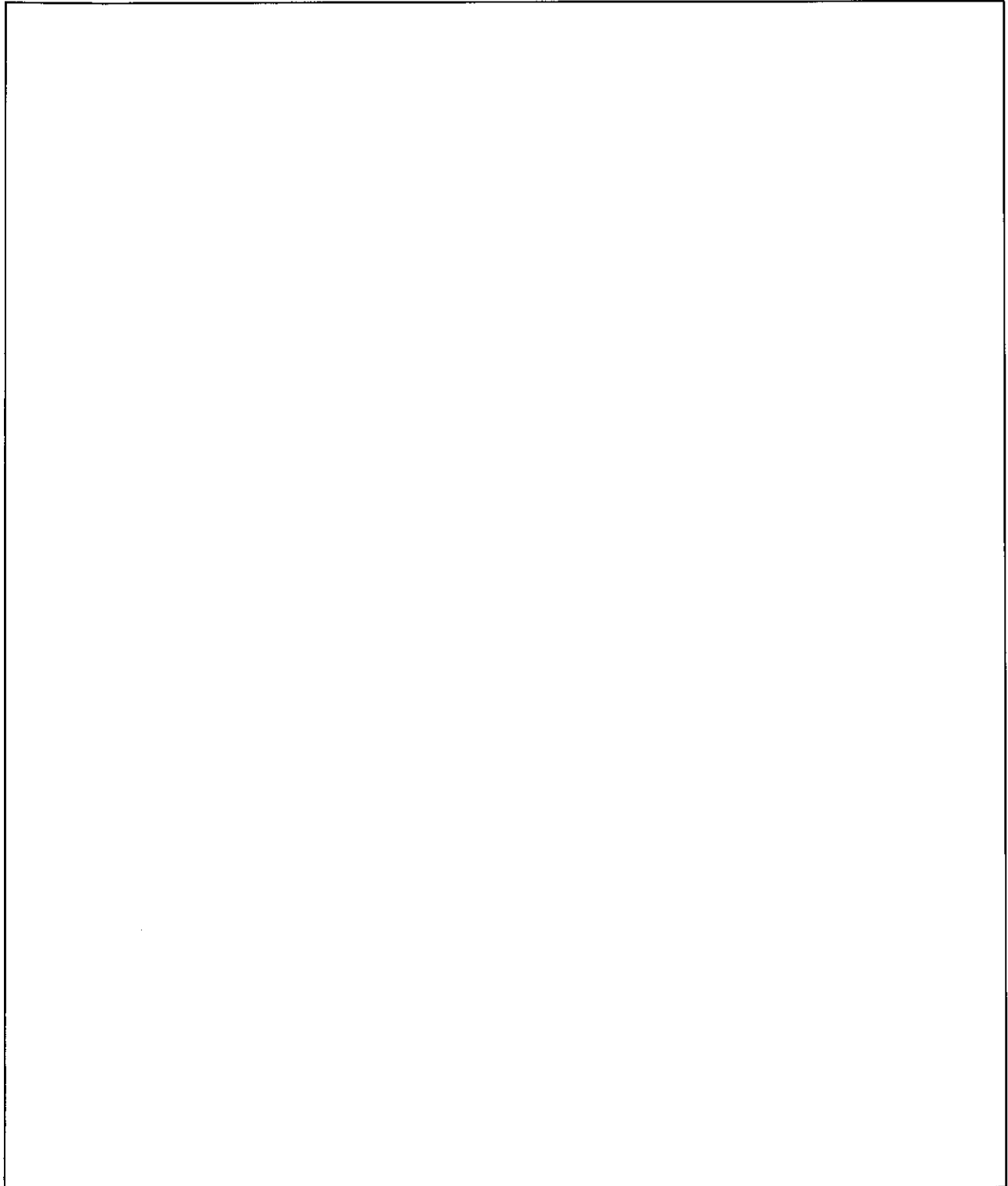
- Can you tell if someone is HIV-positive just by looking at them? What does a person look like who is infected with HIV?
- How old does a person have to be to be infected with HIV?

Post-reading:

- How does Binti find Gogo in Mulanje?
- Why is Binti angry with Gogo? Do you agree with Binti? Why or why not?
- What work does Jeremiah do?
- At first, Binti is afraid to touch Jeremiah. Why?
- Why does Binti soon forget that Jeremiah is HIV-positive?

HIV/AIDS: Peer Education Poster

Jeremiah is a peer counsellor for HIV/AIDS. Design a poster for young people about HIV/AIDS using the information Binti learns about HIV/AIDS from Jeremiah in this and previous chapters. Be prepared to explain your answers with evidence from the text.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the student to draw their poster. The box occupies most of the lower half of the page.

Chapter 13

SYNOPSIS

Binti tells Gogo everything that has happened. Binti is introduced to Memory, a “hard-faced” girl about Binti’s age who lives with Gogo, and they start off on the wrong foot. At first, Binti is worried that Gogo and Memory will try to take her possessions, as Aunt Agnes and Uncle Wysom had done. However, Gogo assures Binti that she can keep her possessions and do with them as she pleases. Twelve children live with Gogo in her small house. Binti feels indignant that she has to share her plate with four small children at the evening meal and sleep on a reed mat on the ground beside the other children. She wishes she were back in Blantyre, warm in a soft bed, beside her sister. At first, Binti attempts to ignore the plight of the other children beside her, but she eventually shares her blanket with them.

On the first morning at Gogo’s house, Binti awakens to find Memory standing over her ordering her to fetch water. Binti finds herself at a loss to perform daily tasks, such as eating with her hands, fetching water from the well, and bathing the children in cold water without soap. When Binti complains that she is hungry and asks why there is no food, Memory replies that it is because Bambo died. At first, Binti does not understand what Memory is referring to. Then she realizes that these are the cousins Bambo was always sending money to when he was alive.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

Pre-reading:

- What causes people to look down on other people?
- Have you ever looked down on anyone? Why?
- How do you feel when someone looks down on you? How do you react?

Post-reading:

- Describe Binti’s new environment at Gogo’s house.
- Compare Binti’s environment at Gogo’s house with her environment at Uncle Wysom’s house. How have her circumstances improved? How have they worsened?
- Describe the relationship between Binti and Memory. How does Binti feel about Memory? Why?
- How does Memory feel about Binti? Why?
- Why are conditions at Gogo’s house so poor?

On the Move

Since the beginning of the novel, Binti has lived in three different environments in Malawi. Use the chart below to compare Binti's environments in Blantyre (chapter 2), Lilongwe (chapter 9), and Mulanje (chapter 12). You will have to look back at previous chapters to complete this exercise. Be prepared to explain your answers with evidence from the text.

	Blantyre	Lilongwe	Mulanje
Natural environment (i.e., mountains, weather, etc.)			
Urban environment (i.e., streets, market, etc.)			
Presence of family and friends			
Satisfaction of needs (i.e., enough food, opportunity to go to school, etc.)			
Binti's feelings towards her environment			

Chapter 14

SYNOPSIS

Memory tells Binti that they have school two days a week. They used to have school every day, but the teachers kept dying, so now they only have one teacher who travels between schools. At first, Binti is worried about attending school because of the condition of her school uniform. Then she attends school for the first time and discovers that all the children wear their regular clothes to school. Students sit outside on rocks, and there are no books, notebooks, or pens for them to use. Binti is far ahead in English but behind in fractions.

Memory takes Binti to the Orphan Club after school, where she is able to eat nsima and beans. One of the boys at the club asks to borrow Binti's school blazer so he can wear it in a play. At first, Binti is reluctant to lend him her blazer, but she eventually agrees, as long as she is given a part in the play. The boy tells Binti that all the good parts in the play have been taken, so she will have to settle for a peripheral part – being one of the sisters. Binti feels uncomfortable about improvising the play as they go along, as she is used to performing with a script. She notices how easy it is for the other kids to improvise, and decides that maybe she can learn something from them.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Pre-reading:

- What is something you know how to do better than other people?
- How do you feel about being an expert in this area?

Post-reading:

- Describe the school in Mulanje.
- How is the school in Mulanje different from Binti's old school in Blantyre?
- What subject is Binti better at than the other students?
- What subject are the other students better at than Binti?
- Where does Memory take Binti after school?
- What do they do there?
- What is the one thing Binti has always been the most proud of?
- Why does Binti have difficulty acting in the play?
- Do you agree with the boy who says that anyone can act with a script? Does Binti agree with the boy? Why or why not?
- What does Binti learn through this experience?

An Outsider Tableau

In this chapter, Binti finds herself to be different from the other children in Mulanje and an outsider in her new environment. In small groups, write down the ways in which Binti differs from the other children in Mulanje. Then choose one scenario, create a tableau (frozen picture using body position, posture, and expression), and perform it for the class. When the teacher taps the shoulder of an individual in the tableau, that person speaks his or her character's thoughts out loud.

Scenario #1: _____

Character's thoughts and feelings: _____

Scenario #2: _____

Character's thoughts and feelings: _____

Scenario #3: _____

Character's thoughts and feelings: _____

Scenario #4: _____

Character's thoughts and feelings: _____

Chapter 15

SYNOPSIS

Binti slowly adjusts to her new environment at Gogo's house. Memory tells Binti that Gogo takes care of children when their mothers are too sick to do it. Binti assumes the baby always strapped to Memory's back will also go back to his mother some day. Gogo tells Binti that Memory was raped by her uncle's friend who had AIDS and believed he would be cured from the disease if he had sex with a virgin. Binti learns that Memory is HIV-positive and that the baby always strapped to her back is actually her daughter. At first, Binti can't look at Memory. Then Gogo affirms to Binti that Memory has no reason to be ashamed as she is a good girl and a good mother. A thousand questions run through Binti's mind, but in the end she only asks one – the name of Memory's daughter, which is Beauty.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Pre-reading:

- People often judge other people's actions. Think of a time when someone judged your actions. Do you think that person was fair to you? Why or why not?
- Think of a time when you judged someone else's actions. Do you think you were fair to that person? Why or why not?
- How does it feel to be judged?
- Why do we judge others?

Post-reading:

- Memory has a secret. What is it?
- How does Binti first react to Memory's secret?
- What helps Binti to change her mind about Memory?
- How did Memory get her name?
- Do you agree with Gogo's advice to Memory? Why or why not?
- Why do you think Memory called her daughter Beauty?

Inner Thoughts

Sometimes what people say is different from what they are actually thinking. The dialogue below, on the left, is what Binti and Memory actually say to one another. In the space on the right, write what you think each character is actually thinking as they speak. Be prepared to explain your answers with evidence from the text.

What each character says...	What each character is thinking...
Binti: “So they’re not all real cousins, then.”	
Memory: “Are any of these children not good enough to be your cousin?”	
Binti: “When does he go back to his mother?”	
Memory: “The baby is a <i>she</i>. You didn’t even know that. You don’t even know her name.”	
Memory: “This is my daughter. Gogo said I should tell you. She said you needed to know, but I don’t care if you know or not.”	
Binti: “What’s her name?”	

Chapter 16

SYNOPSIS

Jeremiah visits Gogo's house during his rounds of peer counselling and checks in on Binti to see how she is coping in her new environment. Although Binti had more food and was warmer and cleaner at Uncle Wysom's house, she is now living with her grandmother, who loves her, and working for people she cares about. Jeremiah is unable to help provide Gogo's household with the material things they need, but he says he might be able to help Binti locate Kwasi and Junie because he is connected to HIV/AIDS support groups around the country. Binti asks Jeremiah whether Memory and Beauty have AIDS. Jeremiah says that they are both HIV-positive and that Beauty may have contracted the virus when she was born or from Memory's breast milk. For the first time, Binti asks what she can do to help Memory and Beauty. Jeremiah responds by telling Binti that she can be their family, and let them be her family.

The next day, Jeremiah does a presentation on AIDS at the Orphan Club, and Binti and the other children put on a play afterwards. This time, the children loosely follow Binti's script, as she plays Gogo. Now Binti doesn't mind them improvising their lines. One evening, the neighbours bring a wind-up radio over to Gogo's house, and everyone listens to "Gogo's Family". Binti becomes emotional when she hears her voice on the radio and recalls her days as a radio star. The following week, as everyone gathers to listen to the radio, Binti hears another girl playing the part of Kettie on "Gogo's Family." Binti feels herself slipping away. She has lost her mother, her father, her home, her school, her brother, and her sister. Now she has lost her radio spot, which was the only thing that made her feel special. Gogo tells Binti that the best way to feel better is to help others, so Binti works with her neighbours to turn some of her clothes into clothes for the younger children. One day at the Orphan Club, Jeremiah tells Binti that he has located her brother Kwasi – and Kwasi is in jail.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Pre-reading:

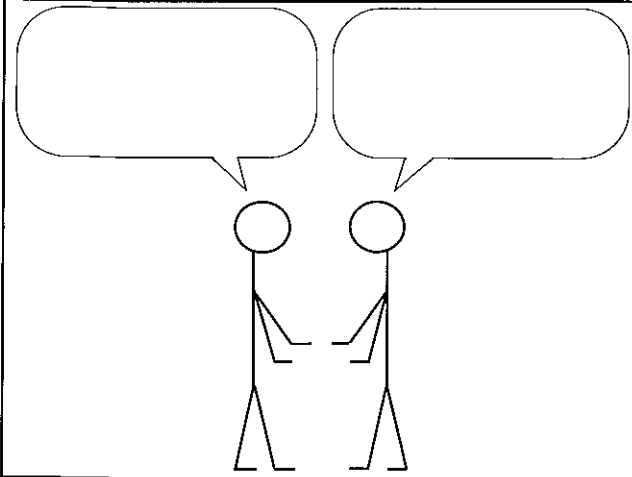
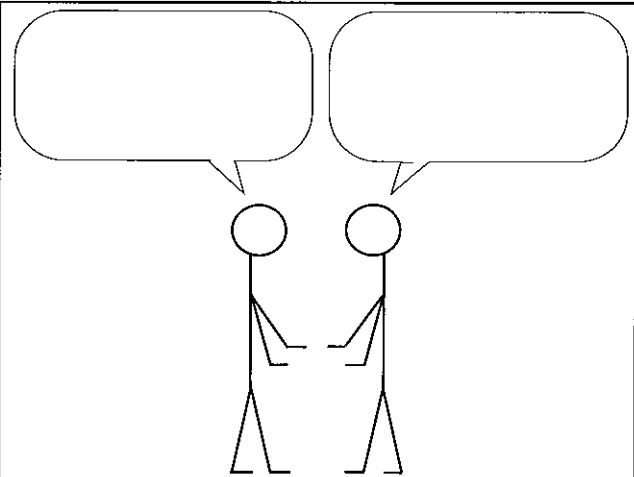
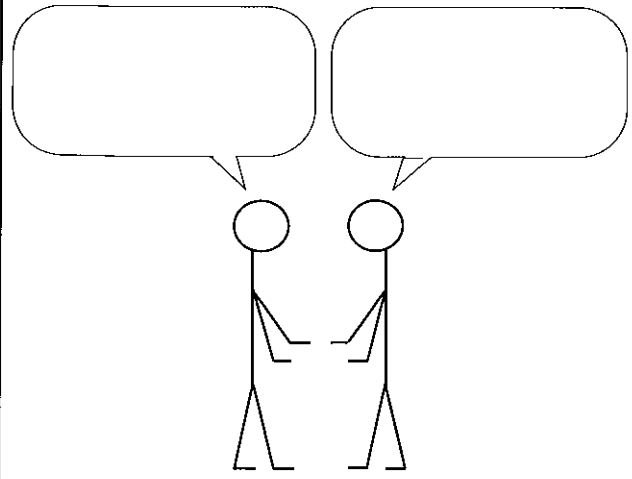
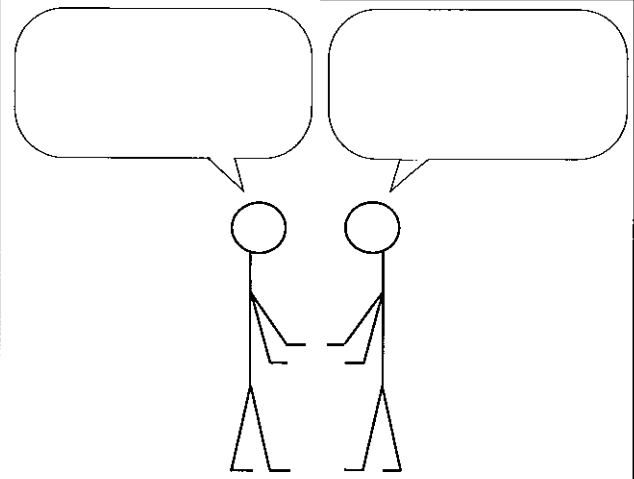
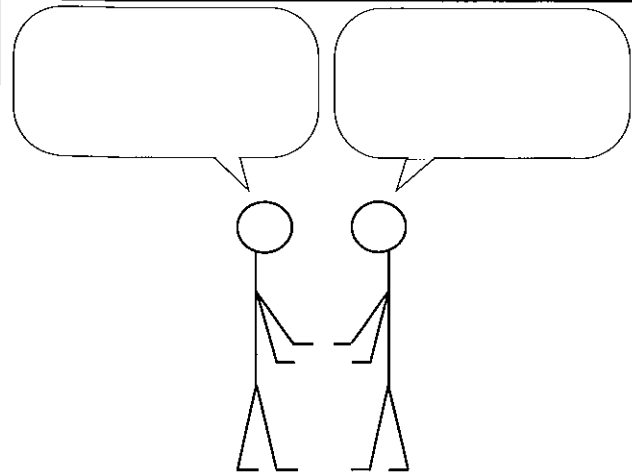
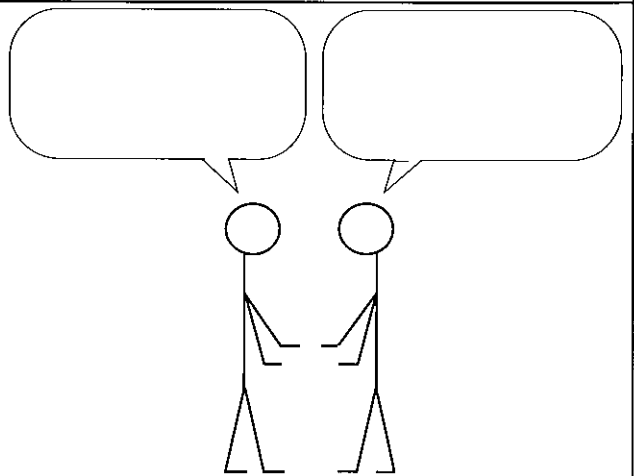
- People react in different ways when they are sad or unhappy. How do you react when you feel this way?
- Do you think your reaction is helpful or unhelpful? Why?

Post-reading:

- How did Beauty contract the HIV virus?
- According to Jeremiah, what usually happens to babies who contract the HIV virus?
- Binti is changing. In what ways has Binti changed since the beginning of the novel? Why has she changed?
- How does Binti feel when she hears her voice on the radio?
- How does she feel when she hears another girl playing the role of Kettie?
- Why does Binti feel she is "slipping away" (p. 144)?
- What does Gogo advise Binti to do to feel better? Do you think this is good advice? Why or why not?
- Why do you think Kwasi is in jail?

HIV/AIDS: Role-Play

In this chapter, Binti learns how to act by improvising and creating her own dialogue. Write a dialogue for two or three characters (a TV interview, a discussion between friends, etc.) about what you have learned about HIV/AIDS so far. Be prepared to explain your answers with evidence from the text.

Chapter 17

SYNOPSIS

After about a week, Jeremiah is able to arrange permission for Binti to visit the prison where Kwasi is being held. Binti learns that Kwasi is being held on charges of theft. Kwasi explains that the relatives he was staying with had food but refused to share it with him. The social worker informs Binti and Jeremiah that they can take Kwasi home if they can get his uncle to drop the charges against him. Kwasi describes his environment in prison, and Binti vows to visit him and bring him more food, even though she has no idea how she will get the money to do either of these things.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Pre-reading:

- Describe a time when you were forced to make a morally difficult decision (i.e., to cheat on a test or to fail).
- What thoughts ran through your mind as you contemplated this decision?
- How did you feel about the decision you made? Why?

Post-reading:

- Why is Kwasi being held in prison?
- Do you think he has committed a crime? Why or why not?
- Describe the conditions of the prison where Kwasi is being held. Compare and contrast these conditions with what you know of prisons in Canada.
- On what condition can Kwasi be released from prison?
- Why will it be difficult for Binti to visit Kwasi again or bring him food?

Internal Dialogue: Corridor of Voices

Binti, Kwasi, and Junie have been put in the position where each of them has had to make morally difficult choices. Choose one character and write down a situation in which she or he has had to make a tough choice (i.e., to steal or not to steal). Next, write down the character's thoughts and feelings as she or he contemplated the decision. Be prepared to explain your answers with evidence from the text.

As a class, divide into two lines and face each other to form a long corridor. One student plays the role of the character and slowly walks through the corridor. As the character passes the other students, they voice possible emotions, reactions, and thoughts experienced by the character. The result is a collage of comments called out spontaneously but separately as the character slowly walks through the corridor.

Difficult decision:

Character's thoughts and feelings:



Chapter 18

SYNOPSIS

Gogo sets off to Monkey Bay to convince her son to drop the charges against Kwasi. While she is gone, Memory confronts Binti about the fact that she behaves as if she were somehow special and only stuck with them in Mulanje by accident. Binti responds to Memory by telling her that she doesn't understand how it feels to lose something she once had. Binti acknowledges that Memory is right when she replies that Binti should be grateful that she once had the opportunity to be a radio star. Binti gets her menses for the first time, and Memory gives her cloths made from her mother's dress. Binti recognizes the sacrifice Memory has made and, in return, she gives Memory her school prefect pin, the most valuable thing she has left.

Gogo returns to Mulanje with Kwasi. Bit by bit, Kwasi regains his strength, and on days when the Orphan Club doesn't meet and there is no school, he hikes to Mulanje to look for work. Noticing that Kwasi misses drawing, Binti gives him her script to draw on, and Kwasi crafts a pencil from a piece of charred wood.

Jeremiah continues his search for Junie. Kwasi tells Binti that Jeremiah is in love with Junie. At first, Binti is worried about this because Jeremiah is HIV-positive. Kwasi tells her that HIV affects the blood and not the heart. At this, Kwasi gazes in the direction of Memory.

One of the toddlers at Gogo's house dies. Gogo says he died of a broken heart because he missed his mother, who died the week before. Binti and Kwasi fashion a simple coffin for the toddler out of reeds and sticks. With no money for a proper funeral, the boy is buried beside his mother in an informal graveyard among the trees.

Gogo is growing increasingly tired and is resting more and more.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Pre-reading:

- We often hear the word "love" when we listen to songs on the radio. What kinds of love are there (filial, platonic, romantic, etc.)?
- Practically, what does it mean to love someone?

Post-reading:

- What does Binti learn from Memory about being special?
- In this chapter, Binti begins to think of others before herself. How does Binti show love to Memory? How does Binti show love to Kwasi?
- Kwasi says that HIV affects the blood and not the heart. What does he mean by this?
- Who is Jeremiah in love with? How do you know?
- Who is Kwasi in love with? How do you know?
- Why does one of the toddlers die even though he was not that sick?
- How is he buried?
- Is the toddler's death formally recorded by the government? What does this tell you about the accuracy of mortality statistics in the developing world?

Love Poem

In this chapter, Binti looks beyond herself and learns the meaning of love from Memory, Kwasi, Jeremiah, and the toddler who dies. Complete the following poem with the lessons Binti learns about love from those around her. Be prepared to give evidence from the text.

Love

Love is.....

Love is.....

Love is.....

Love is.....

Love is.....

Love is.....

Love is.....

Love is.....

Love is.....

Love is.....



Chapter 19

SYNOPSIS

Binti, Kwasi, and Memory start a coffin business called Heaven Shop Coffins to give babies who have died in the community a better resting place. Some neighbours pay for their coffins in cash, while others pay in food. At Memory's urging, the children decide to purchase lumber and tools with the money they have earned from selling coffins. Kwasi and Memory go off to town to buy building supplies, while Binti stays at home to care for Beauty and the other young children. When Kwasi and Memory return with the supplies, they discover that Gogo has died in her sleep. The children make Gogo a coffin as best they can. Jeremiah tells them that Gogo made out a will before she died leaving her few possessions to the children and protecting them from greedy relatives. Everyone in the community mourns Gogo's death, as she was highly respected and loved by all.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Pre-reading:

- What would you like people to remember about you when you die? Why?
- What things are really important in life?

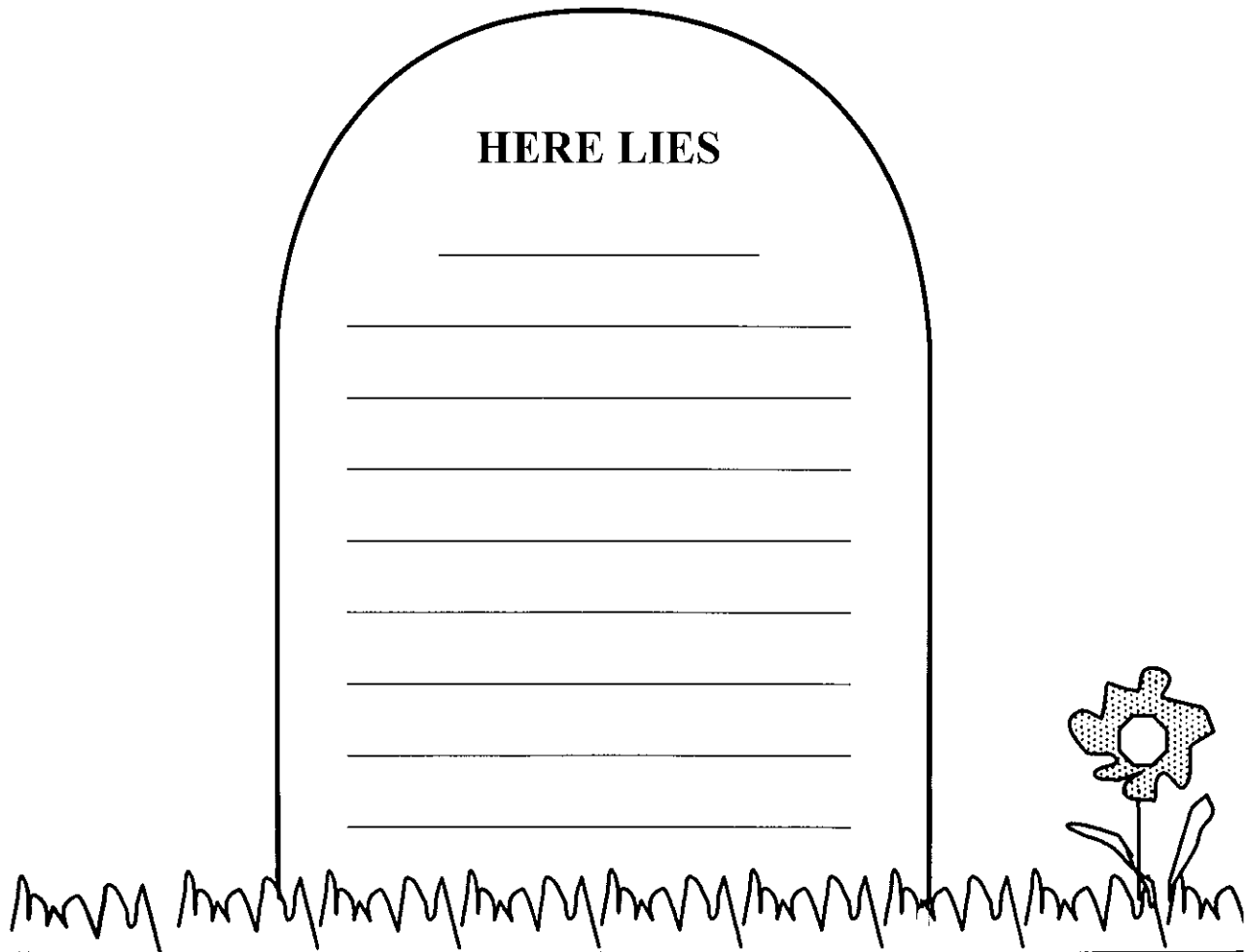
Post-reading:

- What name do the children give to their new coffin business? Why?
- What did Gogo do before she died to protect the children?
- What was Gogo remembered for after she died?

Rest in Peace: Character Epitaph

In this chapter, everyone mourns the death of Gogo. Write an epitaph for Gogo, describing her life and contributions to society. Be prepared to explain your answers with evidence from the text.

Now, think about what you would like to be remembered for when you die and write an epitaph about your life. Share your ideas with your classmates.



Chapter 20

SYNOPSIS

The Heaven Shop Coffin business grows slowly, providing the children with enough money to feed themselves on days when the Orphan Club doesn't meet. Kwasi talks with customers and draws sketches of the products to be made, Binti does most of the building, and Memory secures lumber and other building materials from suppliers. Working hard helps the children deal with their grief over Gogo's death.

Jeremiah comes to announce that he has found Junie, who is working in the sex trade in a town called Muloza on the border with Mozambique. At first, Kwasi can't believe the news that Jeremiah has brought them. Binti explains to him that Junie "got lost" along the way, and that she herself also "slipped away" when she lost her identity as a radio star. After some reflection, Kwasi realizes that it had also happened to him when he was taken to Monkey Bay and put in prison. Memory recounts how it happened to her when she was abused by her uncle's friend. Jeremiah adds that he lost himself when he was informed that he was HIV-positive. However, he says that meeting other HIV-positive people, who weren't sick and who were living positively, helped him to find himself again.

Jeremiah reveals that Junie is also HIV-positive, and that she is not sure whether Binti and Kwasi will accept her back in this condition. Kwasi and Binti want to see Junie, regardless of her condition, and they make their way to Muloza where Junie is staying. When they encounter Junie, Kwasi immediately rushes over to embrace her. Binti, on the other hand, bursts into tears and asks Junie why she left her alone that night at the house of Uncle Wysom and Aunt Agnes. Junie explains that she thought it was the best thing to do at the time. After exchanging important news, Kwasi, Binti, and Jeremiah take Junie back to Gogo's house at Mulanje. For the trip home, Junie changes into her old school uniform, which she has repaired and cleaned.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Pre-reading:

- What often happens to people when they lose all control over their lives (drug abuse, crime, etc.)?
- How do these people usually feel about themselves?

Post-reading:

- What news does Jeremiah bring to Kwasi and Binti?
- How does Kwasi react to the news? Why?
- Binti tells Kwasi that Junie "got lost" along the way. What does she mean by this?
- Binti, Kwasi, Memory, and Jeremiah all say they "slipped away". What caused each one of them to slip away?
- Why does Junie think Binti and Kwasi might not want her back?
- How does Kwasi respond when he first sees Junie?
- How does Binti respond when she first sees Junie? Why?
- How does Junie show that she has found herself again?

Then and Now

Binti's priorities and values have changed significantly since the beginning of the novel. Rank (from 1 to 10) the priorities and values held by Binti at the beginning of the novel (worksheet 5) and contrast them with the priorities and values she holds now. Be prepared to explain your answers with evidence from the text.

Now, think about how your own priorities and values have changed since you were in elementary school. Rank (from 1 to 10) the priorities and values you held in elementary school and contrast them with the priorities and values you hold now.

	Binti Then	Binti Now
Family	_____	_____
Public image	_____	_____
Personal accomplishments	_____	_____
Well-being of others	_____	_____
Personal goals and dreams	_____	_____
Friends	_____	_____
Health	_____	_____
Money	_____	_____
Material possessions	_____	_____
Status in the community	_____	_____

Chapter 21

SYNOPSIS

The group arrives back in Mulanje, and Junie is introduced to Memory and the rest of the children at Gogo's house. Junie tells them that she has been collecting things for a long while in order to pay them a surprise visit at Christmas time. Among the gifts are balls for the younger children, paper and coloured pencils for Kwasi, a new piece of chintje cloth for Memory, and a book of plays and a copy of *Youth Times* for Binti. As Binti looks at the old photo of herself reading her script in front of the microphone, she feels embarrassed at how she used to strut about town showing off to others. She now has other things to be proud of, like standing up to Aunt Agnes, learning how to carry water and cook nsima, taking care of the small children who depend on her, and learning to act without a script. After reflecting on life, Binti gets up from the ground, dusts herself off, and sets out to fetch water and prepare the evening meal.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Pre-reading:

- Think about yourself two years ago. In what ways have you changed?
- Do you think these changes have been for better or worse? Why?

Post-reading:

- What gifts does Junie bring each of the children?
- How does Binti react when she sees the photo of herself in the *Youth Times*? Why?
- What has Binti learned about herself?
- What has Binti learned about love?
- What has Binti learned about life?
- What do you think will happen to each of the main characters (Binti, Junie, Kwasi, Memory, and Jeremiah)?

Facts About Orphans and Families Affected by HIV/AIDS

Globally, 14 million children under the age of 15 have lost one or both parents to AIDS. By 2010, this number is expected to exceed 25 million. Without urgent collective action, millions more children will face enormous risks in their struggle to stay alive.

THE FACTS

One of the most devastating aspects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic is the growing number of children the disease has orphaned. Unlike most diseases, HIV/AIDS generally kills not just one but both parents. What is more, the stigma and discrimination that people affected with HIV often live with are passed onto their children, making their fight for survival that much more precarious.

When parents or caregivers fall sick and die, a child's life often falls apart. With HIV and AIDS, the hardship hits well before children are orphaned. First, a parent or caregiver becomes ill and is unable to work. The entire family feels the economic impact. Children, especially girls, often must drop out of school to go to work, care for their parents, look after their siblings, and put food on the table.

On top of the psychological impact of losing parents, children who lose their parents to AIDS are often stigmatized or ostracized by their communities. These children are much more at risk of becoming a victim of violence, exploitative child labour, discrimination, or other abuses. Surviving children face malnutrition, illness, physical and psychosocial trauma, and impaired cognitive and emotional development. Unaccompanied girls are at especially high risk of sexual abuse. And because of all this, they, too, are very likely to become HIV-positive.

In Zambia, a study by the International Labour Organisation in several districts shows the majority of children in the sex trade are orphans, as are the majority of street children.

In Ethiopia, the majority of child domestic workers in the capital city Addis Ababa are orphans.

In Uganda, focus-group discussions revealed that girls who were orphaned by AIDS were especially vulnerable to sexual abuse because of the stigma attached to their orphaned status.

Studies from numerous regions have shown that orphaned children have substantially lower levels of education than children who are not orphaned.

Across sub-Saharan Africa, where the HIV/AIDS epidemic is most severe, the extended family traditionally stepped in to take care of children who had lost their caregivers. But this traditional safety net is collapsing under the weight of the HIV/AIDS crisis. More and more orphans are heading up their own households. In Swaziland, as many as one in ten households is run by orphans. Many more orphans are ending up on the street. In 12 African countries, it is expected that, by 2010, orphans will make up 15 per cent of all children under the age of 15.

THE CHALLENGE

With global infection rates still rising, HIV/AIDS will continue to cause unprecedented suffering among children for at least the next two decades, if not longer. It takes roughly ten years between HIV infection and death from AIDS, so today's prevalence levels will largely determine the number of orphans over the next decade. Because of the lag time between infection and death, the numbers of orphans will continue to increase even in countries where HIV infection rates are declining.

UNICEF'S ROLE

Building effective partnerships

UNICEF is working with governments to help them create national policies, laws, and action plans to meet the goals they have committed to. UNICEF is collaborating with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and UN partners to help communities strengthen the traditional safety nets to care for, support, and protect children orphaned or made vulnerable by the disease. In Southeast Asia, for example, UNICEF has teamed up with Buddhist monks across the Mekong region to break the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS and to improve care for children orphaned by the disease. UNICEF supports a church-based organization in Zambia called Chikankata Health Services, which assists hundreds of children who have lost their parents to AIDS by raising money to pay their school fees and for medical care. Hundreds of similar organizations around the world receive UNICEF support.

Helping parents live longer

An obvious way to prevent children from becoming orphaned is to help their parents live longer. UNICEF is part of an international effort to give people living with HIV/AIDS expanded access to treatment with anti-retroviral drugs, which can slow or halt the immune suppression caused by HIV. If parents can maintain their health, they are better able to care for their children. Although UNICEF does not have the resources to purchase the drugs, it is directly lobbying drug companies to reduce their prices or donate their drugs, and helping governments strengthen their health care systems so that the drugs may be administered successfully. UNICEF also promotes and supports strengthening health care systems to provide drugs for the treatment of opportunistic infections (i.e., tuberculosis, pneumonia, thrush, etc.), which often become fatal for people living with AIDS.

Supporting communities

UNICEF believes that, whenever possible, children who are orphaned should remain in their communities to be raised by their extended families because family care is far better for children and far less costly than institutionalized care. Children who grow up in families develop better social skills and are psychologically better adjusted than those who grow up in institutions because they receive more affection and attention and develop a better sense of personal identity.

This is why UNICEF is working with NGOs and community groups to help ensure that families have the resources they need to care adequately for orphaned children. This support ranges from providing psychological counselling and helping parents with succession planning to job training, paying school fees, and providing basic health care.

In Uganda, for example, UNICEF supports the Uganda Women's Effort to Save Orphans (UWESO), which helps communities start income-generating projects, such as bee keeping or sustainable farming. It also provides micro-credit to help women start small businesses.

Finally, UNICEF helps ensure that communities maintain regular contact with orphaned children heading households to make sure that they have adequate nutrition, are in school, and are safe from exploitation and abuse.

How you can help

For information on how you and your students can participate in UNICEF's global campaign to stop HIV/AIDS, log on to www.unicef.ca or contact your nearest UNICEF office for details.

About the Author

Deborah Ellis was born in Northern Ontario but grew up farther south in Paris, Ontario, Canada. Like many writers through history, she was a creative loner as a child, at odds with formal education in her youth, and a voracious reader at all times. As an adult, Deborah has been occupied with many issues of interest to women, such as peace, education, and equality in society, at home and abroad. She also travels whenever she can, listening to people's stories, especially the stories children tell about their lives. Deborah's books include *Looking for X*, *The Breadwinner*, *Parvana's Journey*, and *A Company of Fools*. These works have garnered her literary awards — including the Governor General's Award in 2000 for *The Breadwinner*.

Deborah works at a group home for women in Toronto, Ontario, reading and writing in her spare time.