

WAR BROTHERS The Graphic Novel

by Sharon E. McKay and Daniel Lafrance • Lesson Plan prepared by Marla Conn, MS Ed.

Genre: Fiction

Themes: War; death/loss; Africa; violence; friends; family; global studies; current events; multicultural; memoir; child soldiers; graphic novel

Suitable for: Grades 9+

Summary

Jacob, a 14-year-old Ugandan boy, along with several school friends, is brutally abducted and forced to become a child soldier in the Lord's Resistance Army, a militant movement led by the notorious warlord, Joseph Kony. Under the threat of death, Jacob and the others must commit unspeakable acts of violence. It is all he can do to hold on to his sanity and his will to escape.

The author spent time in Uganda and based this story on real-life accounts of the horrors inflicted on child soldiers and their victims. Readers will be drawn along by the fast-paced action of the artwork, but also deeply affected by the experiences of such a young boy struggling for his life, unsure who to trust, afraid of succumbing to the madness, and above all desperate to get to freedom.

Common Core standards are noted throughout.

THEME

1. Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details. **RL.9-10.2**
2. Why is it important to reflect on the theme of a piece of literature? **RL.9-10.2**
3. Determine two or more themes from the story. **RL.9-10.2**
4. How is the theme shaped or developed over the course of the text? **RL.9-10.2**
5. How is a summary different from a re-telling of a story?
6. Summarize *War Brothers: The Graphic Novel*. Create an audio recording. **RL.9-10.2**

STORY ELEMENTS

1. What feelings are evoked from the setting of the story?
2. Analyze how complex characters develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme. **RL.9-10.3**
3. How does Sharon McKay build characterization in *War Brothers: The Graphic Novel* to enhance the reader's understanding of the characters' personalities? **RL.9-10.3**
4. What kinds of people are the main characters? Think about their beliefs, hopes, dreams, ideals, fears, morals, strengths, weaknesses, virtues, and talents. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly, as well as inferences drawn from the text. **RL.9-10.1,3**
5. What are your opinions of them? Would you choose them as friends? Give reasons why or why not. **RL.9-10.3**
6. Explain how the main characters' actions contribute to the sequence of events.
7. How is the theme reflected through the characters' behavior? Setting? **RL.9-10.2,3**

VOCABULARY ACQUISITION

1. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone). **RL.9-10.4**
2. Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings. **L.9-10.5**
3. Interpret figures of speech (e.g., euphemism, oxymoron) in context and analyze their role in the text. **L.9-10.5.a**
4. What kinds of comparisons are made that add layers to the meaning of the story?
5. Struggling after his horrific experiences, Jacob asks himself, "Are we all beasts? Is this our nature?" What does this mean to you? **L.9-10.5/R.9-10.1**

6. Oteka says to Jacob, “The lion is a mighty beast, he hunts with nobility. But when he is old and cast out of his pride, he too will kill to survive. We are no different. We can choose. That is God’s gift.” What does Oteka mean by these words? Do you agree? **L.9-10.5/R.9-10.1**

AUTHOR’S CRAFT

1. Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it, and manipulate time create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise. **RL.9-10.5**
2. Determine the author’s purpose, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, and beauty of the text. **RL.9-10.5**
3. Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different media (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account. Compare and contrast *War Brothers: The Novel* with the graphic novel and how each medium influences the story. **RI.9-10.7**
4. How does the illustrator integrate visual information into the text? What is the overall effect the illustrator wishes to create? **RI.9-10.7**
5. How does the illustrator use color to create mood and tone? **RL.9-10.5**

POINT OF VIEW

1. How does identifying the author’s purpose help to understand the text?
2. Determine the author’s purpose, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, and beauty of the text.
3. What is the author’s attitude towards what she is writing and how is it reflected in the tone of the story? What is the feeling of the whole work and writer’s craft? **RL.9-10.6,7**
4. How did the book affect you personally? How does the subject matter influence your point of view? Why? **RL.9-10.6**
5. Research Sharon McKay. How does the author’s historical background influence her writing?
6. Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States or Canada. **RL.9-10.6**

FURTHER RESEARCH AND EXPLORATION

1. What is the LRA fighting for? Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation. **W.9-10.7,8**
2. Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation. **W.9-10.8**
3. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. **W.9-10.9**
4. Research Joseph Kony. Compare the information gathered about the leader of this violent rebel group with his portrayal in *War Brothers*. Is it an accurate depiction? Draw evidence from *War Brothers* as well as other sources to support analysis, reflection, and research. **W.9-10.7,8,9**

DISCUSSION

1. How do people persevere to overcome obstacles along a journey? Discuss obstacles the characters faced in the story and how they survived. Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions. **SL.9-10.1c,1d,2**
2. Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement; make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented. Research Adrian Bradbury and his fight for the abandoned children of northern Uganda (www.guluwalk.com). Discuss: How much of a difference can one person make in such a huge cause? Do you think it matters?
3. Make connections to the letter Jacob writes to the reader in the beginning of the book to actual historical events. Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source. **SL.9-10.1c,1d,2/W.9-10.9**

War Brothers. The Graphic Novel. By Sharon E. McKay Illustrated by Daniel Lafrance. Paperback \$18.95. This graphic novel is based on the acclaimed novel of the same title, winner of a 2009 Arthur Ellis award. The author spent time in Uganda and based this story on real-life accounts of the horrors inflicted on child soldiers and their victims. This is a story of unthinkable violence, but also one of hope, courage, friendship, and family. War Brothers is based on McKay's exhaustive research and extensive interviews with former child soldiers, and the verisimilitude she brings to her characterization and storytelling renders the abstract concept of child soldiers with an all-too-real clarity. Lafrance's art adds another layer, transitioning from crisp naturalism to stylized shadows and colours as panic and violence rise in the characters. WAR BROTHERS: THE GRAPHIC NOVEL (Annick Press, 2013) Written by Sharon E. McKay and illustrated by Daniel Lafrance Grades 6-12. Unfortunately, the plight of child soldiers—the focus of WAR BROTHERS: THE GRAPHIC NOVEL by Sharon E. McKay and Daniel Lafrance—has become a topic that we are all too familiar with, especially after the KONY 2012 campaign, which sought to bring attention to the issue. WAR BROTHERS: THE GRAPHIC NOVEL is based upon McKay's 2008 novel of the same title. The story features Jacob and his school friends and their experiences, after being kidnapped from school, of serving as child soldiers in the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda.