

# **Bamboo People Study Guide**

## **Bamboo People by Mitali Perkins**

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## Plot Summary

"Bamboo People" by Mitali Perkins is the story of two teenage boys who are on opposing sides of the unrest between the government of Burma and the tribal people in remote areas of the country. As the story opens, Chiko, a fifteen-year-old Burmese boy who lives in Yangon, Burma, with his mother, is sitting outside reading the newspaper. He is excited about an opportunity that he reads about. The government is holding interviews for teaching positions. He can read and write both Burmese and English, has tutored students, and was home-schooled by his physician father, Joon. He is sure that he is qualified for the role.

Just when Chiko is about to tell his mother, Wei-Lin, about the job openings, she scolds him for being outside and reading out in the open where a government agent or the police could see him. He hurries inside and hides the book in a safe that his father built. His mother's warning makes Chiko sad because it calls to mind the reality of his family's current status. The police arrested Joon four months before. They had caught him leaving his house at night to treat a sick man who was a member of the resistance. Chiko and Wei-Lin have no idea if Joon is still alive or dead. On the advice of Daw Widow, a family friend, Chiko decides to apply for one of the teaching positions. Before he leaves Daw Widow gives Chiko photos of his father and of her daughter, Lei, who Chiko is smitten with.

The "job opening" ad was a ruse and used to lure young men as recruits for the Army. Chiko and other young men standing in line to apply for a job were apprehended and taken to a Army recruitment camp. The camp was more like a prison than a military training camp. Chiko made a good friend of Tai, a fifteen-year-old orphan who lived on the streets of Yangon with his younger sister. The two young boys are beaten and punished during their time there. Chiko looks at the photos Daw Widow gave him to find comfort and see him through his ordeal. Chiko volunteers to go on a mission in the dense jungle surrounding the camp. Chiko and four other Burmese soldiers are the victims from the blast of a land mine.

Tu Reh, a sixteen-year-old Karenni boy, is on his first mission in the jungle. The Karenni tribe lives in remote areas of Burma and are considered dissidents and rebels by the Burmese government who wants to eliminate them and take over their land. Tu Reh and the other members of his unit stop in their tracks when they hear a terrible explosion. Tu Reh and his father, Peh, who is leading the mission, explore the area and find four dead Burmese soldiers and one soldier who is badly injured - a bone is sticking out of his mangled leg.

Peh has always taught his son not to kill another human being unless there is no other choice. He gives his son the task of deciding what to do with the boy. Tu Reh, like most Karennis, hate Burmese soldiers. They burned his house and village down. But as he gazes upon the injured young boy who looks younger than he, Tu Reh decides to take him to a healer. The healer tends to him but decides he must be taken to the Karenni camp where a physician can amputate the leg if it becomes infected. At great risk to



themselves, Tu Reh, the healer and her family, rig a stretcher and take him through the jungle to the camp.

Although Tu Reh had only revenge in his heart for Burmese soldiers, he decided that a young boy's life transcended politics and war. He was harshly criticized by other tribe members but in the end he knew he did the right thing. Tu Reh and Chiko grew close over the days during Chiko's ordeal. After Chiko recovered enough to leave the camp, the two bonded and before leaving to go their separate ways, had both expressed the hope to meet again some day. In fact, Chiko's said his last words to Tu Reh in Karenni: "Goodbye, brother."



# Chapters 1 through 4 of Part I

## Chapters 1 through 4 of Part I Summary

In Chapter 1, Chiko is outside in the backyard. A tall fence makes it feel safe and private. He reads about government teaching positions that are available. His mother, Wei-Lin, calls to him to come inside. He could be spotted with that book. He wraps the newspaper around "A Tale of Two Cities" and goes inside. He tries to tell his mother about the teaching positions but she is not of a mind to listen. She is worried about his safety. Chiko is tired of hiding and worrying and remembering when the soldiers took his father away.

Chiko hurries inside and pulls on the large painting of a white elephant on the wall. Behind it is a cabinet where his father stored all his medical books, the Christian Bible, an Oxford dictionary, all his medical books, some Burmese books, the complete works of Shakespeare and other books. Chiko is one of the only boys in town who can read and write Burmese and English. He studied at home under his father's tutelage. The schools are often closed down and it's hard to learn. His father liked to teach him about biology and about the mysteries of the human body. Chiko liked adventure stories the best.

But that all changed when he was taken away almost four months ago. He shouted to Chiko to take care of his mother. Neither Chiko nor his mother will dare as the question out loud: Is he still alive?

In Chapter 2, Daw Widow is coming for tea. She's an older neighbor and Wei-Lin treats her respectfully, addressing her as older sister. She has posted a reward for information about Chiko's father. He was arrested when he was caught sneaking out of the house at night to treat a patient who was an "enemy of the state," a political leader. Even though they don't know if he's alive, the government requires the family to send money for his upkeep. Chiko tells his mother that the government is hiring teachers and he wants to apply. His mother tells him he can't go. Young men are missing all the time. He must stay inside where it's safer.

Besides, they need money. They are almost broke and his mother is getting thinner by the day. She gives him all the meat to Chiko and she does without. She suggests he join the temple. The soldiers don't bother the monks. He can't leave his mother. He promised his father to take care of her. Someone knocks on the door and they both jump.

In Chapter 3, it is Daw Widow and Lei at the door. Daw Widow immediately complains that she saw Chiko reading outside! Chiko tells them that he wants to teach. Lei asks if he could teach her later that day. He doesn't come over to give her lessons much any more because of the risk. Daw Widow had asked him to teach Lei to read and write. Chiko and Lei grew up together. She was like a little sister to him. One day he was



suddenly struck by her beautiful eyes and glowing skin like he was looking at her for the first time. Daw Widow tells Wei-Lin that she should let Chiko take the teaching test.

In Chapter 4, Chiko and Wei-Lin are both surprised that Daw Widow supports Chiko applying for the teaching position. Daw Widow tells Wei-Lin she will take care of her while Chiko is gone. Daw Widow says that Chiko is not safe inside the house. She heard at the market that because Chiko hadn't registered for the army, they will be coming to get him, make him fight or put him in prison. Applying to be a teacher may save him from that. Daw Widow tells him he must face the future whatever it is. Chiko longs for the old days when his father was there.

Daw Widow brought two miniature photos of Chiko's father mounted on cardboard. It was his college graduation photo. Chiko and Wei-Lin both have the same hope as they gaze at the photo - that is still alive. Daw Widow tells Chiko to hurry and catch a rickshaw so he's not late for the interview. Everyone wants a brave son-in-law. Chiko is embarrassed. Apparently he hasn't been able to hide his feelings for Lei from Daw Widow. Chiko promises to have lessons with Lei on the next day. She calls him "Ko" which stands for brother but also it is what girls call their sweethearts.

## Chapters 1 through 4 of Part I Analysis

In Chapter 1, the story starts off with full-throated intrigue and terror. Chiko and his mother are living in fear after the arrest of his father for reasons unknown at this point. The oppressiveness of the Burmese government is symbolized by Chiko's father's hidden books. Seemingly harmless books such as the works of Shakespeare and the Oxford Dictionary are obviously banned by the government. It appears that the government does not want any connection with the West so that they can keep complete control of the citizenry.

In Chapter 2, Chiko's father, Joon, is a physician and was apprehended by the government because he treated a dissident. Because Wei-Lin has lost her husband, at least temporarily, she is traumatized and terror-stricken fearing that she will lose her son too. As a result, she doesn't want him to go outside or read a book in the yard where someone might see him. She does not want him to apply for the teaching positions the government is holding interviews for. It is obvious that both mother and son are on edge when they jump at the knock on the door. They live in a very untenable situation under a very oppressive government.

In Chapter 3, Lei is a young neighbor girl who Chiko has known all his life. Now that they are grown, his feelings for her are changing. He's not sure how she feels. Her mother, Daw Widow, is an older woman who treats Wei-Lin like a younger sister. Like many societies in the east, the Burmese culture embraces their elders with much respect and obedience. She scolds Wei-Lin for allowing Chiko to read his book outside. Although Daw Widow is upset that Chiko was outside, Wei-Lin is surprised when Daw Widow tells Wei-Lin she should let Chiko apply for a teaching position.



In Chapter 4, Daw Widow's departure from her usual caution is revealed. She has heard that the soldiers are planning on arresting Chiko and either making him fight in the army or go to prison. If he applies for a teaching job he could possibly avoid both. Although Daw Widow is stern and domineering, she is not immune to enjoying a blossoming romance between her daughter, Lei, and Chiko. Daw Widow gives Chiko solid advice when she tells him that he must face his future no matter what it is.



# Chapters 5 through 8 of Part I

## Chapters 5 through 8 of Part I Summary

In Chapter 5, on his way to the interview, the rickshaw Chiko travels in avoids hitting children in the street. They should be in school but schools are closed more than they are open. He feels he can qualify for a teaching position even though he doesn't have any formal training. He's tutored many kids in the past. The line of young people waiting for interviews is long. A brother and sister in front of him have been waiting for hours. Just when they are discussing whether it was a ruse and they should leave, a door flies open and everyone is being waved into a room by men waving rifles. Now Chiko is sure that it was a trap.

The soldiers push and shove the boys into the room and yell at the girls to go home. The boy says he was applying for a street sweeping job. Chiko thinks he must be in the wrong line. The young girl fights with the soldiers to stay with her brother. They pull her away and threaten to beat her. Her brother screams at her to go leave. Chiko tells one of the soldiers there must be a mistake. He was supposed to take a teaching exam. He is soundly kicked in the jaw by another soldier who tells him that they don't make mistakes. Chiko's face is beginning to swell as he and the other boys are all forced to board a beat up looking bus. Soldiers sit in the front seats and gloat about how easy it was to capture their recruits.

In Chapter 6, soon the bus is on the outskirts of town. Chiko worries about how his mother will react. He feels some comfort that Daw Widow promised to stay with her until he returns. He misses his father and wishes he could hear his strong, wise words. He feels his front pocket. The photo is still there. He won't take it out just yet for fear of losing it. When the captain takes off his jacket, the soldier Win Min, who calls the captain "father," folds it up. All the soldiers laugh at the captain's corny jokes.

The bus heads for Thailand where the tribal people like the Kayah, the Shan and the Wa live and plant rice. The government wants to rid the area of the tribes and take their land. Win Min is instructed to tell the "recruits" what happens when someone tries to escape from camp. Win Min advises everyone that they will be well guarded but no one should be stupid enough to try to escape. The boy next to him whispers that he'll find a way to escape.

In Chapter 7, after hours of driving through the dark mountains, the bus stops with a jolt and the boys are all ordered to exit the bus. The building they enter is an old abandoned gym with two netless rims at either end of the room. The soldiers bow to a short stocky man who emerges from the shadows. He announces that he is Sergeant U-Tha-Din and is in charge of the platoon's training. The unit specializes in jungle warfare and search-and-destroy missions "against insurgents and narcotics-based armies" (p. 36).





One boy is bold enough to say he is hungry. He is told that the spoiled city brats won't be eating until the next day. The soldiers refer to the sergeant as their father. So many boys have lost their fathers that they search for authority figures to take their places. They are measured for uniforms and warned not to steal or use the river for a toilet - use the woods, they are told. Each boy is given a battered tin cup. They will be woken at 5:30 in the morning. By the time he gets to the pile of blankets, they are all gone.

In Chapter 8, the boy who sat next to Chiko on the bus had grabbed an extra blanket for him. They are locked in for the night. The boy says he is getting out of there tomorrow when they are outside and not locked up. Chiko reminds him that they are surrounded by jungle. The boy insists that he has to get home to his sister. Chiko assures him that she's probably safe at home with their parents. He tells Chiko that they live on the streets. They have no parents. Chiko is aware of the orphan problem. Yangon is full of orphans who work or scavenge for food. The boys introduce themselves. They are both fifteen and the boy's name is Tai.

Soon Tai has drifted off but Chiko is wakeful. He takes the photo of his father out and finds that there is a second photograph - a black and white photograph of Lei. There is just enough moonlight for Chiko to make out their images. He takes comfort from them.

## Chapters 5 through 8 of Part I Analysis

In Chapter 5, it looks as though Maw Widow's advice that Chiko apply for a teaching job is not good advice. Chiko and the other boys are being forced to join the army. They were duped into "joining" by the phony ads that they were hiring teachers and other workers. Immediately, it is obvious that the experience is going to be an abusive one and one from which they cannot escape. Maw Widow told Chiko he would either be forced into being a soldier or would go to prison. It seems like what's happening is a combination of both.

In Chapter 6, the oppressive government is recruiting soldiers to fight against the tribal people of the mountains. They want to take their land from them in a power grab. There seems to be no way out for Chiko. Their warning not to leave is a thinly veiled threat on their lives.

In Chapter 7, the young soldiers are captivated by their commanding officer, the captain. To them, the man's position symbolizes a father figure for them since so many boys have lost their fathers. The captain is aware of the power he has over the vulnerable young boys and exploits it. The conditions that the boys must live under are more in line with a prison than an army training camp. These poor conditions are another means of control that the government uses to gain control of the young men's minds.

In Chapter 8, Tai wants to escape but just the thought of it terrorizes Chiko. He knows that the captain and his soldiers are serious about their threats. He saw them take a perfectly innocent physician away - his father - for just treating a sick man. But Tai has an incentive to get out. His sister is only twelve years old and an orphan on the streets.

At just fifteen, Tai has matured beyond his years and has taken on the responsibility of his little sister who is vulnerable and homeless. Perhaps Daw Widow feared that Chiko would be arrested when she gave him the photos of his father and Lei, giving him something to focus on under difficult circumstances.



# Chapters 9 through 12 of Part I

## Chapters 9 through 12 of Part I Summary

In Chapter 9, the next morning, a soldier yanks the blanket off of Chiko. For a moment, he forgets where he is. They are taken outside to an open cooking fire. Chiko has not eaten since lunch the day before. In the daylight he sees the lush mounts and jungles that surround them. The soldiers eat first and then the boys are given rice and weak tea. Tai licks his bowl clean. They are given uniforms. There aren't enough boots so half the boys including Chiko have to wear their sandals.

Another bus arrives returning the captain to the camp. He must sleep in nicer quarters. Chiko doesn't like the looks of the bamboo stick he carries which is sharpened like a spear. The captain announces that they have all been accepted into the army so they can serve their country. Their pay can either be sent to their families or given to them there at camp. Chiko is heartened to learn that he can help support his mother. Their service will be three years and they will be paid at the end of each month. Chiko thinks of his mother - how will she endure three years?! On the good side, his pay will enable her to cover her expenses and send more for his father's upkeep.

The captain tells them that they must defeat the tribal people who want to take over the country and destroy the peace. If it weren't for these people, the boys could be home with their families. The Kayah tribe is the most dangerous. Many of these insurgents have fallen away from Buddhism after being lured away by western religions. The rebels will be supplied with American weapons to see their plans of revolution through. Other than Chiko and Tai, the boys seem to be spellbound by the captain's words.

Tai asks what happens if they don't finish their tours of duty. They are severely punished is the captain's answer. To emphasize his answer, he whacks Tai on the leg with his bamboo stick. Tai is smart and moves just enough to lessen the blow but howls in pain. This street boy's "street smarts" will come in handy.

In Chapter 10, a truck delivers a load of building materials - cinder blocks and lime among them. The sergeant gives Chiko, Tai and two other boys the task of hauling bricks from the truck to the construction site while the other recruits are made to start digging. Chiko's arms are aching from months of no exercise. Tai devises a contraption from a bamboo pole and large rag that enables him to carry more blocks at a time. Chiko and the other boys make the same carrying devices. Soon, they have carried all the blocks and have impressed the sergeant.

In Chapter 11, training is more grueling than hauling rocks. It includes running away from the soldiers, climbing trees and kickboxing with over eager soldiers. Tai senses that Chiko is not sure of himself and becomes protective of him. That night in the gym, Chiko and Tai talk in the gym. Chiko tells Tai about his father. The best doctor in Yangon was arrested by the police for treating a sick person. Tai tells Chiko he is going to



escape tomorrow and asks Chiko if he wants to join him. He won't last. He's a teacher not a soldier.

Tai said if he could read and write he might be able to get a job. Chiko makes a deal, if Tai teaches him self-defense he will teach him to read and write. Tai would take him up on that deal but his sister needs him. She is staying in the tea shop in the big temple but they won't let her stay forever. Chiko gets a pencil and paper from a guard. He writes his mother a letter, telling her that he is okay and describes what happened to him. He will be sending her money once a month. He asks that she and Daw Widow go to the tea shop at the big temple and ask for a girl named Sawati. He asks that they take care of her.

In Chapter 12, early the next morning, Chiko runs out to the delivery truck and gives the driver a kyat to deliver his letter. Sergeant U-Tha-Din orders the recruits to line up. But Tai is not there. When asked, Chiko says he doesn't know where he is. The captain orders Chiko to come with him. Behind the barracks, the captain yanks his glasses off and tells Chiko to never wear them again. He throws the glasses to the ground and steps on them. He then begins to beat Chiko demanding that he tell him where Tai is.

Win Min takes over but then Tai comes crawling out of the truck bed and tells them to stop. Chiko runs and gets what's left out of his glasses. He'll be able to see out of one eye. Win Min subjects Tai to a vicious beating, kicking him and punching him to the ground making even the tough Tai cry and scream. Win Min warns everyone that this is the punishment that is prescribed for trying to escape. Chiko gets a brutal kick in the chest for trying to help Tai.

## Chapters 9 through 12 of Part I Analysis

In Chapter 9, the isolation of their camp which is surrounded by jungles and mountains is clear the next morning. If anyone did escape, where would they go? They could not survive in the miles and miles of jungle between the camp and civilization. The only bright side of Chiko's "incarceration" is that he will be paid and he can help his mother. But how much will he be paid? And, will the government really pay them? After all they are not trustworthy - they kidnapped Chiko and the others. Tai is proving to be a tough street boy who can take care of himself. Perhaps his skills will come in handy later in the story.

The army practices psychological mind control, using fear and the vulnerable young boys most of whom have no father and are looking for an authority figure.

In Chapter 10, once again, Tai is proving to be up to the challenge of a prison/army camp. Tai has basic survival instincts from living on the streets. Chiko needs to be toughened up. His months of seclusion have left him weak.

In Chapter 11, Chiko doesn't want Tai to escape because he's worried what will happen to him if he does. But Chiko also doesn't want Tai to leave. They have become friends and Tai is the tough street guy who is teaching Chiko how to stand up to the rigors of



the situation they're in. In order to keep him there, the quick-thinking Chiko finds a way to help Tai's sister without his having to escape.

In Chapter 12, although Tai tries to convince the captain that Chiko wasn't trying to help him escape, the captain doesn't believe it. The soldiers make an example of Tai and Chiko. The vicious beating will make a deep impression. The captain is emerging as the cruelest soldier and unfortunately the one who is in charge of the camp. He tells Chiko that he won't need his glasses because he won't be reading. The army wants to keep their soldiers uninformed and ignorant. They apparently will not have much access to newspapers or reading material.



# Chapters 13 through 16 of Part I

## Chapters 13 through 16 of Part I Summary

In Chapter 13, Chiko crawls over to Tai. They both are okay - in pain - but okay. The sergeant is heading toward the river with the other recruits. Tai thought that Chiko was distracting the driver so he could climb in the truck. Chiko explains that he was asking the driver to take a letter to his mother asking her to find his sister and watch over her. Tai is pleased and grateful. They walk out hand in hand - which is the way men walk with their good friends - to the river where the other recruits are lined up. They tell the others that they are okay - even though they're in pain.

The sergeant tells the boys they will be gathering stones from the middle of the river and bringing them to the construction site. As a reward, a local farmer will give them eggs and fresh milk everyday. The farmer wants the rocks moved because they were slowing his irrigation. The boys cheer. Eggs and milk are luxuries even in the city. After a very rough day, it finally ends. The sergeant tells them that they will work on the actual construction the next day. The work will be a lot easier. Just when the boys are starting to relax, the sergeant tells them that the captain wants to see them.

In Chapter 14, the captain tells the boys that if they are to serve Burma, they must learn what it means to be obedient. He tells them that after everyone else is asleep, they must take all the stones and return them to river and be all finished by morning. They are to tell no one what they are doing. If they don't finish the work, each will spend a week in a cell so small that they won't be able to stand up. The other boys, the sergeant and the farmer will be furious. There goes the eggs and milk! It will be dangerous at night because leopards are on the prowl in the dark.

The resourceful Tai has an idea. That night, he swims across the river and when he returns, he has the farmer's two buffaloes. He explained the situation to the farmer and he loaned him the animals for the night. With the help of the two buffaloes and a cart, the boys were able to finish the job in just a few hours without much effort.

In Chapter 15, Sergeant U-Tha-Din is very upset. The captain ordered him to add a pile of rocks as big as the other one. He is supposed to have two giant rock piles by the time the captain comes with his Major. Tai tells U-Tha-Din that he has a plan. Soon Tai is swimming across the river again. He brings the buffalo and the cart back across the river and there are two huge piles of rock by noon. The farmer is so happy he brings eggs, milk and sugarcane over for the boys. The boys cheer and congratulate them.

That afternoon, the boys are run through a battery of training exercises. So far Chiko had not been selected to face an opponent in kickboxing but Win Min has his eyes on him. He is to face Bindu who, according to the other boys, doesn't kick that hard. Bindu didn't kick very hard and combined with the evasive tactics that Tai had been teaching



him, Chiko did not take a pummeling. Bindu won the match but Chiko couldn't have cared less.

In Chapter 16, Chiko is worried how the captain will react when he finds out how they moved the rocks. After nightfall, the motor of the captain's jeep can be heard approaching the camp. At first the captain thinks the boys didn't finish the job. But U-Tha-Din tells them they completed it and the farmer was so pleased that he sent over milk and eggs and sugarcane. The captain is stunned and takes a lantern over to the construction site to see for himself.

The old major congratulates the boys for being so resourceful. But as they leave, the captain hisses that the boys will be wind up in confinement. Tai takes full responsibility. Chiko feels bad that he doesn't speak up. But it was set, Tai would be in solitary confinement for three days.

## Chapters 13 through 16 of Part I Analysis

In Chapter 13, Tai is grateful for the help that Chiko is trying to get for his sister. The two friends bond. They would have never known each other in "real life" but there in prison, they have formed a strong friendship. They are both kind and caring young boys but from vastly different backgrounds. The boys are naturally apprehensive when the cruel captain wants to see them after the day's over. Wasn't beating and kicking the boys enough punishment?

In Chapter 14, the boys are given an impossible task to perform. The captain is so determined to make them miserable that he is willing to anger the farmer who asked that the stones be moved. But he wants to show Tai and Chiko who's boss. He probably won't be very pleased that the boys outsmarted him.

In Chapter 15, the sergeant and the other recruits are impressed with the way the boys moved the stones. The other boys are happy because they won't have to lug the rocks again and the sergeant is happy because he was ordered to have two piles of rocks piled up by day's end. Chiko is getting a little tougher thanks to Tai's advice. The captain has yet to arrive, and there undoubtedly is a tension among the boys as to how he'll react once he arrives and sees the boys have outsmarted him.

In Chapter 16, Chiko is unable to speak up and take blame in the use of the buffalo and cart to move the rocks. If the important thing was moving the rocks, the captain should be happy but it's obvious that he's more interested in punishing the boys. The only thing that saves them for the moment is that the Major thought their solution was clever. Chiko may feel guilty that Tai is being made to serve time in solitary confinement.



# Chapters 17 through 20 of Part I

## Chapters 17 through 20 of Part I Summary

In Chapter 17, Tai assures Chiko that he'll be fine. But Chiko can't look him in his eyes as the sergeant takes him away. Bindu tells Chiko that the room is a box with no windows or toilet. Chiko, feeling like a coward, is unable to sleep for the two nights that Tai is gone. He pays a guard to give Tai some of his food. When Tai is released, Chiko takes his clothes and scrubs them. He apologizes to Tai who holds no resentment whatsoever.

In Chapter 18, Tai can't figure out a way to escape. No trucks or cars are delivering material any longer. The guard patrol has been intensified. The recruits are split into groups. Tai is becoming a leader in the second group. Chiko asks for paper from the sergeant so he can make up a work schedule for his group as they build the latrines. That way everyone will get a fair amount of rest each day. U-Tha-Din is impressed and asks Chiko to read some mail to him. He's been too busy to read it. He lets Chiko get his glasses. Just don't let the captain or his men see you wearing them, he tells Chiko. After he reads the mail, the sergeant tells Chiko he'd like him to spend part of each day doing paperwork for him.

In Chapter 19, the captain is only showing up every week or so. Chiko is glad when he comes because he always has a big stack of mail for the sergeant. On one occasion, the captain announces to the platoon that they will be watching a movie in the gym. Before the movie starts, the captain tells the recruits that they are leading Burma to peace and stability. The only thing that stands in their way is the rebel army that must be destroyed. The country will return to education and learning when this crisis is passed. The movie is purely propaganda. Afterward, the recruits and soldiers all clap including Tai. The only one who doesn't applaud is Chiko.

In Chapter 20, Chiko wants to make himself indispensable to Sergeant U-Tha-Din. That way, perhaps he can figure out a way to find information about his father. One day, Chiko is writing the sergeant's reply to a personal friend. At the bottom he asks for the status of a prisoner (Chiko's father). He tells Tai that he will try to find out if his mother found Tai's sister. The army is actually paying them as promised. He opted to have his money sent to his mother. He hopes that it is getting there. He is more anxious than ever to see his family and Lei. Tai notices her picture but Chiko is too shy to tell him how he feels about her.

When his group is finished with training, some will stay in camp to help the sergeant, some will help capture more recruits and some will run off into the jungle and fight the tribal people. Chiko is going to teach Tai to read and write on their breaks.





## Chapters 17 through 20 of Part I Analysis

In Chapter 17, Chiko is shamed that he allowed Tai to go into confinement. He feels he should have stepped in and been subjected to the same punishment. Tai is a rough street kid and just shakes it off and has no bad feelings about Chiko's actions. He intuitively knows that he can take more punishment than Chiko.

In Chapter 18, both Tai and Chiko are emerging as leaders in their group. Tai is smart and brave. Chiko is a good organizer and his writing and reading skills are proving to be valuable. The sergeant claims he didn't have time to write or read. In reality, U-Tha-Din doesn't know how to read or write but is too proud or embarrassed to say so. Chiko's abilities may prove to benefit Chiko and Tai.

In Chapter 19, the captain is propagandizing the recruits. He is trying to fill them with the idea that the destiny of the nation is up to them. Of course, the government is just using them and doesn't care if they live or die. The goal is to rid the country of the rebels. The captain wants to make sure that the young men he is recruiting don't turn against the government and join the rebels.

In Chapter 20, Chiko is taking a risk by asking about his father in a letter that U-Tha-Din is sending out. The punishment would be severe if he were to be found out. Since he has access to the outside world, although it's limited and a rather circuitous route, Chiko may be able to find out if Tai's sister is safe with his mother. Such news would ease Tai's mind and perhaps make him forget about escaping. Chiko acknowledges that his future is uncertain, something that every new soldier must come to grips with.



# Chapters 21 through 24 of Part I

## Chapters 21 through 24 of Part I Summary

In Chapter 21, Chiko's reading lessons draw a lot of attention. Eventually Bindu joins Chiko and Tai. He wants to learn how to read, too. The captain comes one night. He doesn't like Chiko's salute, and threatens to put him in solitary unless he wants Tai to do his time again. Tai volunteers but the captain changes his mind. He gives Chiko the choice of either sending Tai to solitary or beating him with a bamboo stick. Chiko rejects both but Tai's signals with a certain expression that tells Chiko what to do. He takes the bamboo stick as the other recruits gather around him. He strikes at Tai but at the last minute he pulls back and at the same time Tai slaps his leg and yowls, pretending to be in pain. Chiko "hits" Tai four times. Tai collapses on the floor, pretending to be unconscious. The captain is satisfied and the boys carry Tai out to the river where they all laugh about what Tai just pulled off.

In Chapter 22, there is not much hard labor at the camp any longer. Chiko is getting more adept at kickboxing. He warns himself to be careful - he might start liking it. Both Tai and Bindu are making progress in their reading, Tai at a faster rate than Bindu. One night, Tai sees Lei's picture. He thinks she's very pretty. He'll be there for the wedding, he tells Chiko. Tai tells Chiko that he never had a brother and never dreamed that he'd find one in a recruitment camp.

In Chapter 23, the captain arrives at the camp to levy a special punishment again a soldier who lied to him. The man said he was Burmese but he is part Shan. After his men beat the man, the captain spits on the him and calls him "half breed." The captain had brought mail with him. Chiko looks quickly through the big stack and finds the reply from the sergeant's friend. The man wrote that Chiko's father was alive and well. He is performing excellently as a medic and is tending to injured soldiers. Tai is progressing very rapidly in his reading and writing which he is doing for his sister.

In Chapter 24, U-Tha-Din wakes Chiko and Tai up, screaming, "Where are they?" Two-thirds of the recruits are gone, taken out in the middle of the night apparently on the orders of the captain. Chiko thinks about Bindu who had just learned to read the word "mother." What will happen to him? The sergeant tells the remaining recruits that they are now full-fledged soldiers and will take over the tasks at the camp. A letter was left on U-Tha-Din's desk. He has Chiko read it. It indicates that headquarters in Yangon needs an office clerk immediately. A car will be sent next week to pick up the boy who has been writing the sergeant's letters. Chiko's heart skips a beat. That boy is HIM! Who is going to read and write my letters, the Sargent laments. Chiko tells him that Tai can read and write. The sergeant tells Chiko not to tell anyone that he is leaving.



## Chapters 21 through 24 of Part I Analysis

In Chapter 21, Chiko is beginning to play the game. He is walking on the precipice between safety and disaster. He and Tai fooled the captain. But if the captain ever found that out, their punishment would be very severe. It is probably a safe bet that if the captain is fooled once and knows it, he will not be fooled again.

In Chapter 22, Chiko is becoming stronger and better at kickboxing. When he warns himself not to like it too much he is saying that he doesn't want to become like the soldiers, vicious and cruel.

In Chapter 23, Chiko's plan worked out just as he hoped. He was able to get outside information without exposing himself to punishment. Despite everything else that is going on at the camp including beatings, Chiko is able to maintain focus on the most important thing in the world to him - his family. It probably keeps him going and keeps him sane.

In Chapter 24, Chiko's ability to read and write is elevating him to a safer and better position. When the sergeant says not to tell anyone, Chiko feels bad that he can't tell Tai because of their close relationship. Things are moving fast. The recruits are being transitioned over to fighting soldiers. It looks as though Chiko will avoid any combat.



# Chapters 25 through 27 of Part I

## Chapters 25 through 27 of Part I Summary

In Chapter 25, the sergeant has Tai read and write for him and he is satisfied that he'll do a good job. In front of Tai, he says that if Chiko wasn't leaving, he'd have him teach everyone to read and write. Of course, Tai's ears perk up at that comment. Chiko starts to tell him but the roar of the captain's jeep is suddenly heard. He pulls up and asks for a volunteer to run through the jungle. No one volunteers so the captain picks Tai. For the first time since he's known Tai, he looks frightened. A voice in Chiko's head tells him not to let Tai go.

Chiko whispers to the sergeant to let Tai go to Yangon. He will go on the mission for the captain. Tai is shocked as is the captain who sputters and fumes. But in the end, he agrees. As he is driving off with the captain he tells Tai to look up his mother and tell her that his father is alive and well.

In Chapter 26, Chiko relishes not being afraid of the captain. After a few miles, the captain stops the jeep and walks into the wood with Chiko right behind him. They meet up with four soldiers gathered around a fire. Their mission will begin in the morning. They are to spy on a cache of weapons that the rebels have been stockpiling. They are to walk down the river road to the rebel camp. It's a long way so they will have to camp over one night. They are to find out as much as they can about their weapons and report back to him. He tells Chiko that he has no more rifles. Chiko is to lead the way. The captain doesn't want any trained marksmen blown up.

In Chapter 27, even though the mission is dangerous, Chiko feels good to be running free on a sunny day. They only have the bananas and mangoes they can find to eat. They stop and camp under a teak tree. The next morning, they arrive at the footbridge and cross into Thailand. Chiko follows the captain's directions as best he can but they don't find the trail he said would be there. Chiko tells the others to wait while he walks into a thicket to see if a path picks up there. After just a few minutes there are two loud blasts. The explosion sends Chiko up in the air and down with thud. The others must have set off an explosion.

## Chapters 25 through 27 of Part I Analysis

In Chapter 25, perhaps it was his guilt combined with the terror-stricken look on Tai's face that made Chiko decide to speak up and volunteer for the mission. Even though he had dreamed of the time he could go home, he gives it up for Tai. He knows that Tai is anxious to see his sister. It was a true act of heroism especially since he had a ticket out of camp. He may have felt he owed Tai a few favors - but this was a huge favor.

In Chapter 26, Chiko no longer fears the captain. Perhaps it was the training and observing and learning how Tai handled the adversity. The captain shows his disdain for



Chiko by not giving him a weapon and by making him walk in front of the others. He's like the canary in the coal mine. If he steps on a land mine, he will be blown up and the others can take cover.

In Chapter 27, the captain's plans backfired. He didn't want to lose his trained marksmen and was more than willing to sacrifice Chiko's life. But the opposite happened. The others were all lost and Chiko was spared. But Chiko is alone in the jungle. Can he salvage any of the weapons or were they blown up, too? If he cannot salvage a weapon, he will be unarmed amongst the enemy and the wild animals of the forest.



# Chapters 1 through 4 of Part II

## Chapters 1 through 4 of Part II Summary

In Chapter 1, Tu Reh, a member of the Karenni tribe, is trekking through the jungle with his father Peh and other members of the tribe. It is his first mission. He recalls with anger the image of his family home being burned down by the Burmese soldiers. As they walk along, Peh points out a path that leads to the healer's hut. Suddenly, there is movement. Five Burmese soldiers dressed in their traditional green are walking nearby. Tu Reh, Peh and the others flatten themselves to the ground to hide. Reh recalls the debate his parents had about his going on the mission. His mother Mua pointed out that he was only sixteen. Peh responded that it was time to channel the anger that Tu Reh had in an appropriate direction since the house was burned down.

In Chapter 2, the soldiers are only a short distance away. Suddenly there is a huge explosion, then another. One of the men fears that if there were any surviving soldiers from the blast that they'd be heading back their way. Before the explosion, Peh heard discuss finding the healer's hut which was in the opposite direction. The two women and their grandfather who live in the healer's hut must be warned. Tu Reh volunteers to warn them. Peh will show him a shortcut but first they need to check to see if any of the soldiers survived. The others will wait for Peh to return.

In Chapter 3, Peh and Tu Reh find four of the soldiers, their bodies limp and unmoving. They find the fifth soldier who is badly injured. One leg is bent and broken. His pants are shredded and bloody revealing a splintered bone. If the soldier survives, he will lose the leg. There is no weapon near the soldier. Only a sharpened bamboo pole that Tu Reh recognizes immediately as the one he had lost. Tu Reh spots a pair of eyeglasses and puts them in his pocket. Peh is able to salvage the weapons and ammunition from the dead soldier's bodies. Peh loads Tu Reh up with the rifles and scoops the wounded soldier up in his arms. In a clearing, Peh tends to the soldier with a small first-aid kit. He ties a tourniquet around his leg to stop the bleeding and washes his wounds.

Peh thinks the soldier might make it but the animals will tear him apart. Tu Reh says they should put him out of his misery. Peh suggests they take him to the healer's hut. Tu Reh does not understand. This is the enemy! Peh tells his son that the rifle has only one use. The bamboo pole is a weapon but it is also food and medicine and baskets, houses and rafts. Peh would rather be like the bamboo - used for many purposes. Peh leaves it up to Tu Reh what to do with the soldier.

In Chapter 4, Peh leaves to join the others. Tu Reh is holding both weapons - the rifle and the bamboo stick. He knows his father thinks killing a man should be one's last choice. A voice within Tu Reh tells him to kill the soldier. Just as he aims his rifle at him, the soldier begins moaning and opens his eyes. He is calling for his mother. The soldier is just a boy, probably younger than Tu Reh himself. He calls for Peh who runs back. He



asks his father if he should stay with the healer to protect them if he takes the boy. Peh tells him that God will lead him.

## Chapters 1 through 4 of Part II Analysis

In Chapter 1, Tu Reh is filled with anger over the burning of his house by Burmese soldiers. He has only hate and revenge in his heart. His goal is to kill the enemy. His father was concerned about the anger that was welling up inside his son and felt that it should be channeled in the proper direction. His father was thinking of the long-term effect of his son's anger.

In Chapter 2, the explosion that Peh and Tu Reh hear is the blast that killed the Burmese soldiers and injured Chiko. It seems that the story is leading to a crossroads of the two young men. They have a shared destiny. What will these two natural enemies mean to each other?

In Chapter 3, Tu Reh is so filled with hate for the Burmese soldiers that he is unable to understand why his father wants to treat his wounds. The burning of their house and village by the Burmese soldiers is so vivid in his mind that he has been immobilized by the traumatic event and cannot move away from it. His father has a deeper understanding of life and how man is meant to be more than a killing machine.

In Chapter 4, Peh has allowed Tu Reh to make the decision regarding the young soldier. Although it goes against the anger and revenge he feels, there is a goodness within him, similar to his father's, and in the end he chooses to help the soldier. He is risking his own life for the life of the enemy that he dreamed of killing.



# Chapters 5 through 8 of Part II

## Chapters 5 through 8 of Part II Summary

In Chapter 5, Peh lifts the boy onto Tu Reh's back. He staggers at the dead weight of the semi-conscious boy. Peh shows Tu Reh the way. It should take him about two hours for him to get to the hut. Peh tells his son that he will be the first man he picks for the next mission.

Tu Reh has a rough time. He has to stop and rest a few times. The boy comes around again. Tu Reh drizzles some water in his mouth. The boy tries to speak but then passes out. Tu Reh makes it to the hut before sundown. A girl runs out from the hut and tells him to wait. There are land mines everywhere. Tu Reh tells her that the injured boy is a Burmese soldier. She leads Tu Reh to the hut, showing him where to step to avoid the bombs.

In Chapter 6, inside the hut, the grandfather is preparing to eat. The younger girl, who is pretty, offers Tu Reh some food. The older sister is the healer. She learned her skills from a Burmese doctor who trained in England. The younger sister is Ree Meh. Tu Reh tells her that his father is the leader of a resistance. The healer keeps working on the soldier while Ree Meh prepares a plate of food for Tu Reh.

In Chapter 7, after she has treated him for hours, the healer places both hands on the boy's chest and bows her head. The soldier is conscious. She tells him that she prays he keeps his leg but he may lose it. He feels no pain because she gave him a pain reducer. The lower leg was badly damaged and she splinted it but and may get infected. The grandfather sits by the soldier and speaks to him in Burmese. The boy tells him that he was on a mission to find a hut containing a weapons cache. Tu Reh suggests they leave for camp because there will be a search party looking for the soldiers. He wants to leave the boy there. The healer and Ree Meh want to take him. They leave it up to their grandfather who says to take him. The boy thanks the healer and Tu Reh for saving his life. The healer tells him her name is Nya Meh. The boy's name is Chiko. When the others are out of earshot, Tu Reh tells Chiko that taking him will put them all at risk.

In Chapter 8, Tu Reh helps Chiko to the privy. On the way back, Chiko whispers that he agrees that he will put them all at risk. He tells Tu Reh to leave him behind. The grandfather settles it by quoting the passage that ends with, "A time for loving, a time for hating; a time for war, a time for peace." (171) from the book of Ecclesiastes. The Holy Bible had been introduced into the tribal areas long ago by missionaries. It was written in Burmese but now it is being translated into Karenni. Nya Meh tells Chiko he has to go because the doctor at the camp can amputate and she cannot. Tu Reh notices that Chiko keeps clutching at his buttoned shirt pocket. The stern look on grandfather's face settles it. They make a stretcher by tying a blanket onto two bamboo poles. Chiko's face lights up when Tu Reh pulls a pair of glasses from his pocket. Chiko grabs them. It is the second time that he has lost them.





## Chapters 5 through 8 of Part II Analysis

In Chapter 5, Peh is proud of the decision his son made. He is his father's son. It is immediately apparent that the healer is focused on helping the boy. She is not concerned with politics and war. She is a healer and to her saving a life is more important than anything else. The dangerous life that these people must endure is symbolized by her knowledge of where it is safe to walk to avoid stepping on a land mine.

In Chapter 6, there is an irony and a sign of humanity in the image of the young Karenni woman, who was trained by a Burmese doctor, caring for the young Burmese soldier who was on a mission to kill her and her kind.

In Chapter 7, although Tu Reh saved the boy, he is not willing to take the extra risk of taking him back to their camp. The healer and her sister do not want the soldier to be left behind to die alone of infection. The grandfather makes the final decision and shows benevolence in his willingness to take great risk for the sake of the enemy. Knowing that Chiko is sensitive, he will probably take to heart Tu Rhe's words that he puts them all at risk.

In Chapter 8, Chiko is afraid that he will put the others in harm's way. He wants to be left behind. But grandfather cites a Passage in the Bible that speaks of peace and healing. He gets his point across. Chiko is still drawing strength from the photos of his father and Lei. Tu Reh wonders why he keeps clutching at his pocket. The thought and spirit of his loved ones is seeing him through this ordeal. Daw Widow proved to be very insightful when she gave him the photos.



# Chapters 9 through 12 of Part II

## Chapters 9 through 12 of Part II Summary

In Chapter 9, Chiko's leg looks good, Nya Meh says. The stitches and the split are holding. Ree Meh lifts up one side of the stretcher and Tu Reh the other. Chiko is light and the weight is evenly distributed. Nya Meh carries household items and medicines in a heavy pack. Grandpa brings an assault rifle and ammunition. Half way to camp, Chiko develops a raging fever. They have to stop over and camp one night. They don't light a fire. It would signal to others where they are.

In Chapter 10, the skin is darkening around Chiko's leg, which is not a good sign. Tu Reh and Ree Meh get more acquainted. Tu Reh tells her she's different than the other girls in the camp. She is stronger and tougher. Grandfather insists they go to sleep. They need the rest. It is the first night that Tu Reh doesn't dream of revenge. He dreams of a twenty-year-old Tu Reh building a house with a pretty black-haired girl with brown eyes planting pepper plants beside it.

In Chapter 11, everyone wakes up from a deep tremor coming from the ground. It's an elephant! Everyone gets behind trees to hide. Ree Meh and Tu Reh rush over and move Chiko. He moans but does not wake. Nya Meh looks worried when she looks at his leg. It is twice as big as it was and oozing pus. The tremors become more violent. An angry bull elephant is charging through the jungle and heading straight for them. Wielding his pole like a spear, Ree Meh runs at the elephant who comes to a stop. He is already suffering from a fresh wound on his leg. He charges off the other way. They hear frightened voices behind them of people who must be encountering the elephant. They are speaking in Burmese.

In Chapter 12, knowing that they are being following, the group recovers from the elephant attack and gets on their way. An hour passes and they are almost to the camp. Suddenly, there is a voice of warning: "Stop or we'll shoot." (185) Bullets are flying by them. Tu Reh tells Nya Meh to run ahead and warn the camp. Ree Meh and Tu Reh are having difficulty navigating the stretcher through the thick underbrush and overhanging growth. The stretcher is slowing them down. The voices and bullets are getting closer. They hoist Chiko up on Tu Reh's back and runs through the dense jungle but the soldiers are not far behind. Tu Reh puts Chiko down on the grass. He runs and hides behind some bushes and shoots in the direction of the soldiers. He runs to another cluster of bushes and shoots another volley of shots. He wants the soldiers to think there's more than one of them. His ploy works. The soldiers retreat and Tu Reh picks up Chiko and races toward the river.



## Chapters 9 through 12 of Part II Analysis

In Chapter 9, although grandfather is a man of peace, he straps on his assault rifle and extra ammunition. It is obvious that he will defend himself and his family if he has no other choice.

In Chapter 10, Peh was right to bring Tu Reh along on the mission. He sensed that the anger inside of him was eating away at him. Although the mission took a u-turn for Tu Reh, he is able to gain a deeper meaning and a different perspective about the world.

In Chapter 11, Tu Reh shows his courage and his ability to act decisively. He recalled that his father said shooting a few bullets into a huge elephant would not stop him but only further enrage him. He stopped grandfather from shooting at the animal and chased it away with his bamboo stick and his boldness. It was a heroic act.

In Chapter 12, once again, Tu Reh shows his bravery and resourcefulness in eluding the Burmese soldiers who are pursuing them. Not only did he save himself, Chiko and the others, he drove the enemy back. The Burmese soldiers are probably not worried about Chiko's life, they are afraid of what he might reveal to them about their operations.



# Chapters 13 through 16 of Part II

## Chapters 13 through 16 of Part II Summary

In Chapter 13, as Tu Reh is crossing the river, a dozen Karenni soldiers race up the hill toward the Burmese soldiers. Ree Meh meets him and helps him carry Chiko into the camp. Auntie Doctor orders them to put Chiko in the medical hut and tells Nya Meh to come with her. When they first heard about the Burmese soldier coming to camp, some of the tribe members were against it. Sa Reh, a rival of Tu Reh, looked disgusted when Tu Reh carried Chiko in. He said it looked like he was holding him like a baby. But when they knew that Nya Meh was bringing him they agreed to let him in. Tu Reh tells Mua that Peh wanted him to bring the boy to safety. Sa Reh asks Tu Reh about the Burmese soldier. They need to interrogate him and find out what the army's plans are.

In Chapter 14, Ree Meh eats dinner with Tu Reh, his little sister, Oo Meh, and his mother, Mua. Oo Meh is going to show Ree Meh to the medic hut to wait for her sister. Mua tells Oo Meh to come back soon to do her homework. She and Tu Reh have to go to school tomorrow. Mua suggests that Ree Meh go with them. She tells Mua that her grandfather taught her to read and write. But there's more to school than just reading and writing. Tu Reh figures that Ree Meh would rather be out in the fields kickboxing with the boys than giggling inside and talking about them with the girls. After dinner, Tu Reh leaves to meet with the camp leaders to fill them in on his mission.

In Chapter 15, the girl's grandfather is sitting with three council members - the president, his top adviser and Bu Reh who is Sa Reh's father. Sa Reh is also present. The grandfather had told the council how Tu Reh had chased off the charging elephant. Tu Reh humbly answers that they all looked out for each other. Regarding the Burmese boy, Peh left it to Tu Reh to decide whether to save him or not. Sa Reh suggests that Tu Reh thought he could get some intelligence from the boy. But the boy was unconscious, Tu Reh responds, and he doesn't seem to know much. They ask why he didn't kill the boy. He didn't want to say that he gave in to the feelings of the healer and her family. He tells them that perhaps they will be able to learn something from him. They ask about Peh's mission which is now one man short. Tu Reh responds that they didn't lose any supplies since the others are carrying his. They were also able to salvage the weapons of the dead soldiers.

In Chapter 16, it is dark when the girls return. Auntie Doctor had to amputate Chiko's leg. Chiko needs a boy to stay with him over night. Chiko is asking for Tu Reh. Tu Reh agrees to stay with him but he's less than thrilled. This boy causes him a lot of problems.



## Chapters 13 through 16 of Part II Analysis

In Chapter 13, Sa Reh is taunting Tu Reh for bringing the Burmese soldier back to their camp and saving his life. He pressures Tu Reh to agree to interrogating the soldier after he recovers. Tu Reh, at this point, has no intention of doing that. He seems to be falling on the side of the healer and her family who want to save the boy's life.

In Chapter 14, Mua seems to take on a motherly tone with Ree Meh. She wants her to go to school while she's at the camp and she promises to teach her how to sew. Tu Reh is fascinated by Ree Meh. He admires her toughness and that she is different than most girls. Tu Reh does not look forward to his meeting with the camp leaders who want to ask him about Chiko.

In Chapter 15, Tu Reh adequately defends his decision to save Chiko. He makes sure that they don't blame his father. The decision was his and his alone. He assures the elders that Peh sending him off to care for the Burmese boy did not jeopardize their original mission. They did not lose the supplies that Tu Reh had been carrying. Tu Reh is most concerned with not having any blame fall on his father who he idolizes. By pointing out that they were able to confiscate the weapons of the dead soldiers, he makes the case that the encounter with the Burmese soldiers was beneficial to their cause.

In Chapter 16, Tu Reh shows his good heart by agreeing to stay with Chiko overnight - even though he's the boy that is causing him so many headaches. Tu Reh is growing as a young man.



# Chapters 17 through 20 of Part II

## Chapters 17 through 20 of Part II Summary

In Chapter 17, Tu Reh lays on a mat next to Chiko's bed. He is not looking forward to telling Chiko that he lost his leg. So many boys are missing limbs and fingers and even eyes. Chiko is sound asleep, his hand clutching at his shirt pocket. An animal howls and wakes Chiko. He asks if they had to cut his leg off. They had to, Tu Reh tells him. Chiko, overcome, buries his face in his arms. He grasps at his pocket. To distract Chiko, Tu Reh asks what's in his pocket. Chiko takes the photos out and shows Tu Reh. He thinks the young man in the picture is Chiko's older brother. Chiko tells him it's his father and that he is currently imprisoned. Chiko tells Tu Reh how he was kidnapped and forced to become a soldier. He tells him that the camp council will be asking him questions tomorrow. He needs to tell them about his father and about being forced into becoming a soldier. Tu Reh emphasizes that his life may depend upon it. Tu Reh hears a noise outside. He looks outside and sees Sa Reh rushing off in the darkness. How much did he over hear?

In Chapter 18, early the next morning, Auntie Doctor and Nya Meh arrive at the tent to dress and bandage Chiko's stump. Auntie Doctor tells Chiko that as soon as it is healed, they will fit him for a prosthetic. Auntie Doctor wants to teach Nya Meh how to perform amputations. Soon the council members, the grandfather and Sa Reh appear in the tent to question Chiko. Chiko responds to the questions of the men by telling them that his captain didn't like him and sent him on the mission without a weapon and with orders to walk first to protect the others in his unit from being blown up. Sa Reh says that his father is a criminal and in prison. Chiko takes the photo of his father out of his pocket and shows it to the men. Sa Reh takes the photo and throws it on the floor and reminds everyone that Chiko is the enemy. Nya Meh picks the photo up and gives it back to Chiko.

Chiko tells the men where the Burmese recruit camp is located. He tells them about the training regimen, the number of soldiers and recruits and provided some of the information he learned from reading letters from headquarters. Chiko's pain is returning and the interrogation ends.

In Chapter 19, Auntie Doctor expresses her hope that the camp allows Chiko to stay until he recovers. She could escort him to the clinic where he could get a replacement leg then get him cleared through the Thai checkpoints because of her position. But they will have to figure out how she can transport Chiko. Tu Reh feels a little frustrated that they are fretting over this Burmese boy. He says he should have left him in the jungle. Auntie Doctor tells him he did the right thing by saving him. Auntie doctor tells Ree Meh and Tu Reh to go to school. Ree Meh is reluctant but Tu Reh assures her that he and his sister will be there with her.



In Chapter 20, before they go to school, Ree Meh asks Tu Reh to give her a tour of the camp. He shows her the building that is used for the meeting hall and the building used for the school. Kids are playing soccer in the field by the school - one of the boys is playing with his replacement leg. There are several watch towers and a barbed wire fence at the border of the camp. Thai soldiers have a checkpoint just beyond the camp. If a Karenni is caught outside the camp, he is arrested and turned over to the Burmese police.

Ree Meh hints at something that the Burmese soldiers did to her. Sa Reh is nearby and overhears their conversation. He wants to know what the soldiers did to her sister. The two get into an argument about bringing Chiko to the camp. Tu Reh fears that he has lost Sa Reh as a friend.

## Chapters 17 through 20 of Part II Analysis

In Chapter 17, Sa Reh was eavesdropping outside the medic tent when Tu Reh and Chiko were discussing how he should respond to the questioning of the camp leaders. Tu Reh gains a deeper understanding of Chiko's situation. He realizes that he is not a violent young man who wanted to join the army and kill the rebels. He was a victim of the oppressive Burmese government himself. Chiko's story stirs sympathy in Tu Reh. His warning that his answers must satisfy the council or he could be executed is overheard by Sa Reh who may cause trouble for both of the young men.

In Chapter 18, Chiko tells the council about his experience with the Burmese army. He also provides valuable intelligence about the operations of the Burmese army. If the Burmese government learns what Chiko has revealed to the enemy, he would probably be executed. He is taking a risk but he is being honest. The Karenni people saved his life. He feels indebted to them and that he owes them at least honest answers to their questions. He is in a difficult spot but he is at the mercy of the Karenni tribe. Sa Reh tries to start trouble for Chiko but the others do not go along with him.

In Chapter 19, Auntie Doctor is trying to figure out how to help Chiko get his prosthetic leg and get him to safety. The majority of the people in the Karenni camp are treating Chiko as an equal and hope for his full recovery and a safe future.

In Chapter 20, Sa Reh is becoming more enraged about Chiko's presence in the camp. He hears Ree Meh hint at the Burmese hurting her sister but she is not specific. Sa Reh pushes her to tell him, but she stands up to him and holds her ground. Sa Reh is the only person in the camp who continues to hold resentment for Chiko and for Tu Reh for saving him. He is the idol of the younger boys. Perhaps he feels that he is losing that status to Tu Reh.



# Chapters 21 through 23

## Chapters 21 through 23 Summary

In Chapter 21, the council has chosen a site for the hut for the girls and grandfather. It is set away from the other huts and is close to the river. Ree Meh walks to school with Tu Reh and Oo Meh. Ree Meh seems to be a little more comfortable about meeting her new school mates after Oo Meh tells her that they are all anxious to meet her. They think she's a brave hero for living in the jungle with just her sister and grandfather.

Tu Reh introduces Ree Meh to the teacher. He's a young man who, like Chiko, stepped on a land mine as a boy. He is lively and happy and bounds around the room on his prosthetic leg with no problem. He is a great teacher and one reason Tu Reh wants to stay in school. Tu Reh is pressed by the other boys about saving a Burmese soldier. Their hero is Sa Reh who is the funniest, the best kickboxer and the bravest boy in camp - he killed a king cobra that found its way into church.

That afternoon, Tu Reh helps on the construction of the girls' new hut. Oo Meh tells Ree Meh and Tu Reh that the council is going to have the entire camp vote on whether Chiko can stay until he recovers. Tu Reh stays with Chiko again that night. Tu Reh tells Chiko he will look for some books printed in English at school for him. Chiko is thrilled. It will get his mind off his missing leg. Tu Reh tells Chiko he should meet the teacher who lost a leg just like Chiko did. He tells Chiko that the camp is going to vote on whether he can stay. He tells Chiko that he won't be executed. Tu Reh thinks to himself that they might have him carry him back into the jungle.

In Chapter 22, Tu Reh begins to worry about his father. Will he be in one piece when he returns? Will he return? At school, Tu Reh asks the teacher if he has any English books he could borrow for the Burmese boy who is recovering in the medic hut. The teacher promises to take the books to the boy himself. That afternoon when the girls and Tu Reh are helping with the construction of the hut, Sa Reh gets Nya Meh alone for a brief chat. He seems to like her. Maybe she can convince him that saving Chiko was the right thing to do. On the way to the medic hut, he stops by Sa Reh's hut. Sa Reh spits a wad of betel at him. The men meeting there say they have plans for his little Burmese friend. Tu Reh gets angry and leaves. When he gets to the medic hut, Chiko's nose is buried in a book. He is half way through the first book in a series called "The Lord of the Rings." He was impressed with the teacher who does quite well with his artificial leg. Chiko says that it makes him think he could be a teacher, too.

In Chapter 23, the camp meeting to vote on Chiko's fate is held in the evening. When Tu Reh walks in the place is crowded. Auntie Doctor is sitting with Mua and the girls. Tu Reh wishes his father was there. Tu Reh is called upon by the president to explain why he brought Chiko to the camp. The president doesn't think the boy is a spy. The president asks for suggestions as to what the camp should do with Chiko.





## Chapters 21 through 23 Analysis

In Chapter 21, Chiko's fate will be decided in a democratic way - by camp-wide vote. It will be a fair way to decide but Tu Reh and the girls and Auntie Doctor probably feel a great deal of apprehension about what will be decided. They have all grown to care for the young man who has undergone such trauma and terror. They saved his life and nursed him back to health. They have a vested interest in his survival.

The young teacher who has an artificial leg will be a great role model for Chiko who always wanted to be a teacher himself. The teacher could be a living example of surviving a personal tragedy and becoming a success in life.

In Chapter 22, Chiko is going to survive his ordeal because of his spirit and the support he received from the kind people of the enemy camp. Chiko can be a link between the two sides to illustrate that there are humane and benevolent people on both sides and that the enemy is not the devil. Chiko's spirits are lifted when he sees with his own eyes that someone with a disability can lead a full and meaningful life.

In Chapter 23, the supporters of Chiko are in full force. It is apparent that they will defend the boy against those who would send him back to the jungle or worse.



# Chapters 24 through 26 of Part II

## Chapters 24 through 26 of Part II Summary

In Chapter 24, some members shout that Chiko should be killed. The grandfather rises to speak. He reminds the group that Chiko was forced into the army and that he suffered the loss of a leg. God commands that the weakest among us be defended. He urges that they not give way to hatred. He could no longer call himself a Karenni if they kill the boy. Tu Reh is moved by the grandfather's words. He leaps to his feet and begins singing the national anthem. The pastor strums along on the guitar. Soon everyone is standing and singing. Everyone except Sa Reh and his father vote in favor of Auntie Doctor's suggestion that she use Mango, Tu Reh's donkey, to travel to the next camp with Chiko where he can get his new leg. From there he can walk across the border. Ree Meh is impressed that Tu Reh is willing to let Auntie Doctor use his donkey. It is obvious that the two young people are having tender feelings for each other. It appears that Nya Meh and Sa Reh might be having the same sort of feelings for each other.

In Chapter 25, Chiko is thrilled with the plans for his departure. On the morning of his departure, Tu Reh, the girls, the grandfather, Mua and Auntie Doctor gather around him. They all wish him good luck. He thanks everyone for their help. He tells them that he will call his new leg his Karenni leg. They get Chiko on Mango. He's a little unsteady so Tu Reh cuts a bamboo stick for Chiko to balance himself. Chiko hopes to see Tu Reh again. Tu Reh feels the same. Chiko speaks his last words to Tu Reh in Karenni, "Good-bye, my brother" (p. 250)

In Chapter 26, Sa Reh picks a fight with Tu Reh over Chiko and the girls. Nya Meh becomes upset. It reminds her of when the Burmese boys fought over her. She runs back to Mua's hut. Although he doesn't find out what exactly happened to Nya Meh, Ree Meh tells him that she is telling her the whole story. Tu Reh returns to the new hut to finish putting on the door. Suddenly, Sa Reh is standing beside him, helping him put the door in. He apologizes to Tu Reh for the way he's acted. He is concerned about Nya Meh's condition, feeling bad that he upset her. Sa Reh looks at the river and spots some men crossing. He tells Tu Reh to look. It's Peh! He's returning. Tu Reh takes off running to greet him. He's got so much to tell him.

## Chapters 24 through 26 of Part II Analysis

In Chapter 24, the elegant yet emotionally laden words uttered by the grandfather convince the people of the camp that the young boy is just an innocent young man. He is not a cruel vicious killer. He is a victim of the oppressive government himself. Tu Reh's emotional response to the grandfather's words further inspire the people who have decided what kind of people they want to be.



In Chapter 25, Chiko and Tu Reh have bonded forever. They began their relationship as enemies and wound up as brothers.

By Chapter 26, Sa Reh sees the error of his ways. He was prideful and resented the attention that Tu Reh was getting. However, he did not want to lose his best friend and realized that his actions were mean-spirited. He decided that he didn't want to be that kind of person any longer.



# Characters

## Chiko

Chiko is a fifteen-year-old Burmese boy who lives at home with his mother, Wei-Lin, in the city of Yangon, Burma. Chiko's father, Joon who is a respected and capable physician, had been arrested four months before. He had been caught leaving his house in the dark to treat a sick man who was a dissident. Chiko is a bright youngster who loves to read and learn and wants to be a teacher. Schools are often closed down in Yangon and learning is difficult. Chiko had been tutored by his father and is able to read and write in both Burmese and English - a rare ability in Burma.

Chiko decides to apply for a teaching position. He travels by rickshaw to the government building to fill out an application. However, there are no open positions. The advertisement for the jobs was just a ruse to lure young men to recruit for the army. Chiko is apprehended and taken to a military training camp deep in the Burmese jungle. He puts up with beatings, mental abuse and sheer terror during his days at the camp which more closely resembled a prison. The conditions were inhumane.

Chiko was sent on a mission into the jungle to learn the operations of the Karenni tribe. He and his small unit of recruits are the victims of a land mine blast. Chiko is the only soldier to survive but is badly wounded. He is discovered by a young Karenni boy, Tu Reh, who must decide what to do about him. In the end, Tu Reh decides that the young boy's life is worth saving.

## Tu Reh

Tu Reh is a sixteen-year-old member of the Karenni tribe. The Karennis live in a remote area of the Burmese jungle. The tribe is at war with the Burmese government that wants to eliminate them and take over their land. Tu Reh is especially bitter. He has hurt and anger in his heart because his family home had recently been torched and burned down by Burmese soldiers.

Peh, Tu Reh's father, is a leader of the resistance. After much debate with Tu Reh's mother, Peh decided to allow Tu Reh to go on a mission with him and a small group of other tribe members. It is Tu Reh's first mission and his dream to revenge his family and kill some Burmese soldiers is becoming a reality for him.

As they walk along, there is suddenly a huge explosion. Upon investigation, Tu Reh and Peh discover the bodies of four Burmese soldiers who died from the blast of a land mine. There is only one survivor, Chiko, a soldier who looks younger than Tu Reh himself. The young boy's leg is badly mangled and he is unconscious. After his father leaves the decision as to what to do with the boy to his son, Tu Reh has an internal debate with himself. He could kill him and put him out of his misery - after all he is the



enemy. He could leave him for the leopards and wild dogs to eat. Or... he could save his life.

Tu Reh demonstrated his humanity and allowed the revenge in his heart to be replaced by compassion for a youngster in a very dire situation. At great risk to himself, he picked up the boy and carried him through the jungle to save his life.

## **Tai**

Tai is Chiko's best friend at the recruitment camp. He and his sister are orphans and live on the streets of Yangon.

## **Wei-Lin & Joon**

Wei-Lin and Joon are Chiko's parents. Joon is a physician who was arrested by the police for treating a sick man who was a dissident. Wei-Lin fears that the police will take her son, too.

## **Daw Widow & Lin**

Daw Widow is an elder in the neighborhood. Lin is her daughter. Daw Widow gives Chiko a picture of his father when he was a young man and a picture of Lin to take with him when he goes to apply for a teaching job.

## **The Captain**

The captain is the cruel commander of the recruitment camp. He relishes any chance he has to wield out harsh punishment and terrorize the new young recruits.

## **Sergeant U-Tha-Din**

Sergeant-U-Tha-Din is the sergeant at the recruitment camp. He is much kinder than the captain. He cannot read or write and has Chiko read all his mail and write his replies for him.

## **Ree Meh**

Ree Meh is the younger sister of the healer, Nya Meh. Ree Meh is a tough and brave young girl and steals Tu Reh's heart.



## **Nya Meh**

Nya Meh is the healer who saves Chiko's life. She is a reclusive young woman who had been brutalized by Burmese soldiers in a prior incident.

## **Grandfather**

Nya Meh and Ree Meh's grandfather is a very wise and influential elder in the community. He convinces everyone to treat Chiko in a kind and humane way.



# Objects/Places

## Chiko's House

After his father is imprisoned, Chiko and his mother stay inside the family home and rarely venture out in fear of being arrested by the police.

## Yangon, Burma

Chiko and his mother live in the city of Yangon, Burma.

## Photographs

During his experience as an involuntary army recruit and his ordeal after being wounded in the jungle, Chiko often took the photos of his father and his friend, Lei, from his comfort to give him comfort.

## Recruit Camp

Chiko was apprehended by army recruiters and forced into an army training camp in the jungles of Burma. The conditions and the treatment he and the other recruits received more closely resembled that of a prison.

## Solitary Confinement

Tai, Chiko's best friend at the recruitment camp, was sentenced to three days in solitary confinement. The cell was too small to stand up in and had no windows or toilet.

## The Jungle

Chiko volunteered to go on a mission that took him through the dense Burmese jungle. It was there that he was severely injured in a land mine explosion.

## The Big Temple

Tai and his sister, Sawati, were orphans and lived on the streets of Yangon. Sawati stayed at the tea shop at the Big Temple in the city.



## Healer's Hut

After Chiko was severely wounded, Tu Reh carried him to the healer's hut in a remote part of the jungle. The healer was a young woman who lived in the hut with her younger sister and grandfather.

## Karenni Camp

Tu Reh and the healer and her family took Chiko to the Karenni Camp where he could be treated for his wounds by the physician there. He was allowed to stay there until he recovered enough to travel.

## Tu Reh's House

Tu Reh and his family lived at the Karenni Camp in a make-shift hut. The family home had been torched and burned by Burmese soldiers, an image that fueled revenge and anger within the young man.



# Themes

## Compassion and Humanity

One of the strongest threads that run through "Bamboo People" by Mitali Perkins, is that of compassion and humanity. The lives of two teenage boys cross in the most unexpected and unfathomable way. Chiko, a Burmese boy, and Tu Reh, a member of the Karenni tribe that lived in the far reaches of Burma, are on opposing sides of the unrest that exists in the country. Officially, these young boys were playing men in a vicious, relentless war and were the hated enemy of one another.

Chiko had been apprehended and forced against his will to undergo training in a military recruitment center in a remote area of the Burmese jungle. He was a sweet and peaceful young man who wanted only to be a teacher and help his mother. But there was no escaping his fate. He was sent on a mission into the jungle to gain intelligence on the movements and operations of the Karenni tribe. He was badly injured when a land mine exploded.

Tu Reh was on a mission with his father who was a leader of the resistance. They came upon the injured boy and the dilemma immediately arose as to what to do about him. His father did not believe in killing another human unless it was impossible to avoid. He left the disposition of the young Burmese soldier to Tu Reh. It was a chance for Tu Reh to grow and develop. His father left him with the words "God will lead you." Tu Reh's heart and mind was filled with anger and revenge when he began the mission that morning. Burmese soldiers had torched and burned his family's home. But gazing down upon the teenager who seemed younger than he, Tu Reh could not shoot him dead nor could he leave him in the jungle to be eaten by leopards.

The hate in Tu Reh's heart was replaced with compassion and sympathy for the young boy he had stumbled upon. In the end, there was only one decision that Tu Reh could make. At great risk to himself, Tu Reh carried the boy through the dense jungle for hours before he came to the healer's hut. The healer came running out and led Tu Reh inside. She had been brutalized by Burmese soldiers but she did not hesitate in tending to his wounds. She splintered and stitched his wounds and treated him with as much care as she would administer to family or friend. Her heart reached out to the wounded youngster. Caring for the boy transcended thoughts of war and political concerns.

The healer feared that Chiko's leg would become infected and decided he must be taken to the camp where a physician could treat him. The healer's grandfather quoted the Book of Ecclesiastes which said in part that there was "A time for loving, a time for hating; a time for war, a time for peace." This was the time for loving and peace. Tu Reh, the healer, her younger sister and grandfather decided to take him to the camp. They encountered a rogue bull elephant that nearly trampled them, fought hunger and fatigue and dodged bullets of Burmese soldiers to save the life of an enemy. In the



end, the young boy was a friend and brother in spirit and was forever grateful to the "enemies" who saved his life.

## Political Oppression

The backdrop of "Bamboo People" by Mitali Perkins is the political unrest between the Burmese government and the tribal people who live in the far reaches of the country. The Burmese government is intent on conquering the tribal people and taking their lands. The tribal people are just as determined not to let that happen, in spite of the inherent risks to life and limb.

The Burmese government is a harsh and controlling one and its cruelty is not limited to its enemies. The government and military is suspicious of its own people and does not trust them to be loyal citizens without their watchful and hostile intervention. Chiko's physician father was arrested when he was caught leaving his house in the dark to treat a man who was considered a dissident by the government. He has been missing four months and Chiko and his mother don't know if he's alive or dead. They are not allowed to communicate with him but they must pay the government for his upkeep.

Another means of control that is employed by the government is to keep the populace uneducated and uniformed. Wei-Lin scolds Chiko for reading outside in the yard. Someone might see him and arrest him. The schools are closed more than they are open and learning is difficult. Chiko hides his books in a vault in the wall.

As unfair and stringent as the government is, those in charge feel they have no limitations. A perfect illustration of the unfair imbalance that these people must endure is the overt kidnapping of Chiko and other young boys by the government, taking them to a military camp to train for the Army. During this forced training, they were subjected to inhumane conditions and could have no contact with their family or loved ones. Wei-Lin was left alone and desolate not knowing if her husband and son are alive or dead.

## Friendship

Despite the fact that tragedy and misery are a part of this story from start to finish, a continuing theme is one of friendship. It is uplifting to see some existing relationships become stronger, others elevated from friendship to romance and some relationships that begin as antagonistic ultimately transformed into special bonds that cannot be broken.

Chiko has been friends with a younger neighbor girl, Lei, most of his life. He tutored her for years. But, suddenly almost overnight she has changed from cute, endearing child to lovely, alluring young woman. Chiko keeps a photo of her and holds it close to his heart when he is faced with the most impossible of situations.



When Chiko is at the military training camp, he becomes best friends with Tai, who is a tough street-kid. The deep friendship and loyalty that develops between the boys who are both in a perilous situation is a tribute to the depth of character of each boy.

Tu Reh carries the injured Chiko to the healer's hut. The healer's younger sister, Ree Meh, is an aggressive young girl who he does not initially see eye to eye with. But when he dreams, he sees himself building a house while Ree Meh plants a garden next to it. Tu Reh disappoints his best friend when he saves the life of an enemy soldier. Sa Reh bitterly criticizes him and calls him unpatriotic. But in the end, Sa Reh realizes that it was envy and self-doubt that drove his bitter words. Neither boy is willing to give up their life-long friendship despite a few bumps in the road.

Tu Reh saved Chiko's life, even though he was an enemy soldier. Chiko was ever grateful. Tu Reh realized that Chiko had reached a deep part of his heart that never knew existed. As Chiko told Tu Reh when he left, they were not only friends, they were brothers.



# Style

## Point of View

"Bamboo People" is recounted in the first-person narrative. The book is separated into two parts. Part One is told by Chiko and is from his perspective. The reader learns of the young boy's hopes and fears. He loves to read and wants to become a teacher but he lives in fear that his father, who was arrested by the police, might not still be alive.

Part Two is recounted by Tu Reh. He is filled with resentment and rage. The image of his burning house, torched by Burmese soldiers, is seared in his mind and compels him to seek revenge.

Although the story is centered on unrest, war, and political oppression, the ability of the human spirit to prevail despite these difficult circumstances also shines through the book. The ordeal of young boys forced to fight and kill, is lightened by the sweetness and innocence that they have. Since the stories are recounted from the boys' perspectives, we are privy to the internal struggles that they face, the choices they have or feel they have, and the fear what the wrong decision may mean for them and their families and loved ones.

The author, Mitali Perkins, is a world traveler visiting and learning about faraway places such as Bangladesh, Thailand, Ghana and Cameroon. Mitali Perkins is an established writer and is the author of "Monsoon Summer," "Rickshaw Girl" and "Secret Keeper."

## Setting

"Bamboo People" by Mitali Perkins is set in Burma which is also known as Myanmar. Chiko lives with his mother in the large city of Yangon, Burma. He travels by rickshaw through the crowded city streets to the government building where he plans to apply for a teaching position. But it is a trick. The government herds the young boys into a large room and announces that they are being recruited for the Army.

A rickety bus takes them into the dark through the hills and countryside of Burma. They arrive at a military training camp where they are made to sleep on the hard floor of an abandoned gym. They are given only a dented tin can and a blanket. The camp is surrounded by jungle and mountains. The boys are made to move large stones from a river at the edge of the camp and stack them in large piles a good distance away. When Chiko's best friend at the camp, Tai, gets into trouble, he is sent to solitary confinement for several days. The solitary cell is underground and has no windows or toilets. It is so small that not even Tai, who is small in stature, can stand up.

Chiko volunteers for a mission that takes him into the dense Burmese jungle. He is saved by a young man, Tu Reh, who belongs to the Karenni tribe. Tu Reh takes the injured Chiko to the healer's hut where he is tended to. On the way to the Karenni camp,



they encounter a rogue bull elephant that nearly tramples them. The Karenni camp is located near a river. It contains stilted homes, a large meeting building, a medic hut and a school.

## Language and Meaning

Tension, intrigue and drama set the tone in "Bamboo People" by Mitali Perkins. Language itself is a focus of this story that takes place in Burma, also known in modern day as Myanmar. Chiko is a bright young boy whose father is a renowned physician. The schools in Burma are closed more than they are open due to the political unrest and the warring that consumes the country. Chiko's father taught him to read and write in both Burmese and English, an ability that is rare in this country. The Burmese government has declared war on the tribal people of outer Burma. They want to conquer these people and take over their land. The government keeps the people as uneducated and uninformed as possible by limiting reading material and restricting education. Both are means of maintaining complete control over them.

While Chiko is undergoing forced training at a military camp, his ability to read and write becomes a huge benefit. The sergeant, who cannot read or write, uses Chiko to read his mail and write responses to letters. Chiko comes to the notice of the headquarters office and orders that he be sent to them to work as an office clerk.

Through no fault of his own, Chiko finds himself in a life-threatening situation which involves the people of the Karenni tribe. Most of these tribal people don't speak Burmese but Chiko does know some Karenni and they are able to communicate. But words aren't always necessary. The raw emotions and mutual respect that emerge as bonds grow between Chiko and the Karenni people during the dramatic story comes through to all concerned, even though Chiko is at first perceived to be the "enemy."

## Structure

"Bamboo People" by Mitali Perkins is the story of two teenage boys who are on opposing sides of the unrest between the government of Burma and the tribal people in remote areas of the country. The structure of the book is an unusual one but one that works perfectly for the story being told.

The book is structured as two stories that merge into one. Structurally, the book is divided into two main parts. "Part One: Chiko" is the story of a fifteen-year-old Burmese boy who is apprehended by soldiers, forced to become an army recruit and sent to a training camp that more closely resembles a prison. The first part, which consists of twenty-seven small to medium sized chapters, tells the story of Chiko's ordeal in the recruitment camp and his friendship with a tough street-kid named Tai who was also kidnapped. Part One ends when Chiko is sent on a mission with a small unit of soldiers into the jungle and are the victims of a land mine explosion.



Part Two: Tu Reh tells the story of a sixteen-year-old tribal boy who his father, a leader of the resistance, selects to go on a mission with him and a small unit of tribal warriors. It is Tu Reh's first mission. As they walk through the jungle, they hear a loud explosion. After investigation, they find four dead Burmese soldiers killed in the blast and one young soldier, Chiko, whose leg is badly mangled.

The stories of the two boys merge from that point on to the conclusion of "Bamboo People." Although they are natural enemies, Tu Reh goes to great lengths, personal risk, and harsh criticism from tribe members to save the young man's life.



## Quotes

"...It seems like she's getting more anxious by the day. So am I, even though I wish I didn't have to admit that. I'm tired of hiding, of worrying, and worst of all, if remembering again and again the day the soldiers came for Father. Remembering how I've failed him" (Part I, Chapter 1, p. 4).

"The familiar dimple in Mother's left cheek deepens. Father used to say that he tumbled into it when he first saw her and never climbed out" (Part I, Chapter 2, p. 8).

"Most boys learn to take and give blows when they're young, but this is the first time I've been struck, and I'm shaking with shock and pain" (Part I, Chapter 5, p. 29).

"They [the tribal people] want to break our country apart and divide it among themselves. Their whole mission is to destroy our peace" (Part I, Chapter 9, p. 48).

"Pulling off my glasses with his free hand, he swings them with two fingers in front of my face. 'I never want to see you wearing these again,' he says, and drops them" (Part I, Chapter 12, p. 61).

"Cars and trucks don't come now that the material for the latrines has been delivered. The dense jungle cuts us off from the rest of the world better than any wall or chain-link fence" (Part I, Chapter 18, p. 86).

"He takes a deep breath. 'I never had a brother,' he says. 'Who knew I'd find one here, of all places'" (Part I, Chapter 22, p. 108).

"That prisoner is alive and well. We have found him to be an excellent medic and are using his skills when officers are injured in battle" (Part I, Chapter 23, p. 110).

"They didn't see the soldiers burning our home and bamboo grove. But I did. My mind blazes with the memory" (Part II, Chapter 1, p. 139).

"God can bring beauty and goodness from anything" (Part II, p. 159).

"So many boys our age are missing legs, arms, fingers, toes. Even eyes. I don't know if I could endure it, but I'd have to, I guess" (Part II, p. 205).

"As you've heard already, this soldier is a boy, forced into the army against his will. Now he's suffered the loss of his leg. Doesn't God command us to defend all who are weak" (Part II, Chapter 24, p. 242).



## Topics for Discussion

Why was Joon arrested by the police? Why was Wei-Lin afraid that Chiko would be arrested?

How did the government trick Chiko and the other boys into joining the army? Why did many of the boys look up to the captain?

How was the recruit camp like a prison? What did Chiko learn during his experience at the recruit camp?

How did Chiko's ability to write and read benefit him? How did Chiko find out about his father?

What is the difference between a "healer" like Nya Meh and Auntie Doctor? What surgical procedure was Nya Meh unqualified to perform?

Why was Sa Reh against bringing Chiko into the camp? How did grandfather change the minds of many who were against Chiko?

Who in the story had lost a limb? How did that person inspire Chiko? Can a disabled person live a full life? Why or why not?