

Copper Sun Study Guide

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Contents

Copper Sun Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Part One: Amari.....	5
Part Two: Polly.....	8
Part Three: Amari.....	10
Part Four: Polly.....	12
Part Five: Amari.....	14
Part Six: Polly.....	16
Part Seven: Amari.....	18
Part Eight: Polly.....	20
Part Nine: Amari.....	21
Part Ten: Polly.....	23
Part Eleven: Amari.....	24
Characters.....	25
Objects/Places.....	30
Themes.....	32
Style.....	34
Quotes.....	36
Topics for Discussion.....	37



Plot Summary

Told from the modulating viewpoints of 15-year-old slave Amari, and 17-year-old indentured servant Polly, *Copper Sun* is a story of resilience in the face of human depravity, and a hope for freedom against all odds.

When the novel opens, Amari is a happy teenager, engaged to the most handsome man in her African village, and beloved by her parents. When white men enter her village for the first time, her people welcome them with open arms, but the men are here for violence. The white men shoot and kill most of Amari's village before setting it aflame. They chain and shackle the healthy youth and cram them into a slave ship set for America. A terrified Amari is sold to Mr. Percival Derby as a birthday present for his eldest son, Clay. At the same time, Mr. Derby purchases the indenture of a seventeen-year-old girl named Polly, who has 14 years left on her service before she earns her freedom. When Polly first meets Amari, she doesn't want anything to do with her. Polly feels superior to Amari because Polly is a white girl who will eventually be free, while Amari is a black slave, no more than a beast of burden in many white people's eyes.

Life on the Derby plantation is horrendous for both girls, and in time, they forge a bond based simply on their will to survive their terrible condition. This bond strengthens after Clay begins raping Amari and Polly sees first-hand just how scared Amari is, which is the same reaction Polly would have to the treatment. She realizes that blacks, even though they are slaves, have the same emotions, and are just as human, as their white slave holders. The only respite for the two young girls comes from the feisty humor of Mr. Derby's slave cook, Teenie, the unbreakable precociousness of Teenie's four-year-old son Tidbit, and the secret kindness of Mr. Derby's eighteen-year-old second wife, who is nearly nine months pregnant. When Mr. Derby remarried after his first wife passed away, his teenage bride came to her new home with all her belongings and her favorite slave, Noah. When Mrs. Derby goes into labor on the plantations, the slave women, including Amari, quickly rush to her aid. Amari is horrified when she sees that Mrs. Derby's baby does not share the white skin of Mr. Derby, but is a beautiful caramel brown, the same color as Noah's skin. Mrs. Derby admits to the girls that she and Noah are deeply in love, and she begs them to help her save her baby. All the slave women band together in an attempt to hide the truth from Mr. Derby, claiming that the baby was stillborn and had to be quickly buried, but Mr. Derby demands to see the body. When no one can produce the dead child, Clay searches the slave quarters and reveals the truth: the baby is not dead, and the baby is black. Mr. Derby calls all the slaves to the courtyard and forces them to watch as he shoots the newborn infant in the head. He then turns the gun on Noah, instantly killing him too. For their part in covering up the truth, Amari and Polly are whipped, held overnight in the storage room, and promised that in the morning, they will be sold to the nearest brothel.

The next morning, the girls manage to escape. They grab Tidbit and run wildly into the woods. The trio run until their legs tire, heading South toward a land known as Fort Mose, a Spanish colony in Florida where slaves can be freed. The trio run for two months, braving every imaginable danger from wild animals to starvation to the



appearance of evil Clay Derby who has come to reclaim them. Through all their trials, the three children must trust and depend on each other to survive. Skin color is no longer an issue and the children view themselves as equal. They meet many kindly strangers along the way who help hide them, give them food, and assist in transportation. Finally, the three weary travelers reach the gate to Fort Mose, where they find a sense of security, safety, and above all, freedom from slavery.



Part One: Amari

Part One: Amari Summary

In the opening section of the novel, the reader sees the beautiful setting of the village where Amari grew up. In the opening scene, Amari picks coconuts with her eight-year-old brother, Kwasi. Their beautiful day is interrupted when strange white men enter the village. Amari and her people have never seen such odd pale skin before, but excited to act as hosts to their interesting guests, quickly arrange a welcoming ceremony with dancing, food, and traditional entertainment. The party is shockingly broken up when the visitors, who have entered the village carrying rifles, begin shooting and killing the villagers. Without mercy, they bludgeon, beat, and shoot their hosts, including both of Amari's parents and Kwasi. Obviously, Amari is absolutely devastated and completely confused. The white men set the village ablaze, saving the lives of only the strongest and fittest teenagers, whom they chain by the neck and lead out of the village. Next to Amari is her fiancé, Besa, but Besa can't even look Amari in the eyes. Immediately, the white men lead their new slaves away from the village, marching them by foot through the woods toward the ships. The slaves walk for days without food, water, or rest. If they die during the journey, the white men simply remove the chains and discard the bodies without ceremony. Finally, after days of travel, they reach their destination: Cape Coast, where the slaves are separated by gender and emptied into a horrifying dark and damp room with hundreds of other slaves, and only a tiny window overhead for air circulation.

Inside this makeshift prison, Amari meets another slave woman, Afi, who has been in the prison long enough to know what to expect: Amari has been brought in with a new group of slaves, fresh from Africa. They will be held in this prison until there are enough of them collected to be sent on ships to America, where they will be auctioned off to the highest bidder. The reason why Afi was not sold off with the last group of slaves is because she caught the attention of one of the guards, and is forced to sleep with him at night: "Yes, child. It is terrible ... I hate him. But I will live. My spirit is too strong to die in a place like this" (Page 26). A few mornings later, the fear is realized when the women are shouted at to exit the prison onto the white sandy beaches of the sea. The women are all terrified, as they have never seen large boats or even water this size before. Many are sure they will die. Outside, the slaves are held in a filthy pen, like animals, and branded with hot irons on their backs. Amari catches sight of Besa, but he refuses to look her way even though he knows she is there. Amari understands. The bond between herself and Besa must now be broken. The slaves are all given a massive meal, which surprises Amari until she learns that they are being given strength for what will certainly be a long journey. The next morning, the slaves are loaded into rowboats to be taken to much larger slaves ships. Amari is horrified when she sees a mother and daughter hurl themselves out of the rowboat to drown in the sea rather than be taken aboard the slave ship. This horror is nothing compared to the actual horror of the slave ship. It is described as "a small city made of wood. Poles taller than any tree reached to the sky" (Page 42). The female slaves are pushed into a hole in the floor where the men had been loaded before, onto narrow shelves made of wood with only a few inches



separating one slave from another. Because of the way the slaves were crammed into the shelves, the blood, vomit, urine, and feces from the top shelves dripped down into the lower shelves, saturating the chained slaves below. All the slaves are chained in this position for months during the journey, given only a few moments respite each day to each bread and breathe fresh air. In the evenings, the slave women are constantly raped by the sailors. Amari escapes this terrible fate for a few nights when one kindly sailor takes her to his cabin and teaches her English instead of raping her. Other nights, she is not so lucky. Meanwhile, hundreds of slaves die from the conditions aboard the ship and are simply tossed overboard. Amari often wishes she could be one of them.

Finally, after months of torturous travel, the slaves arrive at Sullivan's Island, their port into America and the slave auctions. Amari is desperate not to be separated from Afi, who has become like a surrogate mother to her. The slaves are all held in one room while they await the morning auction, and Besa manages to steal away from the guards for a moment long enough to say goodbye to Amari, telling her that he will always hold a beautiful memory of her in his heart. The next morning, the slaves are stripped naked, oiled down to show off their muscled physiques, and lined up for the white men to prod and poke before they decide to buy.

Part One: Amari Analysis

This section functions to show the beautiful life that Amari was ripped away from during the slave trade of the early 18th century. The mentality of many Americans at the time was not only that black slaves were little more than beasts of burden, but that any life, including a slave life of hard work and no pay, was a much higher quality life than what they had been living in Africa. Slaves were often referred to as "savages" and their home life, because it did not function with modern technologies, was also considered savage. Why would anyone want to live in a house made of straw and mud, for example, when you could live in a house made of stone instead? Although Amari and her family may have been considered poor by Western financial ideals, they were rich in village life. Amari's father was a respected storyteller who carried the history of his people in his memories. They had many friends, loved each other deeply, and knew where they belonged in their close-knit community. Amari had a bright future and was engaged to the most eligible bachelor in the village. All this changed when the white men arrived at the village and destroyed everything. It is interesting to note that the guide who brought the white men to the village was an Ashanti soldier, which means that he was a soldier from a neighboring African village. He was likely promised a large sum of cash to lead the white men to the villages, but in the end, he was thrown into the slave ship along with the rest of them.

Much of the violence presented in this opening section of the novel is particularly disturbing, but it not only prepares the readers for the horrors to come, it also shows the dark truth of how Africans were treated during the time of slavery. When students consider the millions of Africans killed during the slave trade, most think that these Africans died in America, under white rule. While this is true for a large percentage of Africans, many more were killed during the village raids, when entire villages - along



with their individual cultures, languages, and histories - were wiped off the face of the earth. As with the Holocaust, only the strongest were saved. Elderly, children, and the medically infirm were immediately killed, as the reader sees during the pillage of Amari's village. Throughout the journey from the village to the slave ship, Amari and her people are treated like animals, a mentality that will carry through Amari's journey. They are chained, penned, fed, and branded like animals, perpetuating the American belief that Africans were beasts. The villagers were systematically stripped of their humanity to prevent them from banding together to overpower the white men. The villagers lived relatively sheltered lives, so the presence of muskets, even the vastness of the sea, terrified them. Many believed the white man was dealing with magic, and many villagers, who were profoundly superstitious, were likely too afraid to fight back. Still, in the face of this profound violence and dehumanization, there were still kind people. It should be expected that slaves who have been in the situation longer would pass on valuable information to the newcomers. The reader sees this in the actions of Tybee on Sullivan's Island, and Afi on the ship. What is less expected, however, is the kindness of a few white people as well. Bill, for example, sometimes takes Amari aside on the slave ship, during the time when the sailors are raping the slaves, to teach her English, knowing that this skill will be invaluable for her in America. During the months long journey away from America, Bill lays the groundwork for the language Amari will need to learn in order to survive. Bill represents a percentage of Southerners who believed slavery was wrong but were powerless to prevent it. Helping slaves escape was a punishable crime, but these sympathizers did what they could to make a difference. After reading this first section, the reader should be prepared for more violence and more acts of kindness.



Part Two: Polly

Part Two: Polly Summary

In the opening of Polly's first section, it is made very clear that Polly doesn't like Negroes. She doesn't like the way they look, doesn't like the way they talk, and certainly doesn't like the way that they work for free, making it impossible for a girl like her to make a living. Polly is an indentured servant whose indenture was sold to Mr. Percival Derby for the next fourteen years. Today, she has joined Mr. Derby at the slave auction where he intends to purchase a young slave as a sixteenth-birthday present for his son, Clay. He purchases Amari. The auctioneer offers Mr. Derby Amari's "mother," Afi, but Mr. Derby refuses. Polly watches as Mr. Derby yanks Amari off the auction stage and throws her, weeping, into his wagon. Another one of the slaves, Noah, helps tie Amari to the cart, and Clay renames Amari "Myna": "because she is mine!" (Page 85). Although Clay is jovial with his father after the receipt of his gift, he still sulks when Mr. Derby talks about his new wife, Isabelle, who is clearly much younger than he is. Polly listens to all this conversation intently. When they arrive at the Derbyshire Plantation, Polly is impressed with the vastness of land, and immediately imagines herself tending to the beautiful Mrs. Derby inside the Big House. She is sorely disappointed, then, when Mr. Derby informs her that her main job is to teach Amari English. On top of this disgraceful position, Polly is also ordered to live in the same shack as Amari. Polly tries to protest her assignment, but her pleas are in vain. Inside the slave quarters, Polly and Amari are immediately introduced to Teenie, the Derby's cook, and her four-year-old son, Tidbit. The girls are given very little time to settle in before Polly must start her lessons with Amari. Afterward, the girls are so exhausted they collapse into their beds. Polly is shocked when, a few hours later, Tidbit knocks on the door and says that Clay is asking for his birthday present now, which means that Amari must get up and join Clay in his bed.

Part Two: Polly Analysis

In this short section, the reader meets Polly, the second protagonist of the novel. Polly's introduction shows the deep racism that was present in the South during slave times. Polly admits that she doesn't know much about African slaves, but she does know that she doesn't like them. As Polly watches Amari weep and cling to Afi on the slave auction block, she genuinely wonders if the slave girl feels affection for her surrogate mother. When she watches Clay whip Noah as he loads the cart, Polly is amazed: "She was always amazed at how much abuse slaves took without it seeming to bother them. Perhaps they didn't feel pain the way others did - she wasn't sure" (Page 80). It is interesting to note that when Polly questions Clay about his motivations for beating Noah, Clay simply answers that beating slaves is expected because it shows the slaves that he cares enough to ensure that they do their tasks correctly.



When Polly first joins with the Derby family, she has high hopes for what her position will entail at the plantation. Because she can read and write, Polly automatically assumes that she will be working in the Big House, and dreams that Mrs. Derby, whom she has heard is beautiful and kind, will train her up to become a proper lady. Of course this is the complete opposite of Polly's actual assignment on the plantation, which requires her to live in slave quarters with Amari. Polly is absolutely scandalized to think that Mr. Derby puts her on the same level as Amari: a slave. Polly despises everything about Amari, from the way that she looks to the way that she smells. She hates Amari's "jungle" language and the "secret" way that she can communicate with Teenie. What Polly truly hates, it seems, is that she doesn't truly belong with the slaves because she is white, but doesn't truly belong in the big house because she is an indentured servant. Although Amari's life is awful, at least she has a readymade community in the other slaves, who understand the heartbreak of where Amari came from. It is only when Polly watches Amari drag herself out of bed that first night to go sleep with Clay that Polly understands how similar she and Amari truly are. Amari is terrified, and Polly sees this as a real, true, visceral emotion that she can relate to. Her perception of Amari and their relationship is now poised to change throughout the novel.



Part Three: Amari

Part Three: Amari Summary

Three months pass quickly as Amari struggles to assimilate to life on the plantation. She is in charge of many household chores, including helping Teenie prepare all the meals. Often, the scent of the cooking food reminds Amari of home, and it brings tears to her eyes. One of her few comforts is in the knowledge that all the slaves around her have lost their mammas too. Amari and Polly tolerate working beside each other but rarely speak. Amari fills her days speaking in broken English to Tidbit, who doesn't mind that she can't speak fluently. In the evenings, Clay frequently calls for her and forces her to have sex with him. Afterward, Clay sometimes likes to lie in bed and talk. He often asks Amari if she likes him, and she has no option but to answer yes.

Some mornings, Teenie takes Amari into the woods to teach her about the roots and berries that grow on the Derby property. Teenie often uses these natural resources for their meals and for homeopathic treatments for slave illnesses and injuries. Amari asks if there is any root out there to poison a man to death. Teenie says that there is, but Amari isn't yet ready to learn which one. While they are out harvesting, Teenie tells Amari about her history on Derby farms. She was born here and has worked here all her life. Yet she still considers herself to be African because she is carrying memories of the home country her mother taught her about. She passes those same memories on to Tidbit so he'll always remember where he truly came from.

Amari is surprised the first time that she meets Mrs. Isabelle Deby, Mr. Derby's young wife. The slaves have been whispering for a while that Mrs. Derby is pregnant, yet she seems wistful. Mrs. Derby is particularly concerned with Amari and often asks how she is adjusting to life on the plantation. It is clear that Mrs. Derby knows what happens at night between Amari and Clay, and that she pities Amari. When Mrs. Derby is gone, Teenie comments on how sorry she feels for the woman. Although she is not technically a slave, her life is not much better than a slave's. Later that night, Amari is sure that she hears voices in the bushes outside her shack and that she hears a woman crying. Fearing that Clay is out there, Amari does not investigate further, but the sounds haunt her that night.

Part Three: Amari Analysis

Slowly but surely, Amari is adjusting to life on the plantation. Although her life is uncomfortable, and her relationship with Clay is certainly abusive, Amari's life is not as violent and tragic as many other slaves at the time. For example, Amari has never been beaten by her master and she is always well-fed. Still, Amari is desperate to leave the plantation and will do anything to get out. She even questions Teenie about poisonous roots, which she would most certainly use to kill her nightly attacker, Clay. It is interesting to note that Clay is genuinely concerned with whether Amari truly likes him. It



is clear that Clay is desperate for affection, but he does not have a healthy way of finding it. Through his description, the reader learns that Clay is greasy and unattractive, with breath that smells of rotting meat. He has a nasty streak and terrible temper. None of these characteristics would make him particularly attractive to Southern women at the time, but it is clear that Clay is vulnerable. His mother died in childbirth and he has likely never had anyone give him motherly love. Clay's relationship with Amari is unquestionably rape, but such rape was allowed, and often expected, in this historic time. Clay's insecurities and vulnerabilities make him a complicated character, and some readers may sympathize with his desire to be loved and his confusion about how love is expressed.

It is interesting to note that Mrs. Derby is portrayed as an extremely caring, gentle woman toward her slaves, yet Clay despises her, perhaps because she has stolen the affection of Mr. Derby, the only person who cared about Clay. Now that Mr. Derby is remarried and deeply in love with his wife, Clay must feel particularly abandoned. It is no wonder that he would resent his father's young wife. Mrs. Derby is pregnant with her first child, yet she does not appear happy with this news. It is clear that Mrs. Derby does not return her husband's admiration and that she feels trapped within her marriage. Teenie observes that even though Mrs. Derby is a free woman on paper, she is bound by the strict rules of her marriage and the social expectations on conduct in society. Mrs. Derby has no say over what happens in her life, which makes her somewhat of a slave in her own right. This theme will be explored further, later in the novel.

Finally, the theme of memory is introduced in this section of the novel. Amari is often overwhelmed with memories of home while she is working in the kitchen and she does not know how to process them. Teenie tells her that as long as something is remembered, it is never truly gone. Even though Teenie was born in America, she still considers herself to be African because she carries her mother's African memories with her, the same memories she passes on to Tidbit. This is an interesting way for the African slaves to keep their culture and history alive even when their freedom has been taken away. Teenie's kente cloth is an important symbol for her memories of Africa. When Teenie's mother was taken from her village, she clung to her own mother - who would have been Teenie's grandmother - tearing a piece of cloth from her mother's headscarf. She clutched that piece of cloth during the entire journey to America and buried it under a tree on the Derby plantation to keep it safe. Before they sold her, she gave the cloth to Teenie as a way of remembering her African roots.



Part Four: Polly

Part Four: Polly Summary

Polly is growing increasingly desperate to find work in the big house with the white family where she feels she belongs. She is excited then when she receives word that one of the slave girls that usually serves dinner has had to rush to her mother's side after she was bit by a snake in the rice fields. To cover for the girl's absence, Lena, the head serving slave, has asked Polly and Amari to serve tonight's meal. Polly is sure that once the Derby's see her in action, they'll realize that her talents are being underused in the slave quarters and they'll move her inside. Teenie warns the girls to be very careful inside the house, to do just as Lena says, and not to touch anything. Amari is nervous and doesn't want to be in such close proximity to Clay, but Polly is elated. Once she is inside the house, she pokes around corners, inhaling the scents of the books and the fine wines in the serving room. Mrs. Derby barely touches her dinner, and Mr. Derby urges her to eat more for the sake of their unborn child. Clay and his father discuss buying new slaves straight from Africa because the ones they've purchased now don't seem to be lasting in the fields. Just as Mr. Derby finishes his glass of wine, he stretches his legs out from his chair, tripping up Amari as she walks through the dining room with the blackberry cobbler. The dessert slips from her hands and crashes in a black puddle onto the white carpeting. Mr. Derby is furious and immediately reaches for his whip, which he slashes onto Amari's back, over and over and over, until her uniform is ripped to shreds and her blood pools and stains the carpeting next to the blackberries. After what seems like an eternity, Mrs. Derby grabs her husband's arm and begs him to stop the beating. Polly has never been so afraid in her life and is shaking as the Derby family leaves the dining room. Noah has stood silently in the corner throughout the entire meal, but once the family is gone, he exits the room, whispering to the girls that vinegar will get the stains out of the carpet.

Part Four: Polly Analysis

When Polly was growing up, her mother always hoped that someday, Polly would turn into a proper lady. Because Polly's parents had grown up poor, they always hoped for a better life for their only child. They taught Polly how to read and write, and instilled a strong sense of self-confidence in her. These dreams left a strong impression on Polly who is sure that if she can just make it into the big house on the plantation, Mrs. Derby will raise her as her own daughter, teaching her the ways of a proper Southern lady. This hope reaches a boiling point when the girls are given a tour of the rice plantation and learn about the terrible life rice laborers are forced to live. They spend entire days hunched over, planting rice plants one seed at a time. They are forced to plant in water, where poisonous snakes and alligators often attack. They see this firsthand when Flora's mother is bitten and she has to leave her post serving dinner that night. Polly has her big chance to impress the Derby family with her skills, but it comes crashing to a halt when Amari spills the blackberry dessert. Mr. Derby reacts violently, whipping the



girl until she is bloody and raw. It is clear to Polly then, and to the reader, that no one is safe from the violence of slavery. Mr. Derby's snap reaction is also a scene of foreshadowing. Through his treatment of Amari in the kitchen, it becomes brutally clear that he is a violent man with a wicked temper. The impulsiveness and fury with which he beats Amari makes him all the more dangerous. It is also interesting to note that Mrs. Derby eats very little, and that she is clearly depressed, particularly when discussing her unborn child, although the reader does not yet understand why.



Part Five: Amari

Part Five: Amari Summary

After the beating from Mr. Derby, Amari is bedridden as her wounds heal. She drifts in and out of consciousness, and Polly never leaves her bedside. Amari apologizes to Polly for ruining her chances to move into the big house, and Polly looks at her with sincere affection. She says that she has missed having Amari working next to her, and that she wouldn't want to live in that big house with Mr. Derby anyway. As Amari drifts in and out of consciousness, she often dreams of her homeland and wishes that her mother could be there nursing her wounds. In her daydreams, her mother's face is often replaced with Mrs. Derby's face, which Amari doesn't understand until she wakes one morning to find Mrs. Derby sitting by her bedside with a cup of tea. Later, Polly tells Amari that Mrs. Derby had come to visit Amari everyday, applying salves and bringing cups of tea to the girl's lips. It is clear that Mrs. Derby feels terribly for the beating and that she wishes she could do more to care for Amari. Clay sends Amari a package of candy from town and gives her nearly two weeks to recover before he calls her to his bed again.

The next time Amari sees Clay, he saunters into Teenie's kitchen unannounced as grabs Tidbit to use as gator bait in his hunt. Teenie is horrified and begs Clay not to take her son. Amari offers to go with Clay during his hunt, which he agrees to so he can show Amari off to his friends. When they reach the hunting group, Clay brags to his friends about sleeping with Amari. Some of his friends try to touch Amari and Clay shouts and jealously pushes them away from her. When his friends grow bored of ogling Amari, they start their alligator hunt by tying Tidbit to a piece of rope and hurling him into the alligator infested river. The idea is that Tidbit splashes around, attracting the alligators, and Clay shoots the gators before they can attack the boy. It is a sick game and the slaves are absolutely terrified. Clay throws Tidbit into the river multiple times, barely giving the boy enough time to catch his breath between the near drownings. When he is bored, he pulls Tidbit in, covered in blood and water, and tells Amari to take him home.

Part Five: Amari Analysis

In this section, Mrs. Derby is portrayed as a somewhat angelic character in the way that she cares for Amari after the beating. It is highly unusual for a white woman to care for her slaves with such compassion, particularly when she is married to such a violent and hateful man. All these idiosyncrasies of character should act as clues for the reader as to why Mrs. Derby is depressed. It is clear that Mrs. Derby was raised to love people regardless of their skin color, but she is powerless to stop her husband from abusing his slaves. This is a common theme in the novel: there are many kindly white people in the South who go out of their way to help slaves. They help the slaves in small ways - giving them medication, money, food, shelter, etc, but they are powerless to stop slavery on a larger scale. Even though they are making only a small difference, the impact is powerful enough to change the lives of the slaves they encounter.



Meanwhile, Clay's character is expanded in this section. Clay is gentler with Amari after the beating, and in his own way, even kind to her: he sends her extra blankets and pillows, perhaps as way of apology for his father's behavior. But Clay complicates his character again by enacting a horrible abuse on Tidbit by using him as alligator bait while amusing his friends at the river. The hunting scene is one of the most horrific and traumatic scenes in the novel. Clay's blatant disregard of Tidbit's safety, even his enjoyment in Tidbit's fear and struggle, characterize him as an evil man. Whatever sympathies the reader may have had for Clay are almost certainly erased. Clay's affection for Amari comes on the trade that he is getting something in return from her: sex. Because Clay is getting nothing in return from Tidbit, the boy is useless in his eyes. Clay does not care for Amari as a human being, but as a piece of property that he wants to take care of. When Clay jealously pushes his friends away from Amari, it is not to protect her from their advances, but to ensure that he is the only man allowed to touch her. He protects his property like a jealous dog.



Part Six: Polly

Part Six: Polly Summary

One morning, a few weeks after the alligator hunting incident, Mr. Derby runs into the slave quarters shouting that Mrs. Derby is in labor. Teenie, Polly, and Amari rush to Mrs. Derby's bedside to help with the delivery while Mr. Derby goes into town for the doctor. When they reach Mrs. Derby's bedside, the woman is clearly in anguish. She desperately begs the girls to help her, and they assure that they will get the baby out. Mrs. Derby wails that she is going to die and she continually begs the girls to help her save her baby. Polly assures Mrs. Derby that she is not going to die, that they are going to take good care of her, but Mrs. Derby just cries and shakes her head. Polly grabs the baby as it slips from Mrs. Derby's body, and cries out in shock. The baby is black. Amari runs from the house to find Teenie, and Mrs. Derby says that she must explain everything before her husband kills her. Mrs. Derby was raised on a plantation of her own alongside Noah, one of the slaves. As Mrs. Derby grew, her relationship with Noah changed and the two fell in love. When she married Mr. Derby, Mrs. Derby asked him to also take her favorite slave, Noah. Even though she knew it was dangerous, Mrs. Derby continued her love affair with Noah after she was married, and it was Noah who fathered her child. Mrs. Derby is sure that once her husband finds out the truth, he will kill her, Noah, and their baby.

The girls hatch a plan to send the newborn baby to live with Sara Jane, a slave who had given birth a few weeks earlier. She will have enough milk to keep the baby alive until they can think of another plan. They will tell Mr. Derby that the baby was stillborn and horribly deformed, which is why they buried it straight away. Mrs. Derby snuggles close to her baby, kissing her head and crying. Finally, she says goodbye to the baby, praying that she will see her daughter again. Shortly after Teenie delivers the baby to Sara Jane's cottage, Mr. Derby comes running up the stairs demanding to see the child. Right on cue, Mrs. Derby bursts into tears and tells him that the baby is dead. She begs her husband not to dig up the body because it is too traumatic for her to relive. Teenie rushes to find Noah and tells him that he must runaway, but Noah refuses to leave Mrs. Derby. The doctor arrives and is confused as to why there is no baby for him to inspect. A suspicious Clay searches the slave barracks and finds the infant in Sara Jane's cottage. He brings the crying infant out into the main courtyard and calls for his father. It only takes a moment for Mr. Derby to figure out what has happened. He calls everyone, including his wife, the doctor, and all the slaves out into the courtyard. He tosses the baby into the dirt and shoots it point blank in the head. Then he turns the gun on Noah and instantly kills him too.

Mr. Derby then turns his rage on the slaves who helped cover up the truth. He grabs Amari and Polly and throws them into the smokehouse, promising to sell them off to the nearest brothel at first light. He turns to Teenie and sneers. She is too valuable for him to sell, so he'll punish her a different way: he'll sell Tidbit. Teenie's wails echo through the plantation as she begs Mr. Derby not to sell off her only child. That night, as Polly,



Amari, and Tidbit huddle in the smokehouse, Cato, the oldest and wisest of the slaves, whispers to them through the cracks in the wood. He tells them about a place called Fort Mose, a safe haven in the South for runaway slaves. He urges them to escape and find that place, but the children have no idea how they will escape their fates.

Part Six: Polly Analysis

This section is considered to be the climax of the novel. When Mrs. Derby goes into labor, it is clear that she knows her days are numbered. At first, the slave women don't understand her desperation, and think that her fears are due to the pain of labor. Once the baby is born, however, they realize how grave the situation truly is. When Mr. Derby first ran around the plantation shouting that his wife was in labor, he couldn't seem to find a slave to help him anywhere. It is clear that the slaves knew what was happening, which means that they knew Noah was having an affair with the Master's wife. No one wanted to be around when Mr. Derby found out the truth, so all the slaves made themselves scarce. When the slave women realize the severity of the situation, they quickly band together, regardless of the consequences, to try to save the innocent baby's life. For a moment, many readers might expect the slave's plan to work. It is a horrifying and truly shocking moment when Mr. Derby shoots Noah, and practically unreadable when Mr. Derby shoots in the infant. In this moment, the depravity of human nature is expressed. The shooting scene highlights the pure evil of slavery, and of Mr. Derby.

There is no doubt in anyone's mind that Mr. Derby has just committed a double-murder, but under the laws of slavery, no charges will ever be filed against him. It is clear that even the doctor is shocked by Mr. Derby's actions, but Percival simply states that he was "disciplining some unruly slaves" (Page 184). His further punishment, promising to sell Polly, Amari, and Tidbit, shows his absolute black-hearted ruthlessness. There is no doubt that Mr. Derby is the villain and almost everyone around him is the victim. The reader feels badly for Teenie, the girls, Tidbit, and of course, Mrs. Derby. It is clear that what Teenie said about Mrs. Derby is true: even though she is white, she is still a slave because she is a woman. Mrs. Derby has no rights as a Southern, white woman. Although she is technically free, she cannot pursue her love, and now she must be shackled to a man that she hates for the rest of her life. Like the slaves, Mrs. Derby is nothing more than property to her husband.



Part Seven: Amari

Part Seven: Amari Summary

The next morning, Dr. Hoskins loads the slaves into his wagon promising Mr. Derby that he'll take them to the slave auction and bring back the money they earn. They drive silently down the road for several hours before Dr. Hoskins pulls the wagon off to the side of the road. He turns to the slaves and tells them that he won't be bringing them to the auction. He doesn't agree with slavery, and after witnessing the horrible double-murder the night before, his conscious has called for him to help set these three children free. All he can offer the children is a small purse of money and a promise that he'll give them a few days head start before telling Mr. Derby that they were attacked by highwaymen and that they escaped. Finally, Dr. Hoskins gives Polly a musket with one round of ammunition warning her to make that one shot count. With that, the children run silently into the woods to begin their journey toward freedom.

The three children discuss what their best option is, with Polly saying they should head North and Amari arguing that they should head South, toward Fort Mose. Polly says that Fort Mose probably doesn't exist and that it's more dangerous for the slaves to wander through the South. Amari argues that everyone will be expecting them to head North. Finally, they decide to take their chances and head South. Tidbit is elated when he sees that his dog, Hushpuppy, has tracked them into the woods and will join them for the journey. Everyone walks in silence for days, half-expecting to see Mr. Derby or Clay to jump out from behind the trees at any moment and bring them back to the plantation. They eat scavenged nuts and berries, but hunger constantly gnaws at their stomachs. Trying to find more sustenance, Amari accidentally feeds everyone mayapples, which make them extremely ill. Other days, Amari catches fish which they eat raw because they cannot risk making a fire to cook it. The threesome trudges through the woods for days and then weeks. Just as the children begin to relax into their routine, a tree branch snaps behind them. Amari whirls around and is horrified to see Clay standing behind their path with a cocky sneer on his face. Clay grabs Amari and begins describing all the horrible things he's going to do to her to teach her a lesson. As his hands begin roving between Amari's legs, Polly jumps from the shadows and fires the musket at Clay. The bullet does not kill Clay, but grazes off his forehead, injuring him. Quickly, they tie Clay, kicking and screaming, to a tree with his own rope and rush into the woods. As they turn to take one last look at Clay, they see a rattlesnake slithering its way toward him.

Part Seven: Amari Analysis

Dr. Hoskins is the first in a string of many white Southerners who do not agree with slavery and do what they can to stop it. It is clear that these individuals feel stifled by the laws and societal expectations of the time. Although Dr. Hoskins does not agree with slavery, he is powerless to stop it. No laws protect him or the slaves that he attempts to free. If he voices his objection to slavery, he will be considered an abolitionist



sympathizer and will therefore be ostracized. Southerners had no choice but to go along with slavery, or move to the North. Such sympathizers have small windows in which they can control a slave's fate, and Dr. Hoskins seizes the opportunity to give the slaves a better life by freeing them, at least freeing them from the wagon. He is putting his own life in jeopardy to help them, and he will not be alone in his quest. As the children's journey progresses, they will meet many like-minded white southerners who will aid their journey, symbolic of the Underground Railroad that led many slaves to freedom in the North.

Because Dr. Hoskins' story wasn't particularly believable, Clay Derby manages to track the slaves to where they are hiding in the woods. He seems genuinely upset that Amari would run away from him. Clay Derby is a complicated character. He is clearly a villain, but he is also vulnerable. Perhaps because the reader is unclear whether or not they should hate Clay, Draper leaves his fate at the end of the novel unclear. Amari leaves him tied to a tree with a rattlesnake nearby. Readers who loathed Clay can safely assume that he was killed, while there is still a small glimmer of hope that he escaped, easing the minds of those who felt Clay did not deserve a death sentence.



Part Eight: Polly

Part Eight: Polly Summary

The children run through the woods faster than they've moved during the entire journey. They've stolen Clay's rucksack and inhaled the food he had packed there. That evening, they wade into the river late at night to catch crawdads and are terrified to see that they've been spotted once again, this time by a redheaded teenager fishing in the river. The boy introduces himself and tells them not to bother lying to him; he can see that they're runaway slaves. Instead of turning them in for the reward money, the boy, Nathan, offers to hide them in his barn for the evening, giving them a safe place to sleep tonight. It is clear that he is particularly taken with Polly, and whenever she looks him in the eye, he blushes. Although they're not sure whether or not they can trust him, the children accept Nathan's offer, and the food he manages to sneak out to them for dinner. Nathan tells them that Fort Mose is a real place, although it might not be as fancy as the girls have imagined. He says that he's heard that runaway slaves are welcome at Fort Mose, as long as they swear their allegiance to the Spanish king. That night, all three children sleep with full bellies and sweet dreams of their Spanish future.

Part Eight: Polly Analysis

Once again, Nathan is the embodiment of kindly white Southerners who have a desire to help escaped slaves. Although Nathan likely would have aided Amari and Tidbit had he found them alone, it helps that the escaped slaves are running with Polly, a beautiful white girl. Immediately, it is clear to everyone, including the slaves, that Nathan and Polly have a connection. For the first time since her parents died, Polly feels beautiful. For the first time in a long time, she feels like a real girl, not a slave. Not only does Nathan embody human kindness, he also embodies hope, not just of living a life in freedom, but also of thriving there.



Part Nine: Amari

Part Nine: Amari Summary

In the morning, the escaped slaves continue their journey toward Fort Mose. They travel throughout the day without incident. When evening falls, they are forced to find shelter yet again, this time in what appears to be an abandoned shack. The children drift off to sleep, but are startled awake by a crazy-looking white woman wearing a buckskin cap. The woman begins shouting, asking the children what they have done with her son, Patrick. Of course the children have no idea what the woman is talking about, and innocently tell her that all they've been doing is sleeping. Their honest candor sets the woman into fits of laughter. Without quite understanding why, Amari feels as if she can trust this woman, Fiona. She tells the woman the truth: they are runaway slaves trying to make their way to Fort Mose. Fiona thinks for a moment, then nods as if she's just made up her mind. She leads the children to her barn and gives them her best horse and wagon. She tells Polly to sit up front, driving, and the two black slaves to hide in the back. Fort Mose is only a few days' travel from here. If the children are quick, and lucky, they can make it to freedom.

As Fiona saddles up her horse, Amari asks if she keeps slave. Fiona plainly answers, yes, everyone around her does. Even though Fiona is a slave owner, she tries to treat her help with respect. She also has no qualms about helping someone else's slaves escape, perhaps because she knows that not all slave owners are as kindly to their "property" as she is. Some of Fiona's slaves peek out from their shacks to see what all the commotion is about. One male slave helps Amari and the others saddle up. The slave is covered in scars, is missing one eye and nearly all of his teeth. When he turns to face Amari, she gasps. This battered slave is Besa. She reaches out, crying, to embrace him, but he pulls away. Besa tells her that since he was taken from Africa, he has had five owners. They have beaten his spirit, and his ability to love, out of him. He tells Amari that he can no longer be the Besa that she remembers. That Besa is dead. Amari begs Besa to join them on their journey to Fort Mose, but again, he refuses. Grasping the clothing and food that Fiona has gifted them with, the children continue their journey toward freedom.

Part Nine: Amari Analysis

Once again, the children meet a kindly white Southerner who is willing to help them on their journey toward freedom. Fiona is an interesting character because unlike the other white folk the children have met thus far, Fiona is a slave owner. She represents an interesting community of Southerners who seem trapped between societal expectation and their own morality. While Fiona is certainly a kind and generous woman for aiding the children, she doesn't seem to understand how her ownership of slaves adds to the problem. Fiona rationalizes her slave ownership by stating that everyone in the South owns slaves, and that nothing would get done without them. Although she treats her



slaves well, they are still slaves. She is still their owner. No matter how kindly she treats slaves like Besa, she perpetuates the Africans' dehumanization by holding them as property, even if she does not treat them as such.

Amari's meeting with Besa is an important turning point for her in the novel. Everyone that Amari cared about was killed when the white men first entered her village. The only tie Amari had to her home was Besa, the man she still dreamed about and still hoped to end up with. The reunification is not what Amari had hoped for, and Besa is now a broken man. Saying goodbye to Besa is symbolic of Amari finally saying goodbye to her past. She realizes now that she will never be the girl she was in Africa. She will never return to her home. This realization becomes increasingly important when Amari discovers that she is pregnant at the end of the novel. Amari's past life is gone, and she must create a future for herself, while keeping the past alive in the new generations.



Part Ten: Polly

Part Ten: Polly Summary

The children continue their journey toward Fort Mose, recalling their favorite memories of home and their favorite memories of their parents. Amari recalls how no matter what she and her mother talked about, her mother always seemed to have the right answer. Polly admits that while her father wasn't perfect, her mother loved him with all her heart.

Tidbit simply says that he wants to return to his mother. He is tired of traveling and he just wants to go home. It is difficult for Amari to explain that he cannot go home, and she is his mother now. Polly and Amari's relationship also deepens as the girls discuss how their opinions of each other's race has changed since they moved onto Derbyshire Farm. Polly despised most black people until she met Amari. She thought of them as animals until she knew them personally. Meanwhile, Amari says that she hates white people sometime, and that she never felt hatred until she became a slave.

As the children travel closer to Fort Mose, their fears reach a climax. They are so close to freedom, they would be devastated if something stopped them now. They fear Clay Derby's return, but they also fear the Spanish soldiers they are sure to meet at the gates. They know soldiers carry guns, and what if the soldier shoots them for being runaway slaves? Their hearts are in their throats as they are stopped by the first, light-skinned Spanish guard. The children's fears are immediately alleviated when the guard tells them that at Fort Mose, runaway slaves don't exist. King Philip of Spain does not believe in slavery, so if they enter the gates and proclaim their dedication to the king, they will be considered free. In fact, the man in charge of Fort Mose, Captain Francisco Menendez is a black man, a freed slave. The children leap with excitement. They are so close to their dream.

Part Ten: Polly Analysis

In this section, the children solidify their changing relationship for the reader. Although it will have been clear to most readers, Amari and Polly's perceptions of the world have fully changed since becoming slaves. Previously, Amari never had a white friend and Polly never had a black friend. Through their experiences together, they have bonded as close as siblings. Verbalizing that changed relationship signals to the reader that the girls will not grow any further in the novel. Now, the plot changes from emotional growth to plot progression. It is interesting to note that for the children, one of the greatest surprises of Fort Mose is that the captain is a black man and a freed slave. Amari has not seen a black man in charge of anything since she left Africa. Surely this will have a profound emotional impact on her. Fort Mose is a place where dreams come true, and the children are anxious to get there as soon as possible.

Part Eleven: Amari

Part Eleven: Amari Summary and Analysis

In the morning, the children finally reach the river that separates Fort Mose from America's south. The children have run out of food and are completely exhausted. When they reach the riverbank, they are terrified. None of them can swim and the water is too deep for them to wade across. They decide to unharness the horse, climb on his back, and let him swim them across the river. It is dangerous, but it is their only option. The horse clearly loves being in the water, and Amari notes that he seems to be galloping through the waves, imagining that he is on land. When they reach the other side, Amari somberly faces Tidbit. She tells him that his mother loved him very much, but where they're going, his mother cannot join them. He needs to accept that Teenie is gone and Amari is his mother now. Tidbit nods, as if he understands everything. He holds tightly to the kente cloth his mother gave him and says that Teenie will always be with him.

When they reach the gates of Fort Mose, it is nothing like they expected it to be. The gate is constructed out of wood, and the streets are not paved in gold, but muddy dirt. A dark woman in a green calico dress calls out to the children, asking to know where they are headed. When she sees the fear that passes over each child's face, the woman laughs and invites them in, offering them warm soup to eat. She recognizes them immediately as runaway slaves, and welcomes them to freedom at Fort Mose. She explains to the children what Fort Mose is, and what it means for them to live there. She also tells Polly that a red-headed boy had been around a few days ago looking for her. Immediately, the children recognize him as Nathan.

A few hours after arriving at Fort Mose, the children meet the Captain himself. He explains that while they are free, everyone at Fort Mose works for the community. Amari is eager to show off the weaving skills she learned in Africa, while Polly, who has always been proud of the fact that she can read and write, will open a school to teach her skills to the rest of the freed slaves. Afterward, Inez, the woman with the soup, shows the children to the home where they will be living. She pulls Amari aside and asks her how far along her pregnancy is. Amari is shocked and confused, arguing that she isn't pregnant. But Inez is certain; Amari is with child. At first, revulsion fills Amari. She cannot imagine raising Clay Derby's child. In time, however, that hatred subsides as Amari realizes that this child is the key to her future. The baby may have been conceived in hate, but she will raise it in love. Amari is too tired to run any longer: from her past or from her future. This child will be the keeper of her secrets, her stories, her Africa. She has finally found her home.



Characters

Amari

Amari is the teenage protagonist of the novel. She was born in Ziavi, a small village in Africa, where she was raised as the daughter of the village storyteller. Amari has a bright future in her village, and at the opening of the novel, is engaged to the handsomest man in town. She is supremely happy, surrounded by the love of her parents and her fiancé, Besa. All this changes when a group of strange foreigners with pale faces arrive at Amari's village. The white men unleash supreme destruction as they kill most of the villagers before setting the entire village ablaze. Amari is one of the few survivors, and she is chained up to the rest of the survivors and taken to a America for a slave auction. There, Amari is sold to Mr. Percival Derby as a birthday present for his son, Clay. Life as a slave is difficult for Amari, but she is spared the danger of working in the rice fields where snakes and alligators claim many victims. In exchange, Amari is forced to work in the kitchen preparing the family meals, and at night she is forced to share a bed with Clay and to do whatever he bids. Through every horror that Amari experiences, she never gives up hope that one day, she will be free again. She manages to find a handful of kindly white folk who convince Amari that a brighter future is possible. One evening, after witnessing a horrible crime in which Mr. Derby murders his wife's lover and their newborn child, Amari decides that now is the time to run. Joining forces with her unlikely best friend, a white girl named Polly, and a four-year-old slave boy, Tidbit, Amari races into the woods toward Fort Mose, a Southern safe haven for runaway slaves. Through her journey to freedom, Amari is tested emotionally and physically, but she never gives up hope. She reaches her breaking point, however, when upon reaching Fort Mose, she learns that she is pregnant with Clay Derby's child. In a final moment that defines Amari's personal strength, she vows to love her child, however it was conceived, and teach it about the Africa she left behind in her pursuit of freedom.

Polly Prichard

Polly Prichard is a fifteen-year-old indentured servant, sold to Mr. Percival Derby for a period of indenture not to exceed fourteen years. Polly was forced into a life of indentured servitude after her parents died and were unable to repay the debts they had accrued. Fourteen years is an exceptionally long time to serve as an indentured servant, double the average seven-year sentence. Because Polly is fifteen, she will earn her freedom by the time she is twenty-nine. Although this is a long time for the teenager to wait, she has the knowledge that one day she will be free, a luxury not afforded to the African slaves. At the opening of the novel, Polly is a stereotypical Southern white girl, meaning that she does not like Africans, nor does she believe they are anything more than beasts of burden. When Polly is assigned to teach Amari English when Mr. Derby purchases her, Polly is deeply offended. Polly knows how to read and write, another luxury at the time, and she believes she deserves work inside the Big House, not slave



labor alongside the Africans. When Clay begins calling for Amari in the night, however, Polly sees how similar she and Amari truly are. She understands on a womanly level the inhumanity of Clay repeatedly raping Amari. Polly's eyes open to the injustice of slavery altogether as she sees that underneath their skin color, she and the slaves are exactly the same. They have the same hopes, the same fears, and the same dreams. When Polly watches Mr. Derby kill Noah and his newborn son, Polly bands together with Amari and Tidbit to run toward Fort Mose and freedom. Along the way, Polly could have easily separated from Amari and Tidbit - being white, it would have been much easier for Polly to disguise her identity - but she refused to leave her friends behind. They were all in this together. In the final days before reaching Fort Mose, Polly meets a young Southern boy and the two strike up a romance. At the end of the novel, it is clear that Polly will settle down with this young boy, Nathan.

Besa

Besa is Amari's fiancé in their home village of Ziavi. Besa is considered to be the most handsome bachelor in the village, and he and Amari share a deep, loving bond. When the slave traders enter the village, however, everything changes. Although Besa and Amari are removed from the village together, they are separated in the slave ship. Amari can see the way Besa's attitude toward her has changed, almost as if he is saying goodbye to her. After being sold to Mr. Derby, Amari doesn't see Besa for many years, until she accidentally runs into him at Fiona and Patrick's farm. The Besa she once knew is dead, and the man standing in his place has clearly had all the joy and vibrancy beaten out of him. Besa has scars running along his body, his right eye is missing, and half his teeth are gone. Besa symbolizes the slaves who could not run away and were forever damned to a life of torturous slavery.

Kwasi

Kwasi is Amari's eight-year-old brother. Kwasi has an insatiable love for life and is often found chasing lizards in the village and climbing coconut trees. Amari admires her brother's zest for life and is truly tormented when she sees him killed by the slave traders. Later, young Tidbit fills in as a stand-in younger brother for Amari when she feels desperate for her family.

Afi

Afi is the older slave woman who takes Amari under her wing at Cape Coast, where the slaves are held before being crammed into the slave ship. Afi has been on Cape Coast for a few months longer than Amari, so she knows what to expect. The only reason why Afi wasn't sent to America with the last bunch of slaves is because one of the generals chose her to act as his consort each night. Because of this experience, Afi is able to emotionally prepare Amari, as best she can, of what life for a slave woman truly is like. Aboard the slave ship, Afi becomes like a mother to Amari, taking care of her after each



rape and ensuring that she has enough food. At the slave auction, however, the two women are separated and Amari never sees Afi again.

Bill

Bill is the kindly red-headed sailor stationed to watch over the slaves during their crossing to America. While the rest of the sailors abuse the women, raping them nightly, Bill takes a special interest in Amari. Instead of raping her, Bill tries to teach Amari English in the hopes that it will improve her life once she gets to America.

Percival Derby

Percival Derby is the owner of Derbyshire Farms and all the slaves that go with it. Throughout the novel, Mr. Derby is seen as a controlling man who beats his slaves into submission, but he never goes above or beyond what is expected of slave owners at the time. His first wife passed away giving birth to their son, Clay, and Mr. Derby is enamored with his new younger wife, Isabelle. When Mr. Derby finds out that the child Isabelle has just given birth to has been fathered by a slave, he snaps and shoots Isabelle's lover, Noah, and their newborn child. At the end of the novel, Percival Derby has been poisoned to death by Teenie after he gets rid of her only child, Tidbit.

Clay Derby

Clay Derby is the eighteen-year-old son and heir of Mr. Percival Derby. Amari was purchased as an eighteenth-birthday present for Clay and he is always eager to show Amari off to his friends. Clay is described as having greasy hair and rotten breath. Although his relationship with Amari is considered rape, it appears that Clay genuinely cares whether Amari likes him. He tries to show Amari favor by sending food and blankets to her shack, but deep down, Clay Derby is an evil, possessive man. It is Clay Derby that is responsible for revealing the truth about Isabelle Derby's baby, and he stands smiling as his father shoots the newborn dead. At the end of the novel, Clay's fate is unclear. After he tracked Amari through the woods to return her to his farm, Amari leaves him tied to a tree with a rattlesnake nearby.

Noah

Noah is the favored slave of Isabelle Derby. When Isabelle was still living with her family, she and Noah were raised together and fell in love, but kept their relationship hidden from everyone. When Isabelle married Mr. Derby, she asked if Noah could come along to live on the plantation with them. Noah endured years of abusive treatment from Mr. Derby simply so he could be close to the woman he loved. When Mr. Derby found out that it was Noah who fathered Isabelle's baby, he shot him point blank in the head.



Teenie

Teenie is a slave woman who has been working for the Derby family since she was born. As an adult, she works in the kitchen preparing all of the Derby's food. She is a kind woman, eager to pass on her slave knowledge to the younger generation of slaves. She is also very concerned with passing on her grandmother's memories of Africa to her young son, Tidbit. When Mr. Derby threatens to sell Tidbit as punishment for Teenie's behavior, Teenie poisons Mr. Derby's food and he dies.

Tidbit

Tidbit is Teenie's four-year-old son. Because he is beloved by everyone around him, Tidbit has been spared much of the abusive treatment many slave children receive to prepare them for adult work in the fields. All this changes when Clay cruelly decides to use Tidbit as bait while alligator hunting. From this moment on, Amari makes it her motivation to protect Tidbit. This motivation is put to the test when Amari and Tidbit runaway from the Derbyshire farm and Amari adopts Tidbit as her own son.

Isabelle Derby

Isabelle Derby is the second wife of Mr. Percival Derby, the plantation owner. She is eighteen-years-old, much younger than Mr. Derby, and loathed by Clay. Mrs. Derby is a kind woman who treats her slaves with respect. This kind treatment is a result of her love affair with Noah, which produced a child. When the baby is born, Isabelle immediately knows that Mr. Derby will kill her, so she begs the slave girls to help her hide the baby. When the plan fails Mr. Derby shoots both Noah and the newborn baby point blank in the head.

Cato

Cato is the wise old slave who first tells Amari about Fort Mose. The man is so old it's a wonder that he hasn't been sold off yet, but he manages to earn his keep with the slaves by acting as their medicine man and storyteller.

Dr. Hoskins

Dr. Hoskins is the doctor called in when Mrs. Derby goes into labor. While he is present at the Derbyshire farm, he witnesses Mr. Derby murdering Noah and the infant baby. He agrees to drive Amari, Polly, and Tidbit to the slave auction the next day, but he sets them free before he gets there. He gives the runaways a small amount of cash and wishes them well in their pursuit of freedom.



Nathan

Nathan is the gentle Southern boy who spots the runaway slaves in the woods and offers to hide them in his barn for the night. Although this plan doesn't work out, it is clear that Nathan and Polly have made a love connection. Like many of the goodhearted characters in the novel, Nathan has red hair and a wide smile. It is assumed that at the end of the novel, Nathan moves to Fort Mose to be closer to Polly.

Fiona O'Reilly

Fiona O'Reilly is the kind Southern woman who offers to hide the runaway slaves in her barn for the night. When she learns that the children are headed toward Fort Mose, she gives them her fastest horse and wagon to make the journey quicker for them.

Francisco Menendez

Francisco Menendez is the captain of Fort Mose. When the children arrive to their final destination, they are surprised to see a black man in charge. Captain Menendez earned his freedom by fighting for the Spanish army for three consecutive wars.



Objects/Places

Ziavi

Ziavi is a small village in Africa, and Amari's hometown. Ziavi is covered in rusty brown dirt, and is flanked with beautiful mango trees laden with fruit. The village comprises of thatched huts where the villagers live and work, taking care of each other in their close-knit community. When the white men come to visit the village, the people of Ziavi honor their guests, and their ancestors, by greeting the strangers with open arms. This hospitality is ignored and the white men kill the villagers, burn their huts to the ground, and sell the few survivors of the attack into slavery.

Cape Coast Castle

Cape Coast Castle is the place where the slaves are brought after being captured in their villages. The women are all shoved into one tiny room, with a small hole in the ceiling that does nothing to circulate air, and a wet, slimy floor of urine, feces, blood, and tears. The slaves are held in this prison until enough of them have been captured and they can be sold and sent to sea.

The Slave Ship

The Slave Ship is what transports Amari and the rest of the slaves from Africa to America. It is described as "a small city made of wood. Poles taller than any tree reached to the sky" (Page 42). The female slaves are pushed into a hole in the floor where the men had been loaded before, onto narrow shelves made of wood with only a few inches separating one slave from another. Because of the way the slaves were crammed into the shelves, the blood, vomit, urine, and feces from the top shelves dripped down into the lower shelves, saturating the chained slaves below. All the slaves are chained in this position for months during the journey, given only a few moments respite each day to each bread and breathe fresh air.

Sullivan's Island

Sullivan's Island is the port of entry for slaves sent from Africa to America. When Amari first sees the beachy island, she is shocked by the beauty of the land, sure that the place of her slavery is going to be ugly. The slaves are forced to wait in quarantine cells on Sullivan's Island until the slave owners are sure they carry no contagious diseases.



An Indentured Servent

An Indentured Servant is like a white slave, but the slavery is upheld only for a set number of years. After the indenture has been worked off, the servant is freed. Indentures are typically put in place when an individual accrues a debt they are unable to pay back. In the case of Polly, who was an indentured servant for Mr. Derby, her indenture was purchased to pay back her deceased parents' debt after their debts.

Hoppin' John

Hoppin' John is a dish of brown peas flavored with pork, then mashed with onions and yellow rice. This dish is often eaten by slaves in the novel, and is what Teenie makes for Amari and Polly on their first day at the plantation.

Hushpuppy

Hushpuppy is Tidbit's pet dog. When the trio of children escapes from the Derby plantation, Hushpuppy tracks them in the woods and joins up with them for their journey.

The Kente Cloth

The Kente Cloth is Teenie's only physical connection to her memories of her mother, who was taken from Africa to be sold into slavery. When Teenie's mother was taken, she clung to her own mother - who would have been Teenie's grandmother - tearing a piece of cloth from her mother's headscarf. She clutched that piece of cloth during the entire journey to America and buried it under a tree on the Derby plantation to keep it safe. Before they sold her, she gave the cloth to Teenie as a way of remembering her African roots. Before Tidbit runs away with Amari, Teenie hands over the cloth to him.

The Smokehouse

The Smokehouse is where the Derbys keep their food locked away from the slaves who prepare it. The only person with the key is Mr. Derby himself. After he kills Noah and the child he fathered with Isabelle, Mr. Derby locks Amari, Polly, and Tidbit inside the smokehouse until he can sell them off the next day.

Fort Mose

Fort Mose is presented as a somewhat heavenly place and the characters, as well as the audience, often question whether it sounds too good to be true. It is true, and at this historic Southern heaven, escaped slaves are granted freedom by the Spanish government. The fort itself is a tiny structure surrounded by a log wall and patrolled by soldiers.



Themes

Ownership

Because this novel deals with the issue of slavery, one of the natural themes is the idea of ownership. Southern whites viewed their slaves as property, and legally, slaves were designated as such. Because the whites believed they owned their slaves, in the same way they owned their farm animals or pets, they believed they could treat their slaves any way they wanted. Slaves were not thought of as emotional human beings, but as beasts of burden unable to form bonds and attachments, and certainly unable to formulate intellectual thought. For male slave owners, this often meant that women were treated as nothing more than sex objects, and their slaves were continually raped simply because they were not allowed a voice of their own to say "no." The slaves themselves suffered terribly for their lack of position on the plantation. Obviously, the slaves were not paid for their labor and could therefore never buy their freedom. Families were ripped apart when slave owners decided that males, females, and children should be bought and sold in whatever way earned the plantation more money, regardless of obvious family ties. Thematically, the idea of one man being owned by another man is completely demoralizing, and the reader witnesses the way such labels emotionally affected the slaves. The reader sees this most clearly with Besa. At the opening of the novel, Besa is a handsome, promising young man in his village. Through the course of his various ownerships, and many terrible beatings, at the end of the novel, Besa is a shell of the man he once was. Besa has internalized his label as a piece of property rather than an individual man, and he has therefore lost his will to live. It is the idea of being free, of being able to make their own decisions and choose their own fates, that propels Amari and Polly through the dangers of the woods. Although they don't know what type of labor they will have to complete in Fort Mose, whether or not they will be given food, or the conditions of their living quarters, the girls know that freedom, no matter how it comes, is better than being owned any day.

Memory

When the slaves were ripped from their homes in Africa and sent to the foreign world of America, all they were allowed to take with them was their memories. Many slaves, like Besa, chose to forget their past lives, their families, and their homes because it was simply too painful to remember. Others, like Teenie, chose to pass their memories on to future generations, to keep in touch with their roots and the paths that lead them to America. For Teenie, the kente cloth given to her by her mother symbolizes the memories of Africa. The kente cloth is Teenie's only physical connection to her memories of her mother, who was taken from Africa to be sold into slavery. When Teenie's mother was taken, she clung to her own mother - who would have been Teenie's grandmother - tearing a piece of cloth from her mother's headscarf. She clutched that piece of cloth during the entire journey to America and buried it under a tree on the Derby plantation to keep it safe. Before they sold her, she gave the cloth to



Teenie as a way of remembering her African roots. Everyday, Teenie strokes the kente cloth and tells her mother's stories of Africa to Tidbit so that he will know where he came from. Before Tidbit runs away with Amari, Teenie hands over the cloth to him. This passion for preserving memories also becomes important to Amari when she learns that she is pregnant at the end of the novel. Although she knows that she will never be able to return to her village in Africa, and even if she could return it would no longer be as she remembers it, Amari knows that it is her duty as a mother to keep her memories of Ziavi alive for her unborn child. In the preface to this novel, author Sharon Draper states that this book is her own way of keeping the memories of past slaves, including her own grandfather, alive so that this terrible history will never repeat itself. This theme is best expressed through Teenie's words, "Long as you remember, ain't nothin' really gone" (Page 283).

Family

When the white men came into the African villages to destroy homes and steal slaves, many families, including Amari's, were devastated by violence. Amari watched horrified as the white men killed both of her parents and her younger brother. In less than an hour, Amari was orphaned, left as the only remaining member of her tight knit family. In order to survive a life in slavery, Amari, and all the other slaves, are forced to recreate versions of family so they don't feel so alone. The first stand-in family member for Amari is the older slave woman, Afi, who acts as a mother figure for the young girl on the boat. Afi becomes like a mother to Amari, taking care of her after each rape and ensuring that she has enough food. At the slave auction, however, the two women are separated and Amari never sees Afi again. Once again, this separation is indicative of what white slave holders believed about their slaves, that they were unable to form bonds. Once she moves into the Derby plantation, Amari forms a strong bond with Teenie, who once again acts as her surrogate mother, and with Polly whom she becomes so close with the two are like sisters. Amari's familial bond with Polly is particularly interesting because the two girls are of different race. This detail is important because it proves to the reader, although modern readers would unlikely have any doubts, that it is what is inside a person that makes them special, not the color of their skin. At the end of the novel, Amari adopts Tidbit, who has been separated from Teenie, as her own son, proving that blood ties are not what makes a family. She also learns that she is pregnant with Clay Derby's child, a man that she hates, but Amari is able to separate her hatred for Clay from her love for her unborn child, proving that in a family, love conquers all.



Style

Point of View

The point of view of this novel is third person, limited omniscience, but the narration fluctuates between both Amari and Polly's perspectives. This point of view is important to the novel so the reader can be given access into Amari and Polly's thoughts and emotions. In doing so, the reader learns much more about these two characters, including the tension between them and the eventual ratification of the racism between them. The main conflict of the novel surrounds the slavery of these two characters - one white and one black - and structuring the point-of-view as vacillating between them creates a deeper understanding of slavery during the 18th century. The story is told mostly through exposition with scenes of dialogue, and is completely filtered through the thoughts and emotions of the point-of-view character - either Amari or Polly - so the reader sees the world through either of their eyes. While living on the Derby plantation, both of these characters spend much of their time alone at work, so hearing their thoughts and emotions is extremely important for the reader to understand what is happening in the novel. Without insight into the character's thoughts, the reader would likely be confused as to the motivations of each character, particularly when dealing with the way their perceptions of each other - initially, Polly views Amari as an ignorant black slave, and Amari views Polly as a spoiled white girl - begin to change.

Setting

This novel is set in the year 1738, before the United States of America was formed, and when the "states" were still colonies controlled by England. The novel opens in the setting of Ziavi, a small village in Africa. Ziavi is covered in rusty brown dirt, and is flanked with beautiful mango trees, laden with fruit. The village comprises of thatched huts where the villagers live and work, taking care of each other in their close-knit community. After Ziavi is burned to the ground, Amari is sent to America where she is bought by Mr. Derby and sent to live on his plantation. The Derby house is set on a narrow lane surrounded by a lush carpet of grass, and surrounded by green rice fields and dark, full woods. Although Polly longs to stay in the Derby home, which appears to have been white-washed several times and carries "an aura of perfection," she is sent to live in a slave shack with Amari and Teenie. The majority of the plot set on the plantation takes place in this shack, particularly the kitchen. The shack is just one room made of rough wood planks. All it holds is "a small wooden table, a chair, one bed, and a straw mat on the dirt floor" (Page 92). After escaping from the Derby plantation, the novel is set in the woods from South Carolina to Florida, a two-month trek by foot, toward Fort Mose, a Spanish colony. Fort Mose is presented as a somewhat heavenly place and the characters, as well as the audience, often question whether it sounds too good to be true. It is true, and at this historic Southern heaven, escaped slaves are granted freedom by the Spanish government. The fort itself is a tiny structure surrounded by a log wall and patrolled by soldiers.



Language and Meaning

As the novel is written for teenage readers, the language tends to be very conversational and easy to follow. The sentences are constructed in a way that is not only easy to follow, but also to gain momentum as the reader reads on. The sentences are constructed to highlight the action of the plot, enticing the reader to turn the next page. The language of the narration, formed with bold phrases and violent descriptions form cliffhangers which add to the intensity of the story. Occasionally, there are passages of dialogue in vernacular, which affects grammar, spelling, and syntax. Therefore, some of the dialogue may be difficult for readers to understand but it helps create a vivid portrayal of the slaves and their relationships. While most readers should be able to deduce what this dialogue means contextually, readers should be encouraged to read such phrases out loud, and hearing the way the words are pronounced can clarify the confusion in a way reading silently on the page cannot. This language is important because it adds depth to the novel, allowing the reader to glimpse into a historic world made believable through the language of the characters. Although the novel is set over 250 years in the past, the history is well researched and the language is accessible, giving all readers access into the world of slavery without much confusion.

Structure

This novel is comprised of forty-two chapters separated into eleven sections, alternating between Amari and Polly's perspectives. Each chapter has a name that refers to an action or event within the novel that foreshadows what the reader is about to read. The chapters tend to be short and full of action, which propels the reader through the novel. The novel revolves around the enslavement of black Amari and white Polly, including back-stories of how they were captured, the lives they left behind, and their hopes for the future. Overall, the plot of the novel is fairly simple: the slaves want to be freed and when an opportunity to run toward freedom at Fort Mose arises, they take it. The climax of the novel arguably occurs when Mr. Derby shoots and kills Noah and Isabelle's baby. This singular action propels the action for the rest of the novel. The second half of the novel is almost entirely devoted to the character's journey from South Carolina to Florida, and although Draper does her best to infuse the journey with suspense and action, many readers may find the journey to be repetitive, even boring to read as there is no doubt in the reader's mind that the characters will arrive safely to Fort Mose. The novel is quite easy to read and the plot is engrossing once the reader is immersed in the history painted in its pages. The story line is linear with no flashbacks or long sections of back-story to contend with. The novel is easy to read and entertaining in its entirety.



Quotes

"Let your yes be yes and your no be no. May you be protected from evil, and may you live to a ripe old age. If you come in peace, we receive you in peace. Heroism ins the dignity of our ancestors, and, in their name, we welcome you" (Page 8).

"We are caught in a place where there is no hope, no escape from the misery of the present of the memories of the past" (Page 29).

"You know, certain people are chosen to survive. I don't know why, but you are one of those who must remember the past and tell those yet unborn. You must live" (Page 37).

"Family ties only confuse the poor creatures. They'll forget each other as soon as the sun sets. Trust me" (Page 78).

"This time last year, when she was back in Beaufort with her folks, she wouldn't have given a second thought to a slave going to work in the rice fields. That's what a slave was supposed to do. Who cared about the feelings of an ignorant slave, anyway? But this was someone she knew, maybe even felt sorry for. Somehow that made a difference" (Page 136).

"I am just one man. I don't know how to fight everything that is happening around me. I don't understand how one man can own another. And I don't know how to stop it ... but I can help the three of you" (Page 202).

"Freedom is a delicate idea, like a pretty leaf in the air: It's hard to catch and may not be what you thought when you get it" (Page 213).

"Long as you remember, ain't nothin' really gone" (Page 283).



Topics for Discussion

Do you think Draper did a good job of merging fact with the fiction in *Copper Sun*? Why or why not? After reading this novel, what do you think are the benefits and drawbacks of writing a novel set in such an iconic historical period? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

How does Polly's slavery compare / contrast to Amari's slavery? Why do you think Draper chose to include the narrative of an indentured servant in the novel? How does Polly's voice add to your depth of understanding about this time in history? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Describe the social setting of the community of Amari's African village, Ziavi. How does this social structure compare / contrast to the social structure of American life during 1738? Based on this exploration of culture and heritage, do you think the people of Ziavi could have prevented their fate when the white men appeared? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Choose either Amari or Polly and describe their emotional growth throughout the novel. What were their interests and viewpoints when the reader first met them? How did these thoughts and ideals change throughout the course of the novel? In the end, do you think the horrible experiences this character lived through strengthened or damaged their character? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

After the death of her mother in the opening section of the novel, Amari formed relationships with many strong women throughout her journey. Describe the relationships Amari formed with Afi, Teenie, and Isabelle Derby. How did these women influence Amari's life? How did each of these women function as substitute "mothers" for Amari? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Describe the relationship between Clay and Amari. How do you think Clay truly felt about Amari? Do you think he ever cared for her as a woman, not just a slave? Do you think Clay deserved to die for his treatment of Amari? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Although *Copper Sun* is a dark and sometimes depressing novel, dealing with shameful time in American history, there are also many moments of humor. Describe the balance between light and darkness in the novel. Why is it important to infuse humor into a harsh narrative such as this? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Slave importation became illegal in the 1820s, and slavery was banned altogether around the time of the Civil War. However, slavery still exists in the world today. What present-day examples of slavery are there? Why do you think the slave industry

continues to boom worldwide? What does this say about humanity? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.