

# **Diamonds in the Shadow Study Guide**

**Diamonds in the Shadow by Caroline B. Cooney**

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## Plot Summary

*Diamonds in the Shadow* tells the story of the Amabo family, a refugee family moving away from war-torn Africa, and the secrets they carry to their new home that may endanger their loving host family in America.

At the opening of the novel, Jared Finch is outraged to hear that his parents have volunteered to house an African refugee family for three months. His sister Mopsy, on the other hand, is overjoyed. She prays the family will have a daughter so she can have a new best friend. Jared hates the idea of sharing his bedroom almost as much as he hates the idea of his sister's excitement. When the Amabo family arrives in New York City, Jared immediately notices that they act strangely toward one another, as if they've only met for the first time on the airplane. The family consists of strong-willed mother Celestine, double amputee father Andre, outspoken and bright-eyed son Mattu, and depressed, mute daughter Alake. When Mattu steps off the plane, he is carrying two cardboard boxes, which he says carry the ashes of his dead grandparents, although neither of his parents seems particularly concerned with the contents.

Moving the African family into a middle-class American neighborhood takes a lot of finesse. The refugees have never seen a microwave, drank hot chocolate, or slept in soft beds. Everything about American life astounds and amazes them. Although Jared is somewhat entertained by the refugees' apparent naivety at home, he is mortified by the idea of bringing Mattu and Alake to school. Alake, who is either unwilling or unable to speak, can't do anything for herself. She doesn't feed herself, doesn't clothe herself, and doesn't bathe herself. She's like a walking zombie, and Jared can't understand why her parents don't do more to help her. It doesn't take long for Jared to start forming theories as to who the Amabo family really is, if they even are a true family. When Jared starts nosing around in Mattu's belongings, he discovers that the cardboard boxes don't actually hold ashes, they hold uncut blood diamonds.

The Finch family doesn't know is that the Amabo family didn't travel to America alone. They were followed by a fifth refugee, a dangerous warlord named Victor. In the New York airport, Victor was separated from the Amabo family and sent on a separate plane to Texas. There, he immediately begins his work to track the family down and take back what is his: the blood diamonds. As the novel progresses, the truth is revealed: Victor needed to transport blood diamonds to America, and when the real Amabo family refused to comply with his demands, he killed them and found other refugees, desperate to leave Africa to take their place. To avoid being murdered, this hodgepodge family of misfits had to pretend to be the Amabos and transport Victor's diamonds. Now that they are in America, the refugees thought they had escaped their captor, but they were wrong.

Just when the Amabos begin to let their guard down, to believe that they are true and free Americans, Victor returns to take back what it is his, and he doesn't care who he has to kill to get it. Taking Mopsy as his hostage, Victor demands the return of his diamonds. Alake lures Victor out to the frozen sea and then tackles him into the water,



sacrificing herself for the greater good. Jared, who has learned to love the refugees as part of his family, dives in to save her. In the end, Alake is spared and fully welcomed into the Amabo family. Victor dies in the icy water, finally giving the Amabos their freedom.



# Chapter One

## Chapter One Summary

Jared Finch joins his parents at a church meeting where they are discussing the refugee family the church had been sponsoring. The church had hoped to place the refugee family in an apartment in Connecticut, but at the last minute, that apartment fell through. The committee is thrilled to announce that the Finch family has volunteered to take the refugees in when they arrive tomorrow morning. Jared is outraged. He has absolutely no desire to take in a refugee family, and even less desire to share his bedroom. His sister Mopsy, on the other hand, is absolutely thrilled. She hopes the family has a girl, so she can have an instant best friend. The committee leader passes around a piece of paper with grainy photographs of the family and what little information they've collected about them. Meanwhile, refugee representative Kirk Crick explains the refugee family's background: they're coming from war torn Liberia, but they've spent the past few months, and possibly even years, living in a refugee camp in Nigeria. Little is known about the family itself, but it's safe to say that they've seen some horrific atrocities. Crick warns that, "In a civil war, there are no good guys. They're all guilty of something. You are probably not saving the innocent, because in a civil war, nobody is innocent" (p. 11). He touches on two of the major issues of African civil war: child soldiers and blood diamonds.

## Chapter One Analysis

In this opening chapter of the novel, the reader meets the Finch family, a religious, upper-middle class family living in Connecticut. The reader's first impression of Jared is that he's spoiled, selfish, and condescending. He is unhappy in home life despite the fact that he has everything: loving parents, a beautiful home, and his own bedroom full of video games, movies, and the latest technologies. Jared has a complete disrespect for his parents and their decisions: he doesn't want to help the refugee family because he doesn't want to share his belongings. Although Jared is a dislikeable character, his obvious character flaws give him great room to grow as the novel progresses. It is interesting to note that when the photographs of the Amabo family are passed around, their photographs are blurred and all their identifying information is illegible. As Jared points out, these people could be anyone. This idea - that the Amabos may not be who they say they are - is integral to the novel's mystery.

When Kirk Crick is explaining the civil war in Africa, he touches on two central themes of the novel: blood diamonds and child soldiers. When he hears about both topics, Jared is sure Kirk Crick is exaggerating the facts to make him feel sorry for the refugee family. Blood diamonds are diamonds mined in Africa. The diamonds are sold to unscrupulous buyers, often by warlords and violent gangs, with the proceeds used to fund the horrific atrocities that occur in civil wars. African civil wars are known for mass genocide, rape, mutilation, and the use of child soldiers. Child soldiers are children forcefully collected



by rebel gangs, many have witnessed their parents or other family members being murdered and forced into lives of crime. Often, child soldiers are made to murder their family members, or risk being killed themselves.



# Chapter Two

## Chapter Two Summary

The four refugees take the flight to New York. The text mentions a fifth refugee who is separated from the family by a few rows of seats. He gets up and stares at the family but they do not return his gaze. When they land, the family quickly makes their way off the airplane, clearly avoiding the fifth refugee. The first person to meet them off the plane is George Neville, the refugee aid representative. He immediately notices that the family seems disjointed: the parents seem puzzled by their surroundings. The father refuses to shake his hand. The boy speaks with a crisp, clear accent, and the girl stands mute, like a statue. The family walks quickly away from the gate, clearly anxious to move away from the airplane. George Neville wonders how this family made it through the careful screening; usually, the organization only chooses to move families that will thrive in America, and from his first impression, this family doesn't look like they will thrive. They came off the plane carrying nothing, no luggage at all except for the two cardboard boxes the boy clutches. The family doesn't speak to each other at all, which George finds strange, and he is also perplexed by Alake's hair. It is knotted and soiled. Typically, when families are living in refugee camps, the women will band together to make their children look presentable, particularly before important events.

While Mattu is waiting in line, he sets down his cardboard boxes. The security guards immediately approach him, which instantly rattles the boy. When he picks the boxes up, a cloud of white ash wafts out. The guards demand to know what's in the box, but aren't prepared for his answer: he's carrying the ashes of his dead grandparents. Still, the guards ask him to put the boxes through the x-ray machine. They come through clean, but the family is rattled, particularly when the security guards ask each family member to step through the machine. Celestine must unpin the safety pins keeping Andre's empty sweatshirt arms in his pockets. The guards cannot look him in the eyes. Meanwhile, the fifth refugee, Victor, is greeted by an airport agent taking him to his next flight, to Texas. Victor is outraged and demands to stay with the Amabo family. The agent tells him that's impossible. Victor swallows the urge to kill the agent. He will have to find the Amabo family later.

## Chapter Two Analysis

When the Amabos step off the plane, even their refugee representative wonders how the family made it through the organization's careful screening. He notices many confusing elements about the Amabo family but immediately starts making excuses for them: perhaps they're jetlagged from their journey. Perhaps they've witnessed more horrors than the average refugee. Perhaps they're just strange. The only clue the reader has as to the Amabos true identity is the fifth refugee on the plane. This man, Victor, is clearly trying to intimidate the Amabos and is desperate to stick with them once they arrive in New York. It's also clear that the Amabos desperately want to get away from



him. When they arrive, the family is quick off the plane and rush away from the public areas. They're very nervous, constantly looking back over their shoulders, as they retreat. The fear of Victor catching up with them could be a factor in their strange behavior and appearance. Kirk Crick's words, "In a civil war, there are no good guys. They're all guilty of something. You are probably not saving the innocent, because in a civil war, nobody is innocent" (p. 11), resonate with the reader because as of now, it is unknown whether the Amabos are "good guys" or "bad guys." Judging by Victor's violent rage at the end of the chapter, it's safe to assume that he's a villain, and judging by the obvious trauma the Amabos have endured - Andre has had his hands chopped off and Alake is mute - it's safe to assume that are victims.





# Chapter Three

## Chapter Three Summary

The Finch family finally meets the refugees. They are shocked to see that Andrew has no hands, and Mopsy immediately begins asking him a million uncomfortable questions about rebel warfare. Mrs. Finch tries to take family photos, but the Amabos are extremely uncomfortable with it. As soon as Jared lays eyes on Mattu, he is jealous of the boy's good looks. Mr. Finch, who has been very despondent lately, barely says a word. In the car, Mopsy doesn't stop her constant tirade of questions. In a way, her questions are helpful because the Amabos don't offer any information about themselves unless asked outright. Through Mopsy's questions, the reader learns that Alake lost her speech as a result of the atrocities she witnessed. It becomes Mopsy's new mission to heal her new best friend. She decides that since Alake can't speak, it would be a good idea for her to start out at the middle school with her, rather than the high school with Jared. She nearly squeals when her mother agrees. As they drive, Jared tries to explain little things about American life to the refugees, like cell phones, which they find particularly fascinating. Jared snaps a photo of Mattu on his phone, and for a moment, the boy is amused. When he learns that photos can be sent to other people, however, he starts to panic. Sensing that something is wrong, Jared deletes the photo. When the narration switches to Mattu's point of view, he looks around at the beauty and vastness of New York City. He thinks about the fifth refugee on the plane, a man named Victor. Victor killed to get on that plane, and he would have no hesitation about killing again. Mattu wonders if, for the first time in his life, he's safe.

## Chapter Three Analysis

When the Finches and Amabos meet for the first time, the clash of their cultures is immediately apparent. The Finches have no concept of the tragedies suffered during a civil war. No one stops Mopsy from flippantly asking questions about Andre's missing hands, child soldiers, and whether they've ever seen anyone die. Emotionally mature readers will recognize the inappropriateness of these questions. The murder, rape, torture, and fear experienced during a civil war have undoubtedly left deep scars with the Amabo family. Mopsy's off-the-cuff questions are insensitive and disrespectful to her guests. The fact that neither Finch parent quiets highlights their insensitivity as well. Many refugees coming to America from Africa are fleeing horrific trauma and often, threats of death. They have moved to start a new life with the hopes of leaving their fears behind, in Africa. As a result, most refugees refuse to have their photos taken so their persecutors have no way of identifying them in America. Yet the Finch family doesn't understand this, and Mrs. Finch even resorts to emotional blackmail to convince the Amabos to pose for family photos. Through this novel, Cooney makes the argument that American families are too sheltered, and that they have no comprehension of what's happening in the outside world. At the end of the chapter, Mattu acknowledges, in his mind, that he and the rest of his family were never interviewed by the refugee

organization George Neville works for. This acknowledgement confirms the suspicion that the Amabos are not who they say they are. Although they've lied to the organization, it's also clear that Mattu, in particular, has come to America to escape threats because he wonders, "Could it be true? Could I be safe in America" (p. 46).



# Chapter Four

## Chapter Four Summary

When they arrive home, the Amabos are startled to see television cameras and news presenters on the Finch's front lawn, ready to capture video of their arrival. They refuse to get out of the car until the cameras have been safely put away. The Finch family is confused, and slightly annoyed, but do their best to make sure the Amabos are comfortable. The first order of business when they return home, is to make sure each of the refugees is showered and fed. Mattu has no trouble managing the shower in his room, but Alake seems completely unable to care for herself. Mopsy is surprised that neither of her parents come to help her, so she takes on the task of showering the teenager and getting her changed.

At the dinner table, Mr. Finch opens with a word of prayer. Andre and Celestine follow up with prayers of thanksgiving and praise for their host family. As they eat, Celestine spoons food into Andre's mouth as if he is a baby. Mopsy wonders why she doesn't feed her daughter as well, because Alake refuses, or is unable to, feed herself. Mrs. Finch announces that her first mission will be to find a doctor to create prosthetic hands for Andre. If he's going to succeed in America, he'll need hands. Mopsy takes Alake into the living room so she can have more privacy and tries to lure the girl into eating a bowl of ice cream or drinking a can of Coke. Nothing works, and Mopsy begins to worry if she'll be able to cure Alake after all. After dinner, Celestine and Andre quickly go to their room and close the door without checking on their children, which Mrs. Finch finds terribly strange. She, and the rest of the family, try not to judge the refugees: perhaps they don't understand the complexities of their culture.

## Chapter Four Analysis

Once again, questions are raised about the way the Amabo family interacts with one another. The parents ignore their children completely. During the hubbub with the news reporters on the front lawn, no one notices that Alake sits alone, emotionless, in the back seat. Neither parent seems bothered that Alake is unable to bathe herself, or that she's not eating at dinner. The Amabos don't discuss their new home, or the new country, with their children, which is strange to everyone, including the reader. It's difficult to imagine leaving one's home country and experiencing the wackiness of Western life - complete with microwaves, cell phones, massive homes, and closets full of food, for the first time without acknowledging that change to the people who understand your excitement most: your family. Over dinner, Jared also notices some discrepancies in the Amabos story. For example, the paperwork given to them by the organization says that both parents completed school, but Celestine says that she and Andre only attended school for a few years. When Mattu announces that his cardboard boxes contain the ashes of his grandparents, neither Andre nor Celestine (whose parents they would have been) look up. Eventually, Andre shrugs and says they were



his parents, but his answer isn't believable. Jared is highly suspicious of the family. He also notices that Mattu has a completely different accent than his parents, and Alake's skin color is much lighter than anyone else in the family. It's certain that the Amabo family is hiding secrets from their new hosts.

Before they eat, the Finch family opens with a word of prayer. Andre offers up a prayer of thanksgiving, praising God for leading him out of Africa and into a country where a new start is possible. Andre is so thankful and so humbled that Jared feels a sense of anger creeping over him. He doesn't understand how Andre can be thankful. Rebel soldiers cut off his hands, mutilating him for life, and still Andre gives praise. Jared is angry with God for allowing this tragedy to happen, and angry with Andre for challenging his atheistic beliefs. Jared would feel more content believing there is no God and therefore, no good or evil in the world. The Amabo family will challenge everything Jared believes, and everything he takes for granted.



# Chapter Five

## Chapter Five Summary

The next morning, all four children get ready for school. Mopsy raids her mother's closet for clothes Alake will fit in, and thoroughly enjoys dressing her new friend. Everyone compliments Alake on how beautiful she looks in these Western clothes, except her parents who remain silent and barely even look at her. As soon as Mattu and Alake are out of the house, they become visibly tense. Jared explains that they live in a safe neighborhood. There are no warlords or man-eating lions to worry about. For the first time since arriving in America, Alake settles her eyes on something: Mopsy's cell phone. Meanwhile, the fifth refugee has been taken to his new home in Texas, where he is staying with two Sudanese refugees. In the middle of the night, the Sudanese refugees pack up their belongings and runaway, telling the organization that something is wrong with their new roommate. He's evil and they do not want to live with him.

In the middle school, Mopsy is shocked by how rudely everyone greets Alake. They clearly have no understanding of what this teenager has been through, and several of the boys make fun of the fact that Alake is mute. Even the school nurse makes disparaging comments about how refugees will tell any story, or make up any lie, to get into America. Surrounded by this negative energy, Mopsy is more determined than ever to save Alake and prove everyone wrong. When the narration switches to Alake's point of view, the reader learns why she is mute. When she was living in Africa, Victor - the fifth refugee - put a machine gun in her hand and told her to kill her teachers or he would kill her Alake's sister. Meanwhile, Mattu's first day of school is going much better than his sister's. He immediately charms the teachers and the student body, particularly the girls. Many of the teachers ask Mattu questions about his homeland, and Jared notices that he often struggles to come up with answers. He wonders if Mattu is telling the truth about who he is and where he comes from. Jared does his best to explain everything about high school to Mattu, from payphones to lunch lines. In gym class, the students play soccer and Mattu performs better than all the other students combined. He is also introduced to Daniel, one of Jared's black friends. While the kids are in school, Mrs. Finch takes Celestine and Andre to the supermarket where they are baffled by the array of fresh vegetables for purchase. Celestine wonders if she could work at a grocery store someday.

## Chapter Five Analysis

The effects of living in the midst of a civil war are ever present in the lives of the refugees. Everything terrifies them, from the sound of someone knocking at the door, to being in unsheltered open spaces, to the vast darkness of night. Jared tries to explain that there's nothing to be afraid of in America, but the wounds are too deep. Mattu and Alake have spent too many years escaping death, and those instincts don't disappear. It seems as if Mattu senses that someone - Victor - is coming for him. He is always on the



alert, and he should be. In Texas, Victor plots his way back to New York. It's clear from the reactions of those around him that Victor is a very dangerous man. The Sudanese refugees he was housed with ran away in the middle of the night, begging their representative to keep their new location a secret, "This is the kind of man we left behind. We will find somewhere else to live. Do not tell this man where we go. Do not give him our phone number. Do not tell him where we work" (p. 67).

At school, more suspicions arise for Jared and Mopsy. In class, Mattu says that he is from Sierra Leon, but the Amabo paperwork says they're all from Liberia. Meanwhile, Mopsy is outraged by the way Celestine ignores her daughter. Mopsy dresses Alake in her mother's finest clothes, and Celestine doesn't even acknowledge her. At school, Mopsy's classmates are outright rude to Alake, saying that she's "like a mutt learning to heel" (p. 69). Even the school nurse suggests, in front of Alake, that many refugees lie about who they are to gain access into the country. These are horrifying, degrading opinions, but sadly, represent some American's viewpoints about immigration. Cooney writes from experience , she worked with refugees in the past and she wants to showcase the entire spectrum of responses refugees receive when they arrive in America.



# Chapter Six

## Chapter Six Summary

On Sunday morning, Mr. Finch tries to convince the Amabos that they would be happier in the all-black church up the road, but the Amabos won't hear of it. They want to attend the church that sponsored them from America. Begrudgingly, Mr. Finch agrees. The pastor preaches a sermon on the Good Samaritan. Afterward, the entire congregation greets the Amabo family, and the Finches take their new, extended family out for dinner. Celestine and Andre are invigorated by the sermon, and proclaim how happy they are to be back in a church, praising the God that kept them safe in the war. Jared doesn't understand their enthusiasm. How can a God who lets so many bad things happen in the world still be called good? Meanwhile, the fifth refugee realizes how far away New York is from Texas. He has no money, but knows that there are plenty of weak and elderly in America that he can prey on.

One afternoon, while the boys are outside playing basketball, Mopsy sneaks into Mattu's room to get a closer look at the ashes in the box. She has never seen a cremated body before and can't quell her curiosity. Quietly, she sneaks into the room and peeks into one of the boxes. She is horrified by the ashes, but even more startled to see that further down, something in the box sparkles. Mopsy gasps and spins around to see Alake standing in the doorway, staring at her. Later that night, Kirk Crick, the refugee aid representative, stops by to check on the family's progress. When he rings the bell, the entire Amabo family nearly falls out of their chairs with fear. When they see who it is, they each vanish upstairs, uninterested in answering his questions. Mopsy takes this opportunity to voice her concerns about Alake. She doesn't seem to be improving, and her parents are ignoring her. Kirk Crick is unimpressed with Mopsy's observations. A few days later, the Finches take the Amabos down to the marina to see the ocean. The entire family is terrified by the water. On the drive back home, Mr. Finch suggests giving driving lessons to Mattu, so that when the Amabo family receives their first car, at least one of them will be able to drive it.

## Chapter Six Analysis

One of the subplots of the novel deals with Mr. Finch's ex-best friend, Brady Wall, who had worked as an elder for the church. Recently, it was discovered that he had stolen nearly three-quarters of a million dollars from the church, leaving the congregation bankrupt. Mr. Finch is particularly devastated by the news because Brady Wall had been his closest friend. Dad feels betrayed, embarrassed, and lonely. As a result, he no longer feels comfortable in the church, but having the refugees around forces him back into the congregation. Still, Jared is frustrated with by his father's depression and is angry with him for being so withdrawn. At church, the preacher sermonizes on the parable of the Good Samaritan. In the Biblical story, an injured man lies on the side of the road. Two churchmen bypass the stranger, ignoring his injuries. A third man, a



Samaritan, sees the injured man and tends to his wounds. Even though he doesn't have much money, he pays for the injured man to stay in an inn, without expecting anything in return. This story is an obvious parallel to the story of the African refugees. The moral of the story - both the Biblical story and this novel - is that humans should look out for each other. We should take care of the weak, house them, love them, and not expect anything in return. It is not only what God asks of his people in the Bible, it is the morally right thing to do.

Also in this chapter, the refugees are taken to the marina. All four of them fear the black, icy water and run away from it. This sets the stage for the end of the novel, when Alake is brought back to the water to confront her biggest fears, and to be reborn in atonement.





# Chapter Seven

## Chapter Seven Summary

Alake has the same dream over and over: the dream of holding the machine gun and shooting all her teachers in a desperate plea to save her little sister. As she shot, she heard Victor laughing. When they were all dead, Victor took the gun from her and shot her little sister anyway. All of Alake's killing had been in vain. In the refugee camp, everyone knew that she had killed, and so everyone refused to speak to her, refused to accept her as part of the community. She was an outcast, worth nothing to anyone. Mopsy does her best to make Alake feel more comfortable, although she has no idea what Alake is struggling with emotionally. The first step is painting her fingernails, showing her how to put on make-up, and giving her a beautiful new haircut.

At school, Jared, too, begins to hear the judgmental opinions of his classmates, who feel that the refugees are mooching off America's generosity. Surprising himself, Jared sticks up for the Amabos, saying that are as deserving as any other family to have safety and security. In Texas, Victor's caseworkers worry that he's alienated himself from the rest of the refugees, and that he hasn't been going to work. They worry about his obsession with the Amabo family, and wonder if they should put him in touch with the refugees that appear to be his only family or friends. Each day that he is separated from the Amabos, and what they have stolen from him, Victor's rage grows.

## Chapter Seven Analysis

In this section, the reader learns what happened to Alake in Africa that turned her into a social outcast. She is a former child soldier. Alake's story highlights the horrific ways warlords turn prey on children, forcing them to commit horrific crimes. Alake is absolutely a victim, but everyone, even the Amabo family, treats her like a monster. In the refugee camp, Alake was ostracized for her murders. Many of the refugees had lost family members, even children, at the hands of child soldiers, so taking her in would have been like embracing their enemy. In the refugees' eyes, Alake was not to be trusted. As a result of the social shunning, which explains why Alake's hair wasn't braided when she arrived in America, for example, Alake began to believe that she deserved the treatment. That she truly was garbage, worthless. Alake stopped speaking because she felt no one would ever want to hear her voice again. She feels nothing but guilt over killing her teachers, and feels unworthy of being forgiven. In a way, Alake doesn't even want to be forgiven. Nothing can bring back her sister, and the pain of that loss prevents Alake from feeling love.



# Chapter Eight

## Chapter Eight Summary

Three weeks after the Amabos move in with the Finches, it starts to rain. Mrs. Finch asks if all the windows are closed upstairs, and Jared realizes, with horror, that he's left his bedroom windows open and that rainwater has filled Mattu's boxes of ash. When Jared picks them up to move them, the weakened cardboard gives out and the contents spill all over the carpet. Jared scrabbles to clean up the mud and is shocked to find large pebbles mixed in with the grit. Upon closer inspection, Jared realizes that the chunks aren't pebble or even bone, they're uncut diamonds. Quickly, Jared slips one of the diamonds into his pocket and runs downstairs. He apologizes profusely to Mattu, acting as if he doesn't know what was truly in the boxes, and offers to help him clean up the mess. Mattu sprints up the stairs and says that he'd rather handle the ashes on his own. When he returns to the living room, he's shivering. Later that night, Celestine talks about the theft experienced at the Finch's church: "The thief worked on your side," she says, "pretending to work for you, but in fact, working for himself. The loss of money hurts the church, but the broken trust hurts you" (p. 127). Her words hit Jared's heart. He feels the diamond in his pocket and knows that he is betraying Mattu by stealing it, but he must know the truth. Could this stone in his pocket really be a blood diamond? After everyone else is in bed, Jared sneaks down to the computer downstairs and searches the internet for images of blood diamonds. He is shocked when Mopsy sneaks up behind him and demands to know what he's doing. When Jared struggles to form an answer, Mopsy claims that she has theories of her own: she doesn't believe the Amabos are a true family, and she thinks Mattu has smuggled diamonds into their home. When Jared shows her the stone in his pocket, Mopsy urges him to bring it to a jewelry store for identification.

## Chapter Eight Analysis

In this chapter, it's discovered for certain that Mattu Amabo has smuggled diamonds into America. At the moment, his reason is unknown, but to the reader, it's clear that these diamonds are what Victor is searching for. Jared, and the reader, wonder which of the Amabos are in on the plan. Jared fears that all the Amabos were after all along was money. Money to start over in America, to buy a big house and a fancy car. For a moment, he feels taken advantage of, as if the Amabos have used his unsuspecting family to cover up their crimes. Yet he sees Celestine sitting patiently at the kitchen table clipping grocery coupons, eager to save ten cents here or twenty-five cents there. Andre is eternally grateful for his family's help in securing doctors to create his prosthetic hands. Mattu works diligently on his schoolwork. No one acts as if they have millions of dollars in the bank. Jared surmises that only Mattu knows about the diamonds. But why would he smuggle them into America and then forget about them? In this chapter, the heart of the novel is revealed: the Amabo family has stolen diamonds hidden in the Finch house, and Victor is coming to find them.



# Chapter Nine

## Chapter Nine Summary

The Amabos wake early in the morning to witness the year's first snow. They are dumbfounded by the beauty of the white, washing everything clean and pure. While Celestine, Andre, Mattu, and Mopsy work on a snowman, Jared angrily confronts his mother in the kitchen. When is she going to stand up and realize that something is strange about the Amabo family? They completely ignore Alake, pretending like she's not even there. It's not normal, he argues, and his mother needs to recognize that. Before Mrs. Finch can answer back, the Amabos come back inside to happily make their breakfast. Mrs. Finch announces that today, Alake will attend high school with Jared. She thinks it's important for Alake to be around kids her own age. At school, the guidance counselor appoints Tay, the most popular girl in school, as Alake's escort. Tay is as excitable as Mopsy, but older and more mature. Alake listens carefully during English class, particularly when they're reading the following poem: "The woods are lovely, dark and deep, / But I have promises to keep, / And miles to go before I sleep, / And miles to go before I sleep" (p. 139). Alake recognizes the beauty of the poem, and she also recognizes the great hospitality being shown to her. Everyone, the Finches, their children, and their classmates, have been nothing but warm and supportive toward her. She wishes she could accept their kindness, but she still feels unworthy of their love. Meanwhile, Mrs. Dowling, the boys' history teacher, suggests that Mattu put his name and contact information on a website that connects African refugees across America. Mattu is horrified. He wants nothing to do with it. Fearing that Mattu is simply too shy, and feeling that he could use African friends who understand his background, Mrs. Dowling secretly puts his information on the website anyway.

## Chapter Nine Analysis

In this section, the symbol of white as cleanliness, forgiveness, and purity is introduced with the year's first snowfall. The Amabo family revels in the beauty of the white, how it has washed away all the dirt and grime (which is symbolic of sin) and left the world pure and beautiful. This symbol will return later in the novel, when Alake receives her redemption.

After the snowfall, Jared confronts his parents about the Amabos treatment of Alake. It's been almost a month, and neither of his parents acknowledges that the Amabos neglect their daughter. They have never once called her by name, inquired about her day, or given her affection. By confronting his parents, Jared hopes they will realize something is suspicious within the family, and will therefore be more receptive to his thoughts about the smuggled blood diamonds. Instead, Jared's parents shrug off his concerns. Jared knows that if he's going to tackle this problem, he has to do it on his own. Meanwhile, Alake is realizing the same thing. She knows she will never be welcomed into the Amabo family, but the poem she reads in class reminds her that her journey isn't

over yet. Even though she has safely arrived in America, she is not safe. She is not yet home.

Also in this chapter, Mrs. Dowling, a meddling American teacher who epitomizes American naivety, puts all Mattu's personal contact information online, making it possible for Victor to track him down. Although Mrs. Dowling had good intentions, she failed to realize that African refugees are often escaping death threats and intimidation. She didn't respect Mattu's request for privacy, and acted as if her desires were more important than her student's.



# Chapter Ten

## Chapter Ten Summary

It had not occurred to Mattu that he might love his American family. He recognizes the sacrifices every member of the Finch family has made to make him feel welcome, and he feels deeply indebted to them. As much as he loves the Finches, Mattu is desperate to be in the company of black people again, so he is thrilled when Daniel's family invites him out to dinner. Daniel's parents discuss their son's future plans, and their hopes for him to become a doctor. When they ask what Mattu would like to be, he thinks, "I want to be safe" (p. 145). Celestine looks proudly at Mattu and suggests that he, too, should become a doctor. A few days later, while Mrs. Finch is taking the Amabos to the zoo, Jared sneaks away to visit a jewelry store in the city. Although he hoped he could saunter into the store and ask the shop owner to identify his pebble, Jared knows, deep down, that he's holding a blood diamond in his hands. He fears what might happen to his family if the shop owner finds out the truth.

Meanwhile, Victor visits the public library in Texas and asks the kind librarians for help tracking down his missing family, the Amabos. The librarians are thrilled to help. A few days later, they tell him they've found the Amabos. They even print out driving instructions from Texas to New York, so he can surprise them with a reunion. Victor can't believe how gullible and trusting Americans are. Immediately, Victor returns home and packs up his belongings, including a wide variety of weapons he's managed to collect during his few weeks in Texas. As he's packing, his refugee supervisor stops by to say that he's concerned about him. He says that if Victor doesn't start going to work - a condition of his refugee status - he'll have to report him to immigration. Without hesitation, Victor chops off the supervisor's hands and then kills him.

Back in Connecticut, Mr. Finch is outraged to discover that Celestine and Mattu have taken his car without his permission. Mattu has only had a few lessons and doesn't even have a license yet! But he took the car to drive Celestine to a job interview at the Stop and Save grocery store. Inside the house, Alake listens to the argument outside. In the distance, she hears the ragged motor of an unknown car. Panic creeps over her; she knows danger is lurking outside. Mopsy tries to tell her that she has nothing to worry about, but Alake rushes to the door and locks the deadbolt.

## Chapter Ten Analysis

Hearing that Mattu would like to become a doctor breaks the ice between the teenage boy and his parents. For the first time since arriving in America, Celestine feels proud to call Mattu her son. She realizes that if they all work together, they might have a chance at the American dream. Meanwhile, Victor has finally located the Amabo family. With the help of local librarians - who also symbolize naivety in America - Victor tracks down the Finch address. Suspense starts to rise as the reader realizes that the Amabo and Finch



families are now in grave danger. Amputating the refugee worker's hands show that Victor has taken the horrors of African civil war to America, and the he will not stop killing until he gets what he is after: the blood diamonds.

In church, Alake is interested by the preacher's message that all sins can be forgiven. Alake feels unforgivable. Even if she reaches out to God, he will rebuke her. But the preacher's message urges her to pray, to ask for forgiveness, to live a life purified of her sins. It's interesting to note that African churches integrate dancing, clapping, and praising into their services, but American churches are more reserved: "The room seemed full of answers. If Alake just dared to stretch her fingers, she could catch hold of a word - two words - even an answer. But people in this church did not stretch or leap or dance or cry out. They sat quietly" (p. 149). Even though Alake wants to reach out to God as the pastor urges, she doesn't know how to do that in America. She will find forgiveness on her own terms.



# Chapter Eleven

## Chapter Eleven Summary

On the bus on the way home from school, Jared and Mattu argue about the presence of evil in the world. Jared believes that since there is no such thing as God, there is no such thing as sin. Mattu cannot comprehend a world where someone would deny the presence of God. He is even more baffled by the idea that there is no sin: "If they chop off your hands, have they not committed a sin?" he asks Jared (Page 157). When Mattu returns home, Celestine is waiting for him. She pulls him aside and says that he must return the diamonds to Victor. The entire story of who Victor truly is comes out, and it's clear Celestine is still afraid of him. She knows he won't rest until the diamonds are returned to him, but Mattu knows that if he brings them back himself, Victor will kill him. He never leaves witnesses. Mattu also knows that if he manages to escape, Victor will hunt him down, and returning home will put the Finch family in tremendous danger. Mattu knows that to keep them safe, he must say goodbye to them forever.

Mopsy has a new idea to get Alake to communicate. She forces a keyboard in front of the girl's hands and demands that she start typing. It's clear that Alake can read, even though she refuses to speak, so it follows that she should also know how to type. The first thing she types looks like gibberish at first, "deerjopsyeiolvyouo," but when Mopsy looks more closely, she realizes what Alake is trying to say: "Dear Mopsy, I love you" (p. 162). Mopsy is overjoyed; Alake is communicating. She forwards the email to all her friends, and to Tay, the only friend Alake has at school. A few hours later, Tay stops by with a present for Alake. An adorable puppy: "Alake needs somebody to love. And sometimes a puppy is easier to love than people" (Page 165). Alake is dumbfounded by the gift. In Africa, dogs are considered pests, mongrels, but this puppy, with its warm fur and soft tongue, opens Alake's heart. She names the puppy Jopsy, and for the first time since her sister's death, her heart opens itself to love.

## Chapter Eleven Analysis

Jared cannot deny Mattu's argument that there is great evil and great sin in the world, but he resents the refugee for forcing him to change his opinion about the world. In a way, Jared's character change is one of the most important in the novel. He lives in an upper-class American neighborhood where there is no true evil, and therefore no true good, and as a result he doesn't even really believe in sin: "there's no such thing as sin anyway. Just look at television. You can do anything you want with anybody you want for any reason you want and what happens? Nothing" (p. 157). As the novel progresses, however, Jared's eyes are opened to the true evil in the world. Through the experiences of the Amabo family, Jared learns about the horrors of civil war and the evil sinful men are capable of. As a result, Jared realizes that he needs God, and he needs prayer.



When the boys return home from school, Celestine urges Mattu to return Victor's diamonds. Celestine is willing to sacrifice Mattu for the greater good. She knows Victor will kill him, but to her, that loss is worth her safety and the safety of the Finch family. The novel is poised to make Mattu a literary Christ figure, one who gives up his life for the greater good of society, but there are still many twists and turns ahead. It is revealed that Victor is warlord who planned to exploit a refugee family and force them to carry his blood diamonds into America. He rationalized that US customs would be less likely to search the bags of a grieving refugee family than a single man in his twenties. When the real Amabo family refused to go along with Victor's plan, he killed them and found four desperate refugees to take their place. Celestine and Andre (who had no hope of being accepted into a refugee program because of his missing hands) became Mr. and Mrs. Amabo. An orphaned teenage boy desperate to continue his education, because Mattu, and a teenage girl, already putty in Victor's hands, became Alake.





# Chapter Twelve

## Chapter Twelve Summary

Kirk Crick arrives with the good news that he's found an apartment for the Amabo family. It's tiny and a bit dirty, but it will be their own. Celestine and Andre are elated. Alake, as usual, shows no emotion, and even Mattu seems proud. It occurs to Jared for the first time that "a refugee must hate being a refugee" (p. 181). Mrs. Finch and Mopsy, however, are devastated by this news and both argue that the family simply isn't ready to leave. When Mattu hears the news, his brain starts running a mile a minute. The Amabo family needs him. With both Celestine and Andre working, they'll need his driving skills to get back-and-forth to work and doctor's appointments. He must find a way to return Victor's diamonds without endangering himself or his new family. Unfortunately for Alake, the new apartment building doesn't allow pets, so she'll have to get rid of Jopsy before the move. Alake is horrified. Even though she just met Jopsy, she loves the new puppy like she's never loved anything before. She knows that she will never let them take the dog away from her. She'll do anything she has to do to keep him. In church the next Sunday, Alake is taken by the words of their hymn, "Jesus walked this lonesome valley. He had to walk it by himself. You must go and stand your trial. You must stand it by yourself" (Page 187). There is a trial now that she must face alone.

In the days that follow, Mattu knows he must locate Victor. He calls three different refugee agencies to see if they have resettled a refugee by that name. On the third call, his heart nearly stops. Yes, they have a refugee by that name. Meanwhile, Victor races from Texas to New York hunting down the Amabo family. He is driving a stolen car (he murdered the car owner) and has also killed an old woman at a gas station so he can steal her cell phone and credit card. He wants his diamonds and will stop at nothing to get them.

## Chapter Twelve Analysis

This chapter mainly functions to progress the plot of the novel. Everyone's emotions are heightened when they learn Kirk Crick has found a new apartment for the Amabos. Alake is finally given a reason to fight for something when she learns she will have to give up Jopsy in the move. Jopsy is the first thing she's allowed herself to love since her sister's death, and losing the puppy now will be like re-living her sister's death. As a way of clinging to the only love she has left in the world, it's clear that Alake is planning to run away. The hymnal words, "Jesus walked this lonesome valley" confirm not only Alake's plan to be alone, but also the parallels between her character arc and Christ's. Although the novel prepared the reader for Mattu to act as the sacrificial lamb, Alake is now poised to take over that spot. Meanwhile, Victor races ever closer to the Finch family. He has already murdered three people - the refugee representative, the car

owner, and the old woman at the gas station - which continues to remind the reader that Victor will stop at nothing to get his hands back on the diamonds.



# Chapter Thirteen

## Chapter Thirteen Summary

Mrs. Finch takes Andre to Boston to meet with a new doctor about his prosthetic hands. As the kids prepare for school, Alake mourns the loss of her puppy, Jopsy. While she's in school today, Tay's mother will come to the house to take back the puppy. Everyone in the Amabo family seems to think it's more important to have their own apartment than it is for Alake to keep Jopsy. Alake leaves for school with empty arms and an empty heart. When the bus arrives at school, however, Alake does not plan on going inside. She waits for Mattu and Jared to climb off the bus, gathers her belongings, and breaks into a sprint back home. If she can beat Tay's mother to the house, she plans to pick up Jopsy, steal Mattu's diamonds, and make her way to New York City where she'll start over: a brand new life. Out of the corner of her eye, Mopsy sees Alake running towards home, and decides to follow her. Meanwhile, Mattu is plotting a plan of his own. When he located Victor's refugee agency, he called and asked if one of the workers could deliver a package to him. When the worker agreed, Mattu was overjoyed. This was the way he could return the diamonds without having to come face-to-face with a murderer. He is horrified, then, when he happens to look out the bus window and sees Victor driving madly toward them. Somehow, Victor has tracked him down and is going to kill him.

## Chapter Thirteen Analysis

In this final chapter of suspense, everyone's plans come to boiling point. Victor has successfully mailed the diamonds to Victor in Texas, and now believes that he has freed himself of Victor's threat. He even sent the diamonds with Andre to Boston to ensure Victor couldn't track them back to Connecticut by the postcode. Unfortunately for him, Mrs. Dowling already let slip where Mattu was living, and now Victor has arrived in search of diamonds that are no longer there. Meanwhile, Alake's plan, to take Jopsy and runaway to New York, begins to take shape. She runs away from school in the hopes of stealing Mattu's diamonds (which are already gone), taking her puppy, and finding her way to New York where she will start over. Alake has spent the past few days in a constant state of prayer. She cries out to God for help. Cooney, who is very religious, leaves the reader with the message that anything can be accomplished through prayer.



# Chapter Fourteen

## Chapter Fourteen Summary

As Alake runs, she hears a car pulling up behind her. She dives into the bushes and sees a shiny, luxury car pull into the Finch's driveway. For a moment, she thinks it's Tay's mother, but is horrified to see that it is Victor. Somehow, he's found her. The Finch's had left the side door open for Tay's mother, so Victor has no trouble walking straight into the house, carrying a gun. When Victor opens the door, Jopsy comes galloping out, and runs straight into the bushes to Alake. Victor raises his gun and orders her inside. Meanwhile, Mopsy has followed Alake home and walks in the front door to find a strange man beating Alake. He has a gun in his hand. Immediately, Mopsy says, "You want the diamonds, don't you" (Page 205). Victor nods, puts the gun to Mopsy's back, and orders her upstairs to retrieve his treasure. With shaking hands, Mopsy opens Mattu's containers and is horrified to see that they are empty. The diamonds are missing. The narration switches back to Alake's point-of-view as she panics about Mopsy's involvement. Why isn't Mopsy at school? Alake knows that Victor will kill Mopsy whether he finds the diamonds or not, and only Alake can save her. Opening her mouth, Alake speaks her first, carefully plotted words. She cannot even bring herself to look Mopsy in the eyes as she says to Victor, "I will get you the diamonds. Then you take me and my puppy to New York and leave us there ... I will not give you the diamonds if you hurt her" (Page 209). Victor nods, dumps Alake and Mopsy in his car, and drives away.

Meanwhile, Mattu finally tells Jared the truth: he smuggled diamonds into America for a murderous warlord. Now, that warlord is in Connecticut searching for him. Although Jared knows about the diamonds, he doesn't believe it's possible for Victor to track his family down. Still, he convinces Daniel to drive them back home so he can check on the house. As they're driving home, they spot Victor driving away with Alake and Mopsy in the backseat. Shocked, the boys follow Victor's car to the marina. They watch in horror as Victor raises his gun and

makes the girls march out to the breakwater. Alake leads the way, saying that she's hidden the diamonds in the rocks. She reaches down and announces that the box has frozen to the rocks. She needs someone with longer arms to pull it out. Hesitantly, Victor lowers his gun and reaches into the water. Without thinking twice, Alake hurls herself at Victor, and they both disappear into the icy water. When Jared sees Alake throw herself into the water, he strips off his jacket, sprints to the dock, and dives in to save her. It takes much longer than he expected to pull her out of the water, and by the time he finds her, Victor has already drowned. Alake wakes in a white hospital room, surrounded by her family. Celestine embraces Alake for the first time, and calls her "daughter." The Amabo family leaves the hospital as one, as a loving family.



## Chapter Fourteen Analysis

In the final chapter of the novel, Alake grows into the perfect literary Christ figure as she is given the opportunity for redemption. Saving Mopsy atones Alake for her inability to save her own sister. A Christ figure is a literary technique used by authors to draw allusions between their characters and the biblical Jesus Christ. Often, literary Christ figure is a martyr, sacrificing himself for the greater good. In this case, Alake sacrifices herself for the greater good by throwing herself in the icy water to kill Victor. Before she martyrs herself, Alake prays for her personal redemption: "Let me be good, just once. Let me atone" (p. 217). Alake doesn't die as Jared saves her, but she is clearly redeemed, cleansed by her sacrifice, white as a lamb, and washed clean of her sin. The symbolism for resurrection is strong when Alake is next seen, recovering in her hospital room: "Alake was in a white room with white sheets and a white table and white wall" (p. 224). Keen readers will recall the snow imagery from chapter nine and the strong themes of purity and forgiveness.

As a result of the many sacrifices made by the characters in the novel, both families are able to unite with newfound love and affection. By the end of the novel, Jared's father is giving him driving lessons, and Jared's relationship with his mother and sister have improved greatly. As a result, Jared is truly happy. Similarly, the disjointed Amabo family learns to assemble true relationships when they band together to battle Victor's evil ways. The biggest change happens when Alake sacrifices herself to save the Finch family. Mattu is the first to realize that he had underestimated his sister and prays, for the first time in his life, that she will live. But it is Celestine who makes the biggest step toward uniting her misfit family: "You saved the daughter of those who saved us. That makes you my daughter now. Come home" (p. 225). She embraces Alake and the two weep, for all that has been lost in the war, and all that can be gained with the love and support of family.



# Characters

## Jared Finch

Jared Finch is the fifteen-year-old protagonist of the novel. At the story's opening, Jared is outraged that his parents have agreed to take in a refugee family without consulting him. He despises his little sister Mopsy, and is angry with his father for being so distant. As the novel progresses, however, Jared begins to feel sorry for the refugee children who have come to live with him, and he even finds himself caring about them. Slowly, Jared realizes that his sister Mopsy is not the most ignorant, annoying, and unintelligent person on the planet. He sees that his little sister has some good ideas, and most surprisingly, that of everyone in his family, he trusts her the most. Jared also realizes that his father is in extreme emotional pain following his best friend's betrayal. Going against his character, Jared reaches out to his father and embraces him in a loving hug. By the end of the novel, Jared's father is giving him driving lessons, and his relationship with his mother and sister have improved greatly. As a result, Jared is truly happy. The other major change Jared undergoes over the course of the novel surrounds his faith. In the beginning of the novel, Jared doesn't believe in God, "Jared never prayed, because the idea of a loving God seemed out of sync with the facts of the world" (p. 5). He lives in an upper-class American neighborhood where there is no true evil, and therefore no true good. As the novel progresses, however, Jared's eyes are opened to the true evil in the world. Through the experiences of the Amabo family, Jared learns about the horrors of civil war and the evil sinful men are capable of. As a result, Jared realizes that he needs God, and he needs prayer.

## Alake Amabo

Alake Amabo is the fifteen-year-old refugee daughter brought to America by a church organization in Connecticut. When Alake first arrives in America, she is a shattered child. No one in the Amabo family will speak to her or touch her. As a result of the horrors she witnessed in Africa, Alake is completely mute, unwilling or unable to speak with anyone. Through the course of the novel, the reader learns why. When she was twelve-years-old, Alake was forced to kill her teachers in order to save her sister. After shooting her teachers with a machine gun, the warlord who forced her into the crime killed her sister anyway. As a result, Alake feels like a tainted human being, a killer, undeserving of love. She protects herself and those around her from her horrific crime by refusing to engage in the world: "She wanted not to be evil. She had been twelve years old. Now she was a thousand. She could never get those years back. She would be a thousand years old as long as she lived" (p. 141). At the end of the novel, Alake is given the opportunity to atone her sins, becoming a perfect literary Christ figure. Alake sacrifices herself for the greater good by throwing herself in the icy water to kill Victor. Before she martyrs herself, Alake prays for her personal redemption: "Let me be good, just once. Let me atone" (p. 217). Alake doesn't die since Jared saves her, but she is clearly redeemed, cleansed by her sacrifice, white as a lamb, washed clean of her sin.



## Mopsy Finch

Mopsy Finch is thirteen-years-old and desperate to be treated like a grown-up. She even wants to be called Martha instead of Mopsy in the hopes of gaining more respect, particularly at home. When Mopsy learns that her family will be taking in African refugees, she is overjoyed and desperately hopes there will be a daughter she can play with. On the surface, Mopsy appears immature and naive, but she is actually quite astute. Mopsy is the first to realize that Alake is being ignored by her family, and the only person who takes the time to address Alake's needs and desires.

## Kara Finch

Kara Finch is the mother of Jared and Mopsy. It is her idea to take in the African refugee family, and she enjoys organizing their schedules, contacting doctors, and arranging school visits. For all the hard work Kara Finch puts into the Amabo family, she is naive to the effects civil war have had on her guests, and often comes across as annoying rather than helpful.

## Andre Amabo

Andre Amabo is the father of Mattu and Alake. His defining characteristic is that he has no hands, both were chopped off by rebel soldiers during the civil war.

## Celestine Amabo

Celestine Amabo is the mother of Mattu and Alake. Her real daughter was killed by a child soldier during the civil war, so Celestine refuses to adopt Alake as her own. Celestine is determined to make life work in America because it will provide a better life for her handicapped husband, Andre. Due to his disabilities, Celestine is the primary breadwinner for the family, and at the end of the novel, she achieves her dream of working in a grocery store. Also at the end of the novel, Celestine grows to love and accept Alake after the girl sacrifices herself to save the Finch family.

## Daniel

Daniel is the only other black kid at school. He comes from an upper-middle class family that promotes education and Daniel's aspirations give Mattu new dreams for the future.

## Mrs. Dowling

Mrs. Dowling is the meddling schoolteacher who puts all of Mattu's contact information online, unwittingly putting him in contact with Victor, the viscous warlord.



## **Victor**

Victor is an evil warlord who has used the Amabo family to help him smuggle blood diamonds into America. After killing the real Amabo family for not complying with his plans, he found four desperate refugees to take their place. Victor is also responsible for chopping off Andre's hands, killing Andre's daughter and Alake's sister, and turning Alake into a child soldier. At the end of the novel, Victor drowns at the marina.

## **Kirk Crick**

Kirk Crick is the refugee representative in charge of the Amabos case. He feels that the Finches are spoiling the refugee family and making it more difficult for them to thrive on their own. He finds the small apartment that the Amabos move into at the end of the novel.

## **Tay**

Tay is the most popular girl at school. Although she is loud and obnoxious, she befriends Alake and even gifts Alake with a puppy, Jopsy, to celebrate Alake's first email.





## Objects/Places

### Blood Diamonds

Blood Diamonds are diamonds mined in Africa that are later used to fund civil war. Blood diamonds earned their name for funding mass genocide in Africa.

### Child Soldiers

Child Soldiers are children in Africa - usually orphaned or otherwise vulnerable - that are forced into bloody warfare by terrifying warlords. The children are used to kill their own families, neighbors, or teachers.

### Liberia

Liberia is the country that the Amabo family comes from in Africa.

### Nigeria

Nigeria is the African country where the Amabos lived in refugee camps awaiting their transport to America.

### Connecticut

Connecticut is the state where the Finches live. The Finches live in an affluent, upper middle class neighborhood where they needn't even lock their doors at night, a far cry from the home life the Amabos are used to.

### Boston

Boston is where Andre goes to meet with doctors about his prosthetic hands, and where he mails the diamonds from so Victor can't trace the family back to Connecticut.

### New York City

New York City is where Victor hoped to meet with the dealer to sell his diamonds. This is also where Alake tries to runaway to with Jopsy, but is caught by Victor before she leaves the house.



## **Jopsy**

Jopsy is the puppy Tay gives to Alake when she learns how to communicate. Jopsy is the first thing Alake allows herself to love since the death of her sister, so when she hears that she will have to give the puppy up in order to move to her new apartment, Alake knows her only option is to run away.

## **The Marina**

The Marina is where Alake lures Victor, promising that this is where she has hidden the diamonds. When he gets close enough to the water, Alake tackles Victor and he drowns.

## **Norwich**

Norwich is the small city the Amabos move to at the end of the novel. Here, they hope to start a new life together as a family, free of Victor's threats.



# Themes

## Christianity

The novel is set in an upper-middle class, American neighborhood in Connecticut, and the American family at the center of the story, the Finches, is Christian. At the opening of the novel, Jared Finch says that he doesn't believe in God: "Jared never prayed, because the idea of a loving God seemed out of sync with the facts of the world" (p. 5). Jared lives in an upper-class American neighborhood where there is no true evil, and therefore no true good. Jared doesn't even really believe in sin: "there's no such thing as sin anyway. Just look at television. You can do anything you want with anybody you want for any reason you want and what happens? Nothing" (p. 157). As the novel progresses, however, Jared's eyes are opened to the true evil in the world. Through the experiences of the Amabo family, Jared learns about the horrors of civil war and the evil sinful men are capable of. As a result, Jared realizes that he needs God, and he needs prayer. The rest of the characters as well learn to rely on prayer when they feel that evil in the world is overwhelming. When Victor returns, for example, the entire family prays. Alake prays for redemption; Jared prays that Alake will live when she falls into the icy water; Mattu prays that Alake will survive the hospital. When faced with Victor's extraordinary evil, the helpless characters reach out to God, relying on their newfound Christian faith, and God does not ignore their prayers: A redeemed Alake makes a full recovery and joins a loving family.

In addition to Cooney's strong Christian message - that anything can be accomplished through faith - she also includes strong Christian symbolism. Alake is a perfect example of a literary Christ figure. A Christ figure is a literary technique used by authors to draw allusions between their characters and the biblical Jesus Christ. Often, literary Christ figure is a martyr, sacrificing himself for the greater good. In this case, Alake sacrifices herself for the greater good by throwing herself in the icy water to kill Victor. Before she martyrs herself, Alake prays for her personal redemption: "Let me be good, just once. Let me atone" (p. 217). Alake doesn't die - Jared saves her - but she is clearly redeemed, cleansed by her sacrifice, white as a lamb, washed clean of her sin. The symbolism for resurrection is strong when Alake is next seen, recovering in her hospital room: "Alake was in a white room with white sheets and a white table and white wall" (p. 224).

## Cultural Divides

Diamonds in the Shadow is particularly successful as a young adult novel because it keenly highlights the cultural differences in modern American and African societies. Through this novel, Cooney is making the argument that American teenagers are too sheltered, and that they have no idea what's happening in the outside world. When the Finch and Amabo families meet for the first time, there is much the two don't understand about the other. The Amabos have never seen snow, a microwave, or the produce



section of a grocery store. The Finches have no understanding of war crimes, or what it feels like to lose your family, your home, your security. The differences are so great that often, Jared wonders whether he will ever be able to bond with the new family, and continues to resent their presence in his home for some time. Other characters struggle with the culture divide, too. Alake, for example, searches for forgiveness in the American church. African churches integrate dancing, clapping, and praising into their services, but American churches are more reserved: "The room seemed full of answers. If Alake just dared to stretch her fingers, she could catch hold of a word - two words - even an answer. But people in this church did not stretch or leap or dance or cry out. They sat quietly" (p. 149). At the end of the novel, however, it is not the differences between the two cultures that matter, what matters is the way each person - regardless of race, wealth, or nationality - is the same. Jared realizes that in some way, everyone is a refugee: "We all want a safe house. A place with strong walls between us and trouble" (p. 188). When he realizes this, Jared can fully embrace the Amabo family as his own. The message to the reader is strong: human beings all over the world have the same hopes and desires. It is part of our responsibility to help our fellow man reach those basic goals of love, happiness, and security.

## Family

At the opening of the novel, both the Finch and Amabo family are divided. Jared is outraged that his parents would agree to take in a refugee family without consulting him first. He despises his little sister Mopsey, and is angry with his father for being so distant. Meanwhile, the Amabo family seem as if they met for the first time on the airplane to America. The parents are absorbed in their own relationship, completely ignoring their children, and Alake - who is clearly the most disturbed of the Amabo family members - is neglected and ignored by her entire family. The reason for the divide in the Amabo family is soon made clear: they are not really a family, but a band of misfits thrown together by an evil warlord. The parents do not want to associate with Alake because she is a former child soldier, and their own daughter was killed by a child soldier (not Alake). The events of the novel affect each of the characters differently, but in the end, both families are brought back together. Slowly, Jared realizes that his sister Mopsey is not the most ignorant, annoying, and unintelligent person on the planet. He sees that his little sister has some good ideas, and most surprisingly, that of everyone in his family, he trusts her the most. Jared also realizes that his father is in extreme emotional pain following his best friend's betrayal. Going against his character, Jared reaches out to his father and embraces him in a loving hug: "Dad's stiff spine relaxed. His tight shoulders sagged. His set jaw softened. He hugged back" (Page 188). By the end of the novel, Jared's father is giving him driving lessons, and his relationship with his mother and sister have improved greatly. As a result, Jared is truly happy. Similarly, the disjointed Amabo family learns to assemble true relationships when they band together to battle Victor's evil ways. The biggest change happens when Alake sacrifices herself to save the Finch family. Mattu is the first to realize that he had underestimated his sister and prays, for the first time in his life, that she will live. But it is Celestine who makes the biggest step toward uniting her misfit family: "You saved the daughter of those who saved us. That makes you my daughter now. Come home" (p. 225). She

embraces Alake and the two weep, for all that has been lost in the war, and all that can be gained with the love and support of family.



# Style

## Point of View

*Diamonds in the Shadow* is told in third-person limited omniscience narration from the revolving point-of-view of the four children: Jared, Mopsy, Mattu, and Alake. In all the character's chapters, the narration is completely reliable, and gives great insight into each character's thoughts and emotions, particularly because the children aren't good about sharing their fears or hopes out loud. Because the novel surrounds a dangerous secret being held by the Amabo family, the modulating point-of-view is crucial to understanding the plot of the novel as a whole. This point of view becomes particularly important when dealing with Alake's character. Since Alake is mute, the reader would have no access to her thoughts, or more importantly, her past history, if the point of view were different. Since, the reader is held very close to each of the children during their chapters of narration, they are rewarded with rich, complex characters that will be impossible to forget. One of the most important themes in the novel is family, and if it were not for the specific point-of-view of the novel's narration, the reader would not be privy to varied emotions that eventually lead to loyalty and love between the characters.

The novel is divided equally between dialogue and exposition, with much of the exposition occurring within the thoughts of the characters, not from an external narrator. The descriptive passages work hard to conjure images of the African civil war, and it is clear that Caroline B. Cooney has researched her novel well and is comfortable incorporating historical information into a successful fiction book.

## Setting

*Diamonds in the Shadow* is set in modern times, with many references to the civil wars that have plagued Africa for the past twenty years. The story is set in an unnamed city in Connecticut, about an hour-and-a-half north of New York City. The Finch family lives in an affluent, upper middle class neighborhood where families needn't even lock their doors at night. The children have never experienced any trauma in their young lives, which are dictated by family events, church, and school. Both Mopsy and Jared work hard at school and are expected to go to college. Their schools, which educate children of primarily wealthy parents, are equipped with the latest technological advances, and materials are easy for both students and teachers to access. This world is a far cry from the Africa the Amabo family left behind. There, warlords dictate everything with extreme violent crimes, like murder, torture, and rape. Each of the Amabo family members have been personally affected by the civil war in Africa. Celestine and Andre saw their children killed. Mattu is orphaned, and bears a gristly scar from Victor's machete attack. Alake was forced to kill her teachers and witnessed Victor murdering her sister. This divide between cultures is very important to one of the novel's central messages, that American teenagers are too sheltered, and that they have no idea what's happening in the outside world.



## Language and Meaning

As the novel is written for teenage readers, the language is conversational and accessible to a wide range of readers. 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. There are many scenes that describe horrific war crimes that may be difficult for some readers to digest. Although the images are troubling, they are important to Cooney's argument that American teenagers are too sheltered, and have no comprehension of the world's evil. Backing away from the images of war would have undermined Cooney's mission, to educate modern teenagers about the reality of Africa's civil wars. These scenes are important because they add depth and relevance to the novel, allowing the reader to glimpse into the disturbing world of war.

The language of the novel is easy and engaging for modern day readers. Completely straightforward, the few metaphors and analogies are almost strictly religious. This creates a dual understanding of the language. On one level, readers with a religious background will find greater depth to the story, particularly the passages reference sin or redemption. The religious symbolism simply adds depth to the novel and having a religious background is certainly not needed to understand the novel, although the understanding will be relatively more superficial.

## Structure

*Diamonds in the Shadow* is comprised of fourteen chapters averaging twenty pages in length. Within each chapter, narration frequently shifts between the point-of-view characters. Each break is notated by a black diamond, and readers shouldn't be confused by the change. The chapters tend to be short and full of action, each adding further clues and mystery, which propels the reader through the novel. Often, chapters end on a cliffhanger moment, forcing the reader to turn the next page and start the next chapter. This intense action, combined with the very short chapter lengths may entice readers to read the entire novel in one or two sittings.

The plot of the novel is fairly simple, with no subplots. The story surrounds the Finch family as they adjust to having a refugee family, the Amabo family, live with them. It's clear to everyone, including the reader, that the Amabo family is hiding something from their hosts. The children set out to solve the mystery, while the adults seem to ignore that anything is amiss. Intermittently, the point-of-view narration switches to the perspective of Victor, the warlord tracking the Amabo family. Victor's search for the family, and his violent actions during that search, are carefully woven into the Amabo's story, so the plot continues to progress forward. The novel is quite easy to read and the plot is engrossing once the reader is immersed in the story being painted in its pages.

The story line is linear with no flashbacks or long sections of back-story to contend with. The novel is quite easy to read and entertaining in its entirety.





## Quotes

"In a civil war, there are no good guys. They're all guilty of something. You are probably not saving the innocent, because in a civil war, nobody is innocent" (p. 11).

"The distance between African and New York City was not just miles. This would be a new world for the Amabos in every way; it was natural for them to be afraid" (p. 15).

"In a civil war, people forget that they are people. Next they forget anyone else is a person. They forget how to be kind" (p. 32).

"Trust broken is worse than money taken" (p. 85).

"Tests are for school. I can't test Andre and Celestine, and I can't test Alake either. Home is where nobody tests you" (p. 117).

"It was a mystery. But in some ways, all families were mysteries. Maybe even all people" (p. 122).

"She wanted not to be evil. She had been twelve years old. Now she was a thousand. She could never get those years back. She would be a thousand years old as long as she lived" (p. 141).

"A diamond seen through an airport X-ray machine did not cast a shadow. Yet a blood diamond always cast a shadow; the shadow of death" (p. 175).

"In Africa, you pray for one meal. In America, you pray to have it all" (p. 176).

"Jesus walked this lonesome valley. He had to walk it by himself ... You must go and stand your trial. You must stand it by yourself" (p. 187).

"Let me be good, just once. Let me atone" (p. 217).

"Now he knew four people in the world who knew that money is not treasure. Love is treasure. Food and hands and a roof of your own are treasure" (p. 223).



## Topics for Discussion

What is strange about the way the Amabo family interacts with each other? What excuses do the adults come up with to justify this strange behavior? What is it about Jared and Mopsy that give them a different insight into the family and helps them form their theories? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Compare / contrast the ways Africans and Americans view the world. For example, the refugees claim that American's don't see, or choose to ignore, the badness in the world. Do you agree with this? Why or why not? What do you make of Alake's statement, "In Africa, you pray for one meal. In America, you pray to have it all" (Page 176)? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Describe Mopsy's personality. What parts about her character does Jared find particularly annoying? Why do you think Alake has such a different reaction to Mopsy's outgoing personality? Would you want Mopsy as a friend? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

What has this novel taught you about the civil war in Africa? Was the story eye-opening for you? Why or why not? Does the novel seem realistic, or do you think the violence of war has been exaggerated for effect? How does it make you feel to know that warlords like Victor are thriving in Africa today? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

How does Jared's attitude toward the refugee family change over the course of the novel? Compare / contrast Jared's attitude on the first and last page. What events have caused this change in attitude? Do you believe his turnaround? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

In what ways does Christianity affect the characters of the novel? How is religion different in Africa and America? What do you think of Cooney's religious message - that prayer makes all things possible? Does it make sense in the context of the novel or does it seem forced into the story? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Describe Alake's journey from comatose war victim to literary Christ figure. First, describe the event that shaped Alake's trauma. Then, describe how Alake slowly began to recover. At the end of the novel, how does Alake martyr herself for the greater good? What message does this sacrifice give the reader about love and loss? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.