

# **A Grain of Wheat Study Guide**

**A Grain of Wheat by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o**

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## Plot Summary

A Grain of Wheat chronicles the events leading up to Kenyan independence, or Uruhu, in a Kenyan village. Gikonyo and Mumbi are newlyweds in love when Gikonyo is sent to detention. When he comes back six years later, Mumbi has carried and given birth to his rival's child. Instead of talking about their trials, a wall of anger separates them. Mumbi's brother Kihika, a local hero, is captured and hanged, and his comrades search for the betrayer. Mugo becomes a hero through leading a hunger strike in detention, and the town wants him to become a political leader. Mugo, though, struggles with guilt and ultimately confesses that he betrayed Kihika.

At the beginning of the novel, as independence approaches, several visitors come to Mugo's door. They ask him to speak at the Uruhu celebration and become a leader, and also ask if Kihika mentioned Karanja, a worker for the white government who is suspected of betraying his friend, before his death. Kihika, a rebel fighter from the village, was captured and publicly hanged. Mugo denies knowing anything about Kihika's death and says he'll think about making the speech.

Gikonyo, one of the men who asks Mugo to speak, feels his life falling apart after coming home from detention camps. As a young man, he is deeply in love with Mumbi, and his rival is Karanja. Mumbi chooses Gikonyo, and they marry. Gikonyo, a carpenter, is happy, but he is arrested as a rebel. Gikonyo spends six years in concentration camps, even after he confesses his oath to the Movement, in order to come back home. He feels guilty about his confession. When he returns home, though, his wife has a child by another man, Karanja. Gikonyo refuses to talk about the child or to share a bed with his wife, and throws himself into work in his distress.

While Gikonyo is away, the town is punished. The huts are burned down and the people are forced to rebuild in a contained area. They are put into forced labor building a trench around the town, and they have no food. People are beaten, raped, and starved. During this time, Mugo protests a guard beating a woman in a trench and is arrested and taken away. Mumbi works hard and is faithful to Gikonyo, though she doesn't know if he's alive or dead. She finds out finally that Gikonyo is coming home, and in a moment of weakness, allows Karanja to have sex with her. Afterwards, she rejects him again, and never wants to see him. Karanja has embraced the white government to gain power.

Meanwhile, Mugo struggles with his own guilt. Before Karanja's death, he hopes to have a quiet life, building a home, business, and family. One day after shooting a government official, Karanja comes to his house and asks him to join the Movement. Mugo is afraid that either the rebels or the government will kill him. He turns Karanja over to the government, but immediately regrets it.

At the detention camp for intervening in the beating, Mugo truthfully claims to have taken no rebel oath. No one believes him. He is beaten mercilessly and inspires a hunger strike. Afterwards, the townspeople consider him a hero, but Mugo is driven by his conscience to confess at the Uruhu celebration, and later is taken away by the

former Freedom Fighters to be punished. Also at the celebration, Gikonyo breaks his arm. In the hospital, he realizes that he needs to open up communication with Mumbi and that he wants to rebuild their marriage.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

A Grain of Wheat chronicles the events leading up to Kenyan independence, or Uruhu, in a Kenyan village. Gikonyo and Mumbi are newlyweds in love when Gikonyo is sent to detention. When he comes back six years later, Mumbi has carried and given birth to his rival's child. Instead of talking about their trials, a wall of anger separates them. Mumbi's brother Kihika, a local hero, is captured and hanged, and his comrades search for the betrayer. Mugo becomes a hero through leading a hunger strike in detention, and the town wants him to become a political leader. Mugo, though, struggles with guilt and ultimately confesses that he betrayed Kihika.

As the novel begins, Mugo wakes too early, feeling upset. He forces himself out of bed in the cold and makes porridge with some maize flour he finds. It reminds him of the detention center. Mugo takes his tools and heads through the village of Thabai to farm his land. Warui, a village elder, greets Mugo. Warui asks if Mugo is ready for Uhuru, independence. Githua comes up to Mugo on his crutches and salutes him, mentioning black freedom. At first, Githua seems ecstatic, but then he mentions harm done by the Emergency and walks away.

Mugo walks past an old woman's house. Her deaf and dumb son, Gitoko, was killed during World War II because he couldn't hear a soldier tell him to halt as he was running to make sure his mother was all right. Mugo has seen the woman several times near her hut, and he feels a strange connection, as if she recognizes him. One day, Mugo brought her some food, and her hut reminded him of sleeping in the soot with the goats at his aunt's house. When the woman looked at him, seeming to recognize him, he ran off. Now, he thinks of going into her hut, but he loses his nerve at the last moment.

Mugo goes to work the land, but he is tired and frustrated. Before the Emergency Mugo was a poor orphan who lived with a drunk, paranoid aunt who was derisive and hateful to him. Mugo hated her and wanted to kill her, but she died of age and drink, leaving Mugo alone. He found comfort in working the soil, but he no longer feels that comfort. Mugo, exhausted, goes home early. Three visitors come to his door, Warui, a woman named Wambui, and Gikonyo, the brother-in-law of Kihika, the man who upturned Mugo's life. Mugo invites them in, and they tell Mugo that they have come to him from the Party, the Movement.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

The novel *A Grain of Wheat* reveals a number of characters' experiences during the lead-up to Kenyan independence, or Uruhu. Mugo is one of the central characters. He feels detached from the world around him, and he is fearful of the attention given to him by the townspeople. Mugo's connection with the woman in the hut is a central element



in the story. They are connected by their common loneliness. Mugo has no one, and he cannot bring himself to participate in the community. The old woman has lost her son, and she talks to no one. She lives isolated, away from the world, sequestered by loss and trauma.

Mugo also is alone. His unhappy childhood left him without relatives to care for him and with little sense of self. Mugo has been living in detention for years, and now all he has is a strip of land given to him by a village elder. He is afraid of the people who come to see him, just as he is nervous when the townspeople seem to look at him and want to talk to him. Mugo has unspoken reasons for self-isolation, and his intense nervousness and reticence hints at more than a troubled past and trauma from abuse during his detention.



# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2 Summary

No one knew when the Movement started, but perhaps it began when white men first invaded Kenya, and as Uhuru approaches, the Movement has grown to every corner of the country. When the first white man came, people laughed at his story of a female ruler, though years ago, women held power. The men waited for women to go to war, and when they returned, impregnated them and rebelled. A beautiful woman once ruled in Muranga, but was dethroned for dancing naked.

The white men gained land and spread Christianity. Waiyaki was an early rebel, unable to stop the "iron snake" of the train and the white man's guns. People say Waiyaki was buried alive, and his blood was the seed of the Movement. Another rebel, Harry Thuku, came along, writing letters to the white man demanding justice. Warui was then a young man and participated in the demonstration to free Harry in 1923, the 1923 Procession. The police fired into the crowd, dispersing the demonstrators with bullets, and Harry was sent away.

One time, Mugo goes to a Movement meeting where Jomo Kenyatta is supposed to speak. Ginkoyo, a carpenter, and the beautiful Mumbi are there. Kenyatta does not show up, but the speakers talk of forceful action. Kihika, a local leader, speaks of the history of Kenya and the need for violent revolt. Mugo cannot abide the call for blood and feels enmity to Kihika. Soon after, Kihika goes into the forest with a number of other soldiers. He succeeds in leading his men against Mahee, a police jail where political prisoners are kept before being sent to detention camps. Kihika's soldiers burn down the garrison and escape with the freed prisoners and supplies of guns and ammunition. A price is put on Kihika's head. A year later, Kihika is captured, tortured, and bribed, but he will not speak. Finally, he is hanged in public as a martyr for the Movement.

## Chapter 2 Analysis

Chapter 2 chronicles the history of the Movement and of white occupation of Kenya, providing background to the reader. The white men are completely foreign in culture to the Kenyans. When the British come to Kenya, none of the native people truly appreciate what is happening. They bring advanced technology and a feeling of superiority. The history of Kenyan blacks is one of resistance and retribution. Over the years, leaders arise and are then beaten down by white power. Uhuru is not something that's happened overnight, but something that Kenyans have been fighting for nearly since the arrival of white men.

The scene describing the Movement meeting that Mugo attends shows Mugo's character and priorities and also introduces Kihika. Kihika is a local hero. His belief is that black men must unite and rise up in revolution and that it is necessary to fight and

sacrifice to achieve freedom. Mugo is appalled at calls for violence. He does not want to see bloodshed. Mugo catches Kihika's eye during the meeting, and he feels an enmity pass between them. Kihika sees a greater good for united Kenya, while Mugo sees the personal loss that a violent fight implies. Kihika looks at a broad, social view, while Mugo looks at a small, personal view.





# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

Chapter 3 returns to Mugo's visitors. Gikonyo, who was poor when he married Mumbi, has become rich after returning from detention. Warui is an old man who has been with the Movement since the 1920s. Wambui worked carrying messages between rebels during the Emergency, and reputedly she barely avoided being caught with a pistol by hiding it between her thighs and complaining about having her private parts searched. Two other men come to the door, former Freedom Fighters General R. and Lieutenant Koina. Mugo is ill at ease. They talk about the Uruhu celebration and having a sacrifice. Then General R. comments that Kihika was religious, but God didn't save him. General R. has Kihika's Bible, and Gikonyo reads an underlined passage, that God shall save the poor and destroy the oppressor.

General R. and Lieutenant Koina comment that Mugo hid Kihika the night he killed Robson, the official in charge of the district. They ask Mugo if Kihika mentioned meeting someone the next week or mentioned Karanja. They suspect Karanja of betraying Kihika and causing his death. Mugo shake his head to say Kihika mentioned nothing. The other visitors state their purpose: They want Mugo to speak at the Uruhu celebration. Mugo hesitates, and the visitors say they will await his answer. They also want him to run in the election for the area's new political leader. The visitors all leave and Mugo wonders what they really want of him.

General R. and Koina return to their hut. General R. is determined to find the traitor who facilitated the death of Kihika. Karanja has been acting guilty and General R. is convinced he's the culprit. Koina, a former cook, deeply believed in Kihika and cried when Kihika was executed, but he is surprised at how much General R. wants revenge. Meanwhile, Gikonyo blames Mugo's quietness and strangeness on the trauma of detention. Gikonyo leaves the others, but seeing that Mumbi is still waiting up, he hesitates to go home. He begins to run, hearing footsteps behind him. Gikonyo wants to talk with Mugo about the detention camps, feeling that Mugo will understand his experience. He goes to Mugo's hut but can't go in. At home, Gikonyo works on his business. His wife insists on making him tea, and questions him on why he didn't tell her about the visit to Mugo. Gikonyo ignores her. She begs him to talk about the child, but he will not. He refuses to go to bed with her and sends her away.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

Religion is an important element in the novel. The white men brought Christianity to Kenya, and many blacks take up Christian religion. However, the existing religions do not die. At the Uruhu celebration, the town will sacrifice rams in a traditional sacrificial rite. At the same time, Kihika is a devoutly religious man, comparing the struggle of the black man in Kenya with the struggle of the Jews to be freed from the Pharaoh. His



Bible is full of underlined passages, and one passage that Gikonyo reads becomes important to Mugo. God is on the side of the oppressed and will save the impoverished and downtrodden. Mugo, though not moved by Kihika's abstract ideas of freedom and black unity, is moved by the idea of the poor and the suffering. He empathizes with individual tragedy.

Gikonyo is traumatized by his time in the detention camps. He holds in his sorrow and has no one he can communicate his feelings with, especially since he has estranged himself from his wife. He sees in Mugo a fellow spirit, also traumatized by a long stay in the concentration camps, who can perhaps share his experience and take some of the load off of his soul. Throughout the novel, several characters will take an opportunity to unburden themselves to another. Both Gikonyo and Mumbi tell their stories to Mugo; Mugo confesses his story to Mumbi. Dr. Lynd confesses her tragedy to Thompson. These scenes identify a human need to talk about the difficulties and horrors that affect each of them. Gikonyo's refusal to talk about the child who represents his wife's disloyalty denies this need and leads him into a bitter isolation.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

An agricultural officer who saw the forest at Githima dreamed of a Forestry Research Station there and fought for one until he was killed by a train at Githima. Later, a station was established, and every year someone is killed by a train. Dr. Henry Van Dyke is the most recent victim, a fat, drunken man who said he'd kill himself if Kenyatta ever went free. No one knows if he killed himself or died by accident. Karanja works at the Githima library and hated Van Dyke, who touched the black men's bottoms. Karanja is stenciling titles on books when Mwaura, a worker, enters his office. Karanja yells at him. Mwaura says Thompson, the white head of the station, wants to see Karanja. Thompson sends him with a message to Mrs. Thompson, a type of errand Karanja finds demeaning.

Margery Thompson asks Karanja inside because she's lonely since the servants left. She makes him coffee, suddenly attracted to him and remembering her sexual affair with Van Dyke. Meanwhile, Karanja tries to find the courage to ask if the rumors regarding the departure of the Thompsons are true. Margery asks Karanja about his love life, and Karanja confesses to being rejected by the one woman he loved. Then he leaves. Karanja goes to an eatery and finds Mwaura there and apologizes, so as not to make enemies.

Meanwhile, Thompson stays in his office, pretending to work. He feels betrayed by Kenyan independence. Through the window, he sees Dr. Lynd, a worker at the station, and her mastiff dog. After Dr. Lynd walks away, the dog runs after Karanja, who is there with other black workers. Karanja grabs a rock for defense, and Dr. Lynd arrives in time to call off the dog and yell at Karanja for throwing stones at it. Thompson takes Dr. Lynd away and tells her the conflict was the dog's fault. He remembers a time he hit a dog in the road. He knew the dog was there, but didn't slow down until it was too late. Dr. Lynd is upset and tells Thompson about a former houseboy, who had been a cook in World War II, who let rebels into her house, tied her up, killed her dog, and stole her guns. Thompson himself was an up-and-coming administrator, until there was a hunger strike at a detention camp he headed which got negative attention in Britain, ruining his career. As Thompson leaves his office, he passes Karanja and tells him he'll deal with the issue of the dog.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

Karanja is deferential to the white men. He gains power over other blacks by having the favor of Thompson, despite the fact that Thompson barely notices him and sends him on demeaning errands. Meanwhile, the other blacks despise Karanja for kowtowing to the powerful whites. Karanja is, in this way, isolated from both whites and blacks. He is, essentially, alone, and he has exchanged human companionship for fleeting power over others. Karanja is not even as important as a dog to the white people that he bows to.



Dr. Lynd jumps to the conclusion that Karanja is throwing stones at her dog, and she would rather see Karanja killed than see harm to her dog.

Thompson is an embittered idealist, unable to cope with the realities of Africa. He is a true believer in the good of the British empire, and Kenyan independence revolts him. Uruhu is a personal failure to Thompson. He holds inside his bitterness and disappointment. The story of Thompson running over the dog, and his inaction when he sees the dog rushing at one of the black men, is an expression of Thompson's deep anger. Unlike Dr. Lynd, Thompson bottles up his feelings, making himself distant from those around him. Dr. Lynd's confession to Thompson is another example of the human need to vent tragedy. Dr. Lynd cannot understand the killing of her dog. To her, it is a senseless, brutal, violent act, an act of savagery, and it leaves her traumatized and convinced that black people are animals.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

Thompson wants to tell his wife Margery about Dr. Lynd, but he doesn't. They talk distantly about leaving Kenya. Thompson is upset when Margery suggests that maybe a black man will take his job. Margery remembers their younger years and wonders how they've grown apart, with Thompson wrapped up in his job. Margery washes the dinner dishes and anticipates missing Kenya. She thinks of her affair with Van Dyke. She was always jealous of him but couldn't show it in public, so they often fought. He talked with her about his work with meteorology. Margery both loved and hated him. Now, Van Dyke is dead. She wants to make a new connection with her husband, to talk with him. She kisses him on the ear, but loses her desire to talk and instead goes to bed.

As a young man, Thompson came to Africa during World War II. Afterward, at Oxford, he became interested in developing Britain's Empire, spreading British culture throughout the world. Two educated African students made him believe African colonies could become truly British. Thompson began writing down his thoughts, intending to create a treatise called *Prospero in Africa*. It outlined his belief that all Africans, including the poor, could be converted to the British way of thinking. Thompson met Margery and shared his vision with her. They went to Africa together, where Thompson's life as an administrator began. He continues to make notes of his thoughts, hoping someday to create a cohesive treatise. In his notes, he refers to blacks as children that must be dealt with harshly and African independence as ruinous to England. One of his notes recalls spiting in the face of a man come to turn in a terrorist, when Thompson was convinced the African was a liar. After the destruction of his career, Thompson is leaving Africa to escape Uruhu. He goes to bed and is relieved to find his wife already asleep.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

When Thompson is with his wife, his inability to make a human connection is emphasized. He has retreated within himself, away from his wife and colleagues, as well as away from his original ideals. Thompson's ideal, formed in part by interacting with educated Africans, is based on the idea that Africans are human beings and can become a part of a British culture that spreads throughout the world, embracing all races. Though Thompson's youthful idealism is Britain-centric and blind to the relevance of other cultures, it is essentially based on an idea of human equality.

However, in Africa, Thompson has no idea how to implement his idealism. He is caught in a machine of government and oppression, a cog in a machine that enforces African slavery to a white upper class. Thompson's notes compare Africans to children, implicitly endorse violence, and show no recognition that native Kenyans are equally human. Thompson cannot understand the cultural differences that divide whites and blacks in Africa, and his reaction to a foreign culture is hatred. Uruhu is a failure of the

British conquest of Africa, and Thompson sees it as the destruction of the world he's built for himself. He imagines that a Kenya run by blacks will decay and self-destruct.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

Gikonyo comes back from the concentration camp in late summer, in time to make money building barns. Unlike his former self, he demands payment when it is due. He is a reliable builder and makes money, investing it in dried foods that he can store and then sell when food is scarce and prices high. He buys grain in bulk and sells small quantities for profit. Customers like him, and his status in the community rises. On the day after going to see Mugo, Gikonyo visits the area's MP in Nairobi to ask about getting a loan to help him and a group of local businessmen buy a farm from a British man who is leaving because of Uruhu. Gikonyo gave a full presentation of all the details of the farm and potential profits before, and the MP tells him to come back, that he will try to get the loan. On this visit, the MP says the loans just take time and that he'll contact Gikonyo when he has news.

Meanwhile, all the people in the village are talking of Mugo's heroics in the concentration camps, though Mugo is unaware of it and doesn't want to speak at the Uruhu celebration. He recalls going to a Movement meeting after being released from detention. He went up to speak because he felt he had to, and talked about desiring nothing more than home and family. Knowing his speech was a lie, Mugo broke up and couldn't continue. While Mugo is ruminating, Gikonyo comes to see him and talk about his suffering in detention. Gikonyo tells Mugo that he confessed to taking the rebels' oath, hoping to return home to his wife and mother. Mugo's speech touched Gikonyo. Even though Mugo says he didn't want to come home, having no family, Gikonyo admires his strength and goodness, and abhors the fact that politicians and traitors are the ones benefiting from Uruhu. Gikonyo says his wife was everything to him, but when he returned, she had changed.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

Chapter 6 deals with the external view of both Gikonyo and Mugo. From the outside, Gikonyo is a respected and admired businessman. The people see him as successful and wealthy, and as someone who has paid his dues in detention camp. His personal tragedy is completely hidden from the public view. Mugo, similarly, is honored as a hero by the people. He is credited with being a leader in the hunger strike at one of the concentration camps, and his years of imprisonment make him a hero to the people of the town. Mugo is completely unaware that the townspeople, whose attentions he fears, hold him in awe and admiration. The reality of Gikonyo and Mugo's existences is not what the public perceives. Perception and reality are at odds.

The speech that Mugo makes at the Movement meeting is another example of differing views of the same event. Mugo goes to make a speech because he feels that he has to and that he'll look out of place if he doesn't. He starts talking about the desire for home



and family in the men held in detention, and he cannot finish what he's saying. He is choked up by the knowledge that his speech is insincere and that he has nothing to come home to. Meanwhile, his words touch Gikonyo who is watching, because Gikonyo's thoughts during his imprisonment were always with his wife Mumbi. Gikonyo feels a connection to Mugo through this speech, but the connection is an illusion. Gikonyo does not truly know Mugo's experience.





## Chapter 7, pages 70-92

### Chapter 7, pages 70-92 Summary

Rung'ei Trading Centre is an African shopping center. Indians come to buy food to resell in Nairobi for a profit, and there is an Indian population there. The iron snake, the train, comes by. Every Sunday, the young people of Thabai gather at the train station for a social event. Afterward dances are performed and fights break out.

When Gikonyo is young, Gikonyo's mother Wangari is thrown out by her husband Waruhiu and takes the train to Thabai. She does not have money for much schooling, but Gikonyo learns carpentry, which he loves. He can identify woods by their smell. His mother likes to come to the workshop to get cast-off boards for firewood, for which Gikonyo chides her, lovingly. Gikonyo is in love with the beautiful Mumbi, daughter of prestigious elder Mbugua and his wife Wanjiku. Mumbi has two brothers, courageous Kihika and intellectual Kariuki. Their house is always full of young people, and Gikonyo is friends with them but finds it difficult to speak in front of Mumbi. Mumbi, who loves to go to the train on Sundays, has turned down a proposal from a young man with a promising future, and Gikonyo doesn't feel he has a chance with her.

Gikonyo works on his carpentry, often knowing that he won't get paid by the poorer people. One day he is playing a guitar and suddenly sees Mumbi watching him. Embarrassed, he stops, and Mumbi compliments his playing. Nervously at first, Mumbi plays for her. Wangari joins them, teasing her son. Then, Mumbi lets him know that she needs a new handle for a farming implement, a panga. Gikonyo says he will fix it for free. Karanja, Kihika, and two other young men come to the workshop, and Wangari goes to make tea. Then, Mumbi leaves and Karanja walks with her. When Karanja returns, the others accuse her of being in love.

Gikonyo lovingly crafts the panga handle for Mumbi. On Sunday, he delivers it to her, finding Mumbi outside the house. She admires the handle and calls her mother to see it. Kihika and Karanja arrive, and the talk turns to politics. When Kihika was younger, Reverend Jackson, a Christian reverend who turned to the evangelical Revivalist movement later, recommended he attend Mahiga school. During Sunday school, Kihika objected to the teacher saying Christians could not practice female circumcision, humiliating the teacher by showing that the Bible doesn't mention it. When the teacher tried to whip Kihika in front of the whole congregation, Kihika insisted that he'd done nothing wrong and ran off. Later, Kihika discovered the Movement.

Kihika talks of how action and unity are necessary, comparing Kenya to India under Ghandi. His speech is charismatic, but Mumbi is concerned at the human cost of revolution and the possible loss of a father, mother, or brother. Two girls, Wambuku and Njeri, join the group, and they have tea. Then they realize the train is coming, and everyone rushes off. Karanja and Gikonyo wait for Mumbi, who goes inside. When she comes out, Karanja races to the train, in competition with Gikonyo. Mumbi, though, asks



Gikonyo to stop and stay with her instead of going to the train. They make love in the woods.

## Chapter 7, pages 70-92 Analysis

Chapter 7 is the longest chapter in the novel and its structural center. It tells Gikonyo's story. Gokonyo expresses himself in his carpentry. The handle that his makes for Mumbi's mother's panga is a labor of love. He refuses to accept money for it because of his feelings for Mumbi. He worries and labors over the simple panga handle, because the effort he is putting into it is also an expression of his feelings for Mumbi. When Mumbi is thrilled with the handle, Gokonyo has his reward, one that is better than money. Even then, Gikonyo does not think that he has a chance with Mumbi. He is jealous of Karanja, and he is self-deprecating, seeing Mumbi as unattainable. Even when Mumbi tells him she is tired and doesn't want to go to the train, inviting him to be alone with her, he is slow to realize that Mumbi is also in love with him. Gikonyo's insecurity evidenced in his early relationship with Mumbi may similarly feed his reactions when he comes back from the concentration camp.

The chapter also tells the story of Kihika, a natural rebel. Enrolled at Sunday school, he takes pleasure in asserting himself in the face of authority. He rebels at the Christian idea that native Kenyan culture is immoral, represented by female circumcision. Though the practice is widely condemned as misogynistic and cruel, Kihika's point is that the condemnation of an element of Kenyan culture isn't coming from the Bible. Instead, it comes from the people who are interpreting the Bible: the white Europeans. Because of the spirit of rebellion that Kihika already has, he is drawn to the Movement, and he mixes his politics with his personal relationship with religion, based in his reading of the Bible.



## Chapter 7, pages 92-121

### Chapter 7, pages 92-121 Summary

At the train station, Karanja realizes that Mumbi and Gikonyo are both gone and becomes jealous. Karanja decides to confess his love to Mumbi. When the train pulls out, Karanja experiences a spell during which everything seems to spin. He recovers and goes to where Kihika is discussing Ghandi, Christ, and revolution. Karanja criticizes him. Kihika is taken aback by his friend's aggressiveness, but defends his ideas. Later, Kihika dances with Wambuku. Karanja plays the guitar, thinking of Mumbi. Njeri refuses to dance, watching Kihika, who goes off into the woods with Wambuku. Kihika talks of politics, and Wambuku is jealous of the rival for Kihika's affection: revolution. Wambuku asks him never to leave her, and he promises, imagining that she will stand by his side when he goes off to fight. Neither understands the other.

When Gikonyo is in detention, he relives the experience of making love with Mumbi in the forest. During Gikonyo and Mumbi's early marriage, Wangari embraces Mumbi as a daughter. Then, Gikonyo and the other men start acting more seriously, engrossed in politics. Kenyatta is arrested, and the governor declares a State of Emergency throughout Kenya. One day, Mumbi is alone and her younger brother Kariuki comes with the news that Kihika has run into the forest to become a revolutionary. Wambuku is heartbroken, and Njeri derides her for not following Kihika into the forest. Alone, Njeri shouts her devotion into the forest. Meanwhile, the government starts rounding up men to take them to concentration camps. Soon they coming looking for Gikonyo.

Six years later, Gikonyo returns. While incarcerated, Gikonyo and the other prisoners agree not to confess making an oath to the Movement. Then, Kenyatta loses at his trial. Another prisoner, Gatu, keeps the others' spirits up by making jokes, but the prisoners realize there will be no quick victory. Gatu is thrown into solitary confinement for days at a time, and when he comes out, he makes fun of the English queen. The prisoners are brought to mine a quarry. Gikonyo thinks back to his early days of marriage, when he thought of carving a stool as a gift for Mumbi. He starts planning to himself the stool he will carve for her. Gatu looks depressed, and Gikonyo talks to him, opening up and telling of his life with Mumbi. Gatu tells him obliquely about losing his love, through waiting too long to get married. Later Gato hangs himself.

Gikonyo starts losing his mind, pushing his hand into barbed wire one day. He can no longer remember Mumbi's face. One day, he wakes up clearer in mind. He decides to confess his oath so he can return to Mumbi. Though he refuses to name others, and is not released for years, Gikonyo feels guilt. When he returns home, he finds his mother's hut. He runs into Mumbi at the door, and sees that she has a child. Gikonyo is crushed. Mumbi has been with another man. The only question he asks is whose child it is, and his mother blurts out that it's Karanja's.



Gikonyo can't sleep. The next day he goes walking. The Rung'ei shopping center is deserted, falling to pieces. Gikonyo goes to check in with the Chief and finds that it's Karanja. Karanja treats him as a stranger, and Gikonyo rushes at him. Karanja subdues him with a pistol. Only later does Gikonyo remember that Karanja is the man who slept with his wife. He rushes home with the intent to kill her. He breaks down the locked door, falls, and hits his head on the hearth. He lies on the ground, foam coming from his mouth, calling to God.

## Chapter 7, pages 92-121 Analysis

Karanja's criticism of Kihika is the first inkling of Karanja's future, working for the government guards and as a Chief under the white government. His criticism, though, seems to come more from his feelings of jealousy and loss when he realizes that, though he beat Gikonyo in the race to the train, he has lost instead of gained by it. Neither Gikonyo nor Mumbi are there, and Karanja guesses what has happened. The love triangle between Wambuku, Kihika, and Njeri echoes that between Gikonyo, Mumbi, and Karanja. Kihika and Wambuku are together, but they do not truly understand each other. Meanwhile, Njeri watches from the sidelines, devoted, quietly, to Karanja, and understanding him far better than Wambuku can. Karanja, like Njeri, will stand on the sidelines and continue to love Mumbi throughout the story, but unlike Njeri, he never truly understands her.

The climax of Chapter 7 is the revelation of the trouble between Gikonyo and Mumbi. In the forest, when they make love, they share a communion. The unity of two spirits is the center of their love, and unlike Kihika and Wambuku, they understand each other. However, Gikonyo remains the same boy he was in many respects. He loves Mumbi with a deep and driving passion, one that breaks his resolve not to confess his oath. However, he does not trust that Mumbi can love him. Instead of sharing his pain and both their experiences during the fight for independence, Gikonyo's insecurity overcomes him at the fact of Mumbi's child by another man. He shuts himself down. Unity and communion give way to isolation and separation.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

Gikonyo tells his story to Mugo. Days after hitting his head, he awoke and decided never to talk about the child and never to sleep with Mumbi again. He threw himself into work. Gikonyo feels judged by Mugo's silence and leaves. Mugo tries to call him back, but it's too late. Mugo feels he should have said something and wonders what would happen if he had confessed his own secrets. Mugo goes for a walk and recalls a day in 1955, during the Emergency when Mugo worked on his farmland in the morning, then rested at noon, feeling the possibilities of the future. This was the height of Mugo's life, before Robson's death and before Kihika entered Mugo's life.

Mugo goes to a tea shop and sits in a corner. Githua, on his crutches, comes over, drunk and bragging about his wealth before the Emergency. General R. is also there watching the scene. Githua talks of supplying the rebels with ammunition and losing his leg after being shot. He says that on the eve of independence, the government has forgotten them. Mugo gives Githua two shillings and leaves. The General follows him out saying what a strange man Githua is and then goes his own way. Mugo thinks of the people who are in need, and he decides to take the political position in the hopes he can help the people.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

Gikonyo's confession to Mugo is similar to Dr. Lynd's confession to Thompson. Both need to share their trauma with someone they feel will understand, but neither Mugo nor Thompson truly empathize with the people who confess to them. Still, Gikonyo and Dr. Lynd both experience some release by the simple act of confessing, of reaching out to another human being, despite their differences. Mugo and Thompson both endure their personal secrets, without sharing them. This eats away at them inside.

When Mugo recalls working on his land, before Kihika threw his life into turmoil, he remembers laying on the ground and dreaming of the future. For Mugo, life held promise. Mumbi feels the same way. Her life was once full of dreams for the future, dreams that have not been fulfilled. This feeling, the idealistic dreaming of youth for greatness in the future, is similar to the collective dream of independence. Though independence is achieved, it is also marred by death and corruption. There is no guarantee that the dream of greatness will come true, particularly with corrupt politicians and the ongoing influence of wealthy whites.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

In the past, Mugo is arrested and brought to detention camp. He's moved to remote, desolate Rira, which houses the worst detainees who have sworn never to cooperate. Thompson is put in charge. He stops some of the torture, like leaving men buried up to their heads in the sand. He improves conditions and talks to the men about their homes and families, trying to get them to confess. Then he starts interviewing each man separately, but they don't say a word. Mugo speaks, but only denies ever taking an oath. Thompson goes after Mugo specially, whipping and beating him. Mugo feels he deserves these beatings and endures them. The men, admiring Mugo's stoic behavior, go on hunger strike. One day, they start throwing stones at the guards bringing food, and the guards retaliate, beating the men mercilessly. Eleven prisoners die.

In the present, Mugo goes to Gikonyo to accept the position as a leader. Gikonyo is out. Mugo asks Mumbi about Kariuki, who is away at school. Mumbi talks about dreams of the future, and she mentions Wambuku, the woman Mugo tried to save from being beaten in the trench. She was pregnant and died three months later. Mumbi's son comes in and asks why she's crying, but she sends him out. Njeri, Mumbi reports, ran to fight in the forest and was shot. Finally, Mumbi tells him her own story.

Soldiers burn down everyone's huts, forcing the town to rebuild in a more confined area. Mumbi and her mother-in-law are forced to build their own house, which isn't finished before the huts are burnt. Karanja begins coming around, sometimes bringing food. Mumbi is frightened one day when she sees Karanja wants to tell her something, but he retreats and stops coming around. Soon after, Kihika is caught. Karanja joins the government guards, and the government forces the townspeople to work to build a trench around the town. The people have no food and are beaten by the guards. Wambuku is the first to die, and eventually twenty-one men and women die. At first, the people sing while working in the trenches, but death silences their singing. At first, Karanja avoids Mumbi. Then, Karanja visits Mumbi, offering food, which she refuses, though starving. The next time, she accepts the food.

Once the trench is finished, Mumbi goes to work on a white tea plantation, supporting her parents, mother-in-law, and brother with the money. The Chief of the area is shot and later killed in the hospital, and Karanja takes over his position. Mumbi despises him, continuing to reject him. Kariuki gets into a high school and goes away for schooling. Mumbi can only wait, unsure if Gikonyo is alive or dead. Finally, Karanja calls her in to tell her that Gikonyo is coming home. In a moment of weakness, she submits to him. When she comes to her senses, she throws his shoe at him and leaves, but is left with child.

Mumbi finishes her story, and General R. and Lieutenant Koina come in. General R. says that Githua is a liar. He never provided the rebels ammunition, and his leg was



destroyed in a car accident. The General reiterates that he thinks Karanja is a traitor and asks Mugo to demand the traitor come forward at the end of the speech. A man will make sure Karanja comes to the celebration. Mugo says that he's come to refuse to be in the celebration and runs out.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

Just as Gikonyo reveals his story to Mugo, Mumbi reveals her story. Just as Gikonyo goes through trials and tortures in the concentration camps, Mumbi goes through trials and tortures in the village. Gikonyo does not know the depth of what went on after he was arrested, and he has closed himself off to communication with his wife. He seeks someone who will understand his story and his tragedy, little knowing that the person who could understand and identify is Mumbi.

Mugo is overwhelmed by the story. He wants to use his current position to do good; after all, Mugo has empathy for those who suffer. He could not help but intervene, seeing a guard mercilessly beat a woman. He has regretted his action in informing on Kihika ever since Thompson first spat in his face. However, Mumbi's story brings his guilt back to him, tenfold. Mugo feels that he is somehow responsible for all the forced labor, starvation, rape, death, and suffering that Mumbi describes. He cannot help but feel that his single act of treachery condemns him. This is why Mumbi endures punishment in the concentration camp. He feels he deserves punishment. He has sentenced himself for his own sins.





# Chapters 10-11

## Chapters 10-11 Summary

In Chapter 10, Mwaura has been reporting on Karanja from Githima, and General R. is convinced of Karanja's guilt. The General is a man of action. He was once a tailor, known as Ka-40 because of his jokes of what he did in 1940, but no one knows his background and he keeps to himself. As a Freedom Fighter, he was fierce. Meanwhile, Karanja is worried. He needs to know if Thompson is really leaving. Thompson has not arrived yet, and Karanja can't concentrate. He has thrown in with the white man, believing his power could not be overthrown. Now he is worried. He goes to chat with some of the workers, who are talking about Van Dyke's death. Restless, Karanja leaves again. He remembers how he lost his job as Chief by having an impoverished man beaten for not paying taxes, something that would have been praised not long ago.

Mwaura asks Karanja if Thompson has left. At hearing the rumor Thompson is being replaced by a black man, Karanja says he isn't leaving, despite his own uncertainty. He brings up having coffee with Thompson's wife. Mwaura tries to convince Karanja to go to the Uruhu celebration, mentioning that the hero Mugo will speak. Then Thompson returns. Karanja brings himself to ask if Thompson is leaving and learns that he is. Afterwards, Mwaura asks again if Thompson is leaving, and Karanja says he doesn't know then yells at Mwaura to get out of the office. Mwaura ridicules Karanja that his master is leaving him.

In Chapter 11, John and Margery Thompson go to their going-away party. Now that Kenyan independence is at hand, the British look at John Thompson as a martyr, despite the condemnation of the Rira scandal at the time. Dr. Lynd looks at John Thompson as she talks boringly of her work with potato diseases. Finally, she corners Thompson and tells him that she saw the houseboy who killed her dog the other day. She is frightened, but refuses to leave Kenya. The evening drags on, and Margery, ignored by her husband, is drawn onto the dance floor by a repulsive drunk. The conversation stops when John drops a glass to the floor. Margery goes to him. At the end of the evening, instead of going home, John drives around. He tells Margery that perhaps it's not over, and that Africa can't do without Europe.

## Chapters 10-11 Analysis

As a young man, Karanja invests in the status quo. He sees the power of the white government, and he chooses it, so that he can stay with Mumbi and not be forced off to a concentration camp. However, Karanja's choice creates a different kind of distance between himself and Mumbi. Karanja is bitter and lonely, and he embraces the power over other black men that gives him a kind of satisfaction. He admits later, he does not think of the men as human beings or empathize with them. Karanja is corrupted by power and thoughtless of other people. He has no communion with his people, and he





shares in no unity. The only person he cares about is Mumbi, and she hates what Karanja has become. When the white power that has given Karanja a position in the world but separated him from his own people begins to topple, Karanja is left with nothing.

Koina is a former cook and a rebel. He matches the details of Dr. Lynd's houseboy. Dr. Lynd sees Koina as a symbol of the danger of black men and Kenyan culture. However, she cannot leave Kenya, she says. She still has some idealistic idea of imposing her own culture and life on people she does not understand or respect, but hates and fears. Meanwhile, the distance between John and Margery remains. John's words, as they drive, shows his obsession with his destroyed idealism. Like Kihika, John is a political man, and like Kihika, his woman is more concerned with their personal lives and intimate connection than with politics.



# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

Gikonyo comes home, clearly upset, and Mumbi asks what's wrong. Gikonyo snaps at her. She tells him that Mugo has refused to speak at the ceremony, and again, Gikonyo snaps at her. The boy runs in to tell Gikonyo a story, and Gikonyo pushes him. Mumbi calls him a coward. Gikonyo slaps her and calls her a whore. The boy runs out and comes back with his grandmother, who yells at Gikonyo. Gikonyo leaves. The reason behind his aggression is not Mumbi at all, but his problems with the MP.

Earlier, Gikonyo meets with his co-investors in the farm, and they come up with a plan to raise the money to buy the land, in case the loan doesn't come through. Then, Gikonyo goes to talk to the man whose farm they are buying, and learns that the M.P. has bought up the land himself.

After fighting with Mumbi, Gikonyo goes to see Warui. To Gikonyo, Warui seems satisfied with life, but Warui is disappointed in his cowardly sons. Gikonyo tells Warui that Mugo refuses to speak at the ceremony, and Warui says Mugo told him nothing, when he ran into Mugo earlier. They go together to see Mugo.

Mugo feels frightened as he leaves Mumbi and General R. In the huts of the town he sees Mumbi's story of the town while he was in detention. Mugo realizes the suffering of the people and feels pain for them. He goes to the trench, now littered with garbage, and remembers the past: a guard jumping in to whip a woman, and Mugo rushing forward to stop him. Mugo was arrested and questioned, and the white men would not believe he had not taken the oath. Mugo suddenly wants to go back to his safe hut, but he runs into Warui, who tells Mugo that the old woman claims to have seen her dead son, twice. Mugo is disturbed by the news, thinking of his strange connection to the woman. He begins to meditate on everything that happened, trying to convince himself that he is not responsible for the trench, the hardship, and the deaths.

That evening, Gikonyo and Warui arrive to see Mugo. Mugo says he is not well and cannot face speaking in front of the town. They cannot convince him. Gikonyo goes home to Mumbi, full of rage, and finds that she has gone back to her parents.

## Chapter 12 Analysis

Gikonyo's inner life is hidden from Mumbi. By holding in his disappointments, Gikonyo turns them into rage. He has no communication with his wife, and this creates a cycle that drives them further and further apart. While outwardly, Gikonyo appears a successful, enviable businessman, internally, he is unhappy and in turmoil. He is on a cycle of rage that seems to be growing. He only succeeds in driving his wife away.



Similarly, Warui appears enviable and happy to Gikonyo. Meanwhile, Warui has his own private disappointments. One of his sons is dead, and two of them have kowtowed to those in power to get through the political turmoil. Again, Mugo is admired externally. He is perceived as a hero. Internally, Mugo feels responsible for everything that has happened in the town. In detention, Mugo is numb. He accepts punishment, and he endures his existence. Now, feeling all comes back to him in a rush, but the reality of the suffering of the town is too much for Mugo.



# Chapter 13

## Chapter 13 Summary

The people of the town see Mugo, as he walks through the rain instead of hiding inside, and they whisper about him. Rumors of his greatness spread. Wambui leads a campaign among the women to get Mugo to speak at the Uruhu celebration. They send Mumbi to talk to Mugo. Meanwhile, Mumbi's parents don't understand why she's left her husband and think she should go back to him. Mumbi is also worried that Karanja will be killed, and she does not want more bloodshed in the name of her brother. She sends a note to Karanja, telling him not to come to the celebration. When the women approach her, she agrees to see Mugo.

Mugo thinks Mumbi has come to talk to him more about her troubles. She had wanted him to talk to her husband, but she says that now she's come to ask him to speak at the celebration. He tells her about the torture he went through in detention, and she's more convinced than ever that he must speak. Mugo finally begins to crack and confesses that he's the one who gave up Kihika. He has lost his head and attacks Mumbi.

Before Kihika's arrest, Thomas Robson is the vicious, murdering District Officer. Kihika, disguised as an old man, shoots him and runs into the woods. Mugo, meanwhile, is satisfied with his life, and the Emergency has not touched him. He comes home from work and lays in his bed, listening to the manhunt for the rebel outside. After the noise dies down, a knock comes at the door. It is Kihika, who says he's murdered Robson.

Mugo is afraid, and Kihika lectures about the movement, seeming frustrated and nervous behind the words. Kihika tries to recruit Mugo. Mugo wants to turn Kihika in, but he is afraid. Kihika calms down and tells Mugo to meet him in the woods in a week to discuss working for the rebels. The sounds of searching keep recurring outside, and Kihika runs off. Mugo is immediately afraid he will be arrested or killed. The next day, he is still afraid that Kihika will kill him if he refuses. Mugo has harmed no one and feels he should be left alone.

After a week of worrying, Mugo is coming home, exhausted. He drops his tools and sits by a garbage pile. A whirlwind comes up, stirring up the trash. Mugo continues his walk, and suddenly sees a poster, advertising a reward for Kihika's head. Mugo sees his solution and goes to see the new District Officer, Thompson. At first, the guards won't let him in, but then Thompson agrees to see him. Mugo says he can lead them to Kihika tonight, at the meeting place. Thompson says he's probably a liar and will stay at the office until they find out. Thompson spits in his face and Mugo immediately regrets his decision.



## Chapter 13 Analysis

Mumbi's main concern is to end death and suffering. Even if Karanja is responsible for her brother's death, Mumbi does not want him to be killed. She has survived a time of great violence, and she is ready for peace, even for those who took the opposing side. She may despise Karanja, but she does not want him killed. Because Mumbi looks at the personal, individual side of things, she is similar to Mugo. Even before the men begin being taken away to detention camps, when Kihika is talking of sacrifice for the greater good, Mumbi thinks of it from the individual point of view, as the potential loss of her mother, or father, or brother. Mugo also thinks of things from an individual perspective. Before he gives up Kihika, he does not want to sacrifice or suffer. He only wants to be left alone.

More of Mugo's story is revealed in this chapter. Mugo is eaten up inside because of his guilt. Kihika comes into Mugo's life as an unwelcome disruption. Mugo wants to be left alone, but he cannot evade the world forever. One way or another the political upheaval of the world around him will invade his world. Mugo simply wants to disassociate himself from the world, not be a part of the community. This desire is impossible. If not Kihika, some other aspect of the struggle around him would invade his quiet existence. Mugo is in a bubble, but he cannot see the vulnerability of his life. Mugo wants to take no sides, but he cannot see that this is impossible. He must choose one side or the other. By trying to save himself and his quiet existence, instead of embracing the community, Mugo destroys himself.



# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary

On December 12, 1963, Kenya gains Uruhu. The night before, everyone is waiting. The people begin to sing, and they sing at Mugo's hut for two hours. Overnight, the light rain becomes a violent storm. The next day, the celebration begins with school sports, races, and bands. Gikonyo runs around, making sure everything is organized. The gathering is somehow gloomy until a 12-lap race is added to the program, one that anyone can join in. Many people join, including Gikonyo and Karanja. Karanja sees it as a reenactment of their race to the train station, so long ago. He thinks Mumbi's warning note shows her attraction to him.

The old men, women, and children drop out of the race after a few laps. Mumbi thinks of Mugo's confession to her. She has told no one, because she wants no one hurt. Meanwhile, Gikonyo thinks over his life and becomes determined to beat Karanja, pacing himself for a final push in the last lap. Mwaura, Kanja, General R., Gikonyo, Lt. Koina, and three other men are the last contestants by the seventh lap. Karanja also thinks over his life, his love for Mumbi, and his reasons for embracing the white man.

General R. runs well. He anticipates exposing Karanja later and thinks about his childhood and his violent, drunken father, who he identifies with the colonial tyrants. When General R. tried to kill his father, his mother stopped him, the slave defending the master. Koina also thinks of his past, as Dr. Lynd's houseboy. He killed the dog because it lived and ate better than the impoverished blacks. He is frustrated that the white upper class is still present. At the end of the race, Gikonyo pulls ahead and he and Karanja are neck and neck. Then, Gikonyo falls and Karanja trips over him. Mumbi rushes to Gikonyo, but when she sees he's okay, she leaves. No one realizes until later that his arm is broken.

The afternoon session is larger. The audience excitedly anticipates Mugo. They have an opening prayer, singing, and speeches. When General R. rises to speak in Mugo's place, the crowd objects, and men are sent to try to convince Mugo to speak. Meanwhile, General R. gives his speech, ending with a call for the man who betrayed Kihika to come forward. Suddenly, the crowd sees Mugo among them, walking up to the stage. General R. and Kihika's betrayer are forgotten; when Mugo stands in front of the people, though, he confesses. He is the one who set up Kihika to be captured. The crowd is stunned and Mugo walks away.

## Chapter 14 Analysis

The novel ends with Uruhu. Kenyan independence is the end of one era, and the beginning of a new one. No one knows what is coming, good or bad. Political corruption certainly exists, and the wealthy seem to remain wealthy while the poor remain poor.



Still, Uruhu means change, and change means hope. The celebration is a coming together of the people, a time for unity in the quest to move forward.

The race is a central point of Chapter 14. Each runner has his own experience, and running seems to free the runners' minds to wander over their pasts, their goals and hopes, and their disappointments. The race seems to be almost a replay of the past, at this moment of moving into the future. Gikonyo and Karanja go back to a pivotal time in their lives, the day when Gikonyo and Mumbi first express their love for each other. Karanja's disappointment and bitterness begins at this moment, when he realizes that Gikonyo and Mumbi are off together. Gikonyo's bitterness and disappointment also begin at this moment, though it is a moment of joy for him. Gaining Mumbi as a lover means that Gikonyo is risking his heart. By racing against each other, both Gikonyo and Karanja hope to recover their pride and Mumbi. Neither can win this race.

Mugo, meanwhile, has struggled with his guilt. He also has looked toward the past, at this moment of moving into the future. He finds that he cannot live with the guilt that he feels. Like Dr. Lynd, like Mumbi, like Gikonyo, Mumbi feels the need to tell his story and connect with the human beings around him. He must confess.



# Karanja, Mugo, Warui, Wambui, and Harambee

## Karanja, Mugo, Warui, Wambui, and Harambee Summary

In Karanja, Karanja goes to his mother's and packs his belongings. He is irritable. Karanja's father did nothing for his wives, and his mother was disappointed in his carefree ways, playing his guitar and running around with girls. She used to tell him a story with a moral about idleness, so he would go work the land. She disapproved of his work for the white government, but loves her son. Karanja finds his old, decayed guitar and leaves, deciding to head to Githima. Karanja runs into Mumbi in the drizzle, as she comes back from the hospital. She never wants to see Karanja again. He tells her about Mugo's confession. Karanja catches a bus to Githima. He goes to a restaurant and thinks of his fear for his life at the Uruhu celebration and his feeling of power, killing other men who he thought of as animals.

In Mugo, Mumbi has just come back from the hospital, where Gikonyo won't talk to her. She doesn't want to see Gikonyo again, but her mother convinces her to take care of him. The next day, at the hospital, Gikonyo hears of Mugo's confession and calls him brave. After getting back, Mumbi rushes to Mugo's hut to try to save him from retribution for his confession, but he is not there.

After Mugo's confession to Mumbi, he feels the irony of the village's songs at his hut. The day of the celebration, he knows he must confess. Immediately after, he is fearful. He starts to run away, but when it starts to rain, he ducks into the old woman's hut. She recognizes him as her son, and then dies. Mugo goes back to his own hut and goes with General R. and Koina when they come for him.

In Warui, Wambui, Warui is in Wambui's hut, listening to the drizzle outside. Wambui's normally neat hut is in disarray. They talk of the old woman's death. Mumbi comes in. Awkwardly, they talk of Mugo, who has disappeared. Mumbi admits that Mugo confessed to her before the celebration. They all agree that they have a village to rebuild and children to wait.

In Harambee, Gikonyo is in the hospital and thinks back on his plan to build a stool for Mumbi, which he thought of in detention. He plans the stool in detail. One day, Mumbi does not come to the hospital. The child was ill, she says the next day. She says she may not come again, and Gikonyo says he finally wants to talk about the child. He also asks her to go back to their house and look after it. She refuses, but she says she may come back to see him and implies that they will talk about their past and future after he is well.





## Karanja, Mugo, Warui, Wambui, and Harambee Analysis

The final four named chapters follow the story's climax and bring the characters forward into the future. Karanja has lost everything and feels that nothing is left in his life. Mumbi rejects him. The white man is leaving. Karanja has no power and no love. He finds the guitar, a symbol of his carefree youth, and now it is decayed and destroyed. He has let the promise of his youth decay.

Meanwhile, just as Mumbi is concerned that Karanja not be harmed in the name of her brother, she does not want Mugo harmed in the name of her brother. She is taken up with her own problems, but she takes the time to try to find and help Mugo. She is too late. Mugo believed, when he went to the detention camp, that he deserved punishment. He still believes it. Mugo at first attempts to escape, but then he goes into the old woman's home. He realizes the kinship between himself and this old woman, who in her insanity believes that Mugo is her dead son. The woman represents isolation. Mugo has isolated himself for so long, and he can no longer impose isolation. Instead of running away, alone, he goes back to his hut to accept his fate, the fate the community imposes on him.

The story of Gikonyo and Mumbi is also concluded. The word Harambee means a joining together. Gikonyo, while in the hospital, begins to think of the stool he has planned to make for his wife. This is an indication of Gikonyo finding again his love for Mumbi. However, the past cannot be ignored. Mumbi and Gikonyo must find a communion, a way to speak with each other and understand each other, to be united. The end of the novel provides promise for this in the future.



# Characters

## Mugo

Mugo is an orphan, raised by a cruel aunt who derides him at every opportunity. When his aunt dies, Mugo is left completely alone in the world. One of Mugo's problems is his isolation from the community. Instead of making connections and becoming part of a family, Mugo lives for himself, building up a little farm and living a solitary life. Mugo hopes to get through the Emergency without anyone bothering him. In fact, he wants to be left alone, left to his isolation. Mugo does not realize that he cannot be totally isolated. After all, he is part of the world.

When Kihika comes to Mugo's tent after shooting D.O. Robson, a vicious and murdering government official, Mugo's life is sent into upheaval. At first, he fears that the government guards searching for Kihika will come and kill him for harboring a fugitive. Then, his problem worsens. Kihika's call to Mugo is a call to join the community, a call for unity. He wants Mugo to give up isolation and join the conflict going on all around him by becoming part of the rebellion.

Mugo cannot abide the disruption of his quiet life, and he sees a chance of escape by turning Kihika in to the authorities. He doesn't realize what the consequences of his actions will be. Kihika is caught and killed, and a time of terrible oppression follows in the village. Mugo is arrested for trying to stop a guard from beating up a woman, and he spends years in concentration camps, enduring punishments he believes he deserves. Afterward, the townspeople think he is a hero and Mugo is eaten up with guilt. Finally, Mugo relieves his guilt by confessing his betrayal of Kihika. He goes willingly with the men who come to punish him.

## Karanja

Karanja grows up as a young man in Thabai. He is friends with Kihika, and he is in love with Mumbi. His life begins to change the day that he races Gikonyo to the train, only to realize that neither Mumbi nor Gikonyo make it to the social event. Karanja's love for Mumbi never leaves him, and his life becomes one of disappointment, where he focuses only on his own sorrow and desire for Mumbi. In this way, Karanja isolates himself from the community. Karanja joins the government guards. Though he took the Movement oath with his friends, he sides with the white government, denying the Movement, so that he doesn't get sent away to a concentration camp and can stay with Mumbi. However, Mumbi is lost to Karanja, who despises his decisions.

Karanja rises in the guards and becomes the Chief of the area. He brings Mumbi to his office one day to tell her that her husband is coming home from the concentration camp, and in a moment of weakness and perhaps shock, Mumbi lets Karanja have sex with



her. She immediately regrets it, though, and Karanja does not get the fulfillment of his love that he desires.

Karanja loses his office when the Kenyan independence is at hand. He ends up working at the library in Githima, where he is little more than a toady. The white men do not respect him, and the black men hate him. Karanja is a man without a world. The rebels believe that he is the one who turned in Kihika, but Mugo saves Karanja from almost certain death by his confession.

## Gikonyo

Gikonyo is a carpenter. His father kicks his mother out when he is young, and they relocate to Thabai. Gikonyo takes on the responsibility of caring for his mother at a young age, with his carpentry. Gikonyo loves working with wood, and he is an expert craftsman. Gikonyo seems to have low self-esteem, and he doesn't believe he stands a chance with the woman he's in love with, Mumbi. Gikonyo carves a panga handle for her, and she is pleased with the result. When Mumbi tells him that she would rather stay with him than go to the train one Sunday, Gikonyo is slow to realize what it means. Mumbi is in love with him. The high point of Gikonyo's life is the first time he makes love with Mumbi, that Sunday in the forest.

Gikonyo believes in the Movement, and he is taken prisoner by government guards early in his marriage. Gikonyo goes to several concentration camps, and he almost loses his mind, at one point sticking his hand into barbed wire. Gikonyo misses Mumbi more than anything and longs for home and family. Because of this, Gikonyo is the first in his camp to confess to the guards that he has taken the Movement's oath. Later, this decision plagues him with guilt.

When Gikonyo comes home, he finds that Mumbi has a child by another man. Instead of trying to regain communication with his wife, learn what happened in his absence, and relieve his soul about his own experiences, he blocks Mumbi out. Only after he has hit her, called her a whore, and driven her from his home, does he begin to regain the desire to rebuilt their relationship, as he recovers from a broken arm in the hospital.

## Mumbi

Mumbi is one of the most beautiful women in the village of Thabai. She is from a good family, and she is Kihika's brother. Mumbi is admired by many of the men in the village, and particularly by Karanja and Gikonyo. Gikonyo is very shy and finds it difficult to express himself in front of Mumbi, but she seems drawn to him. After making love with Gikonyo they get married. At first, they are happy. Mumbi thinks that she will fight when the guards come to arrest her husband, but she does not. While he is gone, she is left to fend for herself.

Mumbi takes on the responsibility of building a new house and working in the trenches while Gikonyo is away. She refuses food from Karanja when she is starving, but then



regrets it, and takes the food he offers her next time. She feeds her parents, Gikonyo's mother, and herself. After the trench is built, she takes a job on a tea plantation, and all her money goes to feed her family and send her brother to school. Mumbi gives in to Karanja only once, in a moment of weakness when she learns that Gikonyo is coming home. She immediately regrets it, and she pays for this decision. Gikonyo returns, and Mumbi cannot express to him what has happened while he was gone. Gikonyo, similarly, cannot express what has happened to him. A wall is built up between them, and Mumbi leaves him after he calls her a whore. Though her parents criticize her, she takes her independence, and she only wants to rekindle a life with Gikonyo on equal footing and with communication.

## Warui

Warui is a village elder. He had three sons. One was killed during World War II, and two others are cowards who kowtow to whoever is in power to get through the Emergency unscathed. However, Warui enjoys life despite his disappointment. He has been involved in the Movement for years, and was at a rally in the 1920s to try to free Harry Thuku.

## Githua

Githua is an old man who is missing a leg. He pretends that he was shot, but he was really injured in an automobile accident. He pretends that he provided guns and ammunition to the rebels, but in reality he did not.

## The Old Woman

An old woman lives alone in a hut. She has stopped talking, since her deaf and dumb son was shot because he could not hear an order to halt from a soldier. Mugo feels a strange kinship with the old woman, and when she sees him, she thinks Mugo is her son, come back to take her from life. The Old Woman dies after Mugo comes to hide in her hut, after his confession that he betrayed Kihika.

## Gitoko

Gitoko was born deaf and dumb. He was a handsome, large man, and he made money doing errands and lived with his mother. During World War II, when English troops came to the village, Gitoko started running home to see if his mother was okay. He didn't hear a soldier telling him to halt and was shot dead. His mother sees Mugo and thinks he is her son come back to her.



## **Waitherero**

Waitherero is Mugo's aunt, who he lived with after his parents' death.

## **Waiyaki**

Waiyaki was an early rebel against the white men, who is rumored to have been buried alive, with his head facing into the Earth.

## **Wambui**

Wambui is an older, toothless woman in Thabai. During the rebellion, she carries messages for the rebels. She is reputed to have been transporting a pistol when government guards came to search everyone and escaped by hiding the pistol between her legs and shaming the guard who tried to search her.

## **Harry Thuku**

Harry Thuku was a rebel in the early-1920s who was captured and held as a political prisoner.

## **Jomo Kenyatta**

Jomo Kenyatta is a rebel who is caught by the British government. The men in the concentration camps expect Kenyatta to win his court case and be freed, but Kenyatta loses, an indicator that the struggle will be long and hard.

## **General R.**

General R. is a man of action and one of the rebels who fights with Kihika. General R. is adamant that the betrayer of Kihika be caught and punished.

## **Mwaura**

Mwaura is one of the rebel movement. He works at Githima and tries to lure Kihika to the Uruhu celebration, so that he can be caught.

## **Kihika**

Kihika is Mumbi's brother. He is a natural rebel, and he embraces the Movement as a young man. He is religious, and compares the struggle in Kenya to the Jews in Egypt



wanted to be free. Kihika believes in sacrifice and unity. He tries to get Mugo to join the rebels and build an underground movement in the town, but Mugo wants to be left alone and turns in Kihika to the authorities. Kihika is caught and hanged, becoming a martyr for the Movement.

## Lieutenant Koina

Lieutenant Koina is a Kenyan rebel, who fights in the forest with Kihika. Koina is a cook during World War II. Afterward, he has trouble finding a job, always expecting better conditions. Koina becomes a houseboy for Dr. Lynd. Koina likes her dog but becomes resentful when he realizes how much better the dog of a white woman lives than many black people. He ties up Dr. Lynd and kills her dog in front of her, before stealing her guns and running away with the rebels.

## Dr. Lynd

Dr. Lynd works at the Githima Forestry Research Station. She wants to stay in Kenya. She loves her dogs, which she has for protection, and hates and fears the black men of the country.

## Dr. Henry Van Dyke

Dr. Van Dyke is a drunken meteorologist who has an affair with Margery Thompson. Van Dyke is killed by a train, and people wonder if he went through with his threat to commit suicide if Kenyatta were freed.

## John Thompson

John Thompson is an idealist in his youth. He believes in the British culture and that the British Empire should create a world-wide country and spread British culture to people of all races. This belief in world unity crumbles under the realities of dealing with another culture. Thompson gives no value to Kenyan culture, not even truly acknowledging its existence. After years of working as part of the elite, white, British government of Kenya, Thompson thinks of the Africans as animals and children.

Thompson is responsible for beating Mugo mercilessly in the hope of making him confess, not remembering that Mugo is the same man who handed Kihika over to Thompson as the District Officer of the region. In that first meeting Thompson spits in Mugo's face. Later, Thompson refuses to believe Mugo's denials that he ever took a rebel oath. Because Mugo's suffering spawns a hunger strike, Thompson ends up destroying his own career, and he retreats to England at the prospect of Kenyan independence, which he believes will be disastrous.



## **Margery Thompson**

Margery Thompson is the disappointed wife of John Thompson, the head of Githima. Margery has an affair with Dr. Van Dyke because she feels estranged from her embittered husband.

## **Mbugua**

Mbugua is a respected elder, father of Mumbi.

## **Wanjiku**

Wanjiku is Mumbi's mother and Mbugua's only wife.

## **Kariuki**

Kariuki is Mumbi and Kihika's younger brother, who is good in school and enjoys reading. Kariuki goes on to college.

## **Wambuku**

Wambuku is Kihika's girlfriend, but she doesn't understand his revolutionary spirit and feels left behind when he runs away into the forest. She marries another man, and while she is pregnant and being beaten by a guard, Mugo tries to save her. She later dies.

## **Njeri**

Njeri is Wambuku's friend, and she loves Kihika. Her love is not returned, but she understands Kihika better than Wambuku does.

## **Gatu**

Gatu is a prisoner who is in the same detention camp as Gikonyo. Gatu is always joking, keeping up the prisoners' hopes, and spends time in solitary. Gatu eventually kills himself after confessing to Gikonyo that he lost the woman he loves by putting off their marriage.



# Objects/Places

## Thabai

Thabai is the Kenyan village that is the central setting of the novel.

## Kihika's Bible

Kihika is a religious man who carries a Bible at all times, although he leaves it behind on the day he is captured. In his Bible, Kihika has underlined many passages in red and black.

## Githima

Githima is an area where a British forestry research station has been set up in the Kenyan forest. A train runs through Githima, and each year, someone is killed by the train.

## Rira

Rira is the concentration camp where Mugo starts a hunger strike, when he refuses to confess to taking an oath that he never took. The hunger strike spells the end of John Thompson's career.

## Prospero in Africa

Prospero in Africa is the title of Thompson's planned treatise about the good that the British Empire can do by spreading British culture to Africa.

## The Iron Snake

The iron snake is what the Kenyans call the train that the British build, running through Kenya. The trains become an important part of life in Kenya.

## The Carved Stool

When Gikonyo is first married, he thinks of carving a stool for his wife, Mumbi, but he cannot decide on a motif. In prison, the idea of the stool comes to him again, and he spends much time designing it in his head. Later, when he is in the hospital, Gikonyo again takes up the idea of the stool, a symbol of his returning love for Mumbi.





## **The Panga Handle**

When Gikonyo is a young man, he tells Mumbi that he will make a new handle for her mother's panga for free. Gikonyo puts much loving care into the handle, which is an expression of his love for Mumbi.

## **The Trench**

During the time leading up to Kenyan independence, the town of Thabai is punished for being the hometown of Kihika, the rebel leader. The government burns down the people's huts and forces them to rebuild in a more centralized area. Then, the government forces the people into labor to build a trench around the town, even though the people are starving. Mugo is working building this trench when he intervenes with a guard beating one of the women and gets sent to the concentration camps.

## **Mahee Police Post**

The Mahee Police Post is a police station where rebels are held before they are sent on to concentration camps. Kihika has a major victory when he leads his men in setting fire to Mahee and escaping with the prisoners, guns, and ammunition.



# Themes

## Unity

When Kihika talks about Kenyan independence, he says that what is needed is unity. Unity is the strength of the people against the weapons and strength of the British. The novel explores the idea of unity, extending it to include community in individuals' personal lives as well as political lives. The opposite of unity is isolation, and focusing on the self instead of focusing on the community. Mugo ultimately destroys himself through his own isolation. He has no family or sense of an extension of himself into the community of Thabai and Kenya. Mugo only wants to be left alone. However, no man is an island. No man can exist only for himself, because he must live in the world.

Mugo does not realize that he is in the same position as the other black people of Kenya. He is part of the community, whether he wants to be or not. When he goes to see Thompson with the information about Kihika, Mugo is confronted with the reality. Thompson sees Mugo only as one of the black men of Kenya. He sees him as a liar, trying to trick the government guards into a trap, perhaps. The moment when Thompson spits in Mugo's face is a moment of revelation for Mugo. He is one of the black men of Kenya, and he has just betrayed himself. Unity is not something Mugo has chosen; he is united with others through oppression.

Mugo and Karanja both choose a path for their individual good, instead of one for the community as a whole. This is what Wambuku wants from Kihika. She wants him to focus on her alone and not leave her, much as Karanja decides to join the guards so that he will never be forced to leave Mumbi. She does not understand his need to fight, not for himself or for her but for the united community.

## Confession and Communication

In *A Grain of Wheat*, confession is the key for individuals to relieve their own minds and hearts, and also the key for individuals to make a life together and open up communication, which is a cornerstone of unity. Throughout the novel, characters are driven to confess their own experiences and truths to others, in order to ease themselves. This confession doesn't necessarily create a connection with another human, but it does help characters deal with their own problems. It is a first step toward understanding and ultimately unity.

Dr. Lynd confesses her traumatic experience and the death of her dog to Thompson. She does not understand what has happened to her fully, though, because she only sees her own perspective. Communication with Koina is completely cut off. He sees the event from a completely different perspective. Like Gikonyo and Mumbi, Koina and Lynd each hold their individual realities within themselves, and because they never



communicate, they can never be reconciled. They hold their own realities to themselves, instead of confessing to each other.

Mumbi and Gikonyo both confess their stories to Mugo. They do not communicate with each other, and so they remain torn apart. Only at the end of the novel, when Gikonyo indicates a willingness to discuss Mumbi's child, does the possibility for reconciliation exist. Communication is what creates this possibility. Mugo, as well, is driven to confession. He tears himself up by carrying his own guilt. When he confesses to the town, he releases himself. Confession allows him to heal. He is saved, spiritually, although he must face a punishment of death.

## Culture and Perspective

The characters in the novel each see Kenya and Uruhu from individual unique perspectives. They, however, cannot fully see each other's truths and each other's lives. The biggest divisions that separate them are those of culture. The white upper class is British. They bring with them not only British technology, soldiers, and weapons, but also British culture. Culture is what Thompson desperately wants to impose upon Africa, and he sees British culture as the height of human accomplishment. He doesn't truly understand that the Kenyans also have a culture, and he cannot accept that the culture of Kenyans could be equivalent in value to the culture of the British.

Meanwhile, the Kenyans do not see the British perspective. The British are merely tyrants and oppressors. There is nothing redeeming in Thompson to Mugo, when Thompson is spitting in his face or whipping him. "These people" are not human to Gikonyo, Kihika, or Mugo, just as Thompson does not consider the Kenyan men and women truly people.

All people look at the world from their own unique perspective. The people of the town see Mugo from one perspective, as a hero, while he is unaware of the people's admiration and is torn up with guilt. The townspeople see Gikonyo as successful and admirable, a businessman who has pulled himself together after detention. Meanwhile, Gikonyo's own perspective is that his life has fallen apart since returning from detention. The disparity between a private life and public appearance is a microcosm of the rift between culture and culture.



# Style

## Point of View

The novel is told by an omniscient narrator, who exposes the point of view of different characters at different times, revealing their thoughts. Unlike many omniscient narrators, the narrator of *A Grain of Wheat* has an identity, as a member of the town of Thabai, or perhaps as a member of the black community of Kenya in general. The narrator refers to "we," making him a part of the community of Kenya. However, the narrator only occasionally uses the first person, leaving the majority of the novel to be told in third person.

Still, the narrator knows the inner thoughts, not only of townspeople of Thabai or other Kenyans, but of John and Margery Thompson, representatives of the white British upper class and the government. The omniscient narrator is able to give diverse points of view, so that the reader can understand the society in Kenya at the time of Kenyan independence from every angle. In addition to the narrator revealing characters' inner thoughts, the characters also tell their stories to each other.

Mumbi's story reveals the lives of the people who stayed in Thabai, while many went to concentration camps. She tells of the starvation, poverty, and enforced labor of those not even accused of a crime. Gikonyo's and Mugo's stories reveal the experiences of those who were taken away. One is guilty of being a rebel, and the other is innocent. Both suffer unjustly. The Thompsons' stories show the experience of the British who came to Kenya, believing it was right to colonize Africa. All of these political perspectives are combined with personal stories of human connections, drawing parallels between these diverse characters as human beings.

## Setting

The novel is set in Kenya at the point of Uruhu, or Kenyan independence. Kenya is under the rule of Britain, and the government and upper class are white Europeans. The black Kenyans form a lower class. The land itself is important, because it is the source of life for the people. The Kenyans live by farming. Still, the country is changing. Nairobi is an urban center, and the iron snake, the train, runs through the countryside. Life has changed greatly since the white man has come to Kenya.

The novel addresses issues of unity and suffering, power and injustice, and the time of Uruhu is fertile ground for this discussion. The country has been in turmoil in the years before Uruhu, because of an underground revolutionary movement that has come to a climax. The Movement goes back as long as the history of white men in Kenya, fed by the blood of the leaders who have died.

The backdrop of Uruhu puts the novel at a point of transition, where blacks are trying to understand how to change their country for the better and where whites are having



difficulties letting go of colonialism and the British Empire. No one knows what the future holds, and though the novel moves around in time, it never hints at what takes place beyond Uruhu. The future is always murky and uncertain, adding to the fears of the characters as they move forward into the unknown.

## Language and Meaning

The words which characters use to refer to others show their perspectives and cultural divisions. The Kenyan men refer to the British as "these people." The white men are not individuals. Mwaura adds a diminutive ending to Thompson's name when he talks about him. Similarly, Thompson uses words to solidify his position of power. After spitting in Mugo's face, he demands that Mugo use a term of respect with him. Thompson is using words to humiliate Mugo and to make himself more powerful.

The novel uses local terms for important elements of life in Kenya. A shamba is a plot of land to farm, the origin of life. Another example is a panga, a local farming implement and part of the way of life of the Kenyans. When the Kenyans refer to elements of British culture, they often put them into cultural contexts of Kenya. That is why the train is known as the iron snake and why guns are compared to bamboo sticks.

The last chapter of the novel is titled Harambee. This is a Swahili word meaning a coming together. It has a dual meaning. The Kenyan people are coming together as a community under an independent government, and also Gikonyo and Mumbi are coming together to a new, tentative understanding of each other. This emphasizes the parallels in the novel between large, social issues and personal, human issues. Unity and communication are the things to strive for, both on the societal and the individual levels.

## Structure

The novel is divided into fourteen numbered chapters plus four short named chapters at the end. The central chapter, Chapter 7, is longer than the rest and is the center of the story. The climax of the novel, in Chapter 14, is the Uruhu celebration, where Mugo confesses his guilt in betraying Kihika. The four named chapters at the end wrap up the stories of the main characters. The novel ends with Mumbi and Gikonyo, the most hopeful story. Karanja ends the novel with nothing but a meaningless, empty life. Mugo ends the novel by confessing his guilt and freeing his soul, but losing his life.

The novel is not told chronologically. It begins shortly before the Kenyan Uruhu celebration, and it climaxes at the celebration itself. In between, it travels back in time and then returns to Uruhu, filling in all the events that lead up to the day of independence. Each character's story is revealed, in bits and pieces, throughout the novel.

The stories are intertwined, making a complex story with many threads. The two major storylines are the story of Mugo, and the love triangle of Gikonyo, Mumbi, and Karanja.

These are not the only stories told. The story of the Thompsons, and the story of Kihika, Wambuku, and Njeri. The old woman and her deaf and dumb son have their own story, as do the other people of the village. These stories intercept at different points: as Mugo walks into the old woman's room, as Mugo saves Wambuku's life, as Mugo confesses to Mumbi. The stories intertwine because the novel is one of community, and it is the combination of all these individuals into one united Kenyan whole that forms a community.



## Quotes

"Mugo's throat was choked; if he spoke, he would cry. He shook his head and stared straight ahead." —Chapter 3, page 23

"Would these things remain after Thursday? Perhaps for two months: and then—test-tubes and beakers would be broken or lie un-washed on the cement, the hot-houses and seed-beds strewn with wild plants and the outer bush which had been carefully hemmed, would gradually creep into a litter-filled compound." —Chapter 4, page 41

"The African only came there to sweep the streets, drive the buses, shop and then go home to the outskirts before nightfall. Gikonyo had a vision of African businessmen like himself taking over all those premises!" —Chapter 6, page 61

"He wanted to shout: that is not it at all; I did not want to come back; I did not long to join my mother, or wife or child because I did not have any." —Chapter 6, page 66

"For Mumbi's smile, for that look of appreciation, he would go on making chairs, tables, cupboards; restore leaking roofs and falling houses; repair doors and windows in all Thabai without a cent in return." —Chapter 7, page 82

"For a moment, sister clasped brother; Thabai went round and round beneath Mumbi's arms. Then the earth became still again, and almost peaceful." —Chapter 7, page 101

"The very air choked him; Thabai was just another detention camp; would he ever get out of it?" —Chapter 7, page 117

"And strangely everything ended in last night's saying from the Bible: he shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor." —Chapter 8, page 124

"Then he went back, his gait, to an observer, conjuring up the picture of a dog that has been unexpectedly snubbed by the master it trusts." —Chapter 10, page 161

"There was surely no connection between sunrise and sunset, between today and tomorrow. Why then was he troubled by what was dead, he thought, remembering the old woman." —Chapter 12, page 175

"But she did not want anybody to die or come to harm because of her brother." —Chapter 14, page 208

"Independence, when finally won, would right all the wrongs, would drive the likes of Dr. Lynd and her dogs from the country. Kenya after all was a black man's country." —Chapter 14, page 213



## Topics for Discussion

What drives Mugo to confess at the end of the novel? What does he lose and gain from his confession?

What kind of a man is Thompson? Why does he sincerely believe that he is doing the right thing?

How are the troubles in Thompson's marriage similar to the troubles in Gikonyo's marriage?

Why does Mugo try to intervene when he sees the woman in the trench being beaten? Why don't the other people intervene?

What seems likely to happen to Kenya and the characters in the future, now that Uruhu is here?

Why does Gikonyo react the way he does when he finds out that Mumbi has a child by another man?

How are women portrayed in the novel? What are the black and white cultural views of women in the novel?

Why does Mugo become such a hero to the townspeople after he comes back from the detention camp?