

Go and Come Back Study Guide

Go and Come Back by Joan Ablove

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Plot Summary

"Go and Come Back" is a Young Adult novel by Joan Abelove. The novel is narrated by a young Isabo girl named Alicia, who lives in a small village in the Amazon jungle of Peru. Two anthropologists - who are called the "old white ladies" even though they are only in their late 20s - come to the village to study the Isabo. During their year in the village, they learn as much about themselves as they learn about the villagers. Go and Come Back is Joan Abelove's first novel.

One day two old white ladies arrive by boat in Poincushmana, a small Isabo village on the Paro River in the Amazon jungle of Peru, where Alicia lives with her family. One is tall with blond hair and is named Margarita, and the other is short and chubby like the Isabo and is named Joanna. The two white ladies are anthropologists and want to live in the village for a year to study the Isabo. Papaisi, the village headman, announces that they can stay in the village and that the village men will build them a house. The men begin work on the house the next morning, but stop as soon as the white ladies leave to pick up supplies, since no one knows if they are really coming back.

Late one night Alicia finds Carmella, the wife of a trader who often stops in the village, cradling a baby and weeping. She tells Alicia that her husband is planning to drown the infant because he believes that it is not his. Alicia takes the child to save its life. Alicia's mother thinks she is crazy and says that the baby is too skinny and will not live long but helps Alicia care for it, as do the rest of the village's women. Alicia names the girl Cami.

The two old white ladies return with many boxes of supplies. The village wants to have a party to welcome them back and drink the bottle of liquor they have brought with them, but the old white ladies will only allow half to be drunk at the party because they want to save the rest and have another party when their house is finished. The villagers don't understand; they believe that if you have liquor you drink it, and if there is extra you share it. The Isabo are a communal people and share everything they have with one another. The two white ladies don't understand this and are thought of as stingy and selfish because they do not immediately share all of the supplies they have brought with the villagers.

As the weeks pass, the two white ladies give medicine and a few other things to the villagers but continue to be stingy, although Joanna does give Alicia sugar for Cami. Alicia is amazed by how ignorant the two white ladies are and sees that no one is teaching them the right way to do things. Alicia decides to help them, and starts to teach them how to be more like the Isabo. She teaches them the proper way to bathe in the river, and helps them when Margarita has a terrible stomachache by getting Papaisi to cure her. Over the next few months, Alicia forms a closer relationship with the two white ladies - particularly Joanna - and they start to act more like the Isabo, although they still make many mistakes.

One day just before the two white ladies are to go downriver and spend a few weeks in the city, Margarita finds that her watch has been stolen and becomes very angry. When



the watch is returned, rather than being grateful and throwing a party, the two white ladies remain angry. Angel, the school teacher, calls a village meeting and it is decided that the two white ladies should be told not to come back. When Angel tells them this they become very upset and ask Alicia what to do. She tells them they must apologize to the village and promise not to be so stingy and selfish anymore. Alicia goes with them to every house in the village where they do what she has told them to, and they are told that they can come back.

When the white ladies return to the village they bring gifts for everyone. Alicia cannot believe the change in them. Though they still make mistakes and many of the villagers think they are silly, they are no longer as stingy as they were. When their house is finally finished they have a party, and when they find that the half bottle of liquor they were saving has been drunk and replaced with river water they do not get angry, but act as the Isabo would and make do with what they have. Later, when Christian missionaries visit the village, the two white ladies cannot believe how stingy they act, and Joanna is ashamed that she and Margarita acted so selfishly when they first came to the village. Alicia is happy that they have learned to act right, like the Isabo.

Cami becomes sick and dies, and Alicia asks Joanna to come with her to the burial. During the last couple of months the two white ladies are in the village, Joanna becomes very close to Alicia. When the time finally comes for them to go, Joanna arranges for Alicia to fly over the village in the airplane that comes to pick them up, so that Alicia can see things in a different way. After the ride is over, Alicia hugs Joanna and tells her to go and come back.



Chapters One - Three

Chapters One - Three Summary

"Go and Come Back" is a Young Adult novel by Joan Abelove which was first published in 1998. The novel is narrated by Alicia, a young Isabo girl who lives in a small village on the Paro River in the Amazon jungle in Peru; the Isabo live in much the same way as their ancestors have lived for centuries. The author lived with a tribe in the Amazon for two years, and used that experience as the basis for the book. In a short paragraph just prior to the start of the first chapter, the author states that the "two old white ladies" referred to throughout the novel are actually in their late 20s.

Chapter One. Late one day near the beginning of the dry season, two "old white ladies" arrive in Poincushmana, the small village where Alicia lives with her family. They are brought up the river by Nonti in his small boat. One of the women is tall and skinny with yellow hair, and the other is short and chubby - more like the Isabo - but with very pink skin. Alicia finds it odd that they wear no beads or anklets, don't have their noses or lips pierced, and that neither has flattened their forehead or done any of the things that would make them beautiful. Alicia's cousin Elena jumps in the boat with the white women and starts to talk with them in the Isabo language. The women don't understand her and she makes fun of the woman with yellow hair, which makes everyone in the village laugh, including Alicia.

Nonti tells the villagers that the women are called anthropologists, and that they come from someplace called New York City. He has taken them up and down the Paro River so that they can find a village to live in, and they have decided that they want to live in Alicia's village. He says the old white women speak Spanish and another language he does not understand and that while they are not mean, they are very ignorant and ask stupid questions. Papaisi, the village headman, says that they will stay at his house, and then tells his daughter to go and prepare dinner for them.

Chapter Two. Alicia's younger brother Marco runs to the boat where the old white ladies are still sitting and leads them up the riverbank to the village. He pantomimes playing a guitar; the tall woman pantomimes back and points at the short woman, indicating that she plays. She says that her name is Margarita, and the short woman's name is Joanna. Marco and Alicia lead the women through the village, showing them the neat line of small houses with thatch roofs and the kitchens built along the riverbank, separated from the houses by a wide path. As they walk through the village they are joined by several small children who are fascinated by the fact that the two white women wear pants like men, and smell like fruit.

They finally reach the house of the village schoolteacher, Angel, and he gives Joanna an old guitar. The small children who have been walking with them, along with Alicia, Angel and his two wives, sit and listen as Joanna tunes the guitar, and then plays a song and sings the word "shboom" over and over again. Angel asks, in Spanish, what



the word "shboom" means, and Margarita says that it means nothing - it is just a nice sound. Later, Alicia's mother tells her it was just baby music, and the two white women are just grownup babies. Alicia knows her mother is right, but she liked the music anyway.

Chapter Three. That night Papaisi, the village headman, blows the horn to call a meeting of the village. When everyone is gathered, he tells the villagers that the two old white ladies want to live in the village for one year; Margarita will study agriculture, while Joanna will study babies. When Papaisi asks them in Spanish what they will do with what they learn, Margarita says that they will write books. Papaisi says that the old white ladies can live with them for a year, and that they will build them a house. The next morning the village men start digging post holes for a house right next to Papaisi's house. The two white ladies say that they need to go back upriver on Nonti's boat to get their supplies. The men stop working on the house the moment they leave, since no one knows if they will really return.

Later that afternoon, Elena asks Alicia to go gather fruit with her. At first Alicia thinks that Elena really wants to go and meet one of her many boyfriends since that is what "going gathering" sometimes means, but as they walk through the jungle, Alicia realizes that there is something wrong. Finally Elena tells Alicia that she is afraid that she is pregnant. She says that she doesn't want to have a baby, and that she hasn't been a child long enough. Alicia understands; she has been afraid of the fact that her own childhood is ending, and that she is entering the "last part" of her life - that of being a wife and mother. Alicia tells Elena that they should play again, just like they did when they were little girls, before they forget how. They play as they did when they were children, pretending that they are old women, and singing songs about their lives.

Chapters One - Three Analysis

These first three chapters serve to introduce the reader to Alicia, the narrating character, as well as to the Isabo people. The Isabo are a simple, relatively "primitive" people by Western standards, and live in much the same way as their ancestors have for centuries. Their houses are simple structures with a roof and a floor, but no walls and no furniture; the kitchens - which are nothing more than a small area for a fire on the ground covered by a thatch roof - are separate from the rest of the house to minimize the risk of fire. There is no electricity in the village, and no running water other than the river. The Isabo men sometimes work on the plantations down river, or go on hunts for weeks at a time. The women gather fruit and nuts from the surrounding jungle, and grow vegetables in small gardens. Everyone in Alicia's village is related in some way to everyone else either by marriage or by blood.

Though they lead relatively simple lives, the Isabo are familiar with many "modern" things from the outside world. Nonti's boat has a gasoline powered outboard motor, for example, and most of the men hunt with rifles. One of the villagers owns a record player that runs on batteries (although he usually has no batteries) that had been left behind several seasons before by some Swiss missionaries who had visited the village. They



sometimes see airplanes flying overhead and understand what they are, and are occasionally visited by soldiers and other representatives of the Peruvian government. The fact that the Isabo almost immediately welcome the "two old white ladies" into their village indicates that they are a friendly, generous people, but they are also wary of them as the two women are almost completely foreign to them, and seem to the Isabo to be very silly and childlike.

Alicia, the narrator of the novel, is a young girl just entering womanhood; although no ages are ever given for any of the Isabo, at one point in the narrative Alicia says that her "blood has come three times already", indicating that she is probably 12 or 13 years of age, and just entering puberty. Alicia thinks that she is skinny and ugly - not fat and beautiful like her cousin and best friend, Elena. Alicia is timid, which is why she waits at the top of the riverbank when the rest of the village goes down to the river to greet the two old white ladies, but she is also very intelligent and practical. At one point Elena tells Alicia that she shouldn't worry so much and have more fun while she can because her "old man husband" will be back soon enough to make her miserable. Alicia tells Elena that the old man is not her husband, and that her father was drunk when he promised Alicia to him. It is unclear whether Alicia is engaged or not; however, in Isabo society men have multiple wives, and fathers can choose husbands for their daughters. The fact that Elena - who is Alicia's age - may be pregnant is presented as being frightening for the young woman, but not surprising.

While their customs and the way the Isabo live will be foreign to Western readers, the author tells the story as seen through Alicia's eyes, from the perspective of the Isabo. From the very beginning, the two women from New York City are the outsiders in the narrative; it is their ways that are strange and their appearance that is out of the ordinary. This "different" perspective becomes increasingly important as the novel progresses.



Chapters Four - Five

Chapters Four - Five Summary

Chapter Four. Shortly after Alicia and Elena play in the woods Elena's blood comes, meaning that she is not pregnant. A week after the two old white ladies leave to get their supplies a Peruvian trader named Paco arrives in the village on his boat with his wife Carmella and their baby daughter. Angel buys a lot of sugarcane liquor from Paco, and the entire village has a party. Later, in the middle of the night after everyone is asleep, Alicia hears someone weeping by the river and finds Carmella there with her baby; Paco's boat is gone. Carmella tells Alicia that Paco has decided the baby is not his, and that he is going to drown it in the river when he returns. Alicia tells Carmella that she will take the baby and get the mothers in the village to nurse her. A few moments later they hear Paco's boat coming up the river. Carmella gives Alicia the baby, and then runs to meet her husband's boat.

The next morning Alicia's mother asks her whose baby she is caring for, and Alicia tells her what happened. Her mother gently chides her for taking a "nawa" (outsider) baby, and says that the baby is too skinny and will not live long. She then takes the baby and says she will give it some of Alicia's brother's food, and breastfeeds it. Later, Elena comes to Alicia's house and asks to see the new baby. She also says that she is too skinny and probably won't live long, but that if anyone will be able to keep her alive it will be Alicia.

Chapter Five. Later that day Alicia's father returns from his hunting trip with a lot of meat. He stays for a few days, and then leaves to work on a plantation downriver. A few days later the news comes that the two old white ladies are returning, and are about three days away. On hearing the news, Papaisi announces that the two white women will stay with his youngest daughter Chawa until their house is finished. Chawa is delighted by this, because she believes that she will have the old white ladies' things all to herself.

The next afternoon, Alicia's mother's sister Nachi comes to see the nawa baby Alicia has decided to raise. Nachi says that the baby is very tiny and pale, but that she is also very beautiful. Nachi asks what the baby's name is and when Alicia says that she doesn't know, Nachi tells her that since Alicia is the baby's mother now she must name it. Alicia decides to call the child Cami after her favorite fruit. Nachi then says that Cami's first mother has already pierced her ears, but that Alicia will soon have to pierce her nose and lip and flatten her forehead so that if Cami lives she will be beautiful. Nachi gives Alicia an old 'wintoti' - a forehead flattening board - and tells her to only keep it on Cami's forehead in the mornings until the child is fatter and stronger.



Chapters Four - Five Analysis

When Alicia finds Carmella crying by the side of the river and hears that her husband Paco intends to kill Carmella's baby, Alicia immediately volunteers to take the baby, even though she is not prepared to raise a child. Alicia is not certain that she will be able to care for the child or keep her alive very long, but she knows that she can at least make sure that the child stays alive that night and is not murdered by her father, and that is all that matters to her. Even though Alicia's mother - and indeed most of the other people in the village - believe that Alicia is crazy for taking a "nawa" (outsider) baby, her mother breastfeeds the child, and Alicia knows that the other nursing mothers in the village will do so as well until the child is old enough not to require breast milk any longer. There is never any question of not helping Alicia with the child. Alicia has made the decision to take the baby and, though they might not think it is a wise decision, the rest of the village will support her and help her if they can. This is the case when Alicia's aunt, Nachi, comes and instructs her on what to do to make the child beautiful, and gives her a board for flattening the child's forehead, as is the custom with female Isabo babies.

One thing that the author makes very clear is that it is not the fact that Paco is going to kill a baby that is shocking to Alicia, but rather the fact that he intends to kill a female baby. At one point Alicia says that while they might occasionally kill a male baby if he were sickly or deformed, or if the mother didn't want him, no Isabo would ever kill a female child because, "girls are the ones who stay home and make sure your old age is happy and easy." In Isabo society, female babies are far more valuable than male babies, and the idea of anyone - even a nawa like Paco - wanting to harm one is unthinkable to Alicia, and the rest of the people in her village.



Chapter Six

Chapter Six Summary

Three days later, the two old white ladies return on Nonti's boat. The boat is filled with boxes, and the villagers all help carry them up to Chawa's house. They have brought a large bottle of sugarcane liquor and everyone believes that means there will be a party. When the white ladies announce that they want to save the liquor, the villagers do not understand. Nonti explains to them that they want to have a party to welcome them back, but they cannot do so because the ladies want to save their liquor. The two white ladies discuss the matter, and finally Margarita tells Nonti that they can have the party, but they want to save half of their liquor. Angel then asks if he can have some of the batteries they have brought with them for his old record player so that they can have some music at the party, but they say that they cannot spare any batteries. When Nonti explains that you cannot have a party without music, Margarita becomes angry and says that in her country if you have no batteries you can have no music, and storms off. Nonti then appeals to Joanna who finally agrees to give them six batteries, and then gets them from a box filled with more batteries than Alicia has ever seen before. After thanking her in Spanish, Angel says in Isabo that the two old white ladies are very stingy, and everyone agrees.

There is only enough liquor for the old people to drink at the party, so Alicia and Elena do not have any. When the liquor is gone, the old men in the village have Nonti ask if they can drink the other half of the bottle, but the white ladies say no, they want to save it and have another party when their house is finished. One of the old men becomes angry and storms off, and Alicia sees him go to where the liquor is stored and drink it all when he thinks no one is looking. Alicia takes the jug and fills it half full of river water so the old ladies won't know their liquor has been drunk.

The next morning the men start back to work on the house. The old white ladies hire Alicia's mother's sister's daughter Cuncha to be their cook and Elena to teach them to speak Isabo, and Nonti tells them how much they should pay each of them. Later, the women in the village watch as the white ladies start unpacking. Alicia has never seen so much rice and sugar in her life. Chawa tells them that the white ladies also have tins filled with all different colored beads, and that they brought them to trade for Isabo things. Many of the women in the village, including Alicia's mother, leave and come back a few moments later with old handmade bowls and sacks that they don't need to trade with the white ladies. Margarita buys an old bowl from Alicia's mother for two bags of beads, and several other things from a few other women, and soon all of the women in the village are going through the white ladies' things, trying to see what they have brought, and what they will give them. Margarita finally becomes angry and tells them all to go away, but several of the women manage to take bags of beads when the white ladies are not looking. For the next few days villagers stop by and ask the white ladies for beads, but they say angrily that they have none left. Alicia does not understand their anger, since they brought the beads for the Isabo anyway.



Chapter Six Analysis

When the two white ladies return to the village, they bring more supplies with them than Alicia has ever seen before. Unfortunately, it soon becomes obvious to Alicia and the rest of the villagers that the two white ladies are "stingy" because they do not act properly and immediately share everything they have brought with them with everyone else in the village. The fact that they will not allow all of their sugarcane liquor to be drunk at the party is particularly hard for Alicia and the others to understand. The idea of "saving" things is alien to the Isabo way of life; they believe that when you had meat you ate it and when you had liquor you drank it. And if you happened to have any extra, you shared it with others so that they would share with you when they had extra. The two white ladies do not understand how the Isabo expect them to act and become angry when the villagers want them to share everything they have with them. Coming from a very different culture, they do not to understand the Isabo's communal way of life.

Although some of the people in the village are certain that the two white ladies are mean and will always be stingy, Alicia believes that they are just ignorant and a little scared about being so far from home. She feels a little sorry for them, and thinks that it is possible that they will learn the right way to act after they have been in the village for a while. She also hopes that eventually the ladies will not always be stingy with her, and that they will give her rice and sugar to help her little Cami grow strong and fat.



Chapters Seven - Nine

Chapters Seven - Nine Summary

Chapter Seven. Several days later, the white ladies tell the villagers to come to Chawa's house in the mornings to get medicine. They also start to visit each of the village's 18 houses each evening. They come by at mealtime, and when people are polite and invite them to eat, they say they are not hungry and continue on. This is very bad manners since the Isabo do not visit others at mealtime unless they are hungry. A villager named Juanita decides to teach the two white ladies a lesson. She learns that Margarita has traded some rifle cartridges to one of the village men, Nimeran, in return for a portion of the meat he brings back from hunting. Nimeran soon returns and gives the white ladies a deer leg, and as soon as they sit down to eat Juanita and her sister stop by. As Alicia and her mother watch from their house, Margarita and Joanna first greet the two other women, then talk something over between themselves, and finally invite Juanita and her sister to eat. Alicia's mother says that perhaps they are not always as stingy as they are most of the time.

The next morning the two white ladies stop by Alicia's house. Alicia's mother tells Alicia to pick the lice off of their heads, and then ask them for some sugar for her skinny baby. Alicia starts to work on Joanna's hair, while her mother works on Margarita's; both are infested with lice. When Joanna sees Cami and asks about her, Alicia tells her the story of how she took her, and her mother tells her again to ask for food. Although Alicia is afraid they will say no she asks, and Joanna tells her to come by their house that evening. Alicia stops by the white ladies' house later and after each of them holds Cami for a while, Joanna gives Alicia a large bag of sugar and tells her that whenever she needs food for Cami she should come back and they will give her more. Alicia remains with them for a while, telling them about the village and some of the Isabo's customs, and is amazed by how little they know about simple things, like sex and babies. Finally Cami starts to cry, and Alicia takes her home so her mother can feed her.

Chapter 8. Alicia continues to be amazed by how little the two white ladies know about simple things, including keeping themselves clean. Specifically, even though the white ladies have started to bathe in both the morning and afternoon, the villagers have noticed that they never get their hair wet when they bathe in the river in the morning. Alicia decides to try and help them. She stops by one morning and finds Joanna alone. She asks if cleanliness is important to them and Joanna says that it is very important. Alicia then asks why she and Margarita never get their hair wet when they bathe in the morning, and Joanna says that they wash their hair when they bathe in the afternoon. Alicia tells her that they should do it in the morning like everyone else so that they are not dirty to begin the day, and says that everyone in the village is laughing at them because of this. Joanna looks sad for a moment, then says that there is much she and Margarita don't know. The next day, the white ladies wash their hair in the morning and are happy when everyone smiles at them.



Chapter Nine. Late that evening, Alicia hears voices coming from Chawa's house, where the white ladies are staying. Chawa is away visiting relatives, and when Alicia goes over to see what is wrong she sees Margarita rolling on the floor, moaning. Joanna tells Alicia that Margarita has a bad stomachache, and has thrown up all the medicine the book they brought with them said to try. Alicia cannot believe Joanna has tried to cure her with a book, and gets Papaisi. Papaisi has Margarita lay on her back and then feels her stomach. He begins smoking his pipe, and then places his mouth on Margarita's belly and blows smoke on it. A few moments later he stands up and vomits over the porch rail. He announces that he has drawn the tree spirit out of Margarita and that she is cured. A few moments later Margarita sits up and says that she feels fine. Alicia has Joanna give Papaisi some cigarettes as payment, and says to call him sooner next time.

Elena comes to Alicia's house a few days later and tells her a story about the two white ladies confusing the Isabo word for "grass" with the word for "vagina", and Joanna announcing to the children who had come over to watch them that they had to leave, because she needed to "cut the vagina" around their house. Since then, the children have been teasing Joanna mercilessly. Elena holds Cami for a while, and tells Alicia that it makes her mad that the white ladies do not share any of their food with the rest of the village, even though there has been no meat for days. Elena cannot understand how they can still be so stingy. Alicia does not tell her about the food the white ladies have been giving Cami. It is the first secret she has ever kept from Elena.

Chapters Seven - Nine Analysis

As time passes, the two white ladies begin to adjust to life in the village, and slowly come to understand some of the customs and practices that the villagers feel are important, although in the eyes of the Isabo they still make many mistakes. Their behavior continues to confuse the Isabo as on the one hand they are generous and give the villagers medicine, and on the other hand they continue to be stingy and not share their food freely with everyone in the village - although Joanna is very generous with Alicia, and gives her food for Cami. No one in the village is ever certain exactly how the white ladies will act in any given situation, which prompts several of the villagers say how much fun they are to watch.

Although she is not certain how she knows it, Alicia understands that the two white ladies - and Joanna in particular - feel unsure of themselves and are frightened much of the time. Even though there are others who spend more time with the white ladies than she does - including Elena, who is teaching them to speak Isabo - Alicia feels as though she must help teach them the things they don't know, and help them fit in with the rest of the village better. Part of the reason for this is because she is grateful for the sugar and other food that they give her for Cami, but it is also part of Alicia's nature to help whenever she can. This is why she did not hesitate to take Cami when she saw that her life was in danger, and why she helps the white ladies when no one else will do so.



Shortly after Papaisi cures Margarita's stomachache, Joanna tells Alicia that it is very hard for her to change her ways and her heart, but that what she is learning from Alicia helps, and Alicia is glad. Alicia is happy when the white ladies start to wash their hair in the mornings, because it shows that what the people in the village think about them matters to them. She is also happy when it is Papaisi that cures Margarita and not something that Joanna finds in her book, because Alicia knows that it will make the two white ladies respect the Isabo more than they already do. Alicia wishes that they would not be so stingy with the rest of the villagers, but believes that in time they will learn not to be.



Chapters Ten - Twelve

Chapters Ten - Twelve Summary

Chapter 10. Later that day Nimeran returns from hunting with a large deer. After butchering the deer, Nimeran's wife Micasio gives Alicia's mother the intestines to make a stew, and divides the rest of the deer up between the village women. Nimeran brings a leg over to the white ladies as payment for the rifle cartridges they gave him. When Alicia's mother's stew is ready, Marco stands in the middle of the road and shouts for everyone to come and eat, and all of the villagers come with plates. Micasio's stew is ready a short time later and everyone takes their plates to her house and eats. Soon the entire village is full and content.

Later that night Alicia and Marco go to the old ladies' house while Alicia's mother watches Cami. Joanna and Margarita play some of their music on their tape recorder. While they are listening to the music, Joanna pulls a long piece of string from a small box and starts pulling it between each of her teeth. Alicia asks what the string is, and Joanna tells her it is called floss. When they see how strong it is, Marco asks for some to use as fishing line, and Alicia asks for some so she can make bracelets. Joanna gives them a whole box of it, and asks them not to tell everyone else because she doesn't want the whole village to come asking for floss. The next morning, the whole village comes to the white ladies' house, asking for the strong string.

Chapter Eleven. As the dry season nears its end, the white ladies prepare for Nonti to return and take them on his boat to Pucallpa, the nearest large city, where they will spend several weeks with friends. Alicia has never seen the two white ladies so excited and happy. Alicia goes to the river and bathes with them and when they come back to the house they give Alicia a very large bag of sugar for Cami. Later, while Alicia is talking with Chawa and Cuncha - the white ladies' cook - Margarita shouts that her watch is gone. When Alicia asks Cuncha if the watch has been stolen, Cuncha says that it was probably stolen by someone who does not want the white ladies to come back. She tells Alicia that many people are angry at the white ladies because they have promised to bring some people things when they return, but not others. Angel and Papaisi come over and try to help Margarita find the watch, but she gets angry and marches off into the jungle.

That afternoon, Angel blows the horn to call a village meeting. After asking Margarita some questions about the watch, Angel announces that the watch will reappear soon, and ends the meeting. The watch reappears that evening in the exact spot Margarita last saw it. Angel tells the white ladies that they should buy liquor and have a party to celebrate the return of the watch, but Margarita and Joanna become angry and refuse. That evening Angel blows the horn to call another meeting, but the white ladies refuse to go. The whole village gathers at Angel's house and people complain about the white ladies. Some want to tell them not to come back, but Papaisi says that they promised they could stay for a year, and they should keep their word. Angel says that the ladies



are too stingy, and that if they are gone for weeks and anything of theirs is missing when they return, they will blame the whole village. He says that the white ladies are selfish and ungrateful, and everyone agrees.

The next morning Angel goes to the white ladies and tells them that the village is ashamed about Margarita's watch being stolen, and that they don't want them to come back. After Angel leaves, Margarita cries for a long time while Joanna tries to comfort her, and then the two of them go to Alicia's house. While Margarita continues to cry, Joanna says that they are going to talk to everyone in the village. Alicia says that they must tell everyone that they want to come back, and that they will not be so stingy anymore. Alicia goes with them and at each house they visit the people say that they were not at the meeting last night and that they want them to come back, and then ask them to bring them something when they return. Later Angel calls another village meeting. Margarita says that she and Joanna very much want to come back to the village, and Joanna says that they will no longer be stingy because they have learned it is wrong. Everyone in the village agrees that they should come back, and the two white ladies go down to the river where a trader's boat is docked and buy liquor for a party. The next morning Nonti arrives, and the whole village goes to the river to wave goodbye and tell the white ladies to go and come back.

Chapter Twelve. Sometime after the white ladies leave, a large government boat comes to the village. The boat comes once a year to take young men into the army. When they hear the boat coming, all of the young men hide in the jungle, while the women hide their clothing. When the boat docks Alicia's mother greets the two government men who get off the boat in Isabo, which neither one understands. One of the men asks where all the men are in Spanish, and Alicia's mother tells them in Isabo that there are none left, the women have eaten them. The men then go from house to house, but find no men and finally go away. Several days later Alicia's father returns to the village for a few days and brings cloth, pots, and a new shotgun, and then leaves again to work on the plantation.

Several days later, Nonti brings the white ladies back to the village. As soon as he hears Nonti's boat is a couple of days away Papaisi blows the horn and gets a few men to start work on the white ladies' house again, and they have the roof started by the time they arrive. The white ladies bring the gifts they promised everyone with them, and then show everyone the pictures they have taken of the village and villagers with their camera. Elena then asks to see pictures of the white ladies' boyfriends, but they have not brought any. Alicia and Elena then ask if their boyfriends dance well, and do sex well, and Joanna and Margarita laugh and say that they do both well. The white ladies seem happier than before, and Alicia is glad that they are back.

Chapters Ten - Twelve Analysis

Even though Margarita and Joanna have learned a great deal from the Isabo they remain outsiders in the village in large part because they still do not understand the importance of the almost completely communal culture that is a key component of



virtually every part of Isabo life. When Nimeran brings back a deer from his hunt everyone in the village is given a piece, and later everyone shares what they have cooked with the rest of the village. No one has to ask for some of the meat; it is simply given to them. One of the things that many of the villagers resent about the white ladies is that they almost never give anyone anything without be asked, and that is considered to be very bad manners in Isabo culture. Although Alicia believes that their behavior is improving, most of the villagers still see them as very stingy and selfish. When they announce that they will be leaving for a few weeks some people - including Angel and Alicia's mother - hope that they do not come back while others - including Papaisi and Alicia - hope that they do come back.

When Margarita's watch is stolen none of the villagers understand why she is so upset since it is an old watch, and she can buy a new one during her trip to the city. Everyone in the village knows who stole the watch and when it is returned, everyone believes that the white ladies will do the proper thing and throw a large party to show their gratitude. When they refuse things finally come to a head and even though Papaisi, the headman, believes they should be allowed to stay, Angel argues that their stinginess and ungratefulness is affecting the entire village and putting a strain on everyone, and that they should be asked to leave. No one is completely certain how to ask them to leave, however, since no one has ever been asked to leave the village before.

When Angel tells them the next morning that the village does not want them to come back because everyone is too ashamed about the watch being stolen and they do not want to risk anything like that happening again, Margarita and Joanna finally understand that it is not the Isabo who need to change, but rather they who will need to adjust their way of thinking to the way the villagers think. Luckily, the Isabo are a forgiving and generous people and none of them are even willing to admit that they were at the meeting the night before when the two white ladies come to their houses to apologize. All of them, including Angel, are more than happy to allow them to come back after they say how much they want to live in the village and promise not to be so stingy anymore. The only exception is Alicia's mother who still believes that they are too much trouble. To Alicia's mother the village is good and everyone else is bad, and Alicia knows that she will always see things that way.



Chapters Thirteen - Fifteen

Chapters Thirteen - Fifteen Summary

Chapter Thirteen: Shortly after the white ladies return to the village the rains start, and work on their house stops. One day Joanna asks Alicia why her feet itch all the time, and Alicia asks if she has been walking barefoot in the mud. When she says that she has been, Alicia tells her that she now has worm eggs in her feet. Eventually the eggs will hatch and the worms will travel to her stomach. When Joanna becomes upset, Alicia tells her that everyone in the village has worms in their stomach, and that when the eggs hatch her feet won't itch anymore. When Joanna looks even more unhappy, Alicia reminds her that she can take the worm medicine that she and Margarita have been giving the villagers, and that will kill the worms. Joanna breathes a sigh of relief and then jokes that between the lice in her hair and the worms in her feet, she spends more time itching than she does working. She then asks where Cami is, and Alicia tells her that her mother has taken her to visit her brother's wife in Weesoshando, a village downriver.

That afternoon the rain stops for a while and the men get back to work on the house. Papaisi tells Margarita and Joanna that the workmen could use some oatmeal to eat, and the two white ladies immediately go and make some. Alicia's mother returns from downriver and tells her that Cami is a good girl and is learning to sit up by herself. Later that evening the rain starts again, and Joanna comes by where Elena and Alicia are talking and asks if Alicia's husband will be happy that he has a baby when he comes back. Alicia says that she has no husband - only her father says she has - but even if she did, Cami would not be his since he had no part in adopting her.

Chapter Fourteen. Over the next several weeks the men work on the house when the rain stops, and one of the white ladies always makes a pot of oatmeal for them without being asked. Finally, Papaisi tells the white ladies that the house is finished, and that it is time to have a party. That night the village gathers at the white ladies' house for the party, and Joanna gets the jug of liquor they have been saving. When one of the village men says that it is not liquor but river water after drinking it, everyone expects the white ladies to be mad that something has been stolen from them, but they are not and play their music on their tape recorder. Soon, all of the villagers are singing along to words they cannot understand and having a good time. The next morning the men build the white ladies a kitchen. Joanna and Cuncha, the cook, are happy with how fast they finish the kitchen, but Margarita says that it is not in line with the other kitchens in the village. Alicia tells Margarita that she is becoming a good Isabo and learning that symmetry is important, and together they go to Papaisi and ask him to move the kitchen so it is in line with all the others.

Several weeks later a plane carrying American missionaries lands on skis on the river. The villagers, along with Margarita and Joanna, greet them. The missionaries are two old white ladies and a man, and say they will only spend one night in the village. While



Margarita and Joanna talk with them, the man says something to Joanna that makes her very angry. When Alicia asks what the man said to her, Joanna says that he asked her if the Isabo women take care of their children, as if he couldn't tell just by looking at them. Later that evening Joanna, Margarita, Elena, and Alicia go to Angel's house, where the missionaries are staying, to visit. While Joanna and Margarita chat with them in English, the missionaries eat bacon they have brought with them, but don't offer to share any. When Alicia whispers to Joanna that it seems all of her people are stingy, Joanna agrees. One of the missionaries then gives Joanna and Margarita each a chocolate bar from a large box of candy they have brought with them. Joanna and Margarita each break off a small piece, then hand the rest to Alicia and Elena to share with the others who have come to watch. Joanna tells Alicia that the missionaries are very stingy, and Alicia agrees.

Later, after the missionaries tell the villagers that they should dig holes in the ground to "make their pui" (go to the bathroom) in and no longer do it in the river, they go to bed and a trader docks at the village. Margarita and Joanna buy a large bottle of liquor. They share it with everyone who is with them, and start to get drunk. The white ladies make fun of the missionaries coming all that way just to tell people where to make pui, and then Joanna borrows the trader's guitar and starts playing; soon, everyone is singing the words "shboom, shboom". Later, Joanna confesses that she is a little homesick and when Angel tells her she should be happy that there are people from her country visiting, she says that the missionaries are from her country but they are not her people.

Chapter Fifteen. Cami becomes sick with diarrhea. Alicia's mother tries to nurse her, but Cami is too weak. Alicia goes to the white ladies' house and they give her rice. Joanna asks if any of the medicine they have brought with them will help Cami, but Alicia says no. When she returns, Alicia's mother tells her that Cami has also started to vomit, and will not live much longer. Alicia boils rice, but Cami will not eat it. Nachi stops by and after Alicia tells her what is happening, Nachi says that Cami wants to die, and Alicia agrees. Alicia wants to be alone, and decides to take Cami to an old abandoned government building in the village called the Sanitario Post. Cami dies during the walk. Alicia sits in the Sanitario Post cradling Cami and crying. A few people walk by and see her, but leave her alone. Joanna comes over, and Alicia asks her to sit next to her. They sit in silence for a very long time until Nachi comes with a funeral urn. Nachi says that it is time to bury Cami, and that her adopted son Juan will take them upstream. Joanna starts to leave, but Alicia asks her to come with them to the burial, and she agrees.

They travel upriver in a canoe and when they reach the burial ground Juan digs a hole. When he is finished Alicia wraps Cami in her small shawl, puts her wintoti on her forehead, and then puts her in the urn. Juan covers the urn with earth, and they return to the village. Joanna returns to her house and immediately lies down, still crying; Alicia does not see her for the rest of the day. The next morning Margarita comes over and tells Alicia how sorry she is. Margarita says that in Joanna's family they mourn the dead for seven days, but that her people only mourn them for one day. Alicia says that the Isabo only mourn until the burial, and then don't speak of the death again. Later, Joanna comes over; she has been crying. She tries to talk about Cami, but Alicia does not want to talk about the child anymore because it makes her sad. She gets Joanna talking



about herself instead. Alicia's mother joins them and Joanna says that she was only six when her mother died, and that now both her parents are dead. Alicia's mother tells her that she and Joanna are both the same, orphans. When Alicia asks if now, because they are both orphans, Joanna is no longer so different from her, her mother remains silent.

Chapters Thirteen - Fifteen Analysis

Alicia cannot believe how much the two old white ladies have changed since returning from their trip to the city. Not only have they learned not to be stingy, but they have also learned that they should share without always having to be asked first, as is shown when they cook oatmeal for the men every day they work on their house. What amazes Alicia the most, however, is the fact that neither Joanna or Margarita becomes angry when they learn that the liquor they have been saving for the party when their house is completed has been stolen. Rather than yelling and making a scene as she did when her watch was stolen, Margarita simply accepts the fact, smiles, and makes a happy party with music, which is what an Isabo would have done.

The change in Joanna and Margarita is shown even more clearly when the American missionaries arrive in the village. Joanna becomes extremely angry when one of them asks if the Isabo take care of their children because the evidence of how happy and healthy the village children are is all around them, and the missionaries are simply too lazy and stupid to look and see it for themselves. Both she and Margarita are also offended by how stingy the missionaries are - both with them, and with the villagers. At one point when they are with the missionaries, Alicia can see in Joanna's face that she is ashamed because she realizes that she and Margarita used to be as stingy, stupid, and selfish as she now sees the missionaries are being. Later, after spending the whole evening with the missionaries, Joanna and Margarita need to get away from them. They spend time drinking and singing by the river with the other people in the village, and they enjoy that time more than the time they spent with their "own people".

When Cami dies Alicia is sad, but the Isabo are a practical people and she only allows herself to mourn and cry until the burial is over, as is their custom. She cannot understand why first Margarita and then Joanna come to her and try to talk about Cami, since being reminded of the child makes Alicia sad. She cannot even begin to understand why Joanna's "people" would put themselves through the pain of mourning for a full seven days. She senses that Joanna has problems dealing with death and, rather than allowing her to make her sad by talking about Cami again, Alicia gets Joanna talking first about her mother's death, and then her father's. When Alicia's mother hears that Joanna is an "orphan" just like she is, Alicia knows that her mother understands the old white lady better and feels closer to her than she ever has before, but when Alicia asks her about it her mother will not admit that it is true.



Chapters Sixteen - Seventeen

Chapters Sixteen - Seventeen Summary

Chapter 16. Later that afternoon Elena's younger sister Olivia comes to see the two white ladies with something her mother has made to trade. Margarita goes to get rice, and Olivia asks Joanna what color her dress is. Joanna tells her it is blue, but Olivia tells her that it is yellow. They go back and forth like this until Margarita returns, and after Olivia is gone Joanna asks Alicia why the girl kept saying her dress was yellow when it was really blue. Alicia says that Olivia was practicing lying, and that learning how to lie well is important since it is better to lie to a relative and tell them you do not have any food than it is to tell them you have food but they can't have any. That way, the relative might still be hungry, but their feelings are not hurt. Alicia then tells the white ladies that girls learn how to do things by watching their mothers do them first, and then trying themselves. Joanna says that her mother stayed home and raised her when she was alive, but never worked. Alicia cannot understand why Joanna thinks that writing in notebooks as she and Margarita do all day is work but that what her mother had done was not work.

Chapter Seventeen. The white ladies go to the city and come back one more time. The next time they leave it will be for good and they will not go on Nonti's boat, but in an airplane. Joanna visits Alicia and her mother every morning, and one morning Alicia's mother asks what Joanna will do when after she leaves. Joanna says that she will write about what she has learned from the Isabo, but Alicia's mother says she should make babies instead. Joanna and Margarita spend a lot of time making lists and deciding who they will give their things to when they leave. They tell Alicia that they will give her and Elena their sleeping bags, but do not say who will get the rest of their things. Many of the things they will give away are things nobody wants, but Alicia does not tell them this because she doesn't want to hurt their feelings.

One day Alicia's mother tells her that Alicia's husband and her sister will be coming back to the village soon. Alicia does not think that she is ready to be a wife, and does not want to have more children so soon after losing Cami. Alicia is glad that she will be seeing her older sister Maya, who is also married to the man her father has promised her to, but she does not want to see the old man she is supposed to marry. Later when Elena says that she heard that Alicia's husband is coming, Alicia says she is not married and that she never wants to be married. Elena tells her not to be silly; whether their husbands are home or not, everyone is married.

Nimeran returns from hunting and gives the two white ladies a live baby land turtle. The day before they are supposed to leave, the white ladies pack the things they will take with them; they have already given most of what they had away, and Alicia is happy that they have done things right. That night, Joanna comes to Alicia's house and gives her a silver ring that looks like a fish which she has worn the entire time she and Margarita have been in the village. She tells her that she had a dream the night before that Alicia



was with her in New York, and that they were going on a canoe trip together. The next morning, after breakfast, the white ladies sit on the riverbank waiting for the plane. While they are waiting, Joanna washes the baby land turtle in the river, and Alicia tells her that because she did that it will rain and the plane will not come. Margarita laughs and tells her that it will not rain just because Joanna washed a turtle, but later it starts to rain and the plane does not come.

The plane does not come for the next few days. To pass the time Alicia and her mother try to teach the white ladies how to make pots, while Nachi teaches them how to embroider, and Elena shows them how to weave mats. Finally Marco hears the plane, and the white ladies hurry down to the river. After the plane lands Joanna speaks to the pilot and then tells Alicia that they have time for her to go up in the plane and see her village from the air, like a bird sees it. Although she is frightened, Alicia gets into the plane with Joanna and soon they are flying. Alicia sees how large the jungle is, and how high the mountains are, and how the river twists and turns, and how small her village looks in comparison to everything else. When the plane lands again Alicia sees that her village looks the same, but she also knows that it looks different when you have a different view. She hugs Joanna, and then tells her to go and come back, and waves to the two white ladies as the plane takes off again.

Chapters Sixteen - Seventeen Analysis

As their time in the village comes to an end, Joanna and Margarita prepare to give most of what they have brought with them away. Even though none of the villagers are interested in a lot of what they are planning to give away - and she herself cannot ever imagine sleeping in the bag they are planning on giving her - Alicia understands that they are trying to do the right thing and act like the Isabo act, and so doesn't tell them. Over the previous few months, since their first trip back to the city, the two white ladies have worked hard to fit in with the rest of the village. As the time draws near for them to leave everyone has come to accept and like them, including Alicia's mother. Even though life will go on as usual after they leave, many people in the village will miss the two white ladies, and no one will ever forget them.

Joanna feels closer to Alicia than anyone else in the village and wants to give her something special. When Joanna invites her to fly over the village with her, she tells Alicia that she knows they will never take the canoe trip together in New York like she dreamed about, and that the short flight will be their trip together. Alicia is amazed by what she sees, and the reader is left with the belief that the short flight gives her a new perspective on things that she will never forget as long as she lives, and that this is the greatest gift Joanna could have given her.



Characters

Alicia

Alicia is a young Isabo girl around 12 or 13 years of age (no exact ages are given for any of the characters in the novel) who lives in the tiny village of Poincushmana. The village sits along the Paro River in the Amazon jungle of Peru. Alicia is smart, generous, and kind although at the start of the novel she is timid, and believes that she is ugly because she is not short and fat like her beautiful best friend, Elena. Alicia's father has promised her to the same man who is married to her older sister, but he lives downriver and Alicia still lives with her mother, younger brother Marco, and another infant brother. Throughout the story Alicia says that she has no husband, and does not believe that she is ready to stop being a child yet and become a wife. Early in the novel Alicia adopts a nawa (outsider) baby to keep it from being killed by its father, and names her Cami. Cami is thin and sickly, and most of the people in the village think she is crazy for trying to raise it, although most of the village women do help her whenever they can. Although Alicia tries to help her grow strong and healthy, Cami eventually dies.

When the "two old white ladies" - anthropologists from the United States named Joanna and Margarita - arrive and spend a year in the village studying the Isabo, Alicia befriends them and tries to help them fit in with the rest of the village. Even though they have hired Elena to teach them the Isabo language and another woman from the village to cook for them, it is Alicia who instinctively understands that they are lonely and frightened and who helps them to realize the mistakes they are making. In particular, she teaches them why their "stinginess" is so offensive to the people in the village. During the year they are there Alicia becomes particularly close to Joanna, who is there to "study babies". When Cami dies, Alicia asks Joanna to go with her to bury the child and later, when it is time for the two white ladies to leave, Joanna arranges for Alicia to take a short ride in an airplane, which gives her a new and different perspective on the world.

Joanna

Joanna is one of the "two old white ladies" who come to Alicia's village to live with the Isabo for a year and study their unique, primitive culture. Joanna is actually in her late twenties, and has come to the village to study how the Isabo raise their children. Joanna is short and chubby, plays the guitar, and is the more emotional of the two white ladies; she cries when she is happy as well as when she is sad, which is something Alicia cannot understand. Alicia feels closer to Joanna almost from the beginning and spends more time talking with her than she does with Margarita. Joanna seems to be the more understanding of the two, and even though both are perceived as stingy and selfish by the Isabo for much of the novel, she is very generous when it comes to giving Alicia sugar for Cami. It is Joanna who first learns that it is wrong to be stingy and selfish, and late in the story becomes ashamed when she sees how greedy and mean some



missionaries who visit the village are, and realizes that she and Margarita had acted in exactly the same way when they first arrived.

Joanna accompanies Alicia and Nachi when they bury Cami. She is very upset when Cami dies, and continues to cry and mourn her loss long after Alicia - who, like all Isabo, only mourns the dead up to the burial - has stopped. Joanna's mother died when she was very young, and she has always had trouble dealing with death. During her final months in the village Joanna becomes very close to Alicia and right before she and Margarita leave, she arranges for Alicia to fly over her village in an airplane, which gives Alicia a whole new perspective.

Margarita

Margarita is the second of the "two old white ladies" and, like Joanna, is in her late 20s. Margarita is quite tall and has blond hair, which Alicia's friend Elena makes fun of when they first arrive in the village. She is also an anthropologist who has come to the village to study agriculture and hunting and spends a lot of time measuring gardens and weighing the meat the hunters bring back from their hunts. She is less emotional than Joanna, although she does occasionally lose her temper, which is something the Isabo rarely do. After her watch is stolen she loses her temper and makes a large scene, which results in the white ladies being asked to leave the village and not come back - although they are allowed to stay after they apologize. Along with Joanna, Margarita learns not to be selfish and stingy, and at one point near the end of the book Alicia tells her that she is "turning into a good Isabo."

Alicia's Mother (not named)

Alicia's mother is a smart, sarcastic, and very capable and generous woman. Although she calls Alicia crazy for adopting a nawa baby, since she is still nursing Alicia's youngest brother she (along with the other nursing mothers in the village) breastfeeds Cami, and helps Alicia care for her. For most of the book she does not like or trust the two old white ladies; she believes that they are stingy, silly, and selfish and that they will never change. She says several times that she wishes that they would leave the village and never come back. In her eyes, her family and village are good, and everyone else is bad. Eventually she softens towards the two white ladies - particularly Joanna, who has coffee with her and Alicia every morning during the last few months she is in the village. However, even though Alicia's mother comes to like and accept the white ladies, she still believes they are both very silly.

Elena

Elena is Alicia's cousin and best friend. They are both about the same age and have grown up in the village together. Alicia thinks Elena is very beautiful because she is short and fat. At one point she believes that she is pregnant and tells Alicia that she is afraid and not ready to become an old lady yet, but it turns out that she is mistaken.



Elena has a quick sense of humor and likes to make fun of everything, and tells Alicia that she should laugh more and have more fun. She is braver than Alicia about many things, and when the two white ladies first arrive in the village Elena jumps in the boat and starts to make fun of Margarita's blond hair, while Alicia is too timid to even go down and meet them. Later, the two white ladies hire Elena to teach them to speak Isabo.

Angel

Angel is the village school teacher, and the most "educated" person in the village. Angel has two wives, and several children. When Joanna and Margarita first come to the village, they are taken to Angel's house where he gives Joanna his old guitar to play. When Margarita's watch is stolen shortly before they are to leave the village for a short visit to the city, Angel asks her many questions about it, and then announces that the watch will reappear. After the watch reappears, Angel sees that the white ladies are not grateful and calls a village meeting where he says that they should ask the white ladies to go and not come back. Later he, like the rest of the village, accepts their apology, tells them that they should come back, and is happy when they do.

Papaisi

Papaisi is the headman, the leader of the village. It is Papaisi who makes the initial decision to let the white ladies stay in the village, and later says that they should be allowed to stay when Angel says that they should be asked to go and not come back. Papaisi also oversees the building of the old white ladies' house; it is right next to his house, and takes several months to build because no work is done when the white ladies are not in the village, or when it rains. When Margarita becomes sick with stomach pains, Papaisi cures her by driving a "tree spirit" out of her. When they are getting ready to leave the village for the last time, Papaisi asks for the white ladies' strong mosquito netting, which they promise to give him.

Nonti

Nonti is Alicia's mother's brother's wife's brother, and owns a small boat. It is Nonti who first brings the old white ladies to the village, and later takes them back and forth twice to Pucallpa - the nearest large city - where they visit their friends for several weeks at a time. For the first few days the white ladies are in the village it is Nonti who does the most to help them adjust; he explains to them why it is important that they have a party, and later tells them how much they should pay Elena to teach them Isabo and Cuncha to cook for them. When Nonti leaves to go back downriver the white ladies are sad, because he is the first Isabo they trust.



Nachi

Nachi is Alicia's mother's sister, and is the first person who encourages Alicia after she decides to adopt Cami, and the first to tell her that Cami is beautiful. Nachi is a kind and compassionate woman and has adopted several children that she has raised as her own, including a nawa baby like Cami. She tells Alicia that she must name the baby if she wants it to live, and then pierce her nose and flatten her forehead so she will grow to be more beautiful. When Cami dies, Nachi brings a funeral urn and has her adopted son Juan take her, Alicia, and Joanna to the burial ground in his canoe.

Nimeran

Nimeran is an "old man", and one of the best hunters in the village. Shortly after the two white ladies arrive he trades them a portion of the meat he brings back from his hunts in return for cartridges for his rifle. Nimeran is a kind man, and is one of the few people in the village who calls Cami Alicia's baby, which Alicia appreciates. During one of the parties the white ladies host Nimeran gets very drunk and says that he wishes he could go back to their country with them when Joanna and Margarita leave and see everything he has never seen before he dies. Everyone is amazed that the old man has such dreams.

Chawa

Chawa is Papaisi's youngest daughter and the third wife of one of the village men (unnamed). Papaisi has Joanna and Margarita stay with Chawa and her children in her house during the months that their house is being built. At first Chawa is delighted that the two old white ladies will be staying with her, because she is certain that they will share all of their things with her. Later, Chawa spends a great deal of time complaining about how stingy the white ladies are, and how they do not give her or her children anything.

Paco and Carmella

Paco is a trader who works along the Paro River, and Carmella is his wife. Paco docks at Alicia's village, where he sells Angel some sugarcane liquor. Late that night, Alicia finds Carmella sitting by the river, cradling her baby and crying. She tells Alicia that Paco is drunk, and that when he comes back he will drown the baby, because he thinks it is not his. Alicia agrees to take the baby and raise it. Carmella gives the baby to her, and later Alicia names her Cami.



Marco

Marco is Alicia's younger brother. He is a bright, energetic, and friendly boy who immediately takes a liking to the two old white ladies, although he teases them a lot. Marco has the sharpest ears in the village, and is always the first one to hear when a boat is coming up the river to the village, or when an airplane is flying overhead.

Cami

Cami is the name Alicia gives to the baby she takes from Carmella. Cami is sickly and skinny, but Alicia does her best to help her get strong and healthy, and many of the other village women help her. Even though she seems to be getting strong, Cami eventually gets sick and dies. Alicia asks Joanna to come with her to the burial. Joanna agrees, but is very upset by the child's death.

Cuncha

Cuncha is Alicia's mother's sister's daughter, and is hired by Joanna and Margarita to be their cook. She, like Chawa, spends a lot of time complaining about how stingy the old white ladies are, but does nothing to help them learn what they are doing wrong. When Margarita's watch is stolen, Cuncha tells Alicia that she thinks it was stolen by someone who hopes that the white ladies will go and never come back.



Objects/Places

Boats/Canoes

Boats and canoes are the main form of transportation for the Isabo. Margarita and Joanna travel back and forth from the village on Nonti's motorboat. Alicia, Joanna, and Nachi are taken upriver in a canoe when they bury Cami.

Sugarcane Liquor

The Isabo drink sugarcane liquor during the parties that they have. Margarita and Joanna only let the villagers drink half of the sugarcane liquor they bring with them during the party when they first come to the village, which results in their being thought of as stingy.

Beads

Joanna and Margarita bring many bags of beads with them to trade with the Isabo. Shortly after their arrival, most of their beads are taken by the Isabo women during what becomes known as "the day of the beads."

Batteries

Angel asks Joanna and Margarita for batteries for his old record player so there will be music at a party.

Medicine

Joanna and Margarita bring a number of different medicines, which they give to the villagers.

Horn

Papaisi blows a large horn any time he wants to call a village meeting.

Tape Recorder

Joanna and Margarita often play music from their country on a tape recorder.



Guitar

Joanna plays the guitar. At one point in the story the whole village sings "shboom, shboom" while she plays.

Wintoti

A wintoti is a cloth covered board used to flatten the foreheads of baby Isabo girls to make them beautiful. Nachi gives Alicia an old wintoti so she can make Cami beautiful.

Sugar

Joanna gives Alicia sugar for Cami.

Lice

Alicia and her mother pick lice out of Joanna and Margarita's hair.

Thatch

The roofs of the houses in the village are made of thatch. When the two white ladies first arrive in the Isabo village, Elena makes fun of Margarita's blond hair, saying that it looks like thatch.

Meat

The village men are often away, hunting for meat. When Nimeran bring back a large deer, the meat is shared by all of the villagers.

Notebooks

Margarita and Joanna spend a lot of time writing what they learn about the Isabo in notebooks.

Airplane

Joanna and Margarita leave the village for the last time in an airplane. Before they leave, Joanna arranges for Alicia to fly above the village and see the world from a different perspective.



Dental Floss

Alicia and her brother Marco ask the two white ladies for dental floss to use as fishing line and to make bracelets. The next day everyone in the village comes asking for floss.

Ring

Joanna wears a ring that looks like a fish. Before she leaves, she gives this ring to Alicia.

Anthropologists

Joanna and Margarita are anthropologists who come to Alicia's village to study the Isabo.

Poincushmana

Poincushmana is a village on the Paro River in the Amazon jungle of Paro; this is where the novel is set.

Weesoshando

Weesoshando is a small village a little way down river from Poincushmana. Alicia's mother visits Weesoshando with Cami.

Pucallpa

Pucallpa is a large city several days downriver from Alicia's village. Joanna and Margarita make several trips to Pucallpa during the year they live with the Isabo.

New York City

Joanna and Margarita are from New York City. This is where they are going when they leave the village for the final time.



Themes

Family/Community

One of the central themes of "Go and Come Back" is the importance of family and community in Isabo life. In fact, to the Isabo, family and community are the same thing; Alicia's village is made up of one large extended family and everyone is related to everyone else either by blood or by marriage. Alicia and the other villagers find it very strange that Joanna and Margarita would want travel so far away from their own families, and they find it even stranger that the two of them are not related to each other. Although they are familiar with the word "amigo" in Spanish, there is no word for "friend" in the Isabo language. To the Isabo there is only "caibo" (family) and "nawa" (outsider). The character who best shows how outsiders and family are thought of differently is Alicia's mother who for most of the book believes that her caibo is good, and everyone else is bad.

Although by the end of the novel Margarita and Joanna are accepted and even liked by most of the villagers - including Alicia's mother - they always remain outsiders and never truly become part of the village. The same is true for Cami; even though Alicia's mother and the other women in the village nurse and help Alicia to care for the child, she is continually referred to as Alicia's nawa baby and thought of as an outsider by most of the villagers. This severe division of people into family and everyone else is basic to Isabo culture, and in large part makes the Isabo who they are.

Cultural Differences

When Joanna and Margarita first come to Alicia's village, they bring a set of Western values and beliefs with them that are, in most ways, completely different from the values and beliefs of the Isabo. Joanna and Margarita cling to these values throughout much of the novel and, as a result, are not truly accepted by the villagers, with the exception of Alicia who believes that they will change in time and tries to show them what they are doing wrong. The most obvious example of the differences between the old white ladies and the Isabo - and the one that is shown most frequently during the course of the story - is the different way in which possessions and sharing what one has with others is viewed.

Joanna and Margarita are looked upon as stingy by the Isabo because they do not immediately share everything they have with everyone else in the village. While the idea of saving things for later and keeping what they have brought with them for themselves will be very familiar to the reader, to Alicia and the other Isabo it is a completely foreign and unacceptable behavior. In Isabo culture when you have food you eat it, and if you have extra you share it with everyone else so that when they have extra they will share with you. When a hunter brings home a deer, everyone in the village is given some of the meat; they don't have to ask for it, it is simply given. Slowly, Joanna and Margarita



accept and embrace the way that the Isabo live, and come to understand and respect their culture and values. It is only after they learn to think and act like the Isabo that they are truly accepted by the people in the village.

Growing Up/Coming of Age

Even though Alicia is still very young by Western standards (at one point she says that her "blood has come three times", indicating that she is around 12 or 13 years of age) she has already been promised to the same "old man" who is married to her older sister by her father. Everyone in the village - including her mother and her cousin Elena - refers to this man as her "husband" even though she does not yet live with him. Alicia says several times that the old man is not her husband, and refuses to discuss the idea of being married to him even with Elena, who is herself married to another old man that she does not live with. In Isabo culture, soon after a girl's "blood comes", she is expected to marry and start having children.

Alicia is frightened by the fact that she is growing up, and that soon she will have to become a wife and mother - which she sees as being the "last part" of her life. She does not believe that she has been a child for long enough yet, and does not think that she is ready to be a wife and mother. However, throughout the novel Alicia shows the very qualities of responsibility and compassion that are needed to be a good mother as she adopts and cares for Cami and, to a lesser extent, as she adopts Joanna and Margarita and tries to teach them what they need to know to fit in with the Isabo. By the end of the novel, even though she still does not want to be a wife and mother, she has grown as a result of her experiences with Cami and the two old white ladies, and the reader is left with the belief that she will be able to handle whatever life brings her.



Style

Point of View

"Go and Come Back" is written in the first person point of view; the narrator is a young Isabo girl named Alicia, who is around 12 or 13 years of age. All of the action and events in the novel are presented as Alicia sees and understands them from the cultural perspective of an Isabo native. The novel is written as though the action, events, and conversations have just recently happened, and there is no foreshadowing of events that are to come. There are also no major "flashback" scenes, although there are occasionally references to things that have happened in the past. Alicia continually offers her own observations and comments on events during the course of the story.

The narrative is a mix of descriptive prose and dialogue, and is written in a way that allows the reader to see the world through Alicia's eyes, from the perspective of an Isabo villager, and helps the reader to understand and care about the narrating character. It is also written in a way that compels the reader to step outside of their own cultural perspective (i.e., the "civilized" culture of the United States) and view the events in the story through the eyes of someone from a more "primitive" culture. This different perspective is crucial to the overall storyline, and allows the reader to see things in a way that he or she never has before.

Setting

"Go and Come Back" is set in the fictional Isabo village of Poincushmana, which is located along the Paro River, deep in the Amazon jungle of Peru. The village is very small - at one point the narrator says that there are only 18 houses in the village - and is located several days' journey by boat from the nearest city, although several other small villages are located less than a day away. Although the village is remote, it is often visited by traders who come up the river with sugarcane liquor and other things to sell; the village is also occasionally visited by "government men" looking to take young Isabo men into the army, and by Christian missionaries. In a short paragraph before the beginning of the first chapter the author states that the novel is based on events that happened in the early 1970s, although the exact year is not mentioned nor would knowing it have any impact on the reader's understanding or enjoyment of the story.

With the exception of one short scene that takes place deeper in the jungle (when Alicia, Joanna, Nachi, and Juan go to the burial place to bury Cami) and another short scene in which Alicia takes an airplane ride with Joanna, all of the action takes place in the village. The village is described as being built with a symmetrical design; all of the houses are set in a row, then there is a wide path, and then all of the kitchens are set in a row on the bank of the river. The houses are described as having four support posts, a floor and a roof, but no walls and no furniture. The "kitchens" are simply a cleared space



for an open fire covered by a tiny roof, and are separated from the houses by the path for safety.

Language and Meaning

The language used in this novel is informal, conversational, and very easy to read. It is what one would expect from a 12 or 13 year old narrator, and the novel can be understood and enjoyed by readers this age and up. The descriptive passages are short and to the point, and the author does a particularly good job of keeping the dialogue understandable while at the same time giving it a uniquely "Isabo" flavor.

There is no profanity used in the novel, and there are no violent or sexually explicit scenes. Bodily functions, sexual organs, and sexual activity are mentioned and/or discussed at various times in the narrative, but these instances are always appropriate to the story and are handled tastefully (and sometimes quite amusingly) by the author. The language used in the book should not be offensive to even the most sensitive readers.

Throughout the narrative Alicia uses Isabo words ("nawa" for outsider, "caibo" for family, etc) as well as some longer phrases in Isabo ("Hainqui mia itai" meaning "Are you here?"), but these words and phrases are always immediately translated, and the reader never becomes confused or lost. The use of these Isabo words and phrases is very appropriate to the plot as they help to reinforce the fact that the story is being presented by an Isabo, and the action is being seen through her eyes and from her unique perspective.

Structure

"Go and Come Back" is 177 pages long and is divided into seventeen chapters which range from four pages to nineteen pages in length. Most of the longer chapters are divided into one or more untitled subchapters. Each chapter contains both dialogue and descriptive prose. The novel takes place over the course of one year. In some cases the amount of time that passes between events is given ("The next morning...", "Three days later ...", etc) while at other times the narrative simply starts up again after a chapter or subchapter break without the amount of time that has passed since the last event or chapter being noted.

The novel has one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows Alicia's attempts to help Joanna and Margarita, anthropologists from the United States, fit in with the Isabo people and learn how to behave as they spend a year living in an Isabo village in the Amazon jungle of Peru. One subplot involves Alicia adopting a "nawa" baby to save her from being murdered by her father. Another subplot involves Alicia's fears as she reaches the end of her childhood and understands that she must soon become a wife and mother. The main plot comes to a conclusion with the departure of Joanna and Margarita from the village at the end of one year, and the first subplot is

resolved with Cami's death. The subplot that deals with the impending changes in Alicia's life is left unresolved.



Quotes

"Elena was beautiful - short, fat, with round cheeks and a big hearty laugh." Chapter One, p. 3

"I wondered if all old women thought of themselves as beautiful, or did they sing these songs to make the spirits think they were." Chapter Three, p. 21

"You might kill a boy baby, if he were deformed or you didn't want another child. But no Isabo had ever killed a girl child." Chapter Four, p. 27

"The old man had been bragging, of course. He had seven daughters and only one son - a powerful man, a man to be reckoned with, a man who had seven sons-in-law to work for him and only one child he had to give away to work for someone else." Chapter Six, p. 41

"These women were going to study babies! They didn't even understand how to make one. Unbelievable." Chapter Eight, p. 63

"I was glad Papaisi cured Margarita. I was glad that it was Papaisi, not Joanna with her book. It gave both the old ladies a respect for us that they had not had before." Chapter Nine, p. 73

"When people have enough meat, everything else seems much better - your husband looks younger, almost handsome, your children smile and look fat ... and the old people don't seem so close to death." Chapter Ten, p. 82

"No one knew what to do. We had never had strangers living among us, so we had never asked them to leave. And no one of us had ever been so troublesome that we had asked him to leave either." Chapter Eleven, p. 97

"'Where are the men?' the little one asked in Spanish. 'We ate them all, no more left,' my mother answered in Isabo, pretending not to understand Spanish. 'We only eat the young ones. Very good and juicy. Once they are old, we don't want them anymore. Too tough, like alligator skin.'" Chapter Twelve, p. 110

"Who cares if your husband is not nice. Husbands are not supposed to be nice. They are supposed to clear your gardens and bring home meat." Chapter Thirteen, p. 125

"'So ALL of your people are stingy,' I whispered to Joanna. She took her eyes off the bacon and looked at me. 'It seems so, doesn't it?' Joanna whispered back." Chapter Fourteen, p. 137

"The plane stopped and we were back in my old world and it looked the same as when we left it, but now I knew it also looked different when you looked at it from another view." Chapter Seventeen, p. 177



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the Isabo. How are the "two old white ladies" different from them? How are they the same? Why do Margarita and Joanna want to live in the Isabo village for a year? Why do the Isabo think that they are stingy and selfish? Why do the Isabo think they are "fun to watch?" Why do the Isabo think they are ignorant? Are they?

Why does Alicia befriend Joanna and Margarita? Why does she try to teach them how to behave when no one else will? Why does she feel sorry for them? Do they appreciate what she tries to do for them? Do they listen to her advice? Does she really help them?

Why do Joanna and Margarita want to study the Isabo? What do they hope to learn? Why does the village decide at one point that they want Joanna and Margarita to go and not come back? Why do they change their minds? How do Joanna and Margarita change during the year they spend in the village with the Isabo? Are they satisfied with what they learn?

Discuss why Alicia decides to adopt Cami. Why does Alicia's mother think that she is crazy for doing so? Why does Alicia's mother - and most of the other women in the village - help Alicia take care of Cami? Does Alicia love Cami? Why does Nachi understand why Alicia adopts the child? How does Nachi help Alicia?

How do the Isabo deal with death? How does this differ from the way that Joanna and Margarita deal with death? Why does Alicia ask Joanna to come with her to Cami's burial? Why is Joanna so upset by Cami's death? Why does Alicia get Joanna to start talking about her mother and father's deaths when she comes over the day after Cami's burial?

Discuss Alicia's feelings about growing up. Why is she afraid that she is entering "the last part of her life?" Why does she continually say that she does not have a husband? Is this true? Why does she fear being married and having children of her own? Does she have any foundation for her fears? Does she have any other choices?

Discuss the relationship between Alicia and Joanna. Why is Alicia closer to Joanna than she is to Margarita by the end of the book? Why does Alicia's mother finally come to accept Joanna? In the end, does Alicia finally think of Joanna as part of her "caibo"? Why does Joanna arrange for Alicia to fly over the village in a plane? What does she hope Alicia will get from the experience? What does Alicia learn?