

Waiting for the Rain Study Guide

Waiting for the Rain by Sheila Gordon

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Plot Summary

Waiting for the Rain is a novel of South Africa by writer Sheila Gordon. In this novel, the main character is Tengo, a young black boy who grows up on a farm owned by a white family. Tengo is friends with the young nephew of the farmer, but as the two boys grow older Tengo becomes aware of differences in the way he and the nephew are treated. Tengo begins to read and to become educated, causing these differences to become more and more evident. Finally, Tengo finds himself embroiled in the student revolution taking place against the white government and face to face with his old friend. Waiting for the Rain is a story of the terrible toll the struggles in South Africa had on its youngest victims, the children.

Frikkie prefers the adventures in the country he finds on his uncle's farm to the rigors of school in the city. Each time he comes to the farm on his school vacations, he first checks on each of his favorite animals before searching for his good friend, Tengo. Frikkie and Tengo, the son of his uncle's boss-boy, have been playmates since they were only three years old. Tengo is as much a part of the farm as Frikkie's favorite milking cow.

Tengo is a willing playmate to Frikkie despite the differences between them. Tengo is not allowed to dine with Frikkie in the main house even though his own mother prepared the food. Tengo is more knowledgeable about the farm than Frikkie as he is the one to teach Frikkie how to milk the cows. Frikkie returns this favor by teaching Tengo how to swim.

As Tengo grows older, he aches to learn. Tengo's mother is afraid to send him away to school because her older child died shortly after leaving the farm to attend classes. However, Tengo's mother manages to convince a sister to ask her employer for some old schoolbooks. Tengo devours these books and they begin to open his eyes to some of the inequalities taking place right before his eyes. In fact, Tengo discovers that his old friend Frikkie and his uncle misunderstand the history of their own country, allowing them to continue discriminating against Tengo and members of his race.

Tengo finally convinces his parents to allow him to go to Johannesburg to attend school. Tengo is so far behind in his studies that he studies constantly in an attempt to catch up. Tengo hopes to earn a first class matriculation and win a scholarship to college. However, in the year before Tengo is to write his matriculation, unrest breaks out in the city. Students begin staging protests against the government. The schools are soon shut down and Tengo finds himself forced to choose between loyalty to his friends and his desire to learn.

Tengo misses his matriculation exam but learns that a beloved cousin works with the African National Congress. Through the ANC, this cousin can arrange for Tengo to go overseas to continue his education. Tengo is frightened and excited all at once by this opportunity. However, shortly before he is due to leave, there is a gathering after the funeral of several children killed during a protest. Tengo arrives to find soldiers



attempting to break up the meeting. Tengo finds himself filled with so much anger that he begins throwing stones at soldiers firing guns at the unarmed civilians.

One of the soldiers is killed by an unseen gunman. Tengo flees, but finds himself pursued by a soldier. Tengo hides in a shed only to be chased there by the soldier. Tengo hits the soldier on the head with a broken tire iron. After taking the soldier's gun, Tengo comes to realize this soldier is his old friend Frikkie. Tengo and Frikkie talk, sharing memories, but also debating the protests going on outside. Finally Tengo makes the decision to let Frikkie go. On his part, Frikkie makes the conscious choice not to turn Tengo in to his fellow soldiers.



Part 1: Chapters 1-2

Part 1: Chapters 1-2 Summary

This novel's author lived in South Africa as a child and uses her personal experiences to draw from for the plot of this novel.

In chapter one, Frederiek, or Frikkie, arrives at his uncle's farm during his school break and quickly rushes around to check all his favorite animals and play sports. Frikkie then goes in search of Tengo, the son of his uncle's boss-boy and the household cook. Frikkie rushes down to the kraal to find Tengo. Frikkie is treated with a great deal of respect by all who meet him because it is well known that he will one day inherit the farm from his childless uncle.

In chapter two, Tengo is outside his family's small hut, working with a hunk of clay, when Frikkie finds him. Tengo and Frikkie go swimming in the small river where Frikkie taught Tengo to swim a few summers ago. They discuss the sea and what it would be like to one day see it. Frikkie tells Tengo that he does not plan to do much travel when he is older. Frikkie simply wants to get through his matriculation exam so that he can come to live on the farm permanently.

Frikkie is called to the main house for tea. Tengo does some chores before he is called to have his tea behind the house, a tea that is made up of the leftovers of the oubaas tea. Later, Frikkie asks Tengo to teach him how to milk a cow. The two boys make a mess, so Tengo's father Timothy takes over Frikkie's lessons. Afterward, Tengo serves up a mug of fresh milk for Frikkie to drink before having a drink himself.

Part 1: Chapters 1-2 Analysis

The two main characters are introduced in these chapters. Frikkie is the privileged, white nephew of the oubaas, the owner of the farm. Frikkie is a city child with all the privileges that entails, including free schooling. Frikkie, however, does not appreciate this education. Frikkie only wants to live on the farm and take care of the animals all day. On the other hand, Tengo is the son of the black family who works for and cares for the farm and the oubaas. Tengo cannot go to school unless his parents can pay for it, something that is difficult for a couple making very little in their jobs. Tengo dreams of the world outside of the farm, eager to learn and to explore his world.

Other than the personality differences between these two characters, the reader also quickly becomes aware of the differences in the treatment of the blacks as opposed to the whites. Tengo is not allowed to eat inside the main house with Frikkie. Tengo is not allowed free schooling. Tengo lives in a tiny, dirt floored hut while Frikkie lives in a large, splendid home. It is clear there is a class difference between the whites and the blacks in this novel, a difference that will prove to be the conflict that will drive the plot of this novel.



Part 1: Chapters 3-4

Part 1: Chapters 3-4 Summary

In chapter three, Frikkie reluctantly returns to school, leaving Tengo without his playmate on the farm. Tengo finds himself thinking about Frikkie's attitude about school and his own inability to attend classes. There is a school nearby where his parents could send him, but Tengo's older sister became ill and died while away at school, so his parents are reluctant to allow Tengo to go as well. Tengo finds himself filled with questions for which he can find no answers, leaving him frustrated.

Tengo's cousin Joseph from Johannesburg has been ill, so his mother sends him to the farm for some rest and country air. Tengo spends those few weeks with his cousin playing and teaching Joseph to swim. Tengo is fascinated by the city, but Joseph tells him it is not such a great place to live. When Joseph returns home, Tengo's mother sends a note to her sister asking that she might ask her employer to send some old schoolbooks for Tengo to read.

In chapter four, when Joseph returns to Johannesburg, he goes straight to the home of his mother's employer, Dr. David Miller. Dr. Miller is kind, often providing medical care to his employees and their families. When Joseph's mother reads the note from her sister, she immediately asks Dr. Miller's wife about the books. Mrs. Miller agrees to send many of the old books her five children have discarded over the years.

Part 1: Chapters 3-4 Analysis

Tengo has reached an age when he has become aware of many things around him and how much he does not understand about the world at large. Tengo wants to learn, he aches to find answers for the many questions that plague him. However, school for Tengo is out of the question not only because of the cost, but because his mother is reluctant to allow him to leave her home after losing not one, but two children.

Tengo learns from a cousin what life in the city is like for a black person. The reader will note the unfair practice of forcing the blacks to carry papers with them everywhere they go in the city. These people are even forced to have permission to live in the city with their families, to have permission to apply for specific jobs. When a black man loses his job, he is often forced to leave the city even if his wife and children remain in the city. It is a sad situation that Tengo is beginning to understand is inherently unfair.



Part 1: Chapters 5-6

Part 1: Chapters 5-6 Summary

In chapter five, a large box arrives for Tengo at the farm. Tengo waits until that evening to unpack it, excited to pick among the many volumes for the first book he will read. Tengo struggles at first, realizing that Frikkie's six-year-old sister reads faster than him, but within a short time he discovers he can read quite quickly. The Millers send a second box of books to Tengo, but then no more. Several years pass. One day, the outhouse is trimming meat from a kudu buck to make biltong. As Frikkie and Tengo help, the outhouse tells the story of the Great Trek. Afterward, as Tengo is left to shoo away flies while Frikkie and the outhouse have their tea, Tengo reflects on how the outhouse told the story in such a way as to make the natives, Tengo's ancestors, the enemy. In truth, the natives simply did not understand the Boers ways and this is why they attempted to drive them from lands the Boers thought they had purchased.

Tengo is beginning to feel some resentment toward the outhouse, a resentment that falls on Frikkie as well. When Frikkie comes to tell Tengo about a new calf born in the night, he finds a clay model of a bull Tengo has made. Frikkie insists on taking the model even though Tengo is clearly reluctant to let it go. Later that night, the outhouse and his wife discuss the growing distance in Tengo's attitude. They both fear Tengo's desire to be educated will only lead to trouble.

In chapter six, it is soon to be the outhouse's birthday. Frikkie's sister, Sissie, has come to the farm with her parents in anticipation of the celebration. Frikkie is charged with watching Sissie; therefore, she follows him and Tengo everywhere they go. One day Frikkie asks Tengo to get his knife from his bedroom. Sissie is sick and questions his presence in the house. The madam of the house finds Tengo in the bedroom and quickly orders him out, leaving him feeling shamed. A few days later is the party. Tengo helps with the set up and serving during the party. In the afternoon, Tengo is in the kitchen with his mother when one of Frikkie's cousin's drops a piece of cake on the floor. The girl orders Ezekiel, an elder of the kraal, to clean it up. Tengo loses his temper and berates the girl for calling an elder of the kraal "boy". Tengo's mother smooths over hurt feelings in the aftermath and Frikkie trades a prize marble to assure the girls keep their mouths shut. The following day, when Frikkie prepares to leave, he goes to the kraal to say goodbye to Tengo only to find Tengo has gone to a neighboring farm with his father.

Part 1: Chapters 5-6 Analysis

Tengo begins to learn more and more from the schoolbooks given him by his aunt's employer. This limited education is just enough to give Tengo more questions than answers. Tengo can now see how the white man has twisted history to suit his own needs, an example of this in the story of the Great Trek the outhouse tells him and Frikkie, making it seem as though the natives already living in the area when the Boers arrived,



purposely set out to murder and destroy them all. Tengo knows that it was simply a case of one group misunderstanding the ways of another, but he cannot defend his people to the oumbasa because of his position in society. This serves to open Tengo's eyes to the inequality between the blacks and whites in his country.

Tengo finds himself growing more and more angry as he learns more and more. Tengo does not understand why his people are treated as they are by a group of people who are essentially visitors on his native land. This anger boils over when a cousin of Frikkie's calls an elder of the kraal boy. The reader can see how the growing confusion and frustration inside Tengo suddenly explodes on this day. Frikkie appears to take Tengo's side when he bribes his sister to keep silent, but the reader must remember that Frikkie did not stand up for Tengo during his tirade or even seem to agree with his assessment of the situation. This will prove to be an important distinction later in the novel.



Part 1: Chapters 7-9

Part 1: Chapters 7-9 Summary

In chapter seven, Tengo grows more pensive and angry after Frikkie leaves, so much so that even the oubass notices. When Frikkie comes for another brief school vacation, Tengo finds himself reluctant to play with him and angry when Frikkie proves to be taller when they measure their heights. A short time later, Tengo's mother tells the oubass's wife that Tengo is determined to go to Johannesburg for school. The oubass is angry about this because he has put a lot of effort into training Tengo to take his father's place as boss-boy in the future.

In chapter eight, arrangements are made for Tengo to live with his aunt's family in Johannesburg. Tengo is aware of his mother's unhappiness at his departure, but he cannot make himself give up his dreams to make his mother happy. On the day he leaves, the oubass takes Tengo to the train and pays for his ticket, even giving him a little pocket money. The train ride is uneventful. Tengo arrives in the city and makes his way to Dr. Miller's house. Tengo gives the millers some of his clay sculptures as a gift for the books they once sent him. They are so impressed that they urge him to study art in school. Their daughter, Claire, gives Tengo some of her old art books. Dr. Miller also offers to pay for all of Tengo's schoolbooks.

In chapter nine, Frikkie returns to the farm for Christmas break and is heartbroken to find that Tengo has gone to Johannesburg for school. Frikkie falls into a depression at the loss of his good friend and the change from the normal at the farm.

Part 1: Chapters 7-9 Analysis

Tengo becomes moody and angry after the confrontation in the kitchen with Frikkie's cousin. Tengo has quickly become aware of the inequality between the whites and blacks and the senselessness of it is making him terribly angry. Tengo dreams of going off to school, maybe going abroad to a place where he is not treated as less than human. This dream leads Tengo to convince his family to send him to Johannesburg to attend school. The oubass is angry about this, feeling as though he has wasted his time training Tengo to be the boss-boy like his father.

Tengo gets his wish and goes to Johannesburg, where he discovers that not all white people are like the oubass and his wife. Dr. Miller is a kind man who believes that change needs to come to South Africa. Dr. Miller volunteers to pay for Tengo's books, an expense that will save his family from the struggle of paying for the bulk of Tengo's education. At the same time, Tengo finds the answers to his dreams, Frikkie finds himself in a world that is changing in ways that he cannot understand. Frikkie does not see why things need to change on the farm, he does not understand that the way things are can longer continue to be.



Part 2: Chapters 10-12

Part 2: Chapters 10-12 Summary

In chapter ten, three years have passed. Tengo no longer notices the sounds of the city, but he continues to miss certain aspects of the farm. Tengo has been studying non-stop, spending his breaks from school to study with a local preacher to catch up with other students his own age who began school much earlier. Joseph is rarely home and Tengo suspects he is somehow involved in the growing protests against the government by black students.

In chapter eleven, Frikkie continues with school and finally writes his matriculation exam. Now Frikkie is forced to serve two years in the army before he can return to the farm permanently. Shortly after training, at which he excels, Frikkie goes to the farm for a brief vacation. Frikkie learns that Tengo wants to go to college and to hopefully study in America. At the same time a terrible draught has settled in the area. The oubass is concerned that the student uprisings in the cities and the draught will ruin the farm.

In chapter twelve, Tengo works as a gardener for the Millers, taking is first break from studying in three years. Tengo knows his mother wants him to come home for a visit, but he is reluctant to return to the farm. Claire tells Tengo of a community she has planned as part of her studies to become an architect. This community will integrate the black and white communities. However, when Tengo tells Joseph of this, Joseph says that the black will not share with the whites, but will one day take over the homes where the whites live. Joseph insists that the blacks should take back what by all rights should have been theirs all along. This forces Tengo to think about the growing student rebellion that he has attempted to ignore in order to allow him to study freely.

Part 2: Chapters 10-12 Analysis

Time has passed. Now both Frikkie and Tengo are seventeen. Frikkie has finished school and joined the army. Tengo continues to study, studying hard to catch up with other students his own age who started sooner. Studying has been Tengo's sole focus, but suddenly the student uprisings taking place all around have Tengo losing focus and beginning to wonder on which side he should fall. Tengo wants an education because he knows it is the only way he can change anything about his life and the lives of his family members. However, Tengo also knows that many of the protesters, some his friends and family, believe that the white man will never allow the blacks to have the kind of education they deserve, that the black schools are designed to teach the blacks just enough to do menial jobs. Many of the protesters suggest the students leave school until they can be given a better education. This is the last thing Tengo wants.

The reader can see that Frikkie wants things to stay the same, that life staying as it is is familiar and safe to Frikkie. Frikkie has never known anything else. Tengo, on the other

hand, also has never known anything else but he can see how different, how much better, life can be if the blacks are able to achieve their desired result. Tengo knows that change is necessary. Now Tengo finds himself in a position where he must choose between his personal desire for an education and his countries need for change.



Part 2: Chapters 13-14

Part 2: Chapters 13-14 Summary

In chapter thirteen, when school begins again, Tengo once again puts all his efforts into studying. However, one day the protests come to him. Tengo arrives at school to find the military trying to squash a protest outside the school gates. As Tengo attempts to decide which side he should choose, a soldier forces him into the schoolyard. Angry, Tengo attempts to leave, but the soldier will not allow it. The protesters throw rocks at the soldier and Tengo escapes. The school closes after this and Tengo finds himself sinking into a depression as he struggles with the choice of continuing his education or joining the protesters. The reverend comes by the house and counsels Tengo to continue his education with the suggestion that a new black government will need educated people to survive.

In chapter fourteen, schools reopen several weeks later, but are soon closed again when more protests break out. Tengo begins studying on his own with a girl from his class named Emma. However, studying turns into something else when Tengo and Emma discover romance. When Tengo's fifteen-year-old cousin becomes pregnant, however, he becomes frightened and ends his relationship with Emma. A friend of Tengo's, Elijah, comes to him and asks him to join the groups protesting the government. Tengo has waited for this moment, but still he cannot quickly agree. Then Joseph returns. When Joseph learns that Tengo was unable to write his matriculation exam because of the government protests, he tells Tengo about his work with the African National Congress. Joseph tells Tengo he can arrange for him to finish his education abroad through the A.N.C.

Part 2: Chapters 13-14 Analysis

Tengo struggles between loyalty to his own need to be educated and the needs of his countrymen, his family and friends, for change. Tengo finds the struggle has come to him when he arrives at school to find soldiers attempting to stop a protest. Tengo must make a choice, a choice that leaves him indecisive and depressed. Tengo stops studying and finds himself lost. It is a sad choice Tengo must make, one that Frikkie would never have had to make.

Tengo learns that his cousin has been working for ANC, the organization headed by Nelson Mandela. Tengo has suspected for some time that Joseph was working against the government, now he knows for sure. Not only this, but Joseph offers Tengo a way to continue his education. Tengo is excited to do this, happy not only to fulfill his desire to finish his education, but to do it for his country and to do it abroad. Tengo is finally getting all he wants and he no longer has to make a choice between his people and himself.



Part 2: Chapters 15-16

Part 2: Chapters 15-16 Summary

In chapter fifteen, Tengo visits Emma and learns that she is going to a private school outside the city. A few days later, Tengo hears Joseph and Elijah discuss a boy who was supposed to finish his education abroad, but he could not handle being so far from home and has returned. This causes Tengo to begin to wonder if he can make it abroad. Tengo thinks it over and decides to become a freedom fighter instead. A short time later, Joseph tells Tengo they will be leaving at the beginning of the following week. Tengo prepares by organizing and washing his clothes.

Tengo goes to the church to return some books to the reverend and learns that the reverend has gone to the funeral of seven people, including four children, who were killed by soldiers during a protest. The mourners have decided to have a meeting during the funeral, something that is denied them by the government. As Tengo leaves the church, he finds that soldiers have arrived and ordered the crowd to go home. Almost immediately, the soldiers begin firing on the unarmed crowd. Angry, Tengo throws stones at the soldiers. One soldier is killed by an unseen gunman. Tengo runs. Aware there is a soldier following him, Tengo hides in a shed and arms himself with a broken tire iron.

In chapter sixteen, Tengo hides behind the door of the shed. The door opens and knocks Tengo back against the wall. A soldier stands in the gloom. Tengo jumps out from behind the door and hits the soldier with the broken tire iron. The soldier falls to the ground. Tengo quickly closes the door and takes the soldier's gun. When the soldier wakes, he sits up against some bags and asks for water. As he speaks, Tengo suddenly recognizes the soldier's voice. It is Frikkie.

Tengo identifies himself to Frikkie. They talk of the farm for a few minutes. Tengo becomes agitated and tells Frikkie how unfair life on the farm was for him and his family. Tengo tells Frikkie that he never had the same, that he was always treated like one of the animals. Frikkie argues that his uncle always treated him well, that his aunt often gave his family clothes and toys for his little sister. Tengo argues that if the oubass had paid his father better they would not have needed the charity and could have bought their own clothing and dolls. Frikkie, however, refuses to see that his family's treatment of the blacks was ever poor.

Tengo realizes he must allow Frikkie to go. Tengo helps Frikkie to his feet and sends him away with the warning that he better not tell anyone where he is. Frikkie returns to his regiment and lies about the man who hit him and stole his gun. Frikkie is taken to the hospital, still struggling to understand the argument Tengo made for the blacks. At the same time, Tengo slips out of the shed and returns home, determined now to finish his education abroad.



Part 2: Chapters 15-16 Analysis

Tengo becomes frightened by stories of living abroad, causing him to make the decision to not finish his education, but instead to become a freedom fighter. Before this can happen, however, Tengo finds himself once again confronted with the inequality of his country. Soldiers fire on an unarmed group of protesters. This angers Tengo, reminding him of all the shame and inequality he has experienced in his short life. Tengo joins the fight, throwing stones at the soldiers.

Tengo finds himself embroiled in a fight that was not his, but somehow has become his simply because of his race. This fight causes Tengo to be stuck in a shed with his childhood friend, Frikkie. This is a strange reunion that finally gives Tengo the chance to explain all the unhappiness he began to feel on the farm and in his relationship with Frikkie. Frikkie, however, does not understand Tengo's feelings. Frikkie has always thought that his uncle treated the blacks working on his farm with kindness. Frikkie cannot see that Tengo and his family were treated like pampered pets, not like human beings. This discussion exposes the root of the problem in South Africa during this time period. The whites thought they were generous with their treatment of the blacks, while the blacks lived on these lands first and should have had the right to remain on them, not shoved aside and treated like cattle.



Characters

Tengo

Tengo is the young son of a black couple who work for a farmer. Tengo has grown up on the farm playing with the farmer's young nephew, Frikkie. The two boys are the same age and their lives seem to parallel one another. However, as Tengo grows older, he becomes aware of the differences in his and Frikkie's lives. Frikkie has every privilege, including free schooling and the freedom to come and go on his own as he pleases. For Tengo, these things are not a reality. Tengo must pay for schooling as a black child and he must have a pass to travel around in the cities.

Tengo is an intelligent child and he finds himself with many questions when it comes to life and the world around him. Tengo wants to go to school, but his mother is reluctant to let him out of her sight after she has lost two children. This causes Tengo a great deal of frustration and his behavior quickly changes. In time, Tengo's parents realize they must allow Tengo get the education he wants so desperately or lose the child they love.

In the city, Tengo studies hard and tries to ignore the trouble brewing all around him. However, the trouble comes to Johannesburg and Tengo's school. Tengo can no longer ignore the protests and budding war that is building around him. Tengo must make a choice between his education and his country.

Frikkie

Frikkie is the young, white nephew of Oom Koos. Frikkie loves the farm and hopes to one day run it for his elderly uncle. Frikkie does not like school and only attends his classes because his uncle insists. Frikkie loves the farm, the orderliness of it, the constant sameness of it. Frikkie does not see the growing unhappiness in his friend Tengo, just as he has never seen the inequality between their lifestyles.

Frikkie expects Tengo to always be on the farm. In fact, Frikkie tells Tengo that he cannot wait until the day he runs the farm and Tengo becomes his boss-boy. Tengo does not like this idea, however, because he wants to become educated and to leave the farm. Frikkie is surprised that Tengo has left the farm and gone to Johannesburg to get an education. Frikkie falls into something of a depression when his friend leaves, saddened more that something has changed rather than missing his friend.

Joseph

Joseph is Tengo's cousin. Joseph spends a couple of weeks at the farm when he and Tengo are young, a vacation that tightens the relationship between the two boys. When Tengo moves to Johannesburg to get an education, he lives in the same home as



Joseph. However, Joseph is often gone, and when he is home he acts odd and he spends a great deal of time sneaking around the township.

Tengo suspects his cousin is involved in the growing student revolt against the government. However, Tengo soon learns that Joseph is actually a recruiter for the African National Congress, a group of blacks who organize protests against the government of South Africa in the hopes of ending the apartheid. It is Joseph's job to sneak young people out of the country and to present them to the ANC who will give these people the option of continuing their education or training to become freedom fighters.

Elijah

Elijah is a student who attends classes with Tengo in Johannesburg. Elijah is a part of a growing movement of students who protest the government, angry at the substandard education the blacks are allowed to have. Elijah is arrested during a raid of homes in the township after a protest outside Tengo's school and is kept in jail for nearly a year. When he returns, Elijah tells Tengo that the movement has decided that Tengo should get off the fence and join them. Tengo hesitates out of fear and a reluctance to give up his education.

Emma

Emma is a young woman who attends classes in Johannesburg with Tengo. Emma is an intelligent girl and she and Tengo share the top spot in their class. When the schools are closed because of protests, Tengo and Emma begin studying together under the supervision of Reverend Gilbert. However, this relationship quickly changes to a romantic relationship until Tengo becomes afraid that Emma might become pregnant and change their future. In the end, Emma is able to enroll in a private school thanks to the incomes of her educated parents.

Selina

Selina is Tengo's mother. Selina has had a difficult life. Selina's oldest child died when she became sick after leaving home to attend school. About the same time, Selina's baby died. This makes Selina very protective of her remaining two children and reluctant to allow Tengo to go to school as he wants to do. At the same time, Selina is the cook in the big house on the farm. Selina often cooks large, delicious meals, but is forced to feed her family porridge with small amounts of meat. Sometimes Selina is allowed to take food home, but not often. Selina works long hours and rarely has a meal with her family because of this. Selina must remain at the big house until the final meal of the day is over and she can do the dishes.



Timothy

Timothy is Tengo's father. Timothy is the boss-boy at the farm, a title that means he is in charge of the care of the animals on the farm. Timothy works long hours at his job, which entails tough physical labor. Timothy is paid very little for this job. The farmer and his wife often give Timothy cast offs for his children to make up for the lack of pay.

Oom Koos, oubass

Oom Koos is the oubass, or boss, of the farm. The farm has been in Oom Koos's family since the Great Trek that brought the Boers to this section of South Africa several generations before. Oom Koos believes that the blacks who live in this area are without the same intelligence and Christian souls as the whites. For this reason, Oom Koos and his wife believe that the blacks should continue to be suppressed in society and that any blacks who talk back or show intelligence should be put in his place. It is this attitude that Tengo is attempting to run from by getting an education.

Dr. David Miller

Dr. David Miller is the employer of Matilda, Tengo's aunt, in Johannesburg. Dr. Miller is a strong believer in rights for blacks. In fact, Dr. Miller provides free medical care for all his employees and their families and pays for their educations. Dr. Miller's sons have fled South Africa rather than be forced to join the army and fight against unarmed civilians in the growing unrest in the country. Dr. Miller is the opposite of Oom Koos.

Reverend Gilbert

Reverend Gilbert is the reverend of the church Matilda and her family attends. Reverend Gilbert agrees to help Tengo with his studies, often working with him during school vacations in order to help him catch up on his studies. Reverend Gilbert is a white man, but he is sympathetic to the blacks and teaches Tengo that not all whites are the enemy. In fact, Tengo learns a great deal from Reverend Gilbert, not just from books.



Objects/Places

Books

Tengo begins his education by reading schoolbooks given to him by the Miller family at a request from his mother. Later, Tengo studies his books constantly while attending classes in a hope of catching up with other students who have been in school much longer than he.

Cake

A cousin of Frikkie's spills cake on the floor and demands Ezekiel clean it up, causing Tengo to become angry because of her use of the word boy to address an elder from his kraal.

Pocket Knife

Tengo goes to retrieve a pocket knife from Frikkie's room and is made to feel ashamed after he is caught inside the bedroom of Frikkie's sister, Sissie, an innocent act precipitated by Sissie's insistence on knowing what Tengo was doing in Frikkie's room.

Marble

Frikkie gives a marble from his collection to Sissie to keep her from telling their parents or their aunt and uncle about Tengo's fit of anger over spilled cake.

Milk Mug

As young children, Tengo and Frikkie share a mug from which they drink raw milk.

Cricket

Frikkie often encourages Tengo to play cricket with him, but Tengo often dislikes Frikkie's dominance and insistence on playing such games.

Bull Sculpture

Tengo makes small sculptures out of clay. Tengo takes a sculpture of a bull because he admires it, unaware that Tengo is reluctant to let him have it.



Shed

Tengo and Frikkie confront one another in a shed inside the township after a soldier is gunned down by an unknown shooter during a meeting of grieving blacks.

Kraal

A kraal is a traditional rural village usually surrounded by a stockade. Tengo and his family live in a small hut in a kraal just outside the gates of Oom Koos' farm.

Township

Tengo lives in a township within Johannesburg where all the blacks who work and study in the city are forced to live. The township is overcrowded and filled with violence.

Johannesburg

Johannesburg is a large city in South Africa. It is here that Tengo goes to continue his education.

The Farm

Oom Koos owns a farm outside of the city where he raises cattle and corn. Tengo and his family live just outside the gates of the farm in their kraal.



Themes

Racial Inequality

Tengo is a black boy in South Africa whose family works on a white man's farm. Tengo plays with the farmer's nephew. As a small child, Tengo sees nothing wrong with this relationship or the way his family lives. However, as Tengo grows older, he begins to see differences in his life as compared with Frikkie's life. Frikkie is allowed to attend school for free while Tengo would have to pay. Frikkie has tea in the big house while Tengo eats his leftovers out in the yard. Frikkie has a large house with a room of his own, but Tengo lives in a dirt floored hut that he shares with four other members of his family.

The older Tengo gets, the more he realizes that the blacks in his country are not treated fairly. The blacks in the cities must carry passes and they must have jobs where the government tells them they can work. Sometimes families are separated because one parent cannot find a job and the other must continue to work where they are rather than risk losing their only form of income. When Tengo goes to the city to get an education, he sees inequality all around him and learns of the fight of students like himself to force the government to change.

Tengo grows angry because of the inequality perpetrated against people of his race. When Tengo comes face to face with his childhood friend again, he tries to explain his anger. Frikkie does not understand, however, convinced that his aunt and uncle treated Tengo and his family with all fairness. To Frikkie, the inequality of the races has been a constant thing, it is a normal thing, and does not need to be changed. To Tengo, change is not only necessary, it is essential.

Friendship

Frikkie and Tengo are friends. From the time they were three, Frikkie would come to the farm and spend his days playing with Tengo. As they grow older, the two boys continue to seek one another out. However, the older Tengo becomes, the more he sees the differences between himself and Frikkie. These differences are sure to tear these two friends apart.

Frikkie sees Tengo as a staple of the farm, someone who is always there and will always be there. When Tengo suddenly is not there, Frikkie becomes depressed. Frikkie misses his friend, but more, he is unhappy with this change in his normal.

Tengo has grown aware of the differences between he and Frikkie. In time, Tengo becomes aware that there is no true friendship between them because Frikkie does not understand and will never understand the unfairness being perpetrated on the blacks of their country. At the same time, Tengo relies on this friendship when he sets Frikkie free



and hopes he will not tell anyone where he is. It is also for friendship that Tengo allowed Frikkie to go free.

Ambition

Tengo has questions that he cannot find answers for. Tengo wants to find answers for these questions and he knows that the answers can only be found in education. Education is difficult for someone like Tengo to get in South Africa, however, because it costs a great deal of money. Not only this, but Tengo's mother is reluctant to let him leave home because her eldest child died after going away to school. Tengo must overcome these difficulties before he can achieve his desired goal.

Tengo fights for what he wants, only to discover that students like himself have a new challenge to fight. The students around Tengo have realized that the treatment they are receiving from the white government is fundamentally unfair. These students are rising up against the government to force change. Tengo finds himself stuck between these students and his own desire to receive an education.

Ambition is a theme of this novel because it describes to some degree the fight Tengo faces to receive an education. Not only this, but the students in Johannesburg who raise up against the government are also showing ambition in their struggle to change the fundamental way in which the blacks are treated. This is a courageous thing for these students to become involved in and it leads to death for many of them. However, the reader knows that they will eventually find success and this will lead to the changes they so desperately want. It will also allow Tengo to make the choices important to him and his own future.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the third person omniscient point of view. The author uses multiple characters to tell her story, but the majority of the novel is told through the eyes of Tengo. The novel begins in the voice of Frikkie, however, and various other characters tell certain aspects of the story that the reader needs to be aware of but Tengo is not aware of. For example, the author uses Tengo's mother to tell the reader Tengo is going to Johannesburg to study not only because of her emotional reaction to this decision but because she knows before Tengo that arrangements have been finalized for his schooling.

The point of view of this novel can cause some confusion for the reader because the author does use many different characters to tell her story, especially in the beginning of the novel. However, the author continuously tells her story through Tengo's eyes for the majority of the second part of the novel, making it easier for the reader to follow the storyline and understand the underlying message contained in the plot. The fact that the author attempts to show her story through the eyes of both a young black boy and his white friend allows the reader to understand the discrimination the main character faces throughout the novel, but again it can be confusing for the reader when the author suddenly changes narrating characters and the way in which the author writes about the white boy does not make him sympathetic despite her attempts at explaining some of his motives.

Setting

The novel is set in South Africa in the eighties, a tumultuous time in that country. South Africa suffered under an apartheid for many years and it was in the eighties and nineties that the blacks who suffered oppression under the white government began to stand up to that government and fight for equal rights. This novel takes place in the middle of that struggle.

The setting of the novel is essential to the overall plot of the novel. The plot of the novel follows one young black boy who was raised to work on a farm owned by a white family. The boy, Tengo, is a playmate of the nephew of the white farmer, but sees the differences in the treatment of him and his white friend. Tengo aches for an education while his white friend tolerates his education until he can graduate and take over the farm. There are so many differences between the environment in which these two boys live that it soon takes a toll on their friendship. If not for the setting of the novel, the conflict between these two boys and the internal conflict the main character faces would not be an issue and *Waiting for the Rain* would be a totally different book.



Language and Meaning

This novel is set in South Africa where many different languages are spoken, including English and Afrikaans. For this reason, most of the novel is written in simple English, but there are many words and phrases in Afrikaans that are used as well. Many of these Afrikaans words are defined in the text of the novel and those that are not are left for the reader to comprehend through their usage.

The language of this novel is appropriate for its intended audience of young readers. Although there are many foreign words and phrases used in the novel, many of these are quickly explained to the reader and this removes most incidences of confusion. The language is also suited to the characters in the novel. These characters live in a world where English and Afrikaans are interwoven into their daily conversations. The language of this novel supports this idea and gives the reader a good understanding of what it might be like to be a character in this novel.

Structure

The novel is divided into two parts. The first part of the novel contains nine chapters and follows the lives of Tengo and Frikkie as young children. The second part of the novel contains seven chapters and it follows the lives of Tengo and Frikkie as young adults. The separation of the two sections of the novel changes setting as well as allowing time to pass. The beginning of the novel takes place on the farm where Tengo and Frikkie grew up together. The last section of the novel takes place in Johannesburg where Tengo has gone to get an education and ended up on the fringes of a revolution and Frikkie has become a soldier who opposes the revolutionaries.

The novel contains a single main plot and several subplots. The main plot of the novel follows Tengo as he struggles against the forced ignorance of his position in society and fights to get a good education. A subplot of this main plot is the relationship between Tengo and his white friend Frikkie. Frikkie is the polar opposite of Tengo, unhappy in a classroom and anxious to get out on the farm on a daily basis where Tengo wants off the farm and to be in a classroom for as long as possible. This struggle is symbolic of the racial differences between the two races, the main theme of the novel. Another subplot involves Tengo's relationship with his cousin Joseph, a young man who will eventually offer Tengo a way out of the dilemma he faces during the student protests in Johannesburg. All the plots of this novel come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

"The second thing Frikkie always did when he arrived at his uncle's farm for the school holidays was look for Tengo."

Chap 1, p. 3

"When tea was over, Selina cleared the table. In the kitchen, she poured the tea that remained in the pot into a large, chipped enamel mug, stirred in sugar and milk. She put the cake away in a tin in the pantry, cut a thick slice of white bread which she spread with apricot jam, then took the bread and tea out to Tengo who was bouncing a ball in the yard."

Chap. 2, p. 13

"He could not ever remember being so happy as each book was taken out, examined, and marveled at."

Chap. 5, p. 37

"He wished Sissie hadn't come to the farm. He felt bewildered and sore inside. He wanted to get away from Frikkie—from all of them."

Chap. 6, p. 58

"The shock of the girl's words had propelled him across the room as if he had been catapulted."

Chap. 6, p. 62

"After Frikkie left, Tengo knew that he could not go on the same way. There would have to be some change."

Chap. 7, p. 71

"Tengo hardly noticed the noise and the smells and the dirt any more."

Chap. 10. p. 107

"Not turning his head, Joseph said, 'Better not to ask questions, cousin. The less you know, the less you can get in trouble.'"

Chap. 10, p. 115

"The militant students wanted to boycott classes until conditions for blacks were changed. But while Tengo agreed with them about how unjust and unfair it all was, he didn't want to look up from his books until he achieved what he had set out to do, what he had left the farm for."

Chap. 12, p. 127

"The new school year opened, and Tengo put all thought of unrest and revolution out of his mind."

Chap. 13, p. 137



"He was waiting—waiting. He did not know for what, but he knew he must wait."
Chap. 14, p. 155

"Frikkie's a soldier, he reminded himself. He's one of them. But in the same instant, almost, the white soldier became Frikkie again, and he knew that Frikkie would keep his word."
Chap. 16, p. 214



Topics for Discussion

Who is Tengo? Where does he live? How is his home different from Frikkie's? Why is there such a difference? How does Tengo feel about Frikkie at the beginning of the novel? How does this change as the novel progresses? What causes this change? Do Tengo and Frikkie ever stop being friends? Explain your answer.

Who is Frikkie? What is his anticipated occupation in the future? Why does Frikkie want to pursue this occupation? Who has taught him most of the skills he needs to be successful in this career? Why? Who is Frikkie's childhood friend? How does Frikkie feel about this person? How does Frikkie feel when this friend disappears from his life? Why? What does this reaction say about Frikkie's feelings?

Why does Tengo become frustrated on the farm? What does he want answers to? Why can Tengo not find these answers? What does Tengo want? What is stopping Tengo from getting what he wants? How does Tengo overcome these barriers? Where does Tengo go to get what he wants? Who is upset by Tengo's decision? Who feels Tengo might be in danger? Who feels that Tengo has turned his back on years of training? Is Tengo ungrateful for wanting to find his answers?

Why does Tengo spend so much time studying in Johannesburg? Who helps Tengo with his studies? What does studying help Tengo avoid? Is this a good thing? What happens when a protest takes place outside Tengo's school? Why does this force Tengo into a depression? What decision does Tengo feel he must make now? What decision does he make?

What warnings does Joseph give Tengo about living in Johannesburg? Why does Joseph's father not live with the family? How does this present an example of the discrimination faced by most of the blacks in Johannesburg? Why does Joseph try to warn Tengo away from the city? Does Tengo listen? What happens when Tengo goes into the city?

Why does Tengo yell at Frikkie's cousin during a family party on the farm? What did the girl do? Did she deserve Tengo's anger? Why does Frikkie bribe the girls into keeping their mouths shut? What might have happened to Tengo if the girls had told the adults what happened? Why did Frikkie try to protect Tengo? How does Tengo react when he learns of this bribe years later? Why?

Discuss the history of the novel. What did you know about the South African apartheid before you read this novel? What did this novel teach you about the apartheid? Can you imagine yourself in Frikkie's role? Would you have felt the same way as Frikkie? How might you have reacted differently? Can you imagine yourself in Tengo's role? Would you have felt the same way? How might you have felt differently?