

Weep Not, Child Study Guide

Weep Not, Child

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Plot Summary

Weep Not, Child is the story of a boy, Njoroge, growing up through the years of the Kenyan Emergency. In this time, the Mau Mau fighters commit many acts of violence against the white settlers and Africans that they view as traitors, and the white authorities return this violence in kind. This novel explores the ways that this conflict affects all of those concerned.

The story starts with Njoroge being told that he will attend school; the first in his family to do so. This is Njoroge's greatest wish, and education is a passion he pursues fervently throughout the novel. His brother, Kamau, has been apprenticed as a carpenter and will not go to school. Boro and Mwangi, their older brothers, had gone to fight in World War II. Mwangi was killed and Boro had returned home a changed man. Their other brother, Kori, works in the nearby town of Kipanga, and often brings home stories and friends in the evenings.

Central to the family is their father, Ngotho, who works on the land of a local English settler, Mr. Howlands. One evening, Ngotho is talked into telling a story and speaks about the legend of Gikuyu and Mumbi, to whom Murungu (the Creator) had given the land in the surrounding area. This land had been taken by the white settlers and, discovering that his father's generation had been awaiting the fulfillment of a prophecy for its return, Boro leaves in anger. Njoroge hears his father's words about the prophecy too, and thinks that with his education perhaps he is destined to make a difference.

As Njoroge's education progresses, so too does the unrest amongst the African people of the area. A national strike is organized, and Boro is one of the speakers at a meeting on the first day. Despite being threatened with dismissal, Ngotho takes part in the strike and attends the meeting, where he leads the crowd to attack Jacobo, a wealthy black farmer who has been brought in to try to pacify the workers. Not only does Ngotho lose his job, but he is also evicted from his home, which is on Jacobo's property.

Two and a half years pass, in the time between Parts 1 and 2 of the novel. In that time, the violence and danger in Kenya have increased. Jomo Kenyatta has also been arrested. When he loses his court case, there is a feeling that much hope has been lost, as Jacobo and Mr. Howlands, both of whom have grudges against Ngotho, have risen in power, and Njoroge's brothers have become increasingly involved in political events and the Mau Mau Uprising.

As the country becomes more dangerous, and people Njoroge knows are arrested or killed, he buries himself deeper in his studies and his religion, viewing himself as like a prophet who, if he could just get an education, could save the country. He is successful in gaining entrance to secondary school, where he finds a community of students and teachers from all walks of life, working and studying together successfully. His school is like a haven from the death and destruction taking place in the rest of the country.



Meanwhile, Boro has become a Freedom Fighter and plotted to kill Jacobo. He has sent threats, and eventually must carry them out. When Jacobo is killed, Kamau is arrested for the murder, and Ngotho confesses to try to save his son. Njoroge is expelled from school and tortured by Mr. Howlands to try to gain information about the killing, of which he has no knowledge. The extent of the violence in Ngotho's interrogation has left him near death, and Boro returns home only in time to be present for his father's passing. The grief he experiences leads him to confess to Mr. Howlands that he killed Jacobo, before shooting Mr. Howlands as well.

With his family in pieces, his dreams of education gone, and his faith in God shattered, Njoroge tries to turn to his childhood friend, Mwihaki – the daughter of Jacobo with whom he has fallen in love. Although she loves him too, she cannot turn away from her duty to her family and her country, as Njoroge asks. Having now lost everything, Njoroge goes out and sits under a tree, waiting for dark when he intends to hang himself. Before that can happen though, Njoroge's mother comes in search of him, and brings him home.



Part 1 (The Waning Light) - Chapter 1

Summary

Set in the village of Mahua in Kenya, the novel opens on a scene in which a small boy, Njoroge, is invited by his mother, Nyokabi, to attend school. It is his greatest dream and he eagerly accepts, even when conditions are placed upon him. None of his siblings have been to school and he wants to share his news and his learning with his half-brother, Kamau. Kamau is training as an apprentice carpenter, so he will learn a trade and bring in money, rather than going to school. He is happy for his brother, nonetheless. Both boys hope that their paths will bring them wealth and happiness.

The narrator describes the countryside and village life, including the black sealed road that crosses the landscape, having been put there by the white settlers. There are distinct geographical markers that differentiate the land of the black people from that of the white people, but in the nearby town of Kipanga, Africans, English settlers, and Indians all work and mix together. There is something of a social hierarchy in their dealings though, where Indian shopkeepers will stop serving African customers if a white person enters the store, and the Africans want to boycott the Indian stores but are trapped by the low prices that are not available in the African shops.

In the town, there is a barber's shop, where the local men congregate for haircuts, to discuss the events of the day, and to avoid their wives. The barber has many stories from his travels in World War II (a white man's war that the African men cannot understand the logic behind) that he is always willing to share. On the day described, he is talking about the prostitutes he engaged whilst in Jerusalem. Ngotho, Njoroge and Kamau's father, visits the barber under the pretense of going to get meat for his two wives and, several hours later, comes home from the butcher's shop with equal sized parcels for each. When he arrives home, his wives tease him good naturally, and Nyokabi assures him that Njoroge will be happy to go to school.

Analysis

Right from the first few sentences, Chapter 1 introduces the idea of education as a valued commodity; a theme that is explored throughout the text. Sending Njoroge to school will cost the family money that they can barely afford, and so, through the rules that Nyokabi sets out, the significance of what he is being offered is made clear to Njoroge. This is further amplified in his conversation with Kamau, when it is made clear that the other children have been given trades rather than schooling, and that they will be providing money in order to give Njoroge this opportunity.

There is also an introduction to the idea that white men and Africans are too different to understand each other, which is discussed throughout the book. As well as outright stating that "you cannot understand a white man," the discussion of the world wars



suggests that a war between different countries of white men is illogical and incomprehensible. Indeed, although the British fear of Hitler elevates him in the narrator's view, it does not help to explain why they would go to war with him. The extended discussion of the Indian people in the town, and of the children of Italian prisoners and black women, suggests that race is not as simple as black and white, but this complexity does not seem to translate into greater understanding, or attempts to understand.

The barber's discussion of white prostitutes in Jerusalem brings the reader's gaze onto women in a way that amplifies a comparison of black and white women, through their objectification, but does not invite a critical analysis of their status in comparison to men. There is a casual nonchalance about the barber's descriptions that invites Ngotho to think about his white employer's wife and whether she would become a prostitute, and to compare her to his own two wives, Njeri and Nyokabi. Although he acknowledges his wives as good women, he also claims that you cannot trust them, that they can be fickle and jealous, and that no amount of beating would calm an angry woman. There is no sense of irony in the juxtaposition of his distrust of his wives and his own statement that he would not be away from home long (despite never intending to keep his word), giving the perception that these attitudes are just matters of fact.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the value of education in Kenya, as it is demonstrated in Part 1, Chapter 1.

Discussion Question 2

What effect does it have on the reader, when Hitler is described as a "brave man, whom all the British feared"?

Discussion Question 3

The barber is the only character in the book who does not have a name. Why do you think the author has done this?

Vocabulary

divined, origin, vigilance, toil, customs, brethren, prophet, cowardice, porters, conscripted, bias, gratitude



Part 1 (The Waning Light) - Chapter 2

Summary

Starting school, Njoroge already has a friend – Mwhiki, the daughter of a wealthy local landowner (Jacobo) whom he comforted one day when other children were picking on her. She returns the favor on his first day when he is teased for being new. Their friendship grows over time, and one afternoon Mwhiki asks him to wait for her after school. They end up playing on the hillside until it starts to grow dark and Njoroge's mother has to come looking for him. He feels that he has disappointed Nyokabi by mixing with a child of a higher social class, and decides to stay away from Mwhiki in future.

One afternoon, Njoroge comes home from school and pleads with Nyokabi to again tell him a traditional story, as he had been asked to tell one at school and forgotten everything he knew. She tells him that she will later on, and he is sent to fetch Kamau from work. As he goes, he comes across Mwhiki as he walks near her house, dressed in the calico cloth he has grown up wearing. He finds a path to avoid interacting with her, but feels uncomfortable that his primary reason for avoiding her is shame at being seen wearing his calico. He is reminded of another time when he visited her house and felt shame, having started giggling during grace, along with another child. When he meets Kamau, Kamau is angry with his employer, Nganga, whom he thinks is teaching him too slowly and trying to keep him from advancing.

In the evening, when Ngotho arrives home, he is persuaded to tell a story to his sons and their friends, and tells the story of Gikuyu and Mumbi, who were given all of the land in the area of Mahua village by Murungu, the Creator. When Njoroge asks what has happened to the land, Ngotho reveals that it was taken by the white settlers and that, although there is a prophecy that the colonists would again leave Kenya, it has not yet come to pass. Kamau's older brother Boro, who returned home from World War II, becomes angry at what he sees as his father's generation's lack of action to regain the lands, and walks out.

Analysis

Chapter 2 introduces the relationship between Njoroge and Mwhiki, the only male-female relationship that gains more than a passing mention, and the only such relationship in Njoroge's generation. Right from this early point in their development, there is an element of protection and concern for each other that suggests the relationship will be important to them both. There are also elements of his father's (and society's) attitude towards women coming through, however, as when he finds himself in trouble for coming home late, Njoroge's immediate thought is to blame Mwhiki.



In Njoroge and Mwhaki's blossoming relationship, the reader can also see an undercurrent of the social standing conflicts that cause Nyokabi to be annoyed with Njoroge when he is home late. Knowing Mwhaki to be of a higher class than him, Njoroge feels shame that she will see him in the calico cloth he wore before he started going to school. He also has a sense that his upbringing is being called into question when he and the other children are told off at the Christmas party after starting to laugh during Grace. This does not matter to Mwhaki though, and in fact seems to bring her closer to him.

This issue of social standing also informs Nyokabi's motivation for wanting her son to go to school. She thinks of the pride she feels for Njoroge's achievements in relation to those in the community of a higher social standing, such as Juliana, who is Jacobo's wife, and the wife of the English settler, Mr. Howlands. Nyokabi's aim is to say that her son is as well educated as anyone else's children.

In contrast to the Western education being delivered to Njoroge at school, this chapter highlights the importance of traditional oral storytelling to pass on knowledge and values. Ngoto's story of Gikuyu and Mumbi communicates not just the traditional legend, but also provides a conduit for a discussion of the lost lands and the prophecy that the lands will return to their rightful owners. It is of note that Njoroge, who tries very hard to learn as much as he can at school, is unable to remember the traditional teachings in his classroom. This provides a symbolic parallel whereby those in the pursuit of Western education may forget the teachings of their own culture.

Ngoto's faith in the prophecy has led him to take a more passive approach to the return of the lost lands, supporting men he believed might have been able to bring about the prophecy but not actively fighting for it to come about himself. Boro disagrees with Ngoto and tells him that he should have done more, suggesting in the same way that Kamau was frustrated with Nganga's teaching methods, that there is growing discontent amongst the young people for the older ways of doing things, and a desire to take a more active approach in controlling their own lives.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the idea of shame as Njoroge experiences it in Part 1, Chapter 2.

Discussion Question 2

Later in the book, Njoroge draws parallels between the Kikuyu creation story of Gikuyu and Mumbi and the Christian creation story of Adam and Eve. Why do you think that the author has told the story in Part 1, Chapter 2, but does not have Njoroge make the connection until later?



Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Boro became angry with his father? What evidence is there in the text to support your ideas?

Vocabulary

quarreled, coarse, thrashed, delicate, elated, cunning, pyrethrum, haughty, primitive, adjacent, endowed, portended, troublesome, homage, superstitious



Part 1 (The Waning Light) - Chapter 3

Summary

Instead of taking his normal path through the fields, Ngotho travels along the road to work the next morning, thinking over the events of the night before and his own history, which had brought him to work for Mr. Howlands, an English settler, on the lands that had belonged to his ancestors. Although Mr. Howlands does not recognize Ngotho's connection to the land, he observes the care with which Ngotho carries out his work and feels some level of admiration for that.

Mr. Howlands came to Kenya in search of some meaning following his return from World War I. He had found that meaning in taming and conquering the African land and had returned to England only in search of a wife who would be willing to come to Kenya with him. He has little concern for his wife or the children they have had together, with the exception of Peter, his first-born son to whom he intended to leave the land. Peter was killed in World War II, however, but despite having concerns about his younger son, Stephen's, ability to take on the shamba after him, his dedication to his work continues unabated.

On this morning, Mr. Howlands and Ngotho discuss the land, and share with each other their mutual admiration for it. Ngotho is unable to understand why Mr. Howlands would have such a connection to it, and hopes that when he expresses concern about Stephen taking over the land it means that they will be returning to England. Mr. Howlands tries to tell Ngotho that Kenya is his home, but Ngotho, who also lost a son (Mwangi) in World War II is unable to see his foreign employer (with his connection to the English government who declared war) as someone who belongs to the country.

Analysis

Part 1, Chapter 3 opens with a juxtaposition of Ngotho's usual path to work, through the fields of the land to which he feels a deep spiritual connection, and the solid, black tarmac road that the white men imprinted on Kenya. These two images and the differences between them are metaphors for the entire chapter, which compares the relationships of Ngotho and Mr. Howlands to the land, which each considers to be his own. Like the tarmac road, Mr. Howlands' approach to the land has been to tame and suppress it, bending it to his will, whereas Ngotho usually walks a path through the fields and does not like to disturb nature's ways. It is interesting that on the day when his mind is so tormented by his son's reactions that he chooses to take the white man's road.

Part 1, Chapter 3 also alludes to similarities between Ngotho and Mr. Howlands, as they reflect on their sons and the legacy they will pass to them. Both have lost sons in World War II, and both have another son on whom their hopes for the future rest. Mr.



Howlands is concerned that Stephen, his surviving son, will not live up to the hopes that he had for Peter, the son who was killed, and, although Ngotho does not think specifically of Njoroje, it is clear from previous chapters that a lot of the family's resources have been invested in him. Having these shared experiences could potentially have had the effect of drawing Ngotho and Mr. Howlands together; however, the fundamental conflict between them over the land prevents that, and is further exacerbated by Ngotho's feeling that Mr. Howlands' loss was somehow less than his own, because World War II had been created by the English, not by Africans.

Discussion Question 1

What is the effect of introducing Ngotho's preferred journey to work prior to describing what happened on that particular day?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the term "woman's consolation" in regards to Mrs. Howlands' life in Kenya. In what ways is it an accurate description, and how might it be considered ironic?

Discussion Question 3

How do you think Mr. Howlands and Ngotho could have used their conversation in the shamba to increase the understanding between them? What got in the way?

Vocabulary

compelling, preoccupied, disillusioned, oblivious, consolation, demonstrative, missionary



Part 1 (The Waning Light) - Chapter 4

Summary

Njoroge's first reading lesson involves chatter, laughter and joking and, upon returning home, he tries to share what he has learned with Kamau, but his brother is not interested. Njoroge's teacher, Isaka, encourages a casual approach to his lessons, and is rumored to take a casual approach in his personal life as well, smoking, drinking and flirting with women.

Mwihaki eventually asks Njoroge why he is avoiding her, and does not believe him when he says that she comes out of school too late. Nonetheless, they continue talking and playing together on their way home. They discuss their parents, and Njoroge thinks about his mother's reaction to a local Indian boy giving him a piece of candy. As they draw near to Mr. Howlands' house, Njoroge tells Mwihaki about meeting, and being afraid of, Stephen Howlands, when the boy approached him in the past. He does not tell her what Ngotho told him about the white people taking the land though. Njoroge realizes that because Mwihaki is a year ahead of him at school, she will be helping him learn English when the time comes. He does not like that prospect. Luckily, it is decided at the end of the year that Njoroge does not need to complete the second beginners class, and is promoted to Mwihaki's grade the following year.

Njoroge again tries to encourage Kamau to get an education, but Kamau resists, saying that Njoroge has been selected for that role in the family and that he will support him in that, by working and contributing to the family. Ngotho also promotes Njoroge's efforts at school, telling him that education is important; however, Ngotho views the education as a means to regain the lost lands and not as a goal in and of itself. Njoroge knows that his father believes in the prophecy, that the English will leave, and begins to view himself as being destined to have a role in something great.

Analysis

Njoroge's first reading lesson, with its laughter and shouting, is one of the lightest scenes in the book, where the characters are experiencing pure joy and this joy is associated with learning. It is likely, therefore, that this scene helped to form Njoroge's experiences of school that led him to be motivated in his studies later on. The scene also provides a counterpoint to the increasingly dark scenes as yet only hinted about outside of the school walls. It sets up the school as a place of light and sanctuary in a way that continues throughout the book.

There are complex issues of race considered in this chapter, where the reader is able to compare Njoroge's response to the approach of Stephen Howlands, and the little Indian boy who tried to give him candy. On the former occasion, Njoroge retreated from the interaction, but in the latter he felt guilty for being unkind to the boy and wanted to make



amends. This suggests that the messages that he has internalized from society are more negative towards the English settlers than the Indians who, although they are disliked for their business strategies and rudeness to African customers, are not actively oppressing the African people. It further indicates that the racism being discussed in this text is not general to any outgroup, but has multiple layers, depending on the social standing and power of the group. There is more room for compassion for a group who are viewed as being of lower standing.

Part 1, Chapter 4 provides further clarification of two characters' attitudes towards education; Ngotho and Kamau. Although Njoroge frequently tries to engage his brother in a desire to become educated and to teach him himself, Kamau always resists. He views education as important – Jomo Kenyatta has even said that it is the light of Kenya – but knows that it is not his place to have that education. He, instead, will focus his attention on making money to provide for the family and try to attain wealth and prosperity through land, which he ultimately views as the most meaningful goal. Similarly, Ngotho tells his youngest son that education is the most important thing, but his greatest hope is that the education will lead to the return of their ancestral homelands. These perspectives are in stark contrast to that of Nyokabi in Part 1, Chapter 1, who was motivated by wanting her child to have the best.

Finally, this chapter provides an important shift in Njoroge's thinking about his own purpose. Ngotho's speech impresses on Njoroge a great significance to his education and it is from this point that Njoroge's belief in his vision grows. As a child, he does not have a full comprehension of what is happening in Kenya, or of what he is supposed to do, and so this momentous shift occurs in the absence of a guiding force to keep his belief grounded in reality and tangible benefits.

Discussion Question 1

What parallels are there between Kamau's response to Njoroge wanting to teach him, and Njoroge's own response to Mwihaki's offers of assistance?

Discussion Question 2

"Mwihaki wondered how this boy could do wrong" (37). What does this quote suggest about the way the relationship between Njoroge and Mwihaki will develop over time?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Njoroge does not want to tell Mwihaki about his father's story? What evidence do you have from the text so far to support your theory?

Vocabulary

mischievously, corrugated, murmuring, conjure, ignorant, imposing, allegiance, instinctively



Part 1 (The Waning Light) - Chapter 5

Summary

Njoroge and Kamau stand on a hill outside their home and look towards the lights of Nairobi to discuss their brothers, Boro and Kori, who have gone to the city to look for work. They speak of Boro's anger with their father, of the importance of owning land, of the connection to home that will prevent Boro and Kori from forgetting them, and of the issues that might arise in the city, such as not being able to find work or the national workers' strike that is being planned for all of the African workers in the country. Despite these concerns, Kamau says that he too would like to go to Nairobi and get another job. As it turns out, he does find another job, but it is in Kipanga town so he is able to remain at home with Njoroge and their family.

In school, Njoroge is making good progress and works with Mwihaki regularly. They are starting to learn English and are taught by Mwihaki's sister, Lucia. Lucia is a strict teacher who becomes angry if the students get answers wrong, particularly if she has already taught them the correct response. This happens one day when a European missionary woman, who turns out to be Mr. Howlands' daughter, is visiting the classroom and the students say "Good morning, Sir" when she arrives in the afternoon.

Njoroge does not have many friends his own age, and is dedicated to pursuing his studies. As such, he spends increasing amounts of time alone, reading, and particularly enjoys stories from the Bible. Taking the time to contemplate deeply the ideas he is reading, Njoroge starts to see parallels between the Israelites' struggle in Egypt, and his own tribe's struggle to regain their lost lands.

Analysis

The first part of Part 1, Chapter 5 makes use of Njoroge's youth to try to explain some of the issues that are taking a toll on the book's characters and their relationships with one another. It focuses on the importance of land, and the way that, without land, there is nothing for Boro to do in the village. Nairobi, the greatest chance for employment (and fortuitously, the heart of the growing uprising), is therefore calling him to join, and it is likely that, as a returned veteran, he is only one of a number of young men in a similar situation. These disenfranchised men who fought a war that was not their own would not be content to live in a world that did not recognize their rights or contributions.

Part 1, Chapter 5 also explores further the concept of the Western education, by having an African teacher's successes or failures observed by a European woman. Although we know that Lucia becomes angry with her students when they get answers wrong, she is led to beating them following Mr. Howlands' daughter's visit to the classroom. There is nothing to suggest that the visitor criticized Lucia's teaching; however, it is likely that Lucia will be concerned about the woman's opinion of her anyway. Lucia is



Jacobo's eldest daughter and therefore also likely to have internalized her father's attitudes around impressing and ingratiating herself with the white community.

Njoroge would not have been concerned about the white community's impression of him; however, he is finding himself increasingly isolated from his peers. Presumably, many of the local boys whose families struggled financially would not continue to attend school, instead finding jobs that would provide money for their families. As such, the majority of the students would have been from higher class families with whom he would not readily associate. This suggests that, although education is viewed as the light of Kenya, it is really a light that shines brightest on those who are already wealthy, and wealth has often been associated with a positive relationship with the settlers.

Njoroge's withdrawal into the world of books, and in particular the Bible, help him to develop a sense that everything in his life is connected: his education, his destiny, Bible stories and the stories passed down through his tribal heritage. It is possible that, had he had greater involvement with his school mates, he might have had more opportunities to discuss these ideas and gain feedback on the extent to which they represented reality; however, in the absence of that feedback, the reader sees here the moment when Njoroge's character truly forms, and his actions from this point forward are consistent with the beliefs he has formed at this time.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Boro's anger with his father's generation. What from his life might have made him feel this way?

Discussion Question 2

Why would Kamau want to go to Nairobi, even after discussing all of the pitfalls with Njoroge? What does that tell you about the state of things in Kenya?

Discussion Question 3

How did Njoroge's reading of the Bible affect the way he thinks about the world? Did it add to things he was already thinking, or make him change paths? What other influences does he have in Part 1, Chapter 5?

Vocabulary

cultivate, brooding, confided, criterion, severely, rebuked, overawed, hysterically, intimidated, drudgery, righteousness, perseverance



Part 1 (The Waning Light) - Chapter 6

Summary

Having solidified his belief that the stories in the Bible and the events taking place in his real life are the same, Njoroge takes a great interest in the conversations of the village elders who visit Ngotho, and Kori (Kamau and Boro's brother) and Boro's friends from Nairobi. These men often talk about politics, Jomo (who is described as the Black Moses), and the planned workers' strike. Boro's friend, Kiarie, is a particularly good speaker and manages to convince many of the villagers that the strike will improve conditions for them and their families, as the country will be unable to function without the efforts of the African community.

Mr. Howlands, unsurprisingly, is not in favor of the strike, and summons his workers together to tell them that anyone who takes part will be fired immediately. Ngotho is undecided about whether or not to take part in the strike, as he is aware of the need to support his family and continue his guardianship over the land, but also feels keenly the attack of Boro, who accused him of failing to take action. In a rare display of anger in front of Njoroge, Ngotho and Nyokabi argue about the strike, and when Nyokabi emphasizes the possible outcomes for the family, Ngotho slaps her. He then leaves the house when Njoroge intervenes. That night, Njoroge prays for his sins to be forgiven in case his actions have caused the problems in their family, and then falls asleep waiting for a sign from God that the strike will be a success.

Analysis

In comparing the speeches of the village elders, and those of Boro and Kori's Nairobi friends, the author is depicting a changing of the guard, both in terms of the coming of age of the younger generation, and in the dominance of the new generation's discourse. The older generation had taken a more passive approach to change, believing that it would come with the fulfilment of the prophecy, whereas the young men, who have already experienced the horrors of war, are no longer content to sit back or to follow the instructions of a generation they perceive to have failed them.

Mr. Howlands' response to the planned strike represents both a rejection by the colonial powers of all the Africans' demands, and a demonstration of the arrogance and entitlement with which they expected the rebellion to be put down. In contrast, Ngotho's silent contemplation suggests an awareness of the white community's perspective but not a willingness to submit to it. It is likely that the pressured nature of his relationship with Boro at the time also played on his mind when making the decision whether or not to take part. Knowing that his wife and employer do not want him to take part, but that failing to do so would further damage his relationship with his son and his own self-esteem, makes the decision particularly difficult for Ngotho.



Through Njoroge's emotional discomfort at standing between his mother and father, the reader can see that the issue of the strike is one that affects everyone in the community, not just the men making the decision whether or not to take part. It is also possible to see the beginnings of Njoroge's hero complex, whereby he prays to God for forgiveness for his sins, in case his actions were what had brought disharmony into the home.

Discussion Question 1

What effect would Njoroge's view of Jomo as Moses have had on his opinion of the man, given what you know of Njoroge's character?

Discussion Question 2

What strategies do Kiarie and the other young men use to gain support for the strike?

Discussion Question 3

How did Njoroge feel about his parents' argument? Use the text and your own experience of being caught between two sides of a disagreement to imagine what it must have been like for him.

Vocabulary

implicit, obvious, conviction, paradoxically, winced, foretaste



Part 1 (The Waning Light) - Chapter 7

Summary

In the New Year, Njoroge and Mwhaki both attend school to find out if they have passed their exams and will progress on to intermediate school. Although they are nervous, they both pass, and run home together to tell their families the good news. At the point where their paths diverge, they hold hands for a moment before separating and going home.

What the children do not realize is that the first day of the strike had also taken place that day and there had been a public meeting. Against the advice of their wives, both Jacobo and Ngotho have attended the meeting. At the meeting, the speakers, who include Boro and Kiarie, narrate the people's history and the importance of the land to that story, and encourage a peaceful resistance when the police surround the building. At the same time, however, Jacobo takes the stage on behalf of the government and the police, to try to pacify the crowd and convince them to return to work. Ngotho sees him as a traitor, having sold out his race to pursue his own ends. He stands up and incites the crowd to turn on Jacobo who, with the protection of the police, escapes with only minor injuries.

Ngotho also escapes relatively unscathed, but two men are killed by police, and by the time Mwhaki and Njoroge reach their respective homes, Ngotho's family have been evicted from their home, which was on Jacobo's land, and Ngotho has been dismissed by Mr. Howlands. Nganga, Kamau's former employer, offers to let them build a new home on his land, and Kamau receives a raise in his new job that allows the family to continue to survive.

Analysis

Njoroge's education provides the timeline against which the narrative progresses, and so his completion of primary school serves as a marker of a significant event. This event is a positive experience in the lives of Njoroge and Mwhaki, who are both excited to share the news with their families. In choosing that day as the day of the workers' strike, the author has created an even more significant moment, as it is the last time that the two children's relationship is problematic only because of their differing social classes. The transition from primary to intermediate also becomes a marker for the transition out of childhood innocence.

In describing the situations facing both Mwhaki and Njoroge when they return home, the reader is able to see the similarities across the two families, irrespective of their role in the events of the day. Both children returned home to groups of people milling around their homes, and to their mothers in emotional ruin. Both fathers regret not listening to their wives and going to the meeting anyway, and both were injured but only mildly –



although it could have been much worse. At the moment when the schism that divides their worlds permanently is created, both are just men in difficult situations and there is no real difference between them. At the village meeting, Ngotho does not see Jacobo as another man, however. He sees him as a traitor and the distinction between good and evil, black and white, loyalty and betrayal, was personified in the bodies of himself and Jacobo.

In the past, similar descriptions have been levelled at Nganga as at Jacobo; that he is wealthy and does not care about the wellbeing of others less fortunate than him. When he offers Ngotho's family a place to live, however, he demonstrates that money does not always mean a callous disregard for others and differentiates himself from Jacobo definitively from that point on.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the significance of Mwhaki and Njoroge holding hands for a few moments before turning to their respective homes.

Discussion Question 2

Ngotho joins the strike by convincing himself that it is better to lose his job in the strike than to be in Mr. Howlands' employment at the "time for the settlement of things" (60). What does this suggest that he is expecting to happen in the future? What literary technique is this?

Discussion Question 3

What effect does it have on the reader that we learn of the events at the meeting through Ngotho's eyes, but hear nothing of what Jacobo thought or felt about the meeting?

Vocabulary

subdued, intermediate, anxiously, victorious, posterity, forefathers, Pharaoh, transformed, pacify, personification, convenient, enthusiasm



Interlude

Summary

Two and a half years have passed since the strike, and the situation in Kenya has disintegrated. A government official looks out to Nairobi and debates with himself about whether or not the problems could have been foreseen. People on the street exchange news of the broad daylight murder of a Chief, and gather at night to listen to the radio for further news. A group of the independence movement leaders, including Jomo, have been arrested. This upsets Njoroge, who dreamed of getting to see Jomo in person.

Analysis

The interlude is a brief section of the book, dedicated to marking the passage of time, the increase in violence in Kenyan society, and the fall of Jomo into the hands of the government authorities. It explores the prevalence of the impact of these changes, taking the perspectives of random people on the street and government officials.

The story of the chief being murdered foreshadows the ultimate killing of Jacobo, with the person conveying the story of the Chief's death referencing him as a lesser Chief than the man who was killed, and noting that he had been given land by the Governor so that he would 'sell' the black people. This accusation has also been levelled at Jacobo.

This section of the book also suggests that there is a lack of clarity around what is actually happening in Kenya. The government has declared a state of emergency, which also happened in Malaya, but it is not immediately apparent that the people discussing Malaya have an understanding of what happened there. Similarly, Njoroge knows that the color bar is causing all sorts of problems and that his hero, Jomo, is fighting against it, but he does not really know what the term means.

Njoroge's perspective on Jomo's arrest again reminds the reader that he is only a child, as he is disappointed and frustrated to miss out on meeting a celebrity, rather than concerned about the impact that the arrest will have on the state of the country. This highlights that as things are becoming more serious, Njoroge still does not have an adult's perspective on their implications and therefore cannot always be expected to understand them.

Discussion Question 1

The government official on the hill is described as "stamping his feet angrily" (66). Discuss the other emotions that he would probably be feeling as he looked out over the city, based on what he says to himself at that time.



Discussion Question 2

What effect does it have that the conversation about the chief's murder took place between two unknown people? How would it have been different if it was between two of the characters we already know?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think the author has said that Njoroge does not understand the color bar, but has not then explained it for the reader? How would the effect of the paragraph differ if it had been explained?

Vocabulary

dumb, daring, oppressing, cherished, abolition

Part 2 (Darkness Falls) - Chapter 8

Summary

At school, the boys tell fantastical stories about Dedan Kimathi, the leader of the African Freedom Army. It is rumored that Dedan sent a letter to the police telling them that he would be at a certain place, at a specific time, so they set up a plan to arrest him. On the day, the only person who arrived was a white police inspector who commended them for their efforts and borrowed a motorcycle, as his was not running well. The following day another letter arrived from Dedan, thanking them for waiting for him and providing him with a new motorcycle. Although Njoroge does not believe that Dedan could turn himself white, Ngotho and Kamau have both said that Dedan is capable of wonderful things, so he wonders how much of the story is true.

Over the past two and a half years, many things have happened in the area. Mr. Howlands and Jacobo have both been given positions of authority, and life for Njoroge's family has not improved. Njoroge himself now has to walk five miles each way to attend school as many of the local schools have been closed. Boro has spent increasingly long periods of time away from home, and has not been seen for months, but when Njoroge arrives home, Boro is there. Kori is not with him and, from the way the family speak, it is apparent that some kind of tragedy has taken place. Kori arrives during this conversation though, and tells them that he managed to escape from the back of a truck and hitchhike home, as he had feared that he would have been killed if he had waited for the truck to reach its destination. It is not clear how Boro escaped, or from what, but it has resulted in him being labelled a terrorist.

There is still a sense that Jomo will be the people's savior and that, despite his arrest, when he is released, freedom will come. Ngotho has become more subservient to Boro in the intervening years, but still continues to refuse to take the Mau Mau oath.

Analysis

The story about Dedan Kimathi utilizes the African oral technique of narration and storytelling to build the Mau Mau fighter into a legend. It exaggerates to dramatic effect, in a way that shows Dedan getting something over the white police officers who are made to appear foolish. This kind of propaganda likely serves to amplify the boys' enthusiasm for Dedan's cause, and acts as a recruitment tool for the Mau Mau.

Njoroge's revelation that the majority of schools in his area have been closed by the government demonstrates the contrast between the English and African views on African education. The independent schools had been opened in response to a government failure to provide culturally-relevant education to African children, and by closing them, the government sent the message that they did not value those children's education. As has already been discussed, within Njoroge's community, education is



viewed as being of the utmost importance and so he is willing to demonstrate his commitment to it by walking the five mile journey each way to attend.

Arriving home, Njoroge finds himself in the middle of a discussion about Boro and Kori's experiences away from home and, although it is not spelled out for the reader, it appears that they were arrested, along with a group of other young men, and taken towards an unknown destination in the back of a truck. There is a sense of uncertainty, both for the reader and the characters, about what would have happened to those men and where the truck was going. Initially there is even uncertainty about Kori's fate, as he did not escape with Boro. When he arrives back at home, there is relief for him, but also an ongoing concern about the events taking place in Kenya and the outcome of the night for the men who did not escape.

Njoroge has noticed that, over time, these events, and the increasingly strained relationship with Boro, are taking a toll on his previously strong father. It is apparent that as the situation escalates, the younger generation are becoming empowered, while the older men are reduced in stature and relevance. Much of their empowerment comes from the strength of their figurehead, Jomo Kenyatta, and despite all the ills of the time, there is a confidence that Jomo will prevail against the British authorities and bring about Freedom for his people. This represents the best possible outcome, and is something in which the family are united in their anticipation.

Discussion Question 1

After reading the story about Dedan Kimathi, what do you think of Dedan? How do you think the children in the story feel about him?

Discussion Question 2

Boro and Kori's stories leave out many details of what has happened. What can you tell from what has been said, about the rest of the events? Why do you think the author has left out these details?

Discussion Question 3

What changes are apparent in the relationship between Boro and Ngotho? How would these have impacted on each man's perspective of the independence movement?

Vocabulary

curfew, lordly, exaggerated, deceptively, haggard, contempt, diminished, unflinchingly



Part 2 (Darkness Falls) - Chapter 9

Summary

Jomo's trial dominates conversations in the community (including in the school yard where Njoroge's classmates discuss the country's political factions), and various good omens support the belief that he will win his trial and secure freedom for the African people. When this does not happen, and Jomo is convicted, the people are shell-shocked. Ngotho's family lives in fear, as they are aware that both Jacobo and Mr. Howlands have risen in power and have grudges against Ngotho.

At this point, Ngotho feels that all hope for the fulfilment of the prophecy is lost and, having lost his connection to the land, seemingly permanently, becomes despondent. Njeri (Ngotho's first wife) and Nyokabi say that they did not believe Jomo could win, as the entire justice system is weighted against him. In contrast, Boro claims that the white people are united and that this has led to their success, whereas the black community are divided, which is leading to their downfall. His words inspire in Njoroge a desire to fight, and must have created the same feeling in himself, as he stands and declares that they must all fight to prevent the loss of their values. Njeri and Nyokabi appear afraid that someone has heard this pronouncement and will come to arrest him.

Analysis

Following the news that Jomo Kenyatta lost his trial and was convicted of being a member of the Mau Mau organization, Boro proclaims that it is not possible for black people to overcome the injustice of the white man, because the African cause is divided. It is likely that the author, if not Boro himself, would have been thinking also of the divisions between the African tribes; however, there is a clear demonstration of the extent to which the community were divided in their allegiances to the different factions of the independence movement as it played out in the schoolyard. Supporters of the Freedom Fighters argued with boys whose families were involved with the homeguard; some supported Jomo and others were in favor of Dedan Kimathi. There was discussion of the Mau Mau approach to independence, with arguments about the rights and wrongs of committing violent acts towards other black people. If there was this much disagreement between school boys, it is likely that this would have been apparent even more clearly among the adult population.

Aside from demonstrating a microcosm of the social world, Part 2, Chapter 9 also highlights an emotional descent from the sure belief that Jomo would win his trial and the prophecy would be fulfilled, to the soul crushing despair of losing that scrap of hope. Much as Njoroge sees Jomo as the Black Moses, he comes to see himself as a guide and prophet for his country. There is therefore a parallel between the confidence the community have in Jomo and Njoroge's faith in himself as a savior, and the



disappointment of the community in Jomo's conviction and Njoroge's subsequent contemplation of suicide following his own downfall in a later chapter.

This plummeting emotional experience would likely be familiar, but discomfoting to Ngotho, who has put his faith in a man he thought would fulfil the prophecy in the past, only for that to fail. He would be re-experiencing those emotions in light of Jomo's loss; however, his experience on this occasion would have been much more terrifying as a result of his conflict with Jacobo and Mr. Howlands. He has chosen a side which, it seemed, has lost their best chance of success, but with that, his enemies have gained an advantage and their increased power could result in severe repercussions for his family. When he is considering whether he should have acted differently then, it is not just the natural self-doubt of a devoted parent that is concerning him, but the real grave fear that his actions might have put his sons' lives in danger.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Jomo's loss cause such great distress in Njoroge's family?

Discussion Question 2

Ngotho feels the loss of his land as the loss of a spiritual connection. How would his emotions relating to that loss differ in comparison to Mr. Howlands' emotions, if he had lost his land? What does this suggest about them as individuals?

Discussion Question 3

Boro claims that the white people are united, while the black people are divided. What evidence is there in this chapter that he is correct?

Vocabulary

omen, profound, dispersed, retaliate, communion, redeem, estrangement, emaciating, lamentation, plaintive



Part 2 (Darkness Falls) - Chapter 10

Summary

Mr. Howlands reflects on his life so far, and how the life he tried to avoid in England has, nonetheless, caught up with him in Kenya, forcing him into an administrative position of the government. He has taken on this role only to protect his land, and has come to think of the Africans who want to take it from him as savages. This includes Jacobo, who has also been given a role in the village affairs, and works alongside Mr. Howlands, with seemingly no awareness of the settler's contempt for him.

Although Mr. Howlands intends to make use of Jacobo to advance his own agenda in the area, so too does Jacobo intend to pursue his own goals with Mr. Howlands' assistance. In particular, he wants to get rid of Ngotho's family, claiming that he thinks Ngotho is the leader of the Mau Mau, and suggests arresting his sons and sending them to detention camps. Mr. Howlands agrees to keeping a close eye on them and arrest them for any rule violations.

One evening, the family are all sitting together in the evening, after curfew. They are waiting for Boro to return home, but eventually decide that he will not be back that night. Njeri and Kori decide to return to their hut a short distance away, but as they cross they yard they are intercepted and arrested. Ngotho curses himself for being a coward and allowing it to happen, and when Boro returns home and finds out what has happened, adds his own condemnation of Ngotho and then leaves again. When the fines for breaking curfew are paid, Njeri returns home but Kori is sent to a detention camp, where he remains for the rest of the book. It is unknown what happens to him in the long term.

Although Njoroge can sense a change in his father's presence, he still finds it comforting to be near him. He is also growing in the belief that he, Njoroge, will have an impact on the family's, and country's, fortunes, thanks to his education. When a letter signed by Dedan Kimathi is found at school, threatening to behead the headmaster and 40 students if the school is not closed, it seems as though his education might be ending; however, Kamau counsels him to stay in school, as he will not necessarily be any safer at home. The threatened violence is not carried out, and Njoroge continues with his education.

Analysis

The initial part of Part 2, Chapter 10 is dedicated to Mr. Howlands' reminiscences about his childhood in England. At first it is not immediately apparent why he experiences such disdain for what appear to be happy family memories. The reader knows from previous chapters, however, that his experiences following World War I, when he returned home as a disillusioned young man, led him to seek out the wilds of Africa, far from the staid, if comfortable, existence of life in England. It is likely too, that the memories of his



childhood prior to going to war remind him of the loss of his own son, Peter, with whom he would have shared a new generation of positive experiences. He acknowledges himself that he does not think at all of his daughter, and has concerns about his son's ability to follow after him, and so his connection to the land is really the only thing in his life for which he has any passion. His agreement to take on the role of District Officer acts as a return to his English life, but also gives him a new outlet for his desire to overpower and control.

There is a claim by the narrator, in response to Jacobo's request to monitor and persecute Ngotho's family, that Mr. Howlands had never forgotten Ngotho. This statement appears to be intentionally vague in its tone, as it has been apparent in the past that Mr. Howlands has resisted attempts to have Ngotho fired, suggesting a kind of positive regard for him. It has even been noted that Mr. Howlands was against the strike action because it had caused him to lose Ngotho. At the same time, however, Ngotho had chosen to take part in the strike, in direct defiance of his orders, and was supporting a movement that would see his land taken away if it succeeded. This ambiguous statement, therefore, provides a sense of curiosity in the reader, to find out if Mr. Howlands will continue to try to protect Ngotho, or to punish him.

In Njoroge's reflections and Ngotho's response to the arrest of Njeri and Kori, there is evidence that Ngotho's wellbeing has continued to decline. The strong husband and father who was the center of the family is now wracked with insecurities and a feeling of worthlessness. His sense of the correct way of doing things, as passed down through the tribe over generations, has been gradually eroded, and his contact with the land has been prevented by being dismissed from his employment with Mr. Howlands. It is possible, therefore, to view this disconnect from his culture, traditions and land as manifesting itself as a reduction in his physical and emotional self.

Despite being the brother who is closest to Njoroge in age, Kamau's speeches often suggest a sense of the world that far exceeds that of his younger brother, and his advice in this chapter is no different. Having been working in Kipanga town, and mixing with the townspeople, there is a question of whether or not Kamau's words, advising Njoroge to remain in school, have some additional weight to them because he has involvement with the Mau Mau. This would be supported by the apparent ease with which Nyokabi's fears were allayed in order for Njoroge to remain at school; however, this is a question that is never resolved. It is also possible that Kamau's role as mentor to Njoroge provides him with meaningful messages to convey, and the idea that there is nowhere safe again highlights the decline of society in general and the fact that they know their family will be targeted by Jacobo and the police, if not by Dedan Kimathi.

Discussion Question 1

It is stated in this chapter that Mr. Howlands had "never forgotten Ngotho" (87). What do you think are the things that have made Mr. Howlands remember him? Do you think his feelings towards Ngotho would be positive or negative? Why?



Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Ngotho did not do anything when Njeri and Kori were taken away? Do you think, as he does, that his inaction was caused by cowardice?

Discussion Question 3

Njoroge is described as feeling a "hurt comfort" (91) when Nyokabi tells him that he will not go to school anymore. How do these two emotions go together? What would cause him to feel this way?

Vocabulary

strained, solace, ludicrous, savages, symbolize, thwarted, exasperate, suspicious, detention, irrelevant, reigned, materializing, tension, gravity, genuine



Part 2 (Darkness Falls) - Chapter 11

Summary

Violence in Kenya is on the rise, and one day Kamau tells Njoroge that the bodies of six local men have been found, after they had been arrested and taken away by white government officials. These include the barber, and Nganga, who had let them build their home on his land. Njoroge wonders if they had been Mau Mau, as he cannot understand why they would have been killed otherwise.

As a result of their families' very public feud, Njoroge has been avoiding Mwihaki, but happens to meet her on his way home one day. She reveals that she feels lonely, as everyone is avoiding her, and Njoroge agrees to go to church with her on Sunday. Although he is not comfortable with the plan, he does not renege. In church, the preacher compares Kenyan suffering to that of the Israelites and then someone else, who turns out to be Njoroge's old teacher, Isaka, reads from the Gospel what can be expected at the time of Judgment Day. The similarities to the world they are living in make Njoroge and Mwihaki feel afraid; however, Njoroge pretends that he is not, and teases Mwihaki instead.

Stopping at Mwihaki's house on their way back, Njoroge is afraid of meeting Jacobo there. When this does, in fact, take place, Jacobo is polite to him and inquires about school, then expresses a hope that he will continue with his education as it will be needed to help rebuild the country. This is in line with Njoroge's own beliefs about his role in the world, and his vision for the future captures his attention for the remainder of the afternoon. When Mwihaki becomes upset about the changes in her father and the sin she can see in the world, Njoroge decides to take up his spiritual calling, and tells her that peace will come. Mwihaki suggests that they should run away together, to a place where they would be safe, but this would interfere with Njoroge's vision, so he says no. She laughs the suggestion off as if she was joking, and they agree to be friends and see each other whenever they are both home from school.

Analysis

It has been some time since Mwihaki has been so much as mentioned, as Njoroge has not seen her since the time of the strike. In a situation reminiscent of the Montagues and Capulets of *Romeo and Juliet*, Njoroge and Mwihaki's families are locked in what seems to be an insurmountable conflict. Although the relationship between them has been entirely platonic to date, there is a physical aspect to Njoroge's desire to see Mwihaki that suggests that his feelings for her might have evolved during her absence. Indeed, when he comes across her in the fields, it is her physical appearance that is first described, along with a "pleasant sensation" (Part 2, Chapter 11, p. 95) that he experiences upon seeing her. It is the language of attraction, not friendship, that is used to describe their encounter, leading the reader to the conclusion that there is more to



the relationship than had been the case previously. It is only after he agrees to accompany Mwhaki to church that Njoroge becomes aware of this change, but there is also an internal conflict present, that sets his personal feelings and loyalty to his family at odds with one another.

In contrast, Mwhaki's view is, if not oblivious then indifferent to the greater forces playing a role in their relationship. As the daughter of a well-off family who sides with the British settlers, there is little reason for her to be afraid or to allow the growing unrest to affect her life and, innocently, she does not see any reason why their fathers' battle should impact on them. Her naïveté appears to extend to a lack of understanding that the situation might be different for Njoroge, who is still ashamed of his lesser quality clothing, and this stark contrast sets up a pattern of difference between them that continues, and interferes with their relationship, throughout the remainder of the book.

The selection of Biblical passages presented in church suggests a growth in Njoroge's near-delusional conviction that the stories he reads are taking place in the present day. Starting off with the story of the Israelites in Egypt, the preacher is cementing a link between Kenya and Egypt, and between Kikuyu and the Israelites. This is a conclusion Njoroge has already made for himself, and this would, therefore, increase his engagement with other ideas that are about to be presented. When Isaka discusses the end of the world, therefore, Njoroge is already primed to take on board his message, which is also likely given additional weight in Njoroge's mind, because it is delivered by a man whom he has always viewed very highly and who taught him to read in the first place. It is unfortunate for Mwhaki that these Biblical readings likely further cemented Njoroge's faith in his own supreme destiny, as that takes him further away from her, and makes him unwilling to consider her suggestion that they should leave Kenya together.

As has been highlighted, this chapter marks the commencement of a different kind of relationship between Njoroge and Mwhaki, and so it is possible to examine the ways that his father's attitudes to women have affected Njoroge's own development. In their conversation on the hillside, Njoroge does not listen to her, becomes uncomfortable with her tears, takes delight in believing himself to be braver than her because she is afraid of the end of the world, and refers to her as "only a woman, a girl" (102). It appears that although much has changed between Ngotho's generation and Njoroge's, a belief in the superiority of men over women has prevailed.

Discussion Question 1

In this chapter, we are told that the barber and Nganga have both been killed. Which death upset you more? What was it about each of their characters that made you feel this way?



Discussion Question 2

Why do you think the author would choose to describe Njoroge and Mwhiki's physical appearances at the time they met again? What does the way he does so suggest about their relationship?

Discussion Question 3

Isaka reads in the Gospel of many calamities that will occur during the Second Coming. What evidence has there been in the novel that would suggest to Njoroge that that time might be upon them?

Vocabulary

chaos, circumcision, condemn, lingered, influential, deportations, mysterious, initiative, cloister, gallantry, rendered, indelible, benefactor, calamity, plague, pestilences, iniquity, indulgently, uncommunicative, speculations, irritation



Part 2 (Darkness Falls) - Chapter 12

Summary

Although, at first, Mr. Howlands resented his work as District Officer for taking him away from his land, over time he has come to enjoy it for the way it allows him to force people to do what he wants. Like Mr. Howlands' wife, however, Jacobo remains unsuccessful in taking vengeance against Ngotho, because Mr. Howlands remains unwilling to act. He does become alarmed though, when Jacobo reveals that he has received three death threats, and thinks that Ngotho is behind them. He suggests that Njoroge might even have had something to do with it, mentioning that he was at the house visiting Mwihaki.

Walking to a Christian gathering on the edge of the forest one morning, Njoroge is stopped by a group of soldiers, along with a number of his friends, including Isaka. The soldiers want to see their documents, and Njoroge's prove that he is a student, so he is released. Isaka does not have any documents with him, but remains very calm in speaking to the soldiers. Despite accusations that he is Mau Mau, Isaka maintains that he believes in Jesus and does not have room in his life for the Mau Mau. When the rest of the group are released, Isaka is marched into the forest, and the sound of machine guns tells Njoroge and his friends that Isaka has been killed. The thought makes Njoroge sick.

Boro and his lieutenant sit in a lookout and discuss their motivations for joining the fight. Boro discloses that, for him, it is all about revenge for his brother's death in World War II, not for the lands or for freedom. He tells the lieutenant that Jacobo needs to die, and, despite the other man's protests, insists that he should be the one to do it. He also advises caution though, stating that further deaths other than Jacobo's would be unnecessary.

Analysis

By the time we have reached this chapter, a previously reminiscent and reflective Mr. Howlands has crystallized into a vengeful monster, taking on an almost maniacal representation, and solidifying his attitude towards Ngotho into a violent hatred. Although he had previously been portrayed in a way that suggested a different way of life than that valued by the African characters in the story, he has become a unidimensional villain by this point in the story. He is still resisting arresting Ngotho, but it has become clear that this is because he is saving Ngotho's downfall for a spectacular occasion. Jacobo, on the other hand, displays, for the first time since admitting that his wife might have been right following the strike, some level of humanity. When Mr. Howlands questions him about the death threats he has received, he is willing to point the blame at Ngotho; however, when he is asked to implicate Njoroge in the plot, after acknowledging that Njoroge had been in his house visiting Mwihaki, he shows some reluctance and points out that Njoroge is really only a child. It is a surprising turn of



events and, when Jacobo is later killed, provides some degree of ambivalence in the reader about whether or not killing him had been the right thing to do. This allows a greater exploration of the role of violence in the Mau Mau uprising, and the extent to which such violence had been necessary or beneficial to the cause.

Consideration of the function of Mau Mau violence is also encouraged by the conversation between Boro and his lieutenant. Although many Freedom Fighters claimed that they killed in pursuit of a higher goal – the Freedom of the African people, the return of stolen lands – Boro speaks frankly in saying that his only motivation is revenge for his brother's death in the War, and as that can never be appeased, neither can his lust for violence. This attitude makes Boro seem cold and unreachable, even to his lieutenant, and the combined effect of Boro's callous indifference and Jacobo's consideration of Njoroge serve to shift the narrative framework in which Ngotho's family are seen purely as the story's heroes, and Jacobo and Mr. Howlands are the villains.

This shift in perspectives is not apparent in the intervening paragraphs, when Isaka is killed by the government soldiers, however. Isaka has grown from a good teacher into a good Christian, and there is no doubt that he is intended to be viewed positively by the reader. It is possible even, that the disconcertingly calm demeanor he presents when questioned by the soldiers reflects the devout faith and abhorrence for violence on both sides that he has come to personify. When Njoroge heard of the deaths of the barber and his family's benefactor, Nganga, he was forced to consider if they might have been involved with the Mau Mau, as he could not believe that they would have been killed otherwise. Isaka's death, which Njoroge can be certain was not because of any Mau Mau affiliation, is therefore the first to affect him viscerally, and to cause him to question official versions of events.

Discussion Question 1

What parallels can you see between Mr. Howlands and Boro in this chapter?

Discussion Question 2

There are a number of Swahili words used in the book without translation. Why do you think the author has done this? What is significant about the way it has been used when Njoroge and his friends are detained on the road?

Discussion Question 3

Boro's lieutenant is unable to understand how Boro could talk of killing and caution in the same sentence. Why do you think that Boro wants Jacobo to be killed alone?

Vocabulary

gratifying, assertive, submissive, triumphal, absorbed, interrogated, menacingly, resigned, taut, summarily, vengeance



Part 2 (Darkness Falls) - Chapter 13

Summary

Njoroge passes his exams and is accepted to secondary school. He is the only boy in the area to do so. Mwihaki also passes, but her grades are not good enough for secondary school, so she is going to a teacher's college instead. Many people from the area contribute money to help Njoroge complete his studies.

Before he leaves for school, Njoroge meets Mwihaki to say goodbye. They speak at cross purposes throughout the meeting, with her reminding him that people forget those they leave behind, and him thinking that she is jealous because she is not looking him in the eye. They speak about Njoroge's vision for the future, and he thinks about it even when they are not discussing it. He uses the opportunity to give counsel to Mwihaki, as he intends to give it to all people once he has completed his studies, reassuring her that the sun will come up tomorrow because life would be too difficult to bear if it did not. As the sun begins to set, they say their goodbyes and Njoroge realizes he has been wrong to think Mwihaki jealous.

Analysis

Although this chapter is short, it is able to touch on a number of important ideas. First, there is the ongoing love for education that has remained constant, not just for Njoroge and his family, but for the entire community. Njoroge is the only boy in the area to have succeeded in reaching secondary school, and, despite all of the other problems that are affecting the towns and villages nearby, many people make contributions to ensure that Njoroge will be able to succeed. Kamau and Ngotho both express pride in Njoroge's achievement, and a wish that he will be able to use his education to improve the family's situation.

Mwihaki, too, expresses pride in Njoroge's achievements – despite his secret glee that he had beaten her in the exams, and consideration of whether she might have been jealous of him. This mixed communication is apparent throughout their exchange on the hillside, when Njoroge is focused on gaining the opportunity to fulfil his destiny, and Mwihaki is preoccupied with concerns that he will forget her or that he does not care for her at all. In fact, when Njoroge begins to preach to her about the sun rising, and their duty to their country, she becomes angry, believing him to be oblivious to her as a person. When he explains his reasoning, however, she appears to fall in love with him further and, despite all of their differences, their seemingly fraternal goodbyes are laced with tenderness. There is an understated nature to their relationship that suggests that the social and political issues of the day are more pressing than their feelings for each other, although both struggle to cope with those issues in the other's absence.



Discussion Question 1

In what ways have Njoroge's family influenced his vision for his own future? What information in this chapter supports your ideas?

Discussion Question 2

What emotions do you feel when you read about Njoroge's vision and their responsibilities for the country? What response does Mwhaki have? How is your experience similar or different to hers?

Discussion Question 3

What is the thing "foremost in their own hearts" (115) that Mwhaki and Njoroge do not discuss? How might things have been different if they had?

Vocabulary

glimmer, despised, deliverance, remnant, shrouded, tribulation

Part 2 (Darkness Falls) - Chapter 14

Summary

At Siriana missionary school, Njoroge meets a wide range of people. He is taught by white men and studies with white boys and Africans from all the different tribes. Expecting to find them abusive or at least unkind, Njoroge is surprised to find that people want to help him and are friendly towards him. At an interschool sports tournament, he begins talking to a student from another school, who turns out to be Stephen Howlands. The two boys share stories of seeing each other as children, but being afraid how the other would react. This creates a closeness between them, and Stephen discloses that he and his mother will be returning to England. It does not feel like a return to Stephen though, as he has never been to England and considers Kenya his home. When the two boys return to the sidelines, their comfort with each other disintegrates and they drift apart.

Mwihaki has started writing to Njoroge, and reveals in her first letter the extent of changes in their village, particularly with her father. This makes Njoroge reluctant to return home, where deaths and violence might interrupt his planning for the future, and contemplates whether he might be better to stay at school until he graduates.

Analysis

Attending secondary school is the culmination of Njoroge's dreams for an education, and it is here that his learning truly begins. Surrounded by English and African teachers and students, Njoroge is introduced to a world that is not being torn apart by conflicting views and inter-group violence, but instead exists harmoniously, treating each other with respect. It is this experience, and its associated learning, that could truly be of meaning to him in fulfilling his vision of making a difference for his family and neighbors, by preaching and modeling reconciliation and community.

Njoroge's ability to make use of the experiences he is given is tested in his interaction with Stephen Howlands. Although Njoroge and Stephen had both been afraid to engage with each other as children, having been taught that the other's race was dangerous and untrustworthy, they found it less difficult to relate to each other as teenagers who met on an even footing at a school sporting event. Njoroge's ability to experience compassion is also demonstrated when Stephen tells him that he will be returning to England. Even though that is the goal of the independence movement in trying to reclaim their lands, Njoroge recognizes that Stephen, who was born in Kenya, does not have land in any real sense, having no connection to the land of his forefathers or the land on which he has grown up, and feels sorry for Stephen. This compassion has not always been apparent in his interactions with Mwihaki, when he has tried to make use of his self-declared vision to preach to her; however, this interaction with Stephen



provides the reader with a snapshot of the way in which Njoroge's education might actually have some use.

Although Njoroge's interactions with his peers and teachers, and with Stephen Howlands, have all proven him capable of making use of his education and learning to effect a harmonious environment, Mwhiki's letter detailing the disintegration of Jacobo's character into paranoia and violence, and the state of affairs in Mahua village, cause him to contemplate remaining at school until he has completed his studies. This would provide him with peace of mind with which to contemplate his destiny. It also suggests that he has not yet reached a level of maturity or confidence to fully engage in his community, and make use of the skills he has developed to try to improve his family's lives.

Discussion Question 1

How does Njoroge's experience of meeting white people and boys from other tribes at Siriana relate to the wider events in his village and in Kenya as a whole?

Discussion Question 2

How do Stephen and Njoroge feel about their history when they are talking to each other? Would things be different between them if they saw each other at home during vacation? What has the author done in this chapter to give you this impression?

Discussion Question 3

What was your response to reading Mwhiki's letter? How did your thoughts relate to Njoroge's?

Vocabulary

founders, abode, turbulent, sympathy, determination



Part 2 (Darkness Falls) - Chapter 15

Summary

Njoroge enjoys being at school, and appreciates the way that the environment values people from different cultures and creates a place of acceptance. This is attributed to the headmaster, who treats everyone equally, but places great value on the concept of British civilization and encourages his students to adhere to it.

On this day, Njoroge starts his morning with prayer and breakfast before his English lesson, a class that he really enjoys. He is told by another student that it is a bad omen for him to be so happy in the morning, and this makes him uncomfortable as he has had bad dreams for the past week. Shortly after, he is called out of class to go and see the headmaster, who is accompanied by two police officers when Njoroge arrives. The headmaster expresses condolences to Njoroge, and wishes him to continue following the teachings of Jesus, and then Njoroge finds himself in the police officers' car without any idea of what has actually happened. He is taken to a homeguard post and beaten for denying that he has taken any oaths for the Mau Mau, and for refusing to tell the officers where they can find Boro. He still does not know why he is being questioned.

After spending the night in a hut, listening to women scream nearby, Njoroge's interrogation recommences, and Mr. Howlands is there. He asks Njoroge who has killed Jacobo, and Njoroge's thoughts immediately go to Mwihaki and whether she is alright. Despite threatening to castrate Njoroge, as he says he has done to Ngotho, Mr. Howlands' questioning does not lead to any further information from Njoroge, who eventually passes out from the pain of the pincers on his genitals. He and his mothers are released a few days later without any further questioning.

After hearing of Jacobo's death, Ngotho feels revitalized but when Kamau is arrested, he decides to confess to the murder himself, to save his son. He has been tortured for days but has not given anything away, even when Mr. Howlands (whose actions scare the other officers) interrogated him himself.

Following his release, Njoroge reflects on his life and experiences, but is no longer able to see any way out of the situation and his hope dies. He withdraws from his family, and is haunted by the idea of Jacobo's death as the killer of his dreams. One night he leaves his hut to go to Jacobo's house and confront this demon, but along the way it becomes the spirit of Mwihaki who accompanies him and he finds that he does not want to fight her. As he approaches the house, he realizes that he is in a dangerous situation, and returns home instead. Having lost comfort in his faith, he does not pray before he goes to sleep.



Analysis

Throughout the novel, the reader has seen in Njoroge a steadfast commitment to his faith, his education, and his destiny. In this one chapter, however, all three of these elements unravel, and leave him feeling despondent and hopeless.

Bookended by mentions of prayer, the chapter captures the disintegration of Njoroge's faith through a simple transition from engaging in routine morning prayer in the first paragraph, through to deciding not to pray in the final sentence. His bad dreams appear to portend of some misfortune that is about to befall him, and this links back to the idea of a prophecy and being able to see what is to come. It has its roots in the ancient Kikuyu seers, and reflects a responsiveness to his African traditions that has sometimes appeared to be lacking, in deference to his English education.

Despite Njoroge's commitment to his education, and his family's sacrifices to ensure that he should continue to receive it, the end of Njoroge's school journey is merely a brief mention that is passed over in the events of the day. One minute he is a student at Siriana, and the next he is in the back of a police car being driven towards his home, where interrogations and torture are waiting for him. Removing any ceremony from the experience of being expelled has the effect of awakening from a dream, in which things that so recently seemed true are taken away and the real world again encroaches. It suggests that all the hard work Njoroge put in to his studies, and all the faith he has placed in himself and his own capabilities is for nothing, as he does not truly belong and cannot really succeed. This is reminiscent of Njeri's earlier comments relating to Jomo's trial, that the system is weighted in favor of failure for black people who try to work within it.

Through torturing Njoroge, it is Mr. Howlands' intention to gain information about the murder of Jacobo. What happens instead, however, is the death of Njoroge's dreams and belief in his own ability to effect change. He does not have any information to provide, and so cannot confess, even if he had so desired. Finding out that his father has been castrated, hearing women who could have been his mothers scream in the night, and experiencing excruciating pain himself all have the effect of eroding his sense that there will be good in the world again, and he turns to despair.

Discussion Question 1

The first few paragraphs of this chapter juxtapose Njoroge's love of English literature and Western schooling, with his belief in omens, superstition and dreams. How have these two sides of Njoroge's character been represented in other parts of the book?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think the headmaster does not immediately tell Njoroge what his family has done? Why does the author not tell the reader?



Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Mr. Howlands took part in Njoroge's interrogation? What made him important enough for Mr. Howlands to get involved?

Vocabulary

buoyant, assailed, devotion, consciousness, compassionate, torment, serenity, hobnailed, castrated, supplication, derisively, irresolute, elicit, contemplate



Part 2 (Darkness Falls) - Chapter 16

Summary

In Ngotho's hut, Njeri and Nyokabi sit with him and cry. This makes Njoroge afraid, as he knows they would only do that if there was no hope for his father. Four days have passed since Ngotho was brought home from being tortured and he has been unconscious for that time. At last, he wakes up and looks at his family. He notices that Njoroge has come from school, but thinks that he is only there to laugh at him. He also thinks about Kamau and what might happen to him, having been arrested for Jacobo's murder, and then about Mr. Howlands. Ngotho is rambling deliriously. When he turns to talk about Boro, there is a movement in the room and Boro enters, just in time to say goodbye to his father. Although Ngotho tries to get him to return from the forest, Boro says that he cannot, and Ngotho gives his blessing for his son's fight. He is in the middle of asking Njoroge to look after his mothers when he dies. Boro runs out into the night.

Analysis

The destruction of Njoroge's sense of self that had begun in the previous chapter continues in the current one with the death of Ngotho. His previously strong father is reduced to being in such excruciating pain that he cannot move, and Ngotho's thoughts wander over the fate of his sons. Mwangi's death, ever an event on Ngotho's mind, is paralleled with Kamau's ongoing incarceration at the homeguard post, suggesting that, like Boro's, Ngotho's actions have been about trying to make up for his son's death. Offering himself in place of Kamau might save this son's life, as well as assuaging the guilt and grief he experienced in relation to Mwangi.

Even at the end, Ngotho's comments to Njoroge suggest that there is salvation in education, instructing him to gain as much learning as possible, as that would protect him. He also tries to protect Boro, with almost his last breath, ordering him not to return to fighting in the forest. Boro's inability to agree to that request, as he has seen his father nearing death and now has another life for whom he will fight for vengeance, could have evoked anger in both father and son, and exacerbated Ngotho's frustration that his son did not show him a traditional form of respect by adhering to his wishes. Instead it can be seen that Ngotho chose to take back his role as the head of the household by voluntarily offering his blessing, allowing them both some closure in their relationship prior to him passing away.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Ngotho asked his sons if they had come back to laugh at him?



Discussion Question 2

How do Ngotho's delirious ramblings relate to the essential character of each of his sons? What might be some reasons why Kori is not included?

Discussion Question 3

How does Ngotho's statement that "they - want - the - young - blood" (134) fit with the wider historical context of the Mau Mau Rebellion, and with what we know of the men who specifically targeted Ngotho's family?

Vocabulary

unchecked, executed, acquiring, grotesque, falteringly, exerted



Part 2 (Darkness Falls) - Chapter 17

Summary

Five months after his father died, Njoroge finds himself working for one of the Indian shops, but struggles to find any motivation for his work. On this day a group of women enter the store and do not want to pay the price Njoroge is asking, but he does not want to haggle with them. As they go to leave, the Indian shop owner convinces them to pay more for a similar quality item.

It is revealed that on the night that Ngotho died, Mr. Howlands was killed, and now Boro is awaiting trial for murder, alongside Kamau. Mr. Howlands had been at home alone, having sent his wife back to England. He contemplates finding the black woman he had "taken" the night before as a release, then turns to thinking about his interrogation of Ngotho and feeling angry that he has not been able to break him. In torturing Njoroge he has seen the death of the boy's dreams, and remembers the loss of his own. In his anger, Mr. Howlands is waiting for the police and homeguard to arrive to go on the nightly patrols, but Boro enters instead, armed with a gun. Boro confesses to killing Jacobo, accuses him and Jacobo of stealing land and raping women, and reveals Ngotho's death. Mr. Howlands tells him that it is his own land, not Boro's, and Boro shoots him. As he goes outside, Boro tries to shoot his way past the homeguard, but gives up and is arrested.

Njoroge's demeanor at work leads to him being fired, and as he walks home, trying to work out how to tell Nyokabi and Njeri what has happened, he is overcome by a desire to see Mwihaki.

Analysis

Despite the fact that all of the chapters since the interlude have been gathered together under the title Darkness Falls, Njoroge has done an incredible job of holding on to the light. By the time he has been fired from his position at the Indian store, however, he has very little left to give, and begins to think of Mwihaki as his final hope. Having already stated in the preceding chapters that he gave very little thought to her following her father's death, his desire to see her when he is at his lowest appears to be a selfish act that is motivated by his own feelings and his belief that she could take away his pain. Although his first thought had been to ensure that she was safe, upon hearing of her father's murder, he also blames her for the negative events that have befallen him, seeing them as a result of his friendship with her. This places her not in the position of a beloved partner, but a convenient scapegoat and provider of solace.

Similarly, having sent his wife and son back to England (accompanied by his daughter), it is apparent that Mr. Howlands' predispositions towards owning or possessing a woman feature in his thoughts about 'taking' a black woman. His choice of that



language further exemplifies the theme of women's roles in society as mother or whore, and the reader is reminded of the reverse situation from early in the novel when the barber was in Jerusalem during World War II, a black man visiting white prostitutes. The changes in society have been widespread over the intervening years; however, there is also a sense that Mr. Howlands' 'taking' was not consensual further exacerbating the image of women as objects to be possessed.

Boro's interaction with Mr. Howlands prior to killing him reclarifies a number of the themes that have been apparent throughout the novel. Mr. Howlands thinks about the farm and the way that it belongs to him, raising the idea of ownership of land. He likens it to the possession of a woman, indicating that both would belong to him, and, in speaking that thought to Boro, ends his life. Mr. Howlands takes a strict legal approach to the idea of land ownership, and it is apparent from his descriptions that over the years he has not enhanced his understanding of the African men's connection to the land, or their claim to it, and he has, therefore, made no progress towards creating the peaceful future with his farm that he aimed to regain.

Discussion Question 1

The women in the store are willing to pay more to the Indian store owner than they are to Njoroge. Why? What evidence do you have from the text to support your argument?

Discussion Question 2

Mr. Howlands recognizes the death of Njoroge's dreams in his eyes when he is interrogating him and is reminded of his own lost dreams. How does Njoroge's experience relate to Mr Howlands' during World War I?

Discussion Question 3

What does the narrator mean when he says that "Mr. Howlands said this as a man would say, This is my woman" (Part 2, Chapter 17, p. 140)? How does this fit with the portrayal of women in other parts of the book?

Vocabulary

mingled, roused, indignation, defiantly, exultant, scampered



Part 2 (Darkness Falls) - Chapter 18

Summary

On Saturday, Mwihaki waits to meet Njoroge. Meeting with him causes conflict for her, however, because he is related to her father's killer, but is also the person whose message has helped comfort her. Furthermore, she has been told that he was involved in her father's death. When she first heard about her father's death, she did not feel anything, but during her return journey home she cries with the realization of everything that has been happening in Kenya.

Ngoroje is also nervous about meeting Mwihaki, because he does not know how she will respond to him. At first, she is cold to him, but as he confesses his guilt and hurt, and tells her that he loves her, her feelings change. Although Mwihaki very much wants to be with Njoroge, she also feels torn because he wants them to escape Kenya, as she has previously suggested, but she now wants to fulfil their duties to their families and wait for better times. She decides that she will not give in to him, and so leaves him alone, crying as she goes. Njoroge feels that he is all alone in the world, and grieves for his loss.

On Sunday, Njoroge leaves the house and his mothers are afraid for him. He has given up on God and everything else in which he previously had faith, and knows that it is likely that his brothers will soon be killed. As he walks, Njoroge comes to the place where Mwihaki had left him, and sits down under a tree to wait for darkness. He has prepared a rope and tied it to the tree when his mother comes searching for him. She and Njeri had both risked breaking curfew to find him and, without saying a word, they take him home. On the way, Njoroge contemplates his failures and cowardice, and what this will mean for him going forward.

Analysis

Traditionally, in the final chapter of a novel there would be some resolution to the key themes under discussion. In *Weep Not, Child*, however, there is no such closure. Mwihaki and Njoroge's love story stalled, with them seemingly reaching an impasse that will prevent them from being together; however, after his intended suicide attempt he reflects on the ways in which he has let down his mothers and Mwihaki, and so there is perhaps the potential for the impasse to be resolved in the future. Njoroge's education ended suddenly with no clear plan for what would happen next. It is not clear whether he still views an education as the light of Kenya. With no apparent possibility for completing his education, an ongoing belief in its necessity for him to succeed would likely return him to the tree at a future time, in order to again consider committing suicide. It will be necessary for him to develop a new dream; however, it is unclear whether that will take place either.



The land has not been returned, and at the end of the novel Jomo is still incarcerated, with no clear idea of how the land conflicts will be settled. Boro and Kamau's trials will potentially (even likely, in the case of Boro) result in their deaths and it is unclear what has happened to Kori. Although there is a sense that Njoroge intends to start anew, waiting for the new day to come to Kenya, looking after his mothers and possibly Mwhiki, the ending remains intentionally ambiguous and this allows for all outcomes to be possible, the ultimate escape from the battle between darkness and light.

Discussion Question 1

What does it suggest to you that Mwhiki was unable to cry for her father, and that even when she did, it was for the "calamity that had befallen Kenya" (Part 2, Chapter 18, p. 143)? What else have you read in the text that supports this idea?

Discussion Question 2

How has Njoroge and Mwhiki's relationship developed over the course of the novel? What changes have happened between their last meeting and this final encounter?

Discussion Question 3

At the end of the book, the voice in Njoroge's head tells him that he is a coward, and Njoroge agrees. In what ways has Njoroge been cowardly, and what do you think his agreement with the voice will mean for him in the future?

Vocabulary

revelation, bewilderment, hesitancy



Characters

Njoroge

Njoroge is the main protagonist of the novel, which follows his development through school. He is his father's, Ngotho, youngest son, and has four older brothers. Although it is briefly mentioned that he has sisters (whose names he does not like), they are not otherwise included in the novel.

At the start of the book, Njoroge is a small child, given by his mother a chance to start school. He is a good and dedicated student, enjoys learning English, and is the only boy in the area to be accepted into secondary school. For this, the entire community supports him to go to the missionary school, Siriana. When his family is implicated in Jacobo's murder, however, he is expelled from school and all his dreams are destroyed.

From an early age, Njoroge has developed a belief in himself as the one hope for his family to improve their lot in life, and this is supported by the extent to which his brothers go to ensure that he can continue to attend school, and the way that everyone tells him that education is the most important thing in life. As he develops, Njoroge fuses together his own story with those in the Bible, and comes to view himself not just as the savior of his family, but also of the country as a whole. This belief gets in the way of him seeing a future with Mwhaki, his childhood friend, who grows to be in love with him.

Njoroge is also in love with Mwhaki, but does not seem to realize this until it is too late. Throughout their lives, they encourage and support each other, often at a distance, although Njoroge can also appear somewhat callous towards her, avoiding her for long periods of time, and rejoicing when he performs better than her at school. When his dreams collapse, however, it is Mwhaki he seeks out, and when she will not do what he wants, he feels that all is lost and becomes suicidal.

As it was in the beginning of the novel, so it is at the end, and it is Njoroge's mother, Nyokabi, who saves him from himself and the opportunity to start a new life.

Ngotho

Ngotho is the father of Njoroge, and his brothers, Mwangi, Boro, Kori and Kamau. He has two wives, Njeri and Nyokabi. It is said that Ngotho has a happy home, and that the peace found therein is a result of his fairness to both wives and the fact that he does not beat them often. Njoroge admires his father, and is a little in awe of him, but sees how the events over the years of the Emergency have broken his spirit. In fact, as Njoroge grows into a man, Ngotho is reduced to a shadow of his former self.

Much of this change is as a result of his relationship with Boro, who returns from World War II when Ngotho's other son, Mwangi, does not. Realizing the ways that war and his brother's death must have affected Boro, Ngotho tries to be lenient and understanding



with him, but Boro becomes increasingly angry and accuses Ngotho and his generation of not doing enough to regain their stolen lands from the British colonials. This accusation strikes Ngotho and influences many of his subsequent actions.

He chooses to take part in the national workers' strike, despite the threat of losing his job and access to the land, of which he has always seen himself as guardian. He does so also in defiance of Nyokabi's plea for him to think of what will happen to his family if the strike fails. At the meeting at the beginning of the strike, when Jacobo - a local African landowner - takes the stage to encourage them all to return to work, Ngotho sees him as a traitor and incites the crowd to attack. Both he and Jacobo escape with minor injuries, but Nyokabi's worries come true when he is dismissed from his employment and evicted from his home, which was built on Jacobo's land.

Over time, Ngotho sees less and less of Boro, who has become a Freedom Fighter for the Mau Mau, but when they do meet, their relationship continues to deteriorate. Ngotho defers to his son in most things, in contravention of the way he believes society should be, but refuses to take the Mau Mau oath. This again angers Boro and drives him away.

When Jacobo is killed, and Kamau arrested for the murder, Ngotho summons the courage to confess, in order to save his son. Having done so makes him walk taller again, recovering some of his old self for a short period. After confessing, he is tortured and castrated, before being sent home to die. Ngotho's last moments are spent with the remainder of his family - Njeri and Nyokabi, Njoroge, and for the last few minutes, Boro, who has returned from the forest to see him. He does not live to see the fulfillment of the prophecy that he believed would restore the lost lands, but, after trying once more to get Boro to leave the Mau Mau, gives his blessing for Boro's fight.

Boro

Boro is the oldest of Ngotho's living sons; a full brother to Kori and Kamau, and half brother to Njoroge. He also had a close relationship with Mwangi, his half brother who was killed in World War II. Boro and Mwangi fought together in the War, and Boro has returned embittered, angry, and silent. He also drinks often.

Boro becomes especially angry with his father, Ngotho, upon learning that all of the land in the area had originally belonged to the Kikuyu people, as he feels that the older generation has not done enough to get the land back. He goes to Nairobi to get work, and it is evident during his visits home that he has become increasingly politicized. When he does come home, he brings with him political friends who also speak about a proposed national strike, the need for change, and Jomo Kenyatta, the Black Moses who will lead the people of Africa to their Promised Land.

Eventually, Boro makes the choice to go into the forest and join the Mau Mau fighters, making use of the skills and training he received in the War. His reckless disregard for his own safety makes him a leader in their ranks, and his increasingly fractious relationship with his father leads to him spending more and more time away from home.



Having disclosed to his lieutenant that his only motivation for fighting is revenge, he takes on the responsibility for killing Jacobo. After doing so, Ngotho confesses to the murder, and Boro returns home to reconcile with him only moments before Ngotho dies. In his grief, Boro goes to Mr. Howlands' office and shoots him as well, before being arrested himself. At the close of the book, Boro is in custody awaiting trial and likely execution for the murders.

Jacobo

Jacobo is a wealthy African landowner, who holds the only permit (among Africans) to grow pyrethrum. This brings him in a lot of money, and his monopoly on the trade has caused others to be resentful and wary of him. He is part of a new middle class in Africa, and often seems to be acting in ways that will ensure he continues to grow in wealth and social standing in the eyes of the white settler community, with a disregard for the opinions and experiences of his own tribe.

During the strike, Jacobo agrees to speak on behalf of the colonial government to try to encourage the people to go back to work. This angers Ngotho, who thinks he is a traitor and incites the angry crowd to think the same. Jacobo is left relatively unharmed, thanks to the Police who protect him, but he evicts Ngotho's family from his land and holds a grudge against them from that day forward.

As the events of the Mau Mau Rebellion unfold, Jacobo finds himself promoted to Chief and uses his influence with Mr. Howlands, the white District Officer, to take revenge on Ngotho's family. His violent approach to suppressing the Rebellion leads to his murder by Boro, Ngotho's oldest living son.

Jacobo is the husband of Juliana, and father to Lucia (one of the local school teachers), John (who has completed his education and gone to America), and Mwihaki (who is friends, and later in love, with Njoroge).

Mr. Howlands

Mr. Howlands is the white settler who owns and lives on the Gikuyu ancestral lands around Mahua village. He worships that land as a god, but his reverence is more in respect of his ability to tame the land and bend it to his will than to the land itself. He has a wife, Suzannah, and children, but after the death of Peter in World War II, he worries about who will take over the land after him. He does not think that his younger son, Stephen, will be up to the task.

Apart from thinking about his succession, Mr. Howlands does not appear to think much about his family or any of the other aspects of his life, other than to the extent that they impact on his land. He left England to avoid a life of government and policy but ends up taking on a position as District Officer during the Mau Mau Rebellion in order to protect his land. Over time, he finds that he enjoys bending people to his will as much as he had enjoyed it with the land, however, and takes pleasure in his new role.



As a farmer, Mr. Howlands has employed Ngotho to help him work the land. He is surprised by Ngotho's apparent attachment to it and the care with which he does his work, and resists his wife's efforts to dismiss him. When Ngotho takes part in the strike, in defiance of Mr. Howlands' wishes, however, he fires him immediately, and holds a personal grudge against him for many years. In fact, Mr. Howlands views the destruction of Ngotho as the greatest triumph of his career, and it makes him exceedingly angry when Ngotho cannot be broken.

Following Ngotho's death from the torture Mr. Howlands inflicts on him, Boro enters Mr. Howlands' office and shoots him.

Mwihaki

Mwihaki is the younger daughter of Jacobo and his wife, Juliana. She is also a classmate and friend of Njoroge through their years at school. There are numerous occasions when the two young people take care of each other throughout their friendship, in particular in their younger years when Mwihaki stopped the other boys from teasing Njoroge on his first day of school, and Njoroge comforted Mwihaki after local children threw stones at her and her brothers.

Coming from different social classes, their friendship is not always easy, although Njoroge appears to be more conscious of this than Mwihaki. She sees the very public feud between their fathers as being something that is their fathers' concern and nothing to do with her or Njoroge, and does not think that the long periods between their meetings could be intentional. Despite this, when she does meet Njoroge after a long separation, she confesses her loneliness and they become closer friends after that.

On one occasion, Mwihaki invites Njoroge back to her house, where they meet her father. It is this encounter that implicates Njoroge in Jacobo's murder later on and, although she knows that she was the one who invited him there, she still wonders if he was involved.

Over time, Mwihaki's tender feelings for Njoroge turn to love, and she suggests to him that they should run away from Kenya to be safe elsewhere. He puts the idea aside, but returns to it later on when she is the only possibility he can see for a future. By that time, however, she has realized the importance of looking after her family and refuses to abandon her responsibilities to them and, despite still loving him, she walks away.

Kamau

Kamau is the youngest son of Ngotho and Njeri, Ngotho's first wife. He is therefore Njoroge's half-brother.

At the beginning of the novel, Kamau has begun his apprenticeship as a carpenter, a trade that helps him to take on the role of provider later on when all of the other male members of his family are unable to work. Kamau always ensures that there is enough



money for Njoroge to continue his studies, and never begrudges him the opportunity to learn.

By the end of the book, Kamau has been arrested for the murder of Jacobo. He is not involved, but his father tries to confess to save him; however, there is a very real possibility that he will be executed alongside Boro, who killed Jacobo, and also Mr. Howlands, before being arrested.

Nyokabi

Nyokabi is Ngotho's second wife, a woman who had once been beautiful but whose beauty has faded as a result of time, poverty and loss. She has two sons, Njoroge, and Mwangi, who was killed in World War II.

Nyokabi and Njeri, Ngotho's first wife, get on well, and often work together to help each other get chores done and keep each other company. As Njoroge's biological mother, she is more often the focus of the reader than Njeri.

At the end of the novel, it is Nyokabi who finds Njoroge when he is preparing to commit suicide and brings him home.

Kori

Kori is the middle son of Njeri and Ngotho, and Njoroge's half brother. He is described as being a storyteller, working in a hotel and bringing home gossip and friends from the town. He is a character who seems to be associated with joy and happiness and, as the story becomes darker, he is arrested for breaking curfew and taken to a detention camp. No further news is received of him for the remainder of the novel.

Njeri

Njeri is the first wife of Ngotho, and has three sons with him: Boro, Kori and Kamau. Although she and Nyokabi, Ngotho's second wife, are said to get on well and share everything they do, Njeri takes a secondary position to Nyokabi in the telling of this story. She is arrested for breaking curfew along with Kori, but is released and returns home when the fine is paid. She is also out looking for Njoroge at the end of the book, risking arrest again for breaking curfew, suggesting that there is a strength and courage in her that has not been fully explored.

Mwangi

Mwangi is the older son of Ngotho and Nyokabi, and Njoroge's only full brother. He was killed fighting in World War II, prior to the events of the novel, but his death shapes the characters of Boro and Ngotho especially. Ngotho feels a resentment toward the white



settlers, whose war killed his son, and Boro fought alongside him. Coming home from the war without his brother, Boro is embittered and angry, and later claims that all of the killing he does as part of the Mau Mau is in vengeance for his brother's death.

Nganga

Nganga is the carpenter to whom Kamau is apprenticed as a child. Although Kamau resents his slow teaching style when he is eager to learn and progress, his, and the rest of his family's, attitude towards Nganga changes when Jacobo evicts them from their home and Nganga offers to let them build a new home on his land.

Nganga is taken from his home by government officials late one night and later found dead, along with the barber and four other local people.

Isaka

Isaka is one of Njoroge's primary school teachers, and the person who first teaches him to read. As a student, Njoroge enjoys the loud, relaxed style of Isaka, who is also described, with an element of judgment, as a person who drinks, smokes and goes about with women. He also has a mustache that he plays with when talking to women and this is a source of gossip to the students.

Later, Isaka is reintroduced to the story as a reformed man of God, having shaved off his mustache and become a Revivalist Evangelical Christian. He reads from the Gospel of Matthew about the events that will precede the Second Coming, scaring Njoroge and Mwhiki into considering what it would be like if the world were to end.

Isaka meets his own end on his way to a Christian gathering when his group are detained by soldiers and asked for their papers. Isaka does not have his documents with him and is accused of being Mau Mau. Although he calmly denies it, he is taken into the forest and shot.

Lucia

Lucia is Jacobo and Juliana's eldest daughter, and Mwhiki's older sister. She is a teacher at the local primary school, and Njoroge initially thinks that she is kind. He becomes afraid of her when she canes another boy for teasing a new student.

Lucia's anger with her students is also apparent later on when a European missionary woman comes to visit the school and her students make a number of mistakes with their English. She canes them to try to make them learn not to embarrass her.



Stephen Howlands

Stephen Howlands is the younger son of Mr. and Mrs. Howlands. Mr. Howlands fears that this son will not be up to the task of managing the land after he is gone, in contrast to his older brother, Peter, who was killed in World War II.

Growing up in the village, Stephen is shy of the African boys, but tries to approach Njoroge one day when he goes to visit his father at work. Njoroge does not talk to him, however.

Later on, when they are in secondary school, Njoroge and Stephen meet again and speak to each other. They realize that they had both been afraid of each other as children.

Prior to the end of the book, Stephen and his mother and sister go back to England to escape from the conflict. Stephen has told Njoroge that he does not want to go, as Kenya is the only place he has ever lived, and that he has had a premonition that he will be leaving his father (who is, indeed, killed) forever.

Kiarie

Kiarie is a friend of Boro's from Nairobi. He is involved in politics and comes to the village with Boro and Kori to speak to the villagers about taking part in the strike. Ngotho is impressed by him and his style of speaking, and this seems to influence his decision to take part in the strike.

The reader is later informed that Kiarie is killed in the violence of the years that follow.

Juliana

Juliana is the wife of Jacobo and mother to Lucia, John and Mwhaki. She has strict views on the correct way to bring up children, which she tells to Njoroge and the other children at a Christmas party for the workers' families after Njoroge and another child start giggling during Grace. She also tries to warn Jacobo against going to the workers' strike where he is attacked by the crowd, lead by Ngotho.

John

John is the oldest son of Jacobo and Juliana. He has completed his studies and gone overseas. Njoroge had thought that John had gone to England, but Mwhaki tells him years later that her brother is in America. Irrespective of his actual location, Njoroge would like to travel overseas at the end of his studies, just as John has done.



Suzannah Howlands

Suzannah Howlands is Mr. Howlands' wife. He married her because she expressed an interest in going to Africa with him, but when she got there it was not exactly as she had expected and she became bored. Her children gave her some solace; as did hiring, abusing, beating, and firing her African servants.

After they arrived in Africa, Mr. Howlands paid little attention to her or the house, and her opinions are similarly given little consideration in the novel. Eventually she is able to persuade her husband to allow her and their children to go back to England to get away from the escalating violence, and she is there when Mr. Howlands is later murdered.

Peter Howlands

Peter Howlands is Mr. Howlands' eldest son, and the one to whom he wanted to leave his precious land. Like Mwangi, however, Peter was killed in the war and did not return home. This loss affects Mr. Howlands deeply and he is unsure if his second son will be able to take Peter's place.



Symbols and Symbolism

Light and dark

The references to light and dark throughout the novel speaks to optimism and despair, to write and wrong, to hopelessness and salvation. Njoroge's focus on the light helps to buoy him through Kenya's dark times, but when the light goes out for him, he waits for literal darkness in order to attempt to take his own life.

Right from the epigraph onward, there is a discussion of light and darkness. When Isaka is preaching about the Second Coming in church, a darkness falls over the building, but Njoroge talks also about the sunshine following the night. Even the two parts of the book - *The Waning Light* and *Darkness Falls* - evoke this symbolism.

Land

In this novel, the land symbolizes different things to different people: for Mr. Howlands, it is a representation of his ability to restrain, control and subdue, whereas to Ngotho the land symbolizes his connection to his ancestors and his spirituality, as seen through the legend of Gikuyu and Mumbi, to whom the land was given by Murungu the Creator. These two meanings are in conflict throughout the book, and serve a greater purpose of demonstrating the battle between the English and African ideologies.

The road

The road is a symbol of colonial oppression, in that the white settlers have come to Kenya and laid down this permanent, sealed road across the face of the countryside. It is there as a constant reminder of the changes that the colonists brought to the country, not only in the physical sense, but also in the social and political landscape. The fact that it is said that few know where the road starts or finishes suggests that the colonial presence is also seen as a fact of life that is seemingly immovable.

Jomo

Although he was a real person (the heroically conceived figure of Jomo is the historical leader of the Kenya African Union (KAU), Jomo Kenyatta), his inclusion in *Weep Not, Child* acts more as a symbol for the hopes and aspirations of the oppressed African nation under colonial authority. Jomo is granted biblical status in his portrayal as the Black Moses, and when he is convicted of being part of the Mau Mau Society there is a sense that, for the common people like Ngotho's family who dreamed of a free Kenya, all hope is lost and fear and violence start to spread more quickly.



Pyrethrum

In the case of this novel, pyrethrum is symbolic not just of wealth, and the difference between those with and without money, but a marker of land ownership and of accepting the colonial laws and customs. Pyrethrum was a valuable crop in Kenya's economy, and a permit was necessary to grow it. Only white settlers were generally granted this permit; however, Jacobo has also managed to obtain one. In a society that widely condemns Jacobo for his involvement with the settlers, his ability to grow pyrethrum can also be seen as symbolic of his betrayal of African values.

The barber

Without a name for his own, the barber represents the common man. He has a generic job, that would be found in any town, and is well known, sociable and a center of the community. His presence in the narrative suggests that this story could be told in any town, with any audience, because everyone is able to relate to him and find his stories entertaining. Similarly, his death could be that of anyone. Taken from his home at night and found murdered, this was not an uncommon event that only happened to people who were deeply involved in politics or fighting, it could happen to anyone, anywhere.

Mr. Howlands' daughter

Mr. Howlands' daughter is symbolic of the unspoken female voice. She is a person, with a role to play in the narrative, but is not given a name - despite the fact that her brother, Peter, is named, even though he died prior to the events in the novel. Mr. Howlands' daughter is characterized only in reference to her father, who, we are told, has ceased to think of her at all. This suggests the subservient role of women in relation to men.

Mr. Howlands' daughter is also invisible because she becomes a missionary, symbolizing a disconnect between the missions and the events that are taking place in the rest of the country. In trying to teach a Western Christianity in the face of an uprising with tribal roots, the missionaries can be seen to disregard the very real issues facing the Kenyan people.

Calm

The idea of calm can be viewed in terms of a symbol of irony, as it is uncommon in the novel for the word to be applied in its true sense. There are often qualifiers attached to it (such as unsettled or deceptively) that suggest that there is no calm, and that even the semblances of such have an uneasy quality about them. This is indicative of the depth of conflict taking place, and the way that the community around Mahua village has been disrupted by it.



Nairobi

Although none of the book's action takes place in Nairobi, it is the political center of Kenya, and therefore the ultimate heart of the Mau Mau insurgency. Characters whose lives are being affected by immediate acts of violence are able to look to the distant lights of Nairobi from a hill near the village and see the city that represents the machine of ultimate determination for which they are fighting. This is as true for the homeguard or the non-partisan villagers caught in the crossfire as it is for the Mau Mau.

Prophecy

In a world where traditional values are so often in conflict with those of Western society, the idea of prophets and prophecies run through both cultures, and so find a way to link them together. Christianity had prophets like Moses and Samuel who led their people through challenging times, and the Kikuyu people also had a seer who foretold the arrival, and departure, of the white settlers. The image of the prophecy suggests a message for a time yet to come, and an inspiration to bring that to pass. For Njoroge, the symbol of the prophecy reminds him of the special calling he believes God to have for him, but it is the message of hope that he spreads through his own faith provides the most benefit for those around him.



Settings

Family compound

There are three huts in Ngotho's family compound on Nganga's land: one for each of his wives, and one for Ngotho himself. The majority of the action at home takes place in Nyokabi's hut, and it is leaving that hut to go the few meters to their own, after curfew, that causes Njeri and Kori to be arrested. It is in Njeri's hut where Kori and Boro tell the story of their escape from an unknown dilemma and journey to return home, and Ngotho also returns to the compound after he is tortured.

In the first part of the novel, another version of the family compound exists on Jacobo's land, before the family is evicted. It is there that Ngotho tells his family the story of Gikuyu and Mumbi, and where Nyokabi first gives Njoroge the chance to go to school.

Siriana mission school

The mission school is portrayed as a haven far away, both physically and emotionally, from the stresses and dangers of the rest of Kenya. In this place, men and boys of all different tribes and races mix together freely and without disputes based on their background. Njoroge considers it to be a safe place to work towards his destiny, and does not even want to leave for vacations. It is a microcosm of the world as it should be outside of the school's walls as well.

Mr. Howlands' shamba

The plantation that belongs to Mr. Howlands is the source of conflict between him and Ngotho. Initially, Ngotho takes a passive stance in relation to Mr. Howlands' ownership, preferring to act as quiet guardian than cause problems that might result in him being denied access to the land. After Boro's anger when he revealed that the land had been given to the Kikuyu people by Murungu, however, Ngotho's claim to the land becomes more pressing. His actions in taking part in the strike to demand the return of his lost lands result in him being dismissed from his job, thereby fulfilling his fear.

Mr. Howlands continues to deny Ngotho's family's ancestral possession throughout the novel, however, and even claims it to be his own land right before Boro kills him.

Jacobo's house

In Njoroge's youth, Jacobo's house seems like hallowed ground, and Njoroge wonders what it is like inside. He has been in the kitchen on one occasion; however, he was told off for being uncivilized and laughing during Grace, so had not had the opportunity to go



further. When he is invited to visit by Mwhaki as a teenager, he is still impressed, but less in awe than he had been as a child.

The barber's shop

With a friendly proprietor, who is open with his stories from the War, the barber's shop is a meeting place where the town's men can gather to discuss the news of the day and gossip. It is a place that features in the first half of the book, when hiding from their wives seemed to be the biggest worry for the village men, and it is the place that many villagers go to discuss the events that take place at the strike meeting where Ngotho attacks Jacobo. As the village becomes less safe, however, attention to the barber's shop decreases and it is early in the second part of the book when it is revealed that the barber himself has been killed.

The hillside

The hillside is a neutral location where Njoroge and Mwhaki meet. As Mwhaki is the daughter of Jacobo, and Njoroge is Ngotho's son - and their two fathers publicly despise each other - it would be a challenge for them to meet at either one's home. Between their two homes, the hillside provides open space for them to be together. In this space, they are able to dream of greater futures and imagine how life could be; however, when this imagination is taken away and they have to make real decisions about their lives, it is also to the hillside that Njoroge goes when he is contemplating suicide.



Themes and Motifs

Education

Throughout the novel, which follows the character Njoroge from the local primary school to boarding at the Siriana missionary school, English education is almost invariably viewed as important and a means for making changes, both to individual people's lives and to the country as a whole. Njoroge believes that the value is not in the education itself, but in the way it could make a difference in the fight for the return of the lost lands. The ways in which education is likely to make a significant difference for other characters are, however, much less clear. Even for Njoroge, whose greatest dream is to go to school, it is not certain what he intends to get from his studies or how they will help him to fulfil what he sees as his destiny, to save his family and Kenya. When Mwhaki asks him about his plans after he has completed secondary school, he is uncertain and says that perhaps he will go to university or to America, which could be seen as another means of delaying his involvement with the real world and the problems that his family and countrymen are encountering on a daily basis. Therefore, in many ways, this idea of education as a panacea for the world's ills raises more questions than it answers.

In contrast to this passion for gaining English education, the traditional wisdom that has been passed down through the tribal structure over generations appears to hold less value. Indeed, at one point, Mwhaki asks why the old folk had not had any learning before the white people arrived, and Njoroge replies that perhaps it because there was no one to teach them English. This suggests that there is a subtle cultural bias in favor of Western ideals, even amongst people whose families are not in favor of the colonial government, such as Njoroge's family. This pervasive view makes it difficult to see Kori, who is described as a good storyteller, and therefore likely strong in the Kikuyu values and knowledge, as someone of great learning, and indeed he plays only a small role in the novel. Even Boro, who stands fiercely against the involvement of white men in Kenyan society, takes an interest in Njoroge's education in the Western school system. It is possible that in order to be truly independent from British rule, it will be necessary for the Africans to critique their attitudes and beliefs about Western, versus traditional, forms of education.

Race

The author uses the characters of Mr. Howlands and Boro to exemplify how passion, when mixed with anger, can easily lead to hatred, violence, and bloodshed. Although he initially appears to be a multi-dimensional character, with loves, losses, frustrations and joys, the English settler, Mr. Howlands, becomes increasingly single-minded in his focus on his hatred for the black "savages," as he calls them. As he gains in power over the course of the novel, he is able to exert significant influence over the town's black community, implementing rules and punishments according to his own whim. These



include using physical torture against almost all members of Ngotho's family. In contrast, Boro has returned from the War disenfranchised and eager to pursue a cause that will give his life meaning. Although he chooses the return of the lands stolen by the English settlers and becomes a Mau Mau fighter to achieve this change, it is later revealed that his true motivation is a single-minded focus on revenge for his brother, Mwangi's, death in World War II. For both of these characters, there is an anger towards the 'other' that does not lend itself to reconciliation, compromise or understanding.

Although there is no outright violence between the Africans and the group of Indian people living in the area, there is still a level of tension between them, which provides a reminder that racism exists in lesser ways, even when there is violence on a greater scale. Although they are not mentioned in relation to Mau Mau raids or government killings, there are more subtle ways in which the Indians are presented as being lesser people. For example, the African people do not want to spend money in their shops and resent that they are able to offer lower prices than the African stores, forcing people to work with them. They are also seen as cowards for refusing to fight alongside the English in World War II (even though there is also much resentment from the black community for the African lives lost in the white man's war), and as demeaning in their interactions with black people, by ignoring them when a white person enters the shop. This level of racism is insidious in the novel, highlighting that it is not only violence that causes problems in society.

Social status

The author uses a comparison of Ngotho's and Jacobo's family to highlight that there are differences, not just between races, but also between social classes, that lead to disharmony within Kenya. From the beginning of the novel, it is clear that Ngotho's family is poor, and they struggle to get together the money to send Njoroge to school. Jacobo, on the other hand, has a large house and owns the land that Ngotho's family lives on. Although the two could conceivably co-exist with few problems, as Ngotho's family does with Nganga when they are forced to move to his land following the strike, there is a sense that Jacobo is not viewed by the community as a good man. His wealth springs from his pyrethrum crop, which he grows by license from the white government, and he is the only black farmer to have such a license. There are rumors that he has actively prevented others from being granted them as well. Such rumors are examples of the oft-professed view that there are some people who do not want to share their wealth or knowledge, out of fear that others would surpass them.

The distance between the social classes in this society not only creates resentment, but also barriers to understanding. For example, when Nyokabi comes to collect Njoroge from playing with Mwihaki after school, she is annoyed with him because she does not think it healthy for him to associate with a girl of a higher social class. Similarly, he is later described as focusing inward on his studies and reading because Jacobo's sons, with whom he might have played, are part of the newly self-aware middle class, and he does not belong. Had these opportunities to mix with children of other classes been more readily available, perhaps there would have been greater unity amongst the



African community, as Boro claims that the independence movement requires to succeed.

The role of women in African society

Using an unusual but particularly poignant approach, the female role in African society is addressed by what is absent, more than what is spoken. In passing, it is mentioned that Njoroge does not like the African names of his sisters. At no other time throughout the duration of the novel, however, are any female children of Ngotho, Njeri or Nyokabi mentioned. Similarly, Mr. Howlands' daughter is never given a name, although she is considered to be of sufficient importance to be invited to Njoroge's school and for Lucia to be concerned about making a bad impression on her. This takes away her agency, and minimizes her importance, even relative to her brother, Peter, who died before the start of the novel.

For the female characters who are given a name, there is still a dearth of their opinions, thoughts, emotions and experiences. Despite being married to some of the most important characters in the book, Jacobo's wife, Juliana, and Suzannah Howlands are barely mentioned, and Njeri and Nyokabi's views are not often included in the narrative. This is despite the fact that Njeri is arrested for breaking curfew, they are both detained when Ngotho confesses to murdering Jacobo, and their sons are often missing, detained, or otherwise in harm's way. Even when Nyokabi tries to speak to Njoroge following his father's death, or when she chooses not to say anything following his planned suicide attempt, the reader is not privy to the thoughts and emotions she is experiencing.

On the one occasion when Nyokabi does express an opinion, it is in contradiction to what Ngotho is trying to tell her, and, as a result, he hits her. If Njoroge had not been there to stop him, it is likely that he would also have continued. This gives the impression that, contrary to statements in the book, the relative peace in Ngotho's household may be down to his wives not speaking out, rather than because he has an even temper and great patience.

Christianity

The use of Christian symbolism throughout the novel elevates events in Kenya to Biblical status, such as through Isaka's parallels with the Gospel of Matthew's description of Judgment Day, and the key players in the independence movement, such as Jomo Kenyatta, to the role of prophets. When Njoroge comes to see his own role in the country's affairs as also being Biblical in nature, he seems to lose touch with the reality that is confronting his family, friends and neighbors on a daily basis, and instead imagines himself being the savior of them all. This elevation of his own importance above the everyday, limits Njoroge's ability to use his skills and understanding in a way that genuinely benefits the people around him.



Subtle references to Christian practices, such as Juliana using the interruption of Grace as an opportunity to lecture the children about being uncivilized, or the barber's frequenting of white prostitutes in the holy city of Jerusalem also abound in the text, reminding the reader of the prevalence of Christian belief in Kenyan society. It is interesting to note that Christianity is a belief system that was brought to Africa by the white missionaries, but was adopted strongly by the local population. As can be seen in the legend of Gikuyu and Mumbi, there are parallels between the Bible stories and those of traditional Kikuyu culture that might have made the new religion easy to adopt.

Beyond trying to teach the Kenyan people Western perspectives on religion, there is a view presented in the novel that white people perceive the black community as inferior, or even as savages. In Jerusalem, however, the home of the white missionaries' religion, a black man (in this case, the barber, but Ngotho wonders if Boro might also have done the same) can pay to have sex with a white woman. The motif of Christianity, therefore, plays a role in disrupting the established order of white as dominant over black and allows the reader to question the assumptions upon which the prevailing discourse is founded.

Styles

Point of View

Weep Not, Child uses a third person omniscient narrator to weave seamlessly through the perspectives of different characters, as well as providing objective descriptions of events and settings. As the book is written as an exploration of a society at a given point in time, this style of narration provides the reader with access to the histories and points of view of people on different sides of the political spectrum. For example, we are told about Mr Howlands' struggle to reconnect with his homeland upon his return from World War I from his perspective, and can then see a similar battle playing out within Boro. Similarly, Jacobo's statement to Njoroge that he will be needed to help rebuild the country echoes Njoroge's unexpressed belief in his own destiny as a savior.

In taking on the perspective of Njoroge or Mwhaki, who are children at the beginning of the book and young adults by the end, the reader is able to explore themes and concepts through the eyes of someone who, possibly like them, does not fully understand the gravity of the situation. This is apparent when Njoroge is at school and asks "What's Mau Mau?" and the boys then go on to discuss Jomo and Dedan Kimathi and their complex relationships to the various groups fighting for independence. It also provides an opportunity to subvert cultural assumptions, such as when Mwhaki asks why there was no learning before white people came to Africa, which invites the reader to consider the value placed on a Western education even by those to whom it is not readily available.

Language and Meaning

Although many of Ngugi's later books were written in Kikuyu and then translated into English, Weep Not, Child was originally written in English. There is, nonetheless, a sense of the African voice in the rhythms of the work, through the use of oral storytelling, proverbs, and the spiritual connection to ancestral lands and deities. These, almost supernatural, connections and the language in which they are described are somewhat foreign to a Western audience, whose comprehension of spirituality may be limited, primarily, to that found within a church. It is apparent that Mr. Howlands, who lives within an African community, has little understanding of the attachment.

The novel also makes interesting use of the Swahili and Kikuyu languages, mixing them in with the otherwise English text. On many occasions, the use of the African word presents a concept that is not fully translatable into English, such as the *irimu*, who were mythical god-like creatures and ancestors to the Kikuyu people. The explanation would interrupt the flow of the text, and imply that the novel has been written for a foreign audience, rather than for Kenyans who can read English, Swahili and Kikuyu and, therefore, understand the concepts.



One other key use of the Swahili language is in interactions between Africans and white settlers, such as Mr. Howlands or European police officers. Mr. Howlands greets Ngotho daily in Swahili, and the homeguards instruct Njoroge in Swahili to call the police who are interrogating him 'affendi' (a term used for high military officers in the Kenyan army). It is likely that, for the most part, the Africans in the story, who are all part of the Kikuyu clan, would have spoken Kikuyu to each other, and the English would likely have spoken English. This would mean that much of each group's interactions would be incomprehensible to the other, and Swahili would work as a lingua franca to enable communication between them. The dialogue is written in Swahili in order to highlight this change that both parties make in order to communicate. Although the homeguard would have been able to speak Kikuyu with Njoroge, it would be safer for all of them if they were to speak a language that would be intelligible by the Europeans as well.

Structure

The book consists of two main parts, plus an epigraph taken from a poem by Walt Whitman, and an interlude. The epigraph introduces the symbols of darkness and light, the impermanence of the storm, and the protective relationship between a parent and a child. These concepts all feature strongly in the remainder of the book.

In the first part (The Waning Light), Njoroge is a child, starting school and with optimism for the future. However, by the second part (Darkness Falls) hope for a bright future in Kenya fails and there is much more darkness and violence. The interlude marks a transition period of two and a half years, wherein the state of Kenyan society deteriorates towards civil war. There is a distinct disintegration of community, and the anonymous characters in this section suggest that the changes have been pervasive throughout all part of society.

Each part is split into a number of chapters: seven in Part 1, and 12 in Part 2. These are each relatively brief, but within the chapters there are also sub-sections that capture an event, memory or description so that each chapter is able to move through various perspectives, time periods and settings while also holding on to a primarily chronological retelling of events.



Quotes

Weep not, child Weep not, my darling With these kisses let me remove your tears, The ravening clouds shall not be long victorious, They shall not long possess the sky...

-- Walt Whitman - American poet (Epigraph)

Importance: The first line of this quote provides the book with its title, Weep Not, Child, and captures the sense that the darkness cannot go on forever, which is apparent in Njoroge's attitude throughout the novel. In the original poem, the child is a daughter, on the beach with her father; however, at the point where Njoroge fails to see the light, when he contemplates suicide, it is his mother who comes to take him home. Although the genders are reversed, it remains the role of the child's parent to show them that the light still remains and will return when the storms have ceased.

That's why you at times hear Father say that he would rather work for a white man. A white man is a white man. But a black man trying to be a white man is bad and harsh.

-- Kamau (chapter 2)

Importance: This quote explores the characters' beliefs about differences between races. It establishes that white men are considered incomprehensible, and so when their actions do not seem to make sense, that is acceptable. However, this quote suggests that when the same actions are perpetrated by an African man, they are viewed more negatively. This could be because society, as presented through the narrator, believes that an African man should understand that the behaviors are inconsistent with his own culture and act accordingly. Alternatively, it could be that the perception is that when a black man takes on the actions of the white man, he does so in a more vigorous manner. In either instance, this view sets up those Africans who make use of the English system to promote themselves in opposition to those who do not take on the English world view.

... the way the old man touched the soil, almost fondling, and the way he tended the young tea plants as if they were his own... Ngotho was too much a part of the farm to be separated from it.

-- Narrator (through the eyes of Mr. Howlands) (chapter 3)

Importance: Central to the Mau Mau Rebellion is the issue of ownership of African land. Although the Kikuyu inhabited the land for many generations before the arrival of English settlers, the colonial powers had stripped away their rights and dispossessed them of their lands. In this quote, it is apparent that even Mr. Howlands, who thinks himself to be the rightful owner of the land, is able to see the connection between Ngotho and the land he tends as Mr. Howlands' employee; land which originally belonged to his family and to which he feels a deep spiritual connection.

I've heard Father say so. He says that if people had had education, the white man would not have taken all the land. I wonder why our old folk, the dead old folk, had no learning when the white man came?



-- Mwhaki (chapter 4)

Importance: This quote highlights the complex interplay of racial and education themes in the novel, through the innocent lens of a child. Mwhaki's question highlights the value placed on the British education system that was implemented in Kenya, above the traditional knowledge that had been passed down for generations. It is of note that this comment comes through Mwhaki from her father, Jacobo, who is a landed African who has done very well under the British system.

But don't you want to hear what happened in Murung'a?' 'Oh, Murung'a. That's far away ...' 'A chief has been killed.' 'Oh! Is that all? My wife is waiting for me.

-- Conversation between two unnamed characters (Interlude)

Importance: The casual tone of this interchange is indicative of the extent to which the killing of a Chief has become commonplace in the years since the workers' strike. The reader is presented with a horrific event, in juxtaposition with a mundane everyday occurrence, such as needing to go home for dinner. The speaker also appears to be less concerned about the event because it has not happened nearby. This allows us to see the degeneration of Kenyan society over time, and the ways that the violence had eroded the relationships between people, forcing them to focus inwards towards their own families and concerns, to the exclusion of others.

Njoroge wondered if these were the Mau Mau. For only that could explain why the government people had slaughtered them in cold blood.

-- Narrator (chapter 11)

Importance: This quote provides the innocent perspective of a child who has not yet realized that corruption exists in the world, and we are reminded of Njoroge's youth. He has a black and white view and knows that the government have been killing Mau Mau fighters. In his world, there could be no other reason for respected and wealthy members of the black community to have been killed.

Her world and Njoroge's world stood somewhere outside petty prejudices, hatreds and class differences.

-- Narrator (through the eyes of Mwhaki) (chapter 11)

Importance: Mwhaki's view of her relationship with Njoroge as existing outside the broader culture of the country's chaos and their families' feud gives the story a feeling of star-crossed lovers, like Romeo and Juliet. It suggests that love conquers all; however, the reader knows that Njoroge does not have the same view of their situation and has often avoided Mwhaki because of the differences between them. This further exacerbates the idea that this conception of love is not likely to withstand the pressures of the world.

But for me Freedom is meaningless unless it can bring back a brother I lost. Because it can't do that, the only thing left to me is to fight, to kill and to rejoice at any who falls under my sword. But enough. Chief Jacobo must die.



-- Boro (chapter 12)

Importance: Weep Not, Child takes a variety of view points in examining the state of Kenya's society during the Emergency. In this quote, the reader is provided with the perspective of an ardent and unapologetic member of the Mau Mau. Although he is cold and bloodthirsty in his speech, he talks openly about a motivation that comes from his cherished brother's death and we know his story from the description of his family's lives as well. This gives a human side to Boro, and a greater understanding of how he developed into a hardened killer.

If you knew that all your days life will always be like this with blood flowing daily and men dying in the forest, while others daily cry for mercy; if you knew even for one moment that this would go on for ever, then life would be meaningless unless bloodshed and death were a meaning. Surely this darkness and terror will not go on forever. Surely there will be a sunny day, a warm sweet day after all this tribulation, when we can breathe the warmth and purity of God...

-- Njoroge (chapter 13)

Importance: At times in the novel, Njoroge's blind and unwavering faith in his own vision and destiny can appear short-sighted or even idealistic. This quote, however, provides a deeper understanding of his perspective than is otherwise apparent, and provides solace to Mwihaki, who was feeling afraid. This message demonstrates the kinds of spiritual counsel Njoroge intends to provide after he has completed his education.

It's strange. It's strange how you do fear something because your heart is already prepared to fear because maybe you were brought up to fear that something, or simply because you found others fearing... That's how it's with me.

-- Njoroge (chapter 14)

Importance: Although Njoroge thinks, throughout the novel, that there is some higher purpose to which he is being called through his education, this quote exemplifies one of the greatest opportunities his schooling provides. In interacting with white teachers, teachers and students from other tribes, and white students from other schools, Njoroge is given a chance to unlearn the fear that has been part of his, and others', experiences with other groups. It is through this increased understanding that he can provide the greatest contribution to reconciliation in his country.

This is my land.' Mr Howlands said this as a man would say, This is my woman.

-- Narrator (chapter 17)

Importance: This quote encapsulates both the theme of colonization, and that of women's roles in society. In the face of his impending death, Mr. Howlands still remains incapable of seeing the land as anything other than his rightful property. Similarly, the narrator's comment suggests that Mr. Howlands would also have seen women as his rightful property, and this is supported by an earlier statement that "he wondered if he would go and get the black woman he had taken the night before" (p. 140).



He was only conscious that he had failed her and the last word of his father when he had told him to look after the women. He had failed the voice of Mwhaki that had asked him to wait for a new day.

-- Narrator (through the eyes of Njoroge) (chapter 18)

Importance: As Nyokabi brings Njoroge home from contemplating suicide, the book ends and the future is left ambiguous. Even on the journey back to his home, this quote represents Njoroge's rock bottom, from whence he will either dwell on the sense of his own failures and continue to contemplate or attempt suicide, or use his past failures as a means to build a better life for tomorrow, when the sun comes up on that new day.