

Book 1 Study Guide

Chapter 1

1. What do the first two lines of the book tell the reader about the author's opinion of Africa?
"There is a lovely road that runs from Ixopo into the hills. These hills are grass-covered and rolling, and they are lovely beyond any singing of it." (Pg. 33)
2. Define veld, kloof, and titihoya.
3. Briefly describe changes in the landscape between the lush hills and the valley below.
4. Support the following statement: The red earth is a symbol for the destruction of the tribal way of life.

Chapter 2

5. Use clues from the story to define the title umfundisi. Support the idea that Stephen Kumalo is respected by his neighbors.
6. Why does the Reverend wait instead of immediately tearing open the letter?
7. Remembering that Reverend Kumalo and his wife are from the Zulu tribe, why do you think Paton uses short sentences and phrases in the dialogue? Does the fact that Paton punctuates the dialogue with dashes rather than quotation marks help or hinder you?
8. What door is Reverend Kumalo referring to in the following passage? "You have opened a door, and because you have opened it, we must go through." (Pg. 39)
9. Find an example of sarcasm in this chapter.
10. Support the idea that Reverend Kumalo places a great deal of importance on family.
11. What does the following passage tell the reader about the role of black women in South Africa? "Then she sat down at his table, and put her head on it, and was silent with the patient suffering of black women, with the suffering of oxen, with the suffering of any that are mute." (Pg. 40)
12. Whose eyes is Paton referring to in the last line of this chapter where he says "Happy the eyes that can close"? (Pg. 40)
13. This novel is written in third-person omniscient. Find an example of this type of narration in this chapter.

Chapter 3

14. What favor is asked by the man who helps Kumalo with his bag?
15. Why are there mostly black travelers on the train? What is the "little lie" Kumalo tells the people on the train? What does the "lie" say about Kumalo's character?
16. By now, you have an idea of what happens in the book. Explain what the title means and what literary term is used in it.

Chapter 4

17. Why is Kumalo afraid to cross the street?
18. If Kumalo is suspicious of the young man who offers to guide him to the Sophiatown bus, why does he give him a pound note to buy his ticket?
19. Support the following statement: Despite his unfortunate encounter with the young man who steals his pound note, show that Kumalo believes that most men are decent.
20. What is Kumalo's opinion of Mr. Msimangu?

Chapter 5

21. One characteristic of Paton's writing style is his use of repetition. He repeats the same idea by saying the same thing again using different words, in the same sentence or in the following sentence. For example: He describes the grass as something that "keeps men, guards men, cares for men." Find an example of repetition in this chapter.
22. What do the priests talk about at dinner that first night?
23. Sometimes in this novel, Paton does not give characters names but refers to them by epithets, usually representing personal characteristics. Find a character in this chapter who speaks but is identified only by a physical characteristic. What does the reader learn about the character from this description?
24. What is Msimangu telling Kumalo about his sister when he says, "It would be truer to say ... that she has many husbands"? (Pg. 53)
25. Support the following statement: Msimangu is a humble servant of God and believes any good he does comes from God.
26. What does Kumalo learn about his brother John?
27. Support the following statement: Msimangu does not think it is a tragedy that the white man came to South Africa. What does Msimangu think is the real tragedy for South Africa?
28. Why does Msimangu believe "fear rules this land"? (Pg. 56)

Chapter 6

29. Define *repression* as it applies to black South Africans. Why does John Kumalo call the black newspaper the "Bantu Repress"?
30. Why are the young black children not in school?
31. In Gertrude's conversation with her brother, what evidence is there that she is not truly repentant about her wicked life and that she will ultimately disappoint her brother?
32. List Gertrude's possessions. How does Kumalo react to her son?
33. Support the following statement: Kumalo expects to find his son and persuade him to return home just as easily as he finds Gertrude and persuades her to return home.

Chapter 7

34. Discuss the extent to which you think the following statement may be accurate: Clothes in this story symbolize a person's lifestyle.
35. Why does John not write to his brother?
36. Why does John prefer living in Johannesburg, with all of its problems, to life in Ndotsheni?
37. What is John's opinion of the church?
38. Why does Stephen Kumalo's son leave home?
39. Support the following statement: Msimangu does not respect Stephen Kumalo.
40. What is the "truth" about power that Msimangu says the white men do not understand?
41. Despite the corruption of both blacks and whites by power, Msimangu thinks there is still "hope" for South Africa to overcome its problems. What is the "hope" Msimangu sees for South Africa? What is his greatest fear?
42. What information about Absalom does Mrs. Ndlela withhold from Kumalo?

Chapter 8

43. Who is Dubula?
44. What is good about Alexandra?
45. List two examples of how whites try to help blacks in this chapter.
46. What information about Absalom does Msimangu learn from Mrs. Mkize?
47. A robot is the South African word for traffic light. What surprising event do the two priests witness while their taxi is stopped at a red light?

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 is the first of three chapters that do not contribute directly to the plot line. Instead, Chapter 9 helps the reader understand life in South Africa in general through short scenes unrelated to Kumalo's search for his son.

Many critics believe the overall theme of the deterioration of black character and traditions is presented in Book *Keep that theme in mind when answering these questions.*

48. What are the reasons the black people move to Johannesburg?
49. Briefly describe the housing available in Johannesburg for black people.
50. How do black people get a house?
51. What is Shanty Town? Is it a healthy place to live?
52. What is done to try to eliminate Shanty Town? Why are the government's efforts unsuccessful?

Chapter 10

53. Why is Kumalo more comfortable playing with his nephew than talking with his sister, Gertrude?
54. Sometimes when talking about home, Kumalo is sad. What makes him unhappy, and how does he ease his pain?
55. State a generalization about life from the following passage: "Now God be thanked that the name of a hill is such music... Wise men write many books, in many words too hard to understand. But this, the purpose of our lives, the end of all our struggle, is beyond all human wisdom." (Pg. 94)
56. What kind of treatment does Absalom receive at the reformatory? Why do they release him?
57. Read the brief biography of Alan Paton. In what way do his personal experiences influence the way he writes this chapter?
58. What steps does the white warden take to help Absalom lead a decent life?
59. Briefly describe Absalom's girlfriend. Why do you think Kumalo wants to go back to see her again?

Chapter 11

60. Find an example of irony in the details surrounding Arthur Jarvis' fate.
61. The title of this novel appears more than once in the text of the novel. Paton wants the reader to "Cry for the broken tribe, for the law and the custom that is gone. Aye, and

cry aloud for the man who is dead.” What do you think he means when he writes, “Cry, the beloved country, these things are not yet at an end”? (Pgs. 104-105)

62. Kumalo is suffering from the loss of his son. What other, possibly more tragic loss is suggested by the following passage? “There are times, no doubt, when God seems no more to be about the world.” (Pg. 105)

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 is the second of three chapters that do not contribute directly to the plot line. Instead it presents possible solutions to the native crime problems and also gives the reader a look at the attitudes of the white population toward the natives.

63. Why does Mr. McLaren disagree with the proposal to hire more police to protect people from native crime?

63. What is wrong with Mr. de Villers’ plan to decrease crime by increasing school facilities?

64. List three other possible solutions to native crime suggested in this chapter.

65. Why are the white people afraid to implement any real reforms for the native population?

66. Lipriests go st the places the to look for Absalom. Why do they ask “Is it bad?” (Pg. 112) and “Did it seem heavy?” (Pg. 115)

Chapter 13

67. What changes does Kumalo want to make when he returns to Ndotsheni?

68. Support or refute the following statement: The success of the blind school shows that the white people can help the native population.

69. After listening to Msimangu speak, Kumalo says, “Brother, I am recovered.” Msimangu replies, “I have tried every way to touch you, he says, but I could not come near. So give thanks and be satisfied.” (Pg. 124) What has Kumalo recovered from, and to whom does Msimangu give credit for Kumalo’s recovery?

Chapter 14

70. What can you infer about John’s character by the fact that twice his brother has come to visit him and twice he has failed to recognize him?

71. Kumalo asks his son “why” numerous times. What two unsatisfactory answers does Absalom finally give his father to explain his decline into crime?

72. John Kumalo plans to hire a lawyer to defend his son by claiming there is no evidence that the boy is one of the natives who committed the murder. Stephen Kumalo wants his son to tell the truth. Who do you think is behaving in the way most fathers might react under similar circumstances? Why?

73. Find an example of sarcasm spoken by the “young white man” at the end of this chapter.

74. Why does Kumalo decide to talk to Father Vincent?

Chapter 15

75. Why does the “young white man” believe Kumalo must get a lawyer?

76. What do you think is more important to Kumalo, saving his son’s life or helping his

son regain some decency in his life?

77. What moral lesson is being taught by the parable of the man lying in the grass?

78. Find the metaphor Father Vincent uses to explain why sorrow is better than fear.

79. Find an example of sarcasm in Kumalo's conversation with Father Vincent.

80. What are the many things Father Vincent tells Kumalo to pray for?

Chapter 16

81. Why do you think Kumalo tries to hurt Absalom's girl by asking her, "Have you had a murderer before"? (Pg. 146)

82. Compare Gertrude's response with the young girl's response to Kumalo's offer to take her back home with him. Which of them do you think is the most sincere? Why?

83. One of the major themes of this story is the hope of rebuilding a new life for the black natives. What evidence is there in this chapter that Kumalo is beginning to see and believe in this hope?

Chapter 17

84. What does Mrs. Lithebe think of Gertrude? How is the young pregnant girl different from Gertrude?

85. By referring to the text, support or refute the following statement: Absalom can not truthfully say that he turns to crime because of bad companions.

86. Briefly describe Absalom's lawyer, Mr. Carmichael. When he first meets with Kumalo, what does he do that is unusual for a white man meeting a black man?

87. What does it mean to take a case pro deo? Why does this action make Kumalo weep?

Book 2 Study Guide

Chapter 18

1. Support or refute the following statement: Mr. Jarvis understands the problems with the native farms but does not see any easy solution.

2. Define "Afrikaner." Briefly describe van Jaarsveld.

3. What do you think is Mr. Jarvis' opinion of the white man's responsibility to help the native population at this point in the story? Support your answer by citing passages from the chapter.

Chapter 19

1. Briefly identify John Harrison, Harrison, and Mary.

2. What does James Jarvis learn about his son's life from Harrison?

3. Who is James Jarvis talking about in the following passage? What is surprising about his comments? What problem does Jarvis see with the native school, a problem he has obviously ignored? "For he has never thought much of missionaries.... There was a mission near him, at Ndotsheni. But it was a sad place as he remembered it. A dirty oldwood-and-iron church, patched and forlorn, and a dirty old parson, in a baron valley where the grass hardly grew. A dirty old school where he had heard them reciting...things that could mean little to them." (Pg. 174)

4. As James Jarvis goes to sleep, what question is weighing heavily on his mind

concerning his son's death?

Chapter 20

1. Why do you think Jarvis is sorting through his son's papers and reading his manuscripts?
2. In the Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln stated that it is important that the men who died to end slavery and bring freedom to everyone did not die in vain. Their descendants must honor their deaths by making sure The United States stays strong and free. Knowing this, why do you think Jarvis takes the book containing the Lincoln address with him when he leaves?

Chapter 21

1. List the points Harrison is making about the following native problems—from the white perspective:
Crime –
Trade Unions –
Farmers –
2. Define Republic. Why is Harrison against a Republic for South Africa? Define Nationalism. Why is Harrison against the Nationalists?
3. List three ways the white population of South Africa goes against the teachings of Christianity to suppress the native population.
4. Many critics believe Arthur Jarvis' writings are really essays written by Paton during his life, not necessarily just for this novel. Use these writings to support the idea that Paton believes the native problems in South Africa are due to the greed of the white population.

Chapter 22

1. Support or refute the following statement: Even though the laws are made by the whites, the court system in South Africa tries to be fair to both natives and whites.
2. What part of the cross-examination goes badly for Absalom?
3. How is Absalom's behavior in the courtroom different from the behavior of the other two natives on trial?
4. What is Kumalo's reaction when he notices James Jarvis in the courtroom?

Chapter 23

1. The next section discusses the views of the black natives and the sympathetic whites toward the new-found gold. What changes in the mining system do they want to see at this new gold mine? Do you note any sarcasm in this section?
2. What evidence is there that the people campaigning for the improvements in the new mine do not have the power to make the changes actually happen?

Chapter 24

1. Why does Jarvis feel angry when he reads his son's manuscript "Private Essay on

the Evolution of a South African”?

2. What is significant about the way James Jarvis enters and exits his son’s house? Why does he leave through the front door after reading his son’s “Private Essay”?

Chapter 25

1. Support the following statement: Jarvis is sensitive to Kumalo’s feelings even before he knows Kumalo’s son murdered Arthur.

2. Many critics believe the lives of the two fathers parallel each other—Jarvis in the white world of Ndotsheni and Kumalo in the native world. Describe the similarities in their lives in the following areas:

Relationship with their sons –

Understanding of the native problems in South Africa –

3. Why does Jarvis not translate all the comments made by the white woman about Sibeko’s daughter?

4. How does Kumalo show his respect for Jarvis when he thanks him for the information about Sibeko’s daughter?

5. How does Kumalo describe Arthur Jarvis as a small boy?

Chapter 26

1. Why do Dubula and Tomlinson listen to John Kumalo speak with “contempt, and with envy”? (Pg. 215)

2. Why does Msimangu thank God that John Kumalo is corrupt?

3. What does the white population of South Africa learn, just from the threat of a strike?

4. The last two paragraphs in this chapter are about quiet. The first is the quiet in the mines after the strike is over, and the second is about the quiet in the forest. It is not a coincidence that these paragraphs are presented side by side. What do you think Paton is saying when he concludes, “Nothing is ever quiet, except for fools”? (Pg. 224)

Chapter 27

1. Why does Mrs. Lithebe hide the newspaper from Kumalo?

2. What do you think about Gertrude’s longing to become a nun? Do you think she is really happy to be leaving Johannesburg?

3. What promises does Absalom’s girlfriend make to Gertrude?

Chapter 28

1. Define “assessors.”

2. Why does the judge decide to discharge Absalom’s two accomplices, even after he testifies they are present during the murder? What happens to Absalom’s friends?

3. Support the following statement: Even though Absalom has confessed to the murder, the judge looks for any opportunity he has to find the young man innocent of the crime.

4. What custom does the young white man break after hearing Absalom sentenced to death?

5. The name Absalom is an allusion to the Bible. In the Bible, King David’s son Absalom is a handsome, restless man with long hair. He insults his father and joins with his enemies. When he catches his long hair on the branch of a tree, Absalom is killed by

King David's men. King David mourns for the loss of his son, despite his son's crimes against his father. Why do you think Absalom is an appropriate name for Kumalo's son?

Chapter 29

1. This chapter has one of the most powerful scenes in the book. Absalom clings to his father's knees, begging him not to leave him. What do you think about Kumalo's leaving his son to face his hanging alone?
2. What is Stephen Kumalo trying to tell his brother John when he lies to him about the "friend" sent to his shop to spy on John's activities?
3. What generalizations about life may be drawn from the following passage? "He had come to tell his brother that power corrupts, that a man who fights for justice must himself be cleansed and purified, that love is greater than force." (Pg. 246)
4. Why does Jarvis give John Harrison a check for one thousand pounds?
5. What do you think about Msimangu's decision to join a "community and would forswear the world and all possession"? (Pg. 248)
6. What does the fact that Gertrude leaves her new clothes behind tell the reader about where she has gone?
7. List all the characters, besides Reverend Kumalo, who appear in the first two books. What character type may each of these people represent?

Book 3

Chapter 30

1. How does Kumalo know immediately that he has been missed in the valley?
2. In what way does Kumalo immediately acknowledge the shameful conduct of his family? How do his parishioners react to his family problems?
3. What generalizations about life may be drawn from the following passage?
"Pain and suffering, they are a secret. Kindness and love, they are a secret. But I have learned that kindness and love can pay for pain and suffering.... For our Lord Suffered. And I come to believe that he suffered, not to save us for suffering, but to teach us how to bear suffering. For he knew that there is no life without suffering." (Pg. 261)
4. Many critics believe the overall theme of Book 3 is rebuilding and hope. What does Msimangu do to help Kumalo rebuild his life? What other evidence of rebuilding and hope are presented in this chapter?

Chapter 31

1. What does the following metaphor tell the reader about the government's efforts to help the chiefs make better lives for their people?
"But they were feeding an old man with milk, and pretending that he would one day grow into a boy." (Pg. 264)
2. Why does Kumalo go to see the chief? 3. When the schoolmaster does not have any ideas on

how to keep the young people in the valley, who does Kumalo ask for help?

4. Who is the small boy on the red horse? How does he make Kumalo laugh?

5. How does the small white boy learn about the sick Kuluse child?

Chapter 32

1. What did you feel when you read the story about the chief and his pitiful attempts to be helpful to the magistrate and the men who are placing the sticks in the ground?

2. Support the following statement: Jarvis is sympathetic to Kumalo's feelings when he learns there will be no mercy for Absalom.

3. Why does Kumalo not ask about the mysterious sticks or help Jarvis carry his saddle?

Chapter 33

1. Why does Napoleon Letsitsi come to Ndotsheni?

2. List the ways Letsitsi plans to help the people in the valley.

3. Support or refute the following statement: Kumalo believes the changes proposed for the valley are God's work.

Chapter 34

1. Who is the inkosikazi?

2. Why does Kumalo not visit the Jarvis house to offer his sympathies in person? What does he do instead? 3. Support or refute the following statement: The death of Mrs. Jarvis will not alter John Jarvis' plans for the valley.

4. Why does the Bishop want to transfer Kumalo to another parish? Do you think he is punishing him for his sinful family?

5. What two things does John Jarvis say in his reply to Kumalo's letter that help the Bishop decide to let Kumalo remain with his parish? 6. Who goes to get the flowers for Mrs. Jarvis' wreath? Why does he not have a name?

Chapter 35

1. What new idea is Letsitsi presenting to Kumalo in the following passage?

"We do not work for men...we work for the land and the people.... We work for Africa... Not for a white man or a black man, but for Africa." (Pg. 303)

2. What advice does Kumalo give Letsitsi?

Chapter 36

1. Why does Kumalo go up into the mountain?

2. What is Jarvis telling Kumalo in the following passage?

". . .he stretched his hand over the darkening valley, and he said, One thing is about to be finished, but here is something that is only begun. And while I live it will continue. Umfundisi, go well." (Pg. 307)

3 . Support or refute the following statement: The last line in the book is intended to be hopeful and optimistic about the future of Africa.

“But when that dawn will come, of our emancipation, from the fear of bondage and the bondage of fear, why, that is a secret.” (Pg. 312)

4. What is your opinion of Reverend Kumalo? In your opinion, does he achieve heroic stature?