



Poisonwood Bible

Barbara Kingsolver

Teacher's Guide

Written By Mary Ellen Snodgrass

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Synopsis

Book One: Genesis: Orleanna Price

On Sanderling Island, Georgia, the missionary's wife relives the task of rearing four daughters in Africa. She recalls being inundated by the demands of motherhood in the jungles of the Congo.

The Things We Carried: Leah Price

In 1959, Leah Price leaves Bethlehem, Georgia, with a variety of domestic goods to supply the family during her father's twelve-month mission to the Congo. The family deplanes in Leopoldville, where the Reverend Underdown and his wife greet them before the departure for Kilanga by bush plane.

Ruth May Price

Five-year-old Ruth May gets sick on the last leg of the journey and soils one of her comic books.

Rachel Price

Rachel disapproves of the smell of Africans, who welcome the Prices with a feast and hymn sing. Nathan raves on with a sermon against nakedness that dismays Kilangans. Orleanna forces the girls to eat.

Adah Price

Adah, the handicapped twin, describes the jungle and the Kwilu River, the main thoroughfare.

Leah

Nathan plants a garden. Mama Bekwa Tataba tries to give advice about planting and about the poisonwood tree, which causes a miserable rash on Nathan's face, arms, and hands. Nathan replants the rows that Mama Tataba made into hills.

Rachel

On the Fourth of July, Nathan organizes an Easter pageant and riverside picnic to encourage attendance at this church. Natives refuse to be baptized, but accept Orleanna's fried chicken.

Ruth May

Ruth May makes friends with malnourished children and observes Mama Mwanza, the hand-capped next-door neighbor. Ruth May steers clear of her father, who dispenses corporal punishment with a razor strop.

Adah

Adah takes refuge in literature, puns, and palindromes. She notes that the parrot Methuselah learned crude language from the previous minister, the Reverend Fowles. The family weathers monsoon rains that destroy the garden.

Leah

Nathan punishes the girls with "The Verse," a lengthy scriptural passage to be copied in longhand.

Adah

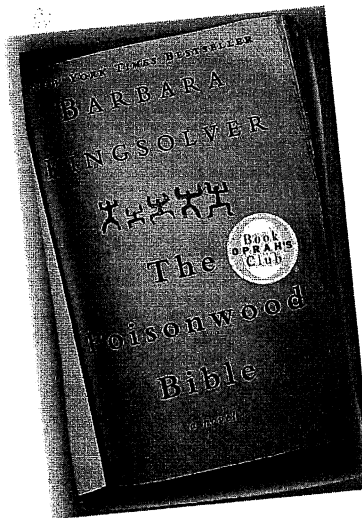
Nathan took the post without full consent of the Mission League. He tries to win converts by dynamiting the river and offering fish. The chore of cleaning up the mess falls to Orleanna and the girls.

Leah

The garden fails to produce vegetables. Mama Tataba quits housekeeping for the Prices.

Book Two: The Revelation: Orleanna Price

In Georgia, Orleanna reflects on Africa and her innocence of the suffering it would exact on the family. She recalls the market, the pounding of manioc into fufu, and the need for bleach to cleanse edibles. Lessening her cash are the demands of Axelroot, the transporter of goods who extorts money for their supplies. Nathan ignores her misgivings and labors on to convert Tata Ndu, the polygamous chief.



The Things We Learned: Leah Price

The family reads books that Fowles left behind. Orleanna home-schools the girls. Leah retreats into the jungle in search of Pygmies and follows Nathan to other villages. She spies on Axelroot and his radio. Ruth May teaches the children "Mother, May I?" Leah makes friends with Pascal.

Ruth May Price

Ruth May breaks her arm while spying on Congolese Boy Scouts. She makes a pet of a mongoose and names him Stuart Little. Axelroot flies her in to Stanleyville for care from a doctor who looks to Patrice Lumumba for the Congo's salvation.

Rachel

Anatole, the village teacher and translator, comes to dinner and reveals that Tata Ndu worries about his people's loss of interest in traditional gods. The ones who attend church are outcasts and lost causes. Anatole tries to explain the priesthood of Tata Kuvudundu. To curb Orleanna's fondness for a blue dish, Nathan breaks it.

Adah Price

Tata Ndu hears a rumor that a lion has eaten Adah, who likes to walk alone in the jungle. Adah stands up from the hammock and deflates his centrality as bearer of bad news.

Leah

Anatole sends the Price family a houseboy, Nelson, who quickly learns English. Orleanna weeps with joy at the extra help. Kilangan children contract enteritis. The Price girls get needlework for Christmas.

Ruth May

Ruth May befriends Nelson and takes an interest in raising chicks. Nathan strikes Leah for being proud.

Rachel

In January, the Underdowns visit the village. The newspaper reports that the Russians want to colonize the Congo. An election is scheduled for May. Frank Underdown warns Nathan that the mission has lost its sanction. Nathan plans to remain, even if his replacement fails to arrive in July.

Adah

Enteritis worsens for Kilangan children. After the rainy season, the male villagers vote in the election. Kuvudundu begins muttering at threats to tradition.

Rachel

After the Underdowns name June 28 as evacuation day, Nathan takes the bush plane to Stanleyville. He learns that Lumumba, a reputed communist, was elected prime minister.

Ruth May

Orleanna meets the evacuation plane, but Nathan refuses to let her board. She takes to her bed in despair.

Leah

On June 30, Leah accompanies Nathan to Leopoldville for the Independence ceremony and observes the public adulation for Lumumba. The new prime minister accuses white Americans of living well while blacks reside in slums.

Adah

On June 30, Adah recovers feathers from Methuselah's corpse, killed by a civet cat.

Book Three: The Judges: Orleanna Price

Orleanna ponders the day she abandoned Nathan. She recalls marrying in Jackson, Mississippi, in fall 1941 after she placed all trust in him. His brief stint with the army in the Philippines reduces him to mania. She rapidly gives birth to three daughters, one of them partially paralyzed. With the birth of the fourth daughter, life becomes a torment.

The Things We Didn't Know: Leah

In September 1960, Leah and Nathan fly in Eeben Axelroot's plane to buy supplies. Mama Mwanza pities the Prices and shares oranges. Nelson believes the family is cursed like Job.

Adah

Adah acquires more knowledge of the Congolese language and realizes how many subtleties Nathan misses.

Ruth May

Ruth May shares quiet time with Orleanna.

Adah

Orleanna and Ruth May sicken with malaria as the family scrimps to make meals. Leah gathers abundant fruit and cooks in her mother's place.

Leah

Three weeks later, Leah makes Ruth May get out of bed. Anatole spies on them from the cane thicket and offers a rabbit for dinner. Leah feels an attraction to him. Anatole shares news of Moise Tshombe, head of the Lunda, which secedes from the Congo. Leah fears that Ruth May will die.

Ruth May

Fever befuddles Ruth May, who accepts a fetish from Nelson.

Leah

Orleanna recuperates and admonishes Rachel for cooking so poorly.

Rachel

Reverend Fowles exhibits a compromising theology that recognizes the Congolese religion. Nathan rejects variations on strict fundamentalism. In departing, Fowles and wife Celine leave medicine and powdered milk as gifts.

Adah

In August, Ruth May's health declines. Tata Ndu brings meat and beans. More gifts indicate that he courts Rachel.

Leah

When the family moves Ruth May's cot, they find her malaria pills stuck to the wall.

Rachel

Rachel is repulsed by Tata Ndu. Nathan pretends that she is engaged to Eeben Axelroot. He flirts with Rachel and hints that he works for the CIA.

Ruth May

Ruth May misunderstands Tata Ndu's intent to have Rachel circumcised. Eeben Axelroot threatens Ruth May for observing his diamond stash.

Rachel

Rachel is annoyed that the family ignores her 17th birthday, which she had hoped to celebrate in America.

Adah

Nathan tries to speak the local language. Leah grows more proficient in French and Kikongo and helps Anatole by teaching math to young boys. She learns to bow hunt. Adah fears reprisals for Leah's breaking gendered rules against female hunters.

Leah

Anatole helps Leah understand the male African mind; she describes American farming. She makes a globe for him out of a calabash.

Rachel

On August 21, Eeben Axelroot reveals that Adah spies on him. On a walk with Rachel into the jungle, he kisses her. He confides that Lumumba will be assassinated.

Adah

Nathan tries to assure Kilangan women that baptism will save their children. Adah snoops on Axelroot's radio transmission concerning a CIA-sanctioned murder. She blames President Eisenhower for manipulating Congolese affairs.

Leah

An invasion of army ants sends the family to the river. Anatole returns for Adah and Ruth May.

Rachel

Rachel survives the melee of fleeing villagers. Mama Mwanza's family shoves Rachel out of their boat. Rachel's mirror breaks.

Ruth May

The flight to the river terrifies Ruth May, whom strong arms carry to safety.

Adah

Adah believes that Orleanna abandons her. Anatole rescues Adah.

Leah

Anatole sets Ruth May in the boat with Leah. Leah blames God for hating them. She divulges that Eisenhower wants Lumumba killed. Anatole reminds Leah that Kilangans are rescuing and feeding the Price family. She confesses her love for him. Two days later, Kilangans return to a ravaged village.

Book Four: Bel And The Serpent: Orleanna Price

Orleanna reflects on the political game that kills Lumumba and elevates the dictator Joseph Mobutu. After 51 days of national independence, the military takes control of the Congo. Assassins kill Lumumba.

What We Lost: Leah

Leah tries to make sense of the gradual collapse of the Congo. Tata Ndu attends church. Nathan preaches about Daniel's proof that Babylonian idols were false gods. Tata Ndu demands an election of preferred deity, which places animism over Christianity 56 to 11.

Rachel

As villagers starve, Leah wars against Nathan, who demands obedience. Leah stays in the jungle practicing with her bow and arrow for the village hunt. Anatole finds a green mamba alongside his cot.

Adah

After a night of drumming and singing, Kilangans hold a fire surround, a gradually decreasing circle that isolates the animals with it.

Leah

Leah shoots an impala buck, which Ndu's son Gbenye claims. Anatole helps Leah skin the buck.

Rachel

At the sight of villagers eating their slaughter and Ruth May gobbling grubworms, Rachel decides to leave Kilanga.

Leah

The momentous day turns from feast to squabble. Tata Ndu tosses a hindquarter of the buck to Anatole and insults him by calling him an orphan. Anatole insists on a bushbuck to feed the Price family. Tata Kuvudundu predicts ruin.

Rachel

That night, Rachel prepares to claim vegetarianism. As the family argues about Leah's role in the hunt, Nelson warns of snakes. He begs to sleep in the house. The girls spread ashes to identify the manipulator of voodoo.

Adah

The next morning, the girls converge on the chicken house with Nelson, who scares off a green mamba. In the ashes are Kuvudundu's footprints.

Leah

The snake bites Ruth May on the shoulder.

Adah

Ruth May curls up and dies.

Rachel

Rachel and her sisters freeze in fear of telling their parents.

Leah

Orleanna makes funeral preparations; Nathan regrets that Ruth May was not baptized. Orleanna lays out the net-wrapped body on a table. Native women crawl to the shrine to mourn. Orleanna gives away the household goods. As rains fall on the parched village, Nathan begins baptizing children.

Book Five: Exodus: Orleanna Price

Grief assails Orleanna as she escapes the village and the failed marriage.

What We Carried Out: Leah Price

Mama Mwanza's daughters supply oranges and water for the trek out of Kilanga. Mama Lo and Mama Boanda accompany the Price women up the Kwilu River toward Leopoldville. Mud and mosquitoes plague the travelers, who halt for the night at Kiala. Leah realizes that Nathan remains behind. By the third day, the women are feverish. Leah has no memory of men carrying her to Bulungu. Anatole doses her with tea. Orleanna and Adah leave by truck for Leopoldville. Leah falls in love with Anatole.

Rachel Price Axelroot

In Johannesburg, Rachel learns French and Afrikaans. After reuniting with Eeben Axelroot at a distant village, she delights in living in a modern city, where she poses as a legal wife.

Adah Price

At Emory University in 1962, Adah recalls how Orleanna forced her out of Africa, onto a military truck, and into a U. N. plane bound for Fort Benning, Georgia. Orleanna moves into a plywood shack. She gardens while Adah studies and visits on weekends.

Leah Price

Leah lives at the Mission Notre Dame de Couleur (Our Lady of Color) in 1964 while Anatole serves a prison sentence. News of Nathan pictures a scraggly hermit beset by malnutrition and parasites. Anatole smuggled Leah to Bangassou in the Central African Republic. On the night of a helicopter fly-in, Leah weeps in dismay and prays for Anatole's safety.

Rachel Axelroot

In Johannesburg, Rachel enjoys the good life, but hates her marriage to Axelroot, who conceals his profits from the diamond business. She angles for Daniel, a French attaché.

Leah Price Ngemba

At Bikoki Station on January 17, 1965, Leah mourns Ruth May and grows sarcastic. After Anatole's release from prison, she shares her home with his Aunt Elisabet. The family lives in fear of Mobutu's soldiers. News from Nathan reports that he vanished into the jungle.

Adah Price

At Christmas 1968, Adah is being cured by a neurologist. Leah and Anatole visit Atlanta with son Pascal while Leah studies agronomics. Adah still fears that Orleana prefers Leah.

Leah Price Ngemba

In Kinshasa in 1974, conditions worsen. Leah's family increases with the birth of Patrice and Martin-Lothaire and with Anatole's cousin Christiane. Anatole continues to teach school; Leah craves protein in her diet. She teaches American children who mock her African ways.

Rachel Axelroot DuPrée Fairley

In January 1978, Rachel inherits from her husband Remy Fairley the Equatorial hotel at Brazzaville, French Congo. She wants to reunite with her sisters to flaunt her wealth, but she disdains Leah's marriage to a black man and the birth of half-black children.

Leah Price Ngemba

In Kinshasa in 1981, Anatole returns to prison. Orleana sends money for Leah to fly home and recover from anemia. Americans stare at Anatole and the children. At the airport, authorities seize Anatole's passport. Adah becomes an expert at epidemiology.

Rachel Price

In 1984, Rachel reunites with her sisters after Orleana buys a Land Rover for Leah. Adah drives the car from Spain to West Africa. They stay at Abomey and catch up on events at Kilanga. Leah reports on Nathan's death at age 64 after villagers burned him to death in a tower.

Adah Price

Orleana moves to Sanderling Island and still mourns for her youngest. She has no feeling for Nathan. Adah declares that she despised him.

Leah Price Ngemba

In 1986, Leah has a fourth son, Nataniel, who is weak at birth. The couple works with farmers in the Kimvula District and plans to escape to Sanza Pombo, Angola.

Book Six: Song Of The Three Children: Rachel Price

Rachel no longer thinks of returning to America.

Leah Price

The Ngemba children grow up, leaving Anatole and Leah to enjoy solitude.

Adah Price

Adah ponders the natural forces that course through Africa as she seeks cures for viruses. Orleana still suffers the effects of diseases contracted in Africa.

Book Seven: The Eyes In The Trees

Mobutu dies. Orleana makes peace with the death of Ruth May.

Timeline

1885 Leopold II of Belgium rules the Congo.

1939 Orleanna Wharton accepts Nathan Price as a suitor.

1941 fall Nathan marries Orleanna.

December 7 Japanese planes attack Pearl Harbor.

ca. December 14 The army drafts Nathan Price and posts him in the Philippines.

1942 April 9 Nathan escapes the Bataan death march and returns home.

1944 August 20 Orleanna gives birth to Rachel.

1945 Orleanna's twins consist of a healthy child, Leah, and Adah, a victim of hemiplegia. Both are intellectually bright.

1953 Dwight D. Eisenhower is elected president.

1954 Ruth May completes the Price family of four daughters.

1956 The Congolese demand an end to colonialism.

1959 Postal worker Patrice Lumumba begins demanding freedom for the Congolese.

June The Price family arrives at the village of Kilanga.

July 4 Nathan celebrates Easter with a pageant.

end of July His garden drowns in a downpour.

end of summer He fishes by dynamiting the Kwilu River.

1960 January The Underdowns that the Mission League no longer supports Nathan.

May The Congolese vote in free elections.

June Orleanna Price contracts malaria.

June 28 As danger encroaches, Nathan remains in Kilanga.

June 30 Lumumba supports neutrality and unifies the Congolese on Independence Day.

July Orleanna teaches Rachel to cook.

July 5 An uprising disrupts the Congolese army.

July 11 Moise Tshombe withdraws Katanga province from the Congo.

August Chief Ndu woos Rachel.

later Army ants invade the village.

September 10 General Joseph Mobutu overthrows the Congolese government.

September 14 He imprisons Lumumba.

late fall Leah arms herself with bow and arrow for a fire surround and shoots an impala.

1961 January 17 Lumumba is martyred by a firing squad. After a green mamba kills Ruth May, Orleanna leads Leah and Adah out of the village.

January 18 Eeben Axelroot flies Rachel to Johannesburg.

February U. N. rescuers fly Orleanna and Adah home to Bethlehem, Georgia. Anatole Ngemba weds Leah.

1962 summer Adah studies science at Emory University.

1964 Diplomat Daniel Duprée marries Rachel. Leah retreats to the Mission Notre Dame de Douleur.

1965 Pascal is born to Anatole and Leah.

November 24 Mobutu engineers a second coup.

1968 Adah and Leah reunite in Atlanta. After the birth of Patrice, Leah studies agronomics at Emory University. The Congo is renamed Zaire.

1971 Anatole and Leah teach at a compound for Americans in Kinshasa.

1974 Muhammad Ali defeats George Foreman in a boxing match at Kinshasa's stadium.

October 30 Rachel manages the Equatorial Hotel in Brazzaville.

1978 January Anatole is freed from prison.

1982 The Price sisters drive from Senegal to Zaire.

1984 Orleanna learns that Nathan burned to death.

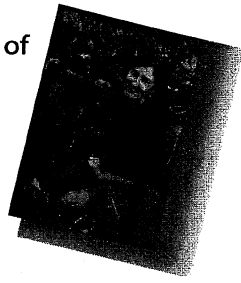
1985 January Anatole administers schools in the Kumvula District.

1986 The Ngembas settle in Sanza Pombo, Angola.

ca. 1991

Author Sketch

Barbara Kingsolver holds a place of honor among writers of conscience. Born in Annapolis, Maryland, on April 8, 1955, she learned to respect humanity from her father, Dr. Wendell R. Kingsolver, a navy physician, and acquired a oneness with nature from her mountaineer mother, Virginia Kingsolver. With a brother and sister, the author grew up among the poor of Carlisle, Kentucky, where she nurtured a knack for storytelling. In girlhood, she lived in the central Congo for two years and in St. Lucia, where her father took temporary jobs. She studied piano at DePauw University, but shifted her major to zoology and English.



After a sojourn in France, Kingsolver settled in Tucson and studied animal behavior at the University of Arizona. She conducted research in physiology and worked as a technical writer before becoming a freelancer specializing in crusading journalism, human rights issues, and environmental studies. She married professor Joseph Hoffmann and lived on a farm in the Arizona desert with their daughter Camille. Kingsolver's first novel, *The Bean Trees*, preceded a collection, *Homeland and Other Stories*, and investigative non-fiction, *Holding the Line: Women in the Great Arizona Mine Strike of 1983*, a feminist diatribe for human rights and justice. Her second novel, *Animal Dreams*, channeled her anger at the Reagan administration for conducting an illegal war in Central America.

During the Gulf War, Kingsolver moved to the Canary Islands in protest of conflict designed to appease oil companies. She anthologized bilingual verse in *Another America: Otra America* and completed a third novel, *Pigs in Heaven*, the non-sequel to *The Bean Trees*. After a divorce and marriage to Steve Hopp, father of their daughter Lily, the author collected 25 essays for *High Tide in Tucson: Essays from Now and Never*. After considerable research, Kingsolver completed *The Poisonwood Bible*, her most complex work. She followed with a fifth novel, *Prodigal Summer*, an ecofeminist romance set in a forest preserve. For the *National Geographic Society*, she narrated a photographic essay, *Last Stand: America's Virgin Lands*. She also publishes thought-provoking essays on the Bush administration, 9/11 terrorism, and war in Iraq.

Critics Corner

Kingsolver's numerous awards include an Enoch Pratt Library Youth-to-Youth Books Award, American Library Association Notable Book, and *New York Times* Notable Book for *The Bean Trees*. Her second novel, *Animal Dreams*, won an American Library Association Notable Book and Best Book for Young Adults, Pen/USA West Fiction Award, Edward Abbey Award for Ecofiction, Arizona Library Association Book of the Year, and *New York Times* Notable Book. A third novel, *Pigs in Heaven*, earned a *Los Angeles Times* Fiction Prize, Mountains and Plains Booksellers Award, American Booksellers Book of the Year nomination, *Publisher's Weekly* Audio Best of Year, and *New York Times* Bestseller and Notable Book. It also merited attention from the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Museum. Her alma mater, De Pauw University, awarded her an honorary degree.

Critics laud Kingsolver's preparations for *The Poisonwood Bible*, which required daily bible reading, perusal of missionary diaries, and research in the Kikongo-French dictionary and in issues of *Life*, *Look*, and *Saturday Evening Post* dating from 1958 to 1961. She studied African animals at the American Museum of Natural History and the Reptile House of the San Diego Zoo and interviewed natives of Western and Central Africa about social conditions under colonialism and corrupt governments. After the issuance of *The Poisonwood Bible*, she accepted a Woodrow Wilson Foundation/Lila Wallace Fellowship and the first of eight consecutive Best Local Author annual citations from the *Tucson Weekly*. The novel earned Kingsolver the National Book Prize of South Africa, American Booksellers Book of the Year, *Los Angeles Times* Best Book, *New York Times* "Ten Best Books of 1998," Canada's North Forty-Nine Books Most Valuable Picks, Village Voice Best Book, New York Public Library "25 Books to Remember," Britain's Orange Prize of £30,000, nomination for the PEN/Faulkner award, and an Oprah Book Club selection. A subsequent novel, *Prodigal Summer*, won the Patterson Fiction Prize, a *Writer's Digest* 100 Best Writers of the Twentieth Century honorarium, and a nomination for a Pulitzer Prize.

Other Works By The Author

The Bean Trees, 1988
Homeland And Other Stories, 1989
Holding The Line: Women In The Great Arizona Mine Strike Of 1983, 1989
Animal Dreams, 1990
Another America: Otra America, 1992
Pigs In Heaven, 1993
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Themes And Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in *The Poisonwood Bible* should include these aspects:

Themes

- evangelism
- family dynamics
- peasant life
- racism

- colonialism
- independence
- dictatorship
- hunger
- sorrow
- injustice
- change
- greed

Motifs

- coping with family setbacks
- understanding the revolutionary mentality
- loving and losing
- assuming the role of rescuer
- coping with civil crisis

General Objectives

1. To understand the impact of revolution on a community
2. To account for the success of mercenaries
3. To interpret social and religious customs
4. To contrast causes of bias and immorality
5. To discuss the themes of obsession and religious fanaticism
6. To outline main events in time order
7. To analyze the backwash of colonialism
8. To describe attitudes toward interracial families
9. To summarize elements that effect atmosphere and tone
10. To analyze the roles of women in a patriarchal society

Specific Objectives

1. To explain how Anatole Ngemba copes with chaos and military threat
2. To analyze the symbolism of the title
3. To summarize Tata Ndu's importance to family and community
4. To account for Tata Kuvudundu's spite
5. To justify Leah's idealism and devotion to family
6. To predict how Rachel will survive old age
7. To summarize Orleanna's role as mother and Christian neighbor
8. To discuss the implications of healing on Adah
9. To describe the roles of Brother Fowles and Patrice Lumumba
10. To list events caused by hatred, suspicion, and revenge

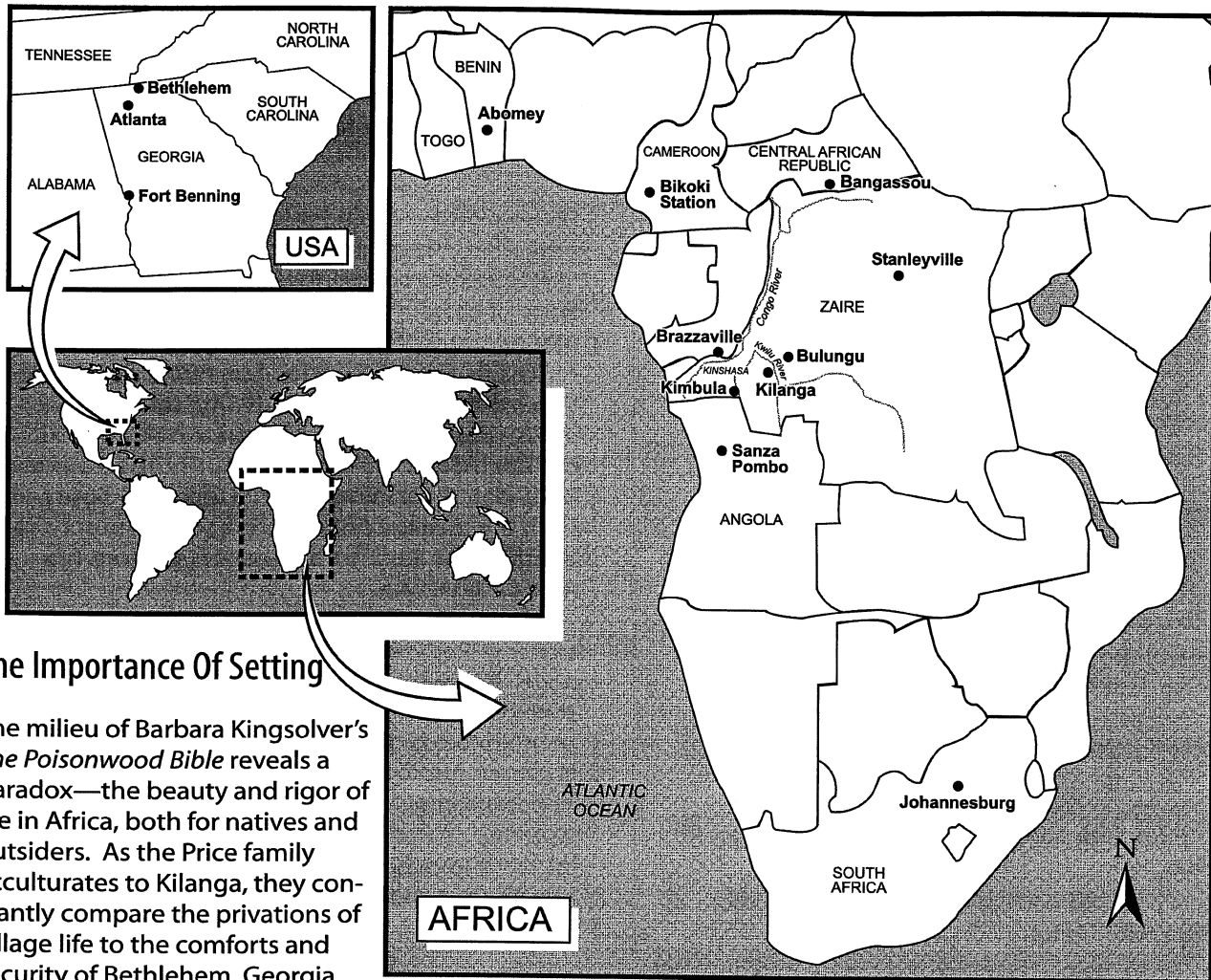
Literary Terms And Applications

For a better understanding of Barbara Kingsolver's fiction, present the following terms and applications:

historical fiction a fictional representation of an historical era. Through the observations of the Price family, Kingsolver painstakingly recaptures the collapse of Belgian colonialism and the aftermath of bloody turmoil. From her two sojourns in West Africa and from a decade of research, she orchestrates the cost in human suffering through the eyes of disparate characters—Nathan the evangelistic meddler, Orleanna the matriarch, Ruth May the victim, Adah the survivor, Rachel the gold-digger, and Leah the idealist. Contributing to the author's castigation of the era are salient observations from Anatole Ngemba.

exposé or propaganda novel a pointed form of protest novel. Through *The Poisonwood Bible*, Kingsolver states the dangers of a conservative American government under Eisenhower, Nixon, and Reagan. She denounces Dr. Henry Kissinger's manipulation of public opinion that the Congo poses a threat of becoming a hotbed of Marxism. She illustrates the idiocy of imposing Christianity and democratic elections on people who have no understanding of the concepts.

symbol a concrete object that stands for a complex or abstract idea or relationship and implies more than the literal meaning of the word or words. The poison in Kingsolver's title heightens menace in the narrative on many levels. The poisonous racism and hatred of Nathan Price for Kilangans nets the disdain of Tata Ndu and promotes the vengeance of Tata Kuvudundu. The thwarted priest strikes back at Anatole Ngemba and the Prices by leaving snakes in the family compound. The death of Ruth May from the bite of a green mamba poisons the memories of the surviving sisters and kills the faltering marriage of Orleanna. In the background, the growing menace of Joseph Mobutu's regime further threatens the survival of Congolese peasants and destabilizes central Africa.



The Importance Of Setting

The milieu of Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* reveals a paradox—the beauty and rigor of life in Africa, both for natives and outsiders. As the Price family acculturates to Kilanga, they constantly compare the privations of village life to the comforts and security of Bethlehem, Georgia.

The initial meeting with villagers introduces the white outsiders to nudity, roasted animals, and the smells of unwashed bodies. The setting both charms and repulses the missionary family with monsoon rains and rapid garden growth, river trade and crocodiles, fried plantains and hookworm, Methuselah and tarantulas, bushbuck and manioc, and abundant fruit and poisonous snakes. Each member of the family makes peace with the jungle by adapting to lazy afternoons on the veranda in the hammocks to retreat from downpours.

At its worst, the setting threatens immediate and excruciating death. Kilangan children succumb from kakakaka, the native word for enteritis. Army ants coat the chickens with a black death that cannibalizes the poultry to bones. Upon Orleanna's escape from a miserable marriage to a fanatic, she leads her girls blindly into a demonic rain that generates mud and mosquitoes and threatens Leah's life from malaria. The positive aspect of the trek

derives from the twins' response to their near-death experience. Adah devotes her brilliance to conquering jungle diseases; Leah forms a peasant commune to aid refugees in adapting to chaos and in learning to farm the land. Orleanna volunteers for African relief projects and raises funds for a Land Rover for the Ngembas.

As an occasional reminder of differences between the Congo and the outside world, scenes of comparison enhance the uniqueness of the equatorial jungle. Leah tries to explain Georgian agriculture to Anatole, who can't imagine plowing with a tractor over acres of deforested farmland. When the Ngembas sojourn in Atlanta, Anatole weathers the stares and rudeness of white Americans who reject his cultural scarification and the skin tones of his biracial sons. Glimpses of Orleanna cultivating her garden contrast the tempered seedlings that flourish on Sanderling Island with the lush, ungoverned vines and foliage of the Congo.

Cross-Curricular Sources

For more information about author Barbara Kingsolver, dictator Joseph Mobutu, Patrice Lumumba, Congo/Zaire, malaria, racism, family, Baptist missions, Marxism, African menus, and other subjects and issues deriving from the novel, consult these sources:

Articles

- Goldstein, Bill, "An Author Chat with Barbara Kingsolver," *New York Times* (30 October 1998).
 Webster, Donovan, "Malaria Kills One Child Every 30 Seconds," *Smithsonian* 31, no. 6 (2000): 32-38, 40, 42, 44.

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Sweet Honey In The Rock, Ladyslipper

Audio CD

- Ebale Ya Zaire*, Sonod
Zaire-Ghana, Retroafric
Zaire: Musiques Urbaines a Kinshasa, Ocora

Books

- Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, Dee Brown
Congo, Michael Crichton
Second-Class Citizen, Buchi Emecheta
Things Fall Apart, Chinua Achebe
The Underdogs, Mariano Azuela
Zlata's Diary, Zlata Filipovic

Film

- The Last Colonial*, Icarus Films
Mobutu, King of Zaire, Icarus Films
Zaire, Cycle of the Serpent, Icarus Films

Filmstrip

- Self-Fulfillment*, Guidance Associates

Map

- Africa*, National Geographic

Memoirs

- Out of Africa*, Isak Dinesen
Shadows on the Grass, Isak Dinesen
So Long a Letter, Mariama Bâ
West with the Night, Beryl Markham

Poems

- "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," Langston Hughes
 "Sanctuary," Donald Davidson
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Reference Books

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The Congo: From Leopold to Kabila: A People's History, Zed Books
Encyclopedia of World Epidemics, McFarland
King Leopold's Ghost, Mariner
More with Less Cookbook, Herald Press
The Troubled Heart of Africa: A History of the Congo, St. Martin
Zaire, A Country Study, Claitors

Slides

- Characters in Crisis*, Center for Humanities
An Inquiry into the Nature of Man: His Inhumanity and His Humanity, Center for the Humanities
No Man Is An Island, Center for the Humanities

Videos/DVDs

- La Vie est Belle*, World of Reading
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Media Versions Of Kingsolver's Work

Audiocassette (Unabridged)

- The Poisonwood Bible*, Brilliance Audio, 1998

Audio CD

- The Poisonwood Bible*, Brilliance Audio, 2004

Large Print

- The Poisonwood Bible*, G. K. Hall, 1999

Literary Companion

- Barbara Kingsolver: A Literary Companion*, McFarland, 2004
The Poisonwood Bible, Spark Notes, 2003

Related Reading

- Isabel Allende, *The House of the Spirits*
 Julia Alvarez, *In the Time of the Butterflies*
 Mariano Azuela, *The Underdogs*
 William E. Barrett, *Lilies of the Field*
 Isak Dinesen, *Out of Africa* and *Shadows on the Grass*
 David Guterson, *Snow Falling on Cedars*
 James Houston and Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*
 Martin Luther King, "I Have a Dream"
 Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* and *The Bean Trees*
 Beryl Markham, *West with the Night*
 Ruthann Lum McCunn, *Thousand Pieces of Gold*
 Rigoberta Menchu, *I, Rigoberta Menchu*
 Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*
 Amy Tan, *The Kitchen God's Wife*
 Yoko Kawashima Watkins, *So Far from the Bamboo Grove*

Meaning Study

Below are significant words, phrases, or sentences from the novel. Explain each in context. Book numbers, chapter headings, and page numbers pinpoint each entry so that you can re-read the passage in which it appears.

1. Maybe I'll even confess the truth, that I rode in with the horsemen and beheld the apocalypse, but still I'll insist I was only a captive witness. (Book One, Orleanna Price, p. 10)
(Speaking in biblical terms, Orleanna confesses that she went willingly to Africa with Nathan like one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse, comprised of war, famine, disease, and death. She witnessed the dissolution of the family, but she disclaims any part in his mission. She later complains, "I was his instrument, his animal. Nothing more.")
2. And Father does, in general, approve of contingencies. (Book One, Leah Price, p. 16)
(Nathan's patriarchal control of a family of five women demands his approval of preparations for departure from Georgia. He agrees with Orleanna that she must pack for physical and medical emergencies.)
3. Kilanga village runs along the Kwilu River as a long row of little mud houses set after-one-the-other beside a long red snake of dirt road. (Book One, Adah Price, p. 35-36)
(The Kwilu River flows southeast from the Kasai River in the rainforest of south-central Congo. In its environs, the American Baptist Mission Board set up a station at Vanga in 1910. Expansion of the evangelical outreach began in 1962.)
4. Mrs. Underdown warned us that, pills or no pills, too many mosquito bites could still overtake the quinine in our blood and spell our doom. (Book One, Leah, p. 42)
(In 1633, Antonio de Calancha, an Augustinian friar posted in Lima, Peru, compiled in Chronicle of Saint Augustine (1633) the efficacy of a tea brewed from the alkaloid bark of the fever tree against pandemic malaria. Seven years later, missionary priests began trafficking in the natural drug, which they called quinine.)
5. Poetry is far more difficult. And palindromes, with their perfect, satisfying taste: Draw a level award? (Book One, Adah, p. 69)
(Palindromes are words or phrases that read the same backwards or forwards, as found in the simplified spelling of Adah's name, "Ada." The collection and writing of palindromes is an amusement of the literate. Examples include the words refer, civic, and toot; the names Otto and Nan, the verb forms sees and stets, the plural nouns shahs and stats, the punctuated term ma'am, the phrase a la, the logo M&Ms, the military slang R&R, the numerals 747 and XIX, the abbreviations CDC and SDS, and the sentences "Sums are not set as a test on Erasmus," "A man, a plan, a canal—Panama!," "Able was I ere I saw Elba," and "Madam, I'm Adam.")
6. His first sermon in August waxed great and long on the subject of baptism. (Book One, Leah, p. 96)
(Nathan is obsessed with the baptism of Kilangan children, which parents forbid because of crocodiles and parasites in the river. Southern Baptists take literally the final verses of the book of Mark, in which Jesus dispatches his apostles to teach and baptize all nations. Nathan complains, "They don't let their children step foot in the river, ever. Not even to be washed in the Blood of the Lamb.")
7. I said to him, "Where is all the green mamba snakes?" (Book Two, Ruth May, p. 146)
(African snakes, especially the insidious green mamba, recur in commentary throughout the novel as a symbol of indigenous menace. The mamba, which is uniformly green, is Africa's most feared reptile. It reaches an average length of five to six feet but can grow as long as 10 feet. It frequents brush and trees, where it hunts birds. Highly poisonous, aggressive, and fast, it kills with a neurotoxic venom.)
8. They had their election, I guess, and the winner is a man named Patrice, if you can believe. Patrice Lumumba. (Book Two, Rachel, p. 217)
(Former postman Patrice Lumumba, whom the doctor calls "the new soul of Africa," was mission educated in Stanleyville. The charismatic radical promoted nonviolent rebellion and was named the Congolese premier until his assassination on January 17, 1961.)

9. A young Congolese man named Joseph Mobutu, who'd walked barefoot into a newspaper office to complain about the food he was getting in the army. (Book Four, Orleanna Price, p. 380)
(The tyrant General Joseph Désiré Mobutu, the assassin of legally elected Premier Patrice Lumumba, slipped into power in Zaire and remained its dictator until his death from cancer in 2004.)
10. Impressed as they were with the Kingdom of Kongo, the Europeans were dismayed to find no commodity agriculture here. (Book Six, Leah, p. 622)
(Kingsolver carefully explains the Congolese mindset that sees no future in growing fields of crops for sale in a land devoid of ready cash, trucks, warehouses, highways, and commodities markets.)

Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers with quotations from the novel.

Motivation

1. What causes the change in Nathan in 1942?
(After marriage in fall 1941 and his draft into the army after the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, Nathan Price changes from a devout minister and loving husband into a zombie stalked by guilt. His retreat from the Bataan death march in the Philippines leaves him traumatized and shamed that he avoided capture. He returns to Bethlehem, Georgia, and evolves into a fanatic Baptist evangelical determined to save the souls of the heathen of the Congo. His retreat into Old Testament rigor causes him to lash out at Orleanna and their four daughters, whom he resents because of their gender and independence. He turns to physical violence and brandishes a razor strap as a punishment. He selects scriptural passages for the girls to copy as a lesson in obedience. His military attitude sours his mission, causing Kilangans to despise and ignore him.)

Setting

2. Describe Kilanga.
(Kilanga, a long, narrow village in south central Congo on the Kwilu River, flourishes from lush natural surroundings. The jungle is the source of shade, fruit, meat, and raw materials for building and household goods. To residents, the superstition and animism of their ancestors form a suitable theology that reveres the seasons and respects such natural calamities as army ants and drought. Without education in Christian principles, villagers share with neighbors and look out for each other's welfare, particularly Mama Mwanza, who lost mobility from burns in a fire.

Less admirable traits erupt in Kilangans during the ant attack, drought, and resultant famine. After organizing a fire surround, they attack each other's kill and claim hunks of meat for their starving families. Gbenye defies Leah, who shoots a bushbuck with an arrow and claims the kill for her family. Tata Kuvudundu retaliates against a female violator of gendered tradition by releasing green mambas in the Price compound, where Ruth May becomes the hapless victim. When Orleanna dresses Ruth May's body for burial, Kilangan women revert to charity and support by grieving aloud and crawling to the bier to pay their respects to a child their children loved.)

Character Development

3. How does Orleanna change over time?
(For 18 years, Orleanna is an obedient, submissive wife to Nathan and devoted mother to their four daughters. She regrets Adah's prenatal handicap and tries to intercede to make life easier for her. After Nathan moves the family to the Congo in 1959 to begin a twelve-month mission to Kilangan villagers, Orleanna orders her girls to behave and to mind their manners at the initial feast. Hardships requiring combat against hookworm and snakes, disinfecting food and household goods, and maintaining a decent standard of living gradually reduce her to a drudge.

As Nathan hardens toward his family out of disappointment in his limited impact on villagers, he rebukes and threatens Orleanna, breaking the one dish that she treasured. She tolerates the shift in his demeanor until malaria and the

sudden death of Ruth May destroy the marriage. Without hesitation, Orleanna leads the way out of Kilanga and the Congo. In Bethlehem, Georgia, once more, she retreats into gardening and volunteering for African relief work and maintains a loving relationship with her four biracial grandchildren. News of Nathan's death fails to alter her bitterness or regret that she followed him to Africa.)

Historical Milieu

4. How does the rise of Mobutu alter the Price family's fortunes?
(Central to the story is the social, economic, and political backwash after the Congo rushes toward freedom and democracy when the Belgians abandon their colony. While Nathan attempts to proselytize villagers for Christianity, armies form and topple Patrice Lumumba, the newly elected premier. The clash of idealism and opportunism limits Leah's chance for a normal marriage to Anatole Ngemba, who is twice imprisoned as a threat to Mobutu's dictatorship.)

In Georgia, Orleanna pledges her support to volunteer projects that relieve the sufferings of the Congolese. Rachel, the daughter who escapes to South Africa, rises in wealth and importance as she marries three times to outsiders who profit from the region's miseries. Integral to her financial advance are kickbacks that mercenaries spend on luxury suites, pool parties, bar entertainment, and dinners at the Equatorial Hotel. Her surviving sisters despise her for her greed and immature self-absorption.)

Theme

5. How does justice prevail in Adah's life?
(Crucial to the story is the repair of Adah's neurological handicap, caused by conditions preceding her birth. During the wretched year in Kilanga, she thinks of herself in terms of her gait, "left . . . behind, left . . . behind." The constant adaption to a twisted body causes her to doubt that Orleanna loves her. In the privacy of thought, Adah develops keen observations and language skills.)

Adah displays her brilliance in securing a college degree and medical training that allow her to study the diseases that shorten African lives.

Whole for the first time in her life, she is able to drive the gift Land Rover from Spain to West Africa and to engineer the reunion with her sisters Leah and Rachel. Although doubts haunt Adah as to her mother's love, Adah takes Orleanna's welfare as a burden and tends her mother's numerous ailments. Adah has no children of her own or any long-term relationships, but she compensates by becoming a devoted aunt to Leah's four boys.)

Interpretation

6. Why does the Baptist mission do so little to help Kilangans?
(The short-sightedness of Southern Baptist zealots like Nathan Price limit the appeal of Christianity to Kilangans. His initial sermon on nudity appalls villagers, who have no reason to accept American behaviors and customs. His continued stress on baptism overlooks the many ways he could improve village life. Rather than adopt Orleanna's generosity in frying chicken for her neighbors, he lures them to the riverside as an inducement to baptism. He shows no sympathy for the many children who die of kakakaka and offers little support to suffering families. In discussions with Brother Fyntan Fowles, Nathan devalues the kindly river traveler who loves Africans for themselves. Nathan's immolation in a field watchtower implies the separation between the judgmental Baptist preacher and his needy parishioners.)

Conflict

7. Why does nature appear to conflict with human survival?
(From the beginning of their sojourn in the Congo, the Price family learns the importance of adapting to nature. They devise ways of warding off mosquitoes, of purifying water by boiling it, and of disinfecting the floor with Clorox to halt invasions of hookworms. The creation of house pets out Methuselah and Stuart Little fails to rid the animals of their natural urges. The planting of seeds requires knowledge of monsoon downpours and disappoints Nathan by producing few vegetables because the Congo lacks pollinators like the bees of Georgia. The advance of army ants and the drought that brings villagers to the brink of starvation imply a mounting hostility of nature toward outsiders. Even on Orleanna's flight to Bulungu, mud, hosts of mosquitoes, and malaria threaten to end their lives.)

Atmosphere

8. How does Rachel relieve serious confrontations?
(With unintentional humor, largely from frequent malapropisms, Rachel returns to self-interest, abandoning the purpose of Nathan's mission or Orleanna's intent to support his endeavor. Rachel's immersion in teen concerns over dating, mohair sweaters, underarm deodorant, and hair conditioners reflect an immaturity that refuses to abate in the Congo. Out of exasperation with her raving father and the loathsome wooing of Tata Ndu, she chooses her only escape, Eeben Axelroot's bush plane. Her sexual opportunism continues through subsequent flirtations and marriages that elevate her in prominence and wealth above the average African. Without overplaying Rachel's racism, Kingsolver uses her as a caricature of the grasping mercenaries who overrun the Congo and grab for themselves whatever spoils remain from a time of crisis.)

Structure

9. Why does Kingsolver divide the text into books?
(The author uses the names of biblical books for her first six divisions. Book One refers to the creation story in which Adam and Eve enjoy the garden of Eden, a prototype for the Congo before colonial insurgents spoiled it. Balancing the innocence of the Price family on their arrival to Kilanga is Book Five, the Exodus, a helter-skelter escape from hunger and mounting military threat that casts Orleanna in the role of Moses, who leads her children out of bondage to an overbearing male. The intervening books suggest the harsh, apocalyptic judgments of the Old testament and an episode, Bel and the Serpent, that plays out in the mission compound with disastrous results for Ruth May. The plaintive title Song of the Three Children stresses Orleanna's physical and emotional burden of three daughters and the stark memory of Ruth May's death from the strike of a green mamba to the shoulder. After the three daughters grow up and assume their own stories, Orleanna is left with a pagan image, eyes in the trees, a dual symbol of Mobutu's fearful Congolese stalkers and of the spirit of Ruth May, which later years fail to dislodge from her mother's conscience.)

Author Purpose

10. Why does the novel appeal to readers?
(Unlike other protest novels, The Poisonwood Bible maintains enough humor, suspense, lyricism, and historical background to balance the author's didactic message. Passages describing the beauties of the jungle jostle against human misunderstandings, such as the rumor that Nathan has five wives and the Price family's misinterpretation of Tata Ndu's marriage proposal to Rachel. Creating variety are glimpses of Adah's struggle to heal and educate herself and of Leah's long months spent as a novice in a convent. Most pathetic is Orleanna's effort to forget Ruth May's death and to exonerate herself for following a Christ-crazed minister on a doomed mission to the jungle. Without giving in to a happily-ever-after romantic conclusion, Kingsolver brings peace to her surviving characters. The remaining shreds of Africa in their hearts and minds attest to the power of the Congo to change lives.)

How Language Works

The salvation of so vast a saga as *The Poisonwood Bible* is Barbara Kingsolver's ability to capture uniqueness of character voices.

1. Nathan Price, the self-appointed evangelist to the Congo, delights in pontifical remarks directed at his family of five women. Upon their departure from Bethlehem, Georgia, he intones a warning: "Where we are headed, there will be no buyers and sellers at all." The author turns his god-like statement into satire with his clarification: "Where we are headed, not so much as a Piggly Wiggly."
2. Orleanna, the most lyrical, guilt-laden voice of the Price family, introduces each book with a reflection on the mission's disastrous miscalculation of the "price" exacted from each outsider. The pun on the family surname accentuates a dark humor that moves from crisis to catastrophe. Like an oracle, Orleanna reflects on the slow realization that female revolt is her only hope of survival: "The day does come, finally, when a daughter can walk away from a man such as that—if she's lucky."

3. Adah, the contemplative scholar and healer, bears a murderous memory of her misguided father. After citing "Full fathom five thy father lies," the sprite Ariel's song from Act I, Scene 2 of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (ca. 1610), she acknowledges Nathan's awesome control: "This is no mortal business. The man occupied us all in life and is still holding on to his claim." The comment bears a double meaning in its implications for colonial sins and dictatorial infractions against the Congolese.
4. Ruth May, the bringer of joy to the Kilangan mission, lives in harmony with children and nature. She reflects on the theft of her monkey-sock monkey by contrasting her parents' responses: "Father says to forgive them for they know not what they do. Mama says you can't hardly even call it a sin when they need ever little thing as bad as they do. So I don't know which one, if it was a sin or it wasn't. But I sure got mad and had a fit."
5. Rachel, the selfish teen queen of the family, is less charitable than her little sister. Rachel injects unintentional humor as the author's representation of American ignorance of political forces at work in the Congo. Rachel's skewed understanding of the cabal that martyred Patrice Lumumba is laughable: "If the CIA and them got rid of him, they did it for democracy. Everybody alive says that."
6. Leah, the idealist and earth mother, reflects on the revolution's crimes against children: "I notice their absence everywhere. The war cost most of its lives among children under ten. That great, quiet void is moving slowly upward through us. A war leaves holes in so much more than the dams and roads that can be rebuilt."

Across The Curriculum

Science And Health

1. Compose a chart to accompany a lecture on serious diseases indigenous to Africa: AIDS, ankylostomiasis, bejel, chikungunya fever, cholera, dengue fever, dracunculiasis, dysentery, Ebola, encephalitis, enteritis, filariasis, gonorrhoea, hemorrhagic conjunctivitis, hepatitis, HIV, kwashiorkor, Lassa fever, leprosy,

malaria, marasmus, Marburg virus, meningitis, monkeypox, onchocerciasis, o'nyong-nyong, pappataci fever, plague, pneumonia, polio, puerperal fever, relapsing fever, Rift Valley fever, schistosomiasis, sleeping sickness, syphilis, trachoma, tuberculosis, typhus, yaws, and yellow fever.

2. Discuss technology that rescues victims of hemiplegia from isolation and powerlessness, including water cures, electronic stimulation, surgery, and traction. Summarize the value of crawling to Adah as she regains the use of her limbs and learns whole-body balance and movement.
3. Outline the history of Medecins sans Frontieres (Doctors without Borders), a volunteer rescue and medical consortium that airlifts patients from places like Kilanga to maternity clinics and hospitals.

Music

1. Create a collage or bulletin board display of musical instruments from West Africa. Include the shakere, harp-lute, and thumb piano as well as drums and flutes.
2. Compare versions of popular hymns mentioned in the text. Determine how Congolese singers would respond to religious songs written in England in the 18th and 19th centuries, such as "Amazing Grace," composed in 1779 by John Newton, a former slaver.

Religion

1. Characterize Christianity and animism as religions and as philosophies of life. Explain why Brother Fyntan Fowles is able to respect animists and their cultivation of nature while Nathan Price condemns all aspects of Congolese theology.
2. Compose a graveside service for Ruth May Price. Note her admirable qualities, especially her ability to befriend black children, to pity the distension of their bellies from malnutrition, and to teach them familiar games like "Hide and Seek" and "Mother, May I!"

Drama

1. Draw stage settings for a dramatization of intense scenes, including incarceration at Camp Hardy, the arrest of Patrice Lumumba, Anatole Ngemba's fear of Leah's statements of love, Rachel's rejection of black guests at her hotel, retreat from army ants by boat on the Kwilu River, the spreading of ash to catch a stalker at the henhouse, Nathan's beating Leah with a razor strop, the Price sisters' visit to a palace in Abomey, Georgians' response to the ritual scarring on Anatole's face, Nataniel's birth by the roadside, Eeben Axelroot's radio transmissions concerning an assassination, and the election of a deity for the village of Kilanga. Supply sketches of costumes and props, such as Rachel's poolside fashions, cocktail glasses, boats, skulls, chicken corpses, cigarettes, beer, bloody white shirt, radio, strop, army uniforms, guns, kapok tree, army ants, stove ash, hens, green mamba, hotel register, bowl, tarantulas, Land Rover, and pebbles for voting markers.
2. Create a storyboard account of the flight from Kilanga. Indicate the location of each family member—Ruth May wrapped in mosquito net on the table, Nathan proselytizing Kilangans in the rain, Orleanna giving away her household goods to Mama Mwanza and other neighbor women, Rachel flying south to Johannesburg in Eeben Axelroot's bush plane, and Leah and Adah walking to Bulungu with their mother, Mama Boanda, and Mama Lo. Conclude with the flight of the U. N. plane to Fort Benning, Georgia.

Education

1. Compose an extended definition of agronomics. Explain what Leah teaches farmers about soil and control of extreme conditions of the West African climate. Name crops vital to the economy and diet—oranges, mangoes, peanuts, melons, beans, pepper, tomatoes, and manioc.
2. Propose curriculum for a class to teach Kilangans or Kinshasans about life in America. Create flashcards to display details of citizenship, clothing, medicine, churches, housing, cooking, schools, and driving.

Speech

1. Organize a discussion of racism and other forms of persecution, classism, and exclusion. Answer these basic questions: What makes people belittle identifiable groups, especially members of a minority tribe? How does Mobutu manipulate tense situations after Belgium frees its colony in the Congo? Why does Dr. Henry Kissinger's talk of Marxism turn Americans against the Congolese? How do editorials and speeches like the hopeful orations of Patrice Lumumba help quell hatred and prejudice?
2. Compose a tour of the Congolese jungle. Express the importance of hunting, gathering, and fishing to village economy. Contrast fishing and trade along the Kwilu River banks with fields planted in beans and pumpkins and a fire surround for killing animals and grubs.
3. Outline a speech honoring Eleanor Roosevelt, who chaired the human rights commission of the United Nations in two languages, English and French. Conclude how she established standards for orphans, displaced persons, widows, the handicapped and wounded, the elderly, and refugees like Orleanna Price and her daughters.

Cinema

1. View films with African settings and characters, such as *Out of Africa*, *The Lion of Africa*, *Sarafina*, *I Dreamed of Africa*, *Africa's Elephant Kingdom*, *World without Walls: Beryl Markham's African Memoir*, and *Shadow on the Sun*. Compare the movies' settings, themes, and dialogue to the novel *The Poisonwood Bible*. Comment on the interplay of people of different ethnic, social, educational, and professional backgrounds, for example, Orleanna and Mama Tataba, Rachel and Eeben Axelroot, Tata Ndu and Nathan Price, Mama Mwanza and Orleanna, Nelson and Ruth May, Brother Fyntan Fowles and Tata Kuvudundu, Mama Tataba and Adah, and Leah and Aunt Elisabet.
2. Propose a biographical film on the African mission of Hélène Breslau and Albert Schweitzer. Outline ways of recreating Lamborene and the patients and medical students who occupied the compound in Gabon.

Geography And Culture

1. Create a mural or web site on the Congo. Note the sharp separation of classes into landowners and laborers, whites and blacks, soldiers and civilians, and teachers and civil servants. Account for the hatred of Joseph Mobutu and his uniformed thugs among people old enough to remember Belgian colonialism and the promise of independence from Patrice Lumumba.
2. Make a web site or bulletin board comparing the terrain and products of South Africa with those of Zaire, including cobalt, copper, and industrial diamonds. How does Rachel exploit the wealth of Africa to her own good? What does Leah teach refugees about coexisting with nature in Zaire?

Art

1. Make an illustrated notebook of touches of African lifestyle in the missionary compound at Kilanga. Mention the wood stove, Methuselah and Stuart Little, ample bananas and oranges from the market, hammocks on the veranda, mosquito netting over the beds, monsoon rains, and invasions of army ants, hookworms, and green mambas.

Law

1. Read aloud international laws governing the rights and responsibilities of foreign insurgents in the Congo, especially government agents and the media. Determine the extent of harm done by mercenaries like Eben Axelroot and by missionaries like Nathan Price and the Underdowns.
2. Make a chart of advice to Rachel concerning ownership of the Equatorial Hotel and employment of native staff during periods of revolution and mob violence. Mention the protection of the United Nations and the American Embassy.
3. Write an encyclopedia entry on murder. Add details that explain why a priest like Tata Kuvudundu would stalk Anatole Ngemba and place snakes in the missionary compound. Explain why villagers turn against Kuvudundu and drive him from power.

Social Studies And Economics

1. Discuss with a small group Kilangan behaviors and expectations of the Underdowns, Nathan Price, and Brother Fyntan Fowles. Explain why outsiders destabilize village life at the same time that they import quinine and antibiotics and conveniences like radios, disinfectants, books, mirrors, and carpentry tools.
2. Report orally on the physical and psychological effects of jailing. Account for Leah's longing for Anatole Ngemba during his incarceration at Camp Hardy. Justify her terrors of Mobutu's exploitation of goods and services, particularly the distribution of mail and packages, random violence toward critics of dictatorship, and the delay of a prison visitation policy.
3. Divide the class into small groups to brainstorm ways to improve community life for Aunt Elisabet, Christiane, Leah, Pascal, Patrice, Martin-Lothaire, and Nataniel, for example, creating import trade in fish, beans, and other sources of protein. Determine why prostitution among foreign work crews endangers the life and health of young Congolese girls.
4. Compose an extended definition of social and emotional isolation. Explain why the term describes the entire Price family. Include details of infractions against Kilangan gender restrictions, display of wealth among the village poor, resentment of forced indoctrination into Christianity, and native jealousy and suspicion of whites.

Psychology And Ethics

1. Describe aloud the drive for survival. Explain how the bonding of Kilangan females helps Orleanna lead her daughters away from Nathan and the mounting military threat. Express the value of Mama Mwanza's example to the Prices. Why does Kingsolver emphasize the irony of grace and charity from a pagan African woman to Christian missionaries?
2. List aspects of change that first overwhelm the Price family when they arrive in Kilanga and attend the welcoming goat roast, where villagers appear partially naked. Name the needs of each family member—clothes and makeup for Rachel, books for Adah, house-

hold assistance for Orleanna, converts for Nathan, playmates for Ruth May, and opportunity for achievement for Leah.

- Using incidents from the book, comment on gradual changes in Orleanna. Discuss how she copes with a cruel, misogynistic husband and the demands of four daughters. Explain the comforts of gardening on Sanderling Island that console her as she continues to blame herself for Ruth May's death.
- Characterize the moral integrity and influence of Anatole Ngemba. Summarize the personal traits that strengthen his teaching and cause people to admire him as an adviser and example of non-violent defiance of the Mobutu regime. Explain why these altruistic qualities also make him a worthy husband and father.

Mathematics And Computers

- Using desktop publishing, make a web site or bulletin board that identifies these terms: mercenary, Abomey, mongoose, Land Rover, pagnes, palindrome, hemiplegia, Benin, CIA, Allen Dulles, simba, malaria, American Baptist, colonialism, republic, baptism, parliamentary system, la cité, Brazzaville, fufu, shackled, Togo, Marxism, vermifuge, Angola, filaires, pageant, Johannesburg, agronomics, Emory University, boa, consorting with natives, pagan, Apocrypha, interdenominational, Methuselah, sequester, sous-chief, Leopold I, contaminate, Bångala, zombie, house arrest, and quinine.
- Based on your understanding of the novel, lead a panel discussion of the effects of drought, army ants, enteritis, and revolution on Kilangan family life. Support your opinions with facts from census reports, sociological surveys, and statistics obtained from almanacs, internet sites, and economic, medical, and military surveys by the United Nations and the World Health Organization.

Language

- Contrast news releases for radio, television, or print announcing the Congo's independence from Belgium, Joseph Mobutu's death, capture of Patrice Lumumba, U. N. airlift of Americans from the Congo, changing of

Congo to Zaire, Muhammad Ali's boxing match against George Foreman, and lethal outbreak of enteritis among young Kilangan children. Indicate public reaction to each event.

- Prepare a dialogue dramatizing Nathan Price's macabre death in a field watchtower. Indicate how natives embroider details of his burning in a field watchtower with rumors of his harem of five wives and of his ability to turn into a crocodile that eats children.
- Lead a debate about the problems of organizing, educating, and governing the Congolese in multiple languages—English, Belgian French, Lingala, and Kikongo.

Literature

- Read aloud from nonfiction, novels, plays, speeches, and stories that describe racism, revolution, coercion, and injustice. Include Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies*, David Guterson's *Snow Falling on Cedars*, Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits*, Yoko Kawashima Watkins's *So Far from the Bamboo Grove*, Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife*, Barbara Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees*, Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream," William E. Barrett's *Lilies of the Field*, Theodore Taylor's *The Cay*, James Houston and Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's *Farewell to Manzanar*, Toni Cade Bambara's "Blues Ain't No Mockin Bird," Rigoberta Menchu's *I, Rigoberta Menchu*, Ruthann Lum McCunn's *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*.
- Explain in a theme the significance of the title *The Poisonwood Bible*, particularly implications that Nathan Price's autocratic theology poisons his relationship with Kilangans and with his own family. Propose other titles that express the inappropriate evangelism of Kilangans, the loss of Ruth May to Tata Kuvudundu's plotting, Adah's fear of being left behind, and Orleanna's hatred of Nathan.
- Write a theme in which you explain the role of a minor character, such as Taniel, Aunt Elisabet, President Eisenhower, the servant Pascal, the neurologist, Daniel Duprée, Mama Boanda, Celine Fowles, the Underdowns,

Gbenye, and Remy Fairley. Determine which characters interact fairly with people of other races and religions and which exploit or abuse others.

4. Explain in an impromptu chalk talk how Kingsolver alters tone and atmosphere through shifts in point of view. Comment on the use of Ruth May and Rachel as comic relief.

Alternate Assessment

1. List examples of violence in the lives of the characters, for example, the attack of army ants, Gbenye's claim of the bushbuck, Anatole Ngemba's imprisonment, Eeben Axelroot's threat to Ruth May, Tata Kuvudundu's revenge against the Price family, Nathan's death in the field watchtower, Pascal's murder, beatings with the razor strop, Patrice Lumumba's assassination, and the Abomey palace decorated with skulls.
2. Compile a list of actions and statements that demonstrate racism, classism, superstition, religious fanaticism, genocide, materialism, and misogyny.
3. Compose a scene in which Rachel visits Orleanna on Sanderling Island. Stress Rachel's failure to mourn her sister and father and her greed for the good life. Propose a rebuke from Orleanna.
4. Make a character list and explain the character flaws of each, including: Mama Tataba's impatience, Tata Kuvudundu's jealousy, Anatole Ngemba's depression, Leah's boldness, Adah's regrets, Rachel's self-absorption and vanity, Patrice Lumumba's idealism, Nathan's fanaticism, Eeben Axelroot's duplicity, the neurologist's opportunism, the Underdowns' superiority, and Orleanna's withdrawal.
5. Account for the recurrence of biblical motifs, especially those describing baptism, Moses, Job, Deborah, Daniel, Jesus, Bel and the Serpent, the Judges, Genesis and Exodus, and the children of Israel.

Vocabulary Test

Complete each of the following sentences with an appropriate word from the list below. You will have answers left over when you finish.

Abomey, agronomics, Apocrypha, baptism, boa, calamities, convalescence, fabrication, filaires, forbearance, guise, immunize, insolent, interdenominational, maimed, manioc, mercenary, mobility, pagan, pageant, pagne, palindrome, rationalizing, sequester, shackled, supremacy, vermifuge, zombie

1. I stomped off to the kitchen house, where I could hear the rats already at the _____, rewarding my spite.
2. I volunteered at the clinic, where the Guinean doctor comes once a week from Coquilhatville to _____ and diagnose babies.
3. I'd nearly forgotten Pascal, his wide-set eyes and _____ smile.
4. It's the only time I get homesick, when America lands on my doorstep in missionary _____.
5. What do people know here but _____?
6. An injury to the brain occurring as early as mine should have no lasting effects on physical _____.
7. Leah is majoring in _____.
8. Her left hand always holds her outer _____ closed for modesty.
9. I also fall prey to the awful itch from _____, tiny parasites that crawl into your pores and cause a flare-up every so often.
10. I signed on to an American payroll, _____ that I'd scatter dollars over the vendors in my little corner of la cité.
11. My life has been 101 _____ with at least half of them in the marriage department.
12. You have your standards of white _____ to uphold, don't you?
13. A boat full of kids turned over by a croc, and all of them drowned or eaten or _____.
14. Mother's _____ is so elaborate I can hardly describe it.
15. Our marriage has been, for me, a very long _____.

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Quotation Identification (30 points)

Match each of the following descriptions with a character name.

- | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| _____ 1. threatens Ruth May | A. Rachel | F. Orleanna | K. Mama Mwanza |
| _____ 2. courts Daniel | B. Nathan | G. Eeben Axelroot | L. Remy Fairley |
| _____ 3. is most loyal to the youngest child | C. Aunt Elisabet | H. Adah | M. Leah |
| _____ 4. becomes a "soeur" | D. Nataniel | I. Tata Kuvudundu | N. Fyntan Fowles |
| _____ 5. has eleven toes | E. Gbenye | J. Nelson | O. Tata Ndu |
| _____ 6. claims Leah's bushbuck | | | |
| _____ 7. changes the subject during marketing to avoid danger | | | |
| _____ 8. scoots on calloused hands | | | |
| _____ 9. seeks another wife | | | |
| _____ 10. fears a snake in the belly | | | |
| _____ 11. leaves the Equatorial to his wife | | | |
| _____ 12. pleads to come into the house | | | |
| _____ 13. admires Kilangan harvest hymns | | | |
| _____ 14. fails to thrive at birth | | | |
| _____ 15. rejects a neurologist | | | |

Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if any part is false.

- _____ 1 Orleanna is not curious or sympathetic about Nathan's death.
- _____ 2. At Emory University, Leah studies agronomics.
- _____ 3. Rachel is recovering from anemia when she reunites with her sisters.
- _____ 4. The pills stick to the wall behind the bed.
- _____ 5. Manioc fufu has little flavor or nutritional value.
- _____ 6. Mobutu's forces seize all passports from the Ngemba family.
- _____ 7. Leah outrages the vendor by stepping across the mound of oranges.
- _____ 8. President Eisenhower sends Allen Dulles to intervene in Moise Tshombe's Marxist dictatorship.
- _____ 9. At Abomey, skulls decorate walls and tables at outdoor restaurants.
- _____ 10. Adah returns to Kinshasa to study viruses.

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: Completion (20 points)

Fill in the blanks below with a word or phrase which completes the sentence. Place your answer in the space provided at left.

1. In 1959, the Price family deplanes in _____, where the Reverend Underdown and his wife greet them before the departure for _____ by bush plane.
2. At the introductory feast and hymn sing, _____ raves on with a sermon against Kilangan _____.
3. Mama Bekwa _____ tries to advise about planting in mounds and about touching the _____ tree
4. Natives refuse to be _____ in a river teeming with crocodiles, but they accept Orleanna's fried _____.
5. Ruth May steers clear of her father, who dispenses corporal punishment with a _____ and by assigning "The _____."

Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences on the essay response page.

1. Explain the importance of ashes on the ground to the solution of two mysteries.
2. Describe how Nathan changes toward Orleanna.
3. Discuss Tata Ndu's influence on village life.
4. Account for Rachel's wealth and luxuries.
5. Summarize events that acquaint Leah with racism, violence, and patience.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Character Identification (30 points)

Supply names of characters described below. You may use a character more than once.

_____	1. smashes a blue plate	Adah
_____	2. pulls down netting to use for burial cloth	Anatole
_____	3. offers to take Nathan's daughter to relieve hunger	Fyntan Fowles
_____	4. gives Ruth May a fetish	Leah
_____	5. rejoices at delivering Nataniel	Nathan
_____	6. teaches at an American school	Ndu
_____	7. plans to sell flowers	Nelson
_____	8. eats toasted grubs at the fire surround	Orleanna
_____	9. debates scripture with Nathan	Rachel
_____	10. send a plane to evacuate the Prices from Kilanga	Ruth May
_____	11. admires miniature boxing gloves	Underdowns
_____	12. turns a calabash into a globe	
_____	13. stops thinking backwards	
_____	14. drives from Spain to West Africa	
_____	15. is accused of turning into a crocodile	

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

Supply a word or phrase in answer to the following questions. Place your response in the blank provided.

- _____ 1. What does Orleanna give the girls for Christmas?
- _____ 2. On the flight from Kilanga, what does the villager serve Orleanna in addition to greens?
- _____ 3. What balances the battery on the lake crossing?
- _____ 4. Who describes the Kingdom of Connubia?
- _____ 5. Who slips eggs into the henhouse?
- _____ 6. What does Nathan celebrate on July 4th?
- _____ 7. Who returns to save Adah from army ants?
- _____ 8. What is Stuart Little?
- _____ 9. Which of the Prices' childhood friends is killed by soldiers?
- _____ 10. What leader was once a postal worker?

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Select the phrase that completes each of the following sentences. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- _____ 1. While Orleanna recovers from malaria,
a. Leah gives birth to Nataniel in Atlanta.
b. Rachel tries to cook.
c. Ruth May is buried.
d. Nathan dynamites the Kwilu River.
- _____ 2. The Ngembas hope to
a. establish a cooperative secondary school for refugees.
b. locate Nathan.
c. recover parcels from Orleanna.
d. emigrate to Angola.
- _____ 3. The Equatorial Hotel
a. is close to Leah's home.
b. refuses kickbacks from Mobutu.
c. is liberal toward biracial accommodations.
d. dispatches a Land Rover to Senegal and Togo.
- _____ 4. Dr. Kissinger explains the chaos is the result of
a. mercenaries like Eeben Axelroot.
b. U. N. interference.
c. Marxism.
d. the jungle climate and long years of colonialism.
- _____ 5. Nathan hopes to
a. extend biblical passages with the Apocrypha.
b. baptize Ruth May as an example to the other children.
c. learn Kikongo.
d. send his family home July 4th.
- _____ 6. Leah carefully
a. rescues a black snake from the manioc.
b. introduces her boys to indoor plumbing.
c. arranges Ruth May's body on the table.
d. feeds her infant sterilized water.

- _____ 7. Adah manages
a. Emory University's virology lab.
b. Orleanna's ailments.
c. to avoid comment on Nathan's death.
d. the family's flight to Bulungu.
- _____ 8. Brother Fowles cackles at news of
a. the Congo's Independence Day.
b. a supply of antibiotics upriver.
c. Methuselah's death.
d. Leah's participation in the hunt.
- _____ 9. Anatole is a useful
a. Kinshasa scoutmaster.
b. sermon translator.
c. treater of snake bite with milk compresses.
d. speechwriter.
- _____ 10. Eeben Axelroot is not eager to
a. share his radio code name.
b. ferry supplies to the Price family.
c. defy Tata Ndu.
d. marry Leah.

Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences on the essay response page.

1. Explain why the twins laugh at Rachel during the reunion.
2. Contrast Brother Fowles and Nathan as missionaries.
3. Describe Leah's life at the convent.
4. Summarize the losses of the Congolese under Mobutu.
5. Account for Orleanna's hatred of Nathan.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY

- | | | |
|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1. manioc | 6. mobility | 11. calamities |
| 2. immunize | 7. agronomics | 12. supremacy |
| 3. insolent | 8. pagne | 13. maimed |
| 4. guise | 9. filaires | 14. fabrication |
| 5. forbearance | 10. rationalizing | 15. convalescence |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Character Identification (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. G | 6. E | 11. L |
| 2. A | 7. C | 12. J |
| 3. F | 8. K | 13. N |
| 4. M | 9. O | 14. D |
| 5. I | 10. B | 15. H |

Part II: True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. T | 6. F |
| 2. T | 7. T |
| 3. F | 8. F |
| 4. T | 9. F |
| 5. T | 10. F |

Part III: Completion (20 points)

1. Leopoldville, Kilanga
2. Nathan, nakedness
3. Tataba, poisonwood
4. baptized, chicken
5. razor strop, Verse

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Matching (30 points)

- | | | |
|-------------|------------------|------------|
| 1. Nathan | 6. Leah | 11. Rachel |
| 2. Orleanna | 7. Orleanna | 12. Leah |
| 3. Ndu | 8. Ruth May | 13. Adah |
| 4. Nelson | 9. Fyntan Fowles | 14. Adah |
| 5. Anatole | 10. Underdowns | 15. Nathan |

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

- | | |
|----------------|------------------------|
| 1. needlework | 6. Easter |
| 2. boiled egg | 7. Anatole |
| 3. Leah | 8. Ruth May's mongoose |
| 4. Anatole | 9. Pascal |
| 5. Mama Mwanza | 10. Lumumba |

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. B | 6. D |
| 2. D | 7. B |
| 3. A | 8. C |
| 4. C | 9. B |
| 5. A | 10. D |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

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