

"a long way gone:
memoirs of a boy
soldier" by ishmael
beah essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Ishmael Beah had a really tough life throughout his childhood and teenage years. In his literary work, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, Ishmael Beah uses symbols to underscore his central theme of oppression and/or freedom. The three symbols he used to underscore his central theme of oppression and freedom was Ishmael's AK-47, his cassette tapes, and the drugs he used. Ishmael's AK-47 was the most important symbol that Ishmael Beah used to underscore his central theme. At the beginning of *A Long Way Gone* Ishmael was terrified of guns. He didn't want anything to do with them. But once he started in the war against the rebels, guns were there to comfort him. He didn't want to leave his gun. After being tested one of the soldiers had said: " You are afraid of looking a man in the eye and afraid of holding a gun." (Beah 109) " You will get used to it, everybody does eventually." (Beah 100). Ishmael in a way did join the war to get revenge on the rebels because they had killed his family.

He states: " Whenever I looked at rebels during raids, I got angrier, because they looked like the rebels who played cards in the ruins of the village where I had lost my family. So when the lieutenant gave orders, I shot as many as I could, but I didn't feel any better." (Beah 122). Guns had changed his life. He went from being afraid of them to loving them in such short time. To Ishmael his gun represented power and protection. Once he got his gun taken away he was lost. Ishmael says: " I hadn't parted with my gun since the day I became a soldier" (Beah 130). Therefore the AK-47 did have a huge impact on Ishmael Beah's life throughout the hard times he had to go through to get to his life now. The second major symbol Ishmael Beah used to emphasize his central theme of oppression and freedom was his cassette tapes. Ishmael

brought his rap cassette tapes literally everywhere with him, he wouldn't leave them anywhere. " Naughty by Nature, LL Cool J, Run-D. M. C., and Heavy D & The Boyz; we had left home with only these cassettes and the clothes that we wore. (Beah 15) The rap cassettes made him connect with his friends and family because they would all dance and sing to them. Ishmael would resort to music when he just wanted to think or even just relax. He would find security with his cassette tapes.

When his cassette tapes were demolished he had finally lost control of himself. " A soldier took my old pants and threw them a blazing fire.... I ran toward the fire, but the cassettes had already started to melt" (Beah 110). That was when he finally had completed his change to a whole different person. " Memorizing lyrics left me little time to think about what had happened in the war." (Beah, 163). Ishmael Beah's rap cassette tapes had a huge impact on his life and how he acted. Without them he was no longer himself, but a monster. The final thing that encapsulated Ishmael Beah that was a symbol in A Long Way Gone was drugs, which particularly were marijuana and cocaine. Drugs had change Ishmael into something he didn't want to be. Once he started on drugs he craved them more and more until he would finally do anything and everything to get them. Drugs made him want to kill others. They would go on huge raids and kill all the rebels just to get some more drugs. " Sometimes we were asked to leave for war in the middle of a movie.

We would come back hours later after killing many people and continue the movie as if we had just returned from intermission. we were always either at the front lines, watching a war movie, or doing drugs. There was no time to
<https://assignbuster.com/a-long-way-gone-memoirs-of-a-boy-soldier-by-ishmael-beah-essay-sample/>

be alone or to think." (Beah 124). Drugs were Ishmael's life during the war. It was like his gateway drug so he wouldn't have to think about his feelings or if he was doing right or wrong. He didn't have to feel or think anymore. The drugs took a huge toll on Ishmael when he first started in the war, the drugs did make him a different. But now he is off drugs and he is back to his normal self. Ishmael Beah's story *A Long Way Gone* was truly touching and lively. By reading this story and remembering it's real makes me have different perspectives on things now. But otherwise, AK-47, drugs, and the rap cassettes had huge impacts on Ishmael's life throughout the book and each of these symbols changed his life. Ishmael Beah uses symbols to underscore his central theme of oppression and/or freedom. This was a life changing book for me and probably many others!

Work Cited

Beah, Ishmael. *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., 2007.