

Beka lamb college essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Beka aspires to be a politician and serve her country one day, but she must conquer school first.

Beka's inner turmoil is representative of Belize's turmoil. Like Belize, Beka is caught between the worlds of "befo'time" and "nowadays" and is constantly evaluating the characteristics of old versus new, accepting some and discarding others. She attends political meetings with her Granny Ivy but also questions her father about his political beliefs. Seeking her own identity often causes conflicts that she describes as a "tidal waves" in her mind. She straightens her hair and insists on speaking Spanish and wearing lipstick.

This prompts her father to label her a phony, which she detests more than the beatings she receives for lying. She tries to stay out of trouble at school, but when she announces her doubts about the existence of heaven and hell, Sister Virgil and Father Nunez suggest that perhaps she should not be educated in a Catholic school. Beka continues to learn and grow with each of life's lessons but Toycie's tragedy is the most impacting lesson of all.

Toycie's death not only strengthens her resolve to "never fall in love" but it also convinces her she must complete her education. Beka learns to channel her passion and intelligence and becomes a mature woman who can correct her mistakes. She blossoms into a self-confidant young woman who is not even afraid to slip into her Creole dialect to make a point to Sister Gabriela while her mother smiles approvingly.

Beka learns that she controls her destiny and with hard work, she will not be condemned to a life like that of the Coolie prostitute, National Vellor, who tells Beka, "No mother, no father, no school. What could I do?" Toycie Qualo

Seventeen-year-old Toycie is Beka's best friend. Toycie lives with her maternal aunt, Eila because her mother abandoned her and moved to Brooklyn when Toycie was two years old. The Qualos are extremely poor but Beka does not realize it at first because she views everything from Toycie's eyes which "embellished everything with bright sparks of what she believed could be." Toycie is intelligent, talented, and beautiful. She plays the guitar and is helpful and well-liked by everyone.

Toycie works hard at school, realizing and appreciating that her aunt must work several jobs to pay her tuition. Her unmarried aunt has failed to give Toycie any counselling about the dangers of premarital sex, however, so lacking any positive male influence in her life, Toycie is easy prey to Emilio's overtures. As Toycie's relationship with Emilio intensifies and Beka decides to apply herself to her studies, the two girls drift apart. When Toycie becomes pregnant, her life is ruined. She is abandoned once again and does not even receive grace from the Sisters of Charity, who expel her from school.

She loses the will to live, stops eating and eventually loses her sanity. She is killed during a hurricane when a mango tree falls on her and shatters her skull. Granny Ivy Granny Ivy is Beka's maternal grandmother. She lives with her son's family and shares an attic bedroom with Beka. She loves to tell stories about how things were in Belize "befo'time" and although she thinks most things were better than they are "nowadays," she is hopeful that "things can change future." She is politically active in the Peoples' Independent Party and is often at odds with her son over her support of this organization, which opposes British colonial rule.

Granny Ivy is a role model forbear, often siding with Beka in arguments with her parents. She confides to Beka at the end of the novel that she, too, became pregnant out of wedlock but she didn't "break down and die" like Toycie. She had wanted to train animals in a circus but she wound up "rocking the cradle." Unlike Toycie, however, Granny Ivy is not a victim. She tells Beka, "It's sad if you lost your virginity unmarried and to the wrong man, but if you lose it, you lose it. There's no need to degrade yourself.

"Lilla Lamb Lilla is Beka's mother. Lilla often complains to her husband about Beka's behavior and then feels guilty when he beats Beka. Lilla is a stay-at-home mother of three children, a rarity in the Creole culture. She respects her mother-in-law Ivy, even though she does not always agree with her views. Lilla is genuinely concerned about Beka's development and remembers what it was like to be a girl.

She consoles Beka that the scar left by her father's beating will fade with oil treatments and convinces her husband to allow Beka to hot comb her hair to straighten it, not to cross cultural lines, but because it is the style. She resists Granny Ivy's "befo' time" stories because she feels it will hinder Beka from looking into the future. Lilla encourages Beka to find her voice by giving her a notebook and a beautiful fountain pen with which to write down her "fictions." She encourages Beka to enter the essay contest, providing the final bit of advice that allows Beka to finish her essay. Lilla is a wise woman who tries to prevent her daughter from suffering the same indignities she endured as "the blackest and poorest one in my class."

" She urges Beka to " be strong like London with all those bombs falling. She has had only two years of high school and her husband has had none. This is not going to happen to Beka if she can help it. Bill Lamb Bill is Beka's father. Belize is a matriarchal society and the major characters in Beka Lamb are female, but Beka's father's is more than a mere breadwinner, as he often complains. " I have no say in this family," he protests.

" I only provide the money. " Bill provides more than that. He works hard to support his family and raise their level of existence. He works long hours for Mr. Blanco and his reputation for being a tough taskmaster has earned him the nickname " Wild Bill.

He is the primary disciplinarian of Beka, even though he inadvertently hurts her with his belt buckle, after which he is immediately remorseful. He, too, believes in the power of education to improve one's station in life and gives Beka a second chance to succeed at school. When Toycie is expelled, Bill courageously confronts the nuns on her behalf, bravely entreating Sister Virgil not to wait for change but to be " brave enough to make that change. " Bill becomes Toycie and Eila's champion, directing Toycie's hospital care and helping with her move to Sibun River. It is Bill who breaks the dreadful news of Toycie's death to Beka. Sister Gabriela and Sister Virgil These two nuns are Sisters of Charity at St.

Cecilia's Catholic School, where both Beka and Toycie are students. They each represent an aspect of religion as viewed by Zee Edgell. Sister Gabriela is loving and merciful. She is an encourager. She takes Beka under her wing. She is an American who has grown up on a farm in Wisconsin.

New at St. Cecilia's, Sister Gabriela is not as familiar with Beka's history as the other nuns. Beka describes her as being "tremendous" in every way: "her large frame, her eyes, her gigantic nose, but especially her smile which made Beka think 'With her, all things seem possible.'" Sister Gabriela recognizes something unique in Beka and encourages her to enter an essay contest, even though Beka does not believe she has a chance of winning. Sister Gabriela assures Beka that while it is possible for her to win, winning is not the point. She reminds Beka that she is being given advantages that most other Belizean girls do not have.

Therefore it is her duty to make the best of it and serve her country. "You must go as far as the limitations of your life will allow" she tells Beka. Sometimes things only seem like they are "breaking down" when in fact, they are "not breaking down at all, sometimes things are taking a different shape." She tells Beka she needs to change her attitude, try to recognize the difference and then "do something about it."

"Sister Virgil is assertive and uncompromising. She is the head nun at St. Cecilia's. Unlike Sister Gabriela, she is a strict disciplinarian.

She is more concerned with enforcing rules than exhibiting charity and grace. She adamantly refuses to bend the rules at St. Cecilia's and allow Toycie to return to school after she has her baby. She coldly tells Bill Lamb that she believes it is up to girls to practice "modesty" with regard to boys.

If they get pregnant, it is their fault. Bill Lamb's entreaty to her that Toycie "needs hope" falls upon deaf ears. She informs Bill that "women must learn to control our emotions." It is up to women to change their own lives.

If they do not, they will remain vulnerable like Toycie. Her words are harsh, yet they ring true. By her characterization of these two Sisters of Charity, Edgell seems to be calling upon the church to exhibit both strength and mercy for the “ long term development” of Belize. Themes Beka Lamb is a deceptively simple novel that touches upon the universal themes of human life—love, loss, sexuality, and community. It is set in a unique time and place—Belize in the 1950s. While the story of Belizean independence is unfolding around them, the characters struggle with friendships and relationships in a cultural milieu that represents these challenges on a greater social and political level.

Narrated through the eyes of a girl maturing into womanhood, the novel explores the personal growing pains of the characters and the national growing pains of the country, offering hope that surviving such painful growth will ultimately redeem and strengthen both characters and country. Beka Lamb is a “ coming-of-age novel” for both Beka and Belize. Growth and maturity are important themes that manifest themselves through the novel’s strong symbolism. Beka plants a beautiful bougainvillea bush that soon grows out of control and encroaches on her neighbor Miss Boysie’s property. To keep the peace, Bill Lamb cuts it down.

After Toycie’s death jolts the characters into the realization that they must unite and support each other to survive, Miss Boysie admits that she misses the bougainvillea. When a new sprout of hope appears, a trellis is built to brace the plant and encourage its new growth. During the storm that develops over Toycie’s pregnancy and subsequent abandonment by Emilio and the church, a violent hurricane forces community members to seek

shelter in each others' homes where they encourage each other while waiting out the storm. Everyone survives except Toycie who is killed when a mango tree falls on her. The replanting of the bougainvillea, therefore, serves " as a remembrance for Toycie" and a reminder to the community of what is necessary to achieve Sister Virgil's " long term development" of Belize.

As Beka struggles to establish her identity in her family and in her community, she learns that although one takes some steps forward and some steps backward in life, one must always be making progress. That forward progress, as Sister Gabriela advises her, is a direct result of her " attitude. " So Beka must suffer the consequences of lying, yet she can learn to channel that lying into writing fiction in her notebook. She must pay the price for " fooling around" instead of doing her work by repeating a grade, but her reward is an education that can propel her out of poverty.

She can grieve and hold awake in her heart for Toycie, but she learns that for the present, a diploma is more important than a baby. She can eat spicy foods and speak Spanish, yet not forget how to use her " best Creole drawl. " She learns to recognize that religion has both Sisters Gabriela and Virgil. She learns that life in Belize is a melting pot of Expatriates, Bakras, Creoles, Panias, Maya, Coolies and Caribs, but that they all have worth.

By winning the essay contest, Beka has taken an important first step towards maturation. She proves to herself that what she had hoped could be true—that all things were possible—is true. Having learned these lessons, she has changed from what her mother calls a " flat-rate Belize Creole into a person with high mind. " Belize must also establish its identity. The theme of

nationalism parallels Beka's personal search for identity. Under the British Empire, Belize was called British Honduras.

When the novel takes place, Belize was still suffering under the "befo' time" scars of colonialism while struggling to move forward towards "nowadays" independence. But what should that independence look like? Colonial rivalry between England and Spain has existed in Belize for hundreds of years. Should Belize take advantage of its being the only English-speaking country in Central America and align itself with England and the United States? Or should Belize acknowledge its Spanish heritage and accept the territorial claims of Guatemala? This conflict is represented in the novel by Beka and Toycie. Toycie's hold on things is slipping away as she clings to the Pania Emilio and lets go of Beka.

There also is turmoil in the Lamb household. Bill and Lilla want Beka to look towards the future yet Granny Ivy encourages Beka not to forget the ways of the past, the ways that have made Belize strong. The imprisonment of the two men from the P. I.

P. at the beginning of the novel is an important first step for Belize towards independence. As things fall apart in Beka's life, she tells Sister Gabriela that sometimes she feels "Bruk down, likemy country." Several times, characters express the idea that everything that comes to Belize breaks down.

Granny Ivy tells of a circus polar bear that died because of the heat. Sister Gabriela tells of seeing broken down machinery that could not be fixed for lack of parts. Sister Gabriela, however, is of the same mind as Voltaire in

Candide that “ we must cultivate our own gardens” and tells Beka to “ find some way to make it work, even if you have to learn to make that part. ” Beka learns to make that part and so must Belize.

At the time of the novel, Belize is still looking for replacement parts, however. It was not until 1981 that it finally achieved its independence. Through Beka’s success, however, Edgel expresses hope for Belize’s future that one day its many cultures will come together and say, with Granny Ivy, that “ everyone’s home is paradise.