

Readers' Guide and

Study Questions for Students

1. What does this story say about injustices both on a personal scale and on an international level?
2. What are the contemporary issues facing Africa that are highlighted in the book, and what can we do as individuals and as nations to address and rectify these problems?
3. Contrast how the tragic worst and the tender best of humanity are depicted in this story.
4. Compare the internal conflicts within Alfred and the external ones he has with others. How do these internal conflicts intertwine with the external ones?
5. Remorse, regret, and guilt trouble Alfred his entire life and are the constant thread throughout this story. Identify these elements in each stage of his life: as a child slave and soldier, at school in Kigali, in the refugee camp, at school in France, during his adulthood in Denver, while on trial in Belgium, after his the trial.
6. There are several important friendships made in the story. How is each of these friendships integral to Alfred's success in dealing with the challenges he faces throughout his life?
7. What are the redeeming qualities of the main characters: Alfred, Anna, and Vincent?
8. Vincent imparts on Alfred an interesting theory of medicine. Discuss this and its importance.
9. Alfred suffers from mild depression, an ailment common to millions. How does he handle it and in your opinion is this an effective approach?
10. Alfred sees a lot of death over his lifetime but six deaths in particular have profound impacts on him, Nyaka, Dzigbote, Mamba, Little Gabe, Stephanie, and Anna. How does he deal with each of these so that he can move on in his life?
11. Alfred has killed many people. Were any of these killings justified? Did you ever consider, while reading the story, that Alfred should be punished for any of his crimes? Why or why not?
12. Discuss Alfred's thoughts about religion and God. How might his time with the rebels have influenced these beliefs, what about his time in the in the Catholic mission school, or the influence of Vincent?
13. How did you feel about what happened to Anna? Whose fault was this?
14. Were there things in the story that made you question your knowledge of international events and politics? If so, what in particular? And if not, was your previous knowledge and opinion of these factual events altered after having read the book?