2014-15 Common Reading Experience Lesson Plan Option #2

All new students are expected to have read this year’s book, Ishmael Beah’s A Long Way Gone, prior to coming to campus this fall. In addition to being incorporated into campus curricular and co-curricular programming throughout the year, this book is considered required reading for UK101. Below you will find a lesson plan option for engaging students in reflection and discussion on perception versus reality as it relates to Ishmael’s memoir, Sierra Leone, and their new Kentucky home.

This lesson plan is a good option for instructors who wish to devote only one class session to the common reading book.

If you would like to discuss the book throughout the class or for more information on the CRE, visit www.uky.edu/UK101 for discussion questions, assignments, and project ideas. These can also be used for the required paper or project assignment.

Materials:
- A Long Way Gone book
- Computer and audio access

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:
- Articulate the purpose of the Common Reading Experience program.
- Express and articulate their opinions and reflections on A Long Way Gone.
- Articulate the perceptions versus the realities of Sierra Leone and Africa related to the perceptions versus the realities of Kentucky and the United States.

Overview:
- Class Attendance & Announcements - 2 min. - Peer Instructor
- Introduction - 5 min. – Instructor
- Video and discussion – 40 min. – Instructor and Peer Instructor
- Reflection and wrap-up - 3 min. - Instructor

Introduction (5 min) - Instructor
Briefly review the purpose of the Common Reading Experience and why the students were expected to read this book. Ask the students “So what? Who cares?,” and “Why do you think UK assigned a common reading book?”

Research shows that the more common academic experiences students have, the more likely they will be successful and stay at a university. The Common Reading Experience was designed to introduce new students to many academic expectations for their collegiate careers, including but not limited to:
- You are responsible for your own learning.
- Not every assignment (i.e., summer reading) will be graded.
• Reading is very important to collegiate learning; you will be assigned many readings, and you will be expected to complete them on your own, usually with no grade attached.
• You will be expected to reflect on your personal experiences and values and relate both to what you read for your classes (verbally and/or in writing).

Ask the students their reactions to reading *A Long Way Gone*. Ask what part of Ishmael Beah’s story they most connected to. What major themes did they pick out from the book? Possible answers and themes that could be discussed include:

- The book focuses on the power of humanity and forgiveness.
- *A Long Way Gone* is Ishmael’s memoir and personal story. Themes include (but are not limited to) storytelling, trauma, violence, family, forgiving oneself, and going through a transformational experience.
- The book introduces us to multicultural and global issues. We are part of a multicultural and global community at UK.
- The book gives us an inside perspective into the lives of child soldiers, the civil wars in Sierra Leone, and Ishmael’s journey to the United States.
- Ishmael went through a violent and traumatic journey during his experience as a child soldier, but he also learned about the power of humanity and forgiving oneself. New students may relate and reflect on Ishmael’s resilience, overcoming immense challenges, and gain an understanding that every person has a story and background.
- The book focuses on the UK Core component of Global Dynamics.

**Video and Discussion on Perception versus Reality (40 minutes) – Instructor and Peer Instructor**

Video clips have been extremely successful tools to generate interest and spark discussion. You can find clips from all the major news web sites as well as those from youtube.com. You can choose to utilize some of the video clips provided for you below to facilitate the discussion on perception versus the realities of Sierra Leone and Africa, as well as Kentucky and the United States, or you can elect to find your own. Be sure to preview the videos beforehand so that you can decide which one(s) to use.

**Facilitator Note:** Prior to showing the videos in class, it is suggested you write the discussion questions on the board, provide a worksheet with the discussion questions so students can take notes as they are watching, or divide the class into discussion groups where each group leads the discussion on a certain video. You could also elect to assign watching the videos as an assignment to save class time.

**Suggested videos:**

**Video 1:** To American Readers (Ishmael Beah): [http://www.alongwaygone.com/media.html](http://www.alongwaygone.com/media.html)

Time: 1:10

**Discussion Questions:**

- Do you agree with Ishmael that everyone is capable of doing what he did if put into that situation of being a child soldier?
- Do you agree that war is romanticized as Ishmael stated in this video? What is the perception versus reality of war in general?
Video 2: Eye to Eye Ishmael Beah (CBS News): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ozsOLdgp_y0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ozsOLdgp_y0)
Time: 6:29
Discussion Questions:
- What did Ishmael say was his “reality”?
- What did Ishmael mean when he said to “lose yourself completely”?
- Why did he say kids believed in the process versus adults? Do you agree or disagree?

Time: 1:00
Discussion Questions:
- How much did you know about the Sierra Leone Civil War prior to reading Ishmael’s story?
- What did you learn about the war in Sierra Leone from reading Ishmael’s book?
- What else do you want to know about the war?

Video 4: Sierra Leone Tourism: Nature (by NTBSL)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eRIt3ToAGLY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eRIt3ToAGLY)
Time: 6:33
OR Sierra Leone Tourism: Freetown (by NTBSL)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDUCpTQPEFA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDUCpTQPEFA)
Time: 4:06
OR Sierra Leone, Africa 2014/2014 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBC6-0ldQCM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBC6-0ldQCM)
Time: 4:01
Discussion Questions:
- Is this how you imagined Sierra Leone after reading *A Long Way Gone*?
- What perceptions (or possible stereotypes) did you have of Sierra Leone after reading the book? Do you think that is the reality or perception of Africa and Sierra Leone?

Video 5: Kentucky Tourism Video [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSeAMPtdTFk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSeAMPtdTFk)
Time: 2:54
Discussion Questions:
- What do you think that non-citizens of Kentucky (those that do not live in-state) perceive of Kentucky? Do you think that is the reality? Why or why not?
- What do you think the world thinks of the United States? Do you think this is the reality of the situation? Why or why not?
- Compare Kentucky and Sierra Leone. Do you think there are misperceptions about these places? Why or why not?

**Reflection and Wrap-Up (3 minutes) – Instructor**

Ask your students to write a one-minute reflection paper about what they learned from the videos and discussion.

Remind students of Ishmael Beah’s author lecture (if you facilitate this lesson before the date), which will be held on Tuesday, October 28, at 7 p.m. in Singletary Center for the Arts Concert Hall. More details will be announced via e-mail.