

# DISTURBED IN THEIR NESTS

## BY JUDY A. BERNSTEIN

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

#### PRE-READING QUESTIONS:

1. Who are the Lost Boys of South Sudan?
2. What caused the Lost Boys to flee their homes? What is the source of political turmoil?
3. Discuss life in the Kakuma Refugee camp. What are some of the struggles the boys had to face prior to coming to the United States? What is a refugee camp? How are refugee camps run?

#### Part One:

#### PAGES 1-55:

1. What was your average day at the age of 5? How does this vary from the story of Alepho?
2. Before arriving to the United States how did the boys perceive the US? How is their perception wrong? How is their perception correct?
3. Identify examples of "American Norms" that are culturally shocking to the Lost Boys of South Sudan? In your opinion, are these positive norms or are they negative norms? Why do you believe that?
4. How does having background knowledge or cultural context play a large role in the conversations that take place between Judy and the boys? Why is this a challenge for both parties?
5. How do the boys value education? Is this the same or different from what you see in your community? Why do you believe this to be?
6. What are Judy's fears about being a mentor for Alepho, Benson, and Lino?

#### PAGES 56-89:

1. What emotions do you imagine you would experience moving to a foreign country? What fears would you face?
2. Create a list of all of the new things that Alepho learns about America within his first few weeks.
3. Alepho wonders the question, "Do people take time to know you in America?" (pg 58) What would your response to this question be? Why do you believe that?

## **PAGES 56-89 CONTINUED:**

4. How many individuals have been displaced by the Sudan Civil War? (pg 59) What is the cause of this turmoil?
5. Discuss the struggles the boys will face as they go out to find a job. Why do you believe they will face these struggles? Is there a way to overcome?
6. What is the relationship between Alepho, Benson, and Lino?
7. Why is Peter, Benson and Alepho's brother not in the United States?
8. How is Judy's perception of a refugee camp different from that of a real refugee camp? Has your perception of a refugee camp shifted?
9. Judy mentions the busyness of the United States, do you find this to be true of the culture in your community? Why or why not?
10. Judy asks the questions, "They survived a war; did that equip them to thrive in a ghetto?" What do you believe the answer to this is? Why do you believe that to be true?
11. Identify two observations that Judy makes while at the ocean and two observations that Alepho makes while at the ocean. Identify the similarities and differences.
12. Why was Alepho so intrigued with the women at the beach? How did this vary from his home?
13. What did the boys eat at the Kakuma Refugee Camp? What did they eat on their journey to the Refugee Camp?
14. What happens to the young boys and girls in their villages when they are attacked? Why is it that the girls can't run like the boys can? How is this culturally different or similar from your own culture?
15. What are some of the character traits of Alepho, Benson, and Lino. Of these character traits which of them do you believe will help them adapt to life in America? Which of them will make adaptation a challenge?
16. As the boys are learning how to interview for a job they are identifying different ways Americans greet each other. How is this different from their own culture?

## **PAGES 90-119:**

1. What is acculturation? Give examples of acculturation from the novel and from your own life.
2. What is the difference between how Sudanese define beauty and how Americans define beauty?
3. How did Alepho first hear about what education is?
4. Alepho mentions that he has fallen between two cultures. He left his home so early and is now a part of the American culture that he does not understand. Describe the emotions that come with that challenge. Have you ever found yourself in a similar situation?
5. What does Alepho realize about his original perception of the United States? How is his new perspective different?

### **PAGES 90-119 CONTINUED:**

6. What about the baseball stadium stood out to Alepho, Benson, and Lino?
7. Identify the similarities and differences between Alephos experience at the baseball game vs. Judy's experience.

## **Part Two:**

### **PAGES 123-166:**

1. What emotions did the boys experience during this major transition to the United States? Give examples of these emotions playing out.
2. Are the anxieties that Alepho experiences caused by truth or cultural misunderstanding? A combination of both? Identify the why to your answer.
3. How did the young boys interpret the statement "American Land of the Free"? What do you believe this actually means?
4. How can language be the greatest barrier to acculturation? Where have you seen examples of this?
5. What is the process for a refugee to travel to another country?
6. Describe Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. What is the importance of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in the mentor process?
7. Describe life as a refugee.
8. What did the boys misinterpret as gunshots?

### **PAGES 167-222:**

1. How did 9-11 influence the influx of refugees to the United States?
2. Because of the boys background knowledge of war, what new fears are now introduced by the 9-11 attacks?
3. How do the boys perceive the "suburbs" of San Diego?
4. Alepho asks Judy if "Americans will blame the Lost Boys for the attack?" Why does he believe this to be true?
5. Why does Judy struggle to decide if she should loan the boys \$600? What do you think you would do? Why?
6. What are Alephos looming fears?
7. What advice did Alepho receive from his father on their walk home from the mediation?

## **PAGES 223-287**

1. Why did James want Judy to take him to his interview at the Bus Station?
2. What do the Dinka believe "having a big heart" means? How does this exemplify the challenge of learning the English language?
3. What does Alepho learn about "tribes" at Palatka?
4. Why did Joseph and Alepho need to escape Palatka?
5. With more evidence from the novel, identify the further challenges the boys have faced in finding a job in the United States?
6. Why does Alepho feel shame about leaving his food behind?
7. What does Benson mean when he says an "American Style relationship with a woman"?

## **PAGES 288-350:**

1. What is education a symbol of for Alepho?
2. What are Alepho's reflections from the zoo?
3. How do the boys face discrimination at the grocery store?
4. What challenges does Alepho face in his new job?
5. What are Judy's fears when she brings the boys to Disneyland? How did the boys interpret their experience at Disneyland? Were these thoughts the same or different?
6. How did Alepho misinterpret what it means to be "hot"?

## **Part Three:**

### **PAGES 353-END:**

1. What changes Alepho's perspective of America from sweet to reality?
2. What are the challenges the boys face while looking for a new apartment?
3. Alepho is facing a number of challenges assimilating in this new culture. What are some examples of this? What are the causes of his anxiety?
4. What struggles does Judy face as she devotes more and more time to protecting the boys?
5. Alepho asks, "Do you think they should bring refugees to his country?", What are the major challenges that refugees faces as they enter a new country?
6. How do the opportunities in America bring incredible stress to Alepho? How is he comparing this stress to that in the refugee camps?
7. Judy is finally seeing the cards turn for the boys. What are examples of positive things coming their way?
8. What experience challenges Judy to feel what Alepho has been feeling this entire time?

### **Post-reading Questions:**

1. What further questions do you have about the events that the Lost Boys experienced?
2. What further questions do you have about the acculturation of refugees?
3. What further questions do you have about the refugee crisis and the process of accepting refugees in the United States?