



Written Comprehension Text

GRADE 10

Ishmael Beah's New Battles

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JANUARY 9, 2014 2:24 PM EST

1. There's no couch in Ishmael Beah's New York City loft. The elevator opens to a long narrow room, empty save for a few X-shaped wooden African chief's chairs, a bunch of pillows on the floor and a massive dining table. There's one cluttered corner of cushions, books and a tall stand where Beah writes. But the kitchen is modern – his pregnant Congolese wife, Priscillia, and Iranian mother-in-law are cooking in there - and in the corner is a big fancy rock-star drum set.
2. Beah is getting good at living between two worlds. He has the odd distinction of being one of his continent's most famous literary and military figures, thanks to his 2007 memoir *A Long Way Gone*, which introduced millions of readers to the plight of the boy soldier. The book details his life from 13 to 16 years old, the deaths of most of his family, his coercion into serving in Sierra Leone's army, his battles (usually fought hyped up on "brown-brown," a cocktail of cocaine and gunpowder) and his rescue and subsequent difficulties re-entering civilian life.
3. Being a huge international best seller has not changed things for him in Sierra Leone. "When I go to buy a beer, people say, 'You have to pay first,' because they assume I can't afford it," he says. Having once being invited to meet the President, he was blocked by guards who declined to believe he was that Ishmael Beah.
4. He's short and soft spoken and looks much younger than 33. In Sierra Leonean culture, old people are respected. What made the civil war of his country so destructive, says Beah, was that boys, enlisted by both sides, killed elders. The elders' job is to protect the young; when they feared them instead, it made resuming normal life much more complicated.
5. Beah has had his own trials. A year after *A Long Way Gone* came out, an Australian newspaper ran a series of articles questioning its veracity, including his length of service in the army. This was sparked when an Australian mining executive in Sierra Leone met a man who falsely claimed to be Beah's father. Former soldiers don't lose their cool easily, but Beah bristles a little at this subject. "Nobody would ever do this, for example, to a Holocaust survivor," he says. "Nobody would ever bring up stuff like that and not apologize, but, fine, you can do it to an African person. I just let it go."
6. While Beah still has vestigial shadows from his past life, he believes they have less power than they once did. "One of the best therapies is to have opportunity in your life. Then you know you are capable of something else."

Adapted from: <https://time.com/4247/ishmael-beahs-new-battles/>

This article appeared in the January 20, 2014 issue of TIME.