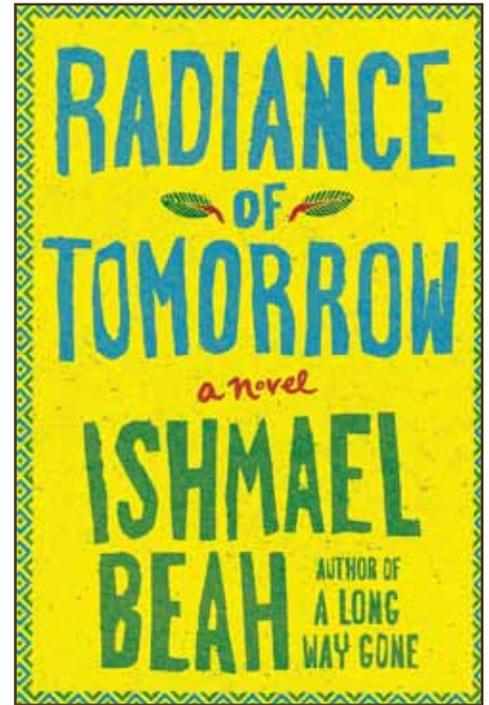


# Reading Group Gold

## *Radiance of Tomorrow*

by Ishmael Beah



ISBN: 978-0-374-24602-0 / 256 pages

When Ishmael Beah's memoir, *A Long Way Gone*, was published in 2007, it became an instant classic that turned the world's attention to the plight of child soldiers on the front lines of Sierra Leone's civil war. With *Radiance of Tomorrow*, Beah brings us an astonishing novel of postwar life in Sierra Leone. At the center of the story are Benjamin and Bockarie, two longtime friends who return to their shattered hometown and take up their former posts as teachers. They join many other villagers in the dream of rebuilding their lost world. But the village is in ruins—the ground is covered in bones—and daily life is beset with obstacles: a scarcity of food, continual crime and retaliation, and the ravages of a foreign mining company that promises prosperity but wrecks the village's vital resources. As Benjamin and Bockarie search for a way to restore order, *Radiance of Tomorrow* becomes a powerful meditation on preserving what we cherish, even in the face of an ominous future.

This guide is designed to enrich your discussion of *Radiance of Tomorrow*. We hope that the following questions will enhance your reading group's experience of Ishmael Beah's illuminating debut novel.

### QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. As you read the opening scenes, what did you discover about the reasons Mama Kadie and Pa Moiwa returned to their village, despite the tragedies that occurred there? Do you feel a similar connection to your homeland? How do you feel about your community or homeland?

# Reading Group Gold

2. How are the people of Imperi sustained by their relationship to the natural world? When their water supply becomes contaminated, how does this reflect the other contaminations—spiritual, emotional, and physical—of their community?
3. Discuss the role of education in rebuilding Imperi. What fosters the students' respect for their teachers? How do uniforms and other mandates keep the schools from being truly "public"? Is the principal, Mr. Fofanah, a sinister man or simply a skilled survivor? What accounts for the corruption within the Educational Ministry of Lion Mountain (Sierra Leone)?
4. What choice did Benjamin and Bockarie have when they abandoned teaching in order to work in the mines? How is their friendship affected by their decision? What are the consequences for a society that has essentially no middle class?
5. How did you react to Colonel's approach to security? For his fellow villagers who survived the atrocities of civil war, what determines the difference between being paranoid and being naïve?
6. How is family life in Imperi distorted by the raiders and the mining company? What do you predict for the "tomorrow" generation of Miata and Abu?
7. What did the novel's elders teach you about living and leading?
8. Discuss the author's poetic use of language, which he discusses in the author's note. What do his colorful images say about the way a community can experience the world?
9. Chapter 8 describes the vulnerability of women as the village itself becomes vulnerable to outsiders. As rape and prostitution rise, parents recall a time when they didn't fear letting their daughters go out simply to fetch water. How is the power of Imperi's women transformed throughout the novel?
10. What will be the legacy of villagers like those featured in the novel, even as the modern world threatens to erase their traditions? Is the Western materialism described in the book—from cell phone addiction to flashy cars—ever a positive force?
11. If we read *Radiance of Tomorrow* as a parable, what is its lesson?
12. For decades, writers have exposed numerous incidents of devastation wrought by mining. In 2012, particularly shocking headlines appeared when South African police fatally shot more than thirty striking workers during a protest at the Lonmin platinum mine in Marikana. As consumers, what can we do to become agents for change?
13. Discuss Kula's tale, which forms the novel's closing scene. As a reader, how would you describe the necessity of storytelling? How did *Radiance of Tomorrow* enrich your experience of Ishmael Beah's memoir, *A Long Way Gone*?

# Reading Group Gold

## PRAISE FOR *RADIANCE OF TOMORROW*

“I really admire the uncompromising bravery of this book. Ishmael Beah has written a novel that moves between forms—part fable, part family epic, part poem. He doesn’t shy away from the horror, nor does he forget that the true function of storytelling is its ability to break our hearts. Reminiscent of Ben Okri and Chinua Achebe, Beah manages to lift the curtain on a world we cannot afford to flinch from.” —Colum McCann, National Book Award–winning author of *TransAtlantic* and *Let the Great World Spin*

“UNICEF Ambassador Beah writes lyrically and passionately about ugly realities as well as about the beauty and dignity of traditional ways.” —*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

“In 2007, Beah woke us from our slumbers with *A Long Way Gone* . . . Here, in his first novel . . . our heroes (like Beah himself) stay radiant to the end.” —*Library Journal*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Ishmael Beah** was born in Sierra Leone in 1980. He came to the United States when he was seventeen and studied political science at Oberlin College, graduating in 2004. His first book, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, was a number-one *New York Times* bestseller and has been published in more than forty languages. *Time* magazine named it one of their Top 10 Nonfiction Books of 2007. Beah is a UNICEF Ambassador and Advocate for Children Affected by War; a member of the Human Rights Watch Children’s Rights Advisory Committee; an advisory board member of the Center for the Study of Youth & Political Violence at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville; a former visiting scholar at the Center for International Conflict Resolution at Columbia University; a senior research fellow at the Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights at Rutgers University; cofounder of the Network of Young People Affected by War (NYPAW); and president of the Ishmael Beah Foundation. He has spoken before the United Nations, the Council on Foreign Relations, and many panels on the effects of war on children. He lives with his wife in New York City. You can follow him on Twitter at @IshmaelBeah.

Guide written by Amy Clements

Contact us at [readinggroup@macmillanusa.com](mailto:readinggroup@macmillanusa.com) | [www.readinggroupgold.com](http://www.readinggroupgold.com)  
Don’t forget to check out our monthly newsletter!