



Diamonds in the Shadow

by Caroline Cooney

Supplies

- Blank paper
- Crayons or markers
- Map of Africa
- Bibles

Personality Portrait

10 minutes

As students enter, give each youth a piece of paper and crayons. Ask each student to choose a character in the book: Mopsy, Jared, Kara Finch, Drew Finch, Victor, Celestine, Andre, Mattu, or Alake. Based on the descriptions in the book, direct students to draw a picture of one of the characters. Have students write three personality traits of their chosen character.

Who's Who?

10 minutes

Have students sit or stand in a circle. Have the youth introduce themselves and share the personality traits that go with the portrait of the character they have drawn. After reading the traits, allow other students to guess the character. Once the character has been guessed correctly, have students share their portrait with the group.

Background Information

5 – 10 minutes

Show students a map of Africa. Ask students to identify the country/area from where the Amabo family originated. Ask students to share what they know about Sierra Leone. State the following facts about Sierra Leone:

- The official language is English, yet there are other vernaculars.
- The population is approximately 5,500,000.
- Located in West Africa, bordered by Guinea, Liberia, and Atlantic Ocean.

- The main economy is from mining, specifically diamonds, titanium, bauxite, and gold. Diamonds mined during the civil war, are referred to as blood diamonds and were typically sold to buy weapons.
- 70% of the country lives in poverty.
- During the civil war in 1991-2002, over 600,000 people fled to neighboring countries. Many children were forced to become soldiers.

Discussion Questions

20 – 30 minutes

- The Finch family takes in a family of four refugees from Africa. The teenage Finches, Mopsy and Jared, aren't told about this until all the arrangements are finalized. Why are their reactions to this news so different? (Mopsy is excited by the idea of having a sleepover every night. Jared does not want to share his room or belongings.) Would you react more like Jared or Mopsy?
- Why don't the Amabos want to discuss their past? Often they say they are looking to the future. Why is it difficult for them to believe they can be safe in America?
- The refugee family, the Amabos, arrive on a plane. There is a fifth refugee on the plane, Victor, who is anxious about getting to the front of the plane. Why?
- This fifth refugee makes lots of people nervous. A passenger asks to move seats. The volunteer at the airport and the case worker are afraid. The Sudanese men who share the apartment with him leave and do not want him to know where to find them. What is wrong with this refugee? Why does he make others so anxious?
- Why does the volunteer who meets the Amabos at the airport find their behavior odd? Why does Jared think they aren't related? (different accents, Alake's unkempt hair, Celestine and Andre not checking on their children)
- At different times, both Mopsy and Jared wondered why God doesn't stop the horrors that take place in civil wars. What would you tell them? (Andre tells Jared that a man cut his hands off, and warns him not to confuse God with man.)
- Mopsy and Jared each snoop in Mattu's boxes. Why? What does each one find? (Mopsy is curious about the ashes. Jared tries to move the boxes because they are getting wet. They each find the diamond but are not sure what they are.)

- Why has Drew Finch disappeared? Is he hiding from the situation at home or the one at church? Why is Drew Finch hurting so much from the church theft? (Celestine says, “The loss of money hurts the church, but the broken trust hurts you.”¹)
- Alake has a memory involving school, where she is forced into violence by Victor. Her family is killed, her schoolmates are killed, and she is forced to kill her teachers in order to save her sister, who Victor kills anyways. How does this memory affect Alake and how she interacts with others?
- Why does Jared compare himself to Brady Wall? (He has stolen a diamond from Mattu’s box, and intends to put it back. Brady stole from the church. Brady was caught and sentenced to jail. Jared has not been caught.)
- Throughout the book, many characters pray to God. Some pray even though they are unsure of God’s existence. What are some things they pray for? (Jared prayed for Mopsy to be safe, Mattu prayed for his own safety and for Alake to get better, Alake prayed to be good, for acceptance and forgiveness.)
- Kirk Crick, the refugee aid worker, reminds Kara, “You’re the innkeeper. People stay with you temporarily. The good deed is helping them leave.”² Why does he say this? (Kirk Crick feels the Finches are doing too many things for the Amabos, holding them up, and not letting them do tasks on their own.)
- Jared explains the Holocaust to Mattu, saying many Jews were slaughtered in the 1940’s. Mattu says, “We have those in Africa. I have been in one.”³ What do you think about this statement? Have you ever thought about civil wars as Holocausts?
- Why do you think Alake responded to the puppy? (She received attention, love, and affection from the puppy when she was not receiving it from anyone else.)
- Jared and a friend, Tay, discuss the hypocrisy of those attending church, putting up an appearance of perfection, wanting to do good, but not really believing. Do you believe church improves people?
- Why did Alake want the diamonds? (to have money to take care of the dog)
- At the end of the book, several characters are willing to sacrifice themselves for others. Name those characters, their sacrificial action, and the outcome. (Alake tries to save the puppy. Mopsy tries to distract Victor so Alake can flee. Alake tackling Victor into the water. Jared diving into the water to save Alake.)
- How important was it for Alake to be accepted by Celestine as a daughter? How do you think this changes Alake’s future?

1 Cooney, Caroline B. *Diamonds in the Shadow*. (New York: Delacorte Press, 2007),127.

2 Cooney, 148.

3 Collins, 158.

Bible Study

10 minutes

When the Finch and Amabo families go to church together, the pastor preaches on the Parable of the Good Samaritan. His sermon focuses on the inn and innkeeper that is asked to watch over the robbed traveler.

- Read the story of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:29–37.
- Ask students to compare characters in the Bible story (priest, Levite, Samaritan, robber, traveler, innkeeper) resemble characters in the book. How are the characters similar?
- What do you think about the pastor referring to the church as the inn?

Closing Prayer

1 minute

God, we pray for those who have no place to call home. Help them to find comfort, safety, and acceptance in the warmth of Your love. Amen.

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