**Post Reading Open Response Discussion** (Teacher will assign specific questions to groups.)

1.Towards the end of the book, we learn that many of Beah’s friends returned to child soldiering. Why do you think this is? Do you think Beah would have returned to child soldiering if he had not fled to America? Why or why not?

2. Early on, Beah’s families are separated from him and later are killed in the war. Along his journey, Ishmael develops relationships with others who are surrogate family members, including his friends: the Lieutenant, Esther, Mohammad, his Uncle, and Laura Simms. What role do these people play in his life? How do they help him along the way? Discuss the ways in which the idea of “family” is configured, re-configured, challenged, and re-affirmed throughout the book.

3. Ishmael’s memoir is a testament to hope, perseverance, and spirit. What universal truths does Ishmael teach us about surviving loss and overcoming isolation? What does he teach us about our own humanity? In retrospect, how do his actions and the actions of others in this memoir show this? What about the people at the rehabilitation center? How can we take his lessons and apply them – as individuals, in our own community, and in the world “out there”?

4. **(A)**Why do you think that child soldiering still occurs even though the United Nations has denounced the practice? What do you think can be done about the problem? **(B)**Who is responsible for its continuation? **(C)** How do ***Hotel Rwanda*** and ***A Long Way Gone*** show solutions?

5. Beah shows us how children are turned into child soldiers. Discuss these techniques.

In your discussion, consider the following passages:

a.“Over and over in our training he would say that same sentence: Visualize the enemy, the rebels who killed your parents, your family, and those who are responsible for everything that has happened to you.” (p. 112)

b.“A young soldier came by with a plastic bag full of some kind of tablets. They looked like capsules, but they were plain white. He handed them to each of us with a cup of water. The corporal said it will boost your energy,” the soldier announced with a secretive smile on his face.” (p. 116)

c.“In the daytime, instead of playing soccer in the village square, I took turns at the guarding posts around the village, smoking marijuana and sniffing *brown brown*, cocaine mixed with gunpowder, which was always spread out on the table, and of course taking more of the white capsules, as I had become addicted to them.” (p. 121)

d. “They have lost everything that makes them human. They do not deserve to live. That is why we must kill every single one of them. Think of it as destroying a great evil. It is the highest service you can perform for your country.” (p. 108).

6. Color Symbolism: Notice how the color white if often associated with war and violence and how Ishmael is often numb to other colors. Give some examples to reinforce this. Also, explain what it is showing about Ishmael’s mental state when he mentions “white” even though he is through with the war and what it means about his rehabilitation progress when other colors are described. White: Chapters 2,9,10, 13, 16, 21

7. Although most of the book’s events occur in Sierra Leone, American culture is a pervasive theme in the memoir and in the author’s life. What positive influences does American culture have on Beah? Negatives? Consider the importance of hip hop. How does it save his life (pages, 38, 67, 169)? Consider the role of American movies such as *Rambo*. How does the movie about the Vietnam War influence the child soldiers?

8. Discuss how African culture and traditions play a role in Ishmael’s life. What aspects of this culture seem to be valued most? (Give specific page numbers and quotes.) What cultural aspects of Africa intrigued you the most? What role does your culture play in your life? What aspects do you value the most?

9. Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* is an important reference point in the book. Which individual, other than Ishmael, is familiar with it, and why do you think that person is always reading it? Explain how the themes and events of Shakespeare’s play might echo Ishmael’s memoir.

(Caesar p. 104, 105, 116)

(Macbeth p. 128) Shakespeare Monologue p. 169)

10. Consider the parables of the wild boar (pg. 53), the Bra spider (pg. 72), and the trickster monkey (pg. 217). Discuss what lessons the author learned from these stories. What lessons can we learn from these stories?

11. When Beah is at the rehabilitation center, Esther helps him discuss what had happened. At the end of every discussion, she always sternly tells him that “none of these things are your fault.” Why does she say this to him? What does she mean when she says these things are not his fault? Does he believe her right away? Why or why not? Did young Ishmael have any choice in what he did? Did any of the children? In your discussion, consider the following passage:

*We were now at the top of a bushy hill immediately behind the swamp, in a clearing just before the escape route. Seeing the civilians all about to make it out, the rebels fired rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), machine guns, AK-47s, G3s, all the weapons they had, directly into the clearing. But we knew we had no choice, we had to make it across the clearing because, as young boys, the risk of staying in town was greater for us than trying to escape. Young boys were immediately recruited, and the initials RUF were carved wherever it pleased the rebels, with a hot bayonet. This not only meant that you were scarred for life but that you could never escape from them, because escaping with the carving of the rebels’ initials was asking for death, as soldiers would kill you without any questions and militant civilians would do the same. (p. 24)*