The Other Side of Truth by Beverley Naidoo

Student pack
(Page references are to the Puffin edition)

Chapter 1 - ‘Survivors’
1. Which words in the italicised passage at the beginning of the novel convey a sense of violence?
2. Who witnessed the murder?
3. How is Sade’s father affected by it?
4. What is Sade’s response?
5. What is the name of the local language?
6. Why do you think the gunmen called at Sade’s house that morning?
7. Summarise Uncle Tunde’s argument.
8. What was the subject and nature of Sade’s father’s recent article?
9. Find out all you can about Ken Saro-Wiwa.

Chapter 2 - ‘Say Nothing!’
1. What has happened to Papa’s passport?
2. How does Sade feel at the beginning of the chapter?
3. What is the plan suggested by Uncle Tunde?
4. What does Sade miss about her mother?
5. What do you think the future holds for Sade, Femi and Papa?
6. Papa is a journalist; write about recent events from his point of view for publication in a European newspaper. You could include at least two interviews with family members or perhaps his work colleagues. In your article you should try to explain why the events occurred.

Chapter 3 - ‘A Small Bag and a Rucksack Each’
1. Describe Sade’s desk.
2. If you had to leave your home suddenly, what three articles would you take and why?
3. What are Sade’s instructions?
4. How does Sade feel as she leaves her home?
5. Create a ‘Character Map’ for Sade. You could write about the sort of family life and childhood she has had so far. What matters to her? How does she know that she is loved and valued? Leave plenty of space so that you can return to your map and add to it later on.

Chapter 4 - ‘So, You Two Will Be My Children’
1. What happens at roadblocks?
2. What sort of journalist do you think Sade’s father is?
3. How does the writer use the local traditions and culture to enliven her writing? Try to give specific examples.
4. How do you think Femi feels about leaving Nigeria? Use a quotation from the text to justify your opinion?
5. What does Sade notice about Mrs Bankole?
Chapter 5 - ‘Spinning Into Darkness’

1. The writer seems to suggest that the authorities are corrupt. What evidence of this has she presented in the novel so far?
2. What upsets Femi at the airport and why?
3. What upsets Sade at the airport?
4. Describe the relationship between Femi and Sade.
5. How does the writer create tension in this chapter?

Chapter 6 - ‘Flight’

Write about a long journey you have undertaken to a place you didn’t know, or to meet people you haven’t previously met (about 500 words).

In your writing you could focus on:

- Where you were going, and when.
- Your emotions during the journey.
- What you saw on the way.
- How you passed the time.
- People you met, food you ate etc.

Try to make your writing descriptive and don’t forget to focus on creating atmosphere and tension.

Chapter 7 - ‘Nothing to Declare’

1. What are the crisis points for Sade in this chapter?
2. How does Mrs Bankole respond to the request from the customs officers?
3. Why is Sade uncomfortable about the American?
4. What do you think he notices?

Chapters 8 and 9 - ‘Victoria Station’ and ‘Where is Uncle Dele?’

1. Sade and Femi encounter many people as they arrive in London. Choose two encounters and write about each one from the points of view of the people they encounter.
2. Carefully read the paragraph on page 51 that begins: ‘Soon they were travelling…’ What are Sade’s feelings and how does the writer convey them?
3. This book is difficult to put down. What techniques does the writer use to make sure that you stay hooked?
4. The writer weaves descriptions of the natural surroundings into the narrative - these help to express the atmosphere of the story. Find a passage of description that does this particularly well and explain why this is the case.
Chapter 10 – ‘Thieves and Vandals’

1. How does the grocery shop remind Sade and Femi of home?
2. Describe Femi’s response to the shopkeeper. What does this tell us about his character?
3. Make a list of all the Nigerian proverbs that you have encountered so far (they are always written in italics in the text). Write them in a table in your book, leaving plenty of space to add more as you go through the novel. See if you can explain their meaning in English.
4. What has happened to the children now?

Chapter 11 – ‘Police Business and Cool Gaze’

1. Describe the way that the writer makes this chapter so exciting. What techniques does she use?
2. Update your character map of Sade.

Chapter 12 – ‘State of Emergency’

1. Find out all you can about General Abacha and the Nigerian political situation in the 1990s.

Chapter 13 – ‘Two Parcels, No Address’

1. Describe how Sade feels at the beginning of this Chapter.
2. What is Femi’s response?
3. List what the Emergency Social Worker does for them.
4. How does Mrs Graham’s son, Kevin, treat them?
5. Describe any kindness the children have received since they’ve arrived. Is this a true reflection on our society?

Chapter 14 – ‘Voices in the Dark’

1. This short chapter is very powerful. How and why?

Chapter 15 – ‘Trouble with the Truth’

1. List the questions that the Social Worker asks.
2. Sade is very reluctant to respond. Why?
3. How does the author suggest Sade’s reluctance? (Use quotations from the text to illustrate this point.)

Chapter 16 – ‘Refugees?’

1. Update your character map of Sade.
2. Write about Sade’s understanding of the term ‘refugee’. What is the origin of the word, and why are refugees so often in the news at the moment?
Chapter 17 - ‘Lies Thicken’

1. What details does Sade give to Mama Appiah?
2. Why does she fear telling the truth?
3. Describe Femi’s response to the interview with Mama Appiah.
4. What information is the lawyer particularly keen to find out?

Chapter 18 - ‘Hawk Lady and Hawk Man’

1. What simile does Naidoo use to describe the immigration building and can you explain why?
2. Describe the inside of the building; what sort of atmosphere do you think it has?
3. Do you think that the Government has the right to fingerprint children? Try to explain your opinion.

Chapter 19 - ‘Welcome’

1. How does Kevin show his dislike of Femi and Sade?
2. Update your table of Nigerian proverbs. Make sure you have tried to work out their meanings. Can you think of any English proverbs that mean the same or similar things?
3. Describe in your own words, what sort of people the Kings are.

Chapter 20 - ‘Sea of Faces’

1. What are Sade’s impressions of the school, and how is it different from her own in Nigeria?
2. What aspects of Femi’s behaviour are causing Sade concern?
3. What are the connotations of ‘smirking’? Construct a short paragraph of narrative that ends with the word, ‘smirking’ and shows that you can use the word for dramatic effect.
4. What do we know of Mariam? Why might she be a good companion for Sade?

Chapter 21 - ‘What kind of name is that?’

1. How do you think the teacher, Mr Morris, could have prevented Sade’s first lesson from making her so uncomfortable?
2. Why does the writer finish the chapter with a rhetorical question?
3. How does the writer suggest that Sade is intimidated by Marcia and Donna?

Chapter 22 - ‘Bullies in the Head’

1. Find evidence in the first paragraph of personification. Why has the writer chosen to use this device?
2. Sade’s dream is frightening because it combines a flashback of what actually happened with her new fears. Read it carefully and identify the elements from her past life and the ideas from the new.
Chapter 23 - ‘Marcia wants you!’

1. ‘At the main gate she joined the stream of students tramping up the drive.’ What does the word ‘tramping’ suggest about the attitude of the students towards school?
2. Naidoo uses simple sentences at significant points in the narrative. Look closely at Sade’s encounter with Marcia and the gang; find two simple sentences and comment on the effect the writer has achieved by using them.
3. What could the teacher have done to help Sade deal with this situation?
4. What advice and practical suggestions would you give to Sade at this point?

Chapter 24 - ‘A Distant Silence’

1. What are the conflicting ideas that Sade is trying to sort through to help her deal with the bullies?
2. Can you explain Femi’s behaviour? Is it understandable?
3. Sade is very uncomfortable telling half truths and lies. What does this tell us about her upbringing?

Chapter 25 - ‘Stranglehold’

1. How is Femi’s behaviour at school different from Sade’s expectations?
2. When Marcia and Donna threaten to cause trouble for Femi, the writer describes a broken plastic bottle and the water it sits in. Why has she chosen to do this?
3. Why is it so hard for Sade to stand up to the bullies?

Chapter 26 - ‘No Escape’

1. How do you think Mariam would feel if she knew what Sade was planning to do?
2. Describe the sensations Sade feels as she steals the lighter?
3. Which do you think affects her the most: Mariam’s, her father’s or her mother’s disappointment in her?
4. Is Sade to blame for the shoplifting? If not, why not?

Chapter 27 - ‘Mariam’s Story’

1. Create a storyboard showing Mariam’s sad story in eight episodes.
2. How do you feel about Sade’s shoplifting now that we know Mariam’s story?
3. Most of Mariam’s story is told in simple sentences, or sentences made up of one main clause and one subordinate clause. What effect does this have on the reader?

Chapter 28 - ‘A Guardian Angel’

1. ‘Sade’s head curled inwards like a snail that has lost its shell’. Explain this simile.
2. Can you explain the irony of the reason for Papa being held in detention?
3. Describe Sade’s emotions as she hears her father’s voice.
4. How does Femi feel, knowing that his brave father has come to find them?
Chapter 29 - ‘Territory of the Eyes’

1. What phrase does Naidoo use to suggest that Sade’s conversation with her father was magical?
2. Why does Naidoo use flashback at this point to tell us about the dictionaries on the desk?
3. Sade and Femi both tell their father about their adventures. Imagine that you are either Sade or Femi, and retell one episode of their story from when they arrived at Heathrow. Try to sound like you are telling the story to your much-loved father.

Chapter 30 - ‘Wanted’

1. When Papa writes to the children he mentions a story about a buffalo and a rabbit. Why does he do this, and what effect will it have on the children?
2. In his second letter, Papa says: ‘Lying is not in your nature’. How do you think this makes Sade feel?
3. Why does the writer tell the events of this chapter in letters between Sade and Papa?

Chapter 31 - ‘Sade’s Plan’

1. Sade’s dream is strange. What might it suggest she can do to help her father?
2. How do you think Papa feels about what is happening to Femi?
3. How do you think Mariam feels about Sade?

Chapter 32 - ‘Mr Seven O’Clock News’

1. Why does Sade want Femi with her?
2. Look at the paragraph that begins: ‘The further they walked from the television studio, the more murky and desolate the street became.’ Find four examples of where the writer suggests fear and tension.
3. Why do you think Mr Seven O’Clock News listens to them?
4. What do you think he will do with their story? How can this help?
5. Do you think they deserve asylum?
6. How do we decide who deserves asylum? Do you think this process is a good one?

Chapter 33 - ‘Waiting’

1. Describe Sade’s reaction to having to wait and see whether her father’s story will be on the news.
2. How could Sade and Mariam resolve their issues with each other? Write some advice for Sade on what she should do.
3. Which important details did the news report miss out?
4. Why do you think the writer gives us a word for word account of the news item, rather than tell us through Sade’s words?
Chapter 34 - ‘Out of the Shadows’

1. Describe the atmosphere at the demonstration.
2. How are the children seen by the crowd of demonstrators?
3. How is their entry into the prison different now, and why do you think it is so?
4. How could the arrival of Uncle Dele help them?
5. ‘As long as we have our pens, we can talk’. What is Papa suggesting, and how might this help Sade?

Chapter 35 - ‘Dare to Tell’

1. What message is hidden in the story to comfort the children?
2. Do you know of another story with the same sort of message?

Chapter 36 - ‘Sorry’

1. What effect does the flashback to Grandma have on the reader?
2. What devices and ideas does the writer use in the flashback to suggest mystery and fear?
3. How does Mariam feel when Sade tells her about the lighter?
4. Do you think that Mariam’s uncle dealt well with the bullying?
5. Can you explain what happens to Sade?
6. What is the doctor suggesting when he uses the word ‘cope’?

Chapter 37 - ‘Blame’

1. In your own words, who is to blame for what has happened to Sade?
2. What advice would you give her to cope with her own guilt?

Chapter 38 - ‘Face to the Wall’

1. Describe Sade’s feelings.
2. Do you sympathise with her?
3. What do you think can be done to help her?

Chapter 39 - ‘A Visitor’

1. How do you think Mariam feels about Sade?
2. Do you think that this could be a rewarding friendship for both of them? Explain your reasons.
3. What is your reaction to the letter from the teacher?
4. Does his letter make up for the mistakes he made earlier?
5. How do you feel about the student in Year 7 who had the courage to tell their parents about the bullying?
6. Would you be that brave?
Chapter 40 - ‘Where is Papa?’

1. What has influenced Kevin to be kind? Do you think he is genuine?
2. What do you think has happened to Papa?
3. How has the writer created tension in the end of this chapter?

Chapter 41 - ‘Christmas Eve … If’

1. Explain the effect of the ellipsis in the title of the chapter.
2. At the end of a paragraph on page 217, the writer uses a one word sentence. The word is ‘Adrift’. Read the paragraph and then describe the effect on the reader of this word.
3. Why does Femi now feel he can express his emotions and cry?
4. What does ‘home’ mean, in this novel?
5. What does ‘home’ mean to you?

Chapter 42 - ‘Letter Home’

1. Why has the writer finished the novel with a letter from Sade to her Grandmother?
2. Do you think this is a satisfactory ending to the novel?

Visit the following websites to learn more about some of the issues raised in ‘The Other Side of Truth’, or find ways in which you can help: