

Reading

Unit 4 - Friday

A Lifetime on the Hills

Kwisera rose at dawn, the light and heat of the Sun's first breaths calling him out from beneath his mosquito net. He had slept well, but then hard work and hill walking will help anyone to sleep.

He stretched, and scratched the jigger hole on his big toe. It was healing well, and one hole was better than ten. Or fifty. When he was at the medical centre he had seen a man from one of the more isolated villagers brought in on the back of a bicycle because he could no longer walk. His feet were so swollen. Those hateful jiggers! Having them picked out was almost as satisfying as water on a hot day, or a seat after a long walk.

A long walk! Kwisera knew he had better set off soon or he would be late, and he did not want to disappoint Mr. Kabanga. The plantation manager had been so good to him and he was proud to be working for a man who had brought so many improvements to the village.

He decided he would set off after just a quick bite to eat. Beans and some cassava. He knew he would need all the nourishment he could get to be able to work hard for Mr. Kabanga.

The plantation was about half an hour away by foot, but that half hour meant walking down and up, or around a valley. Rwanda is known as 'The Land Of A Thousand Hills' with good reason. Kwisera was only ready to set off once his belly was nicely full.

Outside the sun was now bright and rising in the sky; its warmth beginning to flood the land as hill-shadows shrank in the depths of the valleys. On the far hillside, step upon step of tea fields lined the land, but the mountain upon which Kwisera's house rested was draped in the chequered pattern of small farms for which Rwanda was well known.

It was beautiful.

The mud road to the plantation wound its way down towards the valley floor. It was long enough from the last rain for the ground to be firm, but not dusty. Kwisera's favourite. No mud on his feet, and no dust in his eyes when the occasional flatbed truck rumbled past, lurching left and right to avoid potholes.

Perhaps he could speak to Mr. Kabanga about the potholes. After all, it was the extra money from the Fairtrade partnership which had given Mr. Kabanga and the rest of the community the ability to rebuild part of the medical centre, and buy new

books for a nearby school. Without that money restoring the centre and replenishing medical supplies, the jigger in Kwisera's foot might have burrowed much deeper and laid its eggs. What a horrible thought!

Perhaps soon they could use the money to mend the roads? Or maybe there were other, more important things to do first. Either way, Kwisera knew that something was going to get better soon, and that Mr. Kabanga would make a wise decision after listening to people's ideas.

In the middle of the valley floor, the chequered farmland with its banana trees and sorghum stalks gave way to the vivid green of tea plants. Sweeping in swathes to the very top of the hillside, the bushes and their precious leaves looked glorious to Kwisera. He was proud of this plantation. Proud of his work. Proud of the tea which was known even in far away lands for its quality and taste.

'Kwisera!'

A breathless voice and slapping footsteps broke Kwisera from his reverie. He turned to see Constance, Gift and Habimana running to catch him up.

'We saw you leave but Constance was not ready,' gasped Habimana. 'We've run to catch you up!'

'You did not have to run to catch me!' Kwisera laughed, 'But it is very kind of you to want to!'

Kwisera looked at Gift as he said this. Of the three siblings, Constance was the eldest and Habimana had arrived a year and a half after his older sister. Then finally, and unexpectedly, came Gift. That was why she had her name. An unexpected Gift from God. And from the way Kwisera looked at her, you might think she was the most precious gift in all the world.

'Next time we will walk then!' she giggled, and the others laughed as they began to walk up the hill to the main plantation building.

The building was built of mud brick but had a bright red metal roof, paid for by the Fairtrade money. Kwisera was old enough to know what working on a non-Fairtrade tea farm was like. The lack of good facilities, the lack of funds, the turmoil of having prices squeezed down and down. But that was gone now. So were the small inconveniences. The new metal roof kept the tea baskets dry, and as there were not many things more uncomfortable than having a wet basket strap chafing on your skin all day, the workers were very grateful for it!

Also in the compound were the sorting house where the leaves were checked; the trucks which carried the tea away and around the world; and the latrines. All of it able to be bought because of the extra profits created by joining the Fairtrade movement.

Seeing it all made Kwisera smile. Life was better here. Life was good.

Life was a little more fair.

Questions

Start from Challenge 1. See how far you can get through the four stages. They get harder as they go along!

Challenge 1

1. What is a nickname for Rwanda?
2. How does Kwisera feel about his work, the plantation and his boss: pleased, disinterested or grumpy? Find a word, phrase or sentence in the story which supports your choice.

Challenge 2

3. What does 'by foot' mean in the fifth paragraph?
4. Which description of Rwanda most appeals to you? Why?
5. How do you know Habimana is very keen to see Kwisera?
6. How does Kwisera feel about Gift? How do you know?
7. Look at the paragraph which begins 'The building was built of mud brick'. Name one large-scale benefit of working on a Fairtrade farm, and one minor benefit.

Challenge 3

8. Find a simile in the second paragraph and explain why it is effective.
9. What is the difference between the hill where Kwisera lives and the hill which the tea plantation is on?
10. Are the 'mud on his feet' and the 'dust in his eyes' both caused by the trucks which rumble past? How do you know?
11. What is a 'jigger'? How do you know?
12. What does the word 'reverie' mean?
13. Why do you think the author has chosen to end the story with that particular sentence?
14. Would you recommend this story to your friends as something to persuade them to buy more Fairtrade goods? Why?

Challenge 4

15. '...the light and heat of the Sun's first breaths calling him out from beneath his mosquito net.'
What is the name of the literary device the author is using here and why is it effective in short stories such as this?
16. Look at the end of paragraph two and the beginning of paragraph three. What is the effect of the author's repetition of 'a long walk' with different punctuation?
17. Define 'replenishing' as used in the context of 'replenishing medical supplies'.

Answers

E: (Q1) What is a nickname for Rwanda? 'The Land Of A Thousand Hills'

E: (Q2) How does Kwisera feel about his work, the plantation and his boss: pleased, disinterested or grumpy? Find a word, phrase or sentence in the story which supports your choice. Positive, happy, pleased etc. Answers must be justified with an appropriate quotation.

D: (Q3) What does 'by foot' mean in the fifth paragraph? It means 'at walking pace'.

D: (Q4) Which description of Rwanda most appeals to you? Why? Personal answer; must be justified.

D: (Q5) How do you know Habimana is very keen to see Kwisera? He has run to catch him up.

D: (Q6) How does Kwisera feel about Gift? How do you know? He loves/'fancies' her. He directs his 'kindness' compliment towards her, and he looks at her as if she is 'the most precious gift in all the world'.

D: (Q7) Look at the paragraph which begins 'The building was built of mud brick'. Name one large-scale benefit of working on a Fairtrade farm, and one minor benefit. Large-scale: Better facilities, good funding, no more turmoil from having prices squeezed down. Minor scale: having dry basket straps so avoiding chafing.

S: (Q8) Find a simile in the second paragraph and explain why it is effective. Either 'Having them picked out was almost as satisfying as water on a hot day' or 'Having them picked out was almost as satisfying as... a seat after a long walk'. Both of these similes take a (mostly) alien feeling/experience and make it understandable by evoking matching feelings of satisfaction/relief from commonly experienced situations.

S: (Q9) What is the difference between the hill where Kwisera lives and the hill which the tea plantation is on? Kwisera's hill is covered in a checkerboard pattern of small farms. The tea plantation covers the whole of the other hill and is planted on huge steps cut into the hillside.

S: (Q10) Are the 'mud on his feet' and the 'dust in his eyes' both caused by the trucks which rumble past? How do you know? No, because a comma separates the two statements and means the truck comment only applies to the latter of the two problems.

S: (Q11) What is a 'jigger'? How do you know? A burrowing creature which lays its eggs inside a person's foot. A parasite.

S: (Q12) What does the word 'reverie' mean? A daydream or a thought which distracts one's attention from the real world.

S: (Q13) Why do you think the author has chosen to end the story with that particular sentence? To highlight that the purpose of the story is to show how Fairtrade and 'fair' treatment of workers is very important and very good.

S: (Q14) Would you recommend this story to your friends as something to persuade them to buy more Fairtrade goods? Why? Personal answer; must be justified.

M: (Q15) '...the light and heat of the Sun's first breaths calling him out from beneath his mosquito net.' What is the name of the literary device the author is using here and why is it effective in short stories such as this? This is an example of personification. It is effective in short stories because by giving human traits to inanimate objects, authors make those objects more relateable and therefore evoke deeper, different emotions and ideas in their readers' imaginations.

M: (Q16) Look at the end of paragraph two and the beginning of paragraph three. What is the effect of the author's repetition of 'a long walk' with different punctuation? It makes it seem as though Kwisera has suddenly thought of the long walk ahead. It creates the impression that the readers are thinking his thoughts along with him.

M: (Q17) Define 'replenishing' as used in the context of 'replenishing medical supplies'. Replenishing means filling something up again; restoring it to a previous or adequate level.