

# **Esteem Guide Notes**

**On John Ruganda's Play**

## **The Floods**

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## **Preface**

*Esteem Guide Notes* have been compiled with the objective of aiding students' understanding of African literary works as well as stimulating greater interest among the learners by providing a wide range of analyses for the selected works.

*Esteem Guide Notes* are an invaluable companion for review and examination preparation as well as in-depth interpretive platforms.

*Esteem Revision Notes* are written by experts in their fields and compiled to supplement the text and not as a substitute for reading the text itself. The interpretation herein may not be the most accurate and exhaustive but will serve to clarify the work being studied and will be a springboard for debate and further discussion of the text book and will enhance the reader's enjoyment of the topic.

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## BACKGROUND

### Setting:

The geographical setting of the play is an imaginary island in Lake Victoria; there is a looming storm and the weather forecast predicts imminent floods. The geographical setting in a way portrays instability and political upheaval prevalent in many African countries shortly after independence. The unnamed island epitomizes Uganda under the error of the dictatorship of Idi Amin. The setting hastens the vulnerability of the inhabitants of the island and escalates the fear and tension they are faced with. This was the situation in Uganda during the error of dictatorship. There was tension and fear crowned with uncertainty. This era is also remembered for the unprecedented level of state inspired violence meted out on the citizens by the State Research Bureau.

Prejudicial killings and kidnappings are the order of the day. A state of hopelessness prevails and people turn to their creator for solace as the state seems to have betrayed their hopes. Kyeyune, the old man is completely disillusioned and disoriented by the experiences of brutality. He leaves in a state

of fear and hallucination. His life is totally altered when he casts his net and pulls out a petrifying body of a man in uniform with his genitals stuffed in his mouth and three nails in the head. The experience haunts and torments him throughout the play.

The instantaneous execution of the thousands of innocent people loaded in the evacuation boat is a demonstration of brutality and inhumanity masterminded by the state operatives. This is another traumatizing experience to Kyeyune and Nankya. The announcement of the impending floods turns out to be a ploy to have all people who are anti the establishment liquidated. Nankya is glad that her mother and herself are not on the boat when it is sunk by the State Research Bureau.

## **The title**

The title *the floods* is a symbolic title that brings out the tension and fear that dominates the play, *the floods*. The action of the play is constructed on a radio announcement by the metrological station that due to the impending storm and heavy rains, the water levels will rise and the island will be flooded.

The state or the government has 'evacuation' plans in place to rescue the island dwellers by providing a rescue boat.

This intervention plan is however obscured by sinister motives by the government right from the onset. The headman who is in charge of the rescue boat exhibits a high level of high handedness and arrogance over the poor innocent citizens seeking rescue from the impending floods. They are denied from carrying anything like food or personal property into the boat. This causes suspicion and doubt from people like Kyeyune that this may be a death trap which it eventually turns out to be.

*The floods* is a symbol of discomfort and uneasiness that the citizens of the island are faced with. They are submerged by oppression, cruelty and brutality. The island dwellers witness countless gruesome murders of their fellow citizens by the state research bureau and the bodies are dumped in the lake because there is no more space for mass graves. They are therefore overwhelmed by fear and tension as survival seems very uncertain.

The title in a way symbolizes the indescribable abuse of power by the state operatives. There is murder in cold blood of innocent people. The murder of Rutaro and Kyambade are just but a few of the thousands of cases of innocent people butchered by the State Research Bureau under the command of Bwogo. The state invents sensational stories as a cover up of these brutal acts.

There are reports of human rights abuses such as defilement, rape, prejudicial killings that are witnessed by the citizens of the island. Nankya recounts in a flash back how her mother is gang raped by four men in uniform leaving her pregnant. The poor woman is later exposed to abuse and exploitation by her employers as she struggles to bring up her daughter as a single mother.

## THE PLOT SUMMARY

### The First Wave

There is an approaching storm and the scene is characterized by flashes of lightening and growls of thunder. People are visibly agitated and are in flight for fear of their lives. The Headman of the island is calling everyone to get into a rescue boat in waiting to escape the impending floods. He is furious and incensed at the reluctance of the people. He does not allow people to get on the boat with their property and food.

The boat is leaving in a minute's time...dogs are prohibited, goats unpermitted. No fish no fuss. Just you and your blankets.' No fish no fuss

Kyeyune, an old man is enraged at the Headman for his highhandedness and the apparent lack of respect for other people's property. The Headman takes advantage of the situation and helps himself on the fisherman's fish and he has apparently taken over most of the widows on the island. Kyeyune is hesitant to get on the boat. When the headman attempts to drag him forcefully, Kyeyune tactfully disengages and throws a net over his head. He is entangled and collapses



in a heap. Kyeyune then breaks into a flash back narrating his ordeal on the lake. Kyeyune's flash back is a traumatizing one. He had gone fishing and as he cast his net he pulls out a dead man with three long nails in his head and genitals stuffed in his mouth. The Headman is not interested in what he calls **fireside prattles**. Bwogo comes looking for Nankya, his ex-mistress. He tries to convince Kyeyune to get on the boat but the old man refuses. He compares the others to '**Cows heading for the slaughter-house.**'

### **Comment**

This scene creates an atmosphere of tension and fear as the people are being huddled into the rescue boat. This can be summarized in the Headman's own words:

Men are packing and the women wailing  
The children are playing and the goats grazing  
The sky is rumbling and the floods are  
Coming... (**Page 10**)

There is suspicion clouding the motives of the Headman of the island to have everyone on the boat. Kyeyune is quite skeptical about the rescue boat and refuses to get on board. This scene also brings out the high handedness and abuse of power by

those in authority especially in view of the conduct of the Headman. He eats other peoples' fish and unleashes terror on the innocent people as Kyeyune puts it:

**...the very man who spits at our wrinkles and whips the orphans.'**(Page 16)

And then later as:

**'The headman who is having more than his share of the widows.'**(Page 17)

This is a sign of authoritarianism and abuse of power.

## **Questions**

1. Comment on the character and role played by the Headman to the development of the play.
2. Who is Boss? Comment on Kyeyune's attitude towards Boss.
3. What character traits of Boss are brought out by the word 'ogre'?
4. How does the playwright use this scene to prepare us for the impending danger?
5. What is the central theme in this part of the play?
6. Comment on the irony surrounding the rescue boat in line with the biblical story of Noah and the floods.

## The second wave

The scene shifts to an abandoned bungalow and we are introduced to the character of Nankya. The storm still rages on as in the previous scene. Nankya is visibly irritated by the radio announcement and later Bwogo's unwelcome intrusion. Bwogo tries with difficulty to cheer her up or to provoke her into conversation. He enacts a scene crowning Nankya as the winner of an international literary award in a **pantomime**. Nankya and Bwogo are involved in some kind of battle of words which exposes a lot about their previous lives and relationship. Their interaction also reveals a lot about their characters. There is tension and animosity boiling between them as Nankya blames Bwogo for murdering innocent people. She blames him for the murder of Rutaro and the disappearance of many other innocent folks. Bwogo is so infuriated by Nankya's accusations and provocation that when Kyeyune enters excitedly, Bwogo is so startled by his intrusion. He draws his pistol out and fires at Kyeyune but misses. Kyeyune regains his consciousness and narrates the horrible massacre of the innocent women and men on the rescue boat including the Headman. Kyeyune attributes the attack to the beckon of the man with three nails in his head.

The news is traumatizing to everyone especially Nankya. Bwogo is now scared while Nankya is disheartened by the cold blooded murders. They enact a scene to show how the State Research interrogates and arrests people and huddles them into car boots and finally torture them to death at the maximum security facility. The scene is interrupted with intermittent bursts of machine gun fire. Bwogo is visibly scared and shaken. He breaks into a reverie as he is being attacked by the floods that have taken on the human form. He tries to hide but he is dragged out. The scene ends with Bwogo exiting amidst protests by Kyeyune.

### **Commentary**

The most important aspect of this scene is the relationship between Bwogo and Nankya. There is use of irony and contrast that is to bring out the theme of abuse of power and its dehumanizing effects. The most important incidence in this scene is the traumatizing news of the massacre of innocent people on the rescue boat. The theme of brutality and cruelty is portrayed here.

## Questions

1. Describe the relationship between Nankya and Bwogo showing its contribution to your understanding of the play, *the floods*.
2. Discuss the significance of pantomime in the development of the play, *the floods*
3. Discuss the role played by Kyeyune in the development of the plot of the play, *the floods*.
4. How does this scene prepare us for the third wave?

## The third wave

The setting is the same as the second wave. Kyeyune and Nankya are wondering what might have happened to Bwogo. Kyeyune thinks the rampant deaths on the island are a result of the unquenchable anger of the sexual abuse of the goddess of the lake, Nalubale by Nyamghondo. Nankya asks Kyeyune that they should get out of the bungalow but Kyeyune refuses. Nankya delves into a flash back to explicate her first date with Bwogo. The flash back reveals the notorious acts of the SRB when they kidnap a headmaster friend of Nankya at *the imperial hotel* and his body is later found floating in the lake a week after. Nankya goes into a reverie of the death of the queen

mother that brings business on the island at a standstill for four full weeks. The reverie is interrupted by Bwogo's unexpected return. Nankya and Kyeyune are quite agitated that they are hesitant to open the door. Bwogo is not happy with the cluttered furniture and the darkness in the room. He sends Kyeyune to the beach for a drink leaving Nankya and himself behind. There is another verbal battle between Bwogo and Nankya. Apparently it is revealed that Nankya is pregnant by Bwogo who seems to be evading the responsibility and claiming that Nankya is a loose woman. He lashes at her pseudo-intellectual achievements. Nankya threatens to expose Bwogo's evil dealings to the international community. Bwogo calls for a ceasefire and the two delve into the pantomime of their first encounter. Their union is short-lived when the soldiers enter and arrest Bwogo. He has to face the long arm of the law. It is very clear that Boss' government has fallen.

### **Commentary**

The interaction between Bwogo and Nankya is a very important aspect of this part of the play. What is the significance of their relationship towards your understanding of the play? The ending of the play is dramatically significant in

a number of ways. First and foremost, it brings the play to a logical conclusion and resolution of the conflict. Bwogo who has been the architect of violence and brutality is brought to book by the long arm of the law. Secondly, the ending brings out the most important moral that what goes around comes around.

### **Questions**

1. Comment on the relevance of the pantomime of Nankya's first encounter with Bwogo.
2. Comment on the use of literary allusion to the development of the play
3. How dramatically satisfying is the ending of the play?

## CHARACTERISATION

### Headman

He is the headman of the island and apparently taking charge of the rescue boat. He is brutal, selfish and mean in the execution of his duties as the in charge of the rescue boat. He blankly announces that he will not admit anyone with property on the boat. He selfishly eats the fish left under his custody by the fisherman.

He is arrogant and abusive. He hauls insults at the children trying to play on the boat and later Kyeyune. He calls them miserable mackerels and commands them to get on to the boat. This arrogance seems to be backed by the fact that he is in power. He has complete disregard for others irrespective of age.

He is stubborn and not easily advised. Despite Kyeyune's warnings against the motive behind huddling people on the rescue boat, he pays a deaf ear and simply steers his life to a sudden end. He represents the blind and innocent victims that serve in a military establishment like that of Boss.

He is determined to get the people on to the rescue boat. He persistently alerts them and calls upon everyone to enter the



boat. This brings him into constant confrontation with the old man Kyeyune who is not willing to get on the boat for one reason or other. He tries to forcefully push him into the boat irrespective of his health. He feels obliged to evacuate all the people.

He is impatient. He gets irritated and nagged with Kyeyune's many questions and is impatient with his use of parables and his delays to get on to the boat. He tries to drag Kyeyune forcefully into the boat. He praises the two boys for obeying his orders and getting on to the boat but later on he is very impatient with them and insults at them for fighting instead of getting on to the boat.

The headman is inconsiderate as he does not want to listen to the fisherman's pleas concerning his mother. He refuses the fish to be carried into the boat, even when he knows that it is the only food left for the poor family. He even goes ahead to help himself on the fish without the owner's consent.

He is a symbol of an unjust style of leadership in Africa. He is portrayed as an uncouth leader, insensitive to other human beings and inconsiderate.

## **Kyeyune**

He is an old man traumatized by the atrocities committed on the people of the island. He is previously a fisherman until one day when he casts his net only to pull a rotting body of an army major. This haunts him throughout the play. Kyeyune is an apt representation of the vulnerable inhabitants of the island hounded by the forces of dictatorship and brutality by the government forces.

He is such a frank and candid character that he confronts even the most feared characters such as the Headman and later Bwogo. He is so skeptical about life and the possible salvation of the islanders that he resorts to prayer and calls upon Kagoro, Lord of the skies to come to the rescue of the island. Given his age, he seems to have a very rich knowledge about the history of the island.

He is skeptical and cynical. He has a strong belief that the world is coming to the end. He attributes the rampant deaths and killings on the island to an act of revenge from the goddess of the lake, Nalubale who is out to nurse her revenge against man for sexually abusing her. He refuses to get on the boat because

of his sense of cynicism and disbelief that it would deliver them to safety: **'...there is something I don't understand though: why my blood is against that boat. I don't know why.'** This statement summarizes his skepticism.

He is superstitious and a staunch traditionalist. He thinks that the red cloth in his luggage is the one triggering the flashes of lightening. He believes that the numerous deaths and killings on the island are as a result of Nalubale's revenge for her sexual molestation by Nyamgondoh. He abstains from fishing because of his encounter with a dead body of a military man with three nails in the head and his genitals stuffed in his mouth. He strongly believes that the death of the Headman and the other passengers on the rescue boat is the hand of the dead man with the three nails in his head.

He is a skillful fisherman. When the headman attempts to force him into the boat, he skillfully traps him with the net. He says that the villagers even composed songs to praise his fishing skills.

He is wise/clever and sensitive. He is wise enough to sense the mischief in the way the radio is announcing the impending

floods. And for that reason he does not rush into the boat thus saving his life from the brutal murder by the SRB.

He is courageous and fearless. He marshals the courage to face Bwogo and asks him if he was a product of the ogre (Boss). He audaciously tells Bwogo that underneath the jacket was a terrible hand of death (pistol). He also tells him (Bwogo) that together with the government, they have finished all men on the island and that if they were looking for more, then there were no more left. He is not afraid to highlight the evils that the government under Boss had committed against the people and strongly blames Boss for all this:

**‘...we have lived on this island tolerably well before the ogre came on the scene, heralded by fronds and frenzied shouts.’**

Kyeyune symbolizes the common man on the island who is a victim of the mayhem committed by the government. Through him we can see how inconsiderate the government of Boss is to the people and the extent to which they have made the people suffer.

## **Nankya**

Elizabeth Nankya is the protagonist of the play and a human rights advocate. She has apparently fallen out with her former boyfriend, Bwogo, who also happens to be the chief of the notorious state research bureau that terrorizes the residents of the island. Her frustration and resignation galvanizes into resentment and defiance. She openly launches verbal attacks unto Bwogo, his former boyfriend.

She is a girl from a very humble background. Her childhood is dominated by ostracism and exposed to conditions of poverty and deprivation. Her mother's boss has a very tall wall separating the servant's quarters and his home. Her worst experience is the death of her grandmother. She cannot cry out loud to express her grief because the land lord does not want noise. This kind of background creates in her a feeling of resentment and defiance.

She is defiant and stubborn. She is not easily silenced by Bwogo not even with his threats and physical confrontations. She defies boss's orders and plagues Bwogo by reminding him of

the atrocities he has committed. She launches a hard attack on the establishment by pointing out their carnages without fear.

She exudes courage and boldness when she confronts Bwogo about all the evils that he has committed without fear. Despite the fact that Bwogo slaps her she is still adamant to probe him. She confronts him about the state research bureau that kills and brutalizes the citizens.

Bwogo complains that she is nagging. She insists on nagging him about his mistakes and atrocities he commits as chief of the State Research Bureau. She nags him about the killings committed and holds him culpable for the murder of Rutaro and many others. She even accuses Bwogo of giving orders for the massacre of innocent people on the rescue boat.

She is a hardworking and industrious woman. Though she comes from a humble background, she struggles through school until she gets a doctorate degree and becomes a lecturer. This puts her into a position to fight for the rights of other island dwellers. She openly criticizes the government of Boss and for this reason; there is a ploy to have her killed in the fated rescue boat.

She is intelligent and foresighted. She quickly reads between the lines and knows that the whole idea of the floods is a hoax. Thus she does not get on the fateful boat. She knows the reason as to why the whole plan is executed in the first place and that is to kill her and her mother.

She is the voice of reason. Through her, we see someone who applies reasoning and intelligence to face situations no matter how hard. She is a symbol of courage and determination in the fight against evil. She puts up a spirited fight till the bitter end. She is also a symbol of hope and restoration. She is not cowed by the storm.

### **Bwogo**

He is the antagonist and villain in the play. He is violent and brutal. He slaps Nankya on page 33 when she confronts him about the man he kills and then lies that he was a wanted criminal in the newspapers. He also pounces on her threatening to beat her and when Kyeyune enters he draws his gun and shoots at him only to miss. He attacks Nankya under the pretense of madness so as to silence her over her nagging about the truth.

He is the chief of the state research bureau and Nankya's former lover. He is Boss's close cousin and associated with the numerous murders and acts of brutality meted out on the people of the island. He is driven by jealous to mastermind the death of Rutaro, an innocent man who dances with Nankya.

He is such an opportunist and schemer that he even changes his name in order to have a political job. His real name is Moses Bwogo but he changes it to Bashir Bwogo for political expedience. He takes advantage of his relationship with Boss to enrich himself and also become one of the most influential persons in the Second Republic of the island. It is little wonder that he is made under-secretary in the ministry of commerce and then chairman of the building board and chief of the notorious State Research Bureau which unleashes terror on the island dwellers.

Bwogo is such a vulgar character without a ting of morality. He talks of secretaries who misbehave in offices on Afghanistan carpets, secretaries gapping at the ceiling afraid to take their shilling as they are hurriedly filled and then they pick up their garments and hurry to their rented rooms. He later tells



Nankya to move the hips so that they can tantalize men and send their hands diving into their pockets.

He is incompetent and less resilient. He fails to stand the rigor of the training at the military school in Sandhurst and subsequently drops out before completing his training. He flops several times at the schools of technology in London and ends up in India for a commerce degree.

He is a controlling and patronizing character in his relationship with Nankya. He is behind the brutal murder of Rutaro because he suspects that he is in love with Nankya. After an evening out with friends, Rutaro dances with Nankya. Bwogo, driven by jealous cannot take it so lightly that he orders for the immediate custody of Rutaro by the State Research and he is consequently tortured to death. He also jests at Nankya accusing her of flirting with her gynecologist.

He is a sycophant who is blind to the mayhems committed by the SRB and Boss's junta. He dismisses the reports of abuse of power and the arbitrary murders as lies. As the chief of the State Research Bureau, he is directly culpable for most of the offences committed and his arrest at the end of the play is by

and large justified as an act of retribution and poetic justice for the people of the island.

He is a perfect symbol of the ambitious callous leader who goes any length in order to get what he wants. They will even kill in order to get what they want. He represents corrupt and obnoxious leaders who will care for nothing but their wellbeing even if it means killing other people. In fact we learn that he is the brain behind the fake radio announcement of the floods with an aim of eliminating Nankya and her mother.

## THEMES AND IDEAS

### 1. Abuse of power

The play examines the abuse of power by the military dictatorships in contemporary Africa. The second republic of the island in the play is a military establishment headed by Boss, a military officer. Like all other dictatorships, Boss has created a military machine in the name of the State Research Bureau to keep his enemies under check. The SRB therefore use their powers to unleash unprecedented terror on the islanders. They sexually abuse, rape and defile young women and their actions go unchecked. Nankya is a product of gang raping after her mother is raped by four army men while her father is away. Her mother has to bring her up single handedly on the meager resources that she earns from offering cheap labour to one of the close relatives of Boss.

There is murder in cold blood carried out by the State Research Bureau throughout the country. There are reports of Lorries full of dead bodies that are emptied in the lake at regular intervals. This is attested to by Kyeyune a fisherman who randomly casts his nets and fishes a dead body of a petrifying man in uniform

with his genitals stuffed in his mouth and three nails stuck in his head. The horrendous death of Rutaro is just but another of the numerous deaths carried out by the state research bureau. Nankya recounts an evening when one of her colleagues is bundled up and thrown in a land rover only to find his body floating on the lake three weeks later. The story of Salongo is another example of the gruesome murders inspired by state machinery.

The mass murder of the innocent women, men and children on the rescue boat speaks volumes about the brutality of the SRB. Punic stricken, they are huddled in the boat hoping to be rescued from the imminent floods only to be attacked by armed men with masks who indiscriminately open fire on the boat killing everyone on board. The attack is blamed on the guerillas.

Abuse of power is also portrayed through the intense corruption and nepotism that dominates Boss's government. Boss appoints Bwogo as the head of State Research Bureau and chairman of the Building Board because they are close cousins. The headman demonstrates the heightened level of corruption

when he confiscates the fisherman's property and eats his fish without asking for permission. Corruption is also demonstrated through the high levels of permissiveness prevailing on the island.

### **Oppression and cruelty**

The citizens are severely oppressed by the government. They are under clothed, underfed, abused, raped and killed. Through the interaction between Bwogo and Nankya, we are meant to understand that men have been deprived of land that they fought for and mercenaries are used to terrorize the population. Bwogo who is the agent of the oppressive government gives orders to the state research bureau to kill the citizens in large numbers. If anybody dares to cross the path of the government, they are there and then silenced and thrown into the lake.

Nankya says that the island is barricaded with blood, the lake is bubbling with blood like cauldron and the mainland is choking of it. All these are signs of the killings that go on at an alarming rate. The unprecedented murder of Rutaro at the International Hotel clearly portrays oppression and cruelty of the military

junta. There are fake reports in the newspapers that the dead man was actually the most wanted criminal.

The citizens are killed in cold blood. The murder of Kyambade, Rutaro and Salongo are just a few cases of the numerous brutal killings by the State Research Bureau. These cases are followed by insensitive reports in the papers. After the brutal murder of Kyambade for instance, the papers report that he was an agitator paid by the guerillas to incite the masses against the government. Killing is like a sport to the government. They kill for their own convenience and care less for the human life of the 'insignificants.'

African masters are mannerless, exploitative and mistreat their employees. Nankya's mother is forced to resign as a house maid for the simple reason that she cannot tolerate her boss who throws her underclothes which are dirty and her menstrual cloths all over the house for Nankya's mother to clean the mess. Bwogo's father underpays Nankya's mother (seventy shillings a month) though she is very hardworking on her job. This meager salary can hardly sustain her, let alone the two of them together. Her master knows this but he chooses not

to care and acts as if he does not have feelings. When Nankya's grand mother dies, it is natural that Nankya should mourn to express her grief and we expect Bwogo's father to understand this, but on the contrary, he simply insists that he does not want noise, forcing Nankya's mother to slap Nankya whenever she mourned her grandmother.

The worst act of brutality is perhaps the callous execution of the thousands of people on the rescue boat. The government uses the radio to lie to the people about the impending floods. They are lured into the rescue boat which is to take them to a safer place. The government abuses the people's trust when the innocent men and women plus children are ambushed and sprayed on with bullets from the SRB boys. The only survivors are Nankya, Kyeyune and Nankya's mother. This is a very callous act on the part of government and proves the level of brutality and oppression.

## **Brutality and suffering**

To the government, killing people is as easy as doing any other simple errand. Men are viciously killed for no apparent reason. The old fisherman finds a human body with three nails in the head and genitals mutilated. It is very ostensibly clear that the victim is exposed to untold torture and suffering before his death.

The government is out on a killing spree. It is done indiscriminately and torture is the order of the day. The maximum prison is actually known for torture and brutality meted on the inmates. One is only lucky to come out alive. Rutaro is tortured and then thrown off the stairs of the International Hotel simply because he stands in the way of Bwogo's love for Nankya.

The climax of this bloodletting agenda comes knocking when Bwogo decides to kill people with the intentions of eliminating Nankya and her mother. He passes a fake announcement on radio that there is a flood coming due to the changes in the water levels and then organizes a rescue boat that would take people to safety but instead takes them to their fate. This



explains the level of impunity and total disregard for human life. It really defeats reason as to why Bwogo would kill the whole lot of people just to get rid of Nankya. This simply shows how evil man has become that one is even willing to sacrifice others for personal gain. Little wonder, the land is said to have been barricaded with human blood. Through this hyperbole we get to know the magnitude of human brutality and cruelty there is.

### **Fear and anxiety**

Fear and anxiety can be summarized in the words of Kyeyune in the first wave:

‘...but we are no better than a drunkard’s cockerel- unsure of ourselves any one moment. Each dawn is as surprising as it is painful... we welcome dusk with partial sighs of relief and the nights with vigils wrought with squeals of terror.’ (page 16)

This statement sums up the extent of the uncertainty and anxiety prevailing on the island.

Fear is further depicted when Kyeyune fishes out a dead body of a brigadier with three nails in his skull and genitals in his mouth. This leads to a lot of anxiety and fear in Kyeyune as he

even swears never to go back fishing. The fear is heightened when Kyeyune again discovers a human finger while eating fish. This scares him stiff as he again swears never to eat fish. He refuses the Headman's offer of fish brought to him by the fisherman.

Kyeyune freezes with fear when he witnesses a massacre of the islanders in the rescue boat. He relates the scene with fear and revulsion to Nankya and Bwogo. He recounts how he sees a dead brigadier rise from the water claiming to be a fisher of men.

Bwogo also has his own share of the fear. At one occasion, he sees the floods of people coming to revenge against his acts of injustice upon them. His fear and anxiety is motivated by guilt and remorse.

The radio announcement about the impending floods causes a lot of fear and anxiety in both Nakya and Kyeyune. He prays to the old boy, Kagoro to avert the misfortune.

### **Corruption and nepotism**

Boss is an extremely corrupt leader. He uses his position as head of state to employ his relatives at the expense of social

service delivery. Bwogo, Boss' first cousin is the chairman of the Building Board and the head of the State Research Bureau. Although Bwogo flops during his years as a student, he easily gets employment and even gets accelerated promotions. He uses both positions to achieve personal objectives. As chairman of the building board, he is responsible for evicting people on their rightfully acquired land.

Nankya says that Bwogo's father had been mean and money minded; a man they had always seen in the village with no particular merit or integrity yet in an instant he is a master. All this he achieves due to the strong connections he has with Boss. Bwogo actually confesses that his father was not very educated as such.

The judicial system perpetuates injustices against the innocent citizens. Cases are not dealt with conclusively but rather terminated with the pretext that the bodies were not found. The corridors of justice have been tainted with evil minded people who are keen to satisfy their own interest at the expense of the public.

The vice continues to manifest itself later on when Nankya says that if she and her mother were to die in the boat, then the innocent people would have been arrested and charged with treason and they would be promised presidential pardon if they agreed to appear on television and confess crimes which they had not committed.

## **THE STYLE OF THE PLAY**

### **Flash back**

John Ruganda employs a series of flash backs to illuminate the present. Kyeyune shades light on the reason why he does not eat fish through a long flash back of his encounter with a rotting body of a military man with three nails in the head and genitals stuffed in his mouth. This experience haunts and tortures him throughout the play. It is reason why he cannot eat fish and abhors the lake because he thinks that the lake is haunted by the dead man. He strongly believes that it is the dead man who is responsible for the sinking of the rescue boat.

Nankya also recounts her childhood experiences through a flash back. She narrates how her mother is defiled and raped by four military men leaving her pregnant. She also retells her

mother's ordeal with her employers. This flash back explains her current bitterness with the regime and hence her advocacy for change. Nankya's background creates an atmosphere of sadness and grimness in the play. It paints a gruesome picture of the military government.

In another flash back, she relates Bwogo's background. She relays how he fails to complete his training in Sandhurst and later goes to India for a commerce degree and how he ends up chief of the State Research Bureau. This flash back no doubt shades light on the character of Bwogo as an opportunist and a schemer who simply thrives on chance and luck; a self-aggrandizing character ready to sacrifice anybody for personal achievements.

## **Pantomime**

Another very important stylistic device in *the floods* is the use of pantomime. Bwogo enacts a scene crowning Nankya as the winner of an international literary award in a **pantomime**. This is meant to provoke Nankya into conversation with Bwogo. It also reveals Nankya's character as an intelligent and ambitious character. Bwogo seems to acknowledge the fact that she is an

international figure. This also brings out the passive role of the of the international community towards what is happening on the island.

In the pantomime enacted about Nankya's first encounter with Bwogo and their experience on their first date, the character of Bwogo is enhanced. He is revealed as a heartless, selfish and egocentric character. He is very impatient with the waiters and anyone who tries to dance with Nankya. He is jealous and has destructive envy. It is also revealed that he is actually the hand behind Rutaro's brutal murder at the International Hotel.

Through all the other mimes, the character of Bwogo is exposed as vulgar and immoral. He talks about the girls who are laid on the green wet grass gazing at the moon moan fully as they are filled and then they walk away to their fathers fulfilled.

## **Symbolism**

John Ruganda makes use of several symbols to avoid direct confrontation with the establishment of the time which happens to also be the subject of his criticism in *the floods*. He uses symbolism to put across his major concerns and themes. Characters in the play do not only speak for themselves but

represent and symbolize real characters that we can make reference to in real life.

He uses old and weak characters to represent the oppressed masses while characters that represent power are presented as strong and soldier-like to speak about how violence operates within situations of power imbalances. The characters of Boss and Bwogo are used to represent the oppressive government and its brutality. They unleash terror on the citizens without remorse.

Kyeyune on the other hand represents the vulnerable masses that are subjected to torture and brutality by their own government. They are resigned to their fate and have abandoned their fighting spirit. Because of their susceptibility, they have resorted to prayer and waiting for supernatural intervention.

The title of the play, *the floods* is a powerful symbol that brings out the destructive nature of arbitrary use of power by the military. The second republic, under Boss, persecutes the citizens without remorse or reservations for anything. People die in big numbers and the deaths are uncountable only

comparable to the real floods. The island is flooded with atrocities that plague the islanders. He uses the title to create a mental picture of the magnitude of the violence and deaths on the island committed by the government.

This lake can't complain though. It has been a tomb of many men.  
And you, too, know it. Lorryfuls of wailing civilians, driven to their  
deaths over the cliff at the point of bayonets

The unstable water level of the lake is used to show political instability as well as uncertainty in the lives of the individual characters. The lake in a way also depicts dictatorship and high handedness of the regime on the island.

Bwogo relates to Nankya how he had killed the bed bugs in the abandoned bungalow amidst Nankya's protest. Later, Nankya does not want him to touch her because he is smelling of blood. This event symbolizes Bwogo's blood thirst character.

## **Imagery**

The play wright uses a number of images to bring to life the experiences of the characters in the story. Nankya uses similes to describe the way the floods come to get Bwogo:

'...as patient as death...as sure as silence, the final silence'



This imagery has two effects: first, it escalates fear and vulnerability of human life in the face of death and secondly provides relief to the audience that justice is round the corner and that the days of the oppressors are numbered.

Kyeyune refers to Boss as an '*ogre*'; a cruel and frightening man-eating giant. This image enhances the brutality and cruelty of the military regime headed by Boss. Innocent people are killed indiscriminately by state agents under Boss' command. Bwogo talks about **'Lorryfuls of wailing civilians, driven to their deaths over the cliff at the point of bayonets...'** this sums up the brutality of Boss' regime.

## **Humour**

The play has moments of amusement and excitement. One of the purposes of drama is entertainment which Ruganda provides through his use of humour. Amidst the tension and fear that dominates the scenes in the play; there are also moments of amusement. For example Nankya gives startling answers to Bwogo's questions which causes hearty laughter. For instance when they are arguing about why Bwogo had killed Rutaro Bwogo states: '*...familiarity breeds...*' and

Nankya completes 'Death.' This seems to be the topsy-turvy order of events.

Bwogo also uses some kind of vulgar humor that is intended to create comic relief. The use of vulgar language and obscenity has a strong effect on the character of Bwogo as a man with questionable moral standing.

### **Irony**

The most tragic irony in the play surrounds the rescue boat. The Headman solemnly calls people to enter the boat for a safer place from the floods. There is no one suspicious of the ill intentions of the government apart from Kyeyune and Nankya. The actual discrepancy is that this rescue boat later turns out to be a death trap for the innocent women, men and children when they are ensnared and sprayed with bullets by the masked boys of the SRB. The ship is sunk and nobody survives including its captain and the Headman.

The saddest part of the irony is that the government which is meant to protect the citizens is the very one that masterminds the killings through its notorious state research boys and most often than not blames it on the guerillas.

The radio announcer uses verbal irony to bring out the negative attitude of the government towards the citizens:

‘The republican navy will come to rescue stranded inhabitants after it has escorted the benevolent father of the republic who is leading a big peace keeping delegation ...’ (Page 22)

Given the urgency of the situation, it is very ironic that the navy has to first escort the head of state before they can think of rescuing the people. It is also very ironic that the head of state of such a restless population should indulge in negotiating peace for other nations. What moral authority does such a leader have in negotiating peace for other nations?

## **Language**

The language has a very strong contribution towards characterization and understanding of the play. The use of vernacular words or the local dialect by the characters establishes the setting of the play. For example when Kyeyune uses the word ‘*empuuta*’; it affirms the setting that the action takes place in Uganda since the word ‘*empuuta*’ is a Luganda word referring to a type of fish.

Bwogo's language is forceful and less courteous. He does not seem to care for anyone and this shows his character and attitude. It also reflects abuse of power and the cruelty of the people in government. Similarly the headman also uses such forceful language as he calls people into the rescue boat. Forceful language therefore communicates authority and power.

## **The significance of the play, *the floods***

From the discussions above, it is apparently clear that the play is a strong criticism of dictatorship in Africa. The period in question and the setting point towards the dictatorship of Idi Amin in Uganda during the 70s. The regime was characterized by massive killings and torture of innocent people. People could be bundled up in car boots and taken away for good.

The State Research Bureau was a notorious state organ that terrorized the citizens of Uganda for a period of about nine years. People lived in perpetual fear and anxiety. Millions were butchered and others fled their homes to exile to save their lives. The international community placed tough sanctions but there was no response from the government of Amin. The guerillas mentioned in the play were the Ugandan exiles that fought to overturn the regime with the help of the African union troops from Tanzania.

The regime was also characterized by incompetence as most professionals were either killed or had to flee the country. The few that remained in the country lived in perpetual fear and resignation just like Nankya in an abandoned bungalow. The

illiterate business man that Nankya describes in the play is typical of the tycoons of the time who arbitrarily used power to shield their own inadequacies.

State inspired violence is not a thing so remote even to the contemporary Ugandan. Even after the fall of Idi Amin's regime in 1979, the country has gone on to experience violence and brutality orchestrated by the state or security organs. It is very common in Ugandan today for opposition politicians to be bundled up in car boots and incarcerated without cause. There are draconian laws that bar people from holding political assemblies. There are stories of people tortured in 'safe houses' and mired for life. This is typical of what happens in the maximum prison in the play.

## REVISION QUESTIONS

### Context Questions

Context questions test the ability to comprehend the plot of the text in relation to the other aspects of the text. The student is expected to read the passage and precisely respond to the questions in a **brief** and **concise** way. Context questions call for knowledge of text in terms of plot, characterization, setting, themes etc.

The longest answer to a context sub question should be a half a foolscap page and no more.

### Sample Questions

*1. Read the following passage and answer the questions after it*

**HEADMAN:** Suit yourself. A full belly may be handy later.  
You never know.

**KYHEYUNE:** I don't touch what isn't mine. Moreover, I don't eat fish anymore.

**HEADMAN:** (*eating and calling*) six minutes to go and we are off to the mainland. Six minutes. No more no less. (*to Kyeyune*) Beautiful job this. He clearly knows his job well, the young man does. Delicious fish. (*ironically*) but what I hate is

exploiting other people's misfortunes. An emergency situation and you have some people planning what to make out of it.

**KYHEYUNE:** Is it any different from what you are doing right now?

**HEADMAN:** Is that meant to be a reprimand, by any chance?

**KYHEYUNE:** Just a plain question. Is it any different?

**HEADMAN:** Is that why you are sore about me? (*Pause; no answer*) dogs are prohibited, goats unpermitted. No fish, no fuss. Six minutes, six minutes and we are off to the mainland ... You are sure you don't want a grub?

**KYHEYUNE:** You can have my share. It's all yours. (*The boat is heard honking again. Kyeyune is lost in deep thought, now fondling the nets tenderly, now casting them almost imperceptibly.*)

**HEADMAN:** (*singsong*) Captain is impatient and the rains are coming

Men are packing and the women are wailing

The children are playing and goats' grazing

The sky is rumbling and the floods are



Coming

Last call for one and all! Last call!

Hurry up! Hurry up!

**KYHEYUNE:** (*self pityingly*) Once upon a time I too, could eat fish with relish. Once upon a time.

### Questions

a) Place the above passage in its context. (08 marks)

b) Describe the characters of (08 marks)

i) Kyeyune

ii) Headman

c) Explain at least two themes portrayed in this extract (04 marks)

d) Comment on the dramatic techniques used in the passage (06 marks)

e) What is the significance of this passage to the plot of the play? (08 mark)

**2. Read the following extract and answer the questions that follow**

**BWOGO:** *(continues as if nothing had happened; moves to the window)* And my boat...my boat pitching and gliding to and fro, to and fro between the wind and the waves. *(Faces her)* doesn't the flood frighten you, Nankya? Doesn't it? I saw those dotards and the women ... their faces wrought with fright. They know what havoc the floods have caused on this island. And the lake too ... this lake harbours its own unfathomable secrets. As the mainlanders say: "He who eats well is always insatiable." This lake can't complain though. It has been a tomb of many men. And you, too, know it. Lorryfuls of wailing civilians, driven to their deaths over the cliff at the point of bayonets. The crocodiles have never been more thankful. That's what the foreign papers say ... lorryfuls...

**NANKYA:** *(disdainfully)* Is that meant to frighten me?

**BWOGO:** What would happen to us, I wonder if the waves

battered the boat? What would become of us?

**NANKYA:** Its children that fear the blaze of a cockscomb,  
Bwogo.

**BWOGO:** I suppose we would have to wait for the rescue  
team.

**NANKYA:** Rescue team indeed! Wasting the taxpayer's  
money on useless expeditions. A slight sign of  
unrest, and he trots to the neighbouring  
countries... and what are you doing here?

**BWOGO:** "There will be an emergency rescue operation."  
Boss promised. I guess we can wait a while. No  
need to panic.

**NANKYA:** why do you have to follow me like my shadow?  
Can't you mind your own business?

**BWOGO:** A faithful dog never barks.

**NANKYA:** Didn't you receive my letter? O wrote to you ...

**BWOGO:** just wags its tail, but never barks.

**NANKYA:** I wrote to say it's quits. May be you didn't  
believe, but it's true. I am not a well for every pot  
and pan. Do you understand that?

## Questions

- a) Place the above passage in its context (08 marks)
- b) Describe the character of: (08 marks)
  - i) Nankya
  - ii) Bwogo
- c) What does the passage reveal about the relationship between Nankya and Bwogo? (08 marks)
- d) Comment on the dramatic techniques used in the passage above. (10 marks)

### 3. Read the following passage and answer the questions after it

**KYHEYUNE:** *(rearranging the furniture, while he talks to himself; Bwogo is surveying the room)* Dead that's what I feared. Dead and netted. But now I wish it. Deep down in my heart, I wish it had happened. *(There is silence in the room. Nankya is peering at Bwogo. He catches her at it)*

**BWOGO:** what the hell are you staring at me for! Can't think. Can't concentrate with your eyes boring into me ...I said STOP STARING AT ME.

*(Silence except for Kyeyune dragging the chairs and putting them into place; Bwogo is unreasonably irritated by the noise; Nankya is preparing her assault)*

**BWOGO:** *(misdirected anger)* Stop that noise, will you! It's driving me crazy. *(Kyeyune stops but doesn't know what else to do; he decides to mop the furniture ...all in all, he is looking redundant. The silence is gradually getting on Bwogo's nerves.)*

**NANKYA:** *(starting the attack)* Well!

**BWOGO:** *(still irritable but happy at the interrupted silence)*  
Well what?

**NANKYA:** *(Nankya will systematically get her own back.)* You know what I am talking about. Stop ducking.

**BWOGO:** *(Curtly)* LIKE HELL. Like hell, I know what you are jabbering about.

**NANKYA:** Are you satisfied at your findings?

**BWOGO:** (*Diverting*) Give me a drink. A Dimple Scotch.

**NANKYA:** (*Insistent*) Are you satisfied?

**BWOGO:** (*Blowing up to cover up*) I SAID GIVE ME A DRINK. DAMN YOU!

**NANKYA:** Hold your guns man. No need for fretting. You can blow up the roof or bomb the walls if you like, but I'll still be with you. All I'm asking ...

**BWOGO:** Are you going to get me that drink?

**NANKYA:** I'm no your wife, do you know that?

### Questions

a) Place the passage in its context (08 marks)

b) What do you learn about the character of Bwogo from the passage? (12 marks)

c) Describe the character of Nankya as presented in the passage (06 marks)

d) Comment on the dramatic techniques used in the passage above. (08 marks)

### Questions for revision

1. Describe the character of Bwogo and show the role he plays in the play, *the floods*
2. How effectively does Ruganda use irony to develop three of his major concerns?
3. Describe two scenes that you find interesting in the play and show their significance to the development of the plot of the play, *the floods*.
4. How does John Ruganda use symbolism to effectively portray three of his major themes in *the floods*?
5. Discuss the significance of the title to the play, *the floods*
6. How relevant is the play, *the floods* to the contemporary reader?
7. How does Ruganda use character to invoke the reader's feelings?
8. To what extent is the play, *the floods* a microcosm of a modern African state?

9. What societal evils does John Ruganda criticize in the play, *the floods*?
10. Discuss the role played by Kyeyune in the development of the play, the floods
11. Discuss the circumstances leading to the overthrow of boss' government.
12. Describe the relationship between Nankya and Bwogo. What important lessons does it teach the reader?

### **Important Quotations**

1. '...but we are no better than a drunkard's cockerel- unsure of ourselves anyone moment. Each dawn is as surprising as it is painful... we welcome dusk with partial sighs of relief and the nights with vigils wrought with squeals of terror.'(page 18)
2. 'I know as you do not know that the beckon calls he will gallop into the net. Big or small no one can resist the beckon. It is a matter of time.'(page 17)
3. '...this lake harbours its own unfathomable secrets. As the mainlanders say: 'he who eats well is always insatiable. "This lake can't complain though. It has been a tomb of many men. And you, too, know it. Lorryfuls of wailing



civilians, driven to their deaths over the cliff at the point of bayonets'

4. '...So long as our neighbours are mortally interlocked in combat, we can do a bit of business...' says Bwogo (Page 42)