

## ***Copper Sun* Discussion Board Post One with Peer Comments**

### *My Original Post:*

After reading *Copper Sun*, closing the back cover leaves a feeling of wanting more. Sharon M. Draper has many lessons and information for her readers and leaves avenues for them to venture after the novel has concluded. (1) Using the text to support your answer, what is one lesson you learned from the book? (2) What is something you want to learn more about that came from reading the book, and where might you find that information?

*(Question One)* Sharon M. Draper incorporates a plethora of lessons in her novel about slavery and enslaved people, from being pulled away from their villages in Africa to finding freedom in America. Many of these lessons are unfortunately not taught in a typical American educational setting. One lesson Draper presents readers that was new to me was the mixture of races. I know that many white male slave owners raped and used their slaves for their own pleasure, like Clay does to Amari. As we know, interracial marriages (even relationships) weren't allowed through the mid-twentieth century. In *Copper Sun*, we see a few instances of interracial relationships or combinations (recognizing Clay being an abuser and rapist, not as being in a relationship). We have Clay and Amari, Mrs. Derby and Nathan, and the combinations found in Fort Mose. Draper gives insight as to what these sorts of relationships (forced or otherwise) looked like.

For Clay and Amari, we see a forced pairing, as she is bought as a birthday present for Clay. Clay uses Amari for pleasure and female companionship. We see a lot of control, abuse, and rape from him. Clay, not having a mother, turns to Amari for female compassion, even though he does it in a harmful and psychologically inept way. He asks Amari, "'You do like me, don't you?' he implored quietly. To Amari, his voice sounded a little plaintive, almost as if he needed her to say she liked him" (111). Draper later shows an even more brutal side of the white male towards enslaved women, especially those they were using for their own benefit. After escaping Derbyshire, Amari, Poly, and Tidbit are faced with Clay once more in the forest. He proves himself to be truly abusive and manipulative as he says to Amari, "'I fully intend to teach you the folly of trying to run away from me. But tonight,' he said, his voice dropping low, 'I intend to make up for lost time. I really have missed you, gal'" (230). Providing a nasty glimpse of what white men of power had with enslaved women, Draper shows the reader a gruesome insight into what kinds of people these white slave owners were and the kind of "relationships" that were forced upon these enslaved women.

We also see the opposite side of the spectrum with Nathan and Mrs. Derby. These two were in a consensual yet obviously secretive relationship with one another. As I mentioned, a consensual relationship between two people of different races were "invalid" and unconstitutional until the mid-1900s. Draper, again, teaches her audience the possibility of what happened to those caught in an interracial pairing. Going to a horrific extreme, Mr. Derby finds out about the baby Ms. Derby has birthed that was discovered to be Nathan's. Pulling Ms. Derby next to Nathan, Mr. Derby shot Noah, making sure Mrs. Derby had been watching. Following Nathan's murder, soon came the murder of the newborn (183). We don't know what becomes of Mrs. Derby besides

what Mr. Derby says to her, “‘I shall not kill you,’ he continued in a low, eerily controlled voice. She looked at him in surprise. ‘Instead, I shall refuse to let you die’” (182-3). By putting this relationship in *Copper Sun*, Draper allows readers to learn that there were consensual and hidden relationships between black and white people, but oftentimes, those narratives are removed from history.

Lastly, Draper adds a side comment toward the end of the novel about how free people of Fort Mose have mingled and interracially come together. Though no specific example is shown, Inez tells the trio about how there’s an openness towards being one group of people, rather than separated, categorized groups. She says that in Fort Mose, “‘Only about a hundred folk. Mostly runaway slaves who now be free. Some white—mostly Spanish soldiers... Sometimes blacks marry up with Indians, sometimes with whites. It sure ain’t like nothing else, I reckon” (289). I’m not sure if Draper is alluding to a future to come as the novel begins to wrap up, or if this blunt openness of interracial relationships and marriages were as protected and accepted as the passage makes them sound. I appreciate the insight Draper gives her readers into the connections and movement between races. Most of what is taught in schools is that “black people and white people are separate. That is that.” There’s not much insight at the ones who strayed from this—at least in American education, there’s not. These small narratives that Draper adds to the story teaches readers some of those small (or rather large) gaps that schools tend to leave behind.

*(Question Two)* When reading *Copper Sun*, I was drawn in by the opening chapters where Amari sets up her village and the people within it, then is stripped away of all she knows, the people in her life and of her home and heritage. This is part of the enslaved narrative that is almost, if not completely, left out of schools’ teaching of slavery. Either we are taught that basically, enslaved people were already here and wanted to be enslaved because it brought them happiness (like Fiona says in chapter 37, “‘Our slaves like it here’” (256)), or they were brought here on ships. Usually, these accounts are whitewashed; thus, leaving out the origins of where these enslaved people came from. I would like to know more about the people who were brought here, where they came from, their stories, and how did the white people trick, manipulate, destroy, and/or tear them away from their homelands. I suppose to find more information, I could look up firsthand accounts of the slave ships and of first-generation enslaved people in America, if those sorts of stories or records even exist. I could also read more books on black history. There are a few I’ve been interested in: *Four Hundred Souls* by Ibram X. Kendi and Keisha N. Blain, *Voices from Slavery: 100 Authentic Slave Narratives* by Norman Yetman, and one I just heard about very recently, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (or Gustavus Vassa, the African), which is a firsthand autobiography of a man who was kidnapped from Africa, put on a slave ship, and brought to America. That would be where I would start.

#### Works Cited

Draper, Sharon M. *Copper Sun*. Simon & Schuster, 2006.

*Peer 1:*

Hi Will,

The point you bring up about Clay is really interesting, and a view point I didn't think about while reading. Clearly, Clay is a detestable character. His character is mean to portray the sexual abuse and ownership mindset slave holders held over slaves and succeeds in making the reader despise him. However, you bring up a good point though that Clay was not just physically using Amari but also psychologically to fill the void his not having a mother created. Like you said we see this void in his begging Amari to like him, but also in his clear dislike of Mrs. Derby who he should view as a mother figure but instead hates, which is best seen on page 182 where he finds pleasure in his dangerous handling of Mrs. Derby's daughter and her father's anger with her. While we mainly see the treatment slave holders pushed onto slaves throughout *Copper Sun*, we do not see the psychological side to slave holding, clearly being inhuman and simply not right, but still carried out in our nation's history. Why is this? While reading *Copper Sun* I still wanted to learn why one race decided that American slave holding could be justified and believe it sound to treat other human beings so cruelly. So to answer your question number two, I want to learn why human beings acted this way, and it reminds me of the Holocaust, another example of human beings treating one another in unimaginable ways. The causes behind the Holocaust were politically and psychologically driven, and makes me wonder if American slavery was the same. I know religion and economics were a large part of the justification but do not know more. Resources to research more about this topic could come from JSTOR, US History, PBS, and government websites with carefully documented historical accounts.

*Peer 2:*

Hi Will,

Honestly, one of the aspects of *Copper Sun* that helped me understand the enslavement of African people at the time was the difference between an enslaved person and an indentured servitude. First, I did not know what an indentured servant was, furthermore, I thought that enslavement was the same or similar. I wanted to do my lesson plan on the difference between the two because I wasn't aware of the difference before reading this novel, and I think it is a distinction that needs to be taught to everyone. A point made in *Teaching Hard History* states that "Before the 15th century, most enslaved people were not Africans" (8). This knowledge and the misunderstanding of indentured servitude, I think need to be applied to the education curriculum, so the students understand that there is a difference. That because there was servitude and enslaved people were not Africans, does not take away from their history. I have found a large argument towards slavery of Africans has been these two points. Servitude and slaves not being Africans before the 15th century. Therefore, I think it is extremely important to apply these key concepts and differentiations, so as not to make the same mistake as I did.

I answered the questions backwards, and what the book taught me the most was the wide range of enslavement going on in the world. That that our nation's practice has been too easily set aside, and I find that in our history in the classroom, the teacher tends to protect our history.