**WAR BROTHERS**

By Sharon E. McKay

Illustrations by Daniel Lafrance

**Louisiana Young Reader’s Choice Nominee 2015**

**Young Adult**

*Submitted by Jennifer Jacob, Student*

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**Title:** *War Bothers*

**Author:** Sharon E. McKay

Illustrator: Daniel Lafrance

**Publisher:** Annick Press

**Pages:** 165

**SUMMARY**

In this graphic novel adaptation of Sharon McKay’s award-winning novel, vivid illustrations by Daniel LaFrance and powerful words by McKay combine to tell the story of a 14 year old Ugandan boy, Jacob, after he is abducted and forced to work for Joseph Kony’s Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). Jacob is eagerly settling into his first night at an all-boys boarding school when he is brutally and unexpectedly abducted by members of the LRA. Forced to become a member of the resistance, Jacob and his friends are made to perform “unthinkable violence” (McKay 2). Although the captured boys initially hope that their families or the government will come to their rescue, they continue their induction into the LRA and taught to “kill or be killed” (48). Through the LRA, the boys are brainwashed with pseudo-Christian values. In the aftermath of this atrocious initiation, the boys swear an oath that they are brothers. When one of the boys is facing death for disobeying a LRA commander, Jacob and his war brothers make the tough choice to take their lives into their own hands. With bravery and honor, the boys escape and are reunited with their families; however, their journey is not over as they fight every day to reconcile their actions with their morals, searching for answers to tough questions about life, death, fate, and morality. Ultimately, War Brothers is a tale of friendship, love, loyalty, and redemption in “unthinkable” circumstances.

**AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**

Canadian-born Sharon McKay is a young adult author and a “war artist.” Her writing follows the lives of young adults as they struggle to mature during times of great chaos and social upheaval. McKay’s popular historical fiction series, including *Charlie Wilcox Charlie*, *Wilcox’s Great War*, and *Esther*, is set in WWI. In contrast, McKay has also written a war novel about two young girls who live in Afghanistan and many short stories about young adults living during the Holocaust. Her novel *War Brothers*, the precursor to the graphic novel, was awarded the Aurthur Ellis Award in 2009.

 Biographical information taken from the author’s website at <http://www.sharonmckay.ca/about.html>

 Accessed October 8, 2014

**ILLUSTRATOR BIOGRAPHY**

A self-styled “storyboard and graphic novel artist,” Daniel Lafrance lives in Toronto, Canada. According to Annick Press’ website, LaFrance was never formally trained in art or film; LaFrance’s career began in film animation in 1985. From this point, LaFrance worked his way up to commercials, television series, and feature films.

 Biographical information taken from the illustrator’s website at

 <http://danlafrance.com/>

 Biographical information taken from the publisher’s website at <http://www.annickpress.com/author/Daniel_Lafrance>

 Accessed October 8, 2014

**AWARDS**

2014 Independent Publisher Book Award for Best Graphic Novel

2014 Popular Paperbacks for Young Adults, YALSA

2014 YALSA Great Graphic Novels for Teens List, Top Ten

2014 Nominee, Eisner Award: Best Graphic Novel, *War Brothers* Graphic Novel

2009 Arthur Ellis Award, *War Brothers*

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Author’s Website: <http://www.sharonmckay.ca/index.html>

Annick Press Information: <http://www.annickpress.com/War-Brothers>

Goodreads: <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/16276856-war-brothers>

**OTHER TITLES BY AUTHOR**

*Thunder Over Kandahar* (2010)

*Whispers from the Camps* (2009)

*War Brothers* (2008)

*Charlie Wilcox’s Great War* (2003)

**RELATED TITLES**

*Boxers* by Gene Luen Yang

*A Long Way* Gone by Ishmael Bea

*War Child* by Emmanuel Jal

*Darfur* *Diaries: Stories of Survival* by Jen Marlowe

*The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini

*The Odyssey* by Homer

**CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS**

**Language Arts:**

* Research the life of a child soldier and write a persuasive essay about the use of child soldiers. Essays should incorporate evidence from texts to support students’ positions. Evidence should be taken from the novel and from primary sources, such as <http://www.warchild.org.uk/issues/child-soldiers> and <http://www.unicef.org/emerg/files/childsoldiers.pdf>
* Students will recall a journey that they have taken. Using vivid details and language they will describe or create a timeline of that journey. This writing can be used to write a longer memoir or personal narrative; journeys can also be compared and contrasted with the novel. Student model essays and help at <http://www.thewritesource.com/studentmodels/>, <http://eolit.hrw.com/hlla/writersmodel/pdf/W_S0801.pdf>, and <http://grammar.yourdictionary.com/grammar-rules-and-tips/tips-for-writing-a-personal-narrative-essay.html>
* Write a poem or double voice poem using vivid details and poetic devices about a theme, character, or idea expressed in the graphic novel: <http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson1138/TVPoemExample.pdf>
* Students will compare and contrast the treatment of war, family, friendship, or the journey in *War Brothers* with another graphic novel, such as *MAUS*, or with a classic text, like The *Odyssey*. Explore the treatment and development of archetypes, character development, plot, setting, and/or tone: <https://d3jc3ahdjad7x7.cloudfront.net/RWfCSBHIj06S87bWNtYP4r74MsneGDTOVWRc10myfEf93iNb.pdf> and <http://www.stt.org/document.doc?id=1112>
* Students will analyze *War Brothers* with a poem about war to determine the use of theme across genres. Use the following link to access a variety of poems about war: <http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/poems-about-war>
* Students will track the progress of Joseph Kony and the Lord’s Resistance Army through primary sources. They will demonstrate knowledge of speaking, listening, and incorporating evidence through a Socratic seminar discussing the effect of leadership and heroism on society. Socratic seminar resources at <http://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/socratic-seminars-30600.html> and <https://www.nwabr.org/sites/default/files/SocSem.pdf>
* Students will make connections with the text, develop higher order thinking skills, use evidence from the text, and practice speaking and listening with a literature circle: <http://www.gcisd-k12.org/cms/lib/TX01000829/Centricity/Domain/61/Literature_Circles.pdf>

**Social Studies:**

* Students will either watch the documentary *Invisible Children* or read primary sources about child soldiers and analyze the effects of war on children: <http://invisiblechildren.com/>, <http://www.warchild.org.uk/issues/child-soldiers> and <http://www.unicef.org/emerg/files/childsoldiers.pdf>
* Students will select appropriate evidence to research the history West Africa, including the Lord’s Resistance Army, comparing and contrasting to the United States of America. They will then select the most appropriate method of presentation, such as a wiki, PowerPoint, or blog. Use the following websites for research: <http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/africa/history/bantu.htm>, <http://www.un.org/wcm/content/site/undpa/main/activities_by_region/africa/central_africa>, and <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/lra.htm>. Use the following websites for presentations: <https://www.wikispaces.com/content/classroom> or <http://edublogs.org/>
* Students will work in small groups to research and present the current political situation of Uganda and the surrounding countries. They will present their work to the class, using evidence from multiple sources: <http://www.newvision.co.ug/>
* Students will defend their positions on a complex topic, using evidence from a text by debating the significance of Joseph Kony’s actions. They will use primary sources, such as news articles and videos to help gather research. Use the following website: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/parallels/2014/03/25/294315138/joseph-kony-is-back-in-the-news-do-teenagers-still-care>.

**Art:**

* Students will explore the influence of West Africa on forms of artistic expression, such as storytelling, painting, and/or sculpture. Use the following website: <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/aima/hd_aima.htm>
* Storytelling is a large part of West African culture. Students will analyze the significance of stories and their relationship to the West African culture. Students will demonstrate understanding of their story and its importance with a storytelling festival and/or writing. <http://www.allfolktales.com/folktales.php>
* Students will examine the social impact of war on art and culture. Use the following article: <http://www.dw.de/sierra-leonean-storyteller-fights-to-preserve-oral-tradition/a-17408083>
* Students will analyze a theme across genres or texts by creating their own graphic novel images using McKay’s original novel or the graphic version. <https://drawinggraphicnovels.wordpress.com/>

**Vocabulary:**

LRA

 Rebel

 Abduct

 Shame

 Seminary

 Corruption

 Infinite

 Cricket

 Displacement

 Negotiate

 Prosecute

 Interrogated

 Rehabilitated

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What is the significance of the title? Use evidence from the text to support your position.
2. In what ways is Jacob’s journey archetypical? Use evidence from the text to support your position.
3. What is the effect of the author’s use of a frame narrative? How does this influence your reading? Use evidence from the text to support your position.
4. Describe the style of the illustrations in this graphic novel. What techniques does the illustrator use to create these images? Which are the most effective and why? Use evidence from the text to support your position.
5. Which image is the most powerful? Explain your reasoning. Use evidence from the text to support your position.
6. How is the concept of “family” developed throughout the text? Use evidence from the text to support your position.
7. Throughout the text, the boys must make many potentially life-changing decisions. Select one decision and analyze its consequences. Do you agree with their decisions? Use evidence from the text to support your position.
8. What is the effect of Jacob’s final letter to readers? What is the purpose of placing this letter here? Use evidence from the text to support your position.
9. Examine the final images of the book. Do you think that this is a satisfying conclusion? Use evidence from the text to support your position.
10. What is the author’s purpose or message in writing this story? Use evidence from the text to support your position.

**\*\*\*Additional classroom connection ideas found online:**

* Classroom Journaling prompts <https://www.ugdsb.on.ca/uploadedFiles/rockwood/siegwart/blogs/8C_English/Complete%202012%20Equity%20Novel%20STudy%20Journal%20Questions.pdf>
* Classroom Activity Ideas <http://www.reading.org/reading-today/classroom/post/engage/2013/08/13/putting-books-to-work-war-brothers-the-graphic-novel#.U-uLOuO-0yo>

**RELATED WEBSITES**

**TeachingBooks.net**

<http://www.teachingbooks.net/tb.cgi?tid=16261&a=1#ActivityGuides>

Author interview, videos, Common Core State Standards, and lesson plans

**CNN World**

<http://www.cnn.com/2012/10/08/world/africa/ishmael-beah-child-soldier/>

Interview with Ishmel Beah, author of *A Long Way Gone*, the story of a child solider

**Harvard School of Public Heath: “Life After Death: Helping Former Child Soldiers Become Whole Again”**

<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/magazine/child-soldiers-betancourt/>

An article on the recovery process of former child soldiers

**Map of Africa**

<http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/africa-political-map.htm>

A map that may aid students in locating the setting of the book

**U.S. Department of State: Lord’s Resistance Army**

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/03/186734.htm>

Facts about the LRA and international actions taken in relation to the group