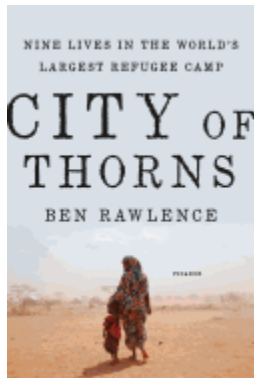


ELPL Lit Kits



City of Thorns by Ben Rawlence

To the charity workers, Dadaab refugee camp is a humanitarian crisis; to the Kenyan government, it is a 'nursery for terrorists'; to the western media, it is a dangerous no-go area; but to its half a million residents, it is their last resort.

Situated hundreds of miles from any other settlement, deep within the inhospitable desert of northern Kenya where only thorn bushes grow, Dadaab is a city like no other. Its buildings are made from mud, sticks or plastic, its entire economy is grey, and its citizens survive on rations and luck. Over the course of four years, Ben Rawlence became a first-hand witness to a strange and desperate limbo-land, getting to know many of those who have come there seeking sanctuary. Among them are Guled, a former child soldier who lives for football; Nisho, who scrapes an existence by pushing a wheelbarrow and dreaming of riches; Tawane, the indomitable youth leader; and schoolgirl Kheyro, whose future hangs upon her education.

In "City of Thorns," Rawlence interweaves the stories of nine individuals to show what life is like in the camp and to sketch the wider political forces that keep the refugees trapped there.

About the Author: BEN RAWLENCE is a former researcher for Human Rights Watch in the horn of Africa. He is the author of "Radio Congo" and has written for a wide range of publications, including "The Guardian," "the "London Review of Books," and "Prospect." He lives in the Black Mountains in Wales with his wife and daughter.

Discussion Questions (The following are generic non-fiction discussion guidelines provided by the American Library Association):

1. What does the author *celebrate or criticize* in the culture? Consider family traditions, economic and political structures, the arts, language, food, religious beliefs.

2. Does the author wish to **preserve or reform** the culture? If reform, what and how? Either way—by instigating change or by maintaining the status quo—what would be gained or what would be at risk?
3. How does the culture **differ** from yours? What was most surprising, intriguing, difficult to understand? After reading the book, have you gained a new perspective—or did the book affirm your prior views?
4. Does the book offer a **central idea or premise**? What are the problems or issues raised? Are they personal, spiritual, societal, global, political, economic, medical, scientific?
5. Do the issues **affect your life**? How so—directly, on a daily basis, or more generally? Now or sometime in the future?
6. What **evidence** does the author give to support the book's ideas? Does he/she use personal observations and assessments? Facts? Statistics? Opinions? Historical documents? Scientific research? Quotations from authorities?
7. Is the evidence **convincing**? Is it relevant or logical? Does it come from authoritative sources? (Is the author an authority?) Is the evidence speculative...how speculative?
9. What kind of **language** does the author use? Is it objective and dispassionate? Or passionate and earnest? Is it polemical, inflammatory, sarcastic? Does the language help or undercut the author's premise?
10. Does the author—or can you—**draw implications** for the future? Are there long- or short-term consequences to the problems or issues raised in the book? If so, are they positive or negative? Affirming or frightening?
11. Does the author—or can you—**offer solutions** to the problems or issues raised in the book? Who would implement those solutions? How probable is success?
12. Does the author make a **call to action** to readers—individually or collectively? Is that call realistic? Idealistic? Achievable? Would readers be able to affect the desired outcome?
13. Are the book's issues **controversial**? How so? And who is aligned on which sides of the issues? Where do you fall in that line-up?
14. Can you point to **specific passages** that struck you personally—as interesting, profound, silly or shallow, incomprehensible, illuminating?
15. Did you **learn something new** reading this book? Did it broaden your perspective about a difficult personal issue? Or a societal issue? About another culture in another country... or about an ethnic / regional culture in your own country?