HOPE IS OUR ONLY WING | RUTENDO TAVENGERWEI

NOTES FOR TEACHERS AND LIBRARIANS  
  
INTRODUCTION

*Hope is Our Only Wing* by Rutendo Tavengerwei is suitable for teaching to students ages 12+, either in class or during allotted

extra-curricular sessions. The reading questions and activities suggested here cover literacy objectives, focusing on reading

comprehension and inference, but also provide suggestions for cross-curricular links. They work as an introduction to the themes

and ideas within the book, taking students’ understanding of the text to a new level and inspiring them to read further.

ABOUT THE BOOK

*A teen novel set in Zimbabwe about hope - and its power to heal a family, a friendship or even a nation.*

*For fifteen-year-old Shamiso, struggling with grief and bewilderment following her father's death, hope is nothing but a leap into darkness.*

*For Tanyaradzwa, whose life has been turned upside down by a cancer diagnosis, hope is the only reason to keep fighting.*

*As the two of them form an unlikely friendship, Shamiso begins to confront her terrible fear of loss. In getting close to another person, particularly someone who's ill, isn't she just opening herself up to more pain? And underpinning it all - what did happen to her father, the night of that strange and implausible car crash?*

*Rutendo Tavengerwei's extraordinary debut takes an honest look at hope, and the grit and courage it can take to hang on to it.*

READING GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What do you learn about the story from the author’s message to the reader at the beginning of the book? Why do you think the author decided to include this?
2. What can you infer about how Shamiso is feeling in the first paragraph of Chapter 1? Which words help to set the tone of the chapter? Can you guess anything about her life and family?
3. In Chapters 1 and 2, Shamiso is getting used to a new setting; where is she? How does she feel about it? How does the author Rutendo Tavengerwei treat the subject of ‘home’?
4. Tanyaradzwa is introduced at the end of Chapter 2 as having eyes that ‘had bags under them, carrying a world of fatigue’. What can you guess about Tanyaradzwa from this sentence?
5. What do you learn about the history of Zimbabwe in Chapter 4? What is Shamiso’s connection to it? What sort of imagery does the author use when describing this new setting in contrast to Shamiso’s old home in England?
6. Why is the theme of loneliness important in the novel? What different types of loneliness does each character experience?
7. How does the author use emotive language to help the reader empathise with Shamiso in Chapter 7? How did you feel when you read this chapter?
8. What is the effect of the shifting perspective between each of the different characters throughout the novel?
9. Would you agree that Shamiso’s father is a character in the novel, despite not physically being present? Why or why not?
10. Why do you think the author has decided to switch between different time periods from Part One through to Part Five of the novel? How does this allow the reader to sometimes find out information before the characters do? Why is this an effective technique?
11. How does Tanyaradzwa react to her diagnosis in Chapter 13? How does the author suggest a correlation between Tanyaradzwa’s experience and Shamiso’s experience? Do you think the girls’ experiences help to bring them together?
12. How are the tensions and conflicts of Zimbabwe’s political landscape played out in Shamiso’s family and her school life?
13. What is Shamiso most scared of losing in the novel? How does she overcome this fear?
14. In Chapter 26, Shamiso describes ‘hope’ as ‘a dangerous thing’ that can ‘leap into endless darkness’. What does she mean by this? Do you think she changes her definition of ‘hope’ by the end of the novel?
15. How do both Shamiso and Tanyaradzwa change as the story progresses? What do they learn?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1: EXPLORING THEMES IN THE BOOK

* Discuss the book in terms of the following ideas or themes:   
    
  HOPE

DESPAIR

ISOLATION

FRIENDSHIP

FAMILY

JUSTICE

GRIEF

Create a short piece of drama in groups, depicting one of these themes in relation to the story.

ACTIVITY 2: WHAT IS GRIEF?

* How would you describe the concept of ‘grief’? Write a definition.
* In the novel, Shamiso is grieving for her father. Can you think of other situations in which someone might ‘grieve’ for someone or something else? For example, could you argue that Tanyaradzwa is also grieving?
* How does Shamiso deal with her grief in the novel? Create a timeline showing the different stages of her grief.
* Create a presentation on what we mean by the term ‘grief’ and the different situations or circumstances faced by young people who are coping with loss. Why is it important to support people who are going through the grieving process in school?

ACTIVITY 3: ZIMBABWE

* In pairs, carry out research into the history of Zimbabwe, splitting your research into three areas:
  + Where is it? What are its geographical features?
  + What is its political history?
  + What is its culture and identity?
* Using Chapters 5 and 6 identify some descriptive settings of Shamiso’s school in Zimbabwe. Use the author’s imagery to draw the scene. Does it correspond to the picture you had in your head from your research into the geography of Zimbabwe?
* Create a tourism guide or pamphlet for the country of Zimbabwe. Why should people visit the country? What is interesting about it? What can you say about its history, culture and identity?

ACTIVITY 4: EMPATHISING WITH THE CHARACTERS

* Write a diary entry in role as Shamiso when she arrives in her new school in Zimbabwe or as Tanyaradzwa when she finds out her diagnosis in Chapter 13.
* Using the imagery in the novel as inspiration, write a description of Zimbabwe through Shamiso’s eyes – or describe an exotic setting that you have visited/seen in a photograph.
* Write a creative piece entitled ‘Home’: think about what the word means to you and what you think makes a good home.
* When you have finished reading, continue the story for one more chapter as a character of your choice.