

I AM THE MAU

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ABOUT THE BOOK

This enticing collection of contemporary fiction is a celebration of our *ubuntu*: the invisible ties that bind us all together.

From ancient forest guardians to modern cultural warriors, from grappling with age-old traditions to championing hair identity, these evocative stories explore the duality of Kenyan life and how to find a way between two cultures, both of which are yours.

Chemutai Glasheen's unforgettable characters are drawn from her early life in Africa with all its richness, diversity and complexity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chemutai Glasheen lives in Western Australia. She is a teacher and a sessional academic at Curtin University. She writes fiction for young people and her work is influenced by her interest and experience in human rights and education. She has written a collection of short stories which are set in east Africa. Her work has been published in ACE: Arresting Contemporary stories by Emerging writers and on the Museum of Freedom and Tolerance website. She holds a PhD in creative writing from Curtin University.

SENSITIVITY WARNING

The collection addresses sensitive topics including war, terrorism, domestic abuse and forced marriage.

THEMES

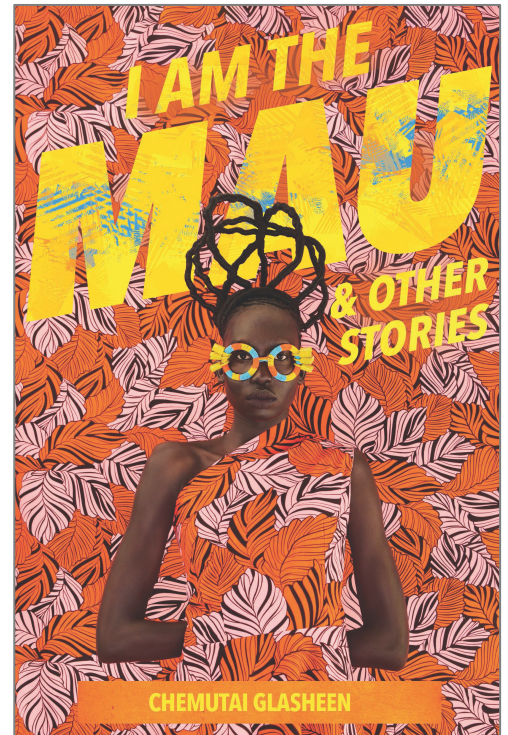
- East Africa
- Human rights
- War
- Terrorism
- Culture and traditions
- Family
- Identity and belonging
- Connection to place
- Dispossession
- Patriarchy and gender inequality

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

- English
- Humanities and Social Sciences

USEFUL WEBSITES

- Australian Human Rights Commission: humanrights.gov.au/education
- United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights: un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights
- Transcript of Barack Obama's speech, referenced in 'Of Hair and Goats': nytimes.com/2008/07/24/us/politics/24text-obama.html



GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The stories in this anthology are set in east Africa. Before reading, consider what you know about this region. After reading the anthology, consider if/how your understanding of the region has changed.
2. Why do you think *I Am the Mau* was chosen as the anthology title?
3. Synthesise the main message/s of this book into a one-paragraph summary. How has the author's purpose shaped the anthology?
4. How can fiction be used to raise awareness of complex issues such as human rights? What are the limitations of fiction for this purpose?
5. Which character from the anthology did you most relate to? Why?
6. Compare and contrast how east African people are represented in this anthology with the representation of east African people in other popular fiction media (i.e. *Black Panther*, *Coming 2 America*).
7. Using examples from the book, debate the question: Does tradition strengthen or weaken communities?
8. What meaning can be made from the visual elements of the book's front and back covers?
9. Some of the short stories in this anthology connect with each other through a common theme. Teachers can therefore select pieces for a particular topic or theme, perhaps within the context of a broader novel study. Some include:
 - a. connection to place: 'I Am the Mau', 'One Last Breakfast'
 - b. identity: 'One Last Breakfast', 'Of Hair and Goats'
 - c. female perspectives: 'A Fire for Mother', 'An Infusion of Masala Tea', 'Beading'
 - d. power/privilege: 'Vote Bahati x2', 'Kembo is Home', 'On Excursion'

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: SPECIFIC TO STORIES WITHIN THE COLLECTION

Kembo is Home

1. What mood has been created in the opening paragraph of this story? How has the author achieved this mood? What impact does it have on the reader?
2. List three ways Kembo supports himself and his mother. List three ways members of the community support Kembo and his mother.
3. Mama Jimi tells Kembo she cannot clean the floors herself as her back is too sore. Why do you think she does not ask her son to do this job instead of paying Kembo?
4. How and why has Jim changed by the end of the story? Do you think he will stay true to his pledge to protect Kembo?
5. Use context clues to predict the meaning of these words from the story: *mwenda* (p. 7), *matutas* (p. 9), *lesso* (p. 9), *githeri* (p. 10), *jiko* (p. 10), *banta* (p. 11), *mabati* (p. 12), *chapati* (p. 12), *asante* (p. 12), *shenzi* (p. 18), *maze* (p. 20). Refer to the glossary on page 248 to find out if your predictions were correct.

One Last Breakfast

1. Explain the meaning of the saying 'when problems come, they bring along all their relatives' (p. 22).
2. On page 31, what do the numbers 1994, 100 and 800,000 refer to?
3. Why does Zuri's father apologise to himself when introducing himself as Wes? How are names tied to identity?
4. Explore this quote from this story: "My own father bequeathed me a debt to society I have never been able to repay," Father began. "And now I am about to do the same to you, my Yared and Zuri." (p. 38)
5. The author has used metaphors to convey meaning in this story. Create a piece of art that explores a metaphor from the story, such as:
 - a. 'Drowning in a sea of forgetfulness.' (p. 30)
 - b. Zuri describes the date 1994 climbing onto her shoulders and spreading tentacles around her neck. (p. 31)
 - c. Zuri imagines herself alone in a sea of homeless people. (p. 38)
 - d. 'The past I was running away from, um ... er ... is here. How can I put it? It is a shadow. It creeps. It fills and wraps around everything I do.' (p. 39)

Vote Bahati x 2

1. What is the meaning of the phrase 'eat the rich' (p. 54)? Are you familiar with this phrase from any other context/s?
2. On page 68, Jenga is disappointed in his brother's handling of the election and is also disappointed in himself. He envies Sally. What personality traits does Sally demonstrate that Jenga would like to possess?
3. Intergenerational power and wealth have given Jenga opportunities. What does Jenga see as the downsides to this privilege?

On excursion

1. How did Kenisha justify her theft? Do you think it was justified?
2. Describe Kenisha's personal growth throughout this story.
3. Two key themes in this story are privilege and the imbalance of power. How does each character's privilege affect their perceptions of the world?
4. Rewrite the story from the perspective of Jose or Duma. Does this change the message of the story?

An Infusion of Masala Tea

1. Explain the meaning of these sayings from the story:
 - a. 'You know not to test the depths of the water with both feet, don't you?' (p. 106)
 - b. 'Look not where you fell but where you slipped.' (p. 109)
2. Salinda's family have an unofficial mantra: vumilia (p. 107). How has this mantra led Salinda into an intergenerational cycle of marital abuse?
3. The smell of masala provokes a strong reaction in Salinda. Describe a smell that is tied to a specific memory or feeling for you.

Of Hair and Goats

1. Listen to the songs listed below, then discuss: How is hair tied to identity? How is this magnified for black women?
 - a. 'Don't Touch My Hair' by Solange ft. Sampha: youtube.com/watch?v=YTtrnDbOQAU
 - b. 'Hair' by Lady Gaga: youtube.com/watch?v=Okq8xHrIZ8I
 - c. 'I Am Not My Hair' by India Arie: youtube.com/watch?v=E_5jlt0f5Z4
2. Kim wore the Moran hairdo to protest cutting her hair. Do you think her protest was successful? Explain your reasons why or why not.
3. Kim must write a personal response to President Obama's speech for her English lesson. Did you connect with the speech? Write your own personal response.

Beading

1. This story explores the balance between respecting and protecting cultural practices, and accepting change when an aspect of cultural tradition no longer serves the community. What aspects of your own culture would you like to see modernised?
2. At the open discussion regarding beading, the women, elders and Moran are all present (p. 167). Why is it important to have representatives of varied groups present to make good and fair decisions?
3. Parts of this story are highly suspenseful. How has the author created a suspenseful atmosphere?

A Fire for Mother

1. Explain the significance of the title 'A Fire for Mother'.
2. How does your culture celebrate engagement and/or marriage? Are there any similarities with the Kalenjin engagement?
3. Explain the meaning of this quote: 'She would simply tell me she owes tradition to her fathers, not her children.' (p. 171)
4. In this story, Chemeli has a change of perspective: 'All this time I was so mad at my mother that she didn't care about us as girls. But it is because she does that she is getting married.' (p. 182). Write a narrative short story that includes a change of perspective.

I am the Mau

1. The protagonist in this story was given a beehive and inducted into the family trade on the day he turned ten. Many cultures acknowledge the transition to adulthood with a ritual or ceremony. How does your culture mark this occasion?

2. Outline the central conflict of this story. What does each group stand to gain and lose?
3. Explain how the proverb 'the pen is mightier than the sword' relates to this story.

Westgate: A Four-part Story

1. Each part of this story is told from a different viewpoint. How does this shape your response to the story?
2. What message can be understood from the parable of the elephants and the ants? How does it relate to this story?
3. Identify the explicit and implicit values of these characters: Juma ('Things Immeasurably Great'), Amina ('Not One of Us'), Mwita ('The Non-hiding Place'), Kamili ('The Pledge'). Are any values shared by all four characters?
4. Write three brief news stories reporting the events of this story: one from the perspective of a media organisation on each side of the conflict, and one from a foreign country, such as Australia.

Weaving Circle

1. What does the weaving circle represent to Chari?
2. Why do you think the author chose to end the anthology with this story? What feeling does it leave in the reader?