



Teaching Guide: *Under Water*

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Before Reading:

1. Consider the title. What does the phrase “Under Water” make you think of? Does it have positive or negative connotations? Why?
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Reading Questions:

Chapter 1:

1. One of the first things we learn about Khosi is that she was “Chosen. Chosen means you don’t choose. Somebody else chooses for you” (7). What does this reveal about Khosi’s personality and the way she feels about being singled out? Does it match the way we usually think about a person who is “chosen”? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

2. Powers chooses to open the story with the main character being pushed to do something she is intensely afraid of. Why might she have chosen this scene for the opening chapter? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5

Chapter 2:

1. The previous chapter ended with water. In this chapter, “Dust chokes my throat” (10). What is the significance of this contrast? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5,
2. What do we know about the main character so far? What is important to her? What does she value? What does she hope for? Try to gather as many details as you can based on specific details from the text. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

Chapter 3:

1. What is Khosi’s attitude toward tradition? Find a specific detail from the text to support your ideas. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3
2. If sangoma is a new word for you, what do you think it means based on what you have read so far? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4
3. Who is in Khosi’s family? What is her relationship with them like? How can you tell? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

Chapter 4:

1. What is Khosi's relationship with Little Man like? Use details from the text to support your answer. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

2. Why is making a decision about whether to let Little Man move in so difficult for Khosi? What does this reveal about her character? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

Chapter 5:

1. Khosi says about Thandi, "Sometimes it feels like we're both hiking a steep trail but the path is taking us up two different mountains" (24). How are their situations similar? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

2. When have we seen Khosi pushed by her ancestors to do something she is afraid of before? What connections can you make between the two scenes? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

Chapter 6:

1. Why do you think Khosi is willing to sacrifice her own schooling for Zi, but resists when Little Man wants to do the same for her? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3

Chapter 7:

1. How does Khosi help the young man who is looking for work? How much of her healing is supernatural? How much is not? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.6

2. Notice how often proverbs are used throughout the text. This chapter ends, "Plenty is still but hunger is a wanderer" (39). What does this mean? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.6, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4

Chapter 8:

1. "the real truth is that sometimes people ask for one thing when it is something else they actually need. And they aren't always happy to learn this" (41). How could this idea apply to Khosi herself? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

2. How does Khosi view the balance between medicine and Zulu medicine? Can you think of other examples from the text when she is struggling to balance or decide between two things she sees as important? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

3. "Sometimes I'm afraid things will change. Sometimes I'm afraid they will stay the same forever and ever" (44). What do you think this means? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

Chapter 9:

1. "What a terrible thing it must be to leave your home and everything you love just because you must save your physical life" (47). Why does Khosi specify physical life here? What does this im-

ply about what is not being saved? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4

2. What do you think causes Khosi to throw up? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

Chapter 10:

1. As they're talking on the phone, Khosi lies and says she can see Little Man when she can't. How does their physical situation mirror the state of their relationship during this conversation? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

2. Khosi says, "I do not believe in this thing of fate or destiny. It is your destiny to make choices. Good choices" (59). Does she seem to be acting on this belief so far? Why or why not? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

Chapter 11:

1. Khosi's former classmate tells her, "Don't just give up!" (62). Do you think she has given up? Use specific details from the text to support your ideas. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3

2. The talk at the university introduces the tension between being environmentally responsible and following the traditional practices of a sangoma. What is Khosi's response to this dilemma? What similar decisions have we seen Khosi be faced with so far? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

3. "It's true, though, we speak about my condition and illness using the same words. People fall sick. I fell..." (66). What "condition" Khosi talking about? How do you know? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

Connections: You can read a version of the story of the Chameleon and the Lizard [here](#). After reading the story, what do you think of Khosi's interpretation? What kind of worldview does the story reveal?

Chapter 12:

1. Powers chose to write the book in the first person, so that when Khosi occasionally addresses an ancestor directly it almost reads as if she is addressing the reader. What effect does this structural choice create? How does it make you feel as a reader? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5

2. Khosi wonders, "Is power always like this? Does he also feel the sting of too much expectation from those who surround him?" (70). Compare Khosi's power to Langa's. How did they each acquire their power? How do they use it? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3

Chapter 13:

1. Names are very important in this novel. In what ways does Little Man embody his name? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4

Chapter 14:

1. “Another day of walking. Sometimes that’s all we can do” (83). What do you think Khosi means by this? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4

2. How does the community respond to the taxi killings? How do they speak to each other and interact? Use specific details from the text. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.6

Chapter 15:

1. In this chapter we learn that Khosi can breathe under water. What are the symbolic implications of this power? Why do you think Powers chose “Under Water” as the title of the novel? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

Chapter 16:

1. How does Powers build tension in this chapter? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5

2. How does this scene of violence compare to the taxi shooting scene? How do the people respond? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5

Chapter 17:

1. Why do you think Khosi decides to clean the house at this point? Use specific details from the text to support your ideas. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

2. At the end of the chapter, Khosi says, “it feels like something has been settle between us. Something big” (104). Look back at the final lines of some earlier chapters. How are they different from this one? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5

Chapter 18:

1. How does Powers use the dialogue in this chapter to develop Sifiso as a character? List what you know and can infer about based on what he says. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

Chapter 19:

1. Compare the structure of this chapter to the previous one. Consider length, dialogue, and setting. How are they alike and different? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5

Chapter 20:

1. What is the significance of this chapter’s subtitle, “Choosing the Powerless”? How does it connect to decisions Khosi has had to make earlier in the novel? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4

2. Gogo says, “People think they deserve what other people have, for all sorts of reasons. Sometimes they’re right, they do deserve it, but that doesn’t mean they can take take take and think it will all even out in the end” (116). What do you think she means by this? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

3. Who is Madiba? What did he advocate (look it up if you need to). CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

4. Khosi decides she will be “on the side of the powerless” (118). Who in the story is powerless? Who has power? Where does their power come from? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

Chapter 21:

1. Khosi is receiving a lot of advice from people around her. What can we infer about her personality from the way she responds? Include a quote from the text to illustrate what you mean. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3

Chapter 22:

1. Powers juxtaposes the idea of a murderer obscuring the victim’s identity by destroying his face with Sifiso’s request for a picture of Khosi’s face. What different ideas about identity and ownership does this juxtaposition bring up? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

Chapter 23:

1. Make a list of all the decisions Khosi is currently facing. What resources and help does she have? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3

Chapter 24:

1. Sifiso tells Khosi, “I will always be the man you see in front of you now” (136). Do you believe him? Use details from the text to illustrate why or why not. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

Chapter 25:

1. Notice that the past several chapters have been quite short and usually focus on one key conversation. What is the effect of this structural choice? What tone does it create? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5

Chapter 26:

1. How does Powers use the setting to set the tone in this chapter? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5

2. Little Man is “an uneasy marriage between the funny, kind boy I have always known and something harder and willing to fight” (144). How is Little Man still like a boy? In what ways is he changing? Use specific examples from the text in your answer. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3

Chapter 27:

1. The witch asks Khosi, “How do you expect to fight evil if you do not understand it? If you cannot sympathize with it?” (153). What types of evil has Khosi encountered in the story so far? How has she shown understanding or lack of understanding? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3

2. What do you think the lesson Khosi has missed might be? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

Chapter 28:

1. What motivates Khosi to act the way she does in this chapter? How does this illustrate what is important to her? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3

Chapter 29:

1. Why do you think Khosi addresses her mother as one of the ancestors for the first time at this point? Why is that significant? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3

Chapter 30:

1. As they drive, Khosi realizes, “even if I don’t know why they’ve kidnapped us, and no matter what happens, I can recognize that even a little bit of spirit or soul within them each is good and worthy of love” (165). How does this realization connect to Khosi’s conversation with the witch in chapter 27? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3

2. Khosi says water is “both my gift and my curse. Sometime we don’t realize how something can be both” (171). Who or what else is ambiguous this way in this novel? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

Chapter 31:

1. What do you think Khosi now understands that the amadlozi were trying to tell her? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

Chapter 32:

1. What questions does Powers leave unresolved? Why do you think an author would make that choice? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

2. How has Khosi changed by the end of the novel? Give specific details to support your ideas. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3

Whole-Text Questions:

1. Trace the role of water through the novel. When is it positive? When is it negative? Does it have a consistent symbolic or thematic role, and if so, what? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

2. Look at the various decisions Khosi has to make over the course of the novel, including both major and minor choices. How does the way she approaches choices change as the story goes on? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3