

HOLIDAY HOUSE | READING GROUP GUIDE



Auma's Long Run by Eucabeth Odhiambo

PB: 9780823445653 • Ages 8–12

About the Book

Auma is racing toward her dreams as fast as possible—but can she turn her back on her family when tragedy hits home? This acclaimed #OwnVoices debut set in 1980s Kenya is a poignant story of loss, grief, and the power of resilience.

Based on the author's childhood in Kenya, Auma's story humanizes the AIDS epidemic and reveals hope amidst a devastating health crisis.

Reading Group Discussion Questions

- Discuss the traditions of Auma's people. How are these traditions especially unfair to women? At what point does Auma begin to think that these traditions are inequitable? How does Auma's mama straddle two different worlds? In what ways does Dani, Auma's paternal grandmother, try to control the lives of Auma and her family?
- Auma refers to "trick questions" several times in the novel. Discuss how Auma's mama uses trick questions to make Auma think about her goals. Explain how her mama makes Auma feel valued. How is this especially difficult in a society with traditions that disrespect women? How are Auma's goals different from most girls in the village of Koromo? Abeth, Auma's best friend, is jealous of Auma because she has distinct goals. How does Auma find the strength and courage to stay focused?
- HIV/AIDS is at epidemic proportions in Koromo, and throughout Kenya. How does the large number of deaths in her village make Auma even more determined to achieve her dream of becoming a doctor? Auma's dad works in the city and comes home once a month. Why does Auma find it strange that her father comes home earlier than usual? Explain why her mother finds it difficult to discuss Baba's illness. Discuss why Auma's mama refuses to seek help from the medicine man.



- After Baba dies, Auma learns that he had slept with other women while working in the city. Discuss her reaction to this revelation. Not too long after Baba’s death, Akuku calls upon Mama. Explain what Abeth means when she says, “Your mother is being inherited” (p. 154). Debate whether Auma’s mama feels she has any other choice but to respond to Akuku’s request. Mama had always warned Auma about boys. How does Mama’s relationship with Akuku lead to Auma’s confusion about men? At what point does Auma realize that the traditions of her people regarding sexual relations are escalating the HIV/AIDS epidemic? Explain why Auma feels that “marriage would be a kind of death” (p. 282).
- It was the custom for women to go about the village and wail loudly after a loved one dies. Explain what Auma means when she says, “It was only now I realized that women wailed more on account of everything they never had a chance to say” (p. 110). What things might her mama have wanted to say but couldn’t, because tradition didn’t allow it? How does Auma plan to use her voice?
- The school tries to educate the students about unprotected sex. How might the young people be the hope of the villagers? Why does Auma feel betrayed by the medicine man? Discuss why knowledge is the only way to change traditions, and eradicate the HIV/AIDS epidemic.
- Several times in the novel, Auma makes reference to not knowing whom she could trust. Why is this such an issue for her? Which adults in the novel does she trust the most? Discuss her trust in Abeth, her best friend.
- Auma is faced with the difficult decision about whether to stay in school or stay at home and care for her siblings. Explain what Mrs. Okumu, her former English teacher, means when she says that “there are things in life that can wait and others that cannot” (p. 281). Debate whether this is “trick” advice. Discuss Auma’s decision. Think about Auma’s character traits and the goals she has set for herself, and discuss whether she eventually returns to school. How might returning to school help her family and her village?
- Explain the double meaning of the title. What is Auma’s “long run”?

Guide prepared by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

About the Author



Eucabeth Odhiambo is a professor of education at Shippensburg University in Pennsylvania. As a classroom teacher she has taught every grade between kindergarten and middle school. This is her first novel, inspired by her experience growing up in Kenya in the '80s and '90s, as well as HIV/AIDS education research for her doctoral degree.



HolidayHouse.com     @HolidayHouseBks