

ILUNGA'S HARVEST

By Mike Tidwell,
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My wife has left me, and I've got to harvest my pond," Chief Ilunga said. It was two o'clock on a Sunday afternoon and he was breathing hard. He had just walked the five miles from his village of Ntita Kalambayi to my house in Lulenga. He had walked quickly, stopping only once to drink *tshitshampa* with friends along the way. Now his speech was excited, full of the fast cadence of personal crisis. "My wife has left me, and I've got to harvest my pond. I've got to harvest it tomorrow and use the money to get her back."

It was a dowry dispute. Ilunga's father-in-law claimed Ilunga still owed 30 dollars in bridewealth from the marriage to his daughter five years earlier. To emphasize the point, he had ordered his daughter home to their village 30 miles away. She had obeyed, taking with her all the children. Now Ilunga was humiliated and alone, with no one to cook his food or wash his clothes. He needed money fast.

The development was something of a blow to me, too. Never had I expected the first fruits of my extension work to go toward something as inglorious as roping in a runaway wife. But that's what the Fates had snipped off. I told Ilunga I would be at his pond the next morning to help with the harvest.

Ilunga's wife had picked a bad time to leave him. His pond was in its fifth month of production, one month short of the gestation period considered best for harvesting. Still, after only five months, things looked good. Ilunga had fed his fish like a man possessed, and as far as we could tell a considerable bounty waited below.

Part of the pond's success was due to a strategy I had developed not long after arriving in Kalambayi. The plan was simple: Get Ilunga and the other farmers to feed their fish with the same intensity they fed me fufu, and they would surely raise some of the biggest tilapia ever recorded.

"Imagine a fish is like an important visitor who has traveled over mountains and through rivers to see you," I had told Ilunga after he finished his pond. "If, when you set a meal down in front of that visitor, he finishes all the food in two or three minutes and then stares back at you from across the table, how do you feel?"

He grimaced. "Terrible," he said. "The visitor is still hungry. He should always be given more food than he can eat. He shouldn't be able to finish it. That's how you know he's full."

"Exactly," I said.

Exactly. Every day for five months, Ilunga dumped more food into his pond than his fish could possibly eat. He covered the surface with sweet potato leaves and man-

*For a description of the setting,
see page 16.*

ioc leaves and papaya leaves, and the fish poked and chewed and started to grow.

Helping things out was an unexpected gift. Two months after we stocked the pond, an official of the United Nations Children's Fund in Mbuji Mayi donated two sturdy wheelbarrows to the Kalambayi fish project. The wheelbarrows were blue with "UNICEF" painted neatly on the sides in white. When I called all the farmers together to present the tools, the shiny steel basins and rubber tires inspired a great amount of whistling and head-shaking. I felt as if I had just delivered two mint-condition Mack trucks. The men ran their hands along the rims and grew dizzy contemplating the wealth the tools might bring. Using the village of Kabala as a dividing point, the farmers split up into two committees representing the upper and lower stretches of the Lubilashi. After establishing rules for their use, the men took possession of the wheelbarrows.

Ilunga, as much as anyone, parlayed the UNICEF largess into bigger fish. He used the upper Kalambayi wheelbarrow to gather leaves and termites for fish food. To fill his pond's stick compost bins he went most Thursdays to the weekly outdoor market in Ntita Konyukua. There, he used the wheelbarrow to collect manioc peels and fruit rinds and the other rubbish village markets leave scattered about the ground. These materials rot quickly in pond water, stimulating a plankton growth essential for intensive tilapia culture. But to get the goods, Ilunga had to swallow his pride. He had to hunt through the crowd of marketers and bend over and compete with hungry dogs and goats and chickens along the ground. It was something of a spectacle. Ilunga was 30 years old and the chief of a village—and he was shooing away goats to get at banana peels in the marketplace dirt. People started to talk. After a while, one of Ilunga's brothers tried to dissuade him from the practice.

"You're embarrassing yourself," he said. "The pond isn't worth this."

But Ilunga didn't listen, just as he hadn't listened back in the beginning when I told him he was digging a pond so large it might kill him. He kept going to the market. Stares and whispers didn't stop him.

Most amazing was the fact that Ilunga was doing all this work in addition to tending his fields every day like everyone else. He was squeezing two jobs from the daily fuel of protein-deficient fufu. Eventually it started to show. I walked to his house one afternoon and found him outside, fast asleep in the coddling embrace of the UNICEF wheelbarrow. He had lined the basin with a burlap sack and reposed himself, his arms and legs drooping over the edges. From the trail 50 feet away, I watched. The imagery was potent, almost unbearable with its themes of hope and struggle and want all bound up in that exhausted face, those closed eyes, those

dirty black limbs hanging down to the ground.

God, how I had set Ilunga's soul ablaze with my talk of rising out of poverty, of beating back the worst aspects of village life with a few fishponds. He had listened to me and followed every line of advice and now he lay knocked out in the hold of the donated wheelbarrow. Deciding it would be criminal to wake him, I walked away, praying like hell that all the promises I had made were true.

And now we would find out. It was time for the denouement: the harvest. Five months had passed since Ilunga's wife had left him, and we would soon discover what had been happening all this time under the pond's surface. I was anxious because, in a way, owning a fishpond is like owning a lottery ticket. Unlike corn, which you can watch as it grows, or, say, chickens, which you can weigh as they get big, there is no way to positively assess the progress of a pond until you harvest it. The fish are underwater, so you can't count them or get a good look at them. You just have to work and work and wait. You hang on to your lottery ticket and wait for the drawing, never sure what number will come up until you drain the pond.

Ilunga and I had a pretty good idea his fish were big, of course. God knows they had been given enough to eat. We also had seen lots of offspring along the pond's edges. But the water was now so well fertilized and pea-green with plankton that neither of us had seen a fish in nearly two months. (Ilunga had refused to eat any fish in order to maximize the harvest.) We knew the tilapia were there but how many exactly? How big? And what about the birds? How many fish had the thieving kingfishers taken? We would soon know all the answers. An unacknowledged, icy fear ran through both of us as we agreed that Sunday afternoon at my house to harvest his pond the next day.

It was just past 6 a.m. when I arrived for the harvest. Ilunga and his brother Tshibamba were calling and waving their arms as I moved down the valley slope towards the pond. "Michel, Michel. Come quickly. Hurry Michel." I had driven my motorcycle to Ilunga's house in the predawn dark, using my headlight along the way. Now as I finished the last of the 20-minute walk to the valley floor, the sky was breaking blue and a crazy montage of pink and silver clouds lay woven on the horizon. The morning beauty was shattered, however, by the cries of the men waiting for me at the pond. They were yelling something I didn't want to hear. It was something my mind refused to accept.

"There are no fish, Michel," they said. "Hurry. The fish aren't here."

I reached the pond and cast an incredulous stare into the water. They were right. There were no fish. The men had spent most of the night digging out a vertical section of the lower dike and slowly draining the water until there now remained only a muddy, five-by-five pool in the lower-most corner of the pond. The pool was about six inches deep. And it was empty.

Tshibamba was screaming, running along the dikes and pointing an accusing finger at the pond bottom. “Where are they?” he demanded of the pond. “Where are the fish?”

Ilunga was past the yelling stage. He gazed at the shallow pool, his face sleepy and creased, and said nothing. He was a wreck, as forlorn and defeated as the pond scarecrow 10 feet to his left with its straw limbs akimbo and its head splotted with bird excrement.

“Wait a minute,” I said to the men, suddenly spotting something at one end of the pool. “Look!”

I pointed to a fan-shaped object sticking out of the water and looking a lot like a dorsal fin. We all looked. It moved. A fish. Before we could celebrate, other fins appeared throughout the pool, dozens of them, then hundreds. The pond water, which had continued all the while to flow out through a net placed over the cut dike, had suddenly reached a depth lower than the vertical height of the bottom-hugging fish. The fish had been hiding under the muddy water and were revealed only at the last moment and all at the same time, a phenomenon of harvesting we eventually became nervously accustomed to in Kalambayi. Ilunga’s fish—big, medium, and small—had been corralled by the dropping water into the small pool where they waited like scaly cattle. They looked stupid and restless. “Yeah, now what?” they seemed to ask.

Ilunga showed them. He threw off his shirt and made a quick banzai charge into the congested fray, his arms set to scoop up hard-won booty. There ensued an explosion of jumping fish and flying mud, and Ilunga absorbed the rat-tat-tat of a thousand mud dots from his feet to his face. By the time his hands reached the pool, the fish had scattered everywhere into the surrounding mud like thinking atoms suddenly released from some central, binding force. Ilunga raised his empty hands. He looked up at us—his face covered with mud dots, his feet sinking into the pond-bottom gook—and flashed a wide smile. The harvest had begun.

“The small ones,” I yelled, hurriedly discarding my shirt and shoes. “Get the small fish first to restock with.”

I jumped into the pond and, like Ilunga, was immediately pelted with mud. Two more of Ilunga’s brothers had arrived by then, and together, five

strong, we gave battle with the tenacity of warriors waging *jihad*. We chased the flapping, flopping, fleeing fish through the pond-bottom sludge. When we caught them, we stepped on them and throttled them and herded them into tin buckets. Ilunga took charge of capturing and counting 300 thumb-sized stocking fish and putting them in a small holding pond. The rest of us collected the other fish, segregating the original stockers, which were now hand-sized, from the multitudinous offspring. The work was dirty and sloppy and hypnotically fun.

So engrossed was I in the harvest, in fact, that I barely noticed the tops of the pond dikes were growing crowded with onlookers. By the time we finished capturing all the fish, people had surrounded the square pond bottom like spectators around a boxing ring. A quarter of the men, women, and children in the village had come to see the harvest. I was impressed by their show of support for Ilunga's work.

Ilunga ordered the crowd to clear back from a spot on the upper dike. Filthy like pigs, we carried the fish out of the pond in four large buckets and set them down at the clearing. We rinsed them off with canal water and began weighing them with a small hand-held scale I had brought. The total came to 44 kilos. It was an excellent harvest. After only five months, Ilunga had coaxed 300 tilapia fingerlings into 44 kilos of valuable protein. It was enough to bring home his wife and then some.

Whistling and laughing, I grabbed Ilunga by the shoulders and shook him and told him what a great harvest it was. I had expected a lot of fish, but not this many. It was marvelous, I told him, simply marvelous. He smiled and agreed. But he wasn't nearly as happy as he should have been. Something was wrong. His eyes telegraphed fear.

Tshibamba made the first move.

"Go get some leaves from that banana tree over there," he told a child standing on the pond bank.

When the child returned, Tshibamba scooped about a dozen fish onto one of the leaves and wrapped them up.

"I'm going to take these up to the house," he said to Ilunga. "It's been a while since the children have had fresh fish."

"Yes, yes," Ilunga said. "Take some."

"I'll have a little too," said Kazadi, Ilunga's youngest brother, reaching into a bucket.

"Go ahead. Take what you need."

Then a third brother stepped forward. Then a fourth. Then other villagers. My stomach sank.

It was suddenly all clear—the crowd, the well-wishers, the brothers of Ilunga who had never even seen the pond until that morning. They had come to divide up the harvest. A cultural imperative was playing itself out. It was time for Ilunga to share his wealth. He stood by the buckets and started placing fish in the hands of every relative and friend who stepped forth.... He was just giving the harvest away.

There was no trace of anger on his face as he did it, either. Nor was there a suggestion of duty or obligation. It was less precise than that. This was Ilunga's village, and he had a sudden surplus and so he shared it. It just happened. It was automatic. But the disappointment was there, weighing down on the corners of his eyes. He needed the fish. Getting his wife back had depended on them.

Caked in mud, I sat on the grassy bank and watched an entire bucket of tilapia disappear. Fury and frustration crashed through me with the force of a booming waterfall. All that work. All my visits. All the digging and battling kingfishers. All for what? For this? For a 20-minute free-for-all giveaway? Didn't these people realize the ponds were different? Ilunga had worked hard to produce this harvest. He had tried to get ahead. Where were they when he dug his pond? Where were they when he heaved and hoed and dislodged from the earth 4,000 cubic feet of dirt?

I knew the answer. They had been laughing. They had been whispering among themselves that Ilunga was wasting his time, that moving so much dirt with a shovel was pure lunacy. And they laughed even harder when they saw him bending over to pick up fruit rinds in the marketplace in competition with goats and dogs. But they weren't laughing now. Ilunga had proved them wrong. He had raised more fish than any of them had seen in their lives, and now they were taking the spoils.

The fish continued to disappear, and I began bursting with a desire to intervene. I wanted to ask Ilunga what the hell he was doing and to tell him to stop it. I wanted to turn over the bucket already emptied of fish and stand on it and shoo everyone away like I had shooed Mutoba Muenyi those first few times she came to my door. "Giving is virtuous and all that," I wanted to tell the crowd. "But this is different. These are Ilunga's fish. They're his. Leave them alone. He needs them."

But I said nothing. I summoned every ounce of self-restraint in my body and remained silent. This was something between Ilunga and his village. My job was to teach him how to raise fish. I had done my job. What he did with

the fish afterward really was none of my business. Even so, I didn't have to watch. I went over to the canal and washed up. Ilunga was well into the second bucket when I told him I was leaving.

"Wait," he said. "Here."

He thrust into my hands a large bundle of fish.

Oh no, I thought. Not me. I'm not going to be party to this gouging. I tried to hand the bundle back.

"But these fish are for you," he said. "You've taught me how to raise fish, and this is to say thank you."

"No, Ilunga. This is your harvest. You earned it. You keep it."

He gave me a wounded look, as if I had just spit in his face, and suddenly I wanted to scream and kick and smash things. I couldn't refuse his offer without devastating him. I took the fish and headed up the hill, feeling like a real parasite.

"Wait for me at the house," he said as I walked away.

It was 8:30 when I reached the village and stretched out, dizzy with disappointment, on a reed mat next to Ilunga's house. He arrived about 30 minutes later with his sister Ngala who had helped at the harvest. Both of their faces look drained from the great hemorrhaging they had just gone through. Without even the benefit of loaves of bread, they had fed a mass of about 50 villagers, and now Ngala carried all that was left of one big tin basin. I estimated there were about 25 kilos. To my dismay, though, Ilunga wasn't finished. He scooped out another couple of kilos to give to older relatives who hadn't made it to the pond. Then he sent Ngala off to the market in Lulenga with roughly 23 kilos of fish, barely half the harvest total.

At the going market price of a hundred zaires a kilo, Ilunga stood to make 2,300 zaires (\$23). It was far short of what he needed to get his wife back. Far short, in fact, of anything I could expect village men to accept as fair return for months of punishing shovel work and more months of maniacal feeding. The problem wasn't the technology. Ilunga had produced 44 kilos of fish in one pond in five months. That was outstanding. The problem, rather, was generosity. It was a habit of sharing so entrenched in the culture that it made me look to the project's future with foreboding. What incentive did men like Ilunga have to improve their lives—through fish culture or any other means—if so much of the gain immediately melted into a hundred empty hands? Why work harder? Why develop? Better just to farm enough to eat. Better to stay poor like all the rest.

After Ilunga's sister left for the market, I couldn't hold my tongue any

longer. We were alone at his house.

“I can’t believe you gave away all those fish, Ilunga. Why did you even bother digging a pond if all you were going to do with the harvest was give it away?”

He knew I was upset, and he didn’t want to talk about it.

“Why did you dig a pond?” I repeated.

“You know why,” he said. “To get more money. To help my family.”

“So how can you help your family if you give away half the fish?”

“But there’s still a lot left,” he said. “You act like I gave them all away.”

I suddenly realized he was about 10 times less upset by what happened than I was. My frustration doubled.

“What do you mean there’s still a lot left? There’s not enough to get your wife back, is there? You gave away too much for that. Your pond hasn’t done you much good, and I guess I’ve wasted my time working with you.”

The last sentence really annoyed him.

“Look,” he said, “what could I have done? After I drained my pond, I had hundreds and hundreds of fish. There were four buckets full. You saw them. If my brother comes and asks for 10 fish, can I say no? For 10 fish? That’s crazy. I can’t refuse.”

“No, it’s not crazy, Ilunga. You have six brothers and 10 uncles and 50 cousins. And then there are all the other villagers. You’re right. Ten fish aren’t very many. But when you give 10 to everyone you have little left for yourself.”

“So what would you have done?” he asked me. “Would you have refused fish to all those people?”

“Yes,” I said, and I meant it.

“You mean you would have taken all the fish and walked past all those people and children and gone up to the house and locked the door.”

“Don’t say it like that,” I said. “You could have explained to them that the pond was your way of making money, that the harvest was for your wife.”

“They already know I need my wife,” he said. “And they know I’ll get her back somehow.”

“Yeah, how? You were counting on the harvest to do that and now it’s over. You gave away too much, Ilunga. You can’t keep doing this. You can’t feed the whole village by yourself. It’s impossible. You have to feed your own children and take care of your own immediate family. Let your brothers

worry about their families. Let them dig ponds if they want to. You've got to stop giving away your harvests."

Thus spoke Michel, the agent of change, the man whose job it was to try to rewrite the society's molecular code. Sharing fufu and produce and other possessions was one thing. With time, I had come around to the habit myself, seen its virtuosity. But the ponds were different, and I had assumed the farmers realized that. Raising fish was meant to create surplus wealth, to carry the farmers and their immediate families to a level where they had more for themselves—better clothes, extra income. That was the incentive upon which the project was built. It was the whole reason I was there.

So when Ilunga harvested his pond that early morning and started giving away the fish, I wanted to retreat. I wanted to renounce my conversion to the local system and move back to the old impulse I had arrived with, the one that had me eating secret, solitary meals and guarding my things in the self-interested way prized by my own society.

"Stop the giving"—that was the real, the final, message I wanted to bring along to Ilunga and the other fish farmers. "Stop the giving and the community-oriented attitude and you can escape the worst ravages of poverty. Build a pond and make it yours. And when you harvest it, don't give away all the fish. Forget, for now, the bigger society. Forget the extended family. Step back and start thinking like self-enriching entrepreneurs, like good little capitalists."

But Ilunga didn't fit the plan. Nor did any of the other farmers who harvested after him. "If my brother comes and asks for 10 fish, can I say no?" he had asked. His logic was stronger than it seemed. Like everyone else in Kalambayi, Ilunga needed badly the help fish culture could provide. What he didn't need, however, were lessons on how to stay alive. And that, I eventually grew to understand, was what all the sharing was really about.

It was a survival strategy, an unwritten agreement by the group that no one would be allowed to fall off the societal boat no matter how low provisions ran on board. No matter how bad the roads became or how much the national economy constricted, sharing and mutual aid meant everyone in each village stayed afloat. If a beggar like Mutoba Muenyi came to your house in the predawn darkness, you gave her food. If you harvested a pond and 50 malnourished relatives showed up, you shared what you had. Then you made the most of what was left. If it was \$23, that was okay. It was still a lot of money in a country where the average annual income is \$170 and falling. It might not pay off a marriage debt, but \$23 satisfied other basic needs.

In the end, despite my fears, sharing didn't destroy the fish project. Farmers went on building and harvesting ponds, giving away 20 to 50 per-

cent of their fish, and selling the rest to earn money for their wives and their children. It was a process I simply couldn't change and eventually I stopped trying.

And perhaps it was just as well Ilunga and the others weren't in a hurry to become the kind of producers I wanted them to be. They might develop along Western lines with time, but why push them? The local system worked. Everyone was taken care of. Everyone did stay afloat. Besides, there were already plenty of myopic, self-enriching producers in the world—entrepreneurs and businesses guided by the sole principle of increasing their own wealth above all else. So many were there in fact that the planetary boat, battered by breakneck production and consumption, was in ever-increasing danger of sinking, taking with it the ultimate extended family: the species. There seemed to be no survival strategy at work for the planet as a whole as there was for this small patch of Africa, no thread of broader community interest that ensured against total collapse. Indeed, sitting in my lamplit cotton warehouse at night, listening to growing reports of global environmental degradation over my shortwave radio, the thought occurred to me more than once that, in several important respects, Kalambayi needed far less instruction from the West than the other way around.

At the moment, however, no one needed anything as much as Ilunga needed his wife. He had given away nearly half his fish and now the opportunity had all but vanished. I stopped back by his house after the market closed in Lulenga and watched him count the money from the harvest: 2,000 zaires. Even less than I had thought. I reached into my pocket and pulled out all I had, 200 zaires. I handed it to him. He was still short.

“What are you going to do?”

“I don't know,” he said, “I've got to think about it.”

Three days later on my way to Tshipanzula, I pulled up to Ilunga's house to see what solution he had come up with. I was surprised when he wasn't there and his neighbors said he had gone to Baluba Shankadi, his wife's tribe.

Another week went by before I saw Ilunga again. It was in the market in Ntita Konyukua and he was standing under a mimosa tree, gesturing and talking with two other fish farmers. As I made my way through the crowd of marketers, getting closer, I saw Ilunga's wife standing behind him, carrying their youngest child.

“How?” I asked when I reached him, shaking his hand, delighted by the sight of mother and child: “How did you do it?”

At first he didn't answer. He talked instead about his pond, telling me he had returned the day before and now was trying to track down the UNICEF

'ILUNGA'S HARVEST'
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Tilapia: The kind of fish Ilunga raised in his pond

Manioc: A plant grown in the tropics, also called cassava

Parlay: To increase into something of greater value

Largess: Gift; generosity

Plankton: The minute animal and plant life of a body of water

Denouement: Grand finale; conclusion; culmination

Montage: Mosaic; mixture

Incredulous: Disbelieving

Booty: Treasure; prize; reward

Ensued: Followed

Cultural imperative: Something a particular culture requires and expects to be done

Gouge: To overcharge or cheat

Myopic: Narrow-minded

wheelbarrow to start feeding his fish again.

"But your wife," I said. "How did you get her back?"

"Oh yes, she's back," he said. "Well, I really don't know how I did it. After you left my house that day I still needed 800 zaires. One of my brothers gave me a hundred, but it still wasn't enough. I tried, but I couldn't come up with the rest of the money, so I decided to leave with what I had. I walked for two days and reached my wife's village and handed the money to my father-in-law. He counted it and told me I was short. I told him I knew I was but that I didn't have any more. Then I knew there was going to be a big argument."

"Was there?"

"No. That's the really strange part. He told me to sit down, and his wife brought out some fufu and we ate. Then it got dark and we went inside to sleep. I still hadn't seen my wife. The next morning, my father-in-law called me outside. Then he called my wife and my sons out from another house. We were all standing in the middle of the compound, wondering what to do. Then he just told us to leave.

"That's it?" I said. "It's over?"

"He told me yes, that I could go home. I didn't think I understood him correctly, so I asked him if he was sure he didn't want any more money."

"No, you've done enough," he said. "Go back to your village."

"I was afraid to say anything else. I put my wife and my sons in front of me and we started walking away before he could change his mind."

Overview

This lesson plan will help you and your students explore the meaning of the personal narrative “Ilunga’s Harvest,” by former Peace Corps Volunteer Mike Tidwell.

“Ilunga’s Harvest” is a fascinating sequel to “I Had a Hero.” In it, Tidwell writes again about his extraordinary friendship with the African village chief Ilunga. This time, Tidwell writes about an incident with Ilunga and the people of Kalambayi that caused him to become aware of, question, and come to grips with his own deep-rooted cultural beliefs as he had never done before. The experience he describes in “Ilunga’s Harvest” raises complex questions that have no easy answers.

As we noted earlier when introducing “I Had a Hero” (pages 85 and 86), Tidwell met Ilunga during his Peace Corps service in the chiefdom of Kalambayi, in the African nation of Zaire (since 1997, the Democratic Republic of the Congo). Tidwell’s assignment as a Peace Corps Volunteer was to teach the villagers how to build and stock ponds for raising fish.

We chose “Ilunga’s Harvest” as the first story under the theme *No Easy Answers* because we think it presents an invaluable opportunity for students to learn about cultural differences—and to think about times in their lives when they faced questions or situations that had no easy answers. In “Ilunga’s Harvest,” Tidwell describes an incident in which there is no clear right or wrong course of action. On one level, the story deals with a people’s struggle to survive. On a deeper level, it deals with issues of generosity, justice, individualism and community, and the complexity of cultural differences. It demonstrates the way in which our cultural upbringing influences our beliefs, our behavior, and the decisions we make. The story also illustrates how the experience of going from one culture to another caused Tidwell to raise questions—not just about the new culture, but also about his own. And the questions that Tidwell confronted were the kind that are not easily answered.

About the Setting

To help your students understand the impact of the story, review with them the information provided for “I Had a Hero” (pages 85 and 86) about the Democratic Republic of the Congo, formerly Zaire (and, before that, the Belgian Congo). Tidwell, in his introduction to *The Ponds of Kalambayi*, describes the Congo River and the chiefdom of Kalambayi in the very heart of central Africa. The description of the Congo River Basin was included as a separate worksheet with “I Had a Hero” on page 87 to be photocopied for students. Have students review it, or, with younger or less able readers, read it to them.

READING AND RESPONDING TO *ILUNGA’S HARVEST*

STANDARDS

National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association

- *Standard 1:* Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world.
- *Standard 2:* Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions of human experience.
- *Standard 3:* Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts.
- *Standard 5:* Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

National Council for the Social Studies

- *Theme 1: Culture.* Social studies programs should provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity so that the learner can explain how information and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.

When you come to the section of the lesson plan (Day One) that recommends that students read Tidwell’s description of the setting, there are two important concepts to revisit with students:

- The meaning of the word “traditional” as Tidwell has used it. Explain to students that the word traditional in this context refers to a place where life is the way it has been for many years. It is a place far from the flow of modern technology—where children grow up and do the same things their parents have done, where family ties are extremely important, and where habits and values rarely change. In the sense that Tidwell used the word, it is the opposite of what we in the United States would construe as “modern.” Thus, on one level, “Ilunga’s Harvest” is about a “modern man”—Tidwell—encountering a “traditional” culture.
- The meaning of Tidwell’s statement: “What I gave these people in the form of development advice, they returned tenfold in lessons on what it means to be human.” As students are reading “Ilunga’s Harvest,” ask them to look for exactly the kind of lesson the people of Kalambayi taught Tidwell on “what it means to be human.”

Introduction

This lesson plan presents many ideas for reading and responding to “Ilunga’s Harvest.” It provides options for using “Ilunga’s Harvest” with younger or less able readers, as well as with older, more sophisticated and skillful readers. In particular, we introduce the option of using literature circles (Daniels, 1994) with older, more experienced readers (see Appendix C, page 178, for instructions). The lesson sequence is a flexible springboard for tailoring instruction to the needs of your students—and to your state or local curriculum standards.

Differentiating Instruction: Older Students

Try using the strategy of literature circles (Daniels, 1994) with older students to help them become more self-directed in exploring the deeper meanings of a text—and to increase their level of understanding and ownership of the ideas embedded in “Ilunga’s Harvest.”

Differentiating Instruction: Younger Students

These lesson plans for “Ilunga’s Harvest” have explicit guidelines, questions, and activities for younger students or less advanced readers. However, you can easily adapt them for students of any age or ability level.

Keep in mind that the use of literature circles and the lesson plan that follows are not mutually exclusive. Use parts of the following lesson plan together with literature circles, or use only the instructional sequence as it’s pre-

sented below. We assume that teachers who use them will make modifications or enhancements based on time, experience, and their students' needs.

The lesson plans address specific language arts and social studies standards using the *Understanding by Design* curriculum framework (Wiggins and McTighe, 1998). The framework, based on “enduring understandings” and “essential questions,” is described in detail in Appendix A to this collection on page 174. You can find the enduring understandings and essential questions that we suggest for this story in the margin at right.



Enduring Understandings:

- Everyone has a culture. It influences how we see the world, ourselves, and others.
- In some cultures, people believe the group is responsible for the well-being of each individual. In other cultures, people believe individuals are primarily responsible for themselves.
- Life can raise questions with no easy answers.

Essential Questions:

- How does our culture influence how we view the world, ourselves, and others?
- When is taking care of the individual more important than taking care of the group? When is taking care of the group more important than taking care of the individual?
- Why are some life questions so hard?

Grade Levels:

This lesson plan can be adapted for use with students in grades 6–12.

Materials:

Worksheet #1: The Congo River Resource Sheet (see page 87);
Worksheet #6: “Ilunga’s Harvest” Discussion Guide

Assessments:

Journal entries, oral presentations, role-playing, extended written responses to the text.

DAY ONE**Purpose:**

- To introduce students to the story “Ilunga’s Harvest.”
 - To stimulate individual and group reflection about the story’s meaning.
1. Provide students with a brief review of Tidwell’s work with the Peace Corps in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) using the information provided on pages 85, 86, and 131. Explain to students that in “Ilunga’s Harvest” they will be reading a sequel to “I Had a Hero.” In it, Tidwell describes what happens to Ilunga’s extraordinary fishpond and how that caused him to think about things in a way he had never done before.
 2. Have students review the Congo River Resource Sheet (page 87) so that they have a feel for the setting—the rural chiefdom of Kalambayi.
 3. Remind students that the two main characters are the author—returned Peace Corps Volunteer Mike Tidwell—and Ilunga, the chief of the African village of Ntita Kalambayi. Ask students to discuss the following questions with a partner: What do you already know about Ilunga? What is he like as a person? What more would you like to find out? What do you think his harvest will be?
 4. Ask students to notice that “Ilunga’s Harvest” has been included under the theme of *No Easy Answers* rather than under the theme of *Heroes & Friends*. Thus, ask:
 - What makes some questions in our lives so hard to answer?
 - Why, in some situations, is it difficult to know the right thing to do?
 5. *Journal Entry*: Ask students to think of a time in their lives when they faced a question that had no easy answers. Have them jot down some notes about this incident in their journal. Then ask students, as they are reading Tidwell’s story, to ask themselves: What are the questions and situations in this story that have no easy answers?
 6. Refer students to the Glossary of Terms on page 64 and ask them to read the first part of the story up to the sentence at the end of the third paragraph on page 56: “An unacknowledged, icy fear ran through both of us as we agreed that Sunday afternoon at my house to harvest his pond the next day.”
 7. Ask students to stop reading for just a moment and discuss with a partner: What is really going on here? What does Tidwell want us to understand—about the fishpond, about himself, and about Ilunga?

8. Following this discussion, ask students to read the next part of the story from page 56 to the top of page 60, ending with the sentences: “I couldn’t refuse his offer without devastating him. I took the fish up the hill, feeling like a real parasite.” Ask students what all the different emotions were that Tidwell wanted to convey in this section of the story. What do the students think was going through Ilunga’s mind as he gazed into the shallow fishpond and saw no fish? What do they think was going through Tidwell’s mind? What are the questions with no easy answers in this section of the story?
9. After a brief class discussion, ask students to finish reading the story. Remind them, as they read, to continue asking themselves: “What are the questions and situations in this story that have no easy answers?”
10. For homework, ask students to reread “Ilunga’s Harvest.” Provide each student with a copy of *Worksheet #6: “Ilunga’s Harvest” Discussion Guide* on page 137 and ask them to jot down notes next to each question as they reread the story.

Purpose:

- To have students probe the deeper meanings of “Ilunga’s Harvest.”
- To stimulate active engagement with the ideas of the story.

1. Prior to class, post five sheets of chart paper around the room, with ample space between each of the sheets. Write one question (and its number) at the top of each sheet of chart paper. Number the questions as they appear on *Carousel Brainstorming Questions, Figure One*, on the next page. Use masking tape to tape a felt-tipped pen next to each sheet of paper.
2. When the time comes for this activity, begin at the front of the room and ask students to number off from one to five. When students have their numbers, ask them to move to the paper on which their number is written.
3. Then ask students to discuss the question on their group’s sheet of chart paper for five minutes. Before the discussion begins, ask each group to select a recorder. As groups are discussing their question, the recorder’s role is to record the group’s responses on the chart paper using the felt-tipped marker.
4. Call time after five minutes. Then give the recorders time, with help from their group, to summarize in writing the group’s responses to its question.
5. Now, ask each group of students to move to the next piece of chart paper. The process repeats, with five minutes for discussion and recording, until you once again call time. Groups again move to the next sheet. The process continues until all groups have discussed and responded to all questions—and the groups

DAY TWO**Cooperative Learning
Strategy:
Carousel Brainstorming**

We suggest using this strategy with “Ilunga’s Harvest” and again with the next selection, “The Talking Goat” (pages 144–153), because we think it is a useful and active way to elicit divergent viewpoints on a story’s multiple meanings. We suggest you use the five questions from the *Discussion Guide* in *Figure One* as the basis for this activity—or any adaptations you may choose.

FIGURE ONE:
Carousel
Brainstorming
Questions

1. What is Ilunga’s crisis? What does it have to do with the fish-pond?
2. Describe Ilunga’s efforts to feed his fish and what this revealed about his character.
3. Why did Tidwell “pray like hell” that the promises he made about helping Ilunga rise out of poverty were true?
4. What made the argument Tidwell had with Ilunga such a heated and emotional one?
5. What do the incidents in “Ilunga’s Harvest” make you wonder about?

have arrived at their original question.

6. Ask groups to read the responses to their question that the other groups have written. Ask groups to select a reporter who will provide a summary of what the group thinks are the most interesting responses. At the end of all of the summaries, ask why some of these questions have no easy answers.
7. Conduct a class discussion on the remaining questions in the Discussion Guide (Worksheet #6). Try to elicit as many different responses as you can; e.g., What is important to you about this story? What questions did this story raise that have no easy answers?
8. *Journal Entry:* For homework, ask students to respond to the following prompts in their journals:
 - As I think about the carousel brainstorming activity we just completed, here are some things that I came to realize about the story’s meaning that I hadn’t thought of before:
 - Describe a time when you faced a question that had no easy answers. What was the question? What made it difficult to answer? Did you ever resolve it? If so, what helped?

Worksheet #6**'Ilunga's Harvest' Discussion Guide**

- What is Ilunga's personal crisis? What has it got to do with the fishpond?

Describe Ilunga's efforts to feed his fish and what this revealed about his character.

What do the incidents in "Ilunga's Harvest" make you wonder about?

- What is important to you about this story?

What are the main questions with no easy answers the story raises?

Why do these questions have no easy answers?



DAY THREE Purpose:

- To engage students in a closer analysis of the text.
- To have students consider how the local culture influenced the events in “Ilunga’s Harvest.”

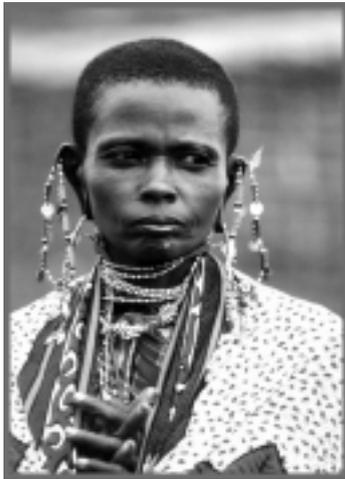
1. Tell students that sometimes, when readers really want to go deeper into the meaning of a story, they take a paragraph or part of the story that seems important and they study it in depth, really trying to think about what the author means and how it relates to life and their own thinking.
2. By way of example, say something such as the following: “There is one passage in ‘Ilunga’s Harvest’ that seems especially important to me. I’d like to share it with you and hear your thoughts on it.”

You gave away too much, Ilunga. You can’t keep doing this. You can’t feed the whole village by yourself. It’s impossible. You have to feed your own children and take care of your own immediate family. Let your brothers worry about their own families. Let them dig ponds if they want to. You’ve got to stop giving away your harvests.... Stop the giving and the community-oriented attitude, and you can escape poverty. Build a pond and make it yours. And when you harvest it, don’t give away the fish. Forget, for now, the bigger society. Forget the extended family. Start thinking of yourself.

3. Then tell students that this passage raised many questions in your mind, such as:

- Did Ilunga really give away too much?
- Can someone be too generous?
- Does generosity have a limit? If so, how do you know what the limit is?
- When is taking care of the individual more important than taking care of the group? When is taking care of the group more important than taking care of the individual? Why might the answers to these questions vary from culture to culture?
- Would it have been possible for Ilunga to “stop the giving and the community-oriented attitude ... and forget the extended family,” given the culture he was raised in?
- Did Ilunga’s brothers have a responsibility to dig their own ponds and raise their own fish?

4. Have students form groups of four to discuss these questions. Photocopy the questions and give one copy to each group. Allow groups 10 minutes



for discussion. Ask each group to select a reporter to summarize the group's thoughts for the rest of the class to hear.

5. When the summaries are complete, ask students why these are examples of questions that have no easy answers.
6. Explain that the culture in which people are raised exerts a strong influence on their behavior. For example, Ilunga's culture actually required him to share the fish. In his culture, it was the right thing to do. It was expected and normal. It was, as Tidwell phrased it, a "cultural imperative." In Ilunga's culture, taking care of the group is a value that takes precedence over taking care of oneself. In Ilunga's culture, people survive by taking care of one another.
7. Ask students in what ways the culture of the United States differs from the culture of Kalambayi. Which words and phrases that Tidwell used in explaining the argument he had with Ilunga over the fish were an example of a cultural value that was ingrained in him, having been raised in the United States?
8. Ask students to discuss these questions in their groups. Then ask for an example of the words Tidwell used that demonstrated the difference between his culture and Ilunga's. Undoubtedly students will cite this example: "Build a pond and make it yours. And when you harvest it, don't give away the fish. Forget, for now, the bigger society. Forget the extended family. Start thinking of yourself." Encourage students to come up with other examples from the text that demonstrate how Tidwell's culture influenced the way he saw the world, himself, and others.
9. Then ask groups to discuss why they think Tidwell became so angry when Ilunga began giving his fish away that he said, "Fury and frustration crashed through me with the force of a booming waterfall." What caused this intense reaction?
10. Finally, ask students whether we in the United States take care of our own relatives and friends as well as Ilunga took care of the people in his village. Why or why not? Which way is better? Does this question have an easy answer? Why or why not?
11. *Role-Playing Option:* If time permits, this would be an excellent place to stop the discussion and ask groups to prepare to role-play in the next class. Students should plan to take roles in the argument that took place between Tidwell and Ilunga on page 58 that begins with the words: "After Ilunga's sister left for the market, I couldn't hold my tongue any longer. We were alone at his house." Using this option, give the groups of four

Note to Teachers:

Cultural anthropologists might classify Ilunga's culture as a "collectivist" culture. They might classify the culture of the United States as a more "individualistic" culture. For information on individualistic and collectivist cultures, see pages 29–36 of the Peace Corps cross-cultural training manual *Culture Matters: Fundamentals of Culture 1: The Concept of Self*. You can find the full text of this manual on the Coverdell World Wise Schools website: www.peacecorps.gov/wws/culturematters.

some time at the end of this class and the beginning of the next one to prepare for the role-playing.

12. *Journal Entry*: Conclude today's lesson by saying to students that, just as you selected a passage from the text that had particular meaning for you, you'd like them, for homework, to go back through the text and select a passage that has particular meaning for them. Ask them to summarize the passage in their Reading Response Journals and write about what it means to them. Have them jot down any questions the passage may raise in their minds. Tell them that you will ask them to share their selections in class the next day and suggest that their ideas might help others in the class learn something from the story that they might have missed.

DAY FOUR Purpose:

- To have students examine the impact of the events in “Ilunga’s Harvest” on the author, on Ilunga, and on the people of Kalambayi.
 - To have students develop an extended response to literature.
1. *Journal Walk*: This is a strategy you can use to help students think more deeply about other portions of the story. Ask students to open their Reading Journals to the pages on which they wrote down a passage from the text and described why it seemed important to them. Then ask them to circulate silently around the room reading various journal responses of others, thinking about the passages others have selected and reflecting on how they might add to their own responses, based on what they've read. (Note: If some students prefer to keep their writing private, provide them the option of turning their journals facedown.)
 2. Provide 5 to 10 minutes for this activity. Then have students return to their seats. Give them time to add to their own journal responses based on what they've read in their classmates' responses.
 3. Now read students the passage in the worksheet on the Congo River Basin (page 87) in which Tidwell remarks:

On the way to the center of the continent, one passes through ever-tightening circles of poverty until, inside the final, smallest ring, one finds

Kalambayi: a 400-square-mile patch of simple mud huts and barefoot people.... There are few places in the world where the people are as poor and the life as traditional.... For two years, I lived among the Kalambayan people. I spoke their language and taught many of them how to raise fish. My goal was to increase family protein consumption. But what I gave these people in the form of development advice, they returned tenfold in lessons on what it means to be human. There, at the center of the continent, they shared with me the ancient spirit of Africa's heart.

4. Ask students what lessons Tidwell learned on “what it means to be human” from the people of Kalambayi. Ask students first to discuss this question with a partner, and then have partners join another group of partners, forming a group of four. Then ask the groups of four to discuss what Tidwell meant when he said: “They shared with me the ancient spirit of Africa’s heart.”

5. *Journal Entry:* Ask students to return to their seats. Then conduct a class discussion about the lessons Tidwell learned from his Peace Corps service in Kalambayi. Conclude the discussion by asking:
 - What mark did Tidwell’s Peace Corps service leave on the people of the chiefdom of Kalambayi and on Ilunga?
 - What mark did the people of Kalambayi and Ilunga leave on the author?
 - How was each changed by encounters with the other?
 - Did each leave the other with questions that have no easy answers?
 - If so, what were they?

6. Conclude the lesson by asking students to respond in their journals to the prompt: What mark do you hope to have on others?

7. *Extended Response to Literature:* Provide students the opportunity to select from one of the following options for an extended written response to “Ilunga’s Harvest”:
 - Interview someone from another culture. First summarize the events in “Ilunga’s Harvest” and then ask what that person would

have done in Ilunga's situation. Write up an account of your interview in the form of a newspaper article to be submitted for publication in the school newspaper.

- Working in groups of four, develop a script for a dramatization of the main events in "Ilunga's Harvest." Perform this dramatization for a class of younger students. Each person in the group should be able to provide a summary of the background of the story and explain the story's significance. After the dramatization, ask the younger students: What would you have done in Ilunga's situation?
- Write a paper describing Tidwell and Ilunga's friendship and how it developed, from the events Tidwell described in "I Had a Hero" to the events he described in "Ilunga's Harvest." Describe the challenges their friendship faced. Explain their growing mutual respect. Describe the mark each left on the other and how their friendship may have changed each of them forever.
- Write a position paper in which you take a controversial issue of your choice from "Ilunga's Harvest" and develop a written argument for or against the position. An example of a controversial issue might be: "Was Ilunga right in giving away his fish?"
- Write a letter to Ilunga describing the impact he had on you. What mark has he left on you? Use examples from "I Had a Hero" as well as from "Ilunga's Harvest." How have you changed as a result of getting to know Ilunga?
- Write a letter to Tidwell describing what you learned about him as an author and a person. Describe the way his writing in "I Had a Hero" and "Ilunga's Harvest" affected you personally.

