

TIME KNEELS BETWEEN MOUNTAINS
Amra Pajalić

Teacher Resource Kit



Title: Time Kneels Between Mountains
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Recommended: Upper Secondary – Year 10 to VCE

Resource kit contains:

- Praise
- Synopsis
- Author statement
- Author information
- Curriculum-Aligned Chapter Questions —Australian Curriculum (Years 9–10) – Key Outcomes
- VCE English/EAL Units 1 & 2 – Applicable Key Skills
- Pre-Reading Activities
- Theme Analysis Activities
- Reading Activities by Chapter
- Discussion / Extended Response Questions
- Essay Format Questions
- Glossary of Key Terms
- Writing, research, debate, and drama activities



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Praise

["Devastating descriptions of the gory consequences of war are the standout scenes here. Still, Seka experiences moments of beauty and joy, all lushly described An assiduously researched, clear-eyed depiction of genocide"](#) Kirkus Review.

“Thrilling Balkan war murder mystery, ‘Time Kneels Between Mountains’” Good Reading Magazine

“The plot is taut and well-paced, and the relationships—especially between Seka and Ramo—add warmth and emotional depth... Fiction like this ensures we do not forget what happened in Srebrenica, and that matters deeply. Pajalić doesn’t offer comfort or easy answers, but she offers something more important: truth through storytelling.” Netgalley reviewer

Synopsis

Set in 1992 during the siege of Srebrenica, *Time Kneels Between Mountains* is a powerful young adult historical novel blending fact and fiction. Through the eyes of teenage protagonist Seka Torlak, we experience life under siege — starvation, shelling, and survival. As her family and friends fight for their lives, Seka also wrestles with questions of identity, love, trauma, and memory. Both a gripping wartime narrative and a moving coming-of-age story, this book challenges readers to consider the impact of war and the cost of complicity.

Author Information

Amra Pajalić is an award-winning Australian-Bosnian author, editor, and teacher. Her writing explores identity, migration, and memory, often drawing on her own cultural heritage and lived experiences. She is the author of *The Good Daughter* (re-released as *Sabiha’s Dilemma*), *Things Nobody Knows But Me*, and co-editor of *Growing up Muslim in Australia*. She is the author of the young adult *Sassy Saints* series and the forthcoming *Seka Torlak* historical-mystery series, beginning with *Time Kneels Between Mountains* and companion essay collection that examine the legacy of the 1995 Srebrenica genocide. *Time Kneels Between Mountains* was developed as part of her PhD in Creative Writing.

Author Statement

I wrote this novel to give voice to a history that was silenced for too long. The Bosnian War, and particularly the Srebrenica genocide, is a part of my heritage, and I wanted to honour that

memory through fiction. Through *Seka*, I explore the strength of young people who resist erasure, who document the unspeakable, and who fight to survive, not only physically but spiritually. This novel is for every reader who wants to understand how war reshapes the personal, and how storytelling keeps memory alive.

Curriculum-Aligned Chapter Questions — Australian Curriculum (Years 9–10) – Key Outcomes

Code	Focus Area	Description
ACELT1635	Literature – Expressing preferences and evaluating texts	Reflect on, discuss and explore notions of literary value and how and why such notions vary according to context (ACELT1634) Explore and reflect on personal understanding of the world and significant human experience gained from interpreting various representations of life matters in texts.
ACELT1773	Literature – Creating literary texts	Create literary texts, including hybrid texts, that innovate on aspects of other texts, for example by using parody, allusion and appropriation
ACELT1633	Literature –How texts reflect the context of culture and situation in which they are created	Evaluate the social, moral and ethical positions represented in texts.
ACELT1771	Literacy – Personal responses to the ideas, characters and viewpoints in texts	Present an argument about a literary text based on initial impressions and subsequent analysis of the whole text
ACELY1742	Literacy – Purpose and audience	Interpret, analyse and evaluate how different perspectives of issue, event, situation, individuals or groups are constructed to serve specific purposes in texts

VCE English/EAL Units 1 & 2 – Applicable Key Skills

- Identify and analyse features of a text such as voice, structure, and perspective.
- Respond critically and creatively to texts.
- Construct a coherent interpretation of themes, characters, and narrative purpose.

Pre-Reading Activities

1. Discuss the difference between history and memory. Can fiction help us understand historical events better than non-fiction?
2. Research: Where is Srebrenica? What happened there in 1995? Create a short timeline of key events leading up to and during the Bosnian War.
3. Define and explore the term “genocide.” What other historical genocides have occurred, and how do we remember them?
4. Reflect on the power of personal stories in war. Why might a young person’s perspective be important in understanding conflict?
5. In small groups, discuss what it means to be a witness. How do people bear witness to history?

Theme Analysis Activities

- **Identity and Displacement:** Seka starts the novel with a pretty straightforward sense of self: a Muslim Bosnian teenager whose biggest worries revolve around friendships, crushes, and the normal dramas of girlhood. As the war closes in, that identity is ripped open. She’s no longer *just* Bosnian—suddenly she is a target, a witness, a survivor, a girl living inside a shrinking world where who you are dictates whether you live or die. Chart how Seka’s understanding of her identity evolves throughout the novel.
- **Witness and Memory:** In the novel Seka writes to her best friend Zora about what is happening as a way of ensuring that they are able to maintain their friendship despite the distance and time that might separate them. This notebook first begins just as a diary to Zora and then becomes a record of the memory of her story of survival. Highlight instances where Seka writes in her notebook. Chart how this notebook functions as a witness and in memorialising the siege.
- **Coming of Age in War:** As a teenager in a war zone Seka faces adult pressures long before she’s ready—risking her safety in a relationship with Ramo, investigating corruption despite life-threatening consequences, and giving up her own food so younger relatives can survive. Which key decisions reveal her growing maturity, and how does the war environment accelerate her transition from adolescence to adulthood?
- **Gender and Resistance:** The novel highlights how the women and girls of Srebrenica become the backbone of survival and moral courage during the siege. They shoulder multiple, often invisible burdens—protesting for peace, carrying pregnancies through starvation and shelling, enduring physical and emotional exhaustion, and acting as frontline caregivers for families and entire communities. Their resistance isn’t just public; it’s deeply personal. Through characters like Seka—who challenges corruption, protects the vulnerable, and insists on truth in a world collapsing into chaos—the novel shows how women resist not only through protest, but through persistence, moral clarity, and the daily labour that keeps their families alive. How does the novel portray the women of Srebrenica—through protest, caregiving, pregnancy, and moral resistance—as central forces of survival and defiance, and in what ways does Seka’s own actions reflect this broader pattern of gendered resistance?

- **Truth, Lies, and Propaganda:** The novel explores how truth becomes contested territory during the siege of Srebrenica, where rumours, misinformation, and deliberate manipulation shape how people understand their own reality. Through the presence of journalist Alyssa Jones, the story examines the complicated role of the media—its power to bear witness, but also its limits, distortions, and the political pressures that influence which stories are told and which are ignored. At the same time, Seka's private notebook offers a counter-narrative: an unfiltered, ground-level account that resists the propaganda circulating both inside and outside the enclave. Together, these elements reveal how truth is constructed, obscured, and fought for in a time when survival depends as much on information as on food or shelter. In what ways does the novel contrast official or external narratives—such as those shaped by journalists and political agendas—with Seka's personal record of events, and how does this tension highlight the fragility and importance of truth during the siege?
- **Justice, Trauma, and Complicity:** The novel directly states that it blends factual history with fictional storytelling to explore these themes. The protagonist, Seka Torlak, actively "fights for justice, retribution and truth", especially in response to desperately needed antibiotics and food disappearing and being sold on the black market. How does Seka's pursuit of justice force her to confront not only enemy violence but also the moral failures within her own community, and what does this reveal about complicity in systems of survival during wartime?
- **War, Survival, and Resilience:** The narrative delves into the human cost of war and the resilience of those who endure it. Seka's life is "up-ended as Srebrenica... falls under siege and she faces starvation, shelling, and sniper attacks". Despite the devastation, characters demonstrate a will to survive. The author's personal dedication notes that the book is shaped by years of research and a passion for shedding light on untold histories, honouring the courage of survivors. In what ways does the novel suggest that resilience is both a physical and moral struggle, and how does the community's determination to endure complicate our understanding of what it means to "survive" a genocide?
- **Identity and Belonging:** The author, Amra Pajalic, often explores themes of "identity, belonging, and resilience" in her works, drawing from her Bosnian background. This is evident in Seka's journey, as she grapples with her Muslim identity versus being Bosnian. How does Seka's internal conflict between her Muslim identity and her broader Bosnian identity reflect the larger fragmentation of Yugoslavia, and what does this tension reveal about how war reshapes cultural belonging?
- **Loss, Fear, and Harsh Realities of War:** The story portrays Seka navigating "loss, fear, and the harsh realities of war". The brutal impact of conflict is a central element, showcasing the daily struggles and tragedies faced by the inhabitants of Srebrenica. How does the narrative use everyday moments of fear, hunger, and dislocation to illustrate the cumulative psychological erosion of a besieged population, and in what ways does Seka's experience mirror the collective trauma of Srebrenica?
- **Love and Relationships:** Amidst the devastation, Seka finds hope as her relationship with Ramo blossoms from friendship to love. The narrative also touches on the complexities of friendship tested by prejudice and the forces tearing their town apart, as seen in Seka's relationship with Zora. How do Seka's relationships with Ramo and Zora function as emotional lifelines, and how does the pressure of war expose the limits, strengths, and fragilities of these bonds?

Reading Activities by Chapter

Chapter 1: Enemy (pp. 3-20)

1. Where is Seka heading with Mama and Edina at the beginning of the chapter, and what is her initial feeling about it? (1)
2. Why does Seka's initial excitement "fade as terror took over" when she sees the town centre? (4)
3. What does Babo's reaction to the "profiteers" selling UN ration bags reveal about the moral climate during the war? (6)
4. What is the general condition of the houses and streets as Seka walks closer to town? (2)
5. What happened when Babo tried to buy eggs at the black market, and what price was requested for one egg? (7)
6. Who is Belma, and what significant personal news does she share with Seka? (9)
7. How did Ramo and his mother, Edina, come to live with Seka's family? (9-10)
8. What was Seka's initial reaction to Ramo when they first met, and why did she feel that way? (10)
9. How does Belma's perspective on Ramo's hatred towards Serbs differ from Seka's, and what does this suggest about the impact of personal loss on prejudice? (10)
10. What happened to Ramo's father and two older brothers? (10)
11. What is the state of the school Seka and Ramo visit, and what caused its destruction? (13)
12. What does Seka's realisation that she wants "to be an ordinary schoolgirl and have a regular, mundane day" imply about the profound changes the war has brought to her life? (14)
13. What do Seka and Ramo do inside the destroyed school? (14-15)
14. What does Ramo's statement, "You have a good heart...I hope that this war doesn't take that away from you," suggest about his own experiences and his view of Seka? (16)
15. Who is Kamila, and what is her relationship with Seka by the end of their interaction in this chapter? (17)
16. What is the significance of Seka's internal monologue about "thinking about those still here, rather than longing for those left behind" after her encounter with Kamila? (19)

Chapter 2: Fracture (pp. 21-35)

1. What happened immediately after Seka heard a whistle and the world exploded in the street? (20)
2. What injuries did Mama and Edina sustain during the shelling? (21)
3. What does Mama's insistence on helping the wounded woman, despite the immediate danger, reveal about her character? (21)
4. How does Ramo protect Seka and Edina during the second explosion? (22)
5. What was the ultimate fate of the legless woman Mama tried to help? (22)
6. What did Seka write to Zora in her notebook about Ramo, and what did she realise about her previous judgment of him? (24)
7. What names does Ramo mention as his lost brothers, and what personal detail does he share about Orhan? (25)
8. How does Ramo's detailed recounting of his family's fate, and his subsequent statement "That's why I hate them," impact Seka's perspective on Serbs? (26)

9. What type of plane do Seka and Ramo observe circling the town, and what unusual feature does Emir point out on it? (27)
10. What is the symbolic significance of the "mosquito" planes and the pilot's "red Nike cap"? (27)
11. Where does Seka's family take shelter during the heavy bombing that follows the plane's appearance? (28)
12. What health issues is Nana struggling with, as mentioned by Mama during the phone call to Mustafa? (29)
13. How do Seka and Ramo obtain cigarettes from a UN soldier near the convoy? (31)
14. How do the reactions of the journalists to the shelling differ from Seka and Ramo's, and what does this highlight about their respective experiences of war? (33)
15. What does the behaviour of the Bosniak soldiers, forming a cordon around the convoy and preventing civilians from taking food, suggest about authority and order in wartime? (33)

Chapter 3: Witness (pp. 36-46)

1. Why does Seka go to the warehouse alone after the convoy incident, despite Ramo's offer to accompany her? (36)
2. How does Seka secure a job translating for Alyssa Jones, and what is her primary motivation for taking the job? (37)
3. What specific, horrific medical procedure does Seka witness in the hospital? (39)
4. What does Seka's immediate focus on earning money, despite the distressing circumstances of the hospital, reveal about her current priorities and the desperation of her situation? (39)
5. What substance is used for sterilisation in the hospital, and where is it sourced from? (40)
6. How do the doctor's and Alyssa's seemingly detached approaches to the amputation differ from Seka's emotional reaction, and what does this illustrate about coping with trauma? (40)
7. What is Alyssa's stated reason for filming the hospital conditions and exposing the story? (41)
8. What happens to the bodies of patients who die in the hospital, according to the doctor? (43)
9. What does the doctor's suspicion that "Serbs are using chemical weapons" suggest about the evolving nature and brutality of the conflict? (43)
10. What request does Seka make of Alyssa regarding Zora? (44)
11. What is Kamila doing at the hospital when Seka encounters her, and what explanation does she give? (44)
12. What specific food items do Seka's family receive as rations the day after Seka earns money? (46)
13. What does the detail about "half-kilogram packs of feta cheese to share between four" and Mama dividing it into eight portions, reveal about the severity of food scarcity? (46)

Chapter 4: Ravenous (pp. 47-66)

1. What is the overall condition of Srebrenica in September 1992, particularly regarding food and humanitarian aid? (47-48)
2. What specific food item does Kamila's family possess that Seka's family is clearly lacking? (48)
3. What does Kamila's refusal to share the *tirit* pita, despite her family's apparent abundance, suggest about the impact of war on hospitality and individual morality? (48)
4. What do Seka's parents plan to do to obtain food from the surrounding villages? (49)
5. Why does Emir want Seka to learn the way to the villages for food? (49)
6. How does the detail about using "ground hazel-bush" for bread highlight the extreme levels of deprivation in the enclave? (50)
7. What book does Seka read to escape the reality of her hometown? (50)
8. What does Seka's internal comparison of Srebrenica to a "death camp," despite the absence of barbed wire and guards, imply about the psychological experience of being trapped? (50)
9. What rumour is circulating among the townspeople about Naser Orić's plan? (51)
10. How do the villagers in the Drina Valley react to Seka's family's attempts to trade jewellery for food? (52)
11. What does the armed villagers' demand for payment for corn, and their sons carrying rifles, suggest about the relationships and power dynamics between Srebrenica residents and those in the surrounding villages? (53)
12. What is the significance of Seka and Ramo's kiss and their discussion about not making it back before their dangerous foraging trip? (56)
13. What is the common method of making cigarettes in Srebrenica during this time? (56)
14. What does Seka record in her notebook about the dangerous trip for food? (57)
15. What do Seka and Ramo find and consume in the basement of an abandoned house in the village? (60)
16. Why does Ibrahim tell them to leave him behind? What does this suggest about his understanding of their situation and his role within the family? (61)
17. Why might the family cling to the hope that the father and uncle will appear, even when logic says the odds are against it? (62)
18. The stranger who helps the father and uncle barely speaks. What might his silence tell us about what he's witnessed or endured? (62)
19. How does the description of the hospital — the reused bandages, the stench, the screams — hint at the broader collapse of infrastructure in Srebrenica? (63)
20. Why does the guard push away the starving villagers so harshly? What might be motivating him beyond simple cruelty? (64)
21. What does the contrast between Seka's previous hospital visit (Zora's mother giving birth) and the current one reveal about how war transforms everyday spaces? (64)
22. Why does the chapter end on Ramo's line about survival being dependent "on surviving the night"? What mood or thematic weight does this add? (66)

Chapter 5: Battleground (pp. 67-85)

1. What daily ritual does Dido perform for Nana each morning? (67)
2. How does Seka's family manage to keep warm during the winter, including finding firewood? (67)
3. What does Dido's ritual of kissing Nana every time he leaves, and his desire for her to "remember their goodbye in case it was the last time," imply about their relationship and the pervasive fear of loss? (67)
4. What physical changes are observed in Babo and Emir after their time on the front lines? (68)
5. What is Mama's reason for deciding to go to the front lines? (68)
6. What does the "Dickensian" description of Srebrenica, despite being set in a different country and century, imply about the universality of poverty and suffering? (70)
7. What specific health condition is Nana suffering from, and what is its historical nickname for the people of Srebrenica? (74)
8. How does the Serbs' intentional withholding of salt, exacerbating the goitre problem, reveal their deliberate use of deprivation as a weapon? (74)
9. What does Nana immediately suspect when Seka reveals she hasn't had her period in months, and why? (75)
10. 8. Why does Seka want to follow Uncle Ibrahim to the front, and what is Dido's main objection? (76)
11. What change does Seka observe in Mama's demeanour and ability to handle distressing situations after she starts helping at the front? (77)
12. What has Seka observed about Emir's transformation in his time on the front? (78)
13. What does Seka's missed period and Mama's explanation about "lack of food" highlight about the severe physiological toll the war is taking on the women of Srebrenica? (78)
14. Why do Emir and Harun talk about Naser with such devotion, even naming their children after him? What does this say about their need for a hero figure? (80-81)
15. Babo's comment—"He is just a man, and he is as corrupt as any man"—clashes with the camp's idolisation. What does this reveal about the competing narratives inside the enclave? (81)
16. What does the Serb boy story suggest about Babo's values, and why might he be clinging to this memory so tightly? (82-83)
17. Emir's reaction—anger, kicking the fire, walking away—after discussing mutilated corpses shows a shift in him. What might this reveal about trauma wearing away his moral compass? (83)
18. Mama says she kept her boots on for two months so she was "ready to run at a moment's notice." What does this reveal about the constant level of threat in the enclave? (84)
19. What might Mama's emaciated body reveal about her choices regarding food, sacrifice, and motherhood during the siege? (84)
20. How does Seka's fear of "turning into someone unrecognisable" hint at her struggle to maintain her identity in a world shaped by violence? (84)

Chapter 6: Parachute (pp. 86-101)

1. What type of planes deliver aid packets to Srebrenica in March 1993, and how are the drops organised? (86)
2. What items are the men hoping for in the food drops, and what do they primarily receive? (87)
3. What does Ramo's preference for "flour and beans" over chocolate reveal about his deep-seated understanding of survival priorities in contrast to Seka's initial excitement? (87)
4. What peace plan is being discussed by the men on the hillside, and what is Dido's opinion on its success? (88)
5. What does Dido's cynical view of European intervention, arguing they "don't care" and prefer "a cross worshipper than a Muslim," suggest about the community's dwindling trust in the international community? (88)
6. What tragic incident occurred during one of the food drops, involving a 15-year-old boy? (91)
7. Who is Derviš, and what happens to him during the food drop, and who is blamed for it? (93)
8. What does Seka and Ramo do after their initial attempt to report the murder to the army headquarters fails? (95)
9. How does the incident with Derviš's death, and the subsequent vigilante justice, illustrate the complete breakdown of formal law and order in the enclave? (96)
10. What conditions does Dr. Tonel encounter at the schoolhouse where refugees are sheltering, particularly regarding scabies? (97)
11. What does the description of the schoolhouse being "filled with desks pushed together, topped with blankets and clothes" imply about the overwhelming number of displaced people and the lack of proper shelter? (97)
12. What is the physical condition of the schoolhouse and its facilities, particularly the toilets, after being taken over by refugees? (97)
13. What does the description of the schoolhouse being "filthy" and having "toilets...backed up" imply about the overwhelming challenges faced by the refugees in maintaining basic hygiene and dignity? (97)
14. What specific health condition is prevalent among the children in the schoolhouse, and how is it diagnosed and treated by Dr. Tonel? (98)
15. How does Seka's growing understanding of the missing medication connect to the broader theme of corruption she is investigating? (100)
16. What startling discovery does Seka make about the hospital's medication supply at the end of her day translating? (100)
17. What is Ramo's initial reaction to the missing medications, and what does he believe happened to them? (100)
18. What is the deeper implication of Seka's realisation that "corrupt bastards took them [medications] to sell on the black market" and that "they could, and they did"? (101)

Chapter 7: Promise (pp. 102-113)

1. Why does Seka's reaction to touching the Canadian soldier's uniform suggest she is emotionally traumatised by the siege? (103)
2. What does Ramo's confidence in identifying APCs and speaking with soldiers suggest about his coping mechanisms during the war? (102)
3. Why does the sight of refugees cooking a cow's leg in the street hint at the level of desperation in Srebrenica? (104)

4. What is the general atmosphere in Srebrenica after General Morillon's arrival in March 1993? (104)
5. Why does Seka feel hopeful after seeing Morillon, even though the conditions around her haven't changed? (105)
6. How do the citizens prevent General Morillon from leaving and why? (106)
7. How does the quiet, orderly protest by women and children communicate more power than violence would? (107)
8. What does the intensity of the women's protest say about their understanding of the danger posed by Serb forces? (110)
9. What does the contrast between the M&Ms and the harsh realities of life in Srebrenica reveal about the emotional state of the crowd? (111)
10. Why does Belma refuse to go home even though she is exhausted and needs to breastfeed her baby? (111)
11. How does Seka's concern about her dirty clothes during the journalists' arrival reflect her growing understanding of how refugees are perceived? (112)
12. Why is the crowd's reaction to Morillon's announcement so immediate and intense, even though his aides openly express doubt? (113)
13. What might the aides' mocking laughter foreshadow about the UN's future actions in Srebrenica? (113)
14. What promise does General Morillon make and how does Seka feel about his promise? (113)
15. Why does Ramo insist Morillon will keep his promise even though he clearly doubts it? (113)
16. What does Seka's hesitation at the end reveal about her changing perception of authority and adult assurances? (113)

Chapter 8: Annihilation (114-131)

1. What community event takes place at the school playground, and who participates? (114)
2. What does the rapid shift from a celebratory "feeling of calm" to "screams rent the air" suggest about the false sense of security provided by the "safe area" designation? (114-117)
3. What is Kamila's reaction to Emir during the soccer game? (115)
4. What happens when the first shell lands in the middle of the playground? (117)
5. How does Seka's initial internal reaction to Minka's dismembered body ("like a perfect doll's hand") reflect the dissociative and psychological impact of extreme trauma? (118)
6. What does Emir's catatonic state and inability to respond reveal about the non-physical, psychological wounds inflicted by the war? (120)
7. What is Ibrahim's reaction to Minka's death, and what action does he take? (121)
8. Why does Mama insist on taking Seka back to the playground to retrieve Minka's body? (123)
9. How does Mama's argument with Babo about retrieving Minka's body ("Which horror is better?") highlight the impossible moral dilemmas faced by parents in wartime? (123)
10. What do Seka and Mama encounter at the playground when they go to retrieve Minka's body? (124)
11. How does Seka manage to obtain extra loaves of bread at the department store? (125)

12. What does Seka's aggressive behaviour to secure extra bread, and her subsequent internal struggle about hiding it from her family, reveal about the extreme survival instinct overriding normal morality during severe deprivation? (125)
13. How does Emir react to the shelling at the playground, and what is his physical state after the attack? (129)

Chapter 9: Resolution (132-146)

1. What task were Ramo and Seka doing when they went to the hospital at the start of the chapter? (132)
2. Why do you think stronger patients pushed the sicker ones out of the beds? What does this reveal about survival in wartime? (132)
3. What did the doctor tell Mama about the hospital evacuation? (132)
4. Who was Officer Johnson, and what did he do to help Aunt Adna? How does the portrayal of the UN (Johnson's kindness vs institutional failure) complicate the idea of "international protection"? (133)
5. What does the explosion during the evacuation symbolise in the larger context of the war? (133)
6. How does Mama's insistence on staying with Aunt Adna show her character and values? (133)
7. How did Mama ensure Aunt Adna would be easily recognised during the evacuation? (134)
8. What happened at the soccer field when the UN tried to evacuate patients? (134)
9. How did Aunt Adna die? 135
10. How does the UN's decision to call off the evacuation reflect the international community's failure? (135)
11. What did the radio announcer say about the "playground massacre"? (138)
12. What does the radio broadcast about the "retaliation" reveal about propaganda and misinformation during the war? (138)
13. Why was Seka angry about the UN's version of events? (138)
14. Why does Ramo's gesture of comfort lead to intimacy between him and Seka? What are they each searching for in that moment? What does Seka's maturing relationship with Ramo suggest about how trauma accelerates adolescence? (139)
15. What might Edina's reaction tell us about the role of women and social reputation during war? (139)
16. How did Nana comfort Seka after Adna's death? (140)
17. What did the family do when shelling started again later that night? (141)
18. What resolution was the UN debating? (141)
19. How did the family react when they learned the UN had declared Srebrenica a "Safe Zone"? (145)
20. Why does Seka write to Zora at the end of the chapter? What does the letter represent emotionally and symbolically? (145)
21. How does the recurring motif of dreams (Adna, Minka, Paša) reflect Seka's trauma and grief? (137)
22. What does the UN "Safe Zone" announcement mean for Seka's family — and what dramatic irony is present in that ending? (145-146)

Chapter 10: Termination (152-169)

1. What does Mama discover Seka and Ramo doing at the back of the house, and what is her immediate reaction? (153)
2. What does Mama's reaction to Seka and Ramo's intimacy, and her fear of Babo's response, suggest about the traditional family values and gender roles even amidst wartime chaos? (153)
3. Why does Seka say they can't be together anymore? (156)
4. What does Mama's warning to Seka that she "might be a widow longer than you're a bride" if she gets pregnant, suggest about the fragility and vulnerability of relationships in the war-torn environment? (155)
5. How does Seka's passionate outburst about the dangers of pregnancy in wartime ("You're not the one who would be pregnant...") reveal the profound and often unequal burden of war on women? (156)
6. Where is Dr. Harun Hodžić practicing, and what is his professional relationship to Kamila? (157)
7. What common health issue is observed among many women in the waiting room at Dr. Harun's clinic, including Mama and Belma? (158)
8. What is the result of Mama's pregnancy test? (158)
9. What is the initial cost of the abortion procedure, and how is it reduced for Mama? (159)
10. What did Mama tell Seka about contraception before the war, and why is it no longer available? (160)
11. What does Mama's decision to have an abortion, despite the implicit moral considerations, reveal about the extreme desperation and impossible choices faced by women in wartime? (160)
12. Mama says the procedure will be done "live." How does her calm acceptance of this reality hint at the level of suffering she has already normalised? (162)
13. Why does Mama want to walk home rather than wait or rest at the clinic, despite being in extreme pain? (162)
14. Why is Ramo's first instinct to offer the only item he has from his father — the watch — even though it clearly devastates him to consider losing it? (164)
15. What does Seka's reaction ("You can't sell it") suggest about her values compared to Ramo's? How do their priorities clash in this moment? (164)
16. Why does Seka decide to lie to Kamila and pressure her into stealing antibiotics? What does this show about how war erodes ethical boundaries? (167)
17. Kamila says the act would be "unethical," yet she does it anyway. What inner conflict is she wrestling with, and what finally pushes her over the line? (167)
18. Why does Seka lie again to her father by claiming Ramo sold his watch? What consequences is she trying to avoid, and what does this reveal about her loyalty? (168)
19. Seka's kiss with Ramo is described as desperate. How has her mother's near-death experience reshaped Seka's emotional attachment to Ramo? (169)
20. Why does Ramo pull away and refuse to continue their relationship, even though he clearly wants to be with her? What danger is he responding to? (169)
21. How does the final image — Seka wiping tears and slipping quietly back into the house — capture the tension between love and fear in a war zone? (169)

Chapter 11: Corruption (171-190)

1. What does Seka rereading *Pride and Prejudice* for the fifth time suggest about her emotional state and her need for stability? (170)
2. Why does Alyssa's arrival feel so significant to Seka, beyond just seeing a familiar face? What does Alyssa represent to her? (171)
3. Why does Mama react so strongly to receiving coffee and sugar, and what does this reveal about the level of deprivation in Srebrenica? (171)
4. What does Seka's "supermodels have to work for this figure" joke tell you about how she uses humour to cope with hunger and trauma? (171)
5. Why does Kamila rush off to brush her hair and put on makeup before Alyssa takes photos, and what does this suggest about how the survivors want to be seen by the outside world? (173)
6. Why is Lebiba so adamant that the corruption not be mentioned in Alyssa's article, even though she knows it is harming people? What fear or calculation is driving her? (173)
7. Alyssa admits she knows about the corruption but won't write about it. What does this reveal about the limits of foreign journalists and the power they actually have (or don't have)? (174)
8. Why does the idea of writing an anonymous exposé excite Seka so much, even though she knows it's dangerous? What need or longing is that tapping into? (174)
9. What does the story about Bram and the letter for Ibrahim show about why Seka both trusts and distrusts peacekeepers and foreigners? (175)
10. When Seka reads Zora's letter and feels both happiness and rage, what does this mixture of emotions show about survivor's guilt and resentment? (178)
11. Why does Seka decide she won't read Zora's letter again while she's still in Srebrenica? What does that decision reveal about how she manages her pain and hope? (178)
12. What does the scene with the councillor's girlfriend in tight jeans and brand-new boots tell you about class divisions and corruption inside the enclave? (179)
13. Why is the man's anger about his worn-out shoes more than just frustration about footwear? What bigger injustice is he reacting to? (179)
14. Why do Ramo, Emir, and Bilal pour so much effort into their overblown, thesaurus-heavy newspaper, even though hardly anyone can understand the vocabulary? What are they really trying to prove or hold onto? (182)
15. How does the President's exaggeration about epidemics backfiring with the UN illustrate the consequences of desperation and lying under siege? (183)
16. What does Seka's diary entry to Zora ("plodding routine of forgettable days and constant *deja vu*") suggest about how war distorts time and memory for her? (184)
17. Why does Seka feel the need to disguise herself in *dimije* and a *šamija* when she goes to interview Kerim? What does that tell you about gender, class, and safety in this setting? 187
18. What does the speed and brutality of Kerim's murder suggest about who is threatened by his activism and how far they are willing to go to keep power? (188)
19. Why is the detail that Kerim's eyes meet Seka's as he dies so important for understanding her psychological state afterwards? (188)
20. Why does Ramo following Seka out of jealousy end up saving her from being completely alone in the aftermath of the murder? What does this tell you about the complexity of their relationship? (189)
21. When Ramo begs Seka to "stop this madness," what does that show about the tension between survival and resistance in their world? (190)

22. At the end, Seka thinks, "That's how you kill a movement. You kill the man with the idea." What does this line reveal about her understanding of power, fear, and political violence? (190)

Chapter 12: Recreation (191-213)

1. Who is Bilal, and what musical instrument does he bring to the Cultural Centre? (191)
2. How does Emir react to Bilal's attempts to use English names for him and others? (191)
3. What is the main purpose of the "Srebrenica Proclamation" newspaper, and who are its creators? (191)
4. How does the youth's engagement in music and newspaper creation, despite the harsh realities of war, serve as a coping mechanism and a form of maintaining normalcy? (191)
5. What is Seka's initial reaction to the article about corruption in the newspaper, and why does her nervousness fade? (191)
6. What new subject has been added to the school curriculum, and what is Seka's personal experience with it, including her interaction with the Imam? (194)
7. What does Seka's discomfort and eventual conflict with the Imam over religious education, despite the wartime context, reveal about her personal values and identity? (194)
8. What specific issue does Belma discuss with Seka regarding contraception and her married life? (195)
9. How does Belma's discussion about the withdrawal method and her desire for children "not like this" highlight the unique and often tragic challenges faced by young women trying to build families in the enclave? (195)
10. How do Seka and Ramo pay for entry into the cinema? (210)
11. What does Ramo's marriage proposal and the exchange of "infinity rings" symbolise about their enduring love and hope for a future, even as they acknowledge the omnipresent threat of death? (212)
12. What does Ramo give Seka for her birthday, and what does he say it symbolises? 212
13. What is Seka and Ramo's shared dream for their future together, particularly regarding their location and professions? (212)
14. What names do Seka and Ramo consider for their future children, and what is their approach to choosing them? (212)

Chapter 13: Deprivation (214-235)

1. Where do Seka and Ramo, along with Emir and Kamila, go for privacy, and who suggested it? (214)
2. How does the act of seeking intimacy in Kamila's luxurious house contrast with Seka and Ramo's usual struggles for survival, and what does this setting highlight about the disparity within Srebrenica? (214)
3. What does Seka's impassioned outburst about the physical and emotional toll of pregnancy reveal about the specific burdens placed on women during the war? (215)
4. What is the core of the argument between Seka and Ramo regarding marriage and pregnancy? (216)
5. What specific negative consequences of pregnancy in wartime does Seka vividly list for Ramo? (216)

6. What startling discovery does Seka make in the previously unnoticed office within Kamila's house? (217)
7. What is the significance of Seka realising that Kamila was "pretending to be my friend" while knowingly benefiting from her parents' illicit activities? (218)
8. How does Seka's heightened determination to expose corruption, even after Kerim's death, demonstrate her evolving sense of justice and defiance against the moral decay around her? (218)
9. How does Seka's perception of Harun and Lebiba's corruption compare to her view of the Serbs' actions? (218)
10. How does Seka's increased determination to expose corruption, even after Nerim's death, demonstrate her evolving moral compass and defiance against injustice? (219)
11. How does Seka plan to get her article exposing corruption out of the enclave and ensure her anonymity? (219)
12. What does the image of children begging for "bonbons" and fighting over garbage at the UN compound suggest about the effectiveness of humanitarian aid and the reality of childhood in Srebrenica? (219)
13. What happens when Seka attempts to give her article to Bart Muis at the DutchBat base? 220
14. What does Seka attempt to do to get the article to Bart Muis at the disco? (223)
15. What job does Kamila get at the Dutch command cafeteria, and what is Seka's reaction to this news? (226)
16. What does the soldier's act of throwing and squashing the banana, when a woman tries to take it for her children, symbolise about the dehumanising effects of strict aid regulations? (234)

Chapter 14: Cleaving (236-260)

1. What significant news does Bilal share with Seka and Ramo at the bus stop in July 1995? (236)
2. What does Naser Orić's departure imply about the community's security and sense of hope, given his previous role as a "saviour"? (236)
3. What happened to a Dutch soldier, Van Renssen, a few days prior to this chapter's events? (237)
4. How does the death of Van Renssen and the subsequent remarks by Dutch soldiers ("wouldn't risk their life for any Muslim pigs") reveal their changing attitudes and growing disillusionment? (237)
5. What physical changes are observed in the Dutch soldiers due to the lack of provisions and how does it distinguish them from Bosnian residents? (238)
6. What is Seka's initial attempt to give the letter to Bart Muis at the compound, and what interferes with this attempt? (238)
7. What news does Seka learn about the southern frontline while driving back to Srebrenica? (240)
8. What does the Dutch Commander at the post office want the Bosnians to do with weapons that were previously surrendered? (240)
9. How does Seka manage to get the letter to Bart Muis after her initial failed attempt? (240)
10. Who does Seka encounter at the Cultural Centre instead of Bart Muis? (241)
11. What does Kamila reveal she overheard the UN soldiers discussing about Seka? (241)
12. What does Seka do with the syringe after grabbing it from Kamila, and what substance is inside it? (243)

13. What does the Dutch Captain Luuk Van Dijk say when he sees the Serb General at the compound, in contrast to the Bosnian military's reaction? (251)
14. Ramo says they are “probably going to try and join a column in the woods” in a *bitter* tone. What does his bitterness suggest about what he believes will happen to those who leave via the woods? (251)
15. Why is the atmosphere described as “lethargic and tension-filled” when there are rumours of NATO bombing? What does that combination tell us about their level of trust in international promises? (251)
16. Luuk smiles with “happiness and relief” when he mentions surrender. Why is his emotional reaction so different from Seka’s, and what does that tell us about whose safety he’s thinking about? (252)
17. When Seka realises her hometown has fallen and thinks, “I had a home no more,” how does that moment change the meaning of the letter she’s trying to smuggle? Why does she suddenly question its importance? (252)
18. How does the graffiti about “A Bosnian Girl” reveal the underlying racism and dehumanisation behind the UN soldiers’ supposed neutrality? (253)
19. What is the significance of Dutch soldiers swapping clothes and bulletproof vests with Serb soldiers? How does this blur moral and visual boundaries between “protector” and “perpetrator”? (253)
20. When Seka gets her period and the Serb soldiers call her “damaged goods,” why does she feel “never more relieved” to have it? What does that reaction reveal about the particular dangers facing women and girls? (255)
21. The tortured man says, “They said they would come back tonight,” and then dies by suicide. What does his decision imply about the kind of “choices” people have under systematic torture? (256)
22. Seka’s out-of-body “floating above the compound” moment reads almost dreamlike. What does this dissociation suggest about how trauma is affecting her perception of reality? (257)
23. Seeing dead men outside the fences while she “floats” above Srebrenica and calls them “a dot on the map” reveals something about how she views the world’s response. What is it? (257)
24. Ramo repeatedly reassures Seka (“Don’t worry... I’ll see you soon”) even as he’s being taken away. What might he be trying to protect her from emotionally in that moment? (258)
25. Luuk promises that having a UN soldier on each bus means they’ll “safely get to the safe territory.” Given what we already know, how trustworthy is this reassurance, and what does it reveal about his self-image? (259)
26. When the bus driver orders everyone off and says they must walk to the free territory, what does this final act reveal about how much (or how little) responsibility the Serbs and UN are willing to take for the refugees’ fate? (260)
27. Seka expects an ambush as they walk and tenses for gunfire. What does that expectation show about how her sense of safety has been permanently reshaped? (260)
28. Why do you think the chapter ends on the moment of being told, “You’re in the free territory”? How does that ending force the reader to hold both survival and irreparable loss at the same time? (260)

Chapter 15: Vanished (261-283)

1. What is the overall condition of the men and young boys in the Death March column, and who are the "important ones" who travel on horseback? (261)
2. What does the explicit mention of a "pecking order" among the military and political leaders during the Death March imply about the persistence of social hierarchies even in dire survival situations? (261)
3. How does the Director's possession of ample supplies, obtained through theft, contrast with the extreme hunger and desperation of others in the column, highlighting wartime profiteering? 262
4. What does the old man's decision to surrender, and his final words ("We should have fought to the last man"), suggest about his disillusioned view of survival versus resistance? (263)
5. What happens to the old man who says he will surrender during the Death March, and what does he give to the narrator? (268)
6. What are the general living conditions in the tent city at Tuzla airport upon arrival? (263)
7. What information do Seka and Belma seek at the UN Headquarters in Tuzla? (263)
8. Who is Imam Samed, and what unusual method does he use to determine Nedjad's fate? (265)
9. What does Seka witness Kamila doing with the Imam's supplies (flour, sugar, coffee)? (278)
10. How does Seka's confrontation with Kamila and her decision to throw the stolen food into the river, despite her own hunger, demonstrate her unyielding moral compass and refusal to compromise her values? (279)
11. What does the women's desperation to find their missing menfolk, leading them to consult fortune tellers and believe omens, reveal about their psychological state and lack of reliable information? (279)
12. How do the women in the tent city react when Seka exposes the Imam's and Kamila's subterfuge? (281)

Chapter 16: 8,372 (284-296)

1. What news does Seka overhear about an "Asian journalist" at the headquarters in March 1996? (284)
2. What specific details about the remains found does Alyssa Jones discuss with the UN soldier? (284)
3. What is the Bosnian government's reluctance to tell the women about their missing menfolk? (285)
4. How does Seka's desperate act of impersonating Zaim to join Alyssa's convoy highlight her unwavering determination to find Ramo, even at great personal risk? (285)
5. What is the horrific scene Seka and Alyssa witness upon arriving in Kravica? (287)
6. What does Alyssa find on one of the skulls, and what does she infer about its removal? (288)
7. What does the description of the Kravica massacre site, particularly the "headless or missing appendages" and "bones ground into the earth," imply about the systematic and brutal nature of the genocide? (288)
8. How does Seka's internal conflict about opening Zora's letter ("War had twisted me into someone dark and broken") reveal the profound and lasting psychological scars of the war on her personal relationships? (289)

9. What does Emir's steadfast belief in "divine will" and his intensified religious devotion reveal about his coping mechanism for dealing with the trauma and loss of the Death March? (290)
10. What devastating news does Seka deliver to her mother and brother about their father? (290)
11. What does Emir's immediate embrace of religion and his rigid piety, after surviving the Death March, suggest about his coping mechanism for extreme trauma? (290)
12. What is Bilal's belief about his own survival, contrasting with Emir's, and what does he do when Seka whispers Ramo's name? (293)

Epilogue (297-299)

1. Why might Seka feel *relief* instead of homesickness as Bosnia disappears beneath the aircraft? (297)
2. What is the profound significance of Ramo's final thoughts and words being about Seka and their shared dream of a future in Australia, even in the face of his presumed death? (298)
3. The chapter places Seka's dream of survival beside Ramo's reality of execution. How does this contrast heighten the emotional impact? (297-299)
4. What does the imagery of "verdant green forests transformed into graveyards" suggest about the transformation of Bosnia after the genocide? (297)
5. Why might the author have chosen to intercut Seka's departure with Ramo's death one year earlier? (297-299)
6. What does Zora's letter symbolise for Seka at this moment in her life? (297)
7. Why does the author include the perpetrators' dialogue, and what effect does this have on the reader's understanding of the genocide? (298)
8. How does the description of the mass grave—"mannequins jumbled together"—serve as a commentary on dehumanisation? (299)
9. What does Ramo's mental retreat into a shared dream of the future suggest about trauma, hope, and denial? (299)
10. In what ways does the epilogue reinforce the themes of memory, loss, and survival introduced earlier in the novel? (299)

Discussion / Extended Response Questions

1. How does the epilogue function as both an ending and a beginning for Seka?
2. Consider the dual timeline: What does it reveal about the cost of survival?
3. In your view, what is the purpose of juxtaposing Seka leaving Bosnia with Ramo's final moments?
4. How does this chapter challenge or complicate the idea of "moving on" after trauma?
5. How does the author use dreams to explore what is lost, what is wished for, and what is impossible?
6. In what ways does this chapter highlight the long-term impact of genocide on individuals and families?
7. Explore how the author uses silence—what remains unsaid or unspoken between characters—to reveal deeper truths.
8. What does Ramo's final vision communicate about love as resistance, even in the face of violence?

9. The chapter ends with Seka imagining a future that Ramo cannot reach. How does this shape the novel's commentary on injustice?
10. How might the knowledge of mass graves and exhumations shape Seka's sense of identity as she begins life in Australia?

Essay Format Questions

1. Analyse the role of deprivation and scarcity in shaping the characters' actions and moral choices throughout the narrative. How do these conditions impact their relationships and their sense of self?
2. Discuss the theme of "normalcy" in the story. How do the characters attempt to maintain or recreate aspects of normal life amidst the chaos and violence of war, and what does this reveal about the human spirit?
3. Examine the portrayal of leadership and authority figures (e.g., Alija Izetbegović, Ratko Mladić, Naser Orić, General Philippe Morillon, Captain Luuk Van Dijk) in the text. How do their actions, or inactions, influence the lives of the Srebrenica inhabitants?
4. Explore the shifting perceptions and loyalties among the characters. How do the Bosnians, Serbs, and United Nations forces interact, and what complexities arise in their relationships due to the conflict?
5. Consider the significance of the recurring motif of communication and information (e.g., radio announcements, rumours, letters) in the story. How does access to or lack of information affect the characters' hopes, fears, and decisions?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Ašikovanje:** A traditional Bosnian dating ritual, often involving flirtatious conversation.
- **Balija:** A derogatory term used by Serbs for Bosniaks.
- **Babo:** Father.
- **Bosniak:** A Muslim South Slav, primarily inhabiting Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- **Bosnian:** A citizen of Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- **Chetniks:** Serb paramilitary groups.
- **Dimije:** Harem pants worn by women in the Middle East.
- **Drina:** A river in Bosnia that runs through Serbia.
- **Džezva:** Coffee pot.
- **Fildžan:** Handleless coffee cup.
- **Rakija:** A traditional Balkan fruit brandy, often homemade.
- **Šamija:** Headscarf.
- **Tito's era:** Refers to the period when Josip Broz Tito ruled Yugoslavia, generally seen as a time when Muslims held important positions.
- **United Nations (UN):** International organization, here specifically referring to the UN forces in Bosnia.

Writing Tasks

- Write a journal entry from the perspective of Ramo after the shelling.

- Compose a short story about a teenager surviving a historical conflict (real or fictional).
- Re-write a key scene from the perspective of Zora or Ramo.

Research Tasks

- Investigate the Dayton Agreement and its aftermath.
- Study other young adult novels about war (e.g., *The Book Thief*, *Persepolis*) and compare themes.
- Explore how the United Nations failed in Srebrenica. What reforms were proposed afterward?

Debate Topics

- “Fiction teaches us more than history textbooks.”
- “The international community failed the people of Srebrenica.”
- “Survival in war justifies all actions.”
- “Writing is a form of resistance.”

Drama Activities

- Monologue writing: Choose a character (Seka, Ramo, Mama, Dido, Zora) and deliver a monologue about an important moment in the novel.
- Group performance: Create a mock UN meeting deciding how to respond to the siege.
- Role-play: Recreate the confrontation between Seka and Naser Orić’s guards at the food drop.