

Things I Learnt in the Forest

MEMORANDUM

CHAPTER 1: “I DON’T WANT TO BE HERE”

1. Refer to the title of this chapter.

a. “Here” refers to which place?

A plantation in Mpumalanga. Thoko uses the word “rural” and “remote”, which suggests it is far from a town or city.

b. Where have Thoko and her mother moved from?

Tshwane (Pretoria)

c. Discuss THREE differences between where Thoko comes from and where she is now.

Plantation	Tshwane
covered with trees – “endless forestry”, “rows and rows of boring trees”	Not as many trees
dirt roads	tarred roads
remote / rural	City
At this stage Pabi is the only girl with whom Thoko can make friends.	wide variety of girls she can be friends with – “crew”

2. Do you like Thoko after reading Chapter 1? Provide reasons for your answer.

Learners’ own responses. This could include:

- **No, she is bratty. She is too concerned about boys (Andile) noticing her. She is very sarcastic. She sees the plantation kids as “country-slow”. She thinks she is superior to the people on the plantation. She becomes mean when she is defensive. Thoko is too aware of her image; she wants to see if the other girls at school are cooler than Pabi before she decides to be friends with her.**
- **Yes, she is confident. Her dramatic reactions and her sassiness provide some humour.**

3. Briefly describe the following characters:

- a. Mr Dibokwane: **He drives the plantation children to school. He “scowls” and “grunts”, which makes him seem unpleasant. However, Cal addresses him as Baba, which shows that he has respect for Mr Dibokwane. He also converses with Cal about Cal’s interests.**
- b. Pabi: **She is eager and friendly, described as “quite a big girl and she has a round face surrounded by a fuzz of black hair”. She is 12 and has dyslexia, a learning disability.**
- c. Andile: **He is a good-looking high school boy and not very talkative.**
- d. Cal: **He attends the same school as Thoko. He does not make direct eye contact, he has “slip-slide eyes that half look at you and then skim away.” He speaks respectfully to the driver. He knows quite a bit about nature and seems**

concerned about it. He is anxious about school and becomes quieter as they approach it. He is thirteen, but small for his age.

4. Refer to "...so-we're-the-smart-ones-around-here..." p8 and "...what's the point of growing so many Christmas trees?" p10
 - a. Discuss the irony evident here. (Remember irony is when the opposite happens of what we expect. Your answer will most certainly contain the word "but".)
Thoko thinks she is much smarter than the plantation children, but she does not know the correct names of the trees and animals in the plantation.

5. On page 10 we can already spot an antagonist in the story.
 - a. Name the character that could be regarded as an antagonist at this stage of the story.
**The Sibiya kids / Vusi
(Cal could also be seen as an antagonist at this stage.)**

 - b. Provide a reason for your answer.
**Pabi says they are her mortal enemies. Vusi thinks it is Mr Mabona's (Pabi's father) fault that his father's job is in danger.
(Thoko says she hates Cal because he embarrassed her.)**

6. "Starting at a new school halfway through the second term is the worst."
 - a. How would you feel about moving to a new school?
**Learners' own responses. Answers could include:
Afraid, nervous, excited, etc.**

 - b. Do you think Thoko is nervous? Substantiate your answer from page 12.
**Yes.
"I am starting to get fluttery about school and the feeling will only get bigger".**

CHAPTER 2: “MA AND ME”

1. Briefly describe Thoko’s mother, Mrs Gumede.
She is always busy. She is a clerk and a single parent.
2. What does the reader learn about Thoko and her mother’s relationship?
Thoko thinks her mother is a “typical” mother because she “won’t let her have proper make-up,” and “never (does) the girly gossip-and-giggle bit” with her. Mrs Gumede spends quality time with her daughter doing things like “manicures and pedicures and outings” (p10) and they have done “loads of big walk and fun runs and cycle races all over Gauteng.”
Thoko is angry with her mother for moving from Tshwane to the plantation. Even though Thoko is sassy and bratty, she listens when her mother gives her chores.
3. Name TWO “Thoko-crimes”. (p14)
“sulking” and “whining”
4. Why has Thoko’s week been “evil”? (p14)
She feels that everyone at her new school hates her. Her fellow learners have kept their distance, stared at her, and whispered and giggled.
5. Compare Cal’s behaviour when they are driving in the plantation and once they have exited it.
He is talkative, but then becomes very quiet.
6. What does Mrs Gumede mean when she says, “even if you like to imagine that’s twelve-going-on-twenty”? (p19)
Mrs Gumede thinks that Thoko thinks of herself as very wise and mature, when in fact she is still only twelve.

CHAPTER 3: “PERSONAL QUESTIONS”

1. Summarise the events that led up to the “abnormal backlog of work” (end of Chapter 2) waiting for Ms Gumede at the plantation office.
 - **The previous clerk could not do the job properly.**
 - **The plantation fired her.**
 - **She appealed.**
 - **During the appeal, the plantation was not allowed to appoint someone else.**
 - **No work was done for months.**

2. Why do you think Ms Gumede says that Thoko will get most out of their move from the city to the plantation?

Learner’s own response. The answer could include:
Thoko’s mother perhaps felt that it would be good for her daughter to get away from the city where she had friends who made fun of others. She could hope that her daughter would become less self-centred when she is surround by humble country people. She might think that nature could be good for her daughter.

3. Refer to page 26: “...Pabi. Don’t you know it is crass (insensitive) to ask such personal questions?”
 - a. Why is Thoko so upset about Pabi’s question?

Thoko does not know much about her father, because her mother does not want to talk about him except that he left them.

 - b. Why is the above comment ironic? (Remember that you must use the word “but” in your answer.)

Thoko says that it is insensitive to ask personal questions, but she asked Cal about his sister and bombarded him with questions about his behaviour at school.

4. Refer to page 26.
 - a. Do you think Cal is “just a bad learner.” Justify your answer.

No, he is intelligent when it comes to nature and the names of animals and trees. We realise that Cal might have a learning disability which makes it difficult for him to finish his work on time and causes him to lose focus towards the end of the day.

 - b. Make a prediction as to “why the teachers are so lenient with” him and where he “slopes off to” when they arrive at school.

The teachers are aware of Cal’s struggles when it comes to schoolwork and are therefore sympathetic. He might go to the bathroom or principal’s office to rest or take medication.

5. Discuss why Thoko has “a go at Ma”. (page 28)

Thoko is angry with her mother, because she could not give Pabi an answer when she asked about her father. Thoko has so many questions, but her mother is unwilling to answer. Thoko might feel deserted by the father she never knew and takes it out on her mother.

6. Refer to page 28. Why is farming seen as negative in this chapter? Use your OWN WORDS.

**The farmers are clearing away indigenous habitat to make space for macadamias.
This is chasing away the wildlife in the area.**

CHAPTER 4: “PEOPLE AREN’T ALWAYS LOGICAL”

1. Refer to page 30, “You’d never believe we’ve only recently moved from Gauteng, the way Ma has taken to leaving the door standing open wide.”

a. What is Thoko suggesting about the difference between Tshwane and the plantation?

Tswane is dangerous and there is a lot of crime. It is much safer on the plantation and that is why her mother leaves the door open.

b. Why is Thoko surprised to see Pabi that morning?

Thoko had been quite mean to Pabi the previous evening saying that she should not be let out without her brother, because she does not know how to behave properly.

2. Refer to page 32: “...the new me...”

a. What does Thoko mean by “the new me”?

Thoko decided that Pabi needed someone to protect her from mean people like herself. She has also set herself the task of being kind to Pabi.

3. Refer to the bottom half of page 33, “I pretend everything is still flowing along exactly as before.”

a. Why has Thoko decided that the waiter is “not really that hot”?

He made her feel embarrassed and angry when he did not flirt back.

4. Refer to page 34. Quote five pieces of evidence that support the following statement:

The meeting between Ms Chundu and the other women was unpleasant.

“Pushily”, “The woman’s heavy face clouds over”, “glaring”, “something bad”, “stomps away”. (Accept correct alternatives.)

5. Refer to the top of page 35: “Do I need to be forgiven?”

a. Would you forgive Thoko for her behaviour towards Pabi? Substantiate your answer. **Learners can answer “Yes” or “No”, but it is the substantiation that should be considered.**

Yes, Pabi is a good friend and likes Thoko.

No, Thoko is mean and takes out her anger on others. It is never acceptable to humiliate a friend or say hurtful things to them.

6. Refer to page 36. List three reasons why Ms Chundu’s son could be considered “trouble”.

- **He damaged many young trees on the plantation with his friends and their quad bikes.**
- **He was expelled from high school.**
- **As revenge for his expulsion, he threw a brick through the principal's office.**

CHAPTER 5: “LIKE A SURPRISE GIFT”

1. Refer to the title. What is “like a surprise gift” to Thoko?

A small flock of colourful birds called white-fronted bee-eaters.

2. Quote one piece of evidence from page 38 that proves Cal is very knowledgeable about nature.

“He identifies the animals by their droppings or the occasional spoor...”

3. Refer to page 40.

a. Discuss the contrast between Cal’s behaviour in nature and at school.

Cal is at ease, confident and happy when talking about nature, but at school he becomes smaller, quiet, and insecure.

b. Why could it be a problem that the birds’ nests are on the farm-side of the stream?

Pabi’s mortal enemies, the Sibiya children, including Vusi, live on the farm side.

OR

The increase in farming is driving away the wildlife; this could include the birds.

4. Discuss the changes we start to see in Thoko in this chapter. (Always use specific examples from the story.)

- **She is enjoying the time she spends cycling past the pines, where previously she found it boring.**
- **She starts to learn the name of trees and birds - “conifers”**
- **She can stop herself from making sassy comments, where previously she said exactly what she wanted, even if it was mean.**
- **She does not talk excessively anymore. Previously she talked nonstop because it helped her to not think. Her thoughts were dark and unsettling. Now she “quite likes” her thoughts, because they are about wildlife and her newfound friendships.**
- **She is not so annoyed by Cal. She is letting him be and going along with his tour of the plantation. Previously she used every opportunity to taunt him.**
- **She is excited at the prospect of seeing a buck or two and cannot believe that this “city-girl” is saying that.**

CHAPTER 6: "IMAGINE"

1. The title, "Imagine" refers to the ability of one character to put themselves in someone else's shoes and try to understand what they have gone through.

- a. Identify TWO instances where one character tried to "imagine" someone else's situation.

Firstly, Pabi tried to imagine what Vusi and his siblings' lives were like living in an abusive household. "It must be so horrible to be Vusi Sibiyi...(his) father beats him...I just think we should (imagine)."

Secondly, Thoko tried to imagine what her mother must have gone through when her father decided to leave.

- b. Quote the lines where the word "imagine" is used.

"It must be so horrible to be Vusi Sibiyi...(his) father beats him...I just think we should (imagine)." / "But imagine, Thoko!"

"I try to imagine what it must have felt like to be Ma when that happened."

2. Discuss what we come to learn about Vusi and his siblings.

Their faces are covered with marks – bruises old and new. Pabi's father says that it is Mr Sibiyi who abuses them. Vusi is angry with the state plantation for almost causing his father to lose his job. Thoko wonders, "If you've had violence done to you, will you do it to other people?"

3. List the three unsettling things that have happened to wildlife in the plantation.

- **A baby vervet monkey was stoned.**
- **Someone blocked the mongoose holes with rocks.**
- **Someone has set traps for the bushbuck or duikers.**

4. Quote four pieces of evidence that shows Thoko's father's character.

- **"easy-going"**
- **"always in a good mood"**
- **"absolutely no ambition"**
- **"...everything else that comes with having a child – the staying home at night, spending money on boring needs – all that thrilled him a whole lot less."**
- **"...what I'm thinking is that he really ran away." (ANY FOUR. ACCEPT OTHER SUITABLE RESPONSES)**

5. Complete the table below:

Character	How they deal with their thoughts
Thoko	Usually talks excessively.
Ms Gumede	Keeps very busy.
Thoko's father	Running away.

CHAPTER 7: “THE POWER OF WORDS”

1. Discuss the following statement: *Thoko is a snob.*

She considers herself to be “cooler” than the learners in her school because she comes from the city and thinks she is more fashionable and wittier than them. The head boy also comments that Thoko thinks her way of talking is “so much better than this town.” She tries to walk like a model and throws her head in a “superior way”. Thoko is intelligent, but looks down on those who are not so intelligent.

2. Do you think Thoko was brave or cruel when dealing with Vusi?

Learners’ own responses. The answers could include the following (the answer could be a combination):

Brave: Vusi and Derek are stronger and bigger than her, yet she could not let them bully her only friend. They were physically bullying Pabi and could just as easily have done it to her too, but she had to stop them even though it meant being very mean.

Mean: It was extremely unkind of Thoko to humiliate Vusi in front of the whole school. She knows the reason he acts violently is because he experiences abuse at home.

3. “Insults are flying out of me like bullets” (p. 55)

- a. Identify the figure of speech.

Simile

- b. Discuss its effectiveness.

Her harsh words are compared to the bullets from a weapon. This emphasises that the purpose of her words was to hurt Vusi. It also came “flying” out which means she said the words without thinking.

4. Refer to page 56. Quote THREE separate sentences that make Thoko seem childish.

“What do you care.”

“I don’t know why you pretend to be interested.”

“I know you do not care about me, or about my feelings...”

5. Do you think it is the right decision for Ms Gumede to not track down Thoko’s father?

Yes, she is concerned about what it would do to Thoko if she were to “track down” her father. She is afraid that Thoko would get her hopes up, imagining this wonderful father, but he would just disappoint her. She is sure that looking for and finding

Thoko's father would be an emotional rollercoaster. Ms Gumede knows her ex-husband and is actually protecting Thoko from the heartache he will cause. (No, Ms Gumede must allow Thoko to get to know her father and make up her own mind about him.)

CHAPTER 8: “THE TEST”

1. Why is “the test” so important to Thoko?

She wants to show off her intellectual ability. She wants the rest of the class to admire her.

2. Refer to page 62. Find some evidence that Cal suffers from ADD.

Cal loses focus towards the end of the school day and his writing becomes illegible.

3. Refer to pages 60 and 61.

- a. Do you think Sindi is a true friend? Justify your answer.

No, Sindi reads Thoko’s message (this is indicated by the ticks going blue), but she does not reply or phone Thoko even though she always has data and airtime.

- b. “Considering how Sindi and the rest of my Tshwane posse would crush someone like Pabi...” What does this reveal about Thoko’s friends from Tshwane?

They are bullies who make fun of a kind and gentle girl like Pabi.

4. Refer to page 66, “I’m not sure. Bad, maybe? As if I’m not that different to Vusi...”

Do you think Thoko can be compared to Vusi when we look at her behaviour in this chapter?

Learners’ own responses. Accept a combination answer. The answers could include: Yes, she might not be physically bullying Pabi or Cal, but her words are very hurtful. What makes it worse is that Pabi has only been kind to Thoko, and she has no reason to be mean to Pabi. Thoko realises that Cal is not like other people, but she still taunts him and asks him very personal questions.

(No, even though Thoko can be quick with what she says, she would never physically hurt Cal or Pabi.)

CHAPTER 9: “IN SOMEONE ELSE’S PLACE”

1. Summarise Ms Koatcho and Cal’s points of view regarding the trees on the plantation.

Ms Koatcho	Cal
Pines and other alien species use up all the ground water.	Plantations follow a set of rules that make sure invasive species are planted far away from water sources like rivers and dams.
/	The plantation provides work which keeps the economy alive.
/	Some spaces are kept for indigenous species.

2. Do you think Ms Koatcho’s behaviour on page 68 is acceptable?

No, even though she is not in a good mood, she cannot blurt out personal information of students. She is the adult and has humiliated Cal.

3. State TWO reasons that Cal takes Ritalin.

- **It helps him concentrate.**
- **It helps him to write neater.**

4. Discuss why Pabi could be considered “empathetic”.

Pabi is sensitive to other people’s experiences and always tries to imagine what it would be like to be them. She walks “a mile in their shoes.” Instead of cross-examining Cal about the Ritalin he takes, she asks how he feels while on it, so that she might understand.

CHAPTER 10: “ANOTHER FRIDAY NIGHT”

1. Contrast Friday nights in Tshwane and the plantation.

Tshwane	The plantation
Sindi and the other girls have an assortment of activities to choose from: sleepovers, school social event and parties, going to the mall, watching a movie, getting a coldrink somewhere and doing some “people watching”.	Not much happens on the plantation on a Friday night. Thoko has a choice of staying at home or visiting Pabi’s house.
Sindi and the girls dress up to go out and spend time with peers.	Thoko gets to spend time with Pabi’s parents.

2. Refer to pages 77 and 78.

a. Name TWO more instances where wildlife have been harmed.

- **A forest buzzard has been injured with a pellet gun.**
- **A bushbuck has been shot.**
-

b. Who is responsible for at least ONE of the above-mentioned actions?

Ngcebo Chundu. (The previous clerk’s son.)

c. Explain the difference between “hunting for the pot” and “vandalism”.

Hunting for the pot would suggest that people are trying to trap wildlife so that they can eat it, because they are hungry. Vandalism suggest that the shooting of animals is for fun.

3. Explain why the plantation workers would set a fire in fire season.

They are making preventative firebreaks. This means that they burn sections of vegetation on purpose to ensure that, should a fire break out in the future, it can only burn up to the firebreak. This could save many trees.

4. Why does Pabi and Mr Mabona’s hug upset Thoko?

Thoko feels jealous that Pabi has a father who loves her. She also wants to experience that kind of love, but her father is not a part of her life.

CHAPTER 11: “I WANT TO BELONG”

1. Refer to pages 82 and 83.

a. Why is Thoko “not interested” in Andile anymore?

She has always thought that Andile was “remote and mature” when he stared out of the Avanza’s window, but she has come to realise that he is actually very conceited (vain). He has been staring at his own reflection every morning.

2. “It’s like the plantation has an enemy.”

The following characters are discussed as possible suspects for the vandalism on the plantation. Complete the table below by filling in the missing information.

	Evidence that this person could be responsible:	Evidence that makes this person an unlikely suspect:
Ms Koacho	She hates forestry because it depletes the water table.	She cares about wild creatures and would not hurt them.
Ms Chundu	She was fired from the plantation and could hold a grudge.	We do not know enough about this character to provide evidence here.
Kgcedo Chundu	He said that he would destroy the forest and everything in it.	He was banned from the plantation before his mother was fired and should not be there.
Vusi / Sibiyi	They hate the plantation people and he is angry because he thinks the plantation is responsible for his father almost losing his job.	Cal does not think that Vusi or the Sibiyi children could own a gun to shoot the buck.

3. “It’s probably the first serious apology of my life.”

a. What is Thoko apologising for?

She was joking that she could be the one causing trouble on the plantation and hurting the wildlife. She also said that she was not happy to be there on the plantation. This comment shocked and upset Pabi. Thoko realised that it was an “ugly” thing to say.

b. What does she suggest she does to show that she is sorry.

She wants to start patrolling the plantation to protect it.

CHAPTER 12: “SOMETHING WEIRD”

1. Refer to the top of page 89: “Our teacher asked Vusi how he got hurt [...] Adults especially.”
 - a. Why do you think people do not want to “get involved”?

Child abuse is a serious matter. Getting involved means calling a social worker to investigate Mr Sibiyi. If a person gets involved, they might have to testify and it could lead to the children being taken away from their father. If a person does get involved and the father finds out, he could take it out on the children even more.

2. “We’re still laughing when I see Vusi coming towards us.”
 - a. What is ironic about Vusi coming to talk to the girls? (Remember to use the word “but” in your answer).

We expect Vusi to bully them, but he comes to ask for information about what is happening on the plantation.

OR Vusi has always been considered an enemy, but after their conversation he could become an ally helping them with the patrols.

OR The girls thought Vusi was responsible for the vandalism on the plantation, but now they realise that Vusi is truly concerned.

3. List some changes we see in Thoko in this chapter.

She starts to realise that her troubles are not so bad when compared to some of the other characters, especially Vusi. She does not feel like picking a fight with her mother anymore. She has also decided that she is not going to blame herself or her mother for her father leaving.

4. Why is this chapter called, “Something weird”?

It refers to Thoko realising that she is happy. It is weird, because she thought that she could only be happy if her life was perfect with lots of money, make-up and her father.

CHAPTER 13: “ON PATROL”

1. “This new me doesn’t care that he knows things I don’t, and doesn’t want to pick fights with Ma. How have I changed so much? What has changed me? Was it coming to live here, or something else? *Things I learnt in the forest...*” (page 95)

- a. Name TWO other changes Thoko notices about herself in this chapter.
- **She notices details in nature around her. In Tshwane she “never thought about nature”.**
 - **She allows Cal to lead her. Usually, she wants to call the shots, but she knows the plantation is his area of expertise.**
 - **She used to hate it when people were kind to her. She felt like they were babying her. Now she does not mind Pabi being kind.**

2. Refer to page 100.

a. Why was Derek and Vusi on the plantation?

They were keeping watch. They wanted to protect the birds’ nests by the stream. They saw a man moving through the trees and started following him.

b. How has Vusi “surprised” Thoko?

She was surprised to find out that he cared about the birds very much. So much that he is doing something dangerous and very brave to try to save them. She has misjudged him.

c. How can Derek be sure that “this dude” is drunk?

Derek says that he and his brother know what a drunk man looks like, because they have seen their father drunk many times.

3. Refer to page 103.

Why is it unnerving when Cal looks Thoko straight in the eyes?

She realised that they are in great danger, because Cal has never looked her straight in the eye before.

CHAPTER 14: "HAPPY HERE AND NOW"

1. "*Vusi is a hero.*"

a. Do you agree? Substantiate your answer.

Yes, he put his own life in danger by following Ngcebo to protect the birds and other wildlife. He turned back to carry Pabi when she injured her ankle. He phoned the farm owner to ask him to not disturb the birds' nest, which landed him in so much trouble with his father.

2. What do Cal and Vusi have in common?

Animals and birds make them both feel better. They can both put their differences aside for the greater good of protecting the wildlife.

3. "*The forest and its people are good teachers.*" (pages 112)

a. List what Thoko has learnt.

- **She has learnt to stop being angry with her mother.**
- **She has learnt that she can be friends with different kinds of people even though they are "uncool" according to some people.**
- **Cal has taught her that everyone is fighting their own battles and everyone deals with their issues differently.**
- **She has learnt that she can be happy now, even if her life is not perfect.**