

The House of Shells

AUTHOR

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Primary



SYNOPSIS

Kuki is sure that the old family curse of the Abiku is a myth—she will not die young.

Then, she meets a new friend, Enilo, while exploring the ruins of a forbidden house. When Kuki finds Enilo playing with children that are unmistakably Arike—wicked spirits—he realises her curse might be true after all.

But the friends form a pact: Enilo promises to go to the spirit realm and destroy the secret charm that binds her there. But if she doesn't return in one day and night, Kuki will fall dangerously ill . . .

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Efua Traoré is a Nigerian-German writer who had a never-boring childhood in a small town in Nigeria. For as long as she can remember, her head was filled with little stories, but it was not until her late twenties that she began to write them down. It became a real passion when she began writing for her daughters. Cuddled under the covers in the evenings she read her stories to them. The sparkle in their eyes, the pleading for 'just one more chapter Mummy, please', got her realising the true magic of writing. Efua has lived in Nigeria, France and Germany. She writes books in English and in German. If she had her way, she would travel much more and write every single day.

THEMES

- Friendship
- Bullying
- Overcoming fear, courage and standing up for oneself
- Fear of death
- New family situations
- Adapting to change
- Nigerian mythology

STUDY NOTES

- *The House of Shells* is heavily inspired by Nigerian mythology. As a class, discuss and write down the mythological aspects of the novel—for example: the Abiku, the house of shells. How many can you identify? Make a list of all of them.
 - Then, separate into small groups. Each group should be assigned one of these Nigerian mythical topics to

research. Each group should create a presentation (PowerPoint or to read to the class)—utilising as many creative media as possible including images, music and quotations from key texts—about their assigned Nigerian mythology subject. Then, present your findings to the class.

- In *The House of Shells*, Kuki's mother moves in with her new husband, Dr. D, and they live together in his house on the beach in Lagos. Think of a time where you have had a significant change in your life—what happened? This could be moving house, the birth of a baby, starting a new school, etc. How did that make you feel? Make a mood board of key words and small images to show all of your emotions.
- As a class, discuss and describe the different ways different families look. How is the person's family sitting next to you different to yours? Every family is different and special. This activity will help to acknowledge and understand these differences, as well as appreciate them.
- Kuki and Moki have a complicated relationship within the story, which changes and develops as the story progresses. The same can be said for Kuki and Enilo, but in a very different way. What differences can you see between Kuki and Moki versus Kuki and Enilo's friendship? As a class, list these differences in a table so you can see direct comparisons between the two.
- In pairs, discuss whether you would react differently than Kuki did towards Moki when she makes Kuki buy her trainers. What would you have said? What facial expressions would you have used? Play act this out with your partner to see all of the different ways this can be done. Then, rewrite the scene in the book, changing Kuki's response to yours.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What do you think *The House of Shells* says about family and belonging, particularly in relation to Kuki and Dr. D's relationship?
- What did you think of Kuki as a character? Is she likeable? Does she change throughout the book?
- How would you characterise the relationship between Kuki and Enilo? What about Kuki and Moki?
- What do you think happens after the story has ended?
- What was the biggest surprise for you in the story?
- Which of the mythological aspects had you heard about already—and which were new and unexpected?
- If you had a token, like the cowrie shell, what would it be? Why?
- Why do you think Kuki and Moki's relationship is important throughout the story?
- What do you think about the way Auntie pushes her superstitious beliefs on Kuki and her family?