Luke Sherner

Bigelow

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A Long Way Gone

War is something that can have a huge effect on childhood, whether the child is directly or indirectly involved in the war. War can strip away childhood, but can also make the child stronger in the end. For example, a child who is separated from his family by war will lose a lot of support that he once had. This loss of support will force the child to survive through hardship because he will have to figure things out on his own. Another effect of war on childhood is that it can cause a child to grow up too fast, which in turn will help him to become more responsible and independent. These effects of war on childhood are prevalent in Ishmael Beah’s A Long Way Gone. Beah demonstrates these effects as the war strips him away from his family and he still survives through hardship. War also causes him to grow up very fast, which makes him more responsible and prepared.

One of the main effects of the war on Beah is the separation of him from his family, which impacts the rest of the book by teaching him to survive through pain and hardship. Beah remembered something his father said while he was wandering through the jungle: “If you are alive, there is hope for a better day and something good to happen. If there is nothing good left in the destiny of a person, he or she will die” (Beah, 54). Beah also relies on other people to help him through his struggles, like when he is talking to Esther. “I didn’t completely trust Esther… I felt that she didn’t judge me for what I had been a part of; she looked at me with the same inviting eyes and welcoming smile that said I was a child” (Beah, 166). Although Beah lost his parents, whom he relied on for comfort and support, he was still able to survive and be independent without them. He was old enough to remember the words of his father, which motivated him to push through his pain and have a desire to live. Beah also found strength in friends like Esther because she didn’t judge him for what he had done. These are things Beah relied on to help him through the war without his parents.

Another main effect of war on Beah’s childhood is that the war causes him to grow up too quickly, impacting the rest of the story by making him more responsible and independent. When Beah was presented with the question about the monkey, he had an idea of a life-altering decision he would have made if he were put into that situation. “I concluded to myself that if I were the hunter, I would shoot the monkey so that it would no longer have the chance to put other hunters in the same predicament” (Beah, 218). This decision he would have made is one that no child should ever have to make. This is an example of how Beah had to grow up tremendously and take on a new understanding of life. This example, from before Beah became a soldier, helped him make better decisions later in his life.

Overall, war will have life-changing effects by altering one’s childhood, but making him/her stronger and more capable later. It is through trials and challenges that one learns life lessons. Beah had his family taken away, but this taught him to push through pain as he was on his own. War also caused him to grow up very quickly, making him more responsible for his decisions and actions. War had impacts on Beah’s childhood that he was able to use for his benefit for years to come. These effects of war may have hurt Beah at first, but he found ways to use them to his advantage.