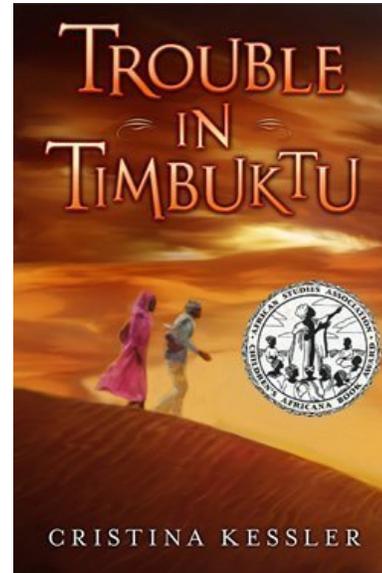
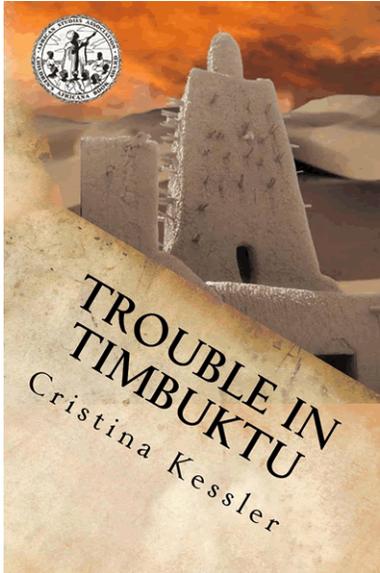




Cristina Kessler
Learning with the Books
Trouble in Timbuktu



Parent-Teacher Guide

TROUBLE IN TIMBUKTU

<https://www.cristinakessler.com/product/trouble-in-timbuktu/>



Outline for Discussion Guide for Trouble in Timbuktu

By

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I. Interconnectedness: In *Trouble in Timbuktu* Ahmed and Ayisha are connected to others in many ways. As twins, they share a strong physical and emotional bond.

- As the eldest children in their family, they are bound by love, respect, and obedience to their parents, and their Auntie B.
- As students, they are part of a school community.
- As Bella, they are part of tribal people, and as Malians, they have national and cultural ties to their heritage and their shared history.
- But, perhaps the strongest connections for these Muslim children are to their faith, as that is the common thread woven through all of their other relationships.

A. Think about the strongest connections in your life. Would you prioritize your allegiances in the same way that Ahmed and Ayisha did? Discuss the role of culture in determining our choices and actions.

B. Respect is esteemed and expected in every relationship in the Bella children's lives. Do you think Americans honor family, community, country, traditions and God? How do you express respect in your life? Does it resemble or differ from the ways Ayisha and Ahmed show their respect?



II. Tradition: The traditional role for Muslim women was one of subservience to men. This is changing in modern times, and in some countries girls are beginning to attend schools, choose careers, and have lives that are independent of their fathers, brothers, and husbands.

A. Ahmed and Ayisha are twins, but they have very different freedoms and privileges. How would you compare the roles of boys and girls in your culture and community with what the twins experience in Mali? Have things changed in how girls and boys are treated since your parents and grandparents were your age?

B. How do Ayisha's struggles to continue her education while honoring her parents' and her community's expectations affect her? What are your parents' ambitions for you? Compare them to your own efforts to balance their ambitions for you and your goals for your own future.

III. Courage: Protecting the sacred manuscripts that document the history and religion of Timbuktu leads Ahmed and Ayisha to take great risks, even venturing into the desert alone.

A. What do you think makes these manuscripts so valuable? Are there any symbols of your history, religion, or culture that you would risk your life to save? Why?

B. When Auntie B. and Baba Abdul find out about the plot to steal the manuscripts, they help to forge a plan to catch the thieves. Why do they feel a moral responsibility to see justice done?

IV. Determination: Griff and Trudy are not typical visitors to Timbuktu. Ahmed feels that right away, especially from Griff.

A. Who is more determined to succeed—Ayisha or Griff? What drives each of them?



- B. What does Ayisha learn from Griff's interest in the ancient manuscripts?
- C. Have you ever started a project for one reason and gained an unexpected benefit?

V. Ethnic and Racial Stereotypes: We meet many different groups of people in this story. Ahmed, Ayisha and their family are part of the Bella tribe. The Bella used to be enslaved by the Tuareg group, though they and the Fulani, and other groups all live in Timbuktu.

- A. Do these different groups share any common concerns or beliefs? How do they coexist?
- B. The Malians call all foreign (not just white ones) visitors toubabs. Why do they sometimes distrust and resent these visitors? How could more information and understanding on both sides make a difference?

VI. Language: Arabic and French are the official languages of Timbuktu. Ahmed speaks Arabic, French, Tamashek, German, Italian and English, although the Americans for whom he serves as a tour guide do not realize he understands English.

- A. How does learning another language foster cultural understanding?
- B. Why is it so important to be multilingual today? Do you ever wish you spoke more languages? Why?



VII. Cultural Awareness: Trudy was grateful when Ayisha taught her about culturally correct dress for women in Mali. Trudy also tries to tone down Griff's behavior from time to time. In other parts of the book they both appear to be very rude.

- A.** Can ignorance of local customs sometimes be misunderstood as rudeness and actually lead to rude behavior?
- B.** Have you ever seen visitors to your culture make mistakes that offend you? Have you ever made cultural mistakes?
- C.** Why do you think Ayisha refers to herself as a toubab after spitting out the unfamiliar food on the boat?
- D.** Have you ever been surprised by new foods or unfamiliar customs when you traveled that you found unpleasant? What did you do?

VIII. Family Secrets: Ahmed and Ayisha learn about their uncle, Jamal, and his honor in defending the sacred manuscripts - only after their own adventures.

- A.** Why do you think the children's parents kept the imprisonment and death of Jamal a secret?
- B.** Do you think Ahmed and Ayisha would have acted differently had they known of the injustice shown to their uncle?
- C.** Do you think secrets in families are sometimes helpful or necessary? Can you think of an instance when this might be so?



IX. Growth and Change: Ahmed and Ayisha felt they had to defy their parents' wishes and risk danger and jeopardize Ayisha's hopes for education to accomplish a feat that they hoped would make their parents proud of them. They knew they were showing lack of respect to their parents, in order to respect the values and traditions their parents and their religious leader, Alhaji Musa, had taught them.

- A.** Can you think of a way they could have caught the thieves without being disobedient?
- B.** Have you ever broken a rule to do something you thought was truly more important? Did you later regret or defend that decision?
- C.** What do you think Ahmed and Ayisha learned about themselves during their difficult journey through the desert, their hardships on the boat ride, and their struggles to catch the thieves?

