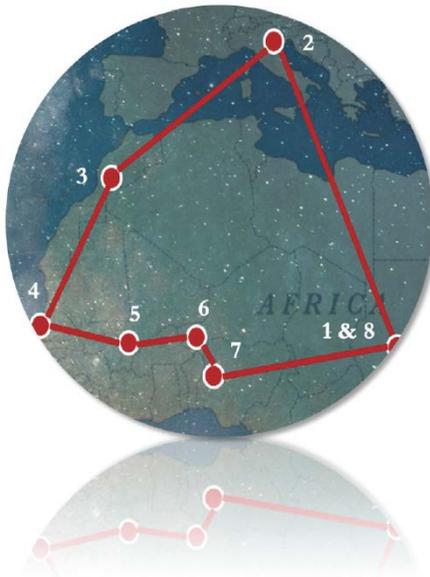
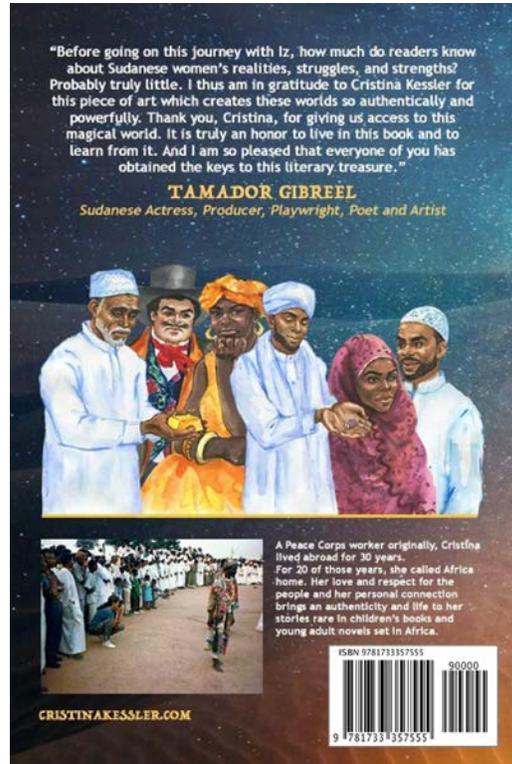
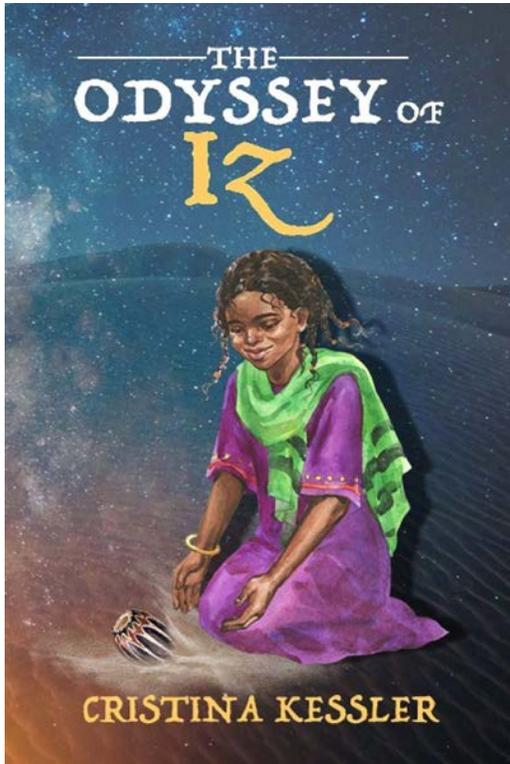




Cristina Kessler
Learning with the Books
 The Odyssey of Iz



- 1– Sudan
- 2– Murano, Italy
- 3– Marrakech, Morocco
- 4– N'Dar, Senegal
- 5– Walk to Niger River Crossing
- 6– Niger River Trip
- 7– Nigeria
- 8– Sudan



Parent-Teacher Guide

THE ODYSSEY OF IZ

<https://www.cristinakessler.com/the-odyssey-of-iz/>

Outline for Discussion Guide for The Odyssey of Iz

By

Cristina Kessler

The Odyssey of Iz is a YA novel that involves time travel, a talking chevron trade bead and a young Sudanese girl. Izdihar finds a beautiful bead on the desert sands one night after a giant *haboob* dust storm. Desperate to leave the village before her parents marry her off to an old man, she asks the bead to take her back through its life.

What follows is a trip that will take my readers through time and places, following the bead's life and all the things it was traded for by a string of owners. Izdihar names the bead Bella, and an adventure that starts in Murano, Italy in the 1800s, more than two hundred years before. Together she and the rather cocky bead, Bella, travel to Morocco, Senegal, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and back to Sudan.

Izdihar's ticket home is based upon her asking the bead the right question that evolves from her challenging experiences. She learns many things along the way, including how much the present resembles the past, and the importance of not making instant judgements. Many unexpected experiences await Izdihar as she travels back two centuries and then forward to 2020. Fear, joy, humility, and confidence all arise during her travels.



As Bella challenges Izdihar throughout their travels, they disagree frequently, admire events together, make snap decisions and their friendship grows. Bella tells Iz she won't get back home and to her family until she asks the right question. She also tells Iz the different isn't better or worse, it's just different in an effort to open the judgmental young girl's mind. Eventually Izdihar is reunited with her family. Can you guess what the correct question was to facilitate that final trip home?

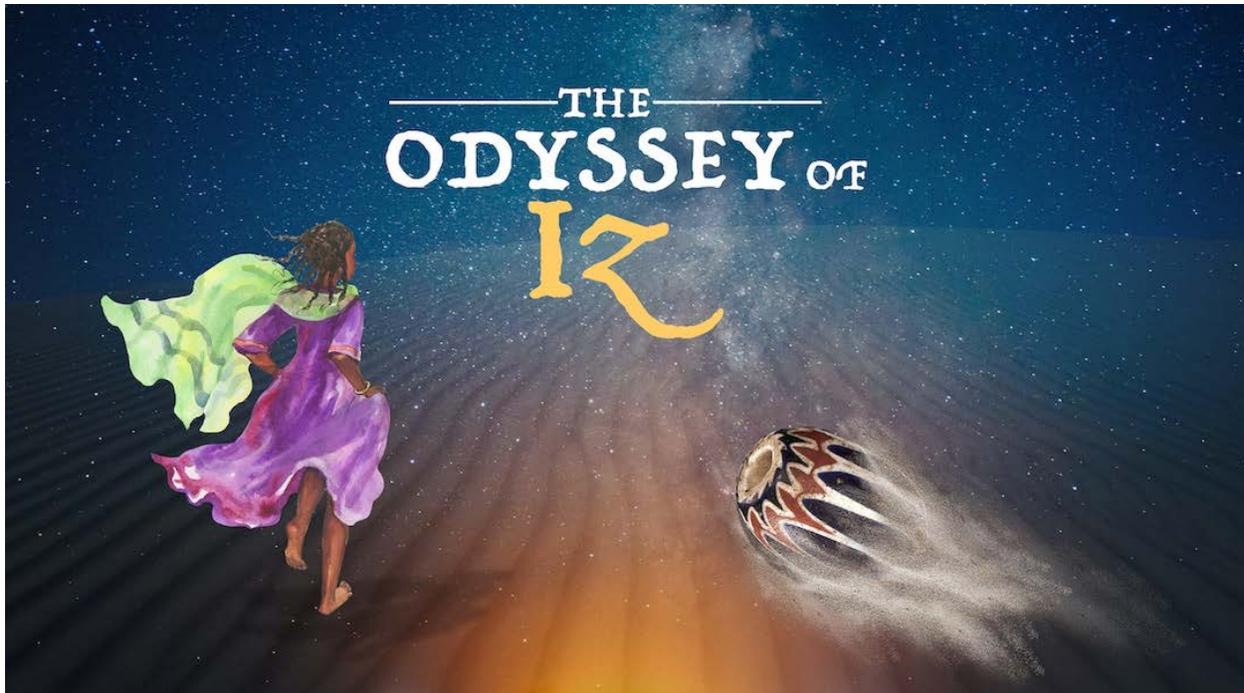
Izdihar is like Khadi in *NO CONDITION*, Aisha in *TROUBLE IN TIMBUKTU*, Fatima in *MY GREAT-GRANDMOTHER'S GOURD*, and Almaz in *THE BEST BEEKEEPER OF LALIBELA*, all strong young women who are the main characters, hopefully inspiring my readers that girls can be strong and focused and successful.

Like many of my previous books, the experiences are based on my own. Obviously, I wasn't in Murano, Italy 200 years ago, but I did attend the amazing Fulani and Wodabbe celebrations; Madame N'Dour was my neighbor in Bamako, Mali where we shared a wall and had many challenging experiences, but eventually ended up sharing mutual respect based on our differences; I almost went over the dam in a ten-foot wooden boat that my friend Paulette Nichols and I hired to travel 625 miles, the length of the Niger River through Niger. We never would have survived that spill.

I hope my readers enjoy the diverse cultures in the book and learn about the things that make these countries unique and similar at the same time. And about the gentle side of Islam, so often overlooked. Travel is always an eye-opener for people visiting new places and new cultures. Due to the current Covid-19 restrictions on world travel, I hope that *THE ODYSSEY OF IZ* allows my readers to travel safely and learn important lessons like mutual respect is as easy to share as disdain, and that by opening our minds to different as just that – different – we can make the world a better place.

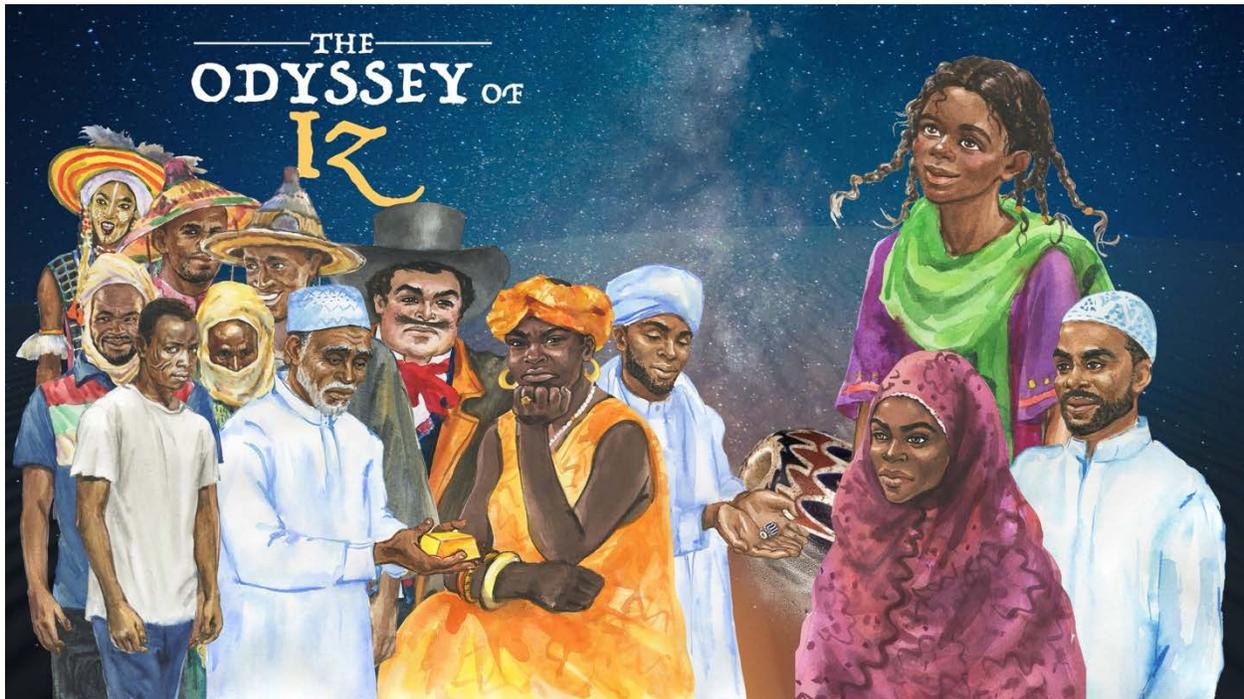


So please join Bella, a beautiful chevron bead that I have carried for the past 30 years, and Izdihar, a modern young Sudanese girl based on a friend of mine in Sudan, on a trip of time, travel and adventures that ultimately lead Iz to the right conclusion that we should all be sharing.



Possible discussion topics:

- Tradition is a way of life in Izdihar's family and village. What spurs her into wanting to not follow the old ways?
- What plan/dream does she refuse to give up?
- What made her form this plan?
- Have you ever tried to fight tradition? What tradition did you not agree with?
- Are your family elders supporting you or not?
- Are traditions good or bad? Can some be good to maintain and others not?
- Is there a favorite family tradition you would pass onto your future kids? What is it?



Izdihar and her father appear to be closer than Iz and her mother:

- What does her father say he should call her and why?
- What does her mother tell her shortly after the haboob sandstorm?
- She shares a secret with her little sister Fanta. What was it?
- Why does she love the dust storms?
- What are her plans for after dinner?
- What news do her parents give her after dinner that sends Iz running out into the desert at night, all alone?
- How does she discover the chevron bead that night?
- What does she ask the bead to do?
- What does Bella mean?
- Do you have dreams and aspirations for yourself that are different from what your parents expect you to do?
- What are they? Do you expect to succeed in following your dreams?
- What dreams do you hold? Have you shared them with your parents?

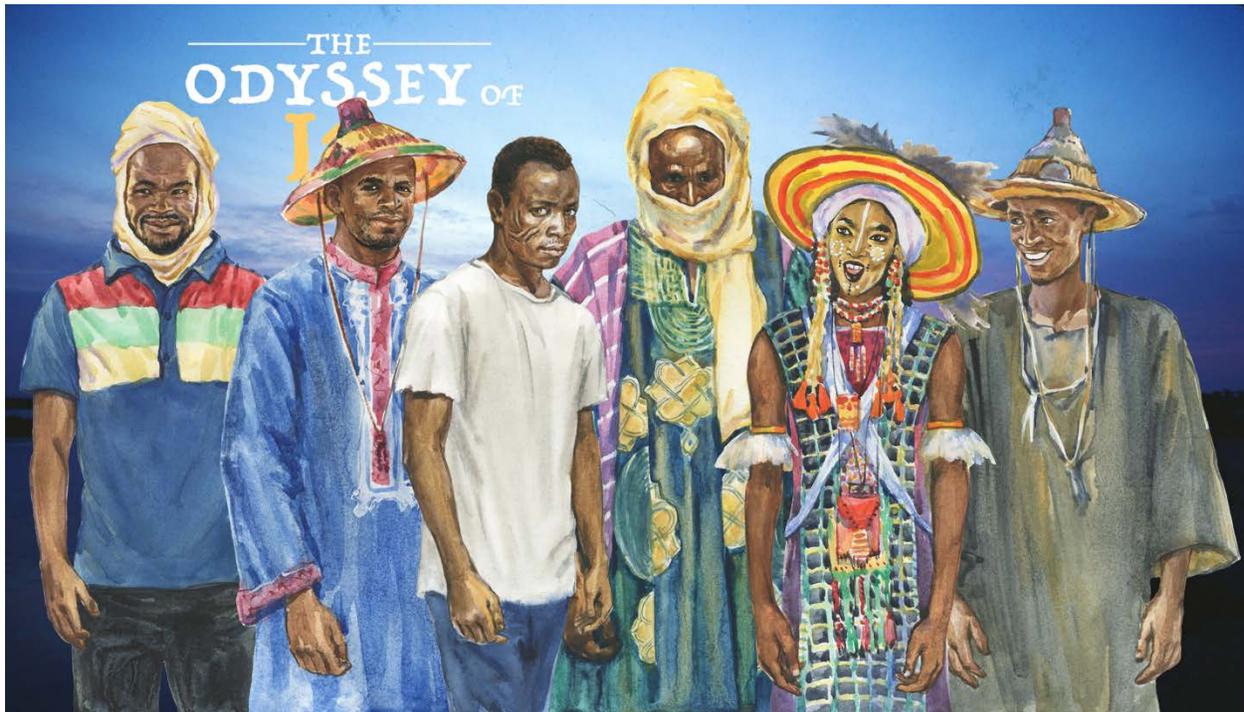


The journey:

- What frightens Iz and Bella so badly that they flee from the village they were in and become invisible for the rest of their trip?
- What consequences does Bella tell Iz about if she drops the bead or loses it?
- How does Iz safeguard the bead?
- Why is the chevron known as The Aristocrat of Beads in real life?
- Have you ever seen a cow swim across a river?
- What special leadership skills did Amee have to make the river crossing successful?
- What festive events did Bella and Iz watch as invisible spectators?
- What were the Fulani and Wodabbe celebrating?
- What did Iz see that made her beg to leave. Why did Bella tell her, “That my judgmental young friend, is the truest sign of a closed mind.” And in the flash of an eye they were no longer with the dancers but on the back of a small boat instead.
- Once they leave the cattle drive, they join the boat ride and meet Marabout Karim and Imam Omar. These two become great friends as they drift and discuss Islam and future plans.
- How did Karim come to own Bella? Do you know what an amulet is?



- Why did Karim giving Omar the bead upset Iz? What did Omar promise Karim in the exchange?
- What is the harmattan? Why is it of concern for the boaters?
- On the Niger River, Iz and Bella have time to observe and discuss many topics. Like the difference between a nomadic and a sedentary lifestyle. Do you know what the difference is?
- What does Bella say when Iz tells her that her goal and intention in life is to be a doctor?
- What did Iz's mother say when she told her parents about her plans? What is a midwife?
- The boat is manned by two paddlers, Hassan, and Musa. Why does Iz like them both immediately?
- As the journey begins Bella warns Iz about hippos and crocodiles. What makes the hippo so feared, even more than the crocodiles?
- What sad story did Marabout Karim tell Imam Omar about hippos?
- Imam Omar changes the subject to war, which makes Iz ask Bella what?
- When Bella hears the question she tells Iz it's a good question, but not the right one to get her home.
- What exactly does Bella tell Iz? Do you agree with Iz that war is not new or gone?
- What does Omar tell Karim about being a religious advisor in an army trying to spread Islam through any means? Why did he leave the army to return home?
- When Bella calls herself "Beautiful Brilliant Bella" Iz can't disguise her shock at such arrogance and conceit. Bella replies, "Confidence is a blessing. Doubt is a curse. You cannot have a truth until you have the confidence to accept it." Do you agree with this statement? What do you think is the difference between confidence and conceit?
- Bella is very happy and congratulates Iz when Iz says she is trying to change. What changes do you see Iz making?



The harmattan:

- Hassan mentions at dinner one night that the wind is really picking up, and it might be necessary to travel at night when the wind slows down. What does Karim offer to do?
- What sudden danger appears the next morning? How do they escape what would have been a disaster for one and all?
- Have you ever heard the power of water going over a dam?
- That evening, Bella gives Iz the choice to finish the river trip immediately and just go to Imam Omar's village, and then return to Sudan, or forget the boat ride and go directly to the village and then home. What does Izdihar reply?
- Once the decision is made to paddle at night for a few hours, Karim agrees but is not happy. Hassan smiles when he hears Karim lightly snoring. Have you ever been frightened by something and then fell asleep anyway?



- The men are warned one day of deep gorges and rapids ahead. That combined with the winds of the harmattan make Hassan announce that it would be best to find another paddler. Who do they find?
- When Musa introduces Mogo, he mentions that he is not Muslim and wonders if anyone is unhappy about that. Imam Omar assures them that he has never judged another man for his tribe or religion. Mogo is welcomed aboard as they await his older brother to give permission for Mogo to join them. When he arrives, he asks what Mogo will receive for his work, and Hassan gives him a large bag of millet. What was the second question the brother asked?
- As they get underway a happy Iz tells Bella, “I like Hassan’s style, humble but powerful.” Bella likes Iz’s new attitude and surprises Iz when she tells her what?
- She also compliments Iz on her progress in realizing that different isn’t better or worse, it’s just different. What did Iz say that made Bella say that?



- The night cruising was going well until Omar announced he would like to offer a prayer of thanks for the new paddler and the easier work on Hassan and Musa. It's quickly established that Mogo is unhappy and when asked if he welcomed the prayer he answered, "If I say no will you kick me off the boat?" What answer does he receive?
- Karim burst out in a short prayer, and Musa translated, "Allah, we thank you for this journey that has brought many strangers together are growing to be friends." Mogo looked at Karim and said, "I have thanked my gods also." Why did he say this?
- Iz is disturbed by Mogo's reaction to the Muslim men praying and says so to Bella. Bella mentions the old problem of a closed mind. Iz says, "I know you mean me." Bella makes Iz smile when she finishes by saying what?
- One minute Iz was enjoying the thrill of the rapids, and the next was screaming in fear as Musa fell out of the boat. With no hesitation Mogo leaned out over the edge and stretched his paddle out to Musa. Invisible Iz yelled, "Grab it Musa! Hold on my friend! Live!" cried Iz. "Please live."
- As Mogo pulled Musa closer and closer, Karim and Omar each grasped an arm. Once Mogo managed to lift an exhausted Musa back into the boat they scraped on a rocky shore and carried Musa onto land. After coughing up water Musa said, "Thank you my friend. You saved my life." Did this make you happy?
- Many lessons were learned in such a brief but scary time. Everyone lavished praise on Mogo for his quick actions, but he said, "I only did what your Allah and my gods wanted – save a drowning man." And then he added an apology for his rude behavior the night before during the other's prayers, saying, "A man should not be judged by his people or religion." An exhausted Iz told Bella, "Maybe it's time to go home."



MESSAGES ~ **HUMAN TOUCH**

Bella challenges Izdihar throughout their travels, hoping to help her develop an open mind and tolerance.

Izdihar learns about all the things that bind the Sahelian countries she had been unfamiliar with.

Izdihar learns a major lesson, the importance of mutual respect.



Final outcomes:

- How many generations does Bella stay with Imam Omar and family?
- Why is Karim's grandson named Ameer? How does he end up with the bead?
- What does Ameer trade the bead for? And who does he trade it to?
- Who is The Sacred One and how did he get his name?
- Iz makes an amazing discovery when Musa thanks Mogo for saving his life and telling him, "Grab the paddle," and, "Live Musa!" Who actually said that?
- Bella congratulates her for risking the chance to get home by calling out to Musa in his distress.
- What does the phrase, "I know you will do well," remind Izdihar of? Who else said that to someone?
- When Iz finally decides it's time to go home Bella asks her to tell her all the things she has learned on their travels. What three things does Iz tell her?



- Then Iz adds, “But I have not told you the greatest lesson of all.” What was that lesson?
- How would you define mutual respect?
- Do you think we need more of that these days? Does it make you happy to receive respect? Who do you truly respect and why?
- The moment comes for Iz to go home. She is awakened by someone tugging on her towb. Who has found her in the desert?
- What led them to where she was?
- Her parents are very concerned. What questions do they ask her?
- What does her mother reveal to Iz that shocks her father?
- When Iz shows them Bella, connected to her bracelet what does she tell her parents about her future?
- Her mother is amazed to see the bead. When Iz tells her she calls it Bella and Bella told her that her mother would know how it got there, Mother is truly confused. She asks Iz two things. What were they?
- As Mother gazes at the bead, she remarks on two things that make the bead especially unusual and beautiful. What were the two things?
- Mother tells them about a legend her grandmother told her about the chevron bead. She says that they bloom on the desert and bring the person who finds it three special things. What are those three things?
- Mother is shocked when Izdihar mentions The Sacred One. Who was he to Mother and why didn’t she like him?
- Izdihar knows that the time has come to tell her parents about her dreams and plans. But first she tells them something very important that she learned from Imam Omar and Marabout Karim. What does she tell them about traditions?
- What was the “possibility” she presented instead of insisting?
- Father is the first to react. What does he tell Mother?
- Mother’s reply let’s Izdihar know that all will work out. What was the phrase that Iz had longed to hear from her mother?
- What did Iz tell her parents as they arrived home?
- Do you think Izdihar eventually achieved her goals?
- What is the biggest lesson you took from this book?



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