

## STUDENT: TISH HUGHES

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Meena faces a great deal of conflict and pain in this excerpt from *The Book of Negroes* by Lawrence Hill. She struggles both internally and externally with the loss and search for her daughter, May. It is clear that Meena faces a great challenge, and she must try to find her daughter in the wide world whilst dealing with her own extreme sadness over her loss, and these conflicts are developed throughout the essay using elements such as setting, dialogue and imagery.

We first sense the pain and desperation Meena feels in the very first paragraphs. These paragraphs set rather grim circumstances. Meena and Jason are searching for May in an “eerily silent” wood. Jason has left town, where he had nowhere to stay and “nobody but disbanded soldiers with guns ready, fists clenched, boots for kicking”. These are not the happy, pleasant images of an optimistic person. These images are dark and despairing, and help introduce us to Meena’s feelings, as they create a grim and helpless tone. Meena and Jason have nothing: no food, no work, no home. Jason had a cut on his face and Meena is missing her daughter. With this depressing setting, the reader is led to understand and empathize with Meena’s internal struggle – her despairing feelings of loss and hopelessness – as well as her external conflict – her difficulties in trudging through forests and avoiding hostile soldiers. The opening paragraphs cast a grim image for the audience, thus introducing us to the world and conflict of Meena.

The dialogue in this selection further develop Meena’s conflicts. Meena makes a few important comments in the essay which help her to express her feelings, and therefore help the reader understand her internal struggles. For instance, she says “I have lost my child. My last child,” and “I am in the mood for dying.” These thoughts, which are coming directly from Meena, create a terribly sad mood for the reader. We begin to understand how depressed and lost Meena must feel, that she cannot bear the thought of having lost her only child, to the point that she feels ready to die. The reader is able to connect with Meena’s feelings through her pained statements. A comment made by McArdle also shows Meena’s conflict. He says, “We don’t know that they stayed in Boston,” and then lists various other places in which May could be. Meena’s search is thus shown to be seemingly impossible, as May could be seemingly anywhere. Meena’s external struggles are clearly very real and very difficult to overcome. The dialogue of Meena as well as McArdle elaborates on the intensity of Meena’s internal and external conflicts.

The imagery used by the narrator (Meena) is also instrumental in developing her conflicts. One example of this is her description of her “phantom limbs.” She describes her children as “phantom limbs, lost but still attached to me. Gone, but still painful.” This is a very powerful image and conveys very well the sensation of pain and loss. It gives an image and picture to relate to, so that the reader can imagine Meena’s feelings, like a phantom limb, and better connect to them. “The limbs had been severed, and they would be forever missing.” With this image in mind, the amount of sadness, pain and loss felt by Meena is made painfully clear.

Meena has suffered a very difficult loss, the loss of her daughter. This is made clear throughout the excerpt, with the use of setting, Meena and McArdle’s dialogue and the vivid imagery used by Meena.