Mr. Pip

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF LLOYD JONES

Jones was born in Lower Hutt, New Zealand in 1955, and went on to study at Victoria University of Wellington. As one of New Zealand's foremost literary authors, he has won multiple awards, most notably the Man Booker Prize for Fiction in 2007 for *Mister Pip*. He has said that *Great Expectations* was the first "adult" novel he read and that it had a profound influence on his conception of literature. He has since written 15 books, including novels, story collections, and a memoir.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Between 1988 and 1998, the island of Bougainville was involved in a messy armed-conflict known as the Bougainville Civil War. The origins of this war trace back to the establishment of a large copper mine on the island in 1972. Because Papua New Guinea invested in the mine—becoming a 20% shareholder—the government developed an economic dependence on its existence. But the people of Bougainville felt that the mine was destructive both to their land and to their social systems, claiming that the company that established the mine had ultimately created a system of apartheid by bringing white workers to the island and separating them from the black locals. Indeed, the mine attracted many laborers, including white Australians as well as Papua New Guineans, whom Bougainvilleans called "redskins." Tensions mounted as the mine's facilities segregated workers based on race, and in 1988 Francis Ona—the commander of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army—led an uprising that finally shut down the entire operation, at which point many of the island's white immigrants returned to their original homes. Not long afterward, Papua New Guinea enforced a blockade around the island, using helicopters and gunboats to patrol the perimeters. Francis Ona established an interim government and appointed himself president, but the conflict raged on fractiously, with clans and various rebel armies breaking off from the Bougainville Revolutionary Army, warring with one another, and terrorizing the villages. With Papua New Guinea forces controlling some parts of the island, the Bougainville Revolutionary Army others, and rebel factions occupying still others, Bougainville ran rampant with violence and conflict. This is the chaotic wartime political climate in which Matilda and her fellow characters in *Mister Pip* exist, pulled between divided armies and powers.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Mister Pip borrows its name and much of its subject matter from Charles Dickens's thirteenth novel, *Great Expectations*. A bildungsroman—or coming of age story—of an orphan named Pip, the novel was first serialized in 1860 and compiled into three volumes the following year. Matilda is drawn to Pip's story because it both relates to and greatly differs from her own life, simultaneously providing solace and escape. Because her father has left Bougainville behind, Matilda understands part of what it means to be an orphan, guessing what her father looks like in the same way that Pip tries to construct an image of his deceased parents. The most striking parallel between Matilda and Pip's lives comes when Matilda's mother steals Mr. Watts's version of *Great Expectations*. Since the "redskin" soldiers occupying the village believe that Pip is a rebel soldier—demanding that the townspeople hand him over—Matilda must choose to either expose her mother's theft (to prove that Pip is a fictional character) or risk her own safety along with everybody else's. This incident mirrors Pip's own dilemma when he is ambushed by an ex-convict who demands that he steal food and tools from his caretakers. Beyond providing this obvious parallel, though, *Great Expectations* serves as the general backbone of *Mister Pip*, a symbolic centerpiece that represents the liberating powers of the imagination.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Mister Pip
- **When Published:** 2006
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary fiction
- **Genre:** Historical Fiction, Contemporary Realism
- **Setting:** Bougainville Island, Papua New Guinea
- **Climax:** Convinced that Mr. Watts is a rebel soldier named Pip, Papua New Guinea's "redskin" forces shoot him and hack him up with machetes. When Matilda's mother, Dolores, confronts the "redskin" leader, she is dragged away, raped, and killed.
- **Antagonist:** Papua New Guinea's "redskin" forces, who occupy Bougainville in order to keep the islanders from establishing independence.
- **Point of View:** First-person narration from Matilda's perspective.

EXTRA CREDIT

Film. *Mister Pip* was made into a film in 2012, starring Hugh Laurie (of the television series *House*) as Mr. Watts. Among other places, the movie was filmed on the island of Bougainville. It was directed by Andrew Adamson, who also directed *Shrek* and *Shrek 2*.

PLOT SUMMARY

Mister Pip opens with a description of the last white person left in a village on the island of Bougainville, near mainland Papua New Guinea. Fourteen-year-old Matilda, the narrator, explains that everybody calls this man Pop Eye and that he looks like somebody who has "seen or known great suffering." Adding to the curiosity surrounding him as the island's sole non-black resident, Pop Eye often wears a red clown's nose and walks through town in a white linen suit while pulling his wife Grace—who is from the village—in a small trolley. As the older townspeople look on in bewilderment, children fall in line behind Pop Eye and Grace, creating an odd procession nobody understands.

Matilda reveals that Pop Eye's real name is Mr. Watts, and that he lives in what used to be the minister's house. Like Matilda, the children of Bougainville have seen very few white people other than Mr. Watts, especially since the Australian miners left the island after the copper mine shut down. In fact, white people weren't the only people to flee Bougainville, as even Matilda's father left the island for Australia. Before Matilda and her mother Dolores could join him, though, Papua New Guinea forces—referred to as "redskins"—descended upon the island to keep Bougainville from becoming an independent country. Fearful of the gunboats and helicopters patrolling the perimeter of the island, Matilda and Dolores were forced to remain in Bougainville.

Matilda describes the progression of tumultuous wartime events, explaining the rise of rebel armies who pitted themselves against the "redskins" and took to the jungle to engage in guerilla warfare. As fighting raged over the island, their village lost electricity and the children stopped going to school.

One morning, as the village anxiously fears the arrival of either "redskin" or rebel forces, Dolores wakes Matilda up and tells her she must go to school—Pop Eye is going to teach the children. Once in the schoolhouse, Matilda counts twenty fellow students who range in age from seven to fifteen years old. Pop Eye tells them, "I want this to be a place of light, no matter what happens." He says he's aware of his nickname and that the students can continue to call him by it. With this permission granted, the children cease to refer to him as such, instead addressing him as Mr. Watts.

Before dismissing the class, he thanks everyone for coming, saying, "the truest thing I can tell you is that whatever we have between us is all we've got. Oh, and of course Mr. Dickens." The children are confused, wondering who Mr. Dickens is and why they haven't met him. At home, Matilda tells her mother that she will meet Mr. Dickens the following day. Dolores is sure her daughter heard Mr. Watts incorrectly, but just in case, she tells her to ask the mysterious man to fix their generator. When Matilda arrives at school the next day, the other children all have similar requests that have been passed along by their mothers. Other than Mr. Watts, though, there is no white man to be seen. Instead, Mr. Watts opens a book and reads the first sentence of **Great Expectations**, in which the character Pip introduces himself.

As the days go by, and Mr. Watts continues to read the book, Matilda grows increasingly attached to Pip. On the first night after listening to *Great Expectations*, she tells her mother about the story, discovering that for the first time in her life she possesses knowledge to which her mother has no access. She tells her about the first scene of *Great Expectations*, in which an escaped convict named Magwitch surprises Pip in a graveyard and demands that the boy return the next morning to release him from his shackles. Following these directions—for the convict threatens to kill him if he disobeys—Pip steals food from his sister (who acts as his mother) and a file from his uncle. Upon hearing this, Dolores asks, "What would you do, girl? If a man was hiding in the jungle and he ask you to steal from me. Would you do that?" Matilda assures her mother that she would do no such thing, thankful that the dark hides her "lying face." Suspicious of what Mr. Watts is teaching her daughter, Dolores says, "I want to know everything that happens in that book. You hear me, Matilda?"

As the days pass, Mr. Watts invites the parents and relatives of his students into the classroom to deliver short impromptu lectures on anything about which they consider themselves knowledgeable. These lessons range from agricultural anecdotes to ruminations on the color blue. In the remaining class time, Mr. Watts continues reading from *Great Expectations*, and Matilda diligently tries to commit the details to memory so she can make the story come to life later when she narrates it to her mother. Unfortunately, in doing this she insults her mother's intelligence. Her smug pride in dangling superior knowledge over Dolores puts a quick end to these bedtime recitations, and her mother never asks about *Great Expectations* again, withdrawing from the book entirely and resolving herself against it, not wanting her daughter "to go deeper into that other world."

The "redskins" arrive for the first time the following morning, but the villagers hear their helicopters and are able to hide in the jungle until the soldiers move on. They aren't so lucky the next morning. This time, the soldiers land just as the villagers reach the jungle. When they finally leave, the town returns to find one of their dogs has been ripped open.

Later that day, Dolores visits Mr. Watts's class and speaks to the students about the importance of faith, referencing the opening of *Genesis* and discussing the impact that the island's first Christian missionaries had on the old systems of belief. Her short speech combines bits of island folklore with elements of the **Bible**, urging the children to pray frequently, for "faith is like oxygen." Matilda reflects upon how severe her mother is,

and is unsure if she aligns with Dolores's strongly-held beliefs. As *Great Expectations* continues, Matilda becomes more and more engrossed in Pip's life, realizing that—much like the rivalry between Pip's sister and his uncle—she will have to choose between her mother and Mr. Watts, who represent vastly different worldviews.

Living conditions deteriorate due to the war and the animosity Dolores harbors toward Mr. Watts grows. Meanwhile, Matilda's imaginative obsession with Pip only increases. She even writes his name on the beach using shells, a display Mr. Watts notices and calls "a shrine." Her mother grows increasingly suspicious of this obsession, worried that Matilda doesn't care enough about family and religion.

The "redskin" soldiers return to the village unexpectedly, landing their helicopter on the beach and catching everybody off-guard. They line the townspeople up and ask them their names, trying to discern whether or not there are any rebel soldiers hiding in the village. Having seen the "shrine" to Pip on the beach, one of the soldiers whispers to the commanding officer, who asks who Pip is and why his name is not on the list. Daniel, a particularly naïve little boy, reveals that Pip "belongs" to Mr. Dickens, and when the officer asks who Mr. Dickens is, he points at Mr. Watts's house. When he emerges, Mr. Watts says that he is, in fact, Mr. Dickens, lying to protect Daniel, who inadvertently misled the "redskin" officer. He then tries to explain that Pip is a fictional character, and sends Matilda to fetch *Great Expectations* off of the desk in the schoolhouse in order to prove this statement. When she enters the classroom, though, she is unable to find the book, returning empty-handed to the "redskin" soldiers. Thinking that the village is harboring a rebel named Pip, the soldiers compile everybody's belongings—including furniture—and burn it in a heap, threatening that they will return in two weeks.

After the soldiers leave, Matilda goes home, which is now completely empty except for a sleeping mat that used to belong to her father. She takes the mat down from where it rests in the rafters and spreads it out on the floor, hoping to surprise her mother with this remaining material possession. When she unrolls the mat, though, she finds Mr. Watts's copy of *Great Expectations* wedged in the middle. Matilda decides not to confront Dolores about having stolen Mr. Watts's book, as she understands that to do so would be to choose Mr. Watts over her mother.

Two weeks later, the "redskins" return. This time they look haggard and battle worn. The commanding officer is clearly ill. He demands medicine and tells everyone that he doesn't have the patience he displayed last time. When nobody brings forth Pip (or *Great Expectations*), the soldiers set to work burning their houses. Dolores and Matilda stand and silently watch the destruction.

In the aftermath of the disastrous second "redskin" visit, class resumes. Desperate for distraction, Mr. Watts and his students decide to reconstruct *Great Expectations* by memory. Each student provides whatever scene he or she can remember and Mr. Watts writes it down in his journal. Outside the classroom, families rebuild their homes, and although their constructions are makeshift, the new structures provide sufficient shelter. Mr. Watts's private life declines noticeably as Grace succumbs to a serious fever. Thus, in addition to teaching classes, he devotes his time to diligently caring for her. Matilda spends her free time searching for fragmentary memories of *Great Expectations* while her mother berates Mr. Watts and laments the loss of her pidgin Bible, which burned in the "redskin" flames.

Grace Watts dies. Some of the village men dig a grave for her using sticks and machetes, and the town congregates around the ditch with Mr. Watts. Eventually, Dolores utters a prayer, the words of which she almost forgets. Then somebody else remembers another prayer, contributing to this improvised funeral. Not long thereafter, a group of rebel soldiers appears, and their presence puts the village at risk, signaling it as a potential target for the "redskins." It remains unclear whether or not the rebels will harm the villagers, an ambiguity exacerbated by their brash reception of Mr. Watts, who they find on their second day in town. Marching him from his home, a drunk soldier threatens to rape him, but Mr. Watts sternly rebukes the young man, shaming him into buckling his belt again. When asked to give his name, Watts tells them he is called Pip. Later that night, villagers and soldiers alike crowd around a fire while Watts explains to the rebels what he is doing in Bougainville, telling them that his story will take seven nights. He then embarks on a long tale that combines elements of his own life with elements of Pip's story, blending the two and naturally transitioning from one to the other.

Mr. Watts explains that he grew up an orphan in New Zealand, where he eventually owned a house, half of which he rented to Grace, who was in the country for dental school. He and Grace fell in love and had a baby named Sarah, who died young of meningitis.

One day Mr. Watts declares a school holiday, and Matilda finds him standing before his wife's grave. He tells her that he has arranged with Gilbert's father to take a fishing boat out to a point at which another boat will meet them and secretly take them to safety. He explains that Matilda must keep this a secret from her mother, because he wants to tell her himself at a later time.

One morning near the end of Mr. Watts's seven-night story, the rebels disappear back into the woods. That same day, the "redskins" return, this time dragging the rebel soldier who threatened to rape Mr. Watts. The "redskin" officer forces his rebel captive to identify the fugitive Pip, and the man points to Mr. Watts's house. The soldiers shoot Mr. Watts and then chop him up with machetes. In a show of power, the officer then asks who saw this act of violence, punishing anybody who admits to

having witnessed the heinous act. "Sir," says Dolores, "I saw your men chop up the white man. He was a good man. I am here as God's witness." At this defiant reply, the "redskin" officers drag Dolores away to be raped, eventually summoning Matilda, who the soldiers also threaten to rape until Dolores bargains with them, insisting that they kill her instead of touching her daughter.

After her mother's death and after the "redskins" leave the village, Matilda is in a daze. A strong storm beats down on the island as she walks absentmindedly, eventually coming upon a wild river that envelops her in its currents, pulling her under until she grabs hold of a log, upon which she floats out to sea. In the open waters, she intersects the boat Mr. Watts had arranged for an escape. The crew loads her onboard and takes her to her father in Townsville, Australia, where she grows into an adult and graduates from the University of Queensland.

Matilda maintains her interest in Dickens, working toward becoming a specialist on his work. She also keeps Mr. Watts in her mind, even visiting his native New Zealand while writing her thesis on Dickens. In New Zealand she speaks with his heretofore unmentioned ex-wife, who tells her about Mr. Watts's love affair with Grace and his passion for acting in the amateur theater. After a depressing visit to England to research Dickens, Matilda turns her thesis about the author into a story about Mr. Watts, *Great Expectations*, and her own life. "Pip is my story," she writes, "and in the next day I would try where Pip had failed. I would try to return home."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Matilda Laimo – A girl from the island of Bougainville and the narrator of *Mister Pip*. For the majority of the novel Matilda is in her early teenage years, turning fourteen shortly after Papua New Guinea's "redskin" army arrives in her village for the first time. Matilda lives with her mother, Dolores, and is one of Mr. Watts's students. Although her mother doesn't like to talk about Matilda's father, Matilda often thinks about him and how he left the island for Australia when she was eleven. This is one of the reasons she is so taken by Charles Dickens's character Pip—an orphan—when Mr. Watts introduces her to the author's penultimate novel, **Great Expectations**. Matilda relishes the escape Dickens's work provides her, often thinking about Pip and feeling as if she knows him personally. This fascination troubles her mother, who is suspicious of Mr. Watts and the useless outsider's knowledge he introduces to the village's children. In this way, Matilda intuits that there is a divide between Dolores and Mr. Watts, a clashing of worldviews that will one day require her to choose one over the other. When "redskin" soldiers demand evidence that Pip is not a rebel soldier, she must finally decide whether or not to remain loyal to her mother, since Dolores stole *Great Expectations*, rendering it impossible for anybody to explain to the soldiers that Pip is a fictional character. In the end, Matilda proves herself a faithful daughter by choosing to let her mother keep the theft a secret—though the disastrous results of this decision come to haunt her.

Tom Watts (Pop Eye) – The last white person in Matilda's village, whom everybody refers to as Pop Eye. The community doesn't know what to make of Mr. Watts, who is married to a native woman named Grace. Having met in New Zealand while Grace was on a dental scholarship, the couple keeps to themselves, occasionally leaving the house in an eccentric display, in which Mr. Watts wears a red clown's nose (along with his characteristic white linen suit) and pulls Grace behind him in a small trolley, a scene that—unbeknownst to the townspeople—references a theatrical production of the **Biblical** story *The Queen of Sheba* that he and Grace acted in while still living in New Zealand. Despite the jolliness of the fake nose, though, Matilda describes Mr. Watts as "someone who had seen or known great suffering and hadn't been able to forget it." After the official schoolteachers leave the island, Mr. Watts agrees to teach the children, though he admits that he has very little to contribute in the way of knowledge. Still, he brings kindness and curiosity to the classroom, encouraging the children to bring in their family members who might be able to share some wisdom with the group. As such, he enhances the village's sense of community while also providing the children with a new imaginative outlet by reading them **Great Expectations**, his favorite novel, aloud each day. After a time, parents begin to worry about the fact that he is an atheist, a point of tension that leads to misunderstanding and a clash of values. For Matilda, Mr. Watts is a very influential figure who instills in her an appreciation of the mind's inner worlds. Believing that he is a fugitive rebel named Pip, "redskin" soldiers shoot him and cut him to bits with machetes, a catastrophic event that affects Matilda into adulthood.

Dolores Laimo – Matilda's mother. Dolores is a strict and pious woman who fiercely loves her daughter. It is of the utmost importance to her that she teach Matilda about the origins of their family and about her religious beliefs, a mixture of Christian theology and island knowledge that seemingly leaves no room to accommodate the secular teachings that Mr. Watts and **Great Expectations** espouse in tandem. Loyalty means a great deal to Dolores, who asks Matilda if she would, like Pip, steal from her if threatened by somebody dangerous. This loyalty also manifests itself in Dolores's insistence that Matilda respect their family heritage, illustrating her devotion to her ancestors and the traditional way of life on the island of Bougainville. In fact, Dolores opposes the foreign secular world Mr. Watts represents with such conviction that she steals his copy of *Great Expectations*, refusing to reveal it even when "redskin" soldiers threaten to destroy the town if somebody

does not prove that Pip is a fictional character and not a fugitive rebel. Despite this stubborn decision, though, Dolores later reveals her appreciation of Mr. Watts by standing as "God's witness" after the "redskin" soldiers kill him. "He was a good man," she says. "I am here as God's witness." Once more, her loyalty is evident. Unfortunately, this display of righteousness provokes the "redskin" soldiers, who respond to her by raping her. When they threaten to also rape Matilda, she pleads with them to kill her instead, thereby saving her daughter and losing her own life.

Pip – The main character of Charles Dickens's novel **Great Expectations**. After listening to Mr. Watts read the book aloud, Matilda feels connected to Pip, who is an orphan in early nineteenth-century England. Part of Pip's appeal has to do with the fact that he never knew his own parents, which resonates with Matilda because she feels as if she doesn't know her father, who left Bougainville when she was only eleven years old. As Pip comes of age in *Great Expectations*, he inherits a large amount of money and, in order to win the favor of the wealthy Estella, goes to London to learn how to become a gentleman. Matilda often evokes Pip's adventures, wondering how he must have felt in certain circumstances and applying these thoughts to her own life.

Grace Watts – Mr. Watts's wife, who is originally from Bougainville. Having left the island to attend dental school in New Zealand, she rented part of Mr. Watts's house, where they eventually began an affair and fell in love. After the death of their child, Sarah, the couple moved back to Bougainville, returning to a community that was suddenly suspicious of Grace, who they believed had forgotten her roots. But this was not the case. In a spare room in her and Mr. Watts's New Zealand home, Grace had filled the white walls with lessons she'd learned as a child, stories her relatives told her, and certain other bits of island folklore—all in the hopes of educating her daughter Elizabeth about her culture. Grace goes into a deep depression after Elizabeth dies, eventually going to a psychiatric hospital before later returning with Mr. Watts to Bougainville, where years later she dies of an intense fever.

The "Redskin" Officer – An unnamed officer who leads a group of "redskins," or soldiers of the Papua New Guinea Defense Force who occupy the island and fight the Bougainville Revolutionary Army and other native rebel forces resisting Papua New Guinea's rule. Having been alerted to the shrine to Pip that Matilda made on the beach, this officer thinks that the town is hiding a rebel soldier by the same name. When nobody steps forward to hand over Pip, this soldier proves himself ruthless and unsympathetic by actually following up on his threats to burn the town's belongings and, later, the residents' homes. He eventually falls ill and exhibits an even more apathetic mentality. Matilda notes, "He was tired of being who he was: tired of his job, tired of this island, of us, and of the responsibility he carried." It is with this mentality that he orders his men to kill Mr. Watts and Dolores, though not before allowing them to rape the latter and threatening to do the same to Matilda.

Matilda's Father – Dolores's husband, unnamed throughout the novel, who leaves Bougainville on a mining plane bound for Australia. Matilda is eleven when he departs, and the intention is that she and her mother will join him once he ensures the country can provide economic stability to the family. Before they can do so, though, Papua New Guinea institutes a blockade barring the people of Bougainville from leaving the island. Matilda spends the next several years of her life reconstructing and imagining her father, aided by several postcards he sent that are eventually burned by the "redskin" forces. When Matilda finally escapes the island after her mother's death, she reconnects with her father in Townsville, Australia. She lives with him there while going to high school. Later, while she attends the University of Queensland, he begins a romantic relationship with Maria, the woman who cleans his house.

Daniel – One of Matilda's classmates. Matilda describes Daniel as "slow," and though he may not always pick up on social cues or nuances, his ignorance sometimes enables him to make astute observations. For example, when Mr. Watts says that he feels especially conscious of his own whiteness when around black people, Daniel replies, "We feel the same. […] We feel black around white people." There are, however, times when Daniel's innocence misguides him, such as when he accidentally insinuates to the the "redskin" soldiers that Pip "belongs" to Mr. Watts, a confusion that forces Mr. Watts to assert that he is, in fact, Charles Dickens. Later, after the "redskin" officer confrontationally asks the townspeople if they witnessed the killing of Mr. Watts (a rhetorical question not meant to be answered), Daniel replies, "I saw it, sir." He is later found dead in the jungle.

The Queen of Sheba – A black Biblical character whose name Grace Watts borrows. In the **Bible**, Sheba visits King Solomon because she has heard that he possesses incredible wisdom regarding the Lord. An impressive ambassador herself, she arrives in his kingdom to find that the rumors of his expansive knowledge are true. The two speak at length before parting on good terms. This story is significant to *Mister Pip* because it exemplifies the meeting of two cultures. Mr. Watts explains to Matilda that Grace took Sheba's name because she was "at a time in her life when she needed to make changes." By borrowing the name of a significant black woman in the Bible who convenes with a knowledgeable white man, Grace models herself after a person who demonstrates an appreciation and curiosity of other cultures—a quality that would prove useful for her, given the fact that she herself is married to a white man from a different culture.

Sarah Watts – The daughter of Mr. Watts and Grace Watts,

who dies at a very young age of meningitis. Mr. Watts says that when he looked at Sarah's face he saw his "dead parents emerge," though he himself had never known what they looked like. Still, he saw the "familiar geography" of his lineage "all muddled up" in her visage, mixed with Grace's ancestry to create "a new world." In his seven-night story, Mr. Watts calls upon his daughter's mixed cultural identity to exemplify a real-life manifestation of hybridity.

Estella Havisham – A character in **Great Expectations** who has been raised to deny the advances and attention of her male suitors. Estella's high standards encourage Pip—who is smitten by her—to work hard in his attempt to become a gentleman. Nonetheless, she is incredibly cold to him, often pointing out his flaws. When Dolores agitatedly shoos Matilda away at one point in *Mister Pip*, she utters a line that reminds her daughter of something Estella tells Pip when she wants him to go away. In turn, this helps Matilda piece together *Great Expectations* by memory, and she is excited to have recovered Estella's remark.

Mr. Jaggers – A character in **Great Expectations** who handles Pip's finances and oversees the young man's training to become a gentleman. It is Mr. Jaggers who first informs Pip that he is the beneficiary of a large amount of money, thus changing the course of Pip's life. When Matilda avoids drowning by clinging to a floating log in *Mister Pip*, she refers to it as "Mr. Jaggers" because it saves her life and serves as the initial means by which she leaves Bougainville, thus beginning her new life.

Magwitch – A character in **Great Expectations**. At the beginning of Dickens's novel, Magwitch—an escaped convict—ambushes Pip in a graveyard and forces him to steal food and a file (to cut the shackles) from the boy's uncle and sister. As a way of thanking the boy later on, Magwitch anonymously gives Pip his considerably large life's savings.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Wilson Masoi – Gilbert's father. With the help of Mr. Watts, he arranges an escape from the island using his hidden fishing boat. Although Mr. Watts is killed before this can take place, Mr. Masoi and his fellow passengers rescue Matilda from tempestuous waters and successfully escape.

Gilbert Masoi – Wilson Masoi and Mrs. Masoi's son, and one of Matilda's classmates. Matilda describes him as having large shoulders and a "big woolly head." She also explains that he only comes to school when his father doesn't need his help fishing.

Mrs. Masoi – Gilbert's mother and Wilson Masoi's wife. When she visits Mr. Watts's class to share her wisdom, she gives the students cooking tips, teaching them how to kill an octopus or a pig.

June Watts – Mr. Watts's former wife, who remains unmentioned until the end of the novel, when Matilda looks her up in a New Zealand phonebook and subsequently pays her a visit in the very house Mr. Watts used to live in, where he first fell in love with Grace.

The Drunken Rambo – A rowdy rebel soldier and Bougainville native who threatens to sodomize Mr. Watts. When he is later captured by the "redskin" forces, he fatally identifies Mr. Watts as Pip, who the "redskin" officer thinks is a fugitive rebel. The "redskins" then kill the soldier.

Charles Dickens – The British author who wrote **Great Expectations**. Mr. Watts considers Dickens the "greatest English author of the nineteenth century." When she reaches adulthood, Matilda visits England to conduct research on Dickens for a thesis about his work.

Maria – A woman from the Philippines who cleans Matilda's father's house in Townsville, Australia, eventually becoming involved in a romantic relationship with him. Matilda says that Maria "tried too hard" to get her to like her, always wanting to talk about Dolores. Still, Matilda is grateful for Maria.

Francis Ona – The leader of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army, which carried out the first attacks on Bougainville's copper mine. These attacks prompted the Papua New Guinea government to enforce a blockade barring inhabitants from leaving Bougainville—the same blockade that prevents Matilda and Dolores from joining Matilda's father in Australia.

King Solomon – A **Biblical** character who is said to possess a large amount of divine knowledge. When the Queen of Sheba visits Solomon to ask him questions and test his knowledge, he engages in a conversation and gives her anything she desires.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

STORYTELLING

Mister Pip takes place on the island of Bougainville (one of many islands off the coast of Papua New Guinea), a place whose inhabitants have been exposed over many years to a series of different stories about other traditions and ways of life. In addition to their own traditional narratives that are unique to their indigenous culture, the inhabitants of the island have most notably experienced the arrival of white Christian missionaries who brought with them stories of Christ and Christianity. Furthermore, with a civil war raging over the island's independence from Papua New Guinea, they are now also locked between two different *political* narratives: one that says Bougainville should be independent, and another that says it should be governed by Papua New Guinea. Finally, when Mr.

Watts, the only white man who has not fled the village during the civil war, introduces Charles Dickens's **Great Expectations** to his class, Bougainvilleans find themselves coming into contact with yet another new narrative, this time in the form of a novel about nineteenth-century England. Through these multiple layers of intersecting stories, *Mister Pip* explores the way that stories offer escape or connection and affect the way people think and behave, as well as how the vital power of storytelling as a collaborative act can build and hold together a community, and how stories can both impact and be impacted by the world.

Mister Pip shows many different stories merging with one another. In some cases, new narratives enhance a character's view of their own world, as is the case for Matilda when she immerses herself in *Great Expectations*. By entering this new world, she gains a sense of optimism that, given the death and destruction surrounding her during the civil war, she would not be able to summon on her own. "I knew things could change," she thinks, "because they had for Pip" (the protagonist of *Great Expectations*). By paying close attention to Pip's life story—a "rags to riches" tale—Matilda is able to recognize the possibility of change. Therefore, she enriches her life by borrowing ideas from somebody else's narrative, merging Pip's circumstances with her own to create a new story and a new framework for her experiences.

However, other characters in *Mister Pip* are less open-minded when it comes to merging new stories with their own lives. Matilda's mother Dolores, for example, becomes suspicious of *Great Expectations* and Mr. Watts's lessons. When Matilda tells her that Mr. Watts doesn't teach **the Bible** in class, Dolores is very unhappy. She sees Mr. Watts's failure to teach the Bible as "a betrayal of [her and Matilda's] very safety." In short, new ways of thinking threaten her beliefs. She responds to this threat by teaching Matilda about the origins of their family, thereby reinforcing traditional Bougainvillean narratives that leave no room for *Great Expectations* and Mr. Watts's secular worldview. This outright rejection of new narratives leads Dolores to steal Mr. Watts's copy of *Great Expectations*, an act that triggers a chain reaction of destruction that ultimately results in Dolores's own demise.

By showing the danger of categorically rejecting the stories of others, Jones implicitly argues for using storytelling as a means for empathy. However, the danger of stories is not limited to rejecting them: Jones also shows that they can be used as a tool of control. This is obvious on a large scale in regards to the Bougainville Civil War. While the rebel armies of Bougainville insist on only believing in narratives that promote their independence, the Papua New Guinean forces insist on a narrative of their own dominance over Bougainville. Matilda speaks to the senselessness of such stubborn viewpoints when she describes a Papua New Guinean officer who appears trapped in a narrative he can't give up: "He was tired of being who he was: tired of his job, tired of this island, of us, and of the responsibility he carried." Because he is a military official, it is this man's "responsibility" to insist that Bougainvilleans should submit to Papua New Guinea. This one-sided approach only leads to violence, though, and the officer's exhaustion represents the uselessness of committing to just one narrative—especially one of subordination. If he could take the Bougainvilleans' point of view into account—merging their story with his own—this man might find it easier to enhance both his and his adversaries' lives. As it stands, he devotes himself to the narrative that he is, as a Papua New Guinean, superior to Bougainvilleans, a closed-minded approach that only leads to more and more brutality.

This idea is observable on a smaller scale, too, in regards to how Matilda tries to share *Great Expectations* with her mother. Although she wants to introduce Dolores to Pip's world, she also relishes the fact that she knows something her mother doesn't: "This was the first time I had been in a position to tell her anything about the world," she writes. Instead of warmly inviting her mother to share her new excitement about Pip's story, Matilda jumps at the opportunity to assume a position of authority, flaunting her new knowledge and vocabulary, and repelling Dolores from wanting anything to do with *Great Expectations*. If Matilda had used *Great Expectations* as a way to build a connection with her mother instead of using it to drive her away, Dolores may have been able to positively integrate its narrative into her own life, ultimately avoiding the disastrous results of rejecting the book.

While those who use stories to wield power invite violence and division, Jones suggests that collaborative storytelling leads to prosperity and survival. After Papua New Guinean forces terrorize the village, Mr. Watts proposes that the class reconstruct *Great Expectations* by memory, and he encourages the students to produce fragments of the story, which he writes in his notebook. Matilda underlines the collaborative nature of this process by comparing it to the village's fishing practices: "We had done this sort of thing before. In the past, when we still had our nets and lines, we would divide up the catch on the beach. That's what we set out to do now with *Great Expectations*." By comparing storytelling to communal fishing, Matilda frames group narration as something that provides sustenance and support to everyone involved. With her fishing example, it's easy to see the benefits of cooperation: when the villagers share their catches, they help feed one another, just as sharing stories promotes emotional wellbeing. In this moment, storytelling is equated to survival and, just like fishing, it is most effective as a group effort. It is an act that simultaneously provides emotional escape and strengthens the community—two significant outcomes for a village suffering from the single-minded and oppressive narratives of the civil war.

THE OTHER

Mister Pip is a novel that contains distinct groups of people who ostracize one another, frequently by pointing to racial divides. Mr. Watts, who is the only white person living in a black village, has difficulty interacting with the townspeople, who are suspicious of his foreign ways. Furthermore, the villagers themselves are torn between two opposing military factions, the Bougainville Revolutionary Army and the Papua New Guinea Defense Force (whom they call "redskins," a racial slur for Papua New Guineans). *Mister Pip* explores these tensions, ultimately showing that to think of people from different groups or ethnicities as "other" only leads to misunderstanding and conflict.

Jones illustrates that viewing people as "other" is often the result of reductive, narrow-minded thinking. Dolores's dislike of Mr. Watts is an example of this outlook. Matilda notes her mother's quick judgment of Mr. Watts, which reduces him to nothing more than his race: "She thought she had Mr. Watts summed up. She could not see what us kids had come to see: a kind man. She only saw a white man. And white men had stolen her husband and my father. White men were to blame for the mine, and the blockade." Dolores doesn't give Mr. Watts's individuality any thought because of what he represents in her mind, while Matilda—who doesn't approach him as an "other"—sees that he is a "kind man." Unfortunately, she is unable to change her mother's mind, and Dolores allows herself to view Mr. Watts as an enemy, prompting her to steal **Great Expectations**, which sets off a succession of events that leads to both Dolores and Mr. Watts's death.

Similarly, the rebel soldiers and the "redskins" each promote their own ideas regarding one another. These black-and-white beliefs make it easier for them to cling to their own notions regarding who's right and who's wrong. To understand this, it's helpful to consider the beginnings of the Bougainville Civil War. Many native Bougainvilleans were unhappy that the island's large copper mine was bringing workers to the island who weren't Bougainvilleans (particularly workers who were racially different). Eventually, groups of Bougainville rebels attacked the mine in a bid to restore the island's purity and original way of life. At this point, the Papua New Guinea government deployed the Papua New Guinea Defense Force to protect the mine and the land around it, but the Defense Force soon spread to the rest of the island, waging war on the villages and rebel factions. As such, both sides thought of one another as malicious others: the Bougainvillean rebels saw the Papua New Guinea Defense Force as an invasive oppressor, while the Papua New Guinea Defense Force saw the Bougainvillean rebels as rowdy and lawless guerilla units who didn't have their own island's best interests in mind (since they had destroyed the mine). As a result, there was very little empathy and understanding between the two sides, which made it easier for each group to advance only their own interests.

Exploring the thinking of the two armies, Jones shows that enemies are easier to fight when they are reduced to a single opposing viewpoint. The villagers of Bougainville, by contrast, don't choose sides. Though many resent the "redskins," they also resent that the rebels attacked the mine and shut it down. Of course, some of them support the rebels—who claim to be fighting for them—but others do not: "Everyone else just wished the fighting would go away, and for the white man to come back and reopen the mine," Matilda says. By recognizing the benefits of the mine, these villagers exhibit tolerance of outside cultures. Perhaps they aren't thrilled by the influx of white people and Papua New Guineans that the mine attracts, but they don't hate their new neighbors. Instead, they focus on the economic benefits of the mine and appear willing to accept the diverse and integrated community it creates. Unfortunately, the mine doesn't reopen, leaving these culturally tolerant villagers trapped in the middle of a conflict between two sides determined to view one another as evil.

Similar to how many Bougainvilleans embrace the diversity the copper mine introduces to their community, Matilda's classmate Daniel demonstrates cultural tolerance and perspective when he interacts with Mr. Watts. Rather than assuming he knows everything about his teacher based on the man's race, he straightforwardly asks, "What is it like to be white?" In doing so, he puts himself in a position to actually learn about somebody from a different race and culture. This question represents a productive open-mindedness when it comes to connecting across racial or social divides, and enables him to successfully exist in the gray area between two opposing cultures. Asking this question makes it impossible for him to simplify Mr. Watts into a stereotypical "other," instead inviting the man to share parts of his life that Daniel otherwise wouldn't know or understand. In this way, Jones holds up open-minded communication as a way to avoid turning somebody from another culture (or somebody with different beliefs) into an enemy.

THE COMMUNITY

Because *Mister Pip* takes place during the Bougainville Civil War, its characters are constantly threatened by a loss of community. To make matters worse, the war is characterized by a number of rival sub-factions: different guerilla militias that seem to forget their original intention to protect the people of Bougainville, instead warring between themselves and threatening the villages they visit. In this confusingly divided climate, Jones emphasizes the importance of banding together with one's community. He highlights that each member of Matilda's village can contribute something valuable to society, even if that contribution is only a bit of fishing advice or **Biblical** knowledge. In turn, these contributions strengthen the community, which provides the villagers emotional stability in unstable times.

In his depiction of education, Jones illustrates that there is power in shared knowledge. Mr. Watts's classroom embodies this, since Mr. Watts—who admits there are gaps in his knowledge—invites parents and relatives to visit the classroom to share what they know. One mother tells the children about a plant called the "heart seed" that can make "a fierce flame and keep away the mosquitos." Another mother teaches the class how to kill an octopus and how to slaughter a pig. Matilda's mother lectures about faith, the opening lines of *Genesis*, and "the wisdom of crabs" (a theory she has about their ability to predict the weather). As a result, the students gain not only useful knowledge, but a deeper understanding of the beliefs and practices of the community they live in. Later, after the town has been terrorized by Papua New Guinean forces, Mr. Watts builds upon this sense of community engagement by suggesting that the class work together to rewrite **Great Expectations** by memory, each student contributing the snippets he or she remembers. This involved group activity becomes critical to the students' emotional well-being, giving them both a distraction from the threat of Papua New Guinean soldiers and a renewed sense of unity in otherwise divisive times.

Shared knowledge has a direct effect on real life, too, when Mr. Watts tells the story of his personal life to the rebel soldiers. Though it's unclear whether or not these soldiers pose a threat to the village, Mr. Watts's seven-night tale invites them to partake in a communal event, ultimately distracting them from harming the villagers. At one point, he draws upon the lessons the community members taught his students in the classroom, incorporating them into his story. This has the effect of both keeping the soldiers entertained *and* ensuring that the villagers remain on his side as he navigates this tricky situation, which has the potential to end badly if somebody like Dolores raises suspicion amongst the soldiers about the validity of his claims. Matilda writes; "[…] we began to hear all the fragments that our mums and uncles and aunts had brought along to Mr. Watts's class. […] Mr. Watts was assembling his story out of the experience of our lives." As such, he uses the communal knowledge he's already learned to create an even bigger community, one that includes the rebel soldiers; by telling this story, he invites the soldiers into the village's shared knowledge, "assembling" a story that takes root in the community itself. And because the story enthralls the soldiers while simultaneously pleasing the villagers, Mr. Watts is able to protect the village (at least temporarily) from conflict.

Another kind of community engagement comes in handy when Matilda's mother finds herself unable to recall more than one prayer at Grace Watts's funeral. Having lost her pidgin Bible when Papua New Guinean forces burned the town's possessions, she has trouble remembering a second prayer, until a fellow funeral-goer provides one by memory. It is in this manner that the funeral proceeds, with the fellow villagers piecing together their Biblical knowledge to give Grace a proper ceremony. They also begin to share their favorite memories of Grace, telling Mr. Watts what she was like as a child: "They gave their bits of memory to Mr. Watts. They filled in a picture of his dead wife. In this way he learned of a girl he had never met. […] The big things came back to us, and the little things. Mr. Watts did not care how small." This is a significant moment because Mr. Watts has been an outsider until this point, and here the village finally welcomes him into its community, caring for him and trying to ease his pain. In turn, he accepts their kindnesses, not caring "how small" their memories are, but simply grateful for their compassion. It is this kind of banding together that Jones holds up as essential to making it through difficult times.

HYBRIDITY

A book about blending cultures and stories, *Mister Pip* frames hybridity (that is, the mixing of various elements or sources to create something new) as fundamental to human life. In order to lead enriching and successful lives, Matilda and her fellow characters all must borrow and accept other ideas, practices, and cultures. Her village itself is a mixture of native island life, the influence of Christian missionaries, and the looming presence of Papua New Guinean armed forces. However, although Jones demonstrates that everybody has hybrid beliefs, he also shows that people often tend to think of their own cultures and worldviews as being pure and correct just as they are. This rigidity, Jones argues, misunderstands the hybrid nature of culture and belief, and it also closes people off to the possibility of incorporating helpful new ideas into their lives, thereby hindering empathy and progress.

Dolores is a perfect example of this reluctance to embrace hybridity. She believes in the purity of her own convictions, refusing to entertain new ideas. Of course, this is ironic because of the fact that what she believes in is itself a combination of island knowledge and the teachings of Christian missionaries who visited Bougainville years ago. Since she first encountered these combined beliefs as a single worldview, however, she denies her own hybridity; for her, these ideas do not represent a coming together of two traditions, since they were handed down to her intact by her parents. As a result, she has never actually experienced the benefits of embracing new worldviews, so she stubbornly fights against the influence **Great Expectations** has on her daughter. Dolores isn't comfortable with the foreign ideas the book presents, and she isn't accustomed to accommodating new outlooks.

Matilda's father also fails to benefit from hybridity, though his situation is different from Dolores's. While Dolores is unwilling to incorporate new elements of white culture into her life, her father is eager to trade his island culture for that of his white coworkers in the mine. The more involved he becomes in this

life, the more he estranges himself from his roots. Matilda's mother stops wanting to visit him in Arawa—where he lives while working in the mine—because she doesn't want to witness him "turn into a white man." This gradual transition from one culture to another eventually leads to his complete departure from Bougainville, when he goes to Australia to live amongst white people without the company of his family. Later, when Matilda reunites with him in Australia, she notes that his "transformation into a white man [is] near complete." To give up on hybridity, Jones suggests here, is to risk losing two important things: family and identity. Because Matilda's father is so wrapped up in what he wants to become, he fails to maintain what he leaves behind, ultimately sacrificing his original life.

Furthermore, Jones suggests that refusing hybridity often leads to violence. Dolores's theft of *Great Expectations*, for example, leads to Mr. Watts's death since, without the book, the village is unable to convince the "redskin" soldiers that Pip is a fictional character and not a fugitive rebel. The soldiers, for their part, are also blinded by an inability to recognize the importance and legitimacy of hybridized worldviews. To them, Pip must be a rebel soldier because they can't conceive of a world in which real life events could mingle with fictional characters. They have no way of understanding why somebody like Matilda would be so invested in a made-up person that she would write his name in the sand. As such, they approach the situation in the only way they can fathom: as a confrontational problem that supports their mission to kill rebels and destroy villages. By showing the disastrous fates of those who fail to embrace hybridity, then, Jones frames embracing adaptability, cultural tolerance, and imaginative flexibility as crucial to morally relating to others.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Great Expectations is a novel written in the nineteenth-century by Charles Dickens. It tells the story of Pip, an English orphan who lives with his oppressive older sister and kindhearted uncle in southeast England. Pip eventually becomes a blacksmith before an anonymous benefactor gives him a large amount of money and tells him to move to London to learn how to be a gentleman. This coming-of-age tale resonates deeply with Matilda, who relates to Pip because—among other things—she has been estranged from her father and is frequently at odds with her mother. She sees the book as representative of the fact that change can happen to anybody, and that disagreeable circumstances can take an unexpected turn for the better. As Pip evolves as a character, Matilda considers what it means to be a gentleman, a thought process Mr. Watts furthers when he tells his class that a gentleman always does the right thing. In this way, *Great Expectations* comes to embody a sense of morality for morality's sake, a philosophy that promotes the intrinsic goodness of being an upstanding person. As Matilda ventures more deeply into these ideas, she finds herself capable of escaping the turbulent wartime environment in which she lives, turning *Great Expectations* into a window through which she can access a foreign world that sheds new light on her current reality. Unfortunately, she also discovers that the secular commitment to goodness that *Great Expectations* champions is at odds with her mother's **Biblical** beliefs, which uphold that morality should be rooted in religion. The presence of Dickens's novel in the village ultimately creates incredible tension, as people like Dolores view its remote ideas as threatening to Bougainville's traditional beliefs. As such, *Great Expectations* symbolizes both the positive aspects of embracing foreign stories *and* the danger of introducing new narratives into volatile communities.

THE BIBLE

The Bible appears in *Mister Pip* as a counterpoint to **Great Expectations** and its secular framing of what it means to be a moral person. Suspicious of ideas that threaten the stability of her traditional beliefs, Dolores invests herself in the Bible (which she calls the "Good Book"), calling upon it to support her ideas about right and wrong. For her, morality is inherently rooted in religion, and a strong familiarity with the Bible ensures a person's goodness. Interestingly enough, though, her commitment to scripture also symbolizes the notion of hybridity, since her foundational beliefs are a mixture of old Bougainvillean island lore and the Biblical teachings of Christian missionaries who visited the village before she was born. As a result, she is just as likely to refer to "the wisdom of crabs" as she is to quote the opening lines of *Genesis*. For her, these two traditions are one and the same. For example, to explain why women in her community have always braided their hair, Dolores upholds that "when you bring two strands of hair together and tease them into rope you begin to understand the idea of partnership…and you understand how God and the devil know each other." This assertion combines the customs of Bougainvillean women with the concept of right and wrong—a concept that draws upon the Bible's depiction of God and the devil. As a result, Dolores uses the Bible to resist the outside influence of **Great Expectations** even as the Bible itself represents the cultural hybridity at play in her own personality and culture.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Dial Press edition of *Mr. Pip* published in 2008.

Chapter 1 Quotes

He pulled a piece of rope attached to a trolley on which Mrs. Pop Eye stood. She looked like an ice queen. Nearly every woman on our island had crinkled hair, but Grace had straightened hers. She wore it piled up, and in the absence of a crown her hair did the trick. She looked so proud, as if she had no idea of her own bare feet. [...]

Our parents looked away. They would rather stare at a colony of ants moving over a rotting pawpaw. Some stood by with their idle machetes, waiting for the spectacle to pass. For the younger kids the sight consisted only of a white man towing a black woman. [...] Us older kids sensed a bigger story. Sometimes we caught a snatch of conversation. Mrs. Watts was as mad as a goose. Mr. Watts was doing penance for an old crime. Or maybe it was the result of a bet. The sight represented a bit of uncertainty in our world, which in every other way knew only sameness.

Related Characters: Matilda Laimo (speaker), Grace Watts, Tom Watts (Pop Eye)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Matilda describes the only real contact her village has had with Mr. Watts before he starts teaching in the schoolhouse. Their sole impression of the man is based upon his frequent trips into town, when he wears a clown's nose, a white linen suit, and pulls his wife in a small trolley. In considering this procession, Matilda is acutely aware of Grace's racial identity, noticing that her hair has been straightened despite the fact that, as a black woman, it is normally "crinkled." She notes that this style is out of step with the rest of the village women, who don't wear their hair "piled up" and "straightened." In so closely examining this seemingly surface-level detail, she alerts readers to the fact that Mr. Watts—the last white person on the island—is not the only person the villagers regard as otherworldly; in fact, Grace confounds them even more than he does, since they don't know what to make of a woman who is so "proud" of her departure from what they consider normal behavior. In response to this "uncertainty," they make up stories, desperately trying to explain what they don't understand.

Chapter 2 Quotes

What I am about to tell results, I think, from our ignorance of the outside world. My mum knew only what the last minister had told her in sermons and conversations. She knew her times tables and the names of some distant capitals. She had heard that man had been to the moon but was inclined not to believe such stories. She did not like boastfulness. She liked even less the thought that she might have been caught out, or made a fool of. She had never left Bougainville.

Related Characters: Matilda Laimo (speaker), Dolores Laimo

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

Matilda writes this as a way of introducing both her mother's stubborn convictions and the island's insular framework. By casting her village as "ignoran[t] of the outside world," she effectively prepares readers to see that the clashes that take place throughout the novel come from a lack of cross-cultural knowledge and empathy. Because Dolores has "never left Bougainville," she has no framework into which she can place Mr. Watts and his secular commitment to literature. As a result, she steals and hides his copy of *Great Expectations*, which leads to the destruction of the village, Mr. Watts's death, and her own death. As such, "ignorance of the outside world" is portrayed as detrimental to a community's well-being.

The weeks passed. Now we had an idea of what our time was for. It was to be spent waiting. We waited, and we waited for the redskin soldiers, or the rebels, whoever got here first. It was a long, long time before they came to our village. But I know exactly when they did because that's what I had made up my mind to do—I had decided I would keep the time.

Related Characters: Matilda Laimo (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

Because of the increasing severity of the Bougainville Civil War, Matilda's village loses electricity and all of its white inhabitants (except for Mr. Watts). Because of the whites' sudden departure, Matilda finds herself without any

teachers and, thus, cannot attend school. Therefore, she no longer has anything to fill her days. The "redskin" army has stripped the village of the things that give shape to life: school, work, the ins and outs of daily life. All of a sudden, the only thing Matilda has left to define her existence is the notion of time and the question of when the soldiers will return. In other words, the "redskin" forces have essentially robbed the villagers of their daily narratives, taking away their agency and replacing it with a singular consideration about the war. The soldiers force upon the village the idea that their time is "to be spent waiting" for the next raid. It makes sense, then, that Matilda decides to "keep the time," for in doing so she not only occupies her mind, but also restores to herself a small amount of agency, realizing that she doesn't have to be completely passive as she "wait[s]" for the next atrocity to rain down on her life.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ "I want this to be a place of light," he said. "No matter what happens." He paused there for us to digest this.

When our parents spoke of the future we were given to understand it was an improvement on what we knew. For the first time we were hearing that the future was uncertain. And because this had come from someone outside of our lives we were more ready to listen.

Related Characters: Tom Watts (Pop Eye), Matilda Laimo (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Matilda describes what Mr. Watts tells his students on his first day as their teacher. His phrase "no matter what happens" acknowledges that the villagers' futures are "uncertain," a sentiment the students' parents never express. Suddenly, the children are receiving new information, or at least a new way of approaching the situation their village is in regarding the dangerous civil war raging in the jungles surrounding them.

It's notable that Mr. Watts's words have so much influence in this moment. After all, he doesn't actually speak about the war or what it means for everybody involved. He simply alludes to the fact that things are liable to change. The attention Matilda and her classmates place on Mr. Watts's words illustrates their willingness to "listen" to somebody who comes "from outside of [their] lives." Mr. Watts is giving them a new narrative about the civil war and how it might affect them, and rather than refusing to accept it—as Dolores might do in the same circumstances—the students embrace this fresh perspective. This illustrates both their open-minded receptiveness and his strong influence as an otherworldly figure in an otherwise insular community.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ There was also a lot of stuff I didn't understand. At night I lay on my mat wondering what marshes were; and what were wittles and leg irons? I had an idea from their sound. *Marshes*. I wondered if quicksand was the same. I knew about quicksand because a man up at the mine had sunk into it, never to be seen again. That happened years earlier when the mine was still open and there were white people crawling over Panguna like ants over a corpse.

Related Characters: Matilda Laimo (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

Matilda says this in regards to her initial impressions of *Great Expectations*. The novel contains words she and her classmates don't understand, and though this may be due to an inadequate foundational education—which Jones never discusses—it is also because the students have never encountered certain concepts that the book draws upon. As a result, Matilda uses the process of association to piece together an understanding of *Great Expectations*. Trying to grasp the idea of a "marsh," she sifts through her own experiences, finding a rough equivalent by evoking the "quicksand" she's heard exists near the copper mine. This is an example of what happens when somebody incorporates new ideas into her own life: literature and storytelling not only gives Matilda the opportunity to escape from her world, but also to reexamine it with more intention and care. In this way, she clarifies her experience as a reader while simultaneously clarifying her own daily existence.

This was the first time I had been in a position to tell her anything about the world. But this was a place she did not know about and hadn't heard of. She couldn't even pretend to know, so it was up to me to color in that world for her. I couldn't remember the exact words Mr. Watts had read to us, and I didn't think I would be able to make it possible for my mum to slip into that world that us kids had or into Pip's life or some other's, that of the convict, say. So I told her in my own words about Pip having no mum or dad or brothers, and my mum cried out, "He is lost."

Related Characters: Dolores Laimo, Matilda Laimo (speaker), Tom Watts (Pop Eye), Pip

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

Having realized that her mother has never read *Great Expectations*, Matilda discovers herself in a "position" of authority, resulting in a reversal of their mother-daughter relationship, in which Dolores possesses all of the knowledge and hands it down to Matilda. Given *Mister Pip*'s interest in how stories change and evolve in new contexts, it's worth noting that Matilda must use her "own words" to "color in [Pip's] world" for her mother. Already, *Great Expectations* starts evolving as it spreads by word-of-mouth throughout the village. This is the first instance in the novel of stories mutating, ultimately foreshadowing the class's reconstruction of *Great Expectations* by memory as well as the composite tale Mr. Watts tells the rebel soldiers around the campfire.

Chapter 5 Quotes

He smiled. "Matilda is a nice name, too. Where did you get such a pretty one?" he asked.

"My father."

"And he…?"

I anticipated his question. My dad had worked with Australians up at the mine. They had given him the name Matilda. He had given it to my mum. And she had given it to me. I explained all this.

"A sort of hand-me-down." Mr. Watts glanced away with the thought. Suddenly he looked gloomy. I don't know why.

Related Characters: Tom Watts (Pop Eye), Matilda Laimo (speaker), Dolores Laimo, Matilda's Father

Related Themes:

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Mr. Watts asks Matilda the origins of her name. In the same way that stories are passed along in *Mister Pip*, Matilda's name migrates from one culture to another. Surprisingly enough, the idea of Matilda's name being a "hand-me-down" makes Mr. Watts gloomy, despite his tendency to promote cultural intersections in other areas (such as literature). This is perhaps because he doesn't view Matilda's naming process as an intersection of two traditions, but rather a linear intrusion of white culture. In the same way that Dolores believes Matilda's father wants to become a white man and leave behind his Bougainvillean identity, Mr. Watts seems to fear that Matilda's naming process risks erasing what her culture has to contribute to her life. This proves Mr. Watts's investment in hybridity and foreshadows his story about the spare room, where he and Grace lined the walls with stories and traditions from their respective cultures so that their child could pick and choose from both, creating a mixed identity rather than simply inheriting it by way of a "hand-me-down" process.

Chapter 6 Quotes

Now listen. Faith is like oxygen. It keeps you afloat at all times. Sometimes you need it. Sometimes you don't. But when you do need it you better be practiced at having faith, otherwise it won't work. That's why the missionaries built all the churches. Before we got those churches we weren't practicing enough. That's what prayers are for—practice, children. Practice.

Related Characters: Dolores Laimo (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

Dolores says this to Matilda and her classmates when she visits the schoolhouse as part of Mr. Watts's invitation to community members to share their bits of wisdom and

knowledge. It becomes clear from Dolores's description of faith why she so aggressively holds onto her beliefs, even when they cause trouble, as is the case when she steals Mr. Watt's copy *Great Expectations* and puts the entire village in harm's way—an action that would be difficult to understand without considering the fact that this is a woman who believes "faith is like oxygen." As such, giving up faith in the things she believes is for her like parting with a primary means of survival. Strangely enough, this idea aligns with Mr. Watts's notions about being a gentleman, which he believes means never giving up certain moral qualities, regardless of the situation. As a result, though the stories they hold true differ greatly, Mr. Watts and Dolores have similar values regarding what it means to truly believe in something.

❝ The trouble with *Great Expectations* is that it's a one-way conversation. There's no talking back. Otherwise I would have told Pip about my mum coming to speak to the class, and how, seeing her at a distance—even though only two desks back from the end of the room—she had appeared different to me. More hostile. […]

Whatever I might say about my mum to Pip I knew he wouldn't hear me. I could only follow him through some strange country that contained marshes and pork pies and people who spoke in long and confusing sentences.

Related Characters: Matilda Laimo (speaker), Pip, Dolores Laimo

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

Matilda experiences these feelings after Dolores comes to her class and embarrasses her with her strong, sweeping religious convictions and "hostile" demeanor. By showing Matilda's frustration that reading *Great Expectations* is like engaging in a "one-way conversation," Jones proves that humans have a natural impulse as readers and listeners to implicate themselves in a story. Indeed, Matilda wants Pip to "hear" her. This desire to become involved in a give-and-take relationship with literature is an inherent element of storytelling and narrative. Unfortunately, Matilda finds herself in a cultural context in which the only narrative she can fully engage with is her mother's faith, a fact that aggravates her and makes her wish she could speak to Pip all the more.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ In our village there were those who supported the rebels—my mum included. Though I suspect her support was nourished by the thought of my father in Townsville living what she called a "fat life." Everyone else just wished the fighting would go away, and for the white man to come back and reopen the mine. These people missed buying things. They missed having money to buy those things. Biscuits, rice, tinned fish, tinned beef, sugar. We were back to eating what our grandparents had—sweet potatoes, fish, chicken, mango, guava, cassava, nuts, and mud crab.

Related Characters: Matilda Laimo (speaker), Matilda's Father, Dolores Laimo

Related Themes:

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Matilda considers the different ways people in her village approach the Bougainville civil war. Although some people support the rebels fighting the "redskin" forces for independence, others wish things would return to how they used to be, when the island accommodated whites Australians, Papua New Guineans, and native Bougainvilleans alike while also running an economically rewarding copper mine. When Matilda writes that "these people missed buying things," she shows the influence the mine had on her culture, demonstrating that Bougainvilleans learned to prioritize money and "biscuits, rice, tinned fish, tinned beef, sugar." Ironically, the hostile "redskin" aggression—which sought to assert Papua New Guineans' place in Bougainville—ended up driving Bougainvilleans *away* from that kind of lifestyle, pushing them back to their original habits—Matilda acknowledges this when she says, "We were back to eating what our grandparents had." As such, Jones illustrates the extent to which Bougainvilleans have been torn back and forth between two ways of life.

It might also be humorous to the average Western reader to consider how Matilda and her community "rank" food. Items that many people might find bland or commonplace (like rice, tinned beef, biscuits) are considered superior to more flavorful and nutritious foods (mango, crab, sweet potatoes) simply because the former are associated with white people and money. Taste is relative, and the people of Matilda's

community resent having to eat food that many would consider exotic and delicious.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ I watched his face and I listened to his voice and I tried to hear how his mind ticked, and what he thought. What was Mr. Watts thinking as our mums and dads, our uncles and aunts, and sometimes an older brother or sister came to share with the class what they knew of the world? He liked to position himself to one side as our visitor delivered their story or anecdote or history.

We always watched Mr. Watts' face for a sign that what we were hearing was nonsense. His face never gave such a sign. It displayed a respectful interest…

Related Characters: Matilda Laimo (speaker), Tom Watts (Pop Eye)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 58

Explanation and Analysis

This passage explores the influence Mr. Watts has on Matilda and her classmates as an authoritative figure from an outside world. When he steps aside to listen to the community's elders deliver their lectures, the children try to see their own culture through his eyes. In the same way that Matilda looks at her world through the lens of *Great Expectations*, she watches Mr. Watts's face for "sign[s]," trying to gauge what he thinks about the beliefs and traditions in which she has been raised. In doing so, she seeks to clarify her own experience by altering her perspective. Each culture, it seems, perpetuates its own stories that make sense of the world. In this moment, Matilda recognizes the fact that Mr. Watts has his own stories and interpretations, and she tries to use this to determine whether or not certain Bougainvillean narratives are "nonsense."

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ Sometimes as he read we saw him smile privately, leaving us to wonder why, at that particular moment—only to realize yet again that there were parts of Mr. Watts we could not possibly know because of our ignorance of where he'd come from, and to reflect on what he'd given up in order to join Grace on our island.

Related Characters: Matilda Laimo (speaker), Grace Watts, Tom Watts (Pop Eye)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

Matilda says this while describing what it feels like to listen as Mr. Watts reads *Great Expectations* to the class. Again, she picks up on the notion that because Mr. Watts comes from an outside culture, there are certain concepts and beliefs he harbors that don't fit into their Bougainvillean lives. Matilda watches him privately revel in elements of Pip's life to which she seemingly has no access. And although she frames her failure to pick up on these unknown nuances as "ignorance," it is actually a simple issue of accessibility—because she has never traveled outside of Bougainville, there is no reason she should be able to understand Mr. Watts's "private" smiles, which take root in his knowledge of his own culture. Importantly, though, Matilda doesn't simply get frustrated about not being able to fully understand Mr. Watts's delight. Rather, she extrapolates upon what she *does* know about him, conjecturing that his private emotions about *Great Expectations* must have to do with a sense of homesickness and "what he'[s] given up in order to join Grace" in Bougainville. As such, she makes an imaginative leap rather than allowing the story's inaccessibility to turn her away.

❝ "I expect another one will grow."

"So that's okay," I said. "Nothing's lost."

"Except that particular toenail," he said. "You could say the same about a house or one's country. No two are the same. You gain as you lose, and vice versa." He stared off distantly, as if everything he'd parted with trailed out to sea and over the horizon.

Related Characters: Tom Watts (Pop Eye), Matilda Laimo (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 69

Explanation and Analysis

Matilda has this conversation with Mr. Watts when she sees him on the beach and his big toenail separates from his toe. When he says, "You gain as you lose, and vice versa" regarding what it's like to move between two cultures, he frames cultural hybridity as something bittersweet. In this moment, Jones suggests that in order to achieve a true cultural convergence, one must meet foreign traditions halfway by willingly sacrificing certain elements of his or her original way of life. And although it would be nice to think that "nothing's lost" in this transitional process, Watts makes it clear that each culture has unique traits that sometimes can't be reproduced in foreign contexts. This ultimately foreshadows Matilda's decision at the end of the book to return to Bougainville, for she understands that some things—like home—can't be replaced.

Chapter 12 Quotes

I know […] you have been hearing some story from Mr. Watts, and a story in particular, but I want to tell you this. Stories have a job to do. They can't just lie around like lazybone dogs. They have to teach you something. For example, if you know the words you can sing a song to make a fish swim onto your hook. There are even songs to get rid of skin rash and bad dreams.

Related Characters: Dolores Laimo (speaker), Matilda Laimo, Tom Watts (Pop Eye)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis

Dolores says this when she visits the schoolhouse to challenge Mr. Watts's secular investment in *Great Expectations*, which she believes is distracting her daughter from learning about their native Bougainvillean beliefs. Because Dolores believes learning traditional island knowledge (along with Biblical wisdom) leads to a moral life, it makes sense that she frames storytelling as an act that should "do" something. In her mind, *Great Expectations* is so removed from the context of her daughter's life that it can't possibly provide anything more than mere entertainment. Her beliefs, on the other hand, "teach" people how to live. This is a very utilitarian approach to storytelling, but it is not actually at odds with Mr. Watts's own ideas regarding the power of narrative. Indeed, Mr. Watts ends up using his knowledge of *Great Expectations* as a way of protecting the village from the possibly dangerous rebel soldiers. By relating elements of Pip's life to the soldiers, he uses storytelling as a defensive mechanism, showing that even *Great Expectations* has a "job to do"—it's just that the reader must decide how to employ it.

Chapter 16 Quotes

The sound of my name took me to a place deep inside my head. I already knew that words could take you into a new world, but I didn't know that on the strength of one word spoken for my ears only I would find myself in a room that no one else knew about. Matilda. Matilda. Matilda. I said it over and over. I tried out different versions, dragging the word out and expanding that room. *Ma til da*.

Related Characters: Matilda Laimo (speaker), Tom Watts (Pop Eye)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 124

Explanation and Analysis

Matilda comes upon this realization when Mr. Watts encourages the class to say their names silently to themselves. In doing so, Matilda discovers the strength of her imagination, which is unique to her. In the same way that "words [can] take [her] into a new world," she sees that they can enrich her sense of self. Suddenly she becomes her own narrator, rather than allowing her mother and her culture to dictate how her life story is told. She also plays with the idea of malleability by trying out "different versions" of her name, "dragging the word out and expanding" the "room" in her head that "no one else [knows] about." Mr. Watts has effectively given her access to a new mode of existence, one that she commands. This a significant discovery for somebody who lives amid the uncertainty and powerlessness created by the civil war.

Chapter 17 Quotes

Because for as long as I could remember, Grace Watts was not really included in the village. She lived with a white man, a man whom our parents didn't especially warm to. It was partly that, and partly the strange sight of her standing in that trolley towed along by Mr. Watts wearing a red clown's nose. We did not understand the reason for this, we had no idea what it meant, and so it had been convenient to think Mrs. Watts was mad.

Related Characters: Matilda Laimo (speaker), Tom Watts (Pop Eye), Grace Watts

Related Themes:

Page Number: 144

Explanation and Analysis

This passage appears during Grace Watts's funeral, when the villagers offer their stories about her to Mr. Watts. With this process of communal storytelling—in which people come together to collaboratively put together the pieces of her life—Grace is finally "included in the village." The fact that this inclusion is the result of cooperative narration implies that storytelling can either create or destroy divisive situations. When Grace was alive, the villagers didn't know how to conceive of her; they didn't "understand" her odd behavior, thus deciding that she "was mad." It's significant that Matilda says this conclusion was "convenient," since the word choice suggests that the villagers didn't bother to put in the effort of trying to understand *why* Grace had married a white man or why she allowed him to pull her around in a trolley. In other words, they closed themselves off to her story. It is only when they themselves participate in reconstructing her life—or story—that they're able to accept her back into the community.

Chapter 21 Quotes

❝ And now, to the startled ears of all us kids, we began to hear all the fragments that our mums and uncles and aunts had brought along to Mr. Watts's class. Our thoughts on the color white. Our thoughts on the color blue. Mr. Watts was assembling his story out of the experience of our lives, the same things we had heard shared with our class. But Mr. Watts introduced new information as well [...].

Related Characters: Matilda Laimo (speaker), Tom Watts (Pop Eye)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 180

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is a description of Mr. Watts's seven-night story, which he tells to the villagers and rebel soldiers in an effort to distract the rebels and keep them from harming the town. The fact that he incorporates fragments and anecdotes of what the villagers have shared in his classroom is a perfect example of weaving two cultures together to create an inclusive narrative. By wedding the Bougainvilleans' thoughts "on the color white" and "on the color blue" (for example) with bits of his own personal history, he crafts a compelling story while also showing the villagers that he appreciates the knowledge they've shared with him. This would perhaps come as a surprise to somebody like Dolores, who has heretofore seen Mr. Watts as an enemy she must compete with. In this moment, though, he demonstrates that he is in fact receptive to new ideas and committed to "assembling" a hybridized narrative. In turn, this narrative protects the villagers because, since its variation makes it so compelling, it enthralls the rebel soldiers and keeps them from turning their minds toward violence or destruction.

Chapter 25 Quotes

❝ My mum said she had no problem with stating the obvious. The problem was that silly blimmin' word *insensibly*. What was the point of that word? It just confused. If it hadn't been for that silly bloody *insensibly*, she'd have gotten it the first time. Instead, *insensibly* had led her to suspect it wasn't so straightforward after all.

Related Characters: Matilda Laimo (speaker), Charles Dickens, Tom Watts (Pop Eye), Dolores Laimo

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 227

Explanation and Analysis

This passage depicts Dolores's reaction to hearing a sentence from *Great Expectations* that reads: "As I had grown accustomed to my expectations, I had insensibly begun to notice their effect upon myself and those around me." Dolores strongly objects to the word "insensibly" because it keeps her from understanding the rest of the sentence. Her objection is interesting not because her opinion is correct—though it is perhaps true that "insensibly" obscures the phrase's meaning—but because her judgment of Dickens's writing is an example of close reading. In trying to attack the strength of the sentence, Dolores is suddenly involved in the process of storytelling. Similar to how an engaged reader sometimes questions the text before them, Dolores scrutinizes the subtle nuances of *Great Expectations*. Furthermore, by arguing her point, she prompts a literary discussion that draws her into a dialogue with Mr. Watts, a man with whom she normally refuses to

engage. As such, Jones gives readers an example of how storytelling can bring people together even when they disagree with one another.

Chapter 26 Quotes

❝ I suppose it is possible to be all of these things. To sort of fall out of who you are into another, as well as to journey back to some essential sense of self. We only see what we see. I have no idea of the man June Watts knew. I only know the man who took us kids by the hand and taught us how to reimagine the world, and to see the possibility of change, to welcome it into our lives.

Related Characters: Matilda Laimo (speaker), June Watts, Tom Watts (Pop Eye)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 244

Explanation and Analysis

Matilda writes this in regards to her eventual discovery that Mr. Watts used to be an amateur stage actor in New Zealand. She questions if this affected his classroom demeanor, wondering if he was *really* the person he presented himself as when he stood at the front of the classroom, or if he was somebody else, perhaps a man who had nothing other than *Great Expectations* and so decided to tell the students it was the greatest novel of the nineteenth century. When Matilda says, "I suppose it is possible to be all of these things," she once again demonstrates her ability to accept hybridity, this time insofar as it relates to identity. Personalities, she makes clear, are socially constructed, and it is possible to "fall out of who you are into another." Of course, this "fall[ing] out" of one identity into another depends upon context. When she says that she has "no idea of the man June Watts knew," readers are reminded of her earlier frustration over the fact that she had no way of fully understanding what *Great Expectations* brought to mind for Mr. Watts. Each person has a private life, she seems to be saying, but that private life doesn't mean he or she can't find common ground with other people, inviting in "the possibility of change" and "welcome[ing] it" into his or her life.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

"Everyone called him Pop Eye," Matilda Laimo writes, describing a man who used to live in her village on the island of Bougainville. The villagers called him by this name because of his bulging eyes, though Matilda says that even when she was a thirteen-year-old, she suspected he knew about his nickname but didn't have time to care, since he "looked like someone who had seen or known great suffering and hadn't been able to forget it." She explains that Pop Eye was the only white person on the island and that the children liked to call him by his nickname in addition to his actual name, Mr. Watts, since nobody else had such a white-sounding name.

Matilda spends the first several pages of Mister Pip *delivering this introductory information about Mr. Watts, placing early emphasis on his whiteness. In doing so, she hints at how strongly the inhabitants of Bougainville feel differences in race and culture. The fact that the children like to call him Mr. Watts in addition to his nickname suggests that they see him as a novelty in their community, something they're eager to emphasize by using his formal title, which stands in such stark contrast to their own names.*

On some days, Matilda explains, Mr. Watts used to wear a white linen suit and a red clown's nose. Dressed in this odd fashion, he would tow Grace in a small trolley behind him. Children would gape at the strange scene, noting that Grace's hair had been straightened and that Mr. Watts's clown nose didn't make him look silly or happy, but rather hopelessly sad. Meanwhile, adults in the village would whisper speculations about the odd couple, guessing that Grace was mentally unstable or that Mr. Watts "was doing penance for an old crime." Matilda notes that "the sight represented a bit of uncertainty in [their] lives, which in every other way knew only sameness."

By acknowledging that their lives "knew only sameness," Matilda shows the importance of pattern and tradition in her culture. This is a group of people who are used to particular ways of being, who have lived a certain way without ever having to question their customs. Not only does Mr. Watts represent a different way of life because of the fact that he's white, but he also disrupts the "sameness" of this village with his odd behavior, for which Matilda and her fellow villagers have no frame of reference.

During these outings, Grace carried a blue parasol to shade herself from the sun. Matilda remembers how she and the other children loved this touch, wondering but not asking about the difference between an ordinary black umbrella and a parasol. "If you went too far with a question like that one," Matilda writes, "it could turn a rare thing into a commonplace thing." She explains that Mr. Watts and Grace lived without children in the old minister's house, which had been engulfed by grass after the minister died. Because of this, the only time the village saw Mr. and Mrs. Watts was when they walked through town with the trolley, the parasol, and the clown's nose.

Matilda's notion about turning "a rare thing into a commonplace thing" shows her capacity to accept things she doesn't fully understand. It seems she would rather appreciate the strange beauty of Grace's parasol than dissect what, exactly, it means. This tendency to embrace the unknown instead of critically scrutinizing new things foreshadows Matilda's later accepting curiosity regarding Mr. Watts. If she were to analyze the difference between an umbrella and a parasol, she may find that the chief difference has to do with class—whereas an umbrella can be used to shield somebody from both sunlight and rain, most parasols only protect from sunlight. Furthermore, they are often used as ornamental accessories rather than as utilitarian objects. By not scrutinizing it, however, Matilda allows herself to enjoy the spectacle without having to feel inferior to the Wattses.

Matilda considers her village's first contact with white people, saying that when her ancestors saw the first white person to arrive on the island, they thought they were seeing ghosts. She says that she was shown a video in school of a white duke visiting the island. The students laughed at the video, finding the duke's behavior incomprehensibly odd, cracking up when he used a piece of cloth to wipe food from his mouth. Matilda herself admits that other than Mr. Watts and several Australian mine workers, she saw very few "living whites" as a child.

Once again, Matilda underscores the extent to which being white on the island of Bougainville is an anomaly many of the inhabitants don't know how to conceptualize. By emphasizing this point once again, Jones sets up the racial divide between Mr. Watts and the rest of the village, suggesting that their differences are widely felt by the community and generated by contrasting ways of life.

CHAPTER 2

Before beginning, Matilda says that she believes her story results "from [the villagers'] ignorance of the outside world." She explains that her mother Dolores's knowledge was limited to what the island's last minister had told her. She says that Dolores did not believe news from beyond the island, such as the fact that humankind had landed on the moon. She depicts her mother as a stubborn, strong-willed woman who never left Bougainville. She also explains that her father left when she was eleven, flying off the island in a mining plane bound for Townsville, Australia. The first postcard he sent recounted the awe he felt after seeing just how small Bougainville looked from the plane. In his second postcard, he confirmed that the family could financially support itself in Australia, at which point Matilda's mother decided that they would join him.

Matilda builds upon the notion she previously established regarding the island's insular and unvaried way of life. In this passage, she offers her mother as a specific example of this kind of single-minded thinking, showing Dolores's reluctance to accept bits of outside information, such as the fact that the United States put a man on the moon. This is the kind of thinking that explains why the villagers would have such a hard time understanding or accepting Mr. Watts and his quirky behavior: it doesn't fit into the way people like Dolores view life on Bougainville.

Just when Dolores determined to move with Matilda to Australia, Francis Ona (the leader of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army) declared war on the island's copper mine and the company that controlled it, an act that resulted in the arrival of Papua New Guinea's military, who hailed from Papua New Guinea's capital, Port Moresby. Matilda and the other Bougainvilleans call these soldiers "redskins." "According to Port Moresby we are one country," writes Matilda. "According to us we are black as the night. The soldiers looked like people leached up out of the red earth." With the escalation of this conflict, Papua New Guinea enforced a blockade around Bougainville, making it impossible for Dolores and Matilda to leave.

At this point, Jones explores the immediate effects of refusing to accept new ways of life. He demonstrates the way people tend to turn foreign cultures into "others," often using race as a divisive tool. For example, Matilda points to racial differences to argue that Bougainville shouldn't be united as one country with Papua New Guinea, commenting that she and her fellow villagers are "black as the night," while the Papua New Guineans look "red." Just as the village has trouble accepting Mr. Watts into their community because of his whiteness—whispering rumors about him instead of embracing the differences he embodies—the village also finds itself unable to make peace with the idea of existing as "one country" with the Papua New Guineans.

News about the war reached Matilda's village in fragments, bits of information passed along through "hearsay" and "rumor." Cut off from any form of reliable news, the village proceeded with life as usual, continuing their lives and sustaining themselves by fishing and eating fruit. Eventually, though, the village permanently lost electricity and children began to succumb to malaria. To make matters worse, rebel forces broke into the nearest hospital and stole all its medicine and supplies. During this time, Matilda and the other children stopped going to school because their teachers had left the island for good. Surprisingly enough, though, Mr. Watts didn't join his fellow white people in fleeing Bougainville, a fact that confounded the villagers and gave them further cause to speculate about him. Matilda notes that it was "easy to accept" that Grace was mentally unstable, but more difficult to place Mr. Watts's eccentricity, since he'd "come out of a world [they] didn't really know."

Yet again, Jones suggests that it is difficult to understand people who come from different cultures. Indeed, Matilda and her fellow villagers are unable to contextualize Mr. Watts's decision to stay in Bougainville because they don't "really know" the world he lives—or lived—in, meaning that they think his whiteness makes him so incredibly foreign that they can't even begin to fathom the way he makes decisions or uses logic. In this moment, it seems to them that he uses fundamentally different intellectual tools, creating a gulf between them that keeps each side from understanding the other.

CHAPTER 3

After a spate of aimless days, Matilda returned to school, this time with Mr. Watts as her teacher. Like the minister's house, the schoolhouse had been overtaken by flowering vines that crept through the windows and down from the ceiling. Mr. Watts waited for the students to file in, and once they'd taken their places, he wrapped his hand around a vine and crumpled it in his fist, saying, "I want this to be a place of light. No matter what happens." The twenty students stared at him, taking in his white linen suit and bulging eyes. He told them he was aware of his nickname and that, should they like to, they could call him Pop Eye.

This is the first moment in Mister Pip *in which Mr. Watts becomes an actual person rather than a mysterious representative of white culture. The barriers between him and the villagers begin to break down in this moment, and the children are given the chance to consider him on his own terms. At the same time, he recognizes that they hold preconceived ideas about who he is. Instead of trying to change this, he accepts their conception of him by allowing them to call him Pop Eye. As such, he shows himself to be flexible and willing to work within the context of his students' culture.*

After the class cleared the room of its creeping vines—creating light and open space—Mr. Watts said, "I want you to understand something. I am no teacher, but I will do my best. That's my promise to you children. I believe, with your parents' help, we can make a difference to our lives." Before dismissing the children, he told them, "The truest thing I can tell you is that whatever we have between us is all we've got. Oh, and of course Mr. Dickens." This confounded the children, as they recognized Mr. Dickens as a white person's name but were certain Mr. Watts was the only white man in the village. Later that night, Matilda told her mother she was going to meet this Mr. Dickens the following day, and Dolores insisted that she must have misunderstood. Just in case, though, she instructed her daughter to ask Mr. Dickens if he could fix their generator.

When Mr. Watts says the sentence, "I believe [...] we can make a difference to our lives," he refers to the class as a collective. Even more importantly, this collective includes him, too. In this way, he demonstrates his belief that he himself can learn from the students, framing the process of education as a collaborative act. Rather than standing at the front of the classroom as an authoritative and superior white instructor, he seeks to establish a give-and-take relationship with his students, recognizing that their culture is just as important as his own and that everybody will benefit if they can weave together their diverse backgrounds.

The next morning, Mr. Watts was the only white person in the classroom. The children strained their necks, looking out the window to see if Mr. Dickens was on his way—like Matilda, each student bore his or her own request for the mysterious white man, messages passed along from their parents. As they waited, Mr. Watts began to read: "My father's family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip." So began his reading of the first chapter of **Great Expectations**, which he described to the children as "the greatest novel by the greatest English writer of the nineteenth century, Charles Dickens." He then told the class that he would read the book aloud to them each day, one chapter at a time, such that they would finish it together in 59 days.

Jones once again illustrates the fact that Mr. Watts's culture and the villagers' culture use completely different points of reference. For Mr. Watts, Charles Dickens is a household name everybody is expected to know. For the children and their families, Mr. Dickens is an unknown entity. By reading Great Expectations aloud to the class, though, Mr. Watts attempts to bridge these kinds of gaps, introducing one culture to the other and thus establishing common ground between the two.

CHAPTER 4

Matilda was quickly swept away by *Great Expectations*, feeling she had "been spoken to by this boy Pip" after just the first chapter. She notes that nobody had told her or her fellow students about the possibilities literature presented, allowing them to meet new people and live foreign lives. She found herself completely immersed in Mr. Watts's readings, especially when he varied his voice to portray new characters, as he did when Magwitch—an escaped convict in **Great Expectations**—seizes Pip and threatens to rip his heart out if he doesn't bring him food and a file to break out of his shackles. In that moment, Magwitch was right there in the classroom; "Mr. Watts had given us kids another piece of the world," Matilda writes. "I found I could go back to it as often as I liked."

Matilda portrays the experience of listening to Great Expectations as an escapist act, one that allows her to lift out of her own world and into a new one. When she says, "Mr. Watts had given us kids another piece of the world," she implies that the world itself is made up of many different parts and that, in order to understand it as a whole, one must embrace shared knowledge and wisdom. According to this notion, life is comprised of multiple experiences that can inform and alter one another, an idea that is attractive to Matilda, given the fact that her current circumstances are weighed down by the difficulties of war, which she otherwise has no power to change.

As Mr. Watts's reading of **Great Expectations** progressed, Matilda got to know Pip more and more and realized she had certain things in common with him despite their different circumstances. Just as Pip never knew his parents, Matilda felt she hardly knew her father. She found herself unable to remember what he looked like and trying—like Pip tries to do with his own parents—to fill in an image of the man. Because Pip guesses that his father was a "square, stout, dark man with curly black hair," Matilda asked Dolores if her own father was stout, surprising her mother with her strange new vocabulary; "*Stout!*" her mother replied. "Where did you get that word from, girl?" She then told her mother about *Great Expectations*, narrating the story to satisfy Dolores's curiosity.

In this moment, Jones considers the accessibility of knowledge. When Dolores asks where Matilda "got" the word "stout" from, she implies that the word itself exists outside the village. In this way, Great Expectations delivers new information from the outside world. Matilda then passes along this new wisdom by relating it to her mother, broadening its accessibility. As such, literature takes on a pervasive quality that demonstrates the human tendency to incorporate new ideas into old ways of thinking.

"This was the first time I had been in a position to tell her anything about the world," Matilda notes in regards to her narration of **Great Expectations** to Dolores. When her mother learned that Pip is an orphan, she lamented, "He is lost." Sensing Dolores's interest in the story, Matilda tried her best to "color in that world for her," though for the most part she had to use her own words because she couldn't remember the book's exact lines. Still, she told her mother about Pip's experience in the graveyard and how Magwitch, the escaped convict, forces him to steal from his older sister and uncle, who watch over him. "What would you do, girl?" Dolores asked. "If a man was hiding in the jungle and he ask you to steal from me. Would you do that?" Matilda reassured her mother that she wouldn't betray her. At the end of this first installment, Dolores told her that she wanted to know everything that happens in *Great Expectations*.

One of the complications about introducing new knowledge or ideas to a group of people has to do with the ways in which these notions filter throughout the community. In this instance, Matilda's knowledge of Great Expectations *puts her in a position of authority over her mother, ultimately toying with her familial hierarchy. By considering this effect, Jones portrays the dissemination of information as a touchy, delicate process, one that affects relationships and social situations. As* Mister Pip *progresses, this is an important idea to keep in mind, for conflict often arises from poorly-handled attempts to impart fresh perspectives and ideas.*

When the class wasn't focusing on **Great Expectations**, it became clear that there were large gaps in Mr. Watts's knowledge. Still, he told them about England, explaining that it is comprised of multiple different parts. This was a difficult concept for Matilda and her classmates to grasp, especially because most of them had never left the island of Bougainville. One of the students asked Mr. Watts if there were black people in England, a question to which he tersely responded, "Yes," before shifting his attention away from the matter. To make up for his lacking wisdom, he began inviting the children's mothers to come into the class to "share what they knew of the world."

Jones further emphasizes Bougainville's insular community by revealing that almost none of the students in Mr. Watts's class have left the island. He also hints at Mr. Watts's discomfort with being the only white person, showing the man's reluctance to speak in more depth about the racial diversity of England. Although he appears happy to incorporate Bougainvillean culture into his class—as evidenced by his welcoming of the students' mothers—he also appears reluctant to fully address the island's lack of racial diversity, for it accentuates his position as an "other."

CHAPTER 5

The first mother to visit Matilda's class told the students about a plant called the "heart seed," informing them that its seeds blow landward from the ocean and that burning their stamens keeps mosquitos away. When she finished, she stayed to listen to Mr. Watts read from **Great Expectations**. Matilda paid close attention to Mr. Watts's narration, knowing that Dolores would want a full account of that day's installment. "I liked to surprise my mum with a new word she didn't know," she writes.

Again, Jones places storytelling into a communal context. Matilda listens to Mr. Watts read Great Expectations not only for herself, but also for the benefit of her mother, to whom she will relay the tale. In this way, narration becomes a relational, collaborative process.

That night, Dolores was skeptical when Matilda told her of Pip's decision to steal his sister's pork pie for Magwitch, the escaped convict. When she asked Matilda what Mr. Watts had to say about this, Matilda replied, "Mr. Watts said it is best to wait until all the facts are known," though Mr. Watts hadn't actually said anything about this particular moment. Later, she used a phrase she had learned that day, quoting Pip by saying, "It was a rimy morning." She knew, of course, that her mother wouldn't know the word "rimy." She herself hadn't even known that the word means "frosty" until Mr. Watts told her earlier that day. Narrating **Great Expectations** to her mother in the dark, Matilda waited for Dolores to ask what "rimy" meant, but the question never came. Matilda notes that this was the last night Dolores ever asked to hear about *Great Expectations*. For this, Matilda blames her use of the phrase "rimy morning."

Although storytelling is a relational act in Mister Pip, Matilda misuses her knowledge in this moment, using it to flaunt her power over her mother instead of offering the story to her in a kind, well-meaning way. When she revels in her superior vocabulary, she ceases to foster a collaborative storytelling environment that encourages a give-and-take relationship between the teller and the listener. As a result, her mother turns away from Great Expectations.

CHAPTER 6

Early the next morning, Papua New Guinean (or "redskin") helicopters appeared overhead, searching the village for its inhabitants. Fortunately, Matilda and the rest of the townspeople heard them coming and were able to escape into the forest, leaving their homes and prompting the "redskins" to retreat without incident. Later that day, the children returned to school, where Matilda's classmate Gilbert Masoi sheepishly introduced his mother, Mrs. Masoi, who had come to speak about cooking. In a blunt and short lesson, she told the children the best way to kill an octopus and a pig.

In this section, Jones begins to merge wartime tensions with his examination of storytelling and communal unity, allowing the presence of the "redskins" to ominously exist just beneath the surface of everyday life in Bougainville. It's notable that Mr. Watts doesn't cancel class, instead continuing the lessons as scheduled and inviting parents to share their wisdom—in doing so, he gives the villagers something to focus on other than the war while also strengthening the community's wealth of shared knowledge, ultimately giving them something in which they can invest themselves.

The villagers were not as lucky the next morning, when the "redskins" came upon their homes once more. This time the helicopters actually landed, and Matilda and the townspeople barely made it to the jungle in time. When the coast was finally clear, they returned to the village to find dead roosters and chooks, which the "redskins" had slaughtered. Worse, they found an old dog with its belly "ripped open." Matilda writes that "to stare at that black dog was to see your sister or brother or mum or dad in that same state." In addition, Matilda and Dolores discovered that their only goat had been taken from them. Matilda imagined the soldiers airlifting the animal out of the village, "its big eyes fill[ed] with wonder" as it rose above the treetops.

The flaying of the dog indicates to the community that there is no denying the escalation of the conflict on Bougainville. Suddenly the violence has become immediate, invading Matilda's life such that she can't help but imagine the deaths of her family. By showing the effect of the dead dog on Matilda, Jones illustrates the community's mounting fear that they will soon fall apart at the hands of ruthless soldiers who don't care at all about them.

In school later that day, Dolores arrives to lecture about faith. She began by telling the students that they had to believe in something, for even "the fish believe in the sea." She referenced the arrival of missionaries generations ago, when white people first arrived on the island to spread their belief in God. Many older people, she told the students, decided to "stay with the wisdom of crabs," remaining invested in their own beliefs that originated on the island. Dolores supported this conviction, saying that true faith can come from something as simple as following a school of fish in order to navigate one's way in the ocean.

The fact that Dolores's lecture on faith coincides with the "redskins'" first act of aggression reveals her dependency on religion and spirituality. For her, systems of belief provide coping mechanisms. Her speech also brings to mind what happens when two cultures collide—by discussing the missionaries' influence on the island, she unwittingly makes a case for hybrid faith, in which two beliefs merge with one another (Christianity and native island lore, in this case).

At this moment, Dolores transitioned to speaking about religion, emphasizing the importance of prayer and praising the work of the missionaries who visited Bougainville many years ago and built churches. "Faith is like oxygen," she said, before quoting the first line of *Genesis*. Finally, she concluded with a pragmatic lesson regarding how to foresee weather patterns by studying the movements of crabs in the sand. Matilda couldn't help feeling like her mother's insistence on religion and faith was intended to challenge Mr. Watts's beliefs. When school let out that day, Matilda and her classmates went down to the beach to test Dolores's crab method. While she was there, Matilda scratched "PIP" into the sand and lined the letters with white heart seeds.

Matilda privately rejects the backhanded challenge her mother delivers to Mr. Watts. She recognizes that Dolores dislikes Mr. Watts's secular outlook, which he promotes by teaching Great Expectations, a nonreligious novel. When Matilda writes Pip's name in the sand, she reveals to readers her allegiance with Mr. Watts and her interest in that which exists outside her own culture. The fact that she uses heart seeds to write the letters in the sand symbolizes this passion for the outside world, for the heart seed—as one of the mothers taught the class—is blown in from the ocean. In the same way that the plant comes from afar and takes root in Bougainville, Pip has drifted into Matilda's life from foreign shores.

As **Great Expectations** progressed, Matilda began to feel sorry that Pip couldn't fully enter her world. She laments that she was always visiting his life, creating what she calls a "one-way conversation." Regardless, though, her bond to him as a character increased. "At some point I felt myself enter the story," she writes. Beginning to frame aspects of her own life in terms of *Great Expectations*, she realized that—much like the divide between Pip's difficult sister and his kindhearted uncle—there was a gulf between Mr. Watts and Dolores, and she began to intuit that she would have to choose between the two sides.

The differences Matilda senses between Dolores and Mr. Watts represent contrasting worldviews. Although Mr. Watts himself doesn't challenge Dolores, it becomes clear to Matilda that she will offend her mother if she trades her own culture for Mr. Watts's. The fact that she will have to choose between these two figures harkens back to Dolores's ideas regarding betrayal, when she asks Matilda if she would ever steal from her if somebody asked her to. Dolores wants her daughter to be loyal and to adhere to what she believes is a superior way of life—if Matilda chooses do otherwise, it would be the equivalent (in Dolores's eyes) of stealing from her mother.

CHAPTER 7

Matilda explains that the previous visit by "redskin" soldiers influenced village members in different ways. While some people secretly stored food and supplies in the jungle—preparing to hide, should it become necessary—her mother decided to throw herself into the task of teaching Matilda about their family history, which included "sea gods" and "turtles," along with human relatives, too. She told her daughter that Mr. Watts descended from a "shining cuckoo," a bird that Matilda had seen flying away from Bougainville to new places, where they took over other birds' nests, discarded the original eggs, and deposited their own before flying off again. Matilda remarks that her mother "thought she had Mr. Watts summed up" and that she saw only a "white man," not the kind person his students saw.

Jones becomes more explicit in his portrayal of Dolores and what she thinks of Mr. Watts. Nervous that Matilda will choose white culture over her own, she depicts Mr. Watts as an "other," reducing him to his most basic quality: his whiteness. An us-versus-them mentality emerges from this viewpoint as Dolores refuses to observe Mr. Watts's specific traits as a human. To make it easier to oppose his secular worldview, she "sum[s]" him up, deciding that he's merely a "white man." It's worth noting that this approach shuts down all possibility of merging two cultures together, instead championing one way of life over the other.

CHAPTER 8

Matilda considers the effect of the Civil War on her village, writing that two babies died of malaria just before Christmas that year. She explains that it wasn't until she was older that she fully understood the tensions between Bougainvilleans and the "redskins," who had arrived on the island to work at the mine and then used their positions to edge natives out of their jobs. Many of the villagers, Matilda says, supported the rebel fighters who lurked in the jungle and fought against the "redskins."

The Bougainville Civil War plays an important role in Mister Pip because it illustrates the consequences of a lack of cross-cultural understanding. While Dolores pits her ideas against Mr. Watts's teachings, the "redskins" and rebel soldiers vehemently fight one another to prove their superiority and dominance. As such, Jones shows the consequences of cultural stubbornness on both small and large levels, making it easier for readers to grasp the fact that hybridity and collaboration are the most effective tools when it comes to navigating seemingly insurmountable differences between two groups of people.

Matilda writes that she herself hoped only for "hope itself," knowing that "things could change because they had for Pip." She then briefly summarizes Pip's changing luck, which comes about when, after working as a blacksmith, he learns that he is the beneficiary of a large amount of money and that the "money will be used to turn [him] into a gentleman." Inspired by this idea, Mr. Watts explained to the class that a gentleman always does the right thing. When one of the students asked if a poor person could be a gentleman, Mr. Watts said, "Money and social standing don't come into it. We are talking about qualities." Resuming her overview of Pip's ascent, Matilda explains that the young man left home—"the blacksmith's forge"—for London.

Pip's move to London is significant for Matilda because of her own relationship with the idea of home. When Pip sets out to become a gentleman in London, he leaves behind life as a blacksmith and, thus, everything he has ever known. This transition surely resonates with Matilda, given the fact that to leave home would be an improvement upon her life, albeit a painful one. As such, a parallel emerges between Pip's life and hers, one that broadens her perspective regarding her own situation, teaching her to hope for "hope itself" based on Pip's eventual success.

CHAPTER 9

As school continued, more and more villagers visited the classroom to share their knowledge. One woman waxed poetic about the color blue. Another spoke of the prophetic powers of weaving. A woman from Dolores's prayer group emphasized the importance of innocence. Matilda's mother picked up on this idea when she returned to deliver another lecture. This time, she said that her aunt once told her that if a woman is standing on a reef and watching birds fly through the sky, it means she has lost her virginity and is planning to travel to the nearest city of white people. She warned the female students to beware of watching the birds on the reef, else onlookers will think they are impure.

The importance of shared knowledge and communal teachings surfaces again in this section. This time it becomes clear that the type of information can vary without influencing the usefulness of the exercise. In other words, even small anecdotes are can be valuable lessons because of the fact that they represent the community. There is inherent worth, Jones suggests, in getting to know what one's neighbors believe, even if those beliefs appear trivial. The process ultimately strengthens a group's sense of community and its ability to evolve.

CHAPTER 10

Matilda's curiosity about Mr. Watts grew alongside her love of **Great Expectations**. One day she saw him on the beach dressed in shorts instead of his usual white linen suit. When he stopped to say hello, he saw her "PIP" inscription in the sand, saying, "A shrine. […] Pip in the Pacific." Matilda told him that she didn't like the fact that Pip seemed to be changing now that he had moved to London in the book, and she asked him why the character changed his name to Handel. Mr. Watts responded by telling her that Pip is "like an emigrant" and that he is "in the process of migrating from one level of society to another," meaning that "a change of name is as good as a change of clothes." He also explained that his own wife, Grace, had changed her name many years ago to Sheba because she was "at a time in her life when she needed to make changes." Emphasizing that this must be kept secret, he went on to tell Matilda that he hoped Grace might someday grow into her new name.

Matilda finds herself unnerved by Pip's drastic transformation because it threatens to make him into an "other," a person to whom she won't know how to relate. There are limits, it seems, to how far she can project herself into unknown worlds. Mr. Watts helps her overcome this fear when he says that sometimes people need to change in order to reflect what's going on in their lives. Here again emerges the idea of adaptability and evolution, which speaks to Matilda because the circumstances of her war-torn village seem to necessitate a similar kind of flexibility.

CHAPTER 11

As tensions rose between Bougainvilleans and the "redskins" in neighboring villages, Dolores doubled down on her mission to teach Matilda their ancestry, forcing her daughter to write their family tree in the sand. At one point, Matilda wrote "PIP" next to the tree, which upset her mother, prompting her to scream, "He isn't a blood relative!" Matilda tried to argue that, though he wasn't a relative, she "felt closer to him than the names of those strangers [her relatives]," a sentiment for which her mother blamed Mr. Watts and his teaching of **Great Expectations**.

Once again, Dolores exhibits her strong commitment to the traditions in which she was raised. The thought that Matilda might part from these traditions is for her an unspeakable injustice, especially because Matilda is investing herself in something Dolores doesn't understand: a fictional white boy from nineteenth-century England. Nothing, it seems, could be further from what Dolores views as relevant to their lives on the island of Bougainville. As such, she rejects the notion of combining these two worlds, thinking that any addition to her way of life will diminish rather than enrich her beliefs.

The village parents became aware of the fact that Mr. Watts was not teaching **the Bible** in class and that he didn't believe in the devil. Not long afterward, Dolores burst through the schoolhouse doors and addressed the class, telling them to "pack the teachings of the Good Book" into their lives. "That way you can save Mr. Watts because I am not going to be the one," she said. Mr. Watts waited politely as she spoke, even allowing her to follow up her rant with a brief contemplation of braided hair, a lesson she seemed to improvise, reveling in the fact that the students were interested in what she had to say. Before long, though, she lost their attention again by allowing her discussion of braids to yield once more to the notion of morality, saying that the two strands represent the relationship between God and the Devil.

This is the first time in Mister Pip *in which Dolores and Mr. Watts's conflicting beliefs are openly acknowledged. While this doesn't seem to bother Mr. Watts—who graciously allows Dolores to argue her point of view—Dolores appears unwilling to accommodate Mr. Watts's viewpoint. In other words, Dolores uses Mr. Watts's secularism against him (making him into an "other") while Mr. Watts embraces the idea that a community should allow for the intersection of multiple beliefs.*

On Christmas day, a young man emerged from the woods with a wounded leg. He was a rebel soldier who used to live in Matilda's village. The town summoned Mr. Watts, who helped pull three "redskin" bullets out of the boy's leg. Two weeks later, Gilbert's father Mr. Masoi took the young man out to sea in his fishing boat, which had a motor he didn't use because he was trying to save fuel. After three days, Mr. Masoi returned looking different. All alone, he dragged his empty boat onshore. Matilda writes that she never saw the young man again.

In addition to adding tension and mystery to the novel's plot, this occurrence shows the indirect involvement Matilda's village has with the Bougainville Civil War. Although they would perhaps like to be completely untangled from the conflict, the fact that some of their former neighbors are members of the rebel factions implicates them in the war. Furthermore, the seriousness with which Mr. Masoi removes the wounded soldier from the village shows the extent to which the townspeople fear any affiliation with Bougainville's guerilla forces. In other words, the village wants to occupy a gray area in an otherwise black-and-white conflict.

CHAPTER 12

Mr. Watts's readings of Great Expectations continued. Once again, Dolores returned to the classroom, this time telling the students that the "job" of a story should be to teach something. She proceeded to relate a tale from her childhood, in which she and her friends came upon an old woman who lived alone and who Dolores asserted was "the first devil" she ever met. After demonstrating her powers by turning into a strange black bird, the woman told Dolores and her friends to steal money from the church collection the following Sunday, threatening to extract their eyeballs if they failed to comply. By Sunday, though, the children had decided not to steal for this devil, determining that "the lesser darkness" of having their eyes snatched from their heads was preferable to the greater darkness of true damnation. Sure enough, nothing happened, and the minister praised the children, telling them that the devil had been sent to test them and that they had passed.

In this moment, it seems Dolores understands that storytelling is the best way to win people over. Knowing that she must compete against the compelling plot of Great Expectations, *she narrates this childhood tale in the hopes of enthralling her student listeners and protecting them from the secular world to which Mr. Watts exposes them. Once again, storytelling is portrayed as a powerful tool.*

CHAPTER 13

The class finally finished **Great Expectations** in February. Matilda found herself somewhat disappointed with the ending and unsatisfied by the idea that, when they began to read the book a second time, the story would remain the same. On the day they were set to start the novel once more, Matilda's classmate Daniel raised his hand and asked, "What's it like to be white?" Mr. Watts responded by telling the boy that being white on the island of Bougainville was "lonely at times," like being "the last mammoth" on earth. When he asked Daniel the same question about being black, the boy replied, "Normal."

In contrast to Dolores, who believes she has Mr. Watts "summed up" due to the fact that he is white, Matilda's classmate Daniel doesn't rely on preconceived notions to understand his teacher. Instead, he invites Mr. Watts to actually explain his own experience. In other words, he recognizes that each person has his or her own story about what comprises his or her identity. When he tells Mr. Watts that it feels "normal" to be black, he raises the idea of perspective, demonstrating that everybody thinks their own experience is "normal."

A week later, "redskin" helicopters landed in the village before anyone could escape. The lead officer spoke in a pleasant voice, simply asking that everybody give him their names. After assembling this roster, he asked the village why there were no young men present—Matilda notes that he surely knew the answer to this but that he wanted *them* to say it. Before the villagers could say anything, though, a soldier arrived with news of Pip's name in the beach sand. "Who is Pip?" asked the officer. Suddenly his voice had lost its friendly, mocking tone. "Pip belongs to Mr. Dickens, sir," Daniel said, to which the officer replied, "Who is this *Mis*ter Dickens?" Happy to be useful, Daniel pointed at the schoolhouse.

When the officer asks why there aren't any young men in the village, he tries to trick the townspeople into choosing sides, since the fact of the matter is that all the young men have run off to join the rebel armies. This threatens to ruin the sense of political neutrality the village has worked hard to construct (even going so far as to smuggle the wounded rebel away in Mr. Masoi's boat). In this moment, the "redskin" officer wants the villagers to acknowledge the "us-versus-them" mentality promoted by the war.

Along with Daniel, the "redskin" soldiers fetched Mr. Watts from the schoolhouse, demanding to know who he was. Mr. Watts picked up on the fact that Daniel had misled the officers to believe that he was Mr. Dickens and that contradicting this claim could have disastrous results for the boy's safety. As such, he told them that he was, in fact, Charles Dickens, and that Pip is a character in a book. This exasperated the officer, who was unlikely to believe such a strange answer. To clear up matters, Mr. Watts asked Matilda to run into the schoolhouse and retrieve **Great Expectations**, which he told her was sitting on the classroom's front desk. When she arrived, though, the book was nowhere to be found.

In this scene, Jones brings the act of storytelling to bear on real life by creating a pressing conflict based upon the existence of Pip, a fictional character. It is only appropriate, then, that Mr. Watts addresses this problem on its own terms by assuming the identity of Charles Dickens. In a strange way, this quick adaptability in the face of danger recalls the kind of flexibility Jones promotes throughout the novel when it comes to accepting new stories and cultures; in this moment, Mr. Watts must embrace the fact that fiction has collided with reality and adapt accordingly.

Convinced Pip was a rebel soldier the village was hiding, the "redskin" officer ordered his men to round up all of the town's material possessions. Constructing a large pile of furniture and personal belongings, he gave the village one more chance to produce Pip before dousing the items in gasoline and lighting them on fire. "You have been foolish," said the officer. "You cannot defeat me with your lies. I will give you two weeks to think about your decision. Next time we come here I expect this man Pip to be handed over."

The "redskin" officer burns the village's belongings because he is unable to comprehend the idea that Pip is a fictional character—this simply doesn't fit into his worldview, which is built upon a cut-and-dry, black-and-white conception of right and wrong. In his view, the village is either in support of the "redskins" or in support of the rebels, and anything that happens must fit within this paradigm. Since he has no frame of reference when it comes to understanding that Pip is from a book, he defaults to his narrow-minded suspicion that the village is harboring rebels—a suspicion that aligns with his single-minded outlook.

CHAPTER 14

When the "redskin" soldiers left, Matilda returned home before her mother and found that the only item left in their house was an old sleeping mat that belonged to her father, something the soldiers probably missed because it was stored in the house's rafters. Thinking that the mat would be a nice surprise for her mother—one that might cheer her up—Matilda took it down and unrolled it. In doing so, she found Mr. Watts's copy of **Great Expectations** stashed covertly in the middle. Although she felt betrayed by her mother in that moment, she also understood why Dolores was unable to produce the book when the "redskin" officer asked for it. She writes, "If she had run back to our house to produce the book she would have had to explain how it got there in the first place. For the same reason, I could not give the book back to Mr. Watts. […] To do so would be to betray my mum."

Matilda's idea regarding betrayal implicitly gives rise to the notion that Mr. Watts and her mother are on two distinctly different sides of a problem. Unfortunately, Matilda—who is so adept in borrowing bits and pieces from different worldviews—is caught between her teacher and her mother. This dilemma is reminiscent of the structures of the Bougainville Civil War: if Dolores and Mr. Watts represent the two warring military forces, Matilda represents the villages who wish to occupy a neutral gray area in the conflict.

CHAPTER 15

As Mr. Watts shouldered the blame, the town went about rebuilding beds and other amenities. One day, Mr. Watts and Grace appeared with their trolley, clown's nose, and parasol. Matilda writes that it was a shock to see this procession again, especially since she had gotten to know Mr. Watts better. For the rest of the village, this procession served as a reminder that the Watts family's possessions had been spared. In a solemn rush, they looted the house and burned its contents while Mr. Watts and Grace looked on with understanding.

Mr. Watts revitalizes his odd tradition with Grace as means of returning to his old way of life after his attempt to integrate himself into the village leads disaster. In addition, it seems he wanted to remind the villagers that his possessions had been spared, inviting them to pillage his home in order to put him in the same circumstances as everybody else. As such, he returns to his life as an isolated "other" while simultaneously working to relate to the community.

When the "redskins" returned, the lead officer looked sick. He demanded medicine and was annoyed to learn that the village had none to provide. Finally, he reminded the townspeople why he was there, warning them that he did not have the patience he had exhibited last time. Once again, he asked for Pip, and Dolores made no move to retrieve **Great Expectations**. When it became evident to the officer that the village wouldn't cooperate, he doused everybody's homes in gasoline and lit them on fire. The schoolhouse and Mr. Watts's home were the only buildings left standing, and this time none of the villagers rushed to even the score. Returning to school several days later, Matilda noticed that there were only half the number of students in attendance because many of the older boys had decided to join the rebel fighters.

Dolores's continued refusal to remedy this situation speaks to the strength of her convictions: she is a woman who would rather see her house burn (along with her neighbors' houses) than confess to having done something that would reflect poorly on her. Given this stubbornness, it's no wonder that she so vehemently clings to her worldviews. In this case, though, her unwillingness to accommodate new ideas ultimately leads to destruction and misunderstanding.

CHAPTER 16

In class Mr. Watts thanked everybody for coming, saying that he hadn't been sure even he was going to be able to make it, given that Grace had become quite sick. He acknowledged that everybody—including himself—had recently lost valuable possessions, emphasizing that the one thing they all still had intact was their imaginations. He encouraged the students to close their eyes and silently say their names, telling them that "nobody in the history of [their] short lives" had the same voice in their heads; "This is yours," he explained. "Your special gift that no one can ever take from you." In keeping with this appreciation of the mind, he suggested that the class work together to rewrite **Great Expectations** by memory. Together, they decided to accumulate the fragments they could recall, recording them in Mr. Watts's notebook.

In reassembling Great Expectations, Mr. Watts encourages his students to become involved with collaborative storytelling. This process is similar to when the community members visited the classroom to share their fragmented bits of wisdom, since both instances demonstrate the usefulness of combined knowledge. This time, though, Watts emphasizes how special the imagination is, showing his students that they don't need material possessions to define who they are or how they view themselves.

Matilda committed herself wholeheartedly to the task of remembering the lines and scenes of **Great Expectations**. She points out that it was difficult to recall lines when sitting in the classroom but that she often found fragments when going about her everyday life. "You had only to look out the door to see a scrub fowl wander into view," she writes. "[…] A stray thought like that could hook you."

Matilda uses her own life to illuminate her memories of Great Expectations, a fact that is significant considering that, until this point, it has been the other way around (with Great Expectations illuminating her life). As such, what was once a "one-sided conversation" becomes ever so slightly more dynamic, as Matilda's tangible experiences influence the way this new version of Great Expectations is told. In this way, storytelling influences real life and real life influences storytelling.

During this period, Dolores's criticisms of Mr. Watts intensified. Although Matilda would normally have avoided hearing such malicious things said about her teacher, she discovered that her mother's exasperated and mean-spirited rants were reminiscent of Estella's cold treatment of Pip in **Great Expectations**. When Dolores erupted one day with the line, "Do you not have a shadow of your own to play with?" Matilda ran to Mr. Watts's house, too excited to wait until the next school day to relay the fragment she'd just remembered as a result of her mother's phrase. When she arrived, Mr. Watts was tending to Grace, who looked very sick. Matilda blurted out the line, startling Mr. Watts as he held his hand over his wife's eyes. When he regained his composure, he told Matilda to go to where his jacket was hanging, take out the notebook, and record the fragment herself. In doing so, she discovered that his white jacket was filthy.

Again, Matilda's everyday life affects her approach to the retelling of Great Expectations, a process that merges fiction with reality. It's also worth noting that Mr. Watts's white jacket is dirty when Matilda visits him. Suddenly, he is no longer an untouchable white man in a perfect suit, but a person who can get dirty like everybody else. This only helps Matilda move farther from the notion that he is an "other" set at a remove from the rest of the village. In this moment, she witnesses a shred of his private life, and it is no more or less glamorous or difficult to understand than anyone else's.

CHAPTER 17

Before Matilda was about to fall asleep one night, her mother told her that Grace Watts died. At the funeral not long afterward, the villagers convened to pay their respects. To break the silence, Dolores said a prayer by memory—since her **Bible** burned up along with everything else—but she stumbled partway through. Eventually she reached the end, and when it was silent again, Mr. Masoi asked her to repeat it. This time she had no trouble reciting the prayer. When she finished, somebody else tried to utter a different Biblical passage but was unable to piece it together. This attempt was followed by yet another unsuccessful prayer. Soon the audience started passing around stories about Grace, telling Mr. Watts what she was like as a child. As they shared their memories he smiled and nodded, grateful for each person's contribution. "The big things came back to us, and the little things," Matilda remembers. "Mr. Watts did not care how small."

Yet again, collaborative storytelling comes to the forefront of Mister Pip. In the same way that the children try to reconstruct Great Expectations, the funeral-goers try to reconstruct the Bible. It is, of course, meaningful that these books, which are held up as examples of two conflicting cultures, receive the same kind of communal attention after they've disappeared. Although they espouse different ideologies and ways of being, they end up serving the same function, bringing the community together to connect over stories and ideas. As such, Jones suggests that it's not the stories themselves that matter most, but how *people tell and receive them.*

At home that night, Dolores told Matilda that Grace was the smartest child in school. The village, she explained, had high hopes for her when she went to New Zealand to study dentistry. When she came back, though, she was different. "[…I]t was clear that 'different' didn't mean better," Matilda notes. Grace became an outsider in her own village, the wife of a mysterious white man. To make matters worse, she hadn't even earned her degree in dentistry, so she couldn't take care of the Bougainvilleans' teeth, as they had all expected her to do. "Instead of a dental nurse we got Pop Eye," Dolores told Matilda. "We did not know anymore if she was black or white. There. That's all I have to say on the matter because now she is dead."

Interestingly enough, Dolores frames race as a social construction when she says that the village didn't know whether Grace was black or white when she came back from New Zealand. This implies that she views race as a cultural phenomenon, one that is subject to change if somebody adopts a new way of life. This is actually a nice representation of how hybridity can influence identity, though Dolores's observation doesn't seek to praise this kind of racial and cultural adaptability. For her, Grace's new racial ambiguity is the unfortunate result of having lost touch with her roots.

CHAPTER 18

Only several days after Grace's funeral, Mr. Watts was back in the classroom encouraging his students to summon their memories of **Great Expectations**. At this point, Matilda recounts the circumstances that led to her father's departure from Bougainville. As an employee of the island's large copper mine, he was called upon by Australian bosses to live in the Bougainvillean town of Arawa, away from Matilda and Dolores's village. When Dolores visited him, she saw that he was slowly modeling himself after the white Australians surrounding him. He started drinking heavily and smiling like a white person. When rebels began attacking the mine and tensions escalated in Bougainville, his boss offered to "sponsor" him and his family in Australia. Matilda considers the meaning of the word "sponsor," explaining that Mr. Watts likened it to the word "adopt," which she says felt appropriate given her father's apparent desire to be taken in by white culture.

Matilda picks up on the fact that her father's gravitation toward white culture doesn't fit with her mother's desire to stay firmly rooted in her existence as a black woman in Bougainville. Her meditation on the word "sponsor" illustrates the potential risks of "adopt[ing]" a culture so fully that everything else gets left behind. Although she isn't as suspicious of this process as her mother is, she appears cognizant of her father's unfortunate failure to maintain elements of his own culture; his is not a story of the successful comingling of two cultures, but an example of one way of life completely erasing another.

Matilda likens her father's Australian sponsor to Mr. Jaggers, the lawyer who serves as a middleman between Pip and his anonymous guardian (who gives him a fortune) in **Great Expectations**. Like Mr. Jaggers, this man represented an opportunity for upward mobility. Dolores and Matilda, though, had no such representative; "My mum now hoped to join my dad, whenever that might be," Matilda writes. "This was just wishful thinking, because there was no Mr. Jaggers in my mum's life. We were trapped, without a way off the island."

It is difficult to understand exactly what Dolores wants. On the one hand, she is rooted to her home and resents Matilda's father for having essentially turned into a white man. On the other hand, she wants to leave Bougainville and join him, and is exasperated that—unlike him—she has nobody to help leave. Jones fails to fully dissect these contradictory wishes, allowing them to sit side-by-side in Dolores's personality, a problem in her character that ultimately gives her depth, for humans are often unclear about what they want. In a way, one could argue that Dolores's conflicting desires produce a hybridity of sorts that exists in her very identity, which would be ironic given her staunch disapproval of hybridity in other contexts.

On her way to a creek where she liked to wash her clothes, Matilda came upon Mr. Watts at Grace's grave. Standing next to him, she asked him if his wife loved **Great Expectations** as much as he did. To her surprise, he said that she did not. In fact, she had trouble getting through the entire book, always happy to find an excuse to put it down. Eventually, Grace told him that she would read the novel all the way through if he would do the same with **the Bible**, a deal he was unwilling to make.

That Grace read the Bible is an important detail, as it shows that she did not, in fact, completely lose her Bougainvillean beliefs. Though Dolores and the rest of the villagers thought she returned to the island a changed woman—a woman who had seemingly transitioned from black to white—it emerges in this moment that she still held onto the things she learned in childhood. But this was perhaps too hard for the villagers to acknowledge, because doing so would require accepting that two people can fall in love across cultural boundaries and that separate beliefs can comingle without destroying one another.

CHAPTER 19

A large group of rebel soldiers appeared at the edge of the jungle one day. The villagers didn't know how to feel about them, let alone receive them—after all, these soldiers were supposed to be on their side. Some of them could even have come from the village itself, though that wasn't the case with this particular group. Hesitantly welcoming the men, the village provided them with food while they lounged near the jungle, drinking in excess and hooting. On their first night, Dolores worried they would come to retrieve Matilda, afraid that what they wanted were girls with whom they could have their way.

Once more, Jones shows the uncertainty Matilda's village faces as a result of being trapped between two sides of a civil war. That these soldiers—who are supposed to be protecting the village—pose a possible threat illustrates that violent conflict leads to a loss of perspective. Constantly involved in an argument about who's right and who's wrong, who's powerful and who's weak, the rebel armies lose their sense of purpose and commit themselves to a futile "us-versus-them" narrative that only leads to more violence.

The rebels found Mr. Watts the following day. One particularly drunk soldier jumped up and threatened him, yelling, "I will fuck you up the arse!" while unfastening his belt. Unmoved, Mr. Watts calmly told the man to sit back down and listen to him, embarrassing the drunkard into fumbling with his belt buckle as he collected himself. When the soldiers asked who he was, Mr. Watts told them his name was Pip, roughly quoting the first line of **Great Expectations**: "My Christian name is Philip, but my infant tongue could make of it nothing longer or more explicit, so I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip."

Mr. Watts's decision to call himself Pip once again shows his commitment to storytelling, as he steps into a fictional world in order to more competently navigate a tricky real life situation. With the entirety of the plot of Great Expectations *at his disposal, he is well equipped to answer any questions the rebels may have for him. He also puts himself in a position that exists outside the narrow-minded narrative of the civil war—if he confounds the soldiers by telling them about Pip's life, which is certainly strange and foreign to them, then they will have a harder time convincing themselves that he is an enemy soldier (a conclusion that would be in line with the war's "us-versus-them" mentality). In other words, he presents himself as somebody who exists outside their paradigms and stereotypes.*


Dolores pulled Matilda away from the rebel soldiers and ran to the beach, wanting to get away from the entire scene. But since they had nowhere to go, they returned to the village. At this point, Mr. Masoi fetched them and brought them back to the rebel campfire, where Mr. Watts explained that he wanted Matilda present in case anything needed translating. Addressing the soldiers, he said he would answer their questions about who he was and where he was from but that there were two conditions: first, he did not want to be interrupted; second, his story would be doled out in seven nightly installments. In turn, Matilda began to see why her teacher had decided to call himself Pip. Now he could blend parts of **Great Expectations** with elements of his own life, moving easily between fiction and reality. For six nights, Matilda stood next to Mr. Watts and translated as he went in and out of reality.

Mr. Watts's plan to tell his story over seven nights references the Middle Eastern collection of folktales called One Thousand and One Nights, *wherein a woman named Scheherazade avoids being executed by a homicidal king. The story goes as follows: there was once a king who discovered that his wife was being unfaithful to him, so he executed her. He then decided to marry a new woman each night before killing her the next day. When he married Scheherazade, though, she told him a magnificent story that ran all throughout the night, stopping in the middle of the narrative just before dawn and telling him that he would have to wait until the next night to hear the rest. She continued this plan for 1,001 nights until the king fell in love with her and didn't kill her. Mr. Watts employs this same method, hoping to use the power of storytelling to avoid the threat of violence from the rebel soldiers.*


CHAPTER 20

At first, Matilda refers to the protagonist of Mr. Watts's story as "Mr. Watts's Pip," who like Dickens's Pip was an orphan, though this Pip was brought up in New Zealand. Later, she simply refers to him as Mr. Watts. In any case, Mr. Watts lived with a woman who died when he was 18 and gave him her house, which he turned into two units and rented out to Grace, who was attending dental school. Over time, he became enamored of Grace, and eventually they fell in love and bore a child named Sarah. Mr. Watts told his audience that he was shocked to see his parents' faces in his daughter, though he hadn't known what they looked like. Still, he could detect their features as they mingled with Grace's darker traits. "Between us, me and Grace had created a new world."

When Mr. Watts says that he and Grace made "a new world" by having Sarah, he touches once again on the idea of combining two cultures. Having caught a glimpse of his lost parents' features in his daughter, he regains part of his own history while simultaneously "creat[ing]" this new life with Grace and his daughter.

CHAPTER 21

One day between story installments, Matilda caught up with Mr. Watts at Grace's grave, where he told her a secret: he had organized an escape from the island for the night after the next full moon. He, Matilda, Dolores, and the Masoi family would board Mr. Masoi's fishing boat and meet another, bigger boat, which would take them away from Bougainville. He asked Matilda not to inform her mother of the plan because he wanted to tell her himself, a plea to which Matilda agreed, though that night she "ached" to tell her, feeling that Dolores needed time to mentally prepare. Taking the matter into her own hands without breaking her promise, then, she told Dolores about Pip's "readiness to leave behind everything that had gone into making him" when he learned that he was inheriting a fortune and moving to London.

Matilda uses storytelling once again to influence her life, this time employing her knowledge of Great Expectations as a way of emotionally preparing her mother to leave Bougainville. Because Dolores is so closely tied to the island and her way of life, Matilda is aware that she will need to be convinced, but the only way to address the subject without breaking her promise to Mr. Watts is by making use of Pip's narrative. As such, Jones shows that people can look to literature in times of emotional strife and indecision, using stories to prepare for things they've never experienced before.

Mr. Watts told the rebels and villagers that he and Grace had a spare room in their house. Before Sarah was born, Grace began writing her family history on the walls, a detail the villagers—especially Grace's elderly relatives—were glad to hear. Mr. Watts did the same, deciding that the child could pick and choose from her parents' respective cultures. As Mr. Watts described what they put on those walls, Matilda recognized stories and bits of knowledge the villagers had shared in his classroom, as Mr. Watts incorporated their lessons into his tale. He also spoke about the color white, eventually admitting that white people feel especially white around black people. This made his audience uncomfortable, though Matilda suspects they weren't surprised to hear this. Finally, Daniel broke the tension by saying, "We feel the same. We feel black around white people."

Mr. Watts uses the combined stories of the village to navigate a real life situation. In doing so, he entertains his potentially hostile listeners (the rebels) while also placating the villagers, lowering the likelihood that they will object to his story (which is, to be fair, largely fabricated) and ruin his credibility in the eyes of the soldiers. When he stumbles on the idea of race—revealing with perhaps too much honesty the extent to which he feels different from black people—Daniel once again steps in with his ability to recognize that race is first and foremost a matter of perspective. In turn, this successfully avoids making somebody from another race into an "other."

CHAPTER 22

Mr. Watts continued with his story. Back in the spare room, he and Grace filled up the walls with information and anecdotes, many of which originated—in Grace's case—from Bougainville. And though they didn't want to admit it, each one of them hoped Sarah would accept certain of their own traditions, rather than the traditions of the other parent, especially when one concept contradicted another, as was the case when it came to religion. Matilda points out that Mr. Watts finally confessed to being a godless man as he stood before the campfire and narrated his story. But she also highlights the fact that he did so "from the distance of the spare room. If things turned nasty he could always claim to have become a changed man." As Grace fought to instill in her daughter a fear of the devil, the listeners of Mr. Watts's story applauded her efforts, hoping that in the end her ideas would prevail over Mr. Watts's secular fixation on fictional characters.

More than anything else in Mister Pip, *the spare room represents the intersection of two cultures. The Watts family's decision to have Sarah choose between their customs and traditions points to their desire to raise a child who fully embodies cultural hybridity. The spare room is a haven of diversity in a stratified world. In keeping with this, Mr. Watts uses it as a safe place in his own storytelling, a flexible environment he can manipulate according to his audience's reaction. As such, Jones implies that narratives have the highest chance of successfully communicating across cultural borders when they leave room for malleable interpretation.*

Mr. Watts's story endeared his listeners to him, especially with its multiple anecdotes and tales that seemed to admit his own ignorance while championing Grace's wisdom, which she had clearly gleaned from her childhood on Bougainville. Not long after Elizabeth was born, though, she died of meningitis, sending Grace into an overwhelming depression. Desperate to help her, Mr. Watts suggested that they move and that she change her name. He looked around the campfire and asked the villagers and rebels if anybody knew about the Queen of Sheba. Dolores asserted that she is a character in the **Bible**, saying, "The Queen of Sheba was a very wise black woman who sought out Solomon to see if she could match his legendary wisdom with her own." Ending that night's installment, Mr. Watts quoted from the King James Bible: "She communed with him of all that was in her heart…and there was nothing hid."

In the Bible, the Queen of Sheba travels to King Solomon in order to test his divine wisdom. She is deeply impressed when she hears him speak, and declares: "It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it." This last sentence is important when considering Mister Pip *because it shows that people from two different cultures must come together in order to understand one another; they must communicate and listen for themselves rather than hear "reports" about one another from outside sources. Similarly, Grace and Mr. Watts come to accept their respective cultures because they patiently share and teach each other their various beliefs, as evidenced by their merging of ideas in the spare room.*

CHAPTER 23

After Mr. Watts's story about Grace and the Queen of Sheba, Matilda followed him into the woods and asked if he had told her mother about his plan to escape the island. When he told her he hadn't yet done so, she suspected that he didn't intend to let Dolores in on the plan after all. Later, when the villagers woke up on the seventh morning of Mr. Watts's story, the rebel soldiers were gone. Suddenly, "redskin" forces emerged from the jungle with the drunken rebel as their prisoner. When the lead officer asked the drunk to identify Pip—who he still believed was a rebel fugitive the village was hiding—the drunk pointed to the schoolhouse. The "redskins" then went into the building, shot Mr. Watts, dragged him outside, chopped him to bits with machetes, and fed him to the pigs.

Since Mr. Watts is wise and intelligent, it feels likely in this moment that he purposefully martyred himself by telling the rebel soldiers his name was Pip. He knew that if this information got back to the "redskins," he could clear up the misunderstanding entire misunderstanding revolving Great Expectations, *assuming Pip's identity and thereby eliminating the soldiers' suspicion that the village was harboring a rebel. As such, he saves the villagers, considering the fact that the "redskins" had already destroyed their houses and would likely grow increasingly bloodthirsty if their demands weren't met. By telling a hybridized story of his own life, then, Mr. Watts uses narration as a defensive tool that saves multiple lives.*

Matilda and the villagers looked at the ground in disgust and horror. "Look up," barked the "redskin" officer. "Who saw this?" he asked them. "I saw it, sir," Daniel said, happy to have "beaten his classmates with the answer." Two soldiers took him into the jungle. When it was silent again, Dolores stepped forward. "Sir. I saw your men chop up the white man. He was a good man. I am here as God's witness." The officer approached and hit her across the face, but again she said, "I will be God's witness." He fired shots in front of her feet. "Sir, I am God's witness," she said. She was then hauled away by a group of soldiers.

In this scene, Dolores has a change of heart while also reaffirming her own beliefs. On the one hand, she finally recognizes Mr. Watts's kindness and generosity (perhaps because she sees that he martyred himself to save the village). On the other hand, she acts on this realization by doubling down on her original commitment to God and religion. Therefore, she stands up for Mr. Watts on her own terms, an act that finally admits the validity of merging her ideas with his, though it is unfortunately too late at this point, considering that he has already died.

When the "redskin" officer discovered that Matilda was Dolores's daughter, he had her taken to the huts, where a group of soldiers were raping her mother. Seeing her daughter, Dolores pleaded with the soldiers, begging them not to touch Matilda, eventually bargaining by telling them they could kill her as long as they didn't rape the girl. The officer consented to this deal, holding Matilda back and standing with her while his men dragged Dolores over to where Mr. Watts had been killed. They cut her up into pieces and fed her to the pigs. In this moment, Matilda saw "how sick [the officer] was with malaria. How sick of everything he was. How sick of being a human being."

The "redskin" officer is perhaps the only person in Mister Pip who is unable to step outside the single-mindedness of his own beliefs: he carries out his duties as a soldier without compromise. In turn, Jones shows that this kind of fixed worldview has the power to deplete and destroy a person. For the officer, his narrow-mindedness makes him "sick of being a human being"; he seems to understand the error of his ways, but stays committed to his task of asserting Papua New Guinean dominance, a tension that sucks the joy out of his life.

In retrospect, Matilda wonders how things could have gone differently. If her mother hadn't spoken out, perhaps they both could have survived. But she also remembers what Mr. Watts taught her about "what it is to be a gentleman" and a moral person. She notes that Mr. Watts told her a moral person never ceases to be moral. "My brave mum had known this when she stepped forward to proclaim herself God's witness to the cold-blooded butchery of her old enemy, Mr. Watts," she writes.

Matilda's consideration of what it means to be a "gentleman" and moral person further emphasizes the moment at which Dolores and Mr. Watts's worldviews came together. Although they each believed in different kinds of morality—religious versus secular—one gets the sense that Mr. Watts would have done the same thing Dolores did when she stepped out as "God's witness." Perhaps he would have framed his motives differently, but his actions would have been the same. In this way, Jones offers a moral convergence between the two characters.

CHAPTER 24

After the "redskin" soldiers left, Matilda and the village were in a daze. Daniel was eventually found crucified in a tree. Matilda woke up that night and wandered in a strong wind, listening to heavy thunder. She wanted to visit Grace's grave to tell her what had happened to Mr. Watts, but she never made it beyond the river, which was rushing and wild in the vicious storm. Flirting with the idea of allowing the river to end her life, she was suddenly swept up in its current and thrust beneath the surface, at which point she decided—in a reflexive way—that she wanted to live. She found a floating log and clung tightly to it, floating atop the rapids until finally flowing out into the coastal waters, which were calmer. This log was her savior, and so she took to calling it Mr. Jaggers, "the man who had saved Pip's life."

Once again, fiction has a tangible relationship to the real world in Mister Pip, *proving itself to be a survival tool; even in times of extreme strife, Matilda looks to* Great Expectations *for solace and perspective, stepping into its imaginative world in order to better accept her own reality.*

After floating on Mr. Jaggers in the rainy night, Matilda came upon Mr. Masoi's fishing boat. After hoisting her aboard, Mr. Masoi told her to be quiet as he paddled her (along with the entire Masoi family) out to sea. Later that night, Matilda safely awoke on a much bigger boat, which then took her to the Solomon Islands, south of Bougainville. In the Solomons' capital, a doctor inspected her and asked where her father was.

In her escape, Matilda travels to the Solomon Islands, which take their name from King Solomon of the Bible. As such, she charts the Queen of Sheba's path from her homeland to Solomon's kingdom. Taken with Mr. Watts's comparison of Grace to the Queen of Sheba, Matilda's journey is symbolic of the merging of two cultures, which takes place in the Bible when the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon share their beliefs. By drawing this parallel, Jones suggests that Matilda is not fully leaving Bougainville behind, but rather taking its culture with her as a representative in foreign lands.

CHAPTER 25

Matilda traveled from the Solomon Islands to Townsville, Australia, where she reunited with her father. She notes that his "transformation into a white man was near complete." She sensed that though he wouldn't ask why she was alone, he was waiting for her mother to walk off the plane, too. Brushing this off, he told her that they had "some eating to catch up on" because he bought her a birthday cake for each of her birthdays that he missed. "That's four cakes," she pointed out, and he chuckled in affirmation.

Even though Matilda sees that her mother's worst fears about her father have come true—since he has, for all intents and purposes, become a white man—she also recognizes that he has not completely forgotten about his old life, as illustrated by his acknowledgement that he has missed four of her birthdays. This suggests that it is possible to transition into a new culture and way of life without fully sacrificing the life that came before. In short, it is possible to exist as a multicultural human being.

Matilda explains that she attended the local high school in Townsville, Australia. On her second day, she went to the library and found **Great Expectations**. When she sat down to read it, she realized with a shock that Mr. Watts had read her class a simplified version of the novel, omitting wordy sentences and even entire characters. She relates an argument Mr. Watts had with Dolores one day when Dolores listened to him read Dickens's sentence, "As I had grown accustomed to my expectations I had insensibly begun to notice their effect upon myself and those around me." Dolores took issue with the word "insensibly," claiming that it merely confused readers and encouraging him to remove such ornamentations when he read aloud. Matilda believes that from that day on, Mr. Watts simplified the text.

Once more, readers see Mr. Watts's willingness to adapt. Although Great Expectations is his favorite novel, he opens his mind to the possibility of altering it in order to accommodate his listeners. This acknowledges that his students come from a different background than him, a background that has perhaps not furnished them with the tools to understand certain words or ideas that Dickens uses. Rather than forcing them blindly into his own worldview, then, he creates a new kind of text that is inclusive and adaptable.

Matilda won the Townsville senior English Prize and eventually graduated from the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia. During her time at the university, her father would sometimes visit, and one time he arrived with Maria, his housecleaner, with whom he'd fallen in love. Maria was kind and eager to establish a relationship with her new stepdaughter, often asking about Dolores and confessing to Matilda that her father never spoke about his ex-wife—a fact that pleased Matilda.

Though understandable, it is strange that Matilda is happy her father never talks about Dolores to Maria, since this runs contrary to her feelings about storytelling and the importance of sharing one's life and past with others. Of course, she most likely feels this way because she believes her father doesn't deserve to talk about her mother, but it seems Mr. Watts—whom she otherwise models herself after so thoroughly—would encourage an open dialogue between her father and Maria so that they could fully understand one another. As it stands, her emotional response to her father's reluctance to share Dolores's story is out of step with her broader worldview.

Even though Matilda says she never pushes **Great Expectations** on anybody, she admits that it was a useful tool when she taught as a substitute teacher in Brisbane at an all-boys Catholic school. When the class was acting rowdy, she would open *Great Expectations* and read aloud, an act that never failed to calm down her students, mesmerizing them with Pip's story. After a time, she started writing a thesis about Dickens and decided to visit New Zealand to better understand the life Mr. Watts led before he came to Bougainville.

Matilda's desire to understand Watts's previous life harkens back to the fact that he never delivered the final installment of his life's story, since the "redskins" killed him before the last night of his tale. As a result, Matilda is left with only the fragments of a story. In keeping with the novel's preoccupation with combining storytelling and real life, she sets out to piece together Watts's narrative, ultimately becoming involved in it herself in the same way that she became involved with the reconstruction of Great Expectations after Mr. Watts's copy burned in the village fire.

CHAPTER 26

In New Zealand, Matilda called all of the Wattses in the phonebook, leading her to June Watts, who lived in the very house in which Mr. Watts met Grace. Apparently, Mr. Watts had failed to mention that he was already married to another woman when he fell in love with Grace. Matilda visited this woman and discovered that Grace had been institutionalized in a mental hospital at one point during her time in New Zealand. Given the "dead air" of the house's living room, Matilda was not particularly surprised to hear this; "Grace must have seen that sky and those same slow-moving clouds. She must have had this same deathly drag on her heart that I felt," she writes.

Matilda previously recognized that her father had happily assimilated into white culture, but here she considers the difficulties of transplanting oneself into a new world. The "dead air" of June's living room is wildly different from the tropical air of Bougainville, and Matilda portrays this contrast as difficult to reconcile. In this moment, Jones seems to be suggesting—contrary to the book's commitment to adaptability—that there are certain problems that arise from moving from one culture to another and that they can, in the end, prove insurmountable.

Before Matilda left, June showed her photo albums of Mr. Watts and Grace acting in amateur theater performances. One of the pictures depicts them in a production of *The Queen of Sheba*. In this photo, Mr. Watts is wearing a red clown's nose and is pulling Grace in a trolley. June told Matilda that it was the director's idea to add these elements to signify that "some meeting of minds had been achieved." Matilda notes that now she had a fragment of Mr. Watts's previous life. Having learned about his passion for acting, she wonders how much of his classroom personality—which included long pauses, slow pacing, and contemplative looks at the ceiling—was merely posturing. "Who was it that us kids saw in the classroom?" she muses. Was he a man truly obsessed with **Great Expectations**, or was he a man "left with only a morsel who will claim it the best meal of his life?" She then concedes that it is "possible to be all of these things."

Although he shows the origins of Grace and Mr. Watts's strange clown-nose-and-trolley procession, Jones leaves the matter open-ended, neglecting to offer a reason as to why *the director of The Queen of Sheba thought these elements conveyed that a "meeting of minds had been achieved" between the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon. By leaving this unanswered, Jones invites readers into the process of making up the story, allowing them to fill in their own interpretations of what, exactly, a clown nose represents in the context of two cultures coming together. This turns* Mister Pip *itself into an act of collaborative storytelling that mirrors Mr. Watts's investment in the communal aspect of narration.*

CHAPTER 27

Matilda visited London to research Dickens more extensively, going to the British Library to look at "all the fragments of life that had gone into the making of **Great Expectations**." She quickly found herself disappointed, though, upon learning that Dickens—despite his compassion for orphans—was not the most loving of fathers. After retracing Dickens's steps—and the novel's steps—for several days, Matilda found herself in a depression, unwilling to leave the bed of her boardinghouse for six days. On the sixth day, she rose early, walked over to the desk, picked up the front page of her thesis, turned it over, and wrote, "Everyone called him Pop Eye."

Matilda's depression in London comes from her own inability to enter the story of Great Expectations. *No matter how much she researches Dickens and the origins of his novel, she exists outside the narrative. Here again is her dissatisfaction with the idea that her relationship to Pip is a "one-way conversation." Unlike Mr. Watts's life story, which she becomes part of by collecting new fragments,* Great Expectations *is sealed against her influence. In response, she jumps up and writes, "Everyone called him Pop Eye," the first sentence of* Mister Pip. *By writing about her own story, Mr. Watts's story, and Pip's influence on her life, she is finally able to interact with* Great Expectations *on a collaborative level.*

Before leaving England, Matilda decided to visit Rochester, a place from which Dickens borrowed several landmarks in the composition of **Great Expectations**. She describes Rochester as a quaint town with cobblestones and shopkeepers who look like Dickens himself. With two hours to spare in the town before catching a train back, she joined a tour guided by a woman from the Charles Dickens Center at Eastgate House. While the group looked at one of the landmarks—a large house that figures prominently in *Great Expectations*—a young man hopped out of a cab and showed annoyance at the tour as he made his way into the landmark; the guide explained that the house had been turned into apartments. Later, Matilda stared at a mannequin of Charles Dickens and muttered, "I have met Mr. Dickens and this is not him." In the silence of this room, she decided that she would return home to Bougainville.

Matilda's assertion that she has met Mr. Dickens and that the mannequin before her does not accurately represent him illustrates the idea that as an engaged reader—and now a writer, too, since she's begun writing the contents of Mister Pip*—she can conceptualize Dickens in whatever way she wants. To her, Mr. Watts was Mr. Dickens and, furthermore, Pip lived not in England but in the Pacific Ocean. She allows herself these liberties because she knows narrative isn't fixed in reality, but rather malleable—it invites interpretation, and Matilda chooses to remake the author of* Great Expectations *in her own image.*

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