Copper sun

by Sharon m. draper · Language: EN

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Overview

Copper Sun" by Sharon M. Draper is a powerful and harrowing historical novel that chronicles the brutal journey of a young Ashanti girl named Amari, from her peaceful village in West Africa to the horrors of slavery in America. The story begins in 1758, depicting Amari's idyllic life in Ziawi, where she is preparing for marriage. Her world is shattered when her village is attacked by white slave traders and their African collaborators, resulting in the massacre of her family and her own capture. Amari is then forced onto a slave ship, enduring the unspeakable atrocities of the Middle Passage, a journey marked by disease, death, and dehumanization.

Upon arrival in Charles Town, South Carolina, Amari is sold at auction to Mr. Derby and taken to his sprawling plantation. There, she is subjected to the cruel whims of his sadistic son, Clay, and forced into a life of servitude. Amidst the despair, Amari forms an unlikely bond with Polly, a white indentured servant, and finds a surrogate family with Teenie, an older enslaved woman, and her young son, Tidbit. Together, they navigate the daily brutalities of plantation life, witnessing profound injustices and experiencing personal tragedies. The novel vividly portrays the resilience of the human spirit in the face of unimaginable suffering and the enduring quest for freedom.

The novel matters because it offers a visceral and unflinching portrayal of the transatlantic slave trade and plantation life through the eyes of a young protagonist. It highlights themes of survival, friendship, the loss of innocence, and the persistent hope for a better future. Draper masterfully crafts a narrative that educates readers about a dark period in history while emphasizing the strength and dignity of those who endured it. It serves as a stark reminder of the devastating impact of slavery and the importance of remembering historical injustices to foster empathy and understanding.

Key Takeaways

- The human spirit possesses an incredible capacity for resilience and hope even in the face of unimaginable suffering.
- True friendship and solidarity can emerge from the most unlikely circumstances, transcending race and social status.
- The pursuit of freedom, though fraught with peril, is a fundamental human drive that can inspire extraordinary courage.

• Understanding history, particularly the horrors of slavery, is crucial for fostering empathy and preventing future injustices.

• Even in the darkest times, small acts of kindness and connection can provide vital strength and a reason to continue.

• The loss of innocence is a profound consequence of trauma, but it does not diminish one's inherent worth or potential for growth.

Chapter Summaries

The Ashanti Village

Amari, a fifteen-year-old Ashanti girl, lives a peaceful life in her village of Ziavi, Ghana. She is betrothed to Besa, a strong young man from a neighboring village. Her days are filled with traditional tasks, storytelling, and the anticipation of her marriage. This idyllic existence is shattered when white slave traders, accompanied by their African allies, attack the village. The villagers are brutally massacred, and Amari, Besa, and a few others are captured, their homes burned, and their families slaughtered. They are then forced on a grueling march towards the coast, enduring immense suffering and loss.

The Middle Passage

Amari and the other captured Africans endure a brutal march to the coast, where they are held in a barracoon, a slave fort, experiencing starvation, disease, and violence. Besa is separated from Amari, and she fears he is dead. She is then forced onto a slave ship, The African Pearl, for the horrific journey across the Atlantic, known as the Middle Passage. Crammed into the ship's hold with hundreds of other captives, she witnesses unspeakable cruelty, sickness, death, and despair. Many die from disease, starvation, or suicide. Amari survives, clinging to a fragile hope, and eventually arrives in Charles Town, South Carolina.

The Auction Block

Upon arrival in Charles Town, Amari and the other survivors are cleaned, oiled, and prepared for sale. She is terrified and disoriented, unable to understand the language or the customs. At the slave auction, she is bought by Percival Derby, a wealthy plantation owner, as a birthday gift for his cruel and sadistic sixteen-year-old son, Clay. Amari is then transported to the Derby plantation in South Carolina, where she is immediately thrust into a life of brutal servitude. She meets Polly, a white indentured servant, and Teenie, an older enslaved woman who becomes a maternal figure, teaching Amari about plantation life and survival.

Life on the Derby Plantation

Amari's life on the Derby plantation is one of relentless hardship and abuse. She is forced to work in the fields and serve the Derby family. Clay Derby, Percival's son, frequently abuses her, leading to her becoming pregnant. Polly, initially resentful of her own servitude and prejudiced against

Amari, gradually forms a bond with her, teaching her English and sharing her knowledge. Teenie, with her young son Tidbit, provides comfort and guidance, helping Amari navigate the harsh realities of slavery, including the constant threat of violence and the despair of her situation. Amari learns to adapt and survive.

A Glimmer of Hope

Amari gives birth to a baby boy, whom she names Kwasi. The joy of motherhood is overshadowed by the fear that her child will also be enslaved and subjected to the same brutal life. The brutal realities of the plantation continue, culminating in a horrific incident where Tidbit is used as alligator bait by Clay Derby, though he miraculously survives. This event, coupled with the constant threat to her child and the escalating cruelty, solidifies Amari's resolve to escape. Polly, witnessing the escalating inhumanity, also yearns for freedom and begins to plan an escape with Amari and Teenie.

The Escape

With the help of Teenie, who provides them with food, supplies, and directions, Amari, Polly, and Tidbit make their daring escape from the Derby plantation. They face immense dangers and challenges on their journey, including treacherous swamps, wild animals, and the constant threat of being recaptured by slave catchers. They rely on their wits, courage, and the kindness of strangers, including an old white woman who offers them shelter and food, and a kind Jewish merchant named Fiona who helps them further along their path, providing them with a map and directions to Fort Mose, a free black settlement in Spanish Florida.

Fort Mose

Amari, Polly, and Tidbit continue their arduous journey south, following the directions to Fort Mose, a beacon of hope and freedom. They face exhaustion, hunger, and the constant fear of discovery, but their determination to reach freedom keeps them going. Their bond strengthens as they overcome obstacles together. Finally, after weeks of travel, they reach Fort Mose, a community where former slaves and free blacks live in safety. They are welcomed into the settlement, where they find safety, a sense of belonging, and the opportunity to build new lives free from the horrors of slavery. Amari, Polly, and Tidbit begin to heal and look towards a future of self-determination.

Best Quotes

“My name is Amari. I am Ashanti.”

Ziavi

Amari declares her identity and heritage, a crucial act of self-preservation and defiance against the dehumanization of slavery. This line emphasizes her connection to her past and her people,

even in the face of immense suffering and the attempts to strip her of her identity.

“The ocean was a monster, swallowing dreams.”

The Coffin

This powerful metaphor describes the terrifying and deadly Middle Passage. It conveys the immense loss of hope, life, and freedom experienced by enslaved Africans, highlighting the brutal reality of their forced journey across the Atlantic and the profound despair it inflicted upon them.

“We are going to Fort Mose, where black people are free.”

The Escape

This line represents the ultimate goal and driving hope for Amari, Polly, and Tidbit. It signifies the promise of a sanctuary from slavery, a place where they can finally live without fear, and serves as the powerful motivation behind their perilous escape journey through the wilderness.

Questions & Answers

What is the main setting of the book "Copper Sun"?

The book begins in the Ashanti village of Ziavi in West Africa, then moves to the slave ships during the Middle Passage. The majority of the story takes place on a plantation in South Carolina, owned by Mr. Derby, and concludes with a perilous journey through the American wilderness to Fort Mose, Florida, a real historical settlement for free blacks.

Who is Amari?

Amari is the protagonist of "Copper Sun," a fifteen-year-old Ashanti girl from Ziavi. Her peaceful life is shattered when her village is attacked, and she is captured and sold into slavery. The story follows her journey of survival, resilience, and her quest for freedom in the face of unimaginable brutality and loss.

What happens to Amari's family?

During the attack on her village, Amari witnesses her parents' murder. Her younger brother, Kwasi, is also captured, but his fate remains unknown to Amari. She is separated from him and never learns what happened to him after their capture, leaving her with profound grief and uncertainty.

Describe the conditions on the slave ship during the Middle Passage.

The conditions on the slave ship, referred to as "The Coffin," are horrific. Enslaved people are crammed into dark, unsanitary holds, chained together, with little food or water. Disease is rampant, and many die from starvation, illness, or despair. The journey is marked by extreme

brutality, sexual assault, and the constant threat of death.

Who is Polly and what is her role in Amari's story?

Polly is a fourteen-year-old white indentured servant who works alongside Amari on the Derby plantation. Initially resentful of Amari, Polly eventually becomes Amari's closest friend and ally. She is intelligent and literate, and her knowledge proves invaluable during their escape to freedom, demonstrating the power of cross-racial solidarity.

Who is Clay Derby?

Clay Derby is the cruel and sadistic son of Mr. Derby, the plantation owner. He is a constant source of torment for Amari and the other enslaved people, often inflicting violence and psychological abuse. His violent and unpredictable nature, particularly towards Noah, highlights the brutality and injustice inherent in the slave system.

What is the significance of Noah in Amari's life?

Noah is an enslaved man on the Derby plantation with whom Amari falls in love. He represents hope, kindness, and resistance against the oppressive system. He plans an escape with Amari, but his attempt to protect her from Clay leads to his brutal murder, which deeply traumatizes Amari and fuels her determination to escape.

What is Fort Mose?

Fort Mose is a real historical settlement in Spanish Florida, established in the 1730s as the first legally sanctioned free black town in what would become the United States. It served as a refuge for enslaved people who escaped from British colonies, offering them freedom, protection, and a new life away from the horrors of slavery.

Why do Amari, Polly, and Tidbit decide to escape?

Amari, Polly, and Tidbit decide to escape after Noah's brutal murder by Clay Derby. Amari realizes she cannot endure the plantation's cruelty any longer, and Polly, witnessing the injustice, feels compelled to help. Tidbit, a young boy, is also in danger, prompting their desperate flight for freedom and survival.

Who is Tidbit and how does he join Amari and Polly?

Tidbit is a young enslaved boy on the Derby plantation, approximately four years old. He is the son of Teenie, the cook. After Noah's death, Amari, Polly, and Tidbit escape together. Amari takes on a maternal role, protecting and caring for him throughout their arduous journey, forming a new makeshift family.

What challenges do Amari, Polly, and Tidbit face during their journey to Fort Mose?

Their journey is fraught with danger. They face hunger, thirst, exposure to the elements, wild animals, and the constant threat of being recaptured by slave catchers. They must rely on their

wits, resilience, and the kindness of strangers to survive the wilderness and reach their destination, demonstrating immense courage.

How does Amari's Ashanti heritage help her survive?

Amari's Ashanti heritage provides her with resilience, knowledge of medicinal plants, and survival skills learned in her homeland. Her strong sense of identity, the stories of her ancestors, and the memories of her family also give her the mental fortitude to endure unimaginable suffering and continue her fight for freedom.

What role does Dr. Hawkins play in the escape?

Dr. Hawkins is a kind white doctor who secretly despises slavery. He helps Amari, Polly, and Tidbit by providing them with food, supplies, and crucial directions to Fort Mose. His assistance is vital for their survival, demonstrating that not all white people supported the institution of slavery and some actively resisted it.

What does the title "Copper Sun" signify?

The title "Copper Sun" likely refers to the sun's appearance in Africa, often described as a vibrant, coppery hue. It symbolizes Amari's lost homeland, her rich heritage, and the warmth of her past life before slavery. It represents a connection to her identity and the enduring hope for a future where she can once again live under a "copper sun" of freedom.

Spoiler: What happens when Amari, Polly, and Tidbit reach Fort Mose?

Spoiler: Upon reaching Fort Mose, Amari, Polly, and Tidbit are welcomed into the community of free black people. Amari finds a sense of belonging and safety she hasn't known since her capture. She learns that she is pregnant with Noah's child, and the community embraces her, offering her a new beginning and the chance to raise her child in freedom, symbolizing hope for the future.

How does the relationship between Amari and Polly evolve throughout the book?

Their relationship transforms from initial animosity and mistrust, stemming from their different backgrounds and societal roles, into a deep bond of friendship and sisterhood. They learn to rely on each other for survival, overcoming racial barriers to form an unbreakable alliance built on mutual respect and shared struggle for freedom and dignity.

What is the significance of the red cloth Amari carries?

The red cloth is a piece of fabric given to Amari by her mother before the attack on her village. It serves as a tangible link to her family, her heritage, and her past life in Africa. It symbolizes her identity, her mother's love, and her enduring hope, providing comfort and strength throughout her ordeal.

How does the author portray the psychological impact of slavery on Amari?

The author portrays Amari's psychological journey from innocence to profound trauma, resilience, and ultimately, hope. Amari experiences deep grief, fear, and dehumanization, but she never loses her spirit. Her internal monologues reveal her struggle to maintain her identity and dignity in the face of overwhelming oppression and loss.

What message does "Copper Sun" convey about freedom?

"Copper Sun" conveys that freedom is an inherent human right, not a privilege. It emphasizes that freedom often requires immense struggle, sacrifice, and courage to attain. The book illustrates that true freedom encompasses not just physical liberation but also the preservation of identity, dignity, and community, and the right to self-determination.

How does the book challenge stereotypes about enslaved people?

The book challenges stereotypes by portraying enslaved people as complex individuals with rich cultures, deep emotions, and strong wills. It shows their intelligence, resilience, and capacity for love, friendship, and resistance, countering the dehumanizing narratives often associated with slavery and highlighting their humanity and strength.