

# Development & Inequity

Narratives of TAKERS & LEAVERS.

Task: Text Annotation and Key Ideas

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**BACKGROUND:** The conversation below between the “Taker” and the “Leaver” is a modified excerpt from a novel called *Ishmael* by Daniel Quinn.

**OBJECTIVE:** Understand Takers and Leavers: How are their cultures, values, and goals different? And WHY are they different – how did these different human stories come to be?

**CLASSWORK:** Read and annotate (*think ON the paper*). **Prove your thinking by writing questions and ideas on the sides of the text.** You may also use these symbols as you annotate:

★ *This seems like a key idea; the writer wants me to understand this.*

*E* *This is evidence that supports a key idea* [draw an → connecting the *E* to the idea].

? *I don't understand this word, phrase, sentence, or section. Someone needs to help me with this.*

! *This is particularly interesting or surprising to me!*

✓ *I agree with this.*

✗ *I don't agree with this.*

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1] **LEAVER:** All right. Let's try this. Wherever the *Takers* have come up against some hunter-gatherers taking up space they wanted for themselves, they've tried to explain to them why they should abandon their lifestyle and become Takers. They've said, “This life of yours is not only wretched, it's wrong. Man was not meant to live this way. So don't fight us. Join our revolution and help us turn the world into a paradise for man.”

2] **TAKER:** Right.

3] **LEAVER:** You take that part—the part of the *Taker*, and I'll take the part of a hunter-gatherer. Explain to me why the life that I and my people have found satisfying for thousands of years is grim and revolting and repulsive.

4] **TAKER:** Good lord.

5] **LEAVER:** Look, I'll get you started. . . . Bwana, you tell us that the way we live is wretched and wrong and shameful. You tell us that it's not the way people are meant to live. This puzzles us, Bwana, because for thousands of years it has seemed to us a good way to live. But if you, who ride to the stars and send your words around the world at the speed of thought, tell us that it isn't, then we must in all prudence listen to what you have to say.

6] **TAKER:** I realize it seems good to you. This is because you're ignorant and uneducated and stupid.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- 7] **LEAVER:** Exactly so, Bwana. We await your enlightenment. Tell us why our life is wretched and squalid and shameful.
- 8] **TAKER:** Your life is wretched and squalid and shameful because you live like animals.
- 9] **LEAVER:** I don't understand, Bwana. We live as all others live. We take what we need from the world and leave the rest alone, just as the lion and the deer do. Do the lion and the deer lead shameful lives?
- 10] **TAKER:** No, but that's because they're just animals. It's not right for humans to live that way.
- 11] **LEAVER:** Ah, this we did not know. And why is it not right to live that way?
- 12] **TAKER:** It's because, living that way . . . you have no control over your lives.
- 13] **LEAVER:** In what sense do we have no control over our lives, Bwana?
- 14] **TAKER:** You have no control over the most basic necessity of all, your food supply.
- 15] **LEAVER:** You puzzle me greatly, Bwana. When we're hungry, we go off and find something to eat. What more control is needed?
- 16] **TAKER:** You'd have more control if you planted it yourself.
- 17] **LEAVER:** How so, Bwana? What does it matter who plants the food?
- 18] **TAKER:** If you plant it yourself, then you know positively that it's going to be there.
- 19] **LEAVER:** Truly you astonish me, Bwana! We already know positively that it's going to be there. The whole world of life is food. Do you think it's going to sneak away during the night? Where would it go? It's always there, day after day, season after season, year after year. If it weren't, we wouldn't be here to talk to you about it.
- 20] **TAKER:** Yes, but if you planted it yourself, you could control how much food there was. You'd be able to say, "Well, this year we'll have more yams, this year we'll have more beans, this year we'll have more strawberries."
- 21] **LEAVER:** Bwana, these things grow in abundance without the slightest effort on our part. Why should we trouble ourselves to plant what is already growing?
- 22] **TAKER:** Yes, but . . . don't you ever run out? Don't you ever wish you had a yam but find there are no more growing wild?
- 23] **LEAVER:** Yes, I suppose so. But isn't it the same for you? Don't you ever wish you had a yam but find there are no more growing in your fields?
- 24] **TAKER:** No, because if we wish we had a yam, we can go to the store and buy a can of them.

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- 25] **LEAVER:** Yes, I have heard something of this system. Tell me this, Bwana. The can of yams that you buy in the store-how many of you labored to put that can there for you?
- 26] **TAKER:** Oh, hundreds, I suppose. Growers, harvesters, truckers, cleaners at the canning plant, people to run the equipment, people to pack the cans in cases, truckers to distribute the cases, people at the store to unpack them, and so on.
- 27] **LEAVER:** Forgive me, but you sound like lunatics, Bwana, to do all this work just to ensure that you can never be disappointed over the matter of a yam. Among my people, when we want a yam, we simply go and dig one up-and if there are none to be found, we find something else just as good, and hundreds of people don't need to labor to put it into our hands.
- 28] **TAKER:** You're missing the point.
- 29] **LEAVER:** I certainly am, Bwana.
- 30] **TAKER:** Look, here's the point. Unless you control your own food supply, you live at the mercy of the world. It doesn't matter that there's always been enough. That's not the point. You can't live at the whim of the gods. That's just not a human way to live.
- 31] **LEAVER:** Why is that, Bwana?
- 32] **TAKER:** Well . . . look. One day you go out hunting, and you catch a deer. Okay, that's fine. That's terrific. But you didn't have any control over the deer's being there, did you?
- 33] **LEAVER:** No, Bwana.
- 34] **TAKER:** Okay. The next day you go out hunting and there's no deer to be caught. Hasn't that ever happened?
- 35] **LEAVER:** Assuredly, Bwana.
- 36] **TAKER:** Well, there you are. Because you have no control over the deer, you have no deer. So what do you do?
- 37] **LEAVER:** We snare a couple of rabbits.
- 38] **TAKER:** Exactly. You shouldn't have to settle for rabbits if what you want is deer.
- 39] **LEAVER:** And this is why we lead shameful lives, Bwana? This is why we should set aside a life we love and go to work in one of your factories? Because we eat rabbits when it happens that no deer presents itself to us?
- 40] **TAKER:** No. Let me finish. You have no control over the deer-and no control over the rabbits either. Suppose you go out hunting one day, and there are no deer and no rabbits? What do you do?
- 41] **LEAVER:** Then we eat something else, Bwana. The world is full of food.

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- 42] **TAKER:** Yes, but look. If you have no control over any of it . . . Look, there's no guarantee that the world is always going to be full of food, is there? Haven't you ever had a drought?
- 43] **LEAVER:** **Certainly, Bwana.**
- 44] **TAKER:** Well, what happens then?
- 45] **LEAVER:** **The grasses wither, all the plants wither. The trees bear no fruit. The game disappears. The predators dwindle.**
- 46] **TAKER:** And what happens to you?
- 47] **LEAVER:** **If the drought is very bad, then we too dwindle.**
- 48] **TAKER:** You mean you die, don't you?
- 49] **LEAVER:** **Yes, Bwana.**
- 50] **TAKER:** Ha! That's the point!
- 51] **LEAVER:** **It's shameful to die, Bwana?**
- 52] **TAKER:** No. . . . I've got it. Look, this is the point. You die because you live at the mercy of the gods. You die because you think the gods are going to look after you. That's okay for animals, but you should know better.
- 53] **LEAVER:** **We should not trust the gods with our lives?**
- 54] **TAKER:** Definitely not. You should trust yourselves with your lives. That's the human way to live.
- 55] **LEAVER:** **This is sorry news indeed, Bwana. From time out of mind we've lived in the hands of the gods, and it seemed to us we lived well. We left to the gods all the labor of sowing and growing and lived a carefree life, and it seemed there was always enough in the world for us, because-behold!-we are here!**
- 56] **TAKER:** Yes. You are here, and look at you. You have nothing. You're naked and homeless. You live without security, without comfort, without opportunity.
- 57] **LEAVER:** **And this is because we live in the hands of the gods?**
- 58] **TAKER:** Absolutely. In the hands of the gods you're no more important than lions or lizards or fleas. In the hands of these gods-these gods who look after lions and lizards and fleas-you're nothing special. You're just another animal to be fed. Wait a second... Okay, this is important. The gods make no distinction between you and any other creature. No, that's not quite it. Hold on... Here it is: What the gods provide is enough for your life as animals, but for your life as humans *you* must provide. The gods are not going to do that.
- 59] **LEAVER:** **You mean there is something we need that the gods are not willing to give us?**

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- 60] **TAKER:** That's the way it seems, yes. They give you what you need to live as animals but not what you need beyond that to live as humans.
- 61] **LEAVER:** **But how can that be, Bwana? How can it be that the gods are wise enough to shape the universe and the world and the life of the world but lack the wisdom to give humans what they need to be human?**
- 62] **TAKER:** I don't know how it can be, but it is. That's the fact. Man lived in the hands of the gods for three million years and at the end of those three million years was no better off and no farther ahead than when he started.
- 63] **LEAVER:** **Truly, Bwana, this is strange news. What kind of gods are these?**
- 64] **TAKER:** These, my friend, are incompetent gods. This is why you've got to take your lives out of their hands entirely. You've got to take your lives into your own hands.
- 65] **LEAVER:** **And how do we do that, Bwana?**
- 66] **TAKER:** As I say, you've got to begin planting your own food.
- 67] **LEAVER:** **But how will that change anything? Food is food, whether we plant it or the gods plant it.**
- 68] **TAKER:** That's exactly the point. The gods plant only what you need. You will plant more than you need.
- 69] **LEAVER:** **To what end, Bwana? What's the good of having more food than we need?**
- 70] **TAKER:** Damn! I get it!
- 71] **LEAVER:** **So what's the good of having more food than we need?**
- 72] **TAKER:** That is the whole point! When you have more food than you need, then the gods have no power over you!
- 73] **LEAVER:** **We can thumb our noses at them.**
- 74] **TAKER:** Exactly.
- 75] **LEAVER:** **All the same, Bwana, what are we to do with this food if we don't need it?**
- 76] **TAKER:** You save it! You save it to thwart the gods when they decide it's your turn to go hungry. You save it so that when they send a drought, you can say, 'Not me! I'm not going hungry, and there's nothing you can do about it, because my life is in my own hands now!'

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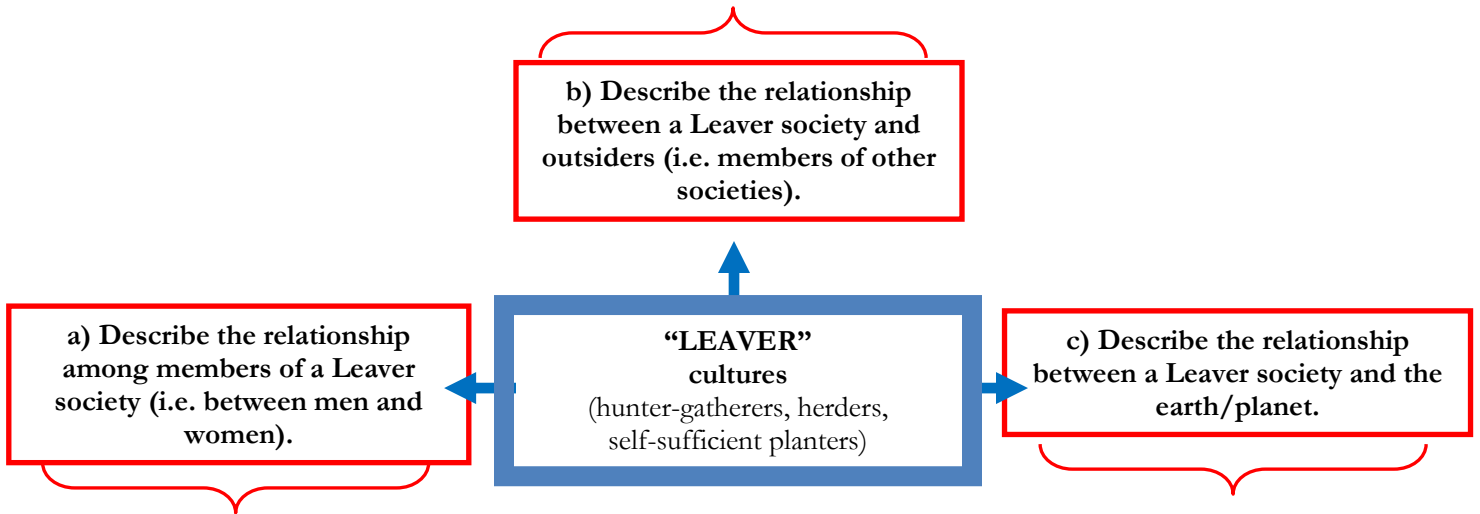
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## **CRITICAL THINKING**

Analyze (break down) the culture of a Leaver society. Write responses to each of the three topical discussions listed outside the LEAVER box. Base your responses on evidence from the text.



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Quinn, Daniel. *Ishmael: An Adventure of the Mind and Spirit*. New York: Bantam/Turner, 1992.