About the author

Sir Henry Rider Haggard was born on June 22, 1856, in Norfolk in the east of England. Haggard was well-educated. He went to grammar school, a type of high school for bright pupils, and also had private tutors. His father was, in the phraseology of the time, a well-connected man. At the age of only 19, Haggard went to Africa to become secretary to the governor of Natal. Only two years later he was one of the first Englishmen to go into the Transvaal when Britain made it a colony. He returned to England when he was 25 and wrote a history of nineteenth century southern Africa. Then he followed his father into the law. Haggard wrote two unsuccessful novels, and then achieved success with his classic adventure story, *King Solomon's Mines* which was published in 1885.

Haggard died on May 14, 1925 in London.

Summary

A man called Neville has disappeared whilst searching for the legendary diamonds of King Solomon’s mines in Southern Africa. His brother, Sir Henry Curtis and Curtis’s friend, Captain Good, enlist the help of Allen Quatermain, a soldier, trader, hunter and prospector, to find Neville in return for the diamonds, should they find them.

As luck would have it, Quatermain knows something of the diamonds and the mines because he has a map that was drawn hundreds of years before.

The three adventurers set out to follow the map. After much hardship and a death in their group, they reach the land in which the mines are located, but find that it is ruled over by a despotic and capricious tyrant, Twala, with the help of an evil old woman, Gagool. Twala is not the rightful king, but everyone believes that Ignosi, the true monarch, died many years earlier as a young child.

Gagool wishes that the strangers be put to death, especially Umbopa, but they are saved by the people’s belief that they have come from the stars, a belief strengthened by Captain Good’s eyeglass and his ability to remove his false teeth, plus the fact that they can strike animals dead from a distance with the aid of guns, unknown until then to the natives.

At this point Umbopa reveals that he is Ignosi, and some of the natives agree to support him in an attempt to regain the throne, provided that he can give a sign of his majesty. Good realises that an eclipse of the moon is due on the following evening and they state therefore that they will make the moon disappear as a sign. The Greys, an elite fighting force, will then rise up on the side of Ignosi.

After a bloody battle, Ignosi is crowned king and forces Gagool to help them find the treasure room of the mine. She tricks them and the secret door of the treasure room closes, trapping them inside.

After beginning to believe they will perish in the treasure room, they find another way out and return to Ignosi and then home. On their way, they find Neville and he is happily re-united with his brother. Quatermain is happy too, as the treasure will make him extremely wealthy.

**Chapters 1 and 2:** Hunter Quatermain is writing a history of what has happened to him over the previous 18 months. He has lived in Africa for many years, and meets Sir Henry Curtis and Captain John Good who are looking for Sir Henry’s brother, Neville, whom Quatermain knows. Quatermain tells Sir Henry that Neville was looking for Solomon’s mines in the Suliman Mountains and shows them a strange document and map of the mines drawn by Jos da Silvestra 300 years before. Sir Henry decides he is going to go there to look for his brother and asks Quatermain to come with him.

**Chapters 3 and 4:** Quatermain decides to go on the journey and the men also recruit Ventvogel and Khiva, and a Zulu called Umbopa offers his services. During their journey, a large elephant chases Captain Good and Khiva is killed while saving Good’s life. Whilst walking through the desert, they struggle with the lack of water and take refuge in a cave where Ventvogel dies and they find the body of Jos da Silvestra.
King Solomon’s Mines

Chapters 5 and 6: The men meet the Kukuanas who tell them that they must die. However, Captain Good removes his false teeth and Quatermain kills a deer with his gun and the Kuhuanas think they come from the stars. Infadoos takes them to meet the king called Twala, although he is not the true king. King Twala is very frightening and cruel as is Gagool, a witch.

Chapters 7 and 8: Umbopa reveals that he is in fact Ignosi, the rightful king, and asks the white men to help him get his kingdom back in return for the diamonds and they agree. Although Gagool wants to kill Ignosi, some of the chiefs agree to support him if they can be given another sign that he is the rightful king. They say they will make the moon dark, as a sign. They also use this to save the life of Foulata, who falls in love with Good.

Chapters 9 and 10: The battle starts and Ignosi and the Greys surround Twala’s army. It is a terrible battle but eventually Twala’s army flees. Afterwards, Twala fights Good, who kills him but is badly injured. Good develops a fever and would have died, but for the care of Foulata.

Chapters 11 and 12: Good survives and Gagool takes the men to the Place of Death, where they see some frightening sights. Once in the treasure room, Gagool shuts the door. She is killed, however, when it crushes her after she fights with Foulata who dies of her injuries in Good’s arms.

Chapters 13 and 14: After almost losing hope, the men eventually escape and find their way out of the mine and back to Ignosi. Before leaving, Quatermain fills his pockets with diamonds. Ignosi tells them they are welcome to come back, but other white men must never come to his land.

Chapter 15: On their way back, they find two men dressed in skins and realise they are Neville and Jim, the hunter. They all travel back to Durban and then eventually to England where they sell the diamonds. Quatermain becomes a rich man.

Background and themes

Exploration of Africa: Haggard published King Solomon’s Mines at the time when Africa was still, for most British people, ‘the dark continent’, mysterious and largely unexplored where impossible things could still exist. It was also the time when the real exploration of the interior was beginning, with Cecil Rhodes pushing north from the Cape colony in 1890 and similar forays by Germans, French, Belgians, Spanish and Portuguese from points all around the coast.

Culture clash: Most people saw the incursion of the Europeans into the heart of Africa as a civilizing influence. The natives were childlike and/or savage. It was the ‘white man’s burden’ to educate and teach them European values. But at the end of King Solomon’s Mines, Haggard touches on another result of the impact between European culture and the native groups. When the white men decide to leave Ignosi’s kingdom, he does not want any other white men to return, selling guns and strong drink. He has seen the other side of European culture and rejects it.

Discussion activities

Before reading

1 Discuss: Put students in small groups and ask them to discuss the book cover. What do you think the book is about? How does the cover make you feel? Is this a book you would like to read?

2 Discuss: Put students into small groups and ask them what they know about Africa. Are any of you from Africa? Have you ever visited Africa? Is Africa a country or a continent? What do you know about it? What natural resources does Africa have? What countries have you heard of? What do people do for a living there? Have you ever heard of a people called the Zulus?

3 Research: Ask students to find out everything they can about diamonds and diamond mining in Africa.

4 Guess: Write the following words on the board and ask the students to guess their meaning: battle, mine, revolver, rifle, spear, treasure, cattle, fellow, wagon, and witch. They can refer to the Word List at the back of the book.

Chapter 1

After reading

5 Artwork: Ask students to look over the descriptions of the two men the writer meets on the boat. Ask them to draw a picture of each man. Then they can ask their partner to put a name to each picture.

Chapter 2

Before reading

6 Research: Ask the students to find out about King Solomon and his mines. Who was King Solomon? Where do we read about him? Did he really exist? Was he a rich or a poor man? Did his mines really exist, do you think? Afterwards, ask students how they think this might relate to the story. Ask them to write down their ideas.
King Solomon’s Mines

While reading

7 Artwork: Ask students to draw a picture that represents the information left by Jos Silvestre’s relative. This can include the map to find the diamonds, the witch, the millions of diamonds in the treasure room, the White Death (ask students to imagine what this is). The students should try to include as many symbols or information as they can. These pictures could then form the basis of a display.

Chapter 3

Before reading

8 Write: Ask students to give Quatermain some advice and to put this in a letter. What should Quatermain do? Should he go on the journey when he has a son and might be killed, or should he stay at home? Ask students to put their reasons in the letter.

After reading

9 Write: Have students write a paragraph about what happened with the elephant and the two men, using the passive voice.

Chapter 4

Before reading

10 Predict: Have students predict what they think will happen in the desert. What will happen when their water runs out? Will they find any water? Will anyone die? If so, who will die? What things could they do to survive? Ask students to write down their predictions.

After reading

11 Pair work: Ask students to discuss their predictions. Did you predict correctly? How do you feel about what happened? Do you think things are going to get better or worse for the travellers? Why?

Chapter 5

After reading

12 Write: In this chapter the white men are called ‘Children of the Stars’, ‘Children of the Shining Eye’ and ‘Disappearing Teeth’. Have students think up similar funny names for themselves and their friends. Have the students share these with the class.

Chapter 6

After reading

13 Predict: The witch, Gagool, makes a horrible prediction about blood. Put students into small groups and ask them to discuss what this might mean. What predictions does Gagool make? What does she mean will happen? Do you believe these sorts of things? Can people predict the future? The students write down their ideas.

Chapter 7

After reading

14 Role play: Student A. You are Twala. You must decide what happens to Umbapo. Listen to the arguments. Student B: You are Gagool. You want Umbapo to die. You think this is very important. Tell Twala why. Student C: You are Quatermain. You do not want Umbapo to die. You must persuade Twala not to kill him. Have the conversation.

Chapter 8

Before reading

15 Pre-teach: the word eclipse. Ask students what they know about eclipses. Ask them to research how an eclipse occurs in books or on the Internet. Ask them to draw a diagram of an eclipse.

After reading

16 Discuss: Put students into small groups and discuss the following: How did the men use their knowledge of eclipses to help them? What did they do?

Chapter 9

Before reading

17 Predict: Have students predict the outcome of the battle. Who will win, do you think? Will anyone be killed or injured? Who do you want to win? Ask students to write down their predictions.

After reading

18 Discuss: Put students into small groups and have them check their predictions. Also, in this chapter we hear about ‘a man’s death’. Have students discuss this. What is a ‘man’s death’? Is this something you understand? Is this something that is important today in your society? Why do you think this is mentioned?

Chapter 13

Before reading

19 Predict: In pairs, ask students to predict what will happen. Will they ever escape? Will they be able to take the diamonds? Will they ever get back home?

Chapter 14

After reading

20 Discuss: Put students into small groups and ask them to discuss why Ignosi does not want any other white men to come to his land.

Vocabulary activities

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.