

During Reading

After you set up the organizer for your Key Topic Notes, you can begin your careful reading of the memoir.

D Read with a Purpose

Keep your reading purpose in mind. Remember that your first reading goal is to find out about the kind of life Dinesen had in Africa. Your second reading goal is to decide how you feel about her and the people, places, times, and events described.

As you read, take notes in your Key Topic organizer. Jot down important or interesting details, as well as any questions you have for the author. If you're not sure where something belongs in the organizer, write it on a sticky note, and leave it in the book for later.

Now read these excerpts from Chapter 1 of *Out of Africa*.

from *Out of Africa* by Isak Dinesen

I had a farm in Africa, at the foot of the Ngong Hills. The Equator runs across these highlands, a hundred miles to the North, and the farm lay at an altitude of over six thousand feet. In the day-time you felt that you had got high up, near to the sun, but the early mornings and evenings were limpid and restful, and the nights were cold.

The geographical position, and the height of the land combined to create a landscape that had not its like in all the world. There was no fat on it and no luxuriance anywhere; it was Africa distilled up through six thousand feet, like the strong and refined essence of a continent. The colors were dry and burnt, like the colors in pottery. The trees had a light delicate foliage, the structure of which was different from that of the trees in Europe; it did not grow in bows or cupolas, but in horizontal layers, and the formation gave to the tall solitary trees a likeness to the palms, or a heroic and romantic air like fullrigged ships with their sails clewed up, and to the edge of a wood a strange appearance as if the whole wood were faintly vibrating.

Physical surroundings

She describes the land.

from *Out of Africa*, continued

We grew coffee on my farm. The land was in itself a little too high for coffee, and it was hard work to keep it going; we were never rich on the farm. But a coffee-plantation is a thing that gets hold of you and does not let you go, and there is always something to do on it: you are generally just a little behind with your work.

She was determined.

In the wildness and irregularity of the country, a piece of land laid out and planted according to rule, looked very well. Later on, when I flew in Africa, and became familiar with the appearance of my farm from the air, I was filled with admiration for my coffee-plantation, that lay quite bright green in the gray-green land, and I realized how keenly the human mind yearns for geometrical figures. All the country round Nairobi, particularly to the north of the town, is laid out in a similar way, and there lives a people, who are constantly thinking and talking of planting, pruning or picking coffee, and who lie at night and meditate upon improvements to their coffee-factories.

She was proud of her farm.

Nonfiction

Coffee-growing is a long job. It does not all come out as you imagine, when, yourself young and hopeful, in the streaming rain, you carry the boxes of your shining young coffee-plants from the nurseries, and, with the whole number of farm-hands in the field, watch the plants set in the regular rows of holes in the wet ground where they are to grow, and then have them thickly shaded against the sun, with branches broken from the bush, since obscurity is the privilege of young things. It is four or five years till the trees come into bearing, and in the meantime you will get drought on the land, or diseases, and the bold native weeds will grow up thick in the fields—the black-jack, which has long scabrous seed-vessels that hang on to your clothes and stockings.

Problem:
drought,
diseases,
weeds

Place:
near
Nairobi

from *Out of Africa*, continued

Nairobi was our town, twelve miles away, down on a flat bit of land amongst hills. Here were the Government House and the big central offices; from here the country was ruled.

When I first came to Africa, there were no cars in the country, and we rode in to Nairobi, or drove in a cart with six mules to it, and stabled our animals in the stables of *The Highland Transport*. During all my time, Nairobi was a motley place, with some fine new stone buildings, and whole quarters of old corrugated iron shops, offices and bungalows, laid out with long rows of eucalyptus trees along the bare dusty streets. The Offices of the High Court, the Native Affairs Department, and the Veterinary Department were lousily housed, and I had a great respect for those government officials, who could get any work at all done in the little burning hot, inky rooms in which they were set.

Sympathizes
with
workers

The colony is changing and has already changed since I lived there. When I write down as accurately as possible my experiences on the farm, with the country and with some of the inhabitants of the plains and woods, it may have a sort of historical interest.

Her purpose
for writing
the memoir

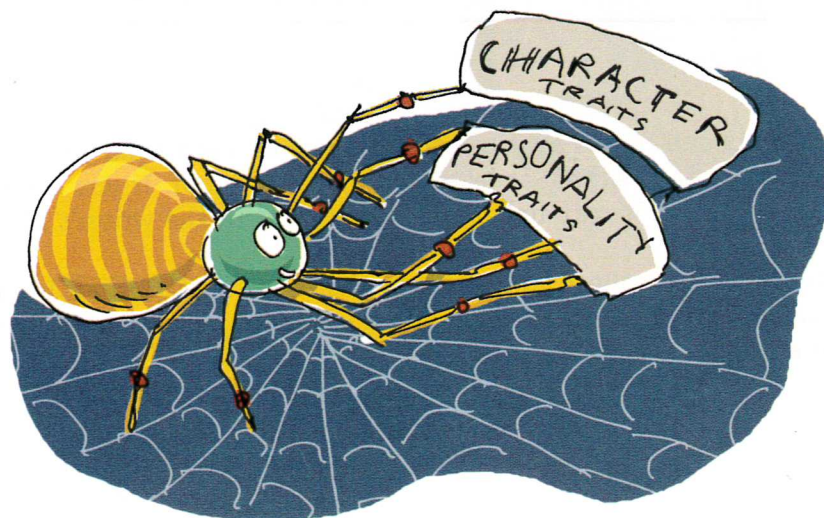
What did you learn about Dinesen from reading these parts of *Out of Africa*? Sort out the information in your Key Topic Notes.

KEY WORD OR TOPIC NOTES

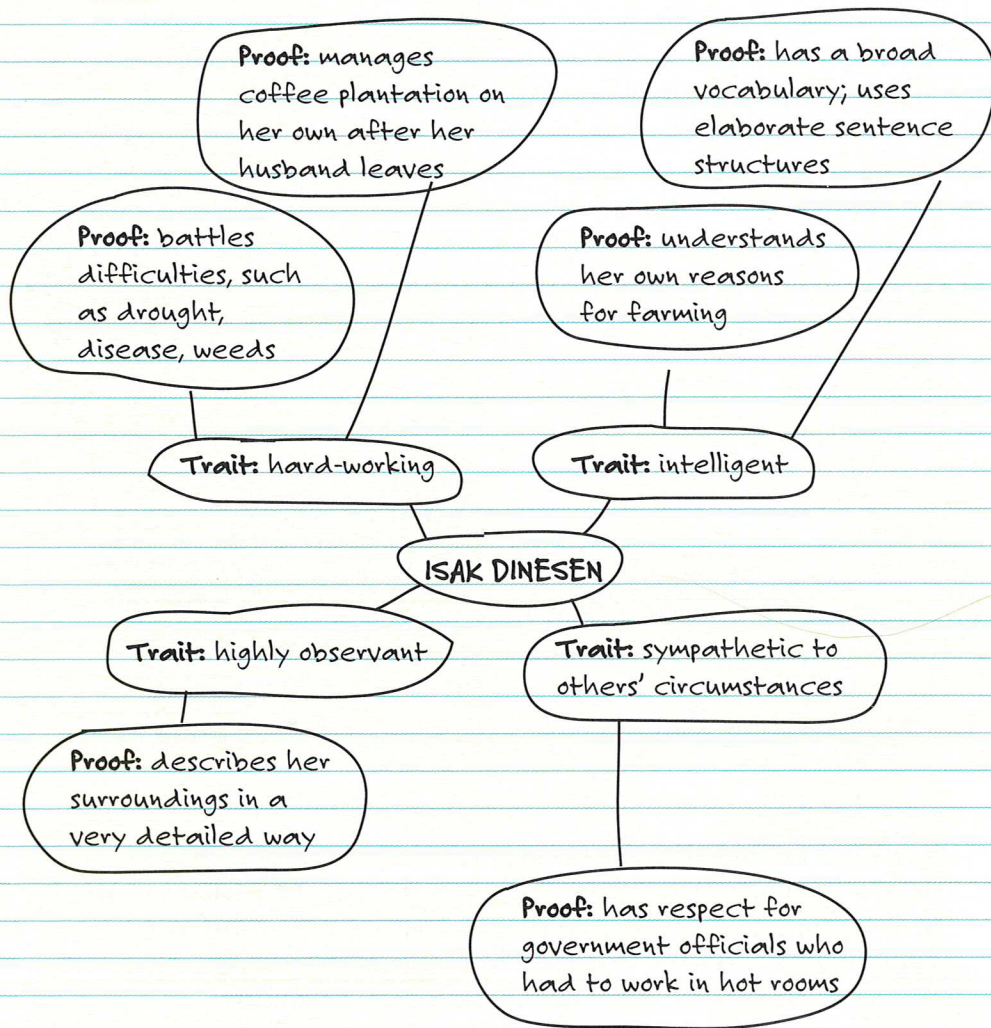
KEY TOPICS	NOTES
reasons for the focus on this period in the writer's life	experiences may be of historical interest
physical surroundings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • plantation near the equator • over six thousand feet high
work and major achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • successfully ran a coffee plantation
major problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • drought, weeds, and diseases • transportation difficult
personality and character traits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feels pride in her achievements • loves the beauty of Africa • is strong and determined

Nonfiction

Key Word or Topic Notes can help you keep track of important details from the writer's life. Keep in mind that you have two parts to your reading purpose. The second part includes forming an opinion about the author. [To do this, use a Web. An organizer like this one can sharpen your understanding of the author.](#)



WEB



Add traits and proofs as you read the memoir. Each time you add a new trait, try to supply at least two pieces of proof. If you can't support a trait, it may not be very important in the writer's life.

You might also collect your feelings about the author in an Inference Chart. Making inferences as you read is a good way to learn about the author.

INFERENCE CHART

TEXT	WHAT I CONCLUDE
<p>Writer She took over management of the coffee plantation after her husband left.</p>	<p>She was determined and brave. It probably wasn't easy to run that plantation on her own.</p>
<p>Places She describes her farm in detail. Nairobi, where the government offices were, was the nearest town.</p>	<p>Her descriptions of the farm and the surrounding countryside make them sound beautiful. Nairobi must have been where she bought supplies.</p>
<p>Times When she first arrived (1914), there were no cars there.</p>	<p>It must have been hard to run a farm without a car, and it must have taken a long time to travel the twelve miles to town.</p>

Nonfiction

An Inference Chart helps you draw conclusions about important aspects of a subject's life. Note how each inference is based on fact, a quote, or an event from the memoir.



How Memoirs Are Organized

Every memoir you read will be organized a little differently. Still, most memoirs share several features.

MEMOIR FACTS

Almost all memoirs are written in the first-person. Watch for pronouns such as I, we, and our.

A memoir often focuses on one or more major periods in the writer's life. Look for them.

Memoirs are not always told in chronological order, so you may want to create a Timeline of events. You can add events as you read the whole book.

TIMELINE

Dinesen goes to Africa.					Dinesen returns to Denmark.
1914	no cars yet	separates from husband	grows coffee	later flew in Africa	1931

E Connect

As you read about the kind of life Dinesen led in Africa, consider the second part of your reading purpose—to form impressions of the writer and the people, places, times, and events described. As you read, make notes in your reading journal about your impressions or ideas.

JOURNAL

This was obviously a major period in Dinesen's life, one that deeply affected her. Maybe this was because her life in Africa was so different from her life in Europe.