

# BLUE GOLD

by Elizabeth Stewart • Lesson Plan prepared by Marla Conn, MS Ed.

**Genre:** Fiction

**Themes:** Africa; China; coltan; consumerism; child labor; bullying; electronics; refugees; global studies

**Suitable for:** Grades 6+

## Blue Gold

Three girls on three continents are unexpectedly linked by a rare mineral called coltan, or blue gold, that is used in the production of cell phones and electronics.

Sylvie and her family live in a squalid refugee camp after fleeing the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where her father was killed in the conflict for control of coltan; Laiping works in abysmal conditions in a Chinese factory where cell phones are assembled; Fiona, a North American girl, takes a picture on her phone that she comes to regret.

Their stories intertwine to create an intense and suspenseful novel about how our hunger for the latest electronics affects the lives of people throughout the world.

**Common Core standards are noted throughout.**

## THEME

1. Determine two or more themes or central ideas of the text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary. **RL.11-12.2**
2. How are the themes in *Blue Gold* reflected through the character's behaviors and element of plot? **RL.11-12.2,3**
3. Choose one of the themes from the story that you connect with. Explain what the theme teaches you about your own life. **RL.11-12.2**

## STORY ELEMENTS

- Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama. **RL.11-12.3**
- How does Elizabeth Stewart introduce Fiona, Sylvie, and Laiping? What is your first impression of each of the characters? **RL.11-12.1/RL.11-12.3**
- What do the characters do and say to reveal themselves? **RL.11-12.1,3**
- What feelings are evoked by the settings in the story? Describe the three settings in detail. Refer to the place, era, country, landscape, political environment, climate, living conditions, etc. **RL.11-12.1,3**
- How does the setting in each case affect the meaning of the story?
- Describe how the story's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond to change as the plot moves toward resolution. **RL.11-12.1,3**
- Describe examples of conflict from the book using the lives of the three main characters. What people, forces, ideas, interests, values, or institutions oppose each other? **RL.11-12.1,3**
- What decisions must the characters make? What do these decisions represent? **RL.11-12.1,3**
- How are Fiona, Sylvie, and Laiping connected? Describe how Stewart uses plot structure (exposition, complication, crisis, climax, and resolution) to create meaning. **RL.11-12.3**

## VOCABULARY ACQUISITION

- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. **RL.11-12.4/L.11-12.6**
- Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression. **RL.11-12.4/L.11-12.6**

3. What is “blue gold”? When does Stewart first mention “blue gold” in the story? **RL.11-12.1,4/L.11-12.6**
4. Find words and phrases from the book that are used to describe, or have similar connotations/denotations as: weapon of war, conflict minerals, Africa, China, coltan, consumerism, child labor, bullying, electronics, refugees. Describe the impact of word choices. **RL.11-12.4/L.11-12.6**

## **AUTHOR’S CRAFT**

1. Analyze how the author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact. **RL.11-12.5**
2. Discuss Elizabeth Stewart’s style and how she structures the story. How does her style contribute to the message and the overall effect she wishes to create? **RL.11-12.5**
3. What is Elizabeth Stewart’s attitude towards the subject matter? How does she create a *feeling* using writer’s craft?

## **POINT OF VIEW**

4. In small groups, analyze a case from each main character in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant.
5. Find examples of satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement. **RL.11-12.6/RL.11-12-4/L.11-12.6**

## **FURTHER RESEARCH AND EXPLORATION**

1. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation. **W.11-12.7**
2. What can you as a consumer do to prevent buying products containing conflict raw materials?
3. Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source, and following a standard format for citation. **W.11-12.8**

4. Research “conflict minerals” and standards used by different manufacturers. Investigate groups who are globally active in the fight to instill ethical standards and preserve the lives of young exploited individuals.
5. Compare and contrast the fictional portrayal of the setting and characters in *Blue Gold* with a historical account as a means of understanding how authors of fiction use history to make a point.

## DISCUSSION

1. Come to discussions prepared having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas. **SL.11-12.1.a**
2. Discuss Elizabeth Stewart’s purpose for writing *Blue Gold*. Analyze how the style and content contribute to the power and persuasiveness of the text. **SL.11-12.1.a, RL.11-12.1**
3. Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task. **SL.11-12.1.d**
4. Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data. **SL.11-12.2**
5. Debate: Should we boycott smartphones, tablets, and laptop computers whose manufacturers cause exploitation in countries around the world? What are some of the factors that need to be considered? **SL.11-12.2**