

A Long Walk to Water

By Linda Sue Park



Novel Guide

Developed by: Ann Forbes

Based upon the College of William and Mary Center for Gifted Education Navigator model

Suggestions

You will read the story twice. The first time is to understand the story as a whole. The second time is to think deeply about specific parts of the story.

During the first reading, answer some, or all, of the questions from the, “While You Read,” section.

Then, go back into the story for a second time to search for deeper meaning. Choose questions upon which to focus from, “Exploring the Story, Meeting the Characters, Understanding the Ideas, and Connecting to You.”

For high-ability learners and children who wish to extend their learning, the, “Differentiated Activities for High-Ability Learners, and Interdisciplinary and Research Connections,” sections are included.

Park, Linda Sue. A Long Walk To Water. New York: Clarion Books, 2010.

Pages: 115

Genre: Fiction

Synopsis: Salva is going to school in South Sudan when terror strikes. He is forced to journey for miles and years, facing seemingly insurmountable obstacles. After he settles in the United States, he is inspired to return to South Sudan to help his father and his country. A parallel story is told by Nya, who lives in South Sudan in present times. She voices the hardships of her long walks for water. How will the future bring change for Salva and Nya?

While You Read

1. Refer to maps or an atlas as you read. Locate South Sudan, Ethiopia (30), the Nile River in South Sudan (42), the Gilo River (74), Nairobi, Kenya (91), Frankfurt (93), New York City (94), Rochester (94), Zimbabwe (100), Amsterdam (101), Kampala, Uganda (101), and Juba, South Sudan (102).
2. Create a table to chart Salva's age as he grows older during the story. Begin with Salva's age and the year when the story begins (1, 11). Enter the year in which the Ethiopian refugee camps closed (73). How old was Salva at that time? Continue by adding the year in which Salva left the Kenyan refugee camp to come to the U.S.A. (91). How old was he at that time? Finally, how old was Salva in 2009, when the story ended?
3. Describe Nya's daily routine walking for water (20). How often did she go to the pond? What was the quality of the pond water? How did she carry the water? How did she feel about her job?
4. What does the author reveal about conflicts between the Dinka and Nuer tribes (16)? How does the past influence the old woman's response to Salva? What did Salva mean when he said, "Everything was upside down," (17)?
5. Why were the boys, who walked from Ethiopia through South Sudan to Kenya, called the Lost Boys (80)?
6. Why did the author wait until the last page of the story to reveal the identity of the boss of the drilling team to Nya and to the reader (115)?

Exploring the Story

1. Since this novel was originally written as a serial story for weekly publication in newspapers, each chapter had a specific length requirement. Explain how the brevity of the chapters affects the author's ability to tell the story.
2. Find examples of ways in which the author uses imagery to add rich details to the story. Explain how the imagery helps you visualize details.
3. How does the author use flashbacks in the story? Give examples and explain the significance of each one.
4. Why does the author sometimes allude to death rather than explicitly stating what is happening?
5. Nya noticed that Salva did not have facial scarring that would indicate the tribe to which he belonged. Why did Salva have no facial scarring? How is this detail important to the story?
6. As the plot develops, the reader learns that Salva is building a well for a Nuer tribe. What makes this unexpected?

Meeting the Characters

1. Salva is, "... letting his mind wander down the road ahead of his body," at the beginning of the story. What does Salva's behavior at school imply about his character traits and self-image?
2. Why does the author include Nya in the story, yet choose not to develop her character?
3. In what ways was Uncle Jewiir a role-model for Salva? Which of Uncle's leadership traits did Salva demonstrate when he led the Lost Boys from Ethiopia to Kenya?
4. When the Nuer tribesmen murdered Uncle Jewiir, Salva's attitude changed. Describe how he felt and acted from that moment forward on his journey to Ethiopia.
5. What may you infer about Salva from his encounter with Michael, the aid worker, at the Kenyan refugee camp?
6. Describe your impressions of Salva's relationship with his family. How did his relationship motivate him to give back to his community?

Understanding the Ideas

1. Compare and contrast walking for water in the rainy season with waiting for water in the dry season.
2. Describe the times in the story when Salva felt hopeless. Compare them with times when he felt hopeful. What are the reasons for the differences in how he felt?
3. Salva did not aspire to become the leader of the Lost Boys. Under certain circumstances, however, leaders emerge naturally. What caused Salva to emerge as a leader?
4. According to Nya's father, how may the construction of a single water-well in a village in South Sudan affect her future?
5. Think about the title: A Long Walk to Water. How does the title symbolize the struggles of the main characters, as well as all people of South Sudan?
6. Stepping into a new, modern life in the U.S.A., almost everything was different from what Salva had previously experienced in South Sudan. What did he learn from each culture that contributed to his success when he returned to his homeland to drill wells?

Connecting to You

1. The story began when Salva was eleven-years-old and ended when he was thirty-three. During the time that he walked to Ethiopia he was the age of a sixth-grader. How do you think you would respond to the fatigue and hunger of the journey if you were in Salva's place?
2. How do you respond to the amount of death that is portrayed in the novel? Give examples from the text, followed by your reactions.
3. Salva described feeling like he was in a black hole of loneliness while at one of the Kenyan refugee camps. Have you ever felt so hopeless that you imagined yourself being swallowed up by a black hole? Compare and contrast Salva's feelings with your own.
4. A large crowd of people was leaving the refugee camp in Ethiopia as soldiers chased them from behind. "Immediately there was chaos. It was as if the people ceased to be people and instead became an enormous herd of panicked, stampeding two-legged creatures." Have you, or anyone that you know, ever experienced panic? Describe how panic feels. What is it about being panic-stricken that affects one's ability to respond to the needs of others?
5. As Salva was crossing the desert with his uncle, he used self-discipline to combat temptation. "It was the hardest thing Salva had ever done, taking only tiny sips when his body cried out for huge gulps of thirst-quenching, life-giving water." Describe a time when you used ultimate self-control. What kept you from falling into temptation? What about your experience was similar to and different from Salva's experience?
6. Nya doubted her elders as she watched men looking for water between two large trees. Recall a time when you doubted one of your parents or teachers, but learned later that he or she was right. Why were you doubtful? If you were Nya, do you think you would have been doubtful? Explain why, or why not.

Differentiated Activities for High-Ability Learners

1. Create a concept map that shows how one of these themes is demonstrated in the story: *resilience, persistence, or loyalty*. Use examples from the text.

After you have completed the concept map, analyze its parts to determine what generalities are depicted. Write one or more generalizations that are based on your analysis. (*Remember, a generalization is a broad, abstract statement that is true in most situations.*)

2. Choose a statement from the list below. Write a persuasive essay in which you discuss whether or not you agree with the statement. Use examples from the text to support your point of view. You may add information from other sources, including other books that you have read and your own experience. Use the Hamburger Model as a guide for structuring your writing.

- Overwhelming tasks can be accomplished by focusing on one step at a time.
- One person can make a significant difference in the world.
- Belonging is more than being visibly marked as a member of a group.
- Always focus on what can be, not on what cannot be.
- Human ingenuity can overcome the environment.

3. Study several words of your choice from the list below. Analyze each word using the Vocabulary Web Model to guide your thinking. Use a separate graphic organizer for each word.

bewildering (98)

gored (52)

quench (53)

contaminated (106)

lag (22)

ravaged (59)

din (78)

luscious (28)

refugee (59)

earnestly (77)

merciless (75)

relentless (52)

emaciated (68)

mingled (71)

revived (58)

gauge (46)

monotonous (46)

solemn (59)

gourd (14)

peril (80)

Interdisciplinary and Research Connections

1. Retrace the history of war and peace in Sudan from the time that the country gained its independence from French colonial rule in 1956 through today. Explain the significance of the referendum for independence that was voted upon in January, 2011. When did the country of South Sudan gain its independence? Create an annotated timeline.
2. An aquifer is an area of underground water storage. When wells are built, they tap into the ground water supply. Find out about the supply and demand for water in South Sudan. For how long should the water supply last? Do scientists have any concerns about its long-term sustainability? How does sustainability differ between South Sudan and Sudan?
3. Salva's father was ill with a water-borne disease called guinea worms. Learn about guinea worms and other diseases that result from drinking contaminated water.
4. The organization that Salva founded to provide water-wells to villages is called "Water For South Sudan". When was the organization founded? For how many years has Salva been drilling water wells? Why does he only drill during the dry season? When does he do fundraising? How does he transport materials and workers to where he needs them?
5. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) helps refugees in many countries. Find out what the definition of refugee is. Learn about present-day refugee camps in Africa. Where are they located? What are conditions like at the camps? Why are people being displaced from their homelands?
6. A variety of animals are identified as living in and around South Sudan. Learn about the honey guide bird. What does it look like? Why does it fly towards honey combs? Where is its native habitat? What survival challenges does it face?
7. Learn about everyday twenty-first-century life in South Sudan. What do the peoples' homes look like? Do families own any type of vehicles? Are there any paved roads? How far apart are trading centers and clinics? How is cooking done? What do people eat? Are electricity, or telephone, or internet services available?
8. Salva is only one of thousands of Lost Boys. Find out about another organization that has been started by a former Lost Boy. Explain what the organization does.