

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

A Long Walk to Water

by Linda Sue Park

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A Long Walk to Water

Note to the Teacher

A Long Walk to Water is a novel based on a true story about the difficulties people, particularly children, face in Sudan. Linda Sue Parker uses a dual narrative structure to shift between a historical fiction account of a girl named Nya and an actual memoir of Salva Dut's childhood and early adulthood. Nya, like many Sudanese girls, does not have the opportunity to attend school because she must spend her days walking to and from a water hole to bring water to her family. Salva Dut must flee when his school is attacked during the Second Sudanese Civil War. He and dozens of other refugees trek across Sudan to reach an Ethiopian refugee camp. Over the years, he lives in three different refugee camps before he is granted asylum in the United States as one of the Lost Boys. As an adult in the US, Salva founds Water for South Sudan, an organization that helps drill wells in this troubled region. When people come to build a well near Nya's struggling village, Salva's and Nya's lives converge.

Linda Sue Park was born in Urbana, Illinois, in 1960 to Korean immigrants. She began writing at a young age and published her first poem at age nine. She obtained an English degree at Stanford University and advanced degrees in literature from Trinity College and the University of London. Park worked in public relations and food journalism and taught English as a second language before publishing her first book, *Seesaw Girl*, in 1999. She has since won a Newbery Medal for *A Single Shard*. Park lives in Rochester, New York, where she befriended Salva Dut and became inspired to record his story.

All references come from the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt edition of *A Long Walk to Water*, copyright 2010.

Terms and Definitions

Anaphora – repetition of a word or group of words within a short section of writing;

Example: “A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted.” – Ecclesiastes 3:2

Coming of Age – a novel or other work of literature in which the main character or characters grow, mature, or understand the world in adult terms; **Examples:** *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; *The Cay*

Conflict – the struggle that moves the action forward in a work of literature; there are three types of conflict, and most books include all three: *man versus man* (**Example:** a typical Western, in which the sheriff confronts the outlaw); *man versus nature* (**Example:** a story about someone surviving in a small boat on the ocean); *man versus himself* (**Example:** a character in a story fighting his or her own drug abuse). Some authorities consider *man versus society* a fourth category of conflict (**Example:** a character in a book fighting against the Nazis).

Foreshadowing – the use of hints or clues in a story to suggest what action is to come; foreshadowing is frequently used to create interest and build suspense. **Example:** Two small and seemingly inconsequential car accidents predict and hint at the upcoming, important wreck in *The Great Gatsby*.

Irony – a perception of inconsistency, sometimes humorous, in which the significance and understanding of a statement or event is changed by its context; **Example:** The firehouse burned down.

Motif – a situation, incident, idea, or image that is repeated significantly in a literary work; **Examples:** In *Hamlet*, revenge is a frequently repeated idea. In *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden continually comments on the phoniness of people he meets.

Onomatopoeia – a word whose sound (the way it is pronounced) imitates its meaning; **Examples:** “roar,” “murmur,” “tintinnabulation.”

Perspective – the viewpoint from which the author wants the reader to follow or understand the work; **Example:** We can understand the world only as Holden Caulfield shows it to us in *The Catcher in the Rye*; the same world would be quite different if it had been delineated by an older person.

Simile – a comparison between two different things using either *like* or *as*; **Examples:** I am *as* hungry *as* a horse. The huge trees broke *like* twigs during the hurricane.

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. identify and understand the political and social issues that existed in Sudan.
2. identify and explain the importance of the following symbols and motifs:
 - water
 - hope
 - courage
 - perseverance
 - the will to survive
 - overcoming adversity
 - family and community
 - finding inner strength and courage
3. discuss how the dry season affects the Sudanese in terms of available water and migration.
4. trace Salva's maturation from a boy to a young man in this coming-of-age story.
5. compare gender roles in the Sudanese culture.
6. analyze how the dual perspectives provide a broad view of life in Sudan and how these two narratives converge.
7. identify the following conflicts that permeate the story and explain how they are connected:
 - man vs. nature
 - man vs. man
8. infer meanings about characters, events, and culture when the meanings are not explicitly stated.
9. recognize the following themes and cite instances in which they are demonstrated in the novel:
 - Difficulties can be endured by taking one small step at a time.
 - People working as a group can accomplish more than an individual can.
10. explain who the "Lost Boys" are and how an international aid program helps them.
11. discuss the importance of education to Salva and Nya and the difficulties they have in obtaining it.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Park mentions prolonged violence between the Dinka and Nuer tribes. Discuss why these disputes continue, and describe how the communities are similar.
2. Uncle Jewiir is the only refugee who does not have to beg for his food, and Salva wonders if it is because he is a leader or because he has a rifle. Do you think having a gun grants Uncle authority in the eyes of other people? Explain your response.
3. Explain how the loss of Uncle Jewiir is a turning point for Salva that marks when he truly starts to mature into a young man.
4. There is a six-year gap during Salva's time in the Itang refugee camp. Why would Park skip these years of Salva's life? Explain your opinion.
5. Discuss how people from different tribes or geographic regions use their strengths or resources to contribute to the survival of the refugees traveling to Ethiopia.
6. Discuss the various forms of family Salva experiences and the role family plays in helping him survive.
7. Nya is skeptical that the men will be able to find water; how does this skepticism illustrate her perspective as a child who has grown up expecting water to be difficult to obtain?
8. Analyze the portrayal of gender roles within this novel, and describe how male and female characters face different hardships because of these gender roles.
9. Discuss Salva's hopefulness: how he maintains a degree of optimism while trekking across Sudan, what causes his optimism to wane, and how his hope for a better future is renewed.
10. Park withholds information, including the names of characters. Examine how this delayed revealing of information affects the story and the reader's understanding of the characters.

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Chapter One

VOCABULARY

aimless – without a goal or purpose
dress – to prepare the carcass of an animal for cooking or market
droned – spoke in a dull, monotonous manner
edged – moved sideways with caution
grouse – a type of ground-dwelling bird
meal – grain that has been ground into powder

1. Explain the contradiction in the introduction to Nya's story and in the statement "Going was easy."

2. What effect does the use of multiple short fragments in the last line of Nya's section have on the meaning and tone of this passage? What effect do the periods have?

3. What language does Salva speak at home? What language does he learn at school and why?

4. Why are there no girls in Salva's class?

Chapter Five

VOCABULARY

gingerly – carefully, cautiously

gnus – African antelopes similar to wildebeest

1. Why does Nya’s family not live near the lake all year?

2. How does Nya obtain water from the lake? What is the quality of the water?

3. Particularly in Nya’s passages, Park stresses ideas through unconventional sentence structure. Describe Parks’s technique, citing the example of this style in Nya’s section of the chapter.

4. How does Salva feel about being stung while getting honey?

Chapter Fourteen

VOCABULARY

dreadful – very unpleasant

wee – [*slang*] little

1. Why are the people at Nya's village celebrating?

2. Why is Nya concerned about the water?

3. Describe the Kakuma and Ifo refugee camps.

4. What inhibits Salva from getting extra food or leaving the Ifo camp to continue his education?
