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Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



A Long Walk to Water

by Linda Sue Park

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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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.

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.

Chapter Nine

VOCABULARY

arid – extremely dry
eternal – endless
hollow – sunken
parched – dry
precise – exact
quenching – satisfying or easing
relentless – harsh; not letting up
reluctantly – unwillingly
tamarind – a tropical plant with fruit used in drinks and medicine

1. Why do you think the visitors are talking to Nya’s uncle, the village chief, about water?

2. Compare the bush near Salva’s village to the Akobo Desert.

3. What hardships does Salva endure in the desert?

Chapter Twelve

VOCABULARY

clangor – a loud noise
mingled – blended, combined
skittered – moved quickly
surge – a sudden movement of a crowd; a wave
torrents – heavy downpours

1. How does Nya describe the drill? What can you infer from her description?

2. Identify and explain a theme of the novel that is illustrated in Nya’s passage.

3. When the woman in the orange headscarf does not respond to Salva’s cries, what does he suddenly realize? What does his awareness and reaction reveal about him?

4. How does Park emphasize the length of time that Salva has lived at the refugee camp? What motifs does she highlight with this emphasis?
