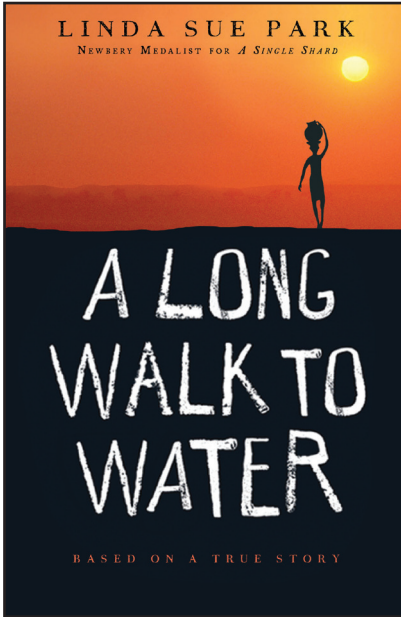


# *A Long Walk to Water*

Based on a True Story  
by LINDA SUE PARK



*A Long Walk to Water*  
Linda Sue Park

## About the Book

Written with spare beauty, this moving story showcases the perilous journey of eleven-year-old Salva Dut, a Dinka boy who goes on a terror-filled trek after his southern Sudanese village is attacked by armed rebels. After being separated from his family in 1985, Salva experiences more than a decade of violence, starvation, brutality, and cruelty, as well as life-affirming kindness and companionship. Like the other “Lost Boys of Sudan,” Salva wanders a war-ravaged African landscape for more than a thousand miles on foot before finding safe haven in the United States in 1996. Basing the book on the true story of refugee Salva Dut, who established the nonprofit organization Water for South Sudan, as well as on other first-person accounts, Newbery medalist Linda Sue Park conveys in an equally rich, parallel narrative the heartfelt tale of Nya, a young Sudanese girl who, in 2008, devotes her long days to an unending quest for water. In a stirring and unforgettable novel, the heroic sojourns of these two admirable young people come together in a surprising conclusion that features a remarkable portrayal of forgiveness and reconciliation.

## About the Author

**Linda Sue Park** is the author of the 2002 Newbery Medal book *A Single Shard* and other historical novels set in Korea. She has also written contemporary realism and fantasy novels, as well as several picture books. She lives in Rochester, New York, with her family. For more information visit her website, [www.lspark.com](http://www.lspark.com).

## Pre-Reading Activities

Discuss the hand-drawn map at the front of the book that shows southern Sudan in relation to the bordering countries of Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda, as well as the rest of Sudan and the continent of Africa. Have students trace Salva Dut’s journey, which is shown on the map in a broken line, identifying such features of the physical landscape as the Nile River, the Akobo Desert, and the Gilo River, as well Salva’s home village of Loun-Arik, the Itang refugee camp, and the Kakoma and Ifo refugee camps. In addition, ask students to use the map’s scale to estimate the length of Salva’s “long walk to water.”  
(CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.7)

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## Discussion Questions

(CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6.1, 7.1, 8.1 applies to each discussion question.)

- Starting with the first chapter, readers learn about life in southern Sudan through what the text says explicitly and through inferences that can be drawn from the writing. Ask students to discuss southern Sudan's geography and climate, government and politics, schools and education, languages and religions, people and population, plants and animals, and family life and communities. (CCSS-ELA-Literacy.RL.6.1)
- Personification is figurative language in which animals, inanimate objects, and abstract ideas are endowed with human characteristics. Park opens the novel with personification as she likens Nya's big plastic water container to a baby that the girl "cradles . . . in both arms" and suggests that the hot sun is like a cook "already baking the air." Ask students to identify other examples of personification in the narrative. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.5)
- The paragraph in the first chapter in which Salva is daydreaming about returning home to his loving mother and a bowl of milk after school is immediately followed by the sound of gunfire as his village is attacked. How does this juxtaposition prepare readers for the story that is about to take place and the major themes of home and security and escape and freedom? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.2, 6.5)
- Throughout the novel Park puts some of Salva's thoughts in italics, starting with *Where are we going? Where is my family? When will I see them again?* and continuing to *One problem at a time—just figure out this one problem.* What do these quotes reveal about Salva's growth and development over the years? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.2, 6.5)
- A journey in a work of fiction often operates on a symbolic level. What do Nya's journeys represent both literally and figuratively? Consider how she changes from the beginning of the story, when she travels eight hours a day to fetch water for her family, to the book's final scene, in which she expresses her gratitude to Salva for the new well in her village. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.2)
- Rather than state that Salva's friend Mariel has been killed by a stalking lion, how does Park imply that this tragedy has occurred? Cite specific examples in the text. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.1)
- How do Uncle Jewiir's words to Salva when they are in the desert, "You need only to walk as far as those bushes," enable Salva to eventually lead 1,500 displaced boys on a dangerous trek from Ethiopia back to southern Sudan and finally to safety in the Ifo refugee camp in Kenya? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.3)
- The Lost Boys of Sudan are named after Peter Pan's cadre of homeless orphaned boys who are threatened by Captain Hook and his pirates. Ask students to draw on their knowledge of J. M. Barrie's classic story, including film and dramatic adaptations, and discuss whether or not they think this is an apt allusion. Students may also want to skim or read the novel, the play, or picture book versions of *Peter Pan* as reference. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.4)
- Compare and contrast the physical representations of Salva and Nya's narratives on the

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book's pages. What do the differences in the size and color of the typeface, length of the entries, and visual motifs represent? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.5)

- Compare and contrast the setting, story line, point of view, and style, including tone, of Salva and Nya's narratives. What accounts for the similarities and differences? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.6; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.2)
- In 1979 oil was discovered in southern Sudan, arguably one of the main causes of the Second Sudanese Civil War. Why doesn't Park mention this aspect of the conflict in her book, in your opinion? What does this omission reveal about her point of view? Readers may also want to consider why Park chooses not to provide details about life in the refugee camps. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.6)
- Ask students to distinguish between the primary and secondary sources that Park acknowledges in her appended note. What kinds of information do readers think came from these different kinds of materials? Do they think one is more effective than the other in conveying Salva's and Nya's often challenging experiences? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.9)
- Ask students, working in small groups, to discuss other kinds of survival stories they have read, such as wilderness adventures, dystopian thrillers, historical fiction, contemporary realism, or myths. What do these narratives have in common with *A Long Walk to Water*? How are they different? A poetic survival novel set in a dry, barren Africa for comparison is Melanie Crowder's *Parched* (HMH, 2013), which also features a boy and

girl struggling against enemies both natural and man-made. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.9)

## Post-Reading Activity

Ask students to view the short videos on Salva Dut's website for his nonprofit organization Water for South Sudan. Then ask them to compare and contrast what they viewed with what they read in the novel about the relationship between having a clean, accessible source of water and the development of schools and education. Do students think one medium is more effective than the other in developing support for clean water initiatives in developing countries? Why or why not? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.7)

## Curricular Activities

- Have students write and illustrate examples of personified language that endow the southern Sudanese and western Ethiopian and Kenyan landscape, including savannah, rivers, mountains, and deserts, with human characteristics and traits. Compile these in a print or online class book. (Social Studies, Language Arts) (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.7.5)
- Ask students to create an annotated online timeline that conveys major events of Salva's harrowing journey, such as his uncle's death at the hands of a party of Nuer men, his survival of the crocodile-infested Gilo River, his first meeting with his new family in America, his reunion with his father in a Sudanese hospital, and his revelation to Nya in her own Nuer village. (Language Arts, Social Studies) (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.3)
- Using the colorful brochures available through the National African Language

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Resource Center at Indiana University Bloomington website ([www.nalrc.indiana.edu](http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu)), ask students to use a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the similarities and differences between the Dinka, Salva's people, and the Nuer, Nya's ethnic group. What do young readers think accounts for the long-standing conflict between the two peoples? (*Social Studies, Language Arts*) (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.1-3)

- Salva experiences a wide range of intense emotions during his terror-filled escape, including fear, loneliness, confusion, desperation, determination—and hope. Ask students to use poetry books in the library, and online resources such as the Academy of American Poets website, [Poets.org](http://Poets.org), to find a poem to share with the class that conveys Salva's inner feelings. (*Language Arts*) (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.5)
- When Nya's younger sister, Akeer, becomes sick with an unnamed waterborne disease that resembles cholera, her family travels several days to a clinic, where, after just two doses of medicine, she is "nearly her old self again." However, Nya worries that she will be unable to keep her sibling from drinking unsanitary water again. Using library books and online resources, ask students to research a waterborne illness and create an illustrated brochure that shows and discusses what the bacterium or organism looks like, how it infects people, the disease's symptoms, how it is treated, what happens if it is not treated, and how the illness can be prevented. (*Science, Language Arts*) (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.7)
- A literary device used by Park is cadence, which can provide a passage with its rhythm. One example is when the plastic hose that is pumping water to a drill in an excited Nya's village breaks down: "The bag sprang a leak. The leak had to be patched./The patch sprang a leak. The crew patched the patch./Then the bag sprang another leak. The drilling could not go on." Using picture books for older readers, ask students to identify examples of rhythm to read aloud in small groups. (*Language Arts*) (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.4)
- Have students write a message in the form of a tweet, no more than 140 characters, from Salva to his American family, his nonprofit organization's donors, or one of his drilling crews in South Sudan. (*Language Arts*) (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.2)
- Have students, working in groups of two or three, make a short book trailer (basically an online book talk), about *A Long Walk to Water*. Good tips, including software suggestions and examples, can be found on the kid-friendly website "Book Trailers for Readers: Spot-lighting Great Books for Children and Teens" ([www.booktrailersforreaders.com](http://www.booktrailersforreaders.com)). Recommendations include writing a script, finding easy-to-view pictures in the public domain, and not giving away the story's ending. (*Language Arts*) (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6-8.3, 8.6)
- In January 2011, the citizens of southern Sudan voted overwhelmingly to secede from Sudan, becoming Africa's newest nation. Using databases and Internet search engines, ask students to find and write a summary of a newspaper or magazine article about the referendum and vote, the first South Sudanese independence day celebration, or the current relationship between South Sudan and the Republic of Sudan. (*Social Studies, Language Arts*) (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6-8.2)

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## Cited Websites

www.waterforsouthsudan.org  
www.booktrailersforreaders.com  
www.nalrc.indiana.edu  
www.poets.org

## Common Core State Standards

The discussion questions and activities can be easily adjusted to meet all of the English Language Arts and Literacy Standards across grades 6–8.

## Language

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.7.5 *Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings.*

## Reading History

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.2 *Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.*

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.6 *Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).*

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.9 *Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.*

## Reading Information

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.1. *Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.*

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.2. *Determine a central idea and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary*

*of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.*  
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.3. *Analyze in detail how a key individual, event or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a text (e.g., through examples or anecdotes).*

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.7 *Integrate information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue.*

## Reading Literature

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.1 *Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text*

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.2 *Determine a central theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.*

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.5 *Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.*

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.9 *Compare and contrast texts in different forms or genres (e.g. stories and poems; historical novels and fantasy stories) in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics.*

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.3 *Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g., how settings shapes the characters or plot).*

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL7.4 *Determine the meaning of words or phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of rhymes and other repetitions of sounds (e.g., alliteration) on a specific verse or stanza of a poem or section of a story or drama.*



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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.5 Analyze how a drama's or poem's form or structure (e.g., soliloquy, sonnet) contributes to its meaning.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.6 Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.3 Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incident in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.4 Determine the meaning of words or phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.5 Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.

## Speaking and Listening

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6-7, 8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6, 7, and 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

## Writing

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6-8.2 Write informative/exemplary texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6-8.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing inquiry when appropriate.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and present the relationships between information and ideas efficiently as well as to interact and collaborate with others.