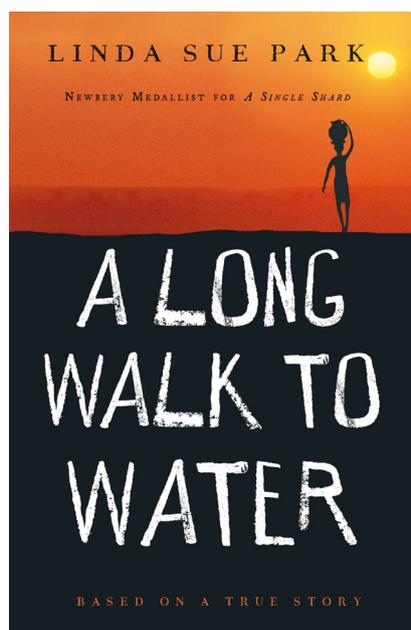


# A LONG WALK TO WATER

## Linda Sue Park



### Teachers' Notes

Written by a Practising Teacher Librarian  
(Middle Years)

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**SYNOPSIS:**

Based on a true story, *A Long Walk to Water* is the compelling and inspiring account of two young Sudanese people caught in the midst of war, drought and famine. Written by Newbery medallist Linda Sue Park, this story unfolds through the dual narrative of Nya, a girl living in a small village and Salva, a boy running for his life during the savage Sudanese Civil War.

As an eleven-year-old, Salva Dut is forced to flee his home as bombs and soldiers tear through his village. Separated from his family and believing they have been killed, he flees war-torn Sudan to seek refuge in Ethiopia and Kenya. Starting in 1985, Salva's journey takes place over a period of twenty years, during which time he overcomes enormous obstacles and eventually leads more than 1500 'Lost Boys' from the refugee camps in Ethiopia to the relative safety of northern Kenya.

Nya is a fictional character created by Linda Sue Park to complement the story of Salva and her story has a contemporary setting. Nya walks daily for several hours from her village to the pond to fetch water for her family. She only has time to stop for a quick meal before repeating this journey. She does this every single day for seven months of the year.

This mesmerising dual narrative by award-winning author Linda Sue Park is a fictionalised account of true events and shows us that in a troubled country, determined survivors may find the future they are hoping for.

**THEMES:****Water:**

- Water is the over-arching theme of this book. The lack of it leads to illness, despair, famine and conflict; the ready availability of water in other parts of the world offers hope and opportunity.
- In Sudan, conflict over resources, including the precious commodity of water, has resulted in tribal wars as well as contributing in part to larger-scale conflicts.
- Salva Dut established the Water for Sudan organisation ([www.waterforsudan.org](http://www.waterforsudan.org)), which has instigated the drilling of over forty borewater facilities in Sudan, providing safe drinking water for tens of thousands of Sudanese.

**Family/Relationships:**

- Salva is devastated by the loss of his family.
- He befriends Marial, a young boy from the same tribe (the Dinka tribe).
- Salva is reunited with his uncle as his group walks from Sudan to Ethiopia.
- Although he believes them dead, Salva's family help him to get through his daily struggles.
- An American family adopts Salva when he is a young man. This family offers Salva complete support and a sense of belonging.
- Salva is reunited with his parents many, many years later.

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**Leadership:**

- Salva proves himself to be a natural leader.
- Effective leadership skills require strength, humility, empathy and understanding. Salva has all of these qualities.
- Salva's leadership skills result in the success of the Water for Sudan organisation.

**War/Refugees:**

- War in Sudan has led to the displacement of millions of Sudanese people.
- These people have sought refuge in neighbouring countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya and Chad.
- In many cases, refugee camps are able to accommodate up to 80,000 refugees. Food and aid are extremely limited.
- Refugees can spend many, many years in camps, as shown in the book. There is little to do in these camps.
- Some of these refugees gain refuge in countries such as Australia, Canada and the USA.

**Perseverance/Hope:**

- Salva overcomes extreme adversity to emerge as a modern-day hero
- Salva's mantra is one he learnt from his uncle: Take things 'bit by bit, one step at a time'.
- Salva believes that hope and perseverance are the keys to his success and survival. These two things underpin everything else.

**WRITING STYLE:**

*A Long Walk to Water* is written as a dual narrative. Both Nya's and Salva's stories are told in third person, past tense. Salva's journey takes place between 1985 and the present day; Nya's takes place in the present day. However, their two stories interweave in a way that is unexpected by the reader.

The writing style is uncomplicated and effective. It uses imagery sparingly however it is the simplicity of the writing that makes this such as a compelling, real and moving story.

**STUDY NOTES:****1. Before reading, discuss the book cover.**

- What might this story be about?
- Where might this story take place?
- What clues is the audience given about the location and the characters?
- Read the blurb thoroughly, taking time to discuss the vocabulary and writing style.

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**2. Examine a map of Africa. Locate Sudan as well as Sudan's neighbouring countries, Ethiopia and Kenya.**

- Study the map on p6 of *A Long Walk to Water*, taking note of the key. Be sure to return to this map as you read the novel.

**3. Keep a journal as you read, jotting down key events.**

- Construct a timeline of events in *A Long Walk to Water* which shows the stories of both Salva and Nya.

**4. Compare the parallel storylines.**

- How are they similar and how are they different?
- Represent this comparison visually through a Venn diagram.

**5. Research Sudan's history starting from 1956 when it gained independence from Britain and Egypt, particularly in relation to its two civil wars. Include research on the Dinka and Nuer tribes.****6. See the link below for the Australian Government's Department of Immigration and Citizenship document about Sudanese-born people living in Australia. It includes many statistics, graphs and background information about this community.**

- [http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/delivering-assistance/government-programs/settlement-planning/\\_pdf/community-profile-sudan.pdf](http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/delivering-assistance/government-programs/settlement-planning/_pdf/community-profile-sudan.pdf)
- Use passages of this document to practise research skills such as skimming and scanning, notetaking, summarising and paraphrasing.
- In small groups, prepare a documentary style presentation about Sudan's past, present and future using a software tool such as Power Point or Movie Maker. Include information about southern Sudan's recent referendum and positive organisations such as Salva Dut's Water for Sudan.

**7. Investigate your local Sudanese community. Visit the Sudanese Community Association of Australia's (SCAA) website <http://scoaa.org.au> for contact details.**

- Invite a member of the local Sudanese community to speak with students.
- In consultation with the SCAA, find out if there are ways in which your class or school could assist the local Sudanese community? If so, establish a task force with various roles for students. How will this assistance be best organised, actioned and distributed?
- Discuss the importance of service to others, especially with regards to keeping the integrity and sense of pride of all parties intact.

**8. Consider a class or school project to raise funds for Water for Sudan.**

- [www.waterforsudan.org](http://www.waterforsudan.org) is an excellent resource that includes video footage and comprehensive information. There is an interview with Salva Dut and Linda Sue Park along with other links for teachers.

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- Create posters and a promotional campaign to support this cause. This may include speaking at assemblies, writing articles for the school newsletter or local newspaper and talking to the local Sudanese community in your area.
- Invite guest speakers from organisations such as Red Cross International or Rotary.
- As a class, have students create their own blog or website to promote this fund-raising project.

**9. Salva believes that his family have perished, yet it is his family that gives him strength and guidance during his ordeal.**

- Discuss the role that family plays, both in *A Long Walk to Water* and in your own personal life.
- Write a reflection that communicates the way in which various members of your own family help to guide you, even if they're not with you at times. What values have they instilled in you? What qualities do you most admire in these family members?

**10. Write an expository paragraph to discuss the theme of water in this text. Include effective topic and concluding sentences, focussing on the importance of supporting ideas with sound reasoning and examples from the book.**

**11. The narrative is written in third person, past tense.**

- Discuss the difference between 'person' (first, second and third) and 'tense' (past, present, future). In which instances would you choose to write in first person rather than third person; past tense rather than present and vice versa?
- Select a passage from *A Long Walk to Water* to rewrite in first person, present tense. Compare your version with the original. Evaluate the effectiveness of each style. Which do you prefer? Why?

**12. Salva has some difficulty when learning English due to the following:**

- homonyms (words which have the same spelling and pronunciation as each other but different meanings and origins);
- homophones (words which have the same pronunciation as each other but different spellings and meanings) and;
- homographs (words which are spelt the same as each other but which have a different pronunciation and meaning).
- Create a spelling list to help people learning English for the first time. Thrass charts would be useful here.
- Find a local school who work with refugee children or children for whom English is not their first language and provide some helpful language resources.

**13. Without bush skills, Salva would never have survived his journey.**

- What skills were used in his survival?
- Research the bush skills of your local Indigenous population.

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**14. The chapter ending on p32 leaves the reader with a hook**

- Why do authors use this technique?
- What do you think will happen next?

**15. Create a table of the obstacles that Salva and his fellow refugees faced along their journey and how these were overcome.****16. Nya's little sister, Akeer, succumbs to cholera after drinking unsafe water. Likewise, Salva's father suffers from guinea worms after years of drinking dirty water.**

- Research the many risks and threats faced by communities using unsafe water.
- Create a brochure or information report that outlines these risks.

**17. How important is hope in this story? Discuss as a class.****18. Research the science of finding water beneath the earth's surface.****19. View the *Australian Story* episode, *Ticket to Tigray*, about two Australians who helped bring water to the Ethiopian region of Tigray.**

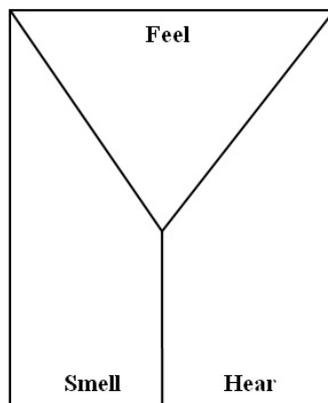
- A transcript of this episode can be found at:  
[www.abc.net.au/austory/content/2007/s2945261.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/austory/content/2007/s2945261.htm)

**20. Although Salva spent many, many years in refugee camps, there is not much detail in the book about the camps, such as Itang in Ethiopia and Ifo and Kakuma in Kenya.**

- Visit Museum Victoria's website and learn about the people who lived at Itang refugee camp before resettling in Australia:  
<http://www.cv.vic.gov.au/stories/nyabana-riek/2011/itang-refugee-camp-ethiopia-1990/>

**21. Re-read chapter 9, during which Salva crosses the desert.**

- Use a Y chart (a blank page onto which a Y is drawn across the page) – with the headings feel, see and hear to brainstorm words and phrases to describe what Salva felt, heard, and saw during his three-day trek across the desert.



- Use these ideas to write a descriptive passage about the desert.

**22. Salva uses his uncle's strategies to help guide him through much of his life. He constantly reminds himself to manage things 'bit by bit, one step at a time'.**

- Discuss how this mantra helps Salva to successfully lead some of the 'Lost Boys' out of Ethiopia and implement the Water for Sudan project.
- What's your mantra?
- How might Salva's philosophy help you in your life?
- Why is perseverance so important?
- How can you better develop the ability to persevere?

**23. Salva emerges as a natural leader.**

- What qualities make an effective leader?
- What qualities does Salva have that make him a good leader?
- What similarities do you notice that Salva has in common with the man leading the drilling operation in Nya's village? (Discuss this before the conclusion of the book is read.)

**24. Once the book has been completed, discuss the way in which the author has so skilfully interwoven the lives and times of Salva and Nya.**

- Did you sense this crossing of lives and stories was coming or were you surprised? Consider this technique when next planning or writing a narrative.
- Why do you think the author invented the character of Nya to help tell Salva's story?

**25. Visit the following organisations' websites for further information about their assistance with the Water for Sudan project. Discuss effective search terms and techniques when using the internet.**

- United Nations
- International Red Cross
- Board of Water for Sudan
- Rotary

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**AUTHOR MOTIVATION (written by Linda Sue Park):**

While researching *A Long Walk to Water* I read Salva's own accounts of his journey and interviewed him many times. For Nya's part of the book, I had access to notes, photos, and video footage from people who had visited villages like hers (including my husband, who traveled to southern Sudan in 2009). I read several books about the Lost Boy refugees, watched documentaries and researched articles. Most important of all, of course, was my unrestricted access to Salva and his willingness to share his memories.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

**Linda Sue Park** is the author of *A Single Shard*, which was awarded the prestigious Newbery Medal by the American Library Association in 2002, for the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children. She has written many other award-winning picture books and novels for young people. The daughter of immigrant parents, Ms Park draws on her Korean ancestry for much of her work. Linda Sue lives in Rochester, New York, with her family.

Visit Linda Sue's website: [www.lspark.com](http://www.lspark.com) and her blog: <http://lsparkreader.livejournal.com/>.