

# **A Long Walk to Water: Based on a True Story Study Guide**

## **A Long Walk to Water: Based on a True Story by Linda Sue Park**

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## Plot Summary

"A Long Walk to Water" is a novel by Linda Sue Park. Published in 2010, the novel is written for older children and young adults and tells two separate stories which are brought together in the final chapter. The first story is about Nya, an eleven-year-old girl living in Southern Sudan who must make two long walks to fetch water for her family each day. The second - and main - story is based on the true life experiences of Salva Dut, who is forced to flee the war in Southern Sudan when he is eleven years old, and spends many years as a refugee before returning to Southern Sudan to drill wells which bring water to remote villages.

2008 - 2009. Nya is an eleven-year-old girl who lives with her family in a small village in Southern Sudan. For seven months out of the year Nya must make two long walks every day to a pond near her village to fetch water for her family. During the dry season, Nya and her family move to a camp by a lake where Nya must dig in the clay of the lakebed with her hands and wait for hours to gather the small amount of filthy water that trickles in. One day after Nya and her family have returned to their village from the lake camp, two strangers arrive and meet with Nya's uncle, the village chief. Soon they return with a crew of men, and begin drilling a well. Although Nya is skeptical at first, water eventually gushes from the hole they have drilled. Nya's father tells her that he and the other village men will build a school and, since she no longer has to make her two long walks to fetch water each day, she will be able to go to school and learn how to read and write.

1985 - 2007. Eleven-year-old Salva Dut is in school one day when gunfire erupts outside. There has been fighting in Southern Sudan between the government troops and the rebels for two years, but this is the closest it has ever come to Salva's village. When the gunfire stops, the teacher tells Salva and the other boys to run into the bush and not return to their villages, because it will not be safe. Salva runs into the bush, away from his home and family, and soon joins a group of other people who are all fleeing the fighting. The group spends their second night in an old barn, and when he wakes up in the morning Salva finds that he has been left behind because he is a child and will slow the group down.

Salva stays with an old woman he calls Auntie for a while until one day Auntie tells Salva that she must leave and that it will not be safe for her to travel with him. Just before Auntie leaves another small group comes by her house, and she arranges for Salva to travel with them. Other people start to join this new group, and a few weeks later Salva is overjoyed when his Uncle Jewiir joins the group. Jewiir has been in the army and soon becomes the group's leader. Jewiir decides to take the group to a refugee camp in Ethiopia, but to get there they must cross the Nile River and the Akobo Desert. While walking through the desert Salva starts to lose hope and begins to fall behind, but Jewiir keeps him moving by telling him to only walk to that clump of bushes, and then only walk to that rock, and so on. By teaching him to set small goals and persevere, Jewiir helps Salva get through the desert. Just before they reach Ethiopia, Jewiir is killed by looters and Salva is again alone.



Salva spends the next six years in the Itang refugee camp in Ethiopia, until one day dozens of soldiers come and force the people living in the camp into the Gilo River. Over a thousand people are killed, but Salva manages to swim across the river back into Southern Sudan. Soon Salva finds that he is the leader of over 1,200 other boys who have also survived being driven into the river and for the next year and a half he uses the lessons he learned from Jewiir in the desert and leads the boys across Southern Sudan to safety in Kenya. Salva spends the next five years in refugee camps in Kenya. One day when he is 22 years old, Salva is told that he has been chosen to be one of 3,000 "Lost Boys" who will be relocated to the United States. Several months later, Salva flies from Kenya to Rochester, New York to start his new life with his new family.

Over the next six years Salva adjusts to his new life, and eventually goes to college. One day Salva gets an email telling him that his father is in a clinic in a remote section of Southern Sudan. With the help of his new family, Salva spends months making travel arrangements, and finally travels to the clinic where he is reunited with his father after almost 19 years. He learns that much of his family is still alive, but that it would not be safe for him to visit them. Before they part, Salva's father blesses him by sprinkling water on his head. During his flight back to Rochester, Salva has an idea of how he might be able to help the people of Southern Sudan by drilling wells and bringing water to remote villages. During the next few years Salva makes this idea the focus of his life, and is eventually able to make his dream a reality.

2009. When the well in her village is finally completed, Nya waits her turn in line and fills her plastic container with cold, clean water. She sees the man who first came to her village and talked with her uncle, and who then acted as the boss of the drilling crew. When she goes over to thank the man for bringing water to her village, he asks her name and after she tells him it is Nya, he tells her that his name is Salva.



# Chapters One - Three

## Chapters One - Three Summary

"A Long Walk to Water" is a novel for older children and young adults written by Newbery Medal winning author Linda Sue Park. The novel is based on a true story and follows two storylines, both of which start out in Southern Sudan. The main story starts in 1985 and is about a boy named Salva Dut, who is forced to flee from the war ravaging the countryside near his village. The second story takes place in 2008 - 2009 and follows a young Sudanese girl named Nya who must make two long trips every day to the nearest pond to get water for her family.

Chapter One. Southern Sudan, 2008. Going to fetch water is easier for eleven-year-old Nya than coming back is. Going she must deal with the heat and the thorns, but the plastic container is empty and light. The walk will still take her half the morning.

Southern Sudan, 1985. Eleven-year-old Salva Dut sits in a classroom pretending to pay attention to his teacher, but really letting his mind wander. Salva can only attend school during half the year, in the rainy season, because during the dry season his family moves away from their village, nearer to water. Salva is daydreaming about hunting with his brothers, and thinking of eating the game they kill makes him hungry, but he knows that his mother will be waiting for him with a large bowl of fresh milk when he gets home.

Suddenly, Salva hears the sound of gunfire from outside. The teacher shouts for everyone to get down as the gunfire continues. Salva does not know much about the war that started two years before; he only knows that rebels from the south, where he lives, are fighting against the government in the north. After a few moments the gunfire stops, but outside people are shouting and running in all different directions. The teacher tells Salva and the other boys to run into the bush and not to their villages, because the soldiers will be going to the villages and they will not be safe. A moment later Salva is outside running away from his village and his family.

Chapter Two. Southern Sudan, 2008. As she walks to the pond, Nya steps on one of the large, spiky thorns that litter the path. She stops, sits down, and uses another thorn to dig it out, trying to ignore the pain.

Southern Sudan, 1985. Salva runs as fast as he can along the path through the bush until he can't run anymore; after he stops running, he walks. There are many other people who are also walking away from the fighting. Salva does not recognize anyone, and he wonders how he will find his way back home, and how he will find his family again. When it gets dark people stop walking and some of the men begin to call out the names of different villages. Salva hears someone call out Loun-Ariik, the name of his village, and sees a group of people he recognizes standing in a circle, but no one that



he knows well. They spend that night by the side of the path, and the next morning start walking again. They pass a group of rebel soldiers, who follow them.

They soon arrive at a rebel camp. The soldiers divide them into two groups: men and teenage boys in one group, women and children in the other. Salva is not certain which group he belongs in and starts towards the men, but a rebel soldier stops him and sends him to the group with the women and children, telling him not to be in such a hurry to be a man. The next morning the rebels leave the camp, forcing the men they have separated from the others to carry their supplies. Salva and the women and children from Loun-Ariik walk in the opposite direction, because they know that wherever the rebels are going there is sure to be fighting. That night they stay in an old barn and the next morning when he wakes up, Salva finds that he is alone.

Chapter Three. Southern Sudan, 2008. Nya finally arrives at the small pond. There are many other people there, mostly women and girls, also filling plastic containers with water. Nya takes a long drink of the cool, brownish water, and then fills her container. She then places a padded cloth doughnut on her head, followed by the full plastic container. She will carry the water back to her family on her head, balancing the container with one hand as she walks. Going back will take longer than the trip there, but with luck she will be home by noon.

Southern Sudan, 1985. Salva realizes that the others from his village have left him behind because he is a child, and they are afraid that he will slow them down or cause trouble. Cautiously, he explores the area around the barn and finds a house a short distance away. There is an old woman sitting in the sun, and Salva can tell from the markings on her forehead that she is part of the Dinka tribe, just like he is. Salva approaches the old woman and greets her politely, saying, "Good morning, Auntie." Auntie gets him some raw peanuts, and then asks Salva why he is all alone. When he tells her that he ran away from the fighting near his school, she asks him how he will find his family again. Salva does not know, and Auntie has no advice to offer him.

Salva stays in Auntie's barn and works fetching firewood from the bush and water from a nearby pond; each day it is harder to get water from the pond, because it is drying up. On the fourth day Auntie tells Salva that she is leaving because the dry season is starting and soon the pond will dry up altogether. She tells Salva that he cannot come with her, because it would be more dangerous for her to travel with him. Auntie is sorry she cannot help him anymore and tells Salva that he must always walk away from the fighting. As Auntie prepares to leave, a small group of people approach her house. Salva can see that they are also Dinkas, and wonders if any of his family is with them.

## Chapters One - Three Analysis

The first three chapters introduce the reader to the two main characters: Nya, and Salva Dut. In these three chapters - and in all subsequent chapters with the exception of the final one - Nya's part of the story comes at the beginning of the chapter, and the type used on the page is a light brown color. Salva's part of the story takes up the rest of the



chapter, and the type is a standard black. Salva's story is the main focus of the novel and is by far the longer of the two; in some cases Nya's part of a chapter is only one or two paragraphs in length. Again, this will carry through the entire novel until the final chapter. Both stories at this point are set in Southern Sudan; Nya's in 2008, and Salva's in 1985.

In these opening chapters, all the reader learns about Nya is that she is an eleven-year-old girl who is tall for her age, and that she fetches brownish-colored water for her family in a plastic jug from a pond that is half a morning's walk away from her village. More about Nya, her family, and their circumstances will be told in later chapters.

Salva, the main character in the novel, is an eleven-year-old boy who lives with his father, mother, three brothers and two sisters in Loun-Ariik, a village in Southern Sudan. Salva is a bright boy who does very well in school even though he has a habit of daydreaming occasionally when he should be listening to his teacher. Salva and his family are part of the Dinka tribe, and his father is an important man in their village who owns many head of cattle and serves as the village judge. Salva knows that he is very lucky to be able to attend school; not every boy from his village is able to, and none of the girls in the village go to school at all.

For the two years prior to the start of the novel there has been war in the area where Salva's village is located. The government, which is located in the northern part of the country, has decided that Sudan is a Muslim nation, and that everyone must convert to Islam. In the southern part of the country, where Salva's village is located, many different religions are practiced and many of the people there do not want to convert to Islam. The rebels that Salva and the other people he is walking with encounter shortly after he runs from the schoolhouse are fighting to gain independence from the government in the north. Salva and the other boys are told to run into the bush and away from their villages by their teacher because both rebel and government soldiers often attacked and looted the villages, and forced the village men to join them. The schoolteacher wants Salva and the other boys to always run away from the fighting; this is the same advice Auntie gives Salva when she tells him that she can't take him with her.

Almost from the start, Salva finds that there really is no place for him with the other people who are running from the fighting. Although he joins up with a small group from his village, they leave him behind in the barn after just two nights because he is a child; he is just another mouth to feed, and is likely to slow them down and complain. Even the old woman he calls Auntie, who is kind to him and lets him stay with her for a while, will not take Salva with her when she leaves because she understands that the rebels will leave an old woman travelling by herself alone, but might make trouble for her if she has a young man with her, even one who was just eleven years old. Although he still hopes to find his family, or even just other people from his village to travel with, Salva begins to understand that at this point he can count on no one other than himself.



# Chapters Four - Six

## Chapters Four - Six Summary

Chapter Four. Southern Sudan, 2008. When Nya returns home with the water, her mother gives her a bowl of sorghum meal to eat. When she is finished eating, her mother gives her back the now empty plastic bottle and tells her to take her five-year-old sister Akeer to the pond with her, because it is time that she started to learn to fetch water. Though she knows that Akeer will slow her down, she takes her sister's hand and starts back to the pond for the second time that day.

Southern Sudan, 1985. When the small group of people reach Auntie's house, Salva sees no one from his family. Auntie asks if the group will take Salva with them, and although there is some grumbling about having another mouth to feed, one of the men says that since Salva is Dinka, they will take him. Auntie gives Salva some peanuts and a gourd for drinking and he thanks her and hurries to keep up with the group, determined not to lag behind or be any trouble. Salva walks with the group from dawn until sundown each day. His peanuts are gone by the third day, and all there is to eat is unripe or rotted fruit.

After a week their group is joined by another group of Dinkas, and some people from a tribe called the Jar-chol. One day, Salva finds himself walking next to a young Jar-chol man named Buksa. Salva is weak, tired, and hungry and when Buksa breaks off from the group to follow a sound he has heard, Salva follows him. A few moments later they stop in front of a large tree. Buksa tells Salva he has been following a bird, and then points up in the tree where Salva sees a large beehive. Salva runs to tell the others, knowing that tonight there will be a feast.

Chapter Five. Southern Sudan, 2008. Every year in the dry season the pond dries up and Nya and her family move to a camp near a larger lake. Nya's family doesn't live at the lake camp all year long because they are part of the Nuer tribe, and sometimes there is fighting with a rival Dinka tribe over the land by the lake. The lake also dries up during the dry season but because it is bigger than the pond, Nya can dig deep down in the clay with her hands and the water will seep slowly into the hole. She then waits for hours each day to collect as much of the the filthy water as she can before returning home.

Southern Sudan, 1985. Salva and the rest of the group are stung many times getting the beehive, but it is worth it. Salva's stomach is full for the first time in days, and that makes the walking easier. Over the next few weeks more people join the group, and every evening Salva walks around the campfire searching for his family. One evening he steps on another boy's hand by accident. The boy is named Marial; he is the same age as Salva, and has also lost his family. Marial and Salva become friends and walk together each day. Over a month has passed since Salva ran into the bush, and the land they are walking through is known throughout Sudan for its fierce lions. Salva finds





it difficult to sleep as the nights are filled with the roar of lions and the squeals of their prey. One morning after a poor night's sleep Salva hears someone call his name, and it takes him a moment to realize that it is not Marial.

Chapter Six. Southern Sudan, 2008. Nya likes the months her family spends at the camp near the lake because she does not have to make two long walks every day to fetch water. This year, however, Nya realizes for the first time that her mother hates the lake camp because she is afraid Nya's father and older brother Dep will run into Dinka tribesmen when they leave the camp to hunt, and will be injured or worse in a fight. So far her family has been lucky and no one has been hurt or killed by the Dinka, but Nya knows that her mother worries that their luck will run out one day.

Southern Sudan, 1985. When Salva turns to see who has called his name, he finds that it is his Uncle Jewiir, his father's younger brother. Salva has not seen Jewiir for two years because his uncle has been in the army. Salva tells Jewiir about running from the schoolhouse and all that has happened to him, and Jewiir says that he will now look after Salva. Jewiir had been allowed to keep his rifle when he left the army, and that day he shoots a young antelope, which is enough to feed everyone in the group. Soon Jewiir is seen by the members of the group as the leader.

Salva and Marial still walk together each day, always staying very close to Jewiir because they are still in lion country. One day the group starts walking in the late afternoon and walks through the night. When they stop, it is almost dawn and Salva is exhausted. He falls asleep immediately and doesn't wake up until he feels Jewiir shaking him. When he opens his eyes he sees that Jewiir's face is very solemn, and when he looks around he cannot see Marial anywhere. Uncle Jewiir says, "I am sorry."

## Chapters Four - Six Analysis

Every year during the dry season, Nya's family moves to a camp three day's walk from their village, because the pond near their village completely dries up and the lake is the closest water available. Nya's family has no house at the camp; they sleep in makeshift shelters and leave most of their belongings behind in their village. During these months not only Nya but other members of her family spend most of their time digging in the clay of the lakebed for water. The water that they are able to get out of the holes they dig is filthy - more mud than liquid - but it is all there is, so they make do. Although Nya likes living at the camp because she does not need to make those two long walks to get water each day, this year she realizes for the first time just how dangerous it really is for her family to live there. Her tribe - the Nuer - and the Dinka have been enemies for many generations and while both tribes are too busy finding water and food during the dry season to do much fighting, it would not be safe for Nya's family to live there year round.

Although at first they do not want Salva to go with them, the group that arrives at Auntie's house finally reluctantly agrees to take him, mostly because he is a fellow Dinka. Although happy to be allowed to join them, Salva understands that if he wants to



remain with the group he will need to keep up with them no matter how tired or hungry he gets, and not whine or complain. Although he has hundreds of questions that he wants to ask about where they are going and what they are hoping to find, he keeps them to himself when he joins the group because he does not want to be left behind again.

Marial is the first boy of his own age to join the group, and it doesn't take long before the two of them become friends. Like Salva, Marial is all alone and does not know where his family is. Even though it does not put extra food in his stomach or make him any less tired, Salva finds that things seem easier now that he has a friend. The two of them talk to each other and tell stories about their villages and their families during the endless hours of walking. When Uncle Jewiir finds him it seems like a miracle to Salva, although he is disappointed that Jewiir does not seem to know anything about what might have happened to his family. Still, Salva is happy that Jewiir is there to take care of him, and that he now has two people that he can talk to.

Along with moving both stories forward, these chapters also introduce the concept of tribal loyalty and hatreds, and how they influence the lives of the Sudanese people. There are many different tribes living in Sudan and while some get along, others do not. For example, the Nuer (Nya's tribe) and the Dinka (Salva's tribe) have been fighting for generations, while the Dinka and the Jar-chol tribe get along well enough to travel together through the bush. Tribal differences - and overcoming them - will play a significant role later on in the story.



# Chapters Seven - Ten

## Chapters Seven - Ten Summary

Chapter Seven. Southern Sudan, 2008. Nya's sister Akeer is sick. The illness she has is common; it starts with a stomachache and cramps, followed by fever and diarrhea. Older children and adults usually recover, but small children and the elderly often die. Nya's uncle, the village chief, tells her parents that there is a clinic a few day's walk away where they can make the child well, but they are uncertain whether or not they should take Akeer on that difficult journey.

Southern Sudan, 1985. Salva's friend Marial has been taken by a lion; all that can be found are some lion tracks and a few drops of blood where he had been sleeping. Jewiir says that he will stand guard during the night, but Salva is still more scared than he has ever been in his life. All he can hope is that Marial died quickly, and that he hadn't felt any fear.

The group starts walking again, and Jewiir tells Salva that they will soon come to the River Nile. When they reach it they will build canoes and float to the other side, where they will then cross a desert into Ethiopia. When they reach the river everyone starts to work helping to build the canoes they will use to cross. Salva's job is to carry long papyrus stalks to the boat builders and he finds that the hard work helps him to not think too much about Marial. It takes two full days to build the canoes, and when everything is ready Salva takes his place in a canoe between Jewiir and another man and floats out onto the Nile.

Chapter Eight. Southern Sudan, 2008. Nya and her mother take Akeer to the medical clinic, where they are able to make her well. A nurse tells Nya's mother that it is the water that made Akeer sick, and that from now on she must boil the water "for a count of 200." Nya knows that the small amount of water they are able to get from the riverbed would be long gone before they could count to 200 while it boiled. Nya is happy that they will soon be returning to their village where she will be able to fetch enough water from the pond to boil, but she wonders what will happen when they return to the camp the next year, and the year after that.

Southern Sudan, 1985. The men paddle for hours, finally coming to a small island in the middle of the river where a group of fishermen live and work. Most of the group has to beg for food because they have no money, but the fishermen give Jewiir food without being asked, either because he appears to be the leader or because he has a gun. Jewiir shares his food with Salva, and they both eat their fill. As the sun starts to go down the fisherman quickly stop what they were doing and go into their tents, and a few moments later dark clouds of mosquitoes rise out of the water. Salva cannot sleep, and in the morning he - and everyone else in the group - is covered with bites. Later that morning they set off for the other side of the Nile and the fishermen warn them to take plenty of water with them for the next stretch of their journey; the Akobo desert.



Chapter Nine. Southern Sudan, 2008. Several months after Nya and her family return to their village, two strangers come to the village in a jeep. Nya's older brother Dep takes the strangers to the village chief's house, where the two men talk with Nya's uncle. When Nya asks him what the men are talking about, Dep tells her that it is something about water.

Southern Sudan, 1985. When they reach the desert Salva's already worn out shoes fall apart. He must walk barefoot, and steps on many thorns. The sun is unbearably hot, and Salva finds it hard to breath. After Salva stubs his toe and tears the nail off he slows down and starts to cry, and finds that he is falling behind the group. Soon Uncle Jewiir is beside him; he points to a clump of bushes and tells Salva that he only needs to walk that far. When Salva reaches the bushes, Jewiir tells him that he only needs to walk to that next rock, and then to that bare patch of sand - and this helps to keep Salva walking for the rest of the day. The next day the heat and the landscape remain the same, but they keep walking. They come upon a group of nine men who have collapsed in the sand; five of the men are dead. One woman starts to wet the lips of one of the four living men with a rag she has dipped in her water, but a man in Salva's groups says that the men will die no matter what and if she gives them her water, she will die too.

Chapter Ten. Southern Sudan, 2008. After Nya's uncle and the two strangers finish talking, the three of them walk past Nya's house to a tree a short distance away. There is another tree 50 paces beyond the first tree, and the first man stops at the midpoint between the two trees. After speaking with his friend, he tells Nya's uncle that this is where they will find water.

Southern Sudan, 1985. Salva wants to give the dying men some of his water but Jewiir stops him, saying he is too small and that he must keep what he has. Several people give the four living men some water, and soon they are able join the group. By the middle of the third day the group is almost through the desert, and it will not be long until they reach the Itang refugee camp in Ethiopia. When Salva asks him how he will find his family if he is in Ethiopia, Jewiir tells him that few survived the attacks Salva had run from, and no one knows where they are. Jewiir then says that after he gets Salva to the refugee camp he will return to Sudan to fight in the war. Salva is frightened that he will be alone again, but Jewiir tells him he will have a new family in the camp, and that they will need him to be someone they can depend upon.

Finally, the group reaches the end of the desert. No one has eaten in two days, and they find a dead stork by the edge of a pond. As the bird is roasting, six men armed with rifles come up to the group. After shouting questions at Jewiir, they tie him to a tree. The men take anything of value and then go to where Jewiir is tied to the tree, shoot him three times, and run away.

## Chapters Seven - Ten Analysis

Nya's younger sister Akeer becomes ill due to the fact that the water the family is able to get from the lak ebed is dirty and contaminated with bacteria - in some cases actually



more mud than water. Although the nurse at the medical clinic Nya and her mother take Akeer to says that all they have to do to make the water fit to drink is boil it "for a count of 200", they are simply unable to get enough water from the lakebed to boil it for that long; all of the liquid would boil away and the family would die of thirst, and so during the dry season Nya and her family have no alternative but to drink the dirty water. When the two strangers arrive in her village and tell her uncle that they will find water between the two trees, Nya cannot understand it. She has never seen water anywhere near the village except when it rains. She knows that the nearest water is half a day's walk away, and believes that the men are wrong.

Uncle Jewiir has become the leader of the group that Salva is with and he keeps the group moving, never allowing them to stop in one place for longer than a single night. Although they have not heard or seen any signs of fighting for a few weeks, there is no way of telling when or where the fighting will flare up. Jewiir understands that the only way he will be able to ensure the safety of Salva and the others in the group is to get them to the Itang refugee camp in Ethiopia, where hundreds of other refugees from the war in Sudan have already gone.

During the three days the group spends crossing the Akobo Desert Salva comes very close to giving up. The combination of the heat, the pain in his feet, and the vastness of the desert cause him to begin to believe that there is no hope of actually getting across it. It is Uncle Jewiir who gives him the key to surviving when he tells Salva that he need only walk as far as the next clump of bushes, and after that only as far as the next rock, and so on. By doing this, Jewiir teaches him that the way to get through any large task is to divide it up into smaller tasks, and then accomplish them one at a time. This is a lesson that Salva will remember for the rest of his life, and one that will keep him going even after Jewiir is murdered by the looters and he finds himself completely alone again.



# Chapters Eleven - Thirteen

## Chapters Eleven - Thirteen Summary

Chapter Eleven. Southern Sudan, 2008. After the two strangers leave Nya's village, the villagers start to clear the area between the two trees where the first man said they would find water. It is hard work, and dangerous because of the snakes that hide in the brush and grass. Nya wonders how there could possibly be water there and when she asks Dep, he just shakes his head.

Southern Sudan and Ethiopia, 1985. The group buries Jewiir in a shallow hole, and then starts to walk again. Now that he has lost both Marial and Jewiir Salva feels more alone than ever before, but is determined to get to the Itang refugee camp, because that is what Jewiir wanted. Now that Jewiir is no longer protecting him, the group's attitude towards Salva changes and again some people start to grumble that he is too young and that he will slow them down. No one shares food with him and he has to beg for scraps.

The group finally reaches Itang, and Salva is shocked by how large it is. There are thousands of people there - more people than Salva has ever seen before. Because he is a child with no family, Salva is separated from the group and put with other children. Though he is frightened because he is alone among so many strangers, Salva clings to the hope that perhaps others from his family are also in the camp. Salva stands near the entrance to the camp on his second day and watches the new arrivals enter. He catches a glimpse of a woman in an orange headscarf like his mother used to wear, and starts pushing his way through the crowd of people to get to the woman.

Chapter Twelve. Southern Sudan, 2009. The two strangers return to Nya's village with a crew of ten men and two trucks loaded with pipes and equipment. One huge piece of equipment is called a drill, and looks to Nya like an iron giraffe. Some of the villagers, including Nya's mother, gather stones in baskets and carry them to the drilling site, while other villagers pound the stones into gravel. The villagers and strangers work hard together, but still Nya cannot see any water.

Itang refugee camp, Ethiopia, 1985. Salva calls out to the woman in the orange headscarf once, and is about to call to her again when he stops himself. He knows the woman is not his mother, and he realizes that his family is probably dead - killed in the war. Salva thinks of his family and wonders how he will survive without them. He remembers when Jewiir helped him get through the desert one step at a time, and decides that he will try to survive in the camp the same way.

Six years later: July, 1991. Salva is almost 17 years old. There have been rumors in the camp that the government of Ethiopia is about to collapse, and that the camp will be closed. One morning shortly after he starts hearing this rumor, many armed soldiers arrive and order everyone to leave not just the camp, but Ethiopia. The soldiers start



moving Salva and the other refugees out of the camp toward the Gilo River, which forms a border between Ethiopia and Sudan. It is the rainy season, and Salva knows that the river currents will be deadly. He also knows that the river is filled with crocodiles.

Chapter Thirteen. Southern Sudan, 2009. Large amounts of water must be poured into the hole to keep the drill working, and the crew drives from Nya's village to the pond and pumps water into a giant plastic container that fills the whole bed of the truck. The container springs a leak, and drilling stops while it is patched. It springs another leak, and drilling stops again. The crew becomes discouraged but their boss - the stranger who said they would find water between the two trees - keeps them going and does not let them become discouraged, and the work goes on.

Ethiopia - Sudan - Kenya, 1991 - 1992. The soldiers drive the refugees to the bank of the river. Some jump in to escape the soldiers and are swept away by the current, while others are able to make some progress across only to be attacked by crocodiles. All of the refugees are forced into the river, and the soldiers begin firing at them. Salva jumps into the river and is forced under water when another boy grasps his neck and holds onto him tightly. Salva feels certain that he is going to drown, but the boy lets go and he is able to force himself to the surface and take a huge gulp of air. A moment later Salva sees that the boy is dead, shot through the neck by a soldier, and he realizes that being forced under the water probably saved his life. Salva swims as hard as he can as more crocodiles attack and bullets hit the water around him. He finally makes it to the other side, and collapses on the ground.

Salva begins walking again. Though he isn't certain, Salva has heard that there may be refugee camps in Kenya, and so he starts walking south. Crowds of other boys follow Salva, and by the end of the first day he has become the leader of a group of over a thousand boys, some as young as five years old. They are back in Sudan, and there is fighting where they are; it is at its worst during the day, so Salva decides that the group will walk at night. They are joined by other boys and when he hears stories of how some weak and sick children have been left behind, he becomes determined to get his group safely to Kenya. He gives everyone a job, and ensures food and water is shared equally. It takes a year and a half, but Salva leads 1,200 boys safely to Kenya.

## Chapters Eleven - Thirteen Analysis

When the two strangers return to Nya's village with their drilling crew, Nya is amazed by the size of the drill, and the amount of noise it makes. Mostly, however, she finds it funny that the crew continues to pour truckload after truckload of water into the borehole of the well. It seems like a waste to her, particularly since she must still make her two long walks back and forth from the pond to fetch water for her family. Even though everyone in the village - including her own mother - works on the project, Nya still does not understand how all of the work and the noise will eventually lead to water.

After Uncle Jewiir is murdered by the looters, the group's attitude towards Salva changes and they no longer willingly share what they have with him as they did when



Jewiir was alive. Rather than becoming more discouraged, however, Salva finds himself walking faster and feeling stronger because he has found within himself the determination to survive. When the group finally reaches the Itang refugee camp in Ethiopia, Salva remembers Jewiir's words when he told him to just walk to the next clump of bushes, and then just walk to the next rock, and it is these words that help him to get through the six long years that he spends in the camp. When he comes to the realization that the rest of his family is probably dead, he becomes determined to survive and somehow make something of his life, to honor their memory.

After the slaughter at the Gilo River - where he would later learn that over one thousand people lost their lives - Salva becomes the leader of a huge group of boys and young men. Salva remembers his own experiences as he walked with the group across Sudan and the way his Uncle Jewiir acted when he was their leader, and uses these experiences to help organize and motivate the others in the group. When the smaller boys become too weak to walk, Salva has the older, stronger boys take turns carrying them. When some boys do not want to do the jobs they have been assigned, Salva talks with them, encourages them, and occasionally - though rarely - becomes angry with them. He does whatever it takes to keep them taking that next step forward, just as his Uncle Jewiir had done with him in the Akobo Desert, and over the course of a year and a half eventually leads over 1,200 boys and young men to safety in Kenya.





# Chapters Fourteen - Sixteen

## Chapters Fourteen - Sixteen Summary

Chapter Fourteen. Southern Sudan, 2009. The drilling in Nya's village continues for three days. Late on the third day, water shoots out of the borehole high into the air. The entire village cheers and starts to sing a song of celebration at the sight of the water. Nya claps her hands with the rest of the children, but soon she frowns. The water from the borehole is brown, and full of mud.

Ifo refugee camp, Kenya, 1992 - 1996. During his first two years in Kenya Salva lives in a terrible, overcrowded refugee camp called Kakuma. When he decides to leave he walks for months with a small group of other boys. They finally reach the Ifo refugee camp, but find that the conditions are no better than they were at Kakuma. There is no work so Salva has no money, and there is very little food. All Salva can do is wait. Three years pass. Salva meets an aid worker from Ireland named Michael who asks if he would like to learn to read and write English. Soon, Salva has learned to write his own name, and Michael is impressed by how hard Salva works to learn. Michael also teaches Salva how to play volleyball.

A rumor starts to spread that 3,000 boys and young men from the camps will be chosen to go and live in America. Salva does not know how this could be possible, but soon the aid workers confirm the rumor. After several months a list of names of those who have been chosen is posted but Salva's name is not on it, and it is not on the next list or the one after that. Salva is afraid that at 22 he might be too old and that no one in America will want him, but he tries not to lose hope. Finally Michael comes to Salva's tent one afternoon and tells him that his name is on the new list. At first Salva thinks it must be a mistake, but when he reads the list he sees his name followed by the words: Rochester, New York.

Chapter Fifteen. Southern Sudan, 2009. The drilling crew keeps on working, and their boss speaks with Nya's uncle and her father. Later Dep tells Nya that the boss explained that they still have to drill deeper and then install pipes and a pump. It will be several days before anyone can drink the water from the well. Nya picks up her plastic bottle and starts her walk to the pond.

Nairobi, Kenya - Rochester, New York, 1996. Salva and eight other boys are taken to a processing center in Nairobi. Salva's picture is taken and many forms are filled out, and then he is given new clothes. He is told he will be given even more clothes when he gets to New York, because it is winter there and very cold. Salva must take three airplanes to get to his new home, and he is amazed by how small everything seems when he looks out his window. When the second plane lands in New York City, Salva is separated from the eight other boys he has been traveling with by an aid worker, since he is the only one going to Rochester.



When he lands in Rochester Salva is greeted by his new family. The father's name is Chris and the mother's name is Louise, and there are four children. Salva is very excited and forgets much of the English he has learned, but no one laughs at him. Before they leave the airport he is given a big, puffy jacket, a scarf, a hat, and gloves. When the doors to the airport open he is hit with a blast of frigid winter air that is unlike anything he has ever felt before. Slowly he follows his new family, and takes his first steps into his new life.

Chapter Sixteen. Southern Sudan, 2009. While the drilling crew continues to work on the well, a number of village men with tools speak with Nya's father. They then walk to a spot just beyond the second big tree and begin to clear the land. When Nya asks her father what they are doing, he tells her they are getting ready to build. When she asks what they will build, he tells her to guess.

Rochester, New York, 1996 - 2003. Salva finds Rochester very different from where he has come from. All the roads are paved, and there are cars everywhere. Salva often becomes confused, but his new family is understanding and patiently answer all of his questions. Salva concentrates on his studies, particularly English, and eventually he enrolls in college and studies business. He thinks that someday he would like to return to Sudan and help the people there, but he is unsure how he will do this. One evening six years after he arrives in the United States, Salva opens his email on the family computer and finds a message from a cousin of his who works for a relief agency saying that his father is in a United Nations clinic, about to have stomach surgery.

Salva is overjoyed that his father might still be alive, and slowly manages to get more information. The clinic is in a remote part of Sudan where there is no telephone or mail service; the cousin only knows Salva's father is there because he saw his name on a list the clinic submitted to the relief agency he works for. It takes months before Salva is able to return to Sudan. There are many forms to fill out and many transportation problems to solve, and Chris and Louise help Salva arrange everything. He must take several flights, and then a long trip in a jeep along dusty roads deep into the bush, but after a week of hard travel, Salva finally reaches the clinic.

## Chapters Fourteen - Sixteen Analysis

Nya is amazed that there is actually water where the drilling crew's boss said they would find it, but is disappointed when she sees that the water is brown and muddy. She remembers that it was this same kind of muddy water that made her sister Akeer sick the last time they had been in the camp by the lake. When Dep explains to her that there is still more work to be done on the well before the villagers will be able to use the water from it, all Nya really understands for certain is that she must continue her walks to the pond to fetch water for a while, but she does feel excited that perhaps soon her long walks will end because of the well.

When Salva reaches the refugee camps in Kenya he finds that that are filthy, overcrowded places. There is never enough food to feed everyone and sometimes



fight break out in which people are injured or even killed. Salva grows into a young man of 22 in the Ifo camp, and for the almost six years he has been in Kenya it seems to him like all he has done is wait, even though he does not know what he is waiting for. When Michael, the aid worker from Ireland, offers to teach him how to read and write English, Salva works and studies as hard as he can not only because he wants to learn but also because he has no way of knowing how long Michael will be there. Over the years there have been many aid workers in the camps, and they usually leave without warning. Salva learns as quickly as he can because he knows that there may never be another aid worker willing to teach him.

Salva is chosen to go to America, and he knows that it is the start of a completely new life for him. In America Salva - and other boys and young men from Sudan who lost their families when they fled from the war - are being called "The Lost Boys". Some of these boys, including Salva, are adopted or sponsored by American families so that they can come to the United States. Salva finds everything new, and exciting, and a little frightening in the United States, and there are times when he feels like he has been taken to another planet. This feeling starts his very first day in Rochester when he steps out of the airport and is hit with a blast of frigid winter air; in Sudan and Kenya, the temperature almost never drops below 70 degrees.

Chris, Louise, and their four children - who he comes to think of as his new family - are very kind and understanding and help Salva adjust to his new life, and over the next six years he is able to fit in to the community in Rochester, and even attend college. When a cousin that Salva hardly knows who works for a relief agency in Zimbabwe sends him an email saying that his father is awaiting surgery in a remote clinic in Sudan, Salva is shocked. It seems to him almost impossible that any of his immediate family could have survived the war, but he has never completely given up hope. Even though information is hard to come by and he has no way of knowing whether it really even is his father in the clinic or just someone else who happens to have the same name, Salva knows that he must find out for sure. It takes many months to fill out all the forms and make all the arrangements, but finally with the help of his new family Salva is able to return to Sudan to look for his father.



# Chapters Seventeen - Eighteen

## Chapters Seventeen - Eighteen Summary

Chapter Seventeen. Southern Sudan, 2009. Nya is unable to guess what the men in her village are going to build, and her father tells her that they will build a school. He says that since the village will have a well, no one will have to fetch water from the pond any longer, and all the children will be able to go to school. When Nya asks him if that means the girls too, her father smiles and tells her yes. Nya is overjoyed that she will soon learn to read and write.

Sudan and Rochester, New York, 2003 - 2007. When Salva reaches the clinic, he is taken to see the man named Mawien Dut Ariik. He looks older, but Salva recognizes him as his father immediately. When Salva introduces himself, his father cannot believe it is possible, but finally recognizes his son and hugs him tightly. Later, he blesses Salva in the Dinka way by sprinkling water on his head. It has been almost nineteen years since they have seen each other, and his father says that everyone in the village was certain Salva had been killed, but that he never gave up hope. He tells Salva that his mother and sisters are still alive and back in their village, but that only one of his three brothers - Ring - survived the war. Salva says that he must go back and see them, but his father tells him that there is still war near their village, and that it would not be safe for him to go back. Salva and his father spend several days together, but soon it is time for Salva to go back to America, and for his father to go back to Loun-Ariik. Salva promises that he will return to the village just as soon as it is safe.

As Salva is flying back to Rochester, he remembers the feeling of the water on his head when his father blessed him, and an idea of how he might be able to help the people in Sudan comes to him. He tells his idea to Chris and Louise, and then to a friend of theirs named Scott who is an expert in setting up projects like what Salva has in mind. Scott and Salva work together for months, and meet other people who also want to help. Salva starts to speak to different groups to raise money and at first he is very nervous and afraid that his English will not be good enough, but the people are very attentive and never laugh at him. Over the next three years Salva speaks to hundreds of people in schools, churches, and civic organizations. Although the process is slow and he sometimes becomes discouraged, Salva remembers the lesson his Uncle Jewiir taught him in the desert all those years before and keeps moving towards his goal one step at a time.

Chapter Eighteen. Southern Sudan, 2009. The well is finally finished, but before the pump is used for the first time the workers' boss brings out a large canvas with English words on it which reads: In Honor of Elm Street School. Nya's uncle explains that it was students at this American school who raised money for the well to be dug. Everyone in the village then stands around the sign so their picture can be taken. Then the villagers get in line to wait their turn for water. When it is Nya's turn her uncle works the pump and her plastic container fills up quickly. She steps out of line and drinks; the water is



clear and cold, not warm and filled with mud like what she got from the pond. The school that the village men have been building will be finished in a few days and Nya, Dep, and Akeer will all attend. There is talk of building a market and even a clinic so that they will not have to walk so far for medical attention like they did when Akeer was sick. All of this is possible because of the well, but the well is not for Nya's village alone. The drilling crew's boss has made it clear that people are to be welcomed from miles around and allowed to fetch clean water from the well, and that no one is ever to be turned away.

Nya catches sight of the boss. He is standing by himself watching people getting water from the well. When Dep sees her looking at the man, he tells Nya that the boss is Dinka. Nya is amazed; the boss's assistant is Nuer, as is most of the crew, but the boss has no ritual scars on his face and so she cannot tell what tribe he is from. Dep then tells her that he heard their uncle and father talking, and they said that he has drilled many wells for his own people and that now he has decided to drill wells for the Nuer also. Nya walks over to the man shyly and after he notices her and says hello she thanks him for bringing the water. He smiles and asks her name and when she tells him it is Nya, he says, "I am happy to meet you, Nya. My name is Salva."

## Chapters Seventeen - Eighteen Analysis

When Salva finally finds his father at the medical clinic and learns that his mother and several other members of his family are still alive, his first instinct is to return to his village of Loun-Ariik and see them, but his father tells him that it is not safe. There is still much fighting in that part of Sudan, and both the government forces and the rebels would try to force Salva to fight for them. Salva knows that his father is right, but vows that he will return and see his family when it is safe, and that is a vow that he will keep.

After he decides that drilling wells in small remote villages would be the best way he could help some of the people of Southern Sudan, Salva makes the project the main focus of his life. The first obstacle he must overcome is his discomfort about speaking in front of large groups, but he remembers the times he had to speak to the many boys he led to safety in Kenya, and he uses this memory to help him overcome his fears. More than anything else, however, it is again the lesson his Uncle Jewiir taught him in the desert that allows him to finally reach his goal. He takes one step at a time, solves one problem at a time, and keeps moving forward.

For Nya and her village, the well that Salva and his crew digs for them means the start of a new and better life. Nya will no longer have to make the long walk to the pond twice a day, nor will her family have to move to the camp by the lakebed during the dry season. She and the other children will be able to learn to read and write, and perhaps make something of their lives. The fact that Salva brings water to her village even though they are Nuer and he is Dinka is something that Nya cannot understand, but the reader is left with the feeling that along with the well and a chance for a better life, Salva has also brought a new way of thinking to Nya and her village.



In a brief message at the end of the novel, the real Salva Dut states that the story is based on events that happened in his life, and thanks the United Nations and International Red Cross for all they have done to help him and the other "Lost Boys". He thanks his adopted family, and a number of organizations who have helped to make his project, Water for Sudan, a reality. He then writes that young people should remain calm when things get hard, and that perseverance and hope leads to more happiness than quitting does.

In a short Author's Note, Linda Sue Park gives a brief history of the Second Sudanese Civil War, which started in 1983 and went on until a peace accord was signed in 2005 which granted Southern Sudan autonomy. During the two decade long war, millions of people in Southern Sudan were killed and imprisoned, and millions of others - including Salva Dut and the other Lost Boys - were permanently displaced. She writes that since founding the nonprofit organization Water for Sudan, Salva Dut has drilled dozens of wells in Dinka and Nuer villages throughout Southern Sudan. The first well was drilled in Salva's home village of Loun-Ariik.



# Characters

## Salva Dut

When the novel opens, Salva Dut is an eleven-year-old boy who lives in the small village of Loun-Ariik in Southern Sudan. Salva and his family are part of the Dinka tribe. Salva is a smart, happy boy who has just started to attend school. One day as he is daydreaming in class gunshots erupt outside the schoolhouse and Salva runs into the bush to escape the fighting between the government forces and the rebels. Salva walks with a group of other people who are fleeing the fighting, moving further and further away from his home and his family. Eventually the group is joined by his Uncle Jewiir, who becomes the group's leader. At one point while walking through the Akobo Desert Salva begins to lose hope, and Uncle Jewiir teaches him a lesson about setting and accomplishing small, manageable goals and never giving up which will stay with him for the rest of his life. After Jewiir is killed by looters Salva is all alone again, but what he has learned from his uncle gives him the strength to continue on. At no point does Salva ever completely give up hope of finding his family.

Salva reaches Ethiopia and spends six years in a refugee camp there until one day soldiers come and force the refugees out of the camp and into the Gilo River, where at least thousand people die. Salva survives, and for the next year and a half leads a group of over 1,200 boys and young men across Southern Sudan to safety in Kenya. After spending almost six more years in refugee camps in Kenya, Salva is chosen to go and live with a family in Rochester, New York, in the United States. Several years later word reaches Salva that his father is in a hospital in Sudan, and Salva is able to travel back and see him for the first time in almost 19 years. After returning from that trip, Salva has the idea of drilling wells in remote villages in Southern Sudan to bring water to the area, and starts a non-profit organization called Water for Sudan, which to date has drilled dozens of wells in Southern Sudan. Salva Dut is a real person, and much of the novel is based on incidents from his life.

## Nya

Nya is an eleven year old girl who lives in a small village in Southern Sudan. Nya and her family are members of the Nuer tribe. Every day for seven months out of the year, Nya must walk from her village to a small pond half a morning's (or afternoon's) walk away with a plastic container and fetch water for her family. She makes two trips every day; the first trip takes her the entire morning, and the second trip takes her the entire afternoon. During the dry season, Nya and her family move to a camp near a lake. When they are at the camp, Nya must go to the lakebed every day, dig a hole in the soft clay, and then wait for hours as water slowly trickles in. Nya likes the months her family spends at the camp because she does not have to make the two long walks to fetch water, but the water from the lake bed is filthy and at one point it makes her younger sister Akeer very sick.



One day after they have returned from the lake camp, strangers arrive in Nya's village. Soon they have a crew there and begin drilling a well which they say will bring water to the village. Nya does not understand how this could be possible, and continues her two long walks to the pond every day to fetch water. Finally, the drilling crew strikes water and Nya's father tells her that the village men will build a school and that since no one needs to fetch water from the pond any longer, boys and girls will both be able to attend. Nya understands that the well has changed her life and when she shyly goes to thank the drilling crew's boss for bringing water to her village, he smiles and tells her his name is Salva.

## Uncle Jewiir

Jewiir is Salva's uncle, his father's younger brother. Jewiir finds Salva by accident when he joins the group that Salva is walking through the bush with shortly after he flees the fighting at the schoolhouse. Jewiir has been in the army and still has his rifle; he is smart and capable, and soon becomes the leader of the group. It is Jewiir who decides that they will cross the Nile River and the Akobo Desert to reach safety in the refugee camps in Ethiopia.

As they are crossing the desert, Jewiir sees that Salva is beginning to lose hope, and teaches him to set and then accomplish small, manageable goals and to never give up. He does this by telling Salva that he only needs to walk to that next clump of bushes, and then he only needs to walk to that next rock, and so on; by teaching him to only concentrate on the next goal and take one step at a time, he helps Salva to finally cross the desert. Jewiir is killed by looters shortly before the group reaches Ethiopia, but the lessons he teaches him during their time together help to make Salva the man he eventually becomes.

## Mawien Dut Ariik

Mawien Dut Ariik is Salva's father. Several years after Salva reaches the United States he receives an email from a cousin he hardly knows that says his father is alive and about to undergo stomach surgery in a remote clinic in Southern Sudan. Salva travels to the clinic and is reunited with his father after almost nineteen years. His father tells Salva that his mother and sisters are still alive and living back in his home village of Loun-Ariik, but that only one of his brothers has survived the war. When Salva tells him that he wants to return to the village, Mawien tells him that it is not safe. The two men spend several days together at the clinic, and Mawien blesses Salva in the Dinka way by sprinkling water on his head. This gives Salva the idea to drill wells and bring water to the people of Southern Sudan.

## Chris and Louise

Chris and Louise are the couple who make it possible for Salva to come to the United States, and who take him in and make him a part of their family. Chris and Louise have





four children of their own and are very kind, patient people who help Salva adjust to his new life in the United States, and answer the many questions that he has. When Salva learns that his father might be alive, Chris and Louise help him fill out all the forms and make all the arrangements to go back to Sudan and find him. After he returns, Chris and Louise are instrumental in helping Salva set up Water for Sudan.

## **Marial**

Marial is a young boy who joins the group that Salva is walking through the bush with just a few weeks after Salva flees the fighting at the schoolhouse. Marial is about Salva's age, and has also become separated from his family. Salva and Marial quickly become friends, and spend each day walking together and talking with each other. Marial is taken and killed by a lion shortly after the group enters lion country.

## **Nya's Uncle (unnamed)**

Nya's uncle is her father's brother, and is the chief of Nya's village. When the strangers come to the village they talk to Nya's uncle about their plans to build a well, and when the well is finally finished it is Nya's uncle who pumps the first water from it. When Nya's sister Akeer becomes ill due to the bad water they are forced to get from the lake bed, Nya's uncle tells her parents about a clinic three day's walk from the camp, where Akeer is made well.

## **Dep**

Dep is Nya's older brother. While at the lake camp, Dep often hunts with his father, and Nya's mother worries that he will be attacked and injured by men from a rival Dinka tribe. Dep listens to the strangers and the village men talking, and it is Dep who explains things about the well to Nya. Dep also tells Nya that the drilling crew's boss is Dinka, which Nya finds hard to believe.

## **Auntie (unnamed)**

"Auntie" is what Salva calls an old Dinka woman who is kind to him after the first group of people he is walking with leaves him behind. Auntie allows Salva to stay with her for several days, but will not take him with her when she decides to leave her home because she believes it would be too dangerous. When a second group of people who are also Dinka arrive at Auntie's home shortly before she is to leave, she arranges for the group to take Salva with them.



## Michael

Michael is an aid worker that Salva meets while he is in the Ifo refugee camp in Kenya. Michael is from Ireland and offers to teach Salva how to read and write English. He also teaches Salva how to play volleyball. It is Michael who first sees that Salva's name is on the list of young men who have been chosen to go to America.

## Nya's Father and Mother (unnamed)

Nya's father is the brother of the village chief, and one of the leaders of her village. Nya's father helps to build the school in the village, and tells Nya that both girls and boys will now go to school. Nya and her mother take her younger sister Akeer to the clinic when she becomes ill because of the water from the lakebed. Nya's mother has Nya take Akeer with her to fetch water from the pond one day, saying that it is time for Akeer to learn.

## Buksa

Buksa is a young man who joins the group Salva is walking with. Buksa is a member of the Jar-chol tribe, who get along with the Dinka. One day Buksa follows a bird to a beehive, and that night the entire group feasts on honey.

## Akeer

Akeer is Nya's younger sister. Akeer is five years old, and becomes ill after drinking the water from the lake bed. Nya and her mother take Akeer to a clinic three day's walk from the camp, where they make her well.

## Scott

Scott is a friend of Chris and Louise who is an expert at setting up projects like the one Salva has in mind when he returns from visiting his father. Scott and Salva work together for many months to make Water for Sudan a reality.

## Ariik, Ring, and Kuol

Ariik, Ring, and Kuol are Salva's brothers. When he returns to Sudan to visit his father in the clinic, Salva learns that only Ring is still alive; Ariik and Kuol have been killed in the war.



## Objects/Places

### Plastic Bottle

Nya carries a plastic bottle to the pond near her village to fill with water; she then carries the full bottle back to her village on her head.

### Gourd

Nya carries a gourd with her when she fetches water. Auntie gives Salva a gourd when he joins the group after leaving her barn.

### Rifles

Uncle Jewiir carries a rifle that he was allowed to keep after leaving the army. The soldiers who lead the refugees to the river also shoot at them with rifles.

### Headscarf

Salva's mother wears an orange headscarf. Salva sees a woman wearing the same color headscarf in the Itang refugee camp, but it is not his mother.

### Jeeps and Trucks

The strangers arrive in Nya's village in a jeep. They bring their equipment into the village in trucks.

### Drill

The work crew uses a large drill to dig the well in Nya's village. It looks to Nya like a large iron giraffe.

### Airplanes

Salva has to take three airplanes to get from Kenya to Rochester, New York.

### Computer

Salva gets news that his father is alive when he checks his email on his adopted family's computer.



## **Canoes**

Salva and the group he starts out with cross the Nile River in canoes that they make from papyrus reeds.

## **Loun-Ariik**

Loun-Ariik is Salva's home village. This is where his organization, Water for Sudan, drills its first well.

## **Akobo Desert**

Salva and his group must cross the Akobo Desert to reach Ethiopia. It is in the Akobo Desert that Uncle Jewiir teaches Salva the most important lesson of his life.

## **Itang Refugee Camp, Ethiopia**

Salva spends six years in the Itang refugee camp in Ethiopia before soldiers drive him and thousands of others into the Gilo River, when many die.

## **Ifo Refugee Camp / Nairobi, Kenya**

Salva spends many years in the Ifo refugee camp. When he is 22 years old, he is chosen to go to America with 3,000 other "Lost Boys". He is processed in Nairobi, and leaves for America from there.

## **Southern Sudan**

Salva escapes the war in Southern Sudan, and returns many years later to drill wells there. Nya's part of the story takes place entirely in Southern Sudan.

## **Rochester, New York**

Salva goes to Rochester, New York when he starts his new life in America.



# Themes

## Perseverance

Perseverance and working towards and attaining goals are central themes of the novel. Salva is taught the importance of perseverance, never losing hope, and always continuing to work towards his goals, and attain them, by his Uncle Jewiir as they are crossing the Akobo Desert. Near the end of the first day in the desert Salva's feet are sore and gored by thorns, the heat is so intense that he can hardly breathe, and he finds himself falling behind the rest of the group as he starts to give up hope. His Uncle Jewiir senses what Salva is feeling and points out a clump of bushes, telling him to just concentrate on walking there; he then points to a rock, and tells him to make his goal walking there. By doing this over and over again, Jewiir teaches Salva that nothing is too great a challenge to overcome if you divide it into smaller goals, work towards achieving them one step at a time, and never give up.

Salva remembers this lesson for the rest of his life, and puts it to use in many different situations. In the refugee camps in both Ethiopia and Kenya, Salva continues to believe that something will happen which will allow him to make something of his life and he survives the sometimes terrible conditions by simply taking one day at a time, and persevering. When he reaches America everything is very strange and foreign to him, but he takes things one day at a time and is slowly able to adapt to his new country. Finally, when he decides that he can best help the people of Southern Sudan by drilling wells to bring them water it seems to him at first as though he will never be able to do it, but by taking on one problem at a time and never allowing himself to quit, Salva is able to persevere and build an organization that changes the lives of hundreds of people in dozens of villages throughout Southern Sudan. In his short message at the end of the book, Salva Dut says, "Quitting leads to much less happiness in life than perseverance and hope."

## Responsibility and Leadership

The importance of responsibility and leadership is shown in a number ways throughout the course of the novel. Salva's Uncle Jewiir becomes the leader of the group Salva is walking through the bush with almost immediately after he joins it because he is willing to take responsibility for the safety of the others in the group. Jewiir is a natural leader, and although he is killed before the group crosses into Ethiopia, it is his vision and leadership which is directly responsible for the group reaching the safety of the Itang refugee camp, and leaving the war in Sudan behind.

Salva shows many of these same leadership qualities when he leads over 1,200 boys and young men through Southern Sudan to safety in Kenya after they are forced to leave Ethiopia. No one appoints Salva the leader of this group or asks him to do it; he simply falls into the role of leader because he is willing to take the responsibility. Later,



when he is drilling the well in Nya's village, Salva (the "boss") again shows his leadership abilities as he will not allow his crew to quit even though they become discouraged, and keeps them working to achieve their goal.

Nya also shows herself to be a very responsible young girl. Regardless of the heat, or how many times she steps on thorns, or how tired she gets, she never shirks her responsibility when it comes to fetching water for her family. When her mother tells her to take her younger sister Akeer with her to fetch water from the pond because it is time she learned, Nya does not complain even though she knows the younger child will slow her down and make her trips back and forth harder. She understands that teaching Akeer is her responsibility, and she accepts it.

## War and Tribal Hatred

Salva flees from the schoolhouse into the bush to escape the war that started in Southern Sudan two years before the story opens. Salva does not understand much about the war but he knows that the government in the northern part of the country has decided that Sudan should be a Muslim nation and wants everyone to convert to Islam, and that the rebels are fighting the government and want Southern Sudan to be independent. Salva and the group that he is walking with are fleeing from both the government and the rebel forces since both sides are known to attack villages and take even very young men to fight for them. This war continues for over 20 years, and is reason why Salva and the other Lost Boys must remain in the camps and cannot return to their villages. Even when Salva is a grown man and finds his father, he is unable to return to his village of Loun-Ariik because both the rebels and the government forces would try and make him fight for them. The war is the reason Salva finally goes to America and is able to start Water for Sudan.

Alongside the war, tribal hatreds that go back many generations cause unnecessary hardships and even fighting and death in Southern Sudan. Nya's mother worries when the family moves to the lake camp every dry season because a rival Dinka tribe also moves closer to the lake, and there has been fighting between the two groups in the past. When Nya learns that the man who has brought water to her village is a Dinka she cannot believe it, because she has been taught throughout her life that Dinkas are the enemy of the Nuer. The fact that Salva wants to bring water to a Nuer village - and that Nya's uncle, the village chief, will accept help from a Dinka - shows that each is willing to cooperate with the other, and the reader is left with the idea that this may be a first step towards helping to end tribal hatred in Southern Sudan.



# Style

## Point of View

"A Long Walk to Water" is written in the third person, and is written from either Nya's or Salva's point of view, depending which of the two stories is being told. In the final chapter of the novel the two storylines come together, and the point of view is Nya's. Either Nya or Salva is at the center of every scene in the novel, and the action and events in the story are presented as they are seen and experienced by these two main characters. Nya's and Salva's thoughts and feelings are continually presented by the author and this allows the reader to better understand what they are going through and also helps to make the reader care about what happens to them.

The story is told mostly through descriptive narrative and there is very little dialogue used in the novel. Those sections where dialogue is used are always very short and to the point. The use of mostly descriptive narrative helps the reader to remain focused on the two main characters and what they are going through. It also helps the reader to more easily follow the passage of time; this is particularly true in Salva's part of the story, which spans a period of over twenty years.

## Setting

Nya's part of the story is set completely in Southern Sudan in the years 2008 and 2009. The majority of this part of the story is set in Nya's home village, although other scenes take place at the lake camp she and her family travel to during the dry season. One important scene takes place at a medical clinic that Nya and her mother take her younger sister Akeer to when she becomes ill due to drinking the filthy water from the lakebed.

The majority of Salva's part of the story takes place in various nations in Africa. This part of the story starts out in Southern Sudan in 1985 and chronicles Salva's life and experiences through to 2007. Significant scenes set in Sudan take place in the bush, while crossing the Nile River, and in the Akobo Desert. Other significant locations in Africa include the Itang refugee camp in Ethiopia and the Ifo refugee camp in Kenya. When Salva is chosen to go to America, he lives with a family in Rochester, New York and eventually attends college there. The final chapter of the novel is set in Nya's village in 2009, where Salva has come to drill a well.

The multiple settings used in the novel are crucial to the plot, and this is particularly true in Salva's part of the story. Showing the various places - many of them very unpleasant - that Salva has been forced to survive in, and the hardships he has been forced to undergo, gives the reader an insight into what shapes him into the man he eventually becomes.



## Language and Meaning

The novel is intended for older children and young adults, and so the language used is appropriate for this reading level. Nya is an eleven-year-old girl and Salva also starts out at eleven years old in his part of the story, and most of the vocabulary used will be understood by readers of about this age and above. The author uses mostly short, declarative sentences in the narrative both in the descriptive passages and when moving the action along. Salva's thoughts and feelings are written using italics. Although the vast majority of the novel takes place in Africa, where English is not spoken, no non-English words are used either in descriptive passages or dialogue with the exception of the names of people, places, and tribes (Nuer, Dinka, etc.).

There is no profanity used in the novel, and there is no sexual content whatsoever. There are several quite violent scenes in Salva's part of the novel and a number of people die during the course of the narrative - including characters that the reader comes to care about - but the violence is not graphically depicted and should not be upsetting even to younger readers.

## Structure

The novel is 120 pages long and is divided into eighteen untitled chapters. Each chapter is between five and eight pages in length. In each of the first seventeen chapters Nya's part of the story comes at the beginning of the chapter and is printed using light brown ink. Salva's part of the story follows, and is printed using traditional black ink. A location and a year (for example, Southern Sudan, 1985) starts both parts of the story in each chapter. Salva's story is by far the longest of the two stories and accounts for approximately 80% of the narrative. In some chapters, Nya's part of the story is only half a page long. In the final chapter, the two stories are brought together in Nya's village. A message from Salva Dut and a short author's note are included at the end of the book.

The novel contains two main plots, and no subplots. The longest of these two plots follows Salva Dut as he flees from the fighting that is going on in his part of Southern Sudan, survives many hardships over the course of the next two decades, and eventually starts an organization that drills wells in remote villages in Southern Sudan and brings water to the people there. The shorter plot tells the story of a young girl named Nya who must make two long walks each day to fetch water for her family, and how her life is changed when a stranger brings a crew of men to her village and drills a well. Both plots come together in the final chapter when it is revealed that the stranger who brings water to Nya's village is Salva Dut.





## Quotes

"But the people in the south were of different religions and did not want to be forced to practice Islam. They began fighting for independence from the north." Chapter One, p. 7

"They went in the opposite direction from the rebels, for wherever the rebels went, there was sure to be fighting." Chapter Two, p. 12

"Home for just long enough to eat, Nya would now make her second trip to the pond. To the pond and back - to the pond and back - nearly a full day of walking altogether." Chapter Four, p. 20

"Their region was inhabited by large herds of antelope, wildebeest, gnus - and the lions that preyed on them." Chapter Five, p. 31

"Nya could see the questions in her mother's face every morning: Would they be lucky again? Or was it their turn to lose someone?" Chapter Six, p. 34

"The Nile: the longest river in the world, the mother of all life in Sudan. Uncle explained that they would come to the river at one of its broadest stretches." Chapter Seven, p. 42

"Salva tried to bite his lip, but the awfulness of that never-ending day was too much for him. He lowered his head, and the tears began to flow." Chapter Nine, p. 53

"As Salva watched, one of the men aimed his gun at Uncle. Three shots rang out. Then the men ran away." Chapter Ten, p. 63

"It did not seem as if the camp could possibly hold any more, but still they kept coming: long lines of people, some emaciated, some hurt or sick, all exhausted." Chapter Eleven, p. 68

"If someone had told Salva that he would live in the camp for six years, he would never have believed it." Chapter Twelve, p. 73

"Nya thought it was funny. You had to have water to find water. Water had to be flowing constantly into the borehole to keep the drill running smoothly." Chapter Thirteen, p. 76

"The plane landed at last, its wheels screeching, while Salva gripped the armrests and braced himself for what was to come." Chapter 15, p. 95

"Mawien Dut sprinkled water on his son's head, the Dinka way of blessing someone who was lost and is found again." Chapter 17, p. 105

"Quitting leads to much less happiness in life than perseverance and hope." A Message from Salva Dut, p. 117



## Topics for Discussion

Who is Salva Dut? Why is Salva forced to flee from the schoolhouse at the beginning of the novel? Why does he run into the bush rather than back to his home and his family? Why does the group Salva starts out with leave him behind, and why is the second group reluctant to take him with them? Why does the old Dinka woman he calls Auntie refuse to take Salva with her when she leaves her home?

Why must Nya make two long walks every day from her village to the pond to fetch water? Why does Nya's family move to the lake camp every year during the dry season? Why does Nya like the camp? Why does her mother dislike the camp? What is it about the water Nya collects from the lakebed that makes her sister Akeer sick? What must be done to make it fit to drink?

Discuss the relationship between Uncle Jewiir and Salva. How does Jewiir comfort Salva after Marial is taken by a lion? What lesson does Jewiir teach Salva in the Akobo Desert? How does this lesson help to shape the man Salva eventually becomes? How does the group's attitude change toward Salva after Jewiir is killed?

Discuss leadership. Why does Uncle Jewiir become the leader of the group Salva is travelling with so quickly? Why does Salva become the leader of a large group of boys who manage to survive the slaughter at the Gilo River? How does the way Salva is treated by the group after Jewiir is killed influence how he leads the boys?

Discuss the refugee camps where Salva lives in Ethiopia and Kenya. Why are Salva and the other refugees forced out of the Itang camp in Ethiopia? What does he learn in the camps in Kenya? What does he hope for while he is in the camps? Who is Michael, and what does he teach Salva? Who are the Lost Boys? Why are over 3,000 of them brought to America?

How does Salva adjust to his new life in America? How does his new family help him to adjust? How does Salva learn that his father is still alive? What happens when Salva is reunited with his father that gives him the idea to drill wells in Southern Sudan? What must Salva do to make this dream a reality? Who helps him, and how?

Discuss the war in Southern Sudan. What is the war about? Who is fighting, and what are they fighting for? How long does the war last, and what impact does it have on Southern Sudan? What impact does it have on Salva's family? Why is it not safe for Salva to return to his village after he is reunited with his father, even though it has been almost 19 years since he left? What is his father afraid will happen?

What impact will drilling a well have on the people in Nya's village? What impact will the well have on Nya herself? What changes come immediately to Nya and her village as a result of the well? What changes are planned for the future? Why is Nya surprised when she learns that the "boss" is a member of the Dinka tribe? Why does Salva decide to start drilling wells in Nuer villages? What might this mean for the future?