

Text Guide: *A Long Walk to Water*

(For Teacher Reference)

This guide is meant to support in-class reading of *A Long Walk to Water* by providing comprehension questions and examples of vocabulary with which students may struggle. Be sure students provide evidence from the text to support their responses to the questions.

Unit 1

Lesson 2, Chapter 1

Vocabulary

- cradle (1): to hold or rock in or as in a cradle
- droned (2): talked in a boring voice without changing one's tone
- rebels (6): people who fight against or are not loyal to the government of their country

Questions

- page 1 “Heat. Time. And thorns.”

What have we learned about the setting? How do we know? We know that the story is taking place in Southern Sudan at two different times: in 2008 and 1985. We can tell this from the headings at the beginning of each section. We also know that the setting is hot and difficult in the first section. The author writes “There was only the heat, the sun already baking the air . . .” (1).

- page 3 “. . . and his younger brother as well.”

What has the author told us about Salva so far? The author has told us that Salva is eleven years old and is a good student. He knows he is “lucky” to be able to go to school, but he is also daydreaming during his lesson, thinking about taking care of his family’s cows with his younger brother.

- page 6 “Go! All of you, now!”

What is happening here? Do we know who is shooting the guns yet? Salva’s class is interrupted by gunfire and the teacher tells the students to run. “Go! All of you, now!”

he says (6). We do not know who is shooting the guns, but it is clear that the teacher is very worried.

Lesson 3, Chapter 2

Vocabulary

- mortars (12): short guns used for firing shells (technically called bombs) at high angles

Questions

- page 9 “Salva lowered his head and ran.”

What do we know about the characters so far? How do we know? Nya is on a difficult journey. The author describes the pain she is feeling, like the thorns in her feet. Salva is running away from fighting. In this chapter the author describes how he is running away from a fighter plane.

- page 10 “Where is my family?”

What are Salva’s reactions to the rebels? He seems uncertain of them, and a little bit afraid. The author writes that the soldiers held guns, but they “were not pointed at the crowd” (10). Salva wonders, “What are they going to do to us?” (10).

- page 13 “He was alone.”

What happens to Salva at the end of the chapter? He is left alone by the group he is traveling with.

Lesson 4, Chapter 3

Vocabulary

- sludge (14): thick, sticky mud
- flinched (16): drew away from something suddenly
- haunches (17): the backs of the thighs and buttocks

Questions

- page 15 “But she might reach home by noon, if all went well.”

What did we learn about the purpose of Nya’s journey at the beginning of this chapter? She is getting water from somewhere and carrying it home.

- End of chapter, page 19 “Could his family be among them?”

What was Salva’s hope about his new situation? What actually happened? Salva hoped he could stay in the old woman’s barn until the fighting stopped. Instead, she told him she had to leave and he couldn’t come with her.

- End of chapter

Why does the old woman tell Salva he can’t travel with her? She is worried that the soldiers will bother her if she has him with her. She feels safer on her own.

How does the chapter end? Salva sees a group of people approaching him. They are Dinka, which means they are from his tribe. He hopes that his family is among them.

Lesson 6, Chapter 4

Vocabulary

- stunted (23): stopped or slowed the growth of
- daze (23): a state of being stunned or confused

Questions

- page 20 “He is Dinka,’ he said, and began walking again.”

What is the group’s feeling toward taking Salva with them? Why do they decide to do it?
The group seems uncertain. Some were “shaking their heads and grumbling” (20), but they take him because one of the men points out that Salva is also “Dinka” just like them.

- page 25 “This night, they would feast.”

What special skill does Buksa have? How does it help the group? Buksa can hear “the call of the bird called the honey guide” (25). This helps the group because he finds honey, which means “they would feast!”

Lesson 7, Chapter 5

Vocabulary

- gingerly (28): carefully or cautiously
- luscious (28): having a highly appealing smell or taste
- strides (30): steps
- inhabited (31): having residents, populated

Questions

- page 30 “It was good to make a friend.”

What do Salva and Marial have in common when they first meet? They are both looking for their families. The author writes that Marial sighed while talking about his missing family, and Salva “heard that sigh all the way to his heart” (29).

- page 32 “Salva!”

What question does the author leave us with at the end of the chapter? The author leaves us with the question of who is talking to Salva. The author writes that “it was not Marial who had spoken” but she does not say who it is. She does say that Salva’s “mouth fell open in amazement” (32).

Lesson 8, Chapter 6

Vocabulary

- makeshift (33): something used for a short time or in place of the usual thing
- wailing (37): loud crying

Questions

- page 34 “Or was it now their turn to lose someone?”

Why does Nya’s mother dislike going to the lake camp? She is worried that Nya’s father and brother would “fight and get injured—or worse” (33) with Dinka tribesmen in the area.

- page 35 “. . . so I will look after you!”

Who does Salva meet? What are his reactions? Salva meets his uncle Jewiir. He is very excited and is unable to speak at first. Then his “hopes were dashed” (34) once he finds out that his uncle doesn’t know where his family is.

- page 38 “A cold fist seemed to grip Salva’s heart.”

What does Salva’s uncle tell him at the end of the chapter? Salva’s uncle tells him something happened to Marial, but we don’t know what yet. The author writes that “Uncle stroked Salva’s head” and says “I am sorry” (38) but does not say what happened to Marial.

Lessons 9–10, Chapter 7

Vocabulary

- prow (44): front of a boat

Questions

- page 40 “—and hope they reached help in time?”

What decision does Nya’s family have to make? Why? Nya’s family has to decide whether to travel to get Akeer medical care or stay at camp to “let her rest so she might heal on her own” (40). They have to make this choice because Akeer has gotten very sick at the camp.

What effect does Uncle Jewiir’s words have on Salva? They help him to continue with the journey despite what happened to Marial. The author writes that without his uncle’s words, Salva “might have gone crazy with fear” (41).

Lesson 11, Chapter 8

Vocabulary

- gauge (46): to measure or judge
- monotonous (46): boring because of having to do with the same thing over and over
- abundance (47): a very large amount

Questions

- page 46 “She would never be able to stop Akeer from doing the same.”

What happens to Akeer in this chapter? Why did she become sick in the first place? Akeer starts to feel better after getting “just two doses of medicine” (45). The nurse explains that Akeer got sick because of the “dirty water” (45).

- page 49 “. . . riding a bicycle with mangoes in its spokes.”

What is Salva’s reaction to the fishing village? Why does he react that way? Salva is “amazed” (47) by the fishing village because of how much food they have.

Lesson 12, Chapter 9

Vocabulary

- relentless (52): without stopping or lessening
- arid (52): extremely dry
- parched (53): made very dry or thirsty

Questions

- page 51 “Anyone could have told them that.”

What is Nya’s reaction to the two men who arrive in her village? She is confused about why they want to talk about water. She says the pond is “half a morning’s walk away” and that “anyone could have told them that” (51).

- page 56 “It is useless—they will die, and you will die with them!”

What are some of the difficulties the people are facing as they cross the desert? Salva is in pain as they walk. “The pain was terrible,” the author writes on page 53. And the people are low on water, so that one of the travelers tells the other not to share water with the people they find along the way. “If you give them your water, you will not have enough for yourself” (56), one man says to a woman who is about to help the others.

Lesson 13, Chapter 10

Vocabulary

- translated (57): to change into the words of another language
- revived (58): brought back to life or consciousness
- refugee camp (59): temporary place to live for people who have fled their countries because of danger

Questions

- page 57 “. . . unless it was raining!”

What is Nya’s reaction to the men’s plan to find water between the trees? She doesn’t understand what they mean about finding water between the trees. She says, “there wasn’t a single drop of water on that spot, unless it was raining!” (58).

- page 63 “Then the men ran away.”

What happens to Salva’s uncle at the end of the chapter? The author writes that the men tied his uncle to a tree and “one of the men aimed his gun at Uncle” (63). Then, “shots rang out” and then “the men ran away” (63) so it seems that Salva’s uncle was shot by the men.

Lesson 14, Chapter 11**Vocabulary**

- numbness (65): lacking feeling
- grudgingly (66): unwillingly
- emaciated (68): extremely thin, usually from starvation or disease

Questions

- page 66 “They are wrong, and I will prove it.”

How does Salva react to losing his uncle and friend? Salva is upset at losing his uncle and friend but believes that “they had left their strength with him” (65). He feels that he is getting stronger as he learns to take care of himself.

- page 69 “He mustn’t lose track of her.”

Where is Salva at the end of the chapter? What is his reaction to this? Salva arrives at a refugee camp where there were more people than he’d ever seen before. The author writes that Salva felt “uncertain and maybe even afraid” (67). Later, Salva thinks he might see his mother, so he chases after her. He is so emotional that a “half-sob” (69) breaks from his lips.

Lesson 15–16, Chapter 12**Vocabulary**

- chaos (74): a state of complete confusion or disorder
- merciless (75): showing no kindness; cruel

Questions

- page 73 “. . . he would never have believed it.”

What realization does Salva come to in this part of the chapter? How does he overcome this? In this part of the chapter, Salva realizes what his uncle was telling him, that “his family was gone” (72). He remembers what his uncle told him about getting through the desert and thinks that he only needs to “get through the rest of this day” and go one day at a time (73).

- page 75 “Crocodiles.”

How long does Salva stay at the Itang Refugee Camp? Why does he leave? Salva stays at Itang for six years. He is forced to leave because the government is closing the camps. He realizes they are “driving” the people “back to Sudan” (75), forcing them to cross the river even though there are crocodiles.

Unit 2

Lesson 2, Chapter 13

Vocabulary

- earnestly (76–77): honestly concerned or sincere
- prodding (77): poking or pushing to move someone or something into action
- telltale (77): revealing or showing to be true
- peril (80): extreme danger or risk
- coax (81): get someone to do something by urging

Questions

- page 77 “The drilling went on.”

What does Nya notice about the drilling in this section? She describes how the men had to “have water to find water” (76), by using water for the drill. She also notices how the boss of the workers leads them by encouraging and persuading them and also, if they don’t listen, by getting angry.

- page 79 “Why was he one of the lucky ones?”
- page 82 “It took them a year and a half.”

What happens as Salva begins walking south? How does the example of his uncle help him? As Salva begins walking south, “crowds of other boys followed him” (80). He became a leader of these boys and helped them continue their journey. The example of his uncle was important because it taught him to go “one day at a time” (82). Following this example, the group was able to make it to Kenya.

Lessons 5–6, Chapter 14**Vocabulary**

- misery (84): deep sadness or pain
- drenched (83): soaked or wet completely
- enclosed (84): closed or shut in with walls or fences
- aid worker (85): a person who helps others as their job
- administration (88): people in charge of something

Questions

- page 84 “It was full of mud.”

What is Nya’s reaction to what happens with the water in this chapter? At first, Nya is excited with the rest of the village at the water. The author writes that “[e]veryone cheered” (83) when they saw the water. But then Nya becomes disappointed when she sees that the water is “brown and heavy-looking” (84). The author writes that Nya “frowned” when she saw this.

- page 89 “He was going to America!”

What were the refugee camps like where Salva was staying? How did his interactions with Michael start to change things for Salva? The refugee camps where Salva stayed were full of “misery” and the “days were long and empty” (84–85). Salva did his best to keep hope alive. He learned to read and speak English and play volleyball with Michael. Eventually, Salva found out that he was chosen to go to America.

Lesson 8, Chapter 15

Vocabulary

- foundation (90): a stone or concrete structure that holds up something from underneath
- grasp (91): to get the meaning of; to understand
- lumbered (92): moved in a heavy, clumsy way
- frigid (95): very cold, freezing
- terminal (95): a place where vehicles stop at the end of travel

Questions

- page 92 “How can I possibly wear any more clothes?”

What is Salva’s experience as he prepares to go to America? Salva is overwhelmed by what the woman helping him is explaining and confused about all the clothes he is getting. He shows surprise that “he was to wear all these clothes at the same time!” (92).

- page 96 “Salva blinked away the tears and took his first step into a new life in America.”

What is Salva’s reaction to being greeted by the family in America? How do you know? Salva feels “his shoulders relax” (95) when he sees his new family’s smiles. He seems happy to see them and also sad at leaving Sudan behind. The author writes that “leaving the airport felt like leaving his old life forever—Sudan, his village, his family . . .” (96).

Unit 3

Lesson 1, Chapter 16

Vocabulary

- scythes (97): a tool for cutting grass, with a long handle and a curved blade
- bewildering (98): confusing
- bough (99): a branch of a tree
- notion (99): an idea, opinion, or view
- remote (100): at a far distance
- frantic (101): very excited by worry or fear; frenzied

Questions

- page 97 “Can’t you guess?”

What do you think the men in Nya’s village are building? Responses will vary, but may include a house, a water pump, a school, etc.

- page 99 “Setting and spiking the ball were the same in any language.”

What is Salva’s life like in America? He is surprised by some of the things he sees, like all the snow and the fact that “in America every road was paved” (98). But he concentrates on his studies as a way to “block out the confusion” (98) of his new life.

- page 102 “I am looking for a patient named Mawien Dut Ariik.”

How does the email from his cousin affect Salva? Through the email from his cousin, Salva realizes that his father is still alive and so he arranges travel to Sudan, which takes “not days or weeks but months” (101) to do. The chapter ends with Salva making it to the hospital where his father might be and announcing that he is looking for him.

Lesson 2, Chapter 17

Vocabulary

- trembling (104): shaking
- contaminated (106): infected or made harmful, usually by a chemical or bacteria
- digestive (106): having to do with the body's system for processing food
- riddled (106): pierced with a large number of holes

Questions

- page 104 “She would learn to read and write!”

What is Nya’s reaction to her father’s news? She is very excited to hear about the new school. The author writes that “She felt as if she were flying” (104) and Nya is happy because she will “learn to read and write” (104).

- page 106 “. . . barely alive by the time he finally arrived.”

What does Salva learn from his visit with his father? Salva learns that his father and mother are both still alive, but his mother is in their village, and the war is still going on, so it is too dangerous for him to return there.

- page 110 “. . . Salva moved toward his goal.”

What happened to Salva after he visits his father? What does he do about it? The author writes that “an idea came” (107) to Salva to set up a big project. He began working with someone who was an expert in these kinds of projects and spoke in front of a large group in order to raise money. We are not told what the project is, however.

Lesson 4, Chapter 18

Vocabulary

- disputes (113): arguments; things people don't agree on
- astonishment (114): great surprise

Questions

- page 115 "My name is Salva."

Based on the ending of the book, who was the leader of the well drillers the whole time? The leader was Salva. What does the ending of the book tell us about what Salva's idea was in the last chapter? Because it is revealed that Salva is the leader of the men drilling the well, we can guess that Salva's idea in the last chapter was to help bring water to the people of Sudan.

Lesson 4, "A message from Salva Dut" and Author's Note

Vocabulary

- coalition (118): two or more groups coming together
- strife (118): intense conflict
- displaced (118): forced out of one's homeland
- referendum (119): a vote by the people in a country for a law
- genocide (119): an attempt to kill all members of a certain race, nationality, ethnic, or religious group
- secede (119): to separate from or leave a group or country

Questions

- page 116 “Quitting leads to much less happiness in life than perseverance and hope.”

What are Salva’s dreams and how are they “beginning to come true” (116)? Salva’s dreams are about helping the people in Sudan get clean water. They are starting to come true because he created an organization called Water for South Sudan, Inc. and he is partnering with many people to bring water to South Sudan.

- page 119 “. . . have brought untold suffering to the people of Sudan.”

What do you learn from this text about the war that forced Salva from his home? The war went on until 2005, which is more than twenty years from when it started. It was a brutal war, and the United States “accus[ed] the Sudanese government of genocide” (118). South Sudan got independence, but there is still a separate war happening in Darfur, another part of the country.

- page 120 “Keep reading . . . and walk the walk!”

What information does this section give about Salva’s life after coming to America? It explains that he was able to reunite with members of his family as well as other Lost Boys. Also, Salva’s organization has been very successful in bringing water to the people of South Sudan. Many people have learned about Salva’s story from the book and have helped him with his goal to bring water to South Sudan, including many students throughout the country.