



A LONG WALK TO WATER: DISCUSSION GUIDE #1



Sample answers

Chapters 1 – 4

Comprehension:

- Who is Salva? Where does he live and what does he do during the day?
Salva is an eleven-year-old boy who lives in Sudan. He goes to school and helps take care of the cattle on his family's farm.
- Why do Salva and his classmates run from the school and away from their villages?
There is gunfire, and their teacher tells them to run into the bush to be safe. The boys can't go back to their homes because the teacher says that the men with guns will be going into the villages.
- During the novel, southern Sudan is fighting for independence from the rest of the country. Why do they want independence?
Sudan's government wants the whole country to follow Islam, the religion that most people in the northern part of Sudan follow. However, many people in the southern part of Sudan follow different religions and do not want to be forced to follow Islam. So, people in the south of Sudan are fighting to become independent from the rest of the country.
- Who are the rebels?
The rebels are the soldiers fighting for independence from Sudan's government in the north.
- Salva and others flee their homes and walk into the wilderness. How and why do they form groups once they are far from the fighting?
Someone shouts for everyone to group themselves by their villages. The idea is that this way people will find someone they know. Salva finds people from his village, Loun-Ariik, but he doesn't know any of them well.
- What does Salva discover when he wakes up in the barn?
Salva discovers that the group of women and children he was walking with had abandoned him.
- Why does Salva trust the old woman?
The old woman's face has Dinka markings. This means that she and Salva are from the same tribe.
- Who is Nya and what does she do every day?
Nya is a girl living in Southern Sudan in 2008 who must walk a long way to get water for her family each day.
- Why does Nya's mother want Nya to take Akeer with her to gather water?
Nya's mother wants Akeer to learn how to gather water even though she is young.



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Analysis:

- At one point, rebel soldiers divide Salva’s group of villagers into two groups: women and children, and older boys and men. Why does Salva have trouble deciding which group he belongs in?
Salva knows that he is young enough to still be a child, but he sees boys only a few years older than himself joining the men’s group. Salva wants to make his family proud by acting like a man, just as his father has always told him. He tries to join the group for older boys and men to show that he is brave and strong.
- What is similar about Nya taking Akeer to the lake and the Dinka group allowing Salva to walk with them? Use evidence from text to support your answer.
Both Nya and the Dinka group worry about the younger children slowing them down. Nya thinks to herself that “Akeer, who was only five years old, was too small and walked too slowly.” The Dinka group worries that because Salva is a child, he will slow them down and not be able to contribute. One person calls him “another mouth to feed,” and another adds that “he is too young to do any real work.”
- “The days became a never-ending walk. Salva’s feet kept time with the thoughts in his head, the same words over and over: *Where is my family? Where is my family?*” Explain what the author means when she says “Salva’s feet kept time with the thoughts in his head.”
Salva’s feet are constantly moving, and he keeps having the same thoughts while he walks. The author says that “Salva’s feet kept time with the thoughts in his head” to show how repetitive and predictable both his thoughts and his movements are.

Personal:

- Salva is abandoned by the people from his village because he is a child. “*I would not have been any trouble—I would not have complained!*” he thinks. Have you ever felt like Salva in this situation? Tell about a time when you were frustrated because you felt like others did not understand you or saw you differently than you see yourself.
Student answers will vary.



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Sample answers

Chapters 5 – 8

Comprehension:

- Why does Nya like living at the lake camp?
Nya does not have to make two daily trips to get water, because there is water at the camp.
- While they are at the lake camp, why is Nya's mother afraid when her husband and son go hunting?
Nya's mother is afraid that her son and husband, who are part of the Nuer tribe, could be injured or killed by members of the rival Dinka tribe.
- Why does Akeer get sick, and why does it worry Nya?
Akeer gets sick because she drinks water that is not clean. Nya is worried because, although most adults and older children who get sick from the water are able to recover, the sickness can cause older people and small children to get so sick that they starve to death.
- What does the doctor recommend to Nya's family, and how does Nya's mother respond?
The doctor says that Nya's family should boil their water for a count of 200 before drinking it to avoid getting sick like Akeer. Although Nya's mother nods her understanding, this advice worries her because they get so little water from the holes in the lakebed that boiling it would cause it all to evaporate before they could drink it.
- Who is Marial and what is his relationship to Salva? What happens to him?
Marial is a boy about the same age as Salva. They are walking in the same group and become friends. One night when the group is sleeping in the Atuot lands, Marial is taken by a lion.
- Why do Salva and the other Dinka need to make the boats with reeds?
Salva and the other Dinka need to make boats in order to cross the Nile River.
- Why is Salva amazed when he first arrives at the island community of Nile fishermen? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
Salva is amazed because he realizes that "it was the first place in their weeks of walking that had an abundance of food." He is also amazed because the Nile fishermen are able to grow a lot of crops, even more than his home village, thinking "it was easy to grow food when there was a whole river to water the crops!"



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Sample answers

Chapters 5 – 8

Analysis:

- How does Salva feel when he first sees Uncle Jewiir? Provide an example from the text to support your answer.
Salva is so stunned to see his uncle that he can't speak or move. Instead, he can only open and close his lips "as if he were a fish."
- Marial sighs after telling Salva that he is looking for his family. The author says that Salva "heard that sigh all the way to his heart." Explain what this means.
It means that Salva understands how Marial feels. He also misses his family and is hoping to find them. When Marial sighs, it is more than just a sound to Salva. It makes him feel the same feelings as Marial.
- Both Salva and Nya feel a sense of uncertainty about the future. Describe some of the challenges they each face.
Salva needs to continuously travel through unfamiliar land without knowing where his family is or where he will end up. Nya needs to gather drinking water for her family but is not sure that they can safely drink it. She and her family also struggle when they need to decide whether to take Akeer to the doctor or let her heal on her own.

Personal:

- The sweet sugarcane reminds Salva of happier times when his father would bring him mangoes. Do certain foods trigger memories for you? Do you have any happy memories about specific foods with your family? Share a memory of a certain food and what it makes you think of when you eat it.
Student answers will vary.