



A LONG WALK TO WATER: PRE-READING DISCUSSION PROMPTS

The prompts below focus on three of the major elements of *A Long Walk to Water*—refugees, Sudan’s second civil war, and a lack of access to clean water. Share the background information and discuss each prompt before reading the novel. **Sample answers**



Part 1: What it means to be a refugee

Refugees are people who are forced to flee their home country in order to escape war, famine, or some other life-threatening situation. These people seek refuge, or safety, in another country because their home country is no longer safe for them.

- What do you think might be difficult about being a refugee?
Students may suggest the hardships of meeting physical needs—food, water, shelter, clothing. Students may also mention the psychological and emotional hardships—fear, sense of danger, being separated from family, friends, and home, being in a foreign place, not speaking the language, never knowing if or when you can return home.
- If you had to flee your home and you could only bring items that you could easily carry, what would you bring?
Student answers will vary. Possibilities include tools for survival, comfort objects, prized possessions or items of monetary value, food or water.

Part 2: The impact of civil war

Salva’s story takes place in Sudan in 1985. Sudan is a large country in northeastern Africa. From 1983–2005, Sudan was involved in a civil war between military forces in the North and the Sudan People’s Liberation Army in the South. This war lasted over 20 years and caused a great deal of damage.

- How is a civil war within a country different from a war between two countries?
In a civil war, people within the country are fighting each other. This typically means that the country’s government is unstable, and everyone in the country is affected. A war between two countries usually means the two different governments are more stable but fighting across borders. It might be possible for some people in each country to not be as affected by the war.
- How do you think a long-lasting civil war might affect a country?
It destabilizes the government and the economy and creates major rifts in the society and among the citizens. A long-lasting civil war makes it harder for a country to truly unite again.



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Part 3: Access to water

Over 600 million people in the world do not have access to running water. Many of these people have to walk a long way to get water to drink and to use for cooking and bathing. Even then, many times the water is dirty or contaminated and can make people sick.

- In the novel, Nya, an eleven-year-old girl, walks about eight hours every day to get water for her family. How do you think this affects Nya?
Physically, she is likely very hungry and tired from all the walking she does. She probably doesn't have much time for anything else, like school or playing with friends. Her family probably depends on her for this chore because water is so important and necessary.
- Explain how your daily life would be different if you had to spend eight hours a day getting water for your family.
Student answers will vary. Possible answers include a lack of time for other activities, physical effects, and psychological effects.