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# WOW REVIEW

READING ACROSS CULTURES  
VOLUME IV, ISSUE 2

Winter 2011  
Forced Journeys

Worlds  
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WOW Review: Volume IV, Issue 2  
Winter 2011  
Forced Journeys

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## Introduction and Editor's

Frequently used as a metaphor for life's pathways, a journey may be defined as physical or psychological journeys, journeys of discovery, growth, or change in the natural world or as journeys in a socio-cultural context. While some journeys are approached with great anticipation, our focus in this particular issue of *WOW Review* is on "Forced Journeys." This kind of journey does not always indicate a negative outcome although it does reflect a challenge that requires time, strength, and a critical stance from its participants. The reviews in this issue cut across a variety of contexts within which the characters are forced along pathways, physically and mentally, as the result of political, social, cultural, and ideological movements or change.

Physical journeys, often imposed by political conflict and struggles for power, have forced people from their homes such as in *Between Shades of Grey* that tells of the 1939 forced journey of Lithuanians to Siberia by Russia—a WWII story not often known. *A Half Spoon of Rice, A Survival Story of the Cambodian Genocide*, relates in picture book format yet another political event in which people were forced from their homes to labor in fields. *A Long Walk to Water* and *A Hare in the Elephant's Trunk* share the context of the Sudanese brutal civil war that displaced and separated families and sent thousands of young boys, the Lost Boys of Sudan, on a journey for survival that lasted several years. Such political conflicts can also force individuals on journeys of fear and racism, such as in *Child of Dandelions*, the story of two Ugandan girls who find they are on opposite sides politically and ethnically when Idi Amin takes political control. *The Island* depicts the fear and racism that accompanies such journeys within the other books reviewed in this issue. This story is told as a fable that reveals the barriers created by fear and racism.

*From North to South* relates the all-to-familiar journey for many in the United States—the journey across the Mexican/US border. In this story a journey is forced on the mother of a family by authorities when she cannot produce her immigration papers. The focus of this picture book is the journey across the border by the children and family to the place where she is being held. Physically forced away from their homes to schools that mentally impose ideologies and life styles on Native children, *Fatty Legs: A True Story* and *A Stranger at Home: A True Story* relate the life experiences of one young Arctic Indigenous child whose life is forever changed in the boarding school years of her life. Not all children departing from their homes do so because of injustice. Written in the voice of a young girl, *I Know Here* is based on the depth of the loss she is experiencing due to a family move. Her "forced journey" will resonate with readers who have also had to move and leave familiar places.

Forced journeys can be the result of ideologies and expectations imposed on all within a group. In some situations, the powerful efforts to suppress individuality are more than an individual can take, such as in *I Am Thomas* where a teen, amidst the voices of those who cannot accept him for who he is, is forced to embark on a physical journey to escape the voices that have created tension in his life. At times, the forced journeys are one's own life choices, decisions that require one to undertake new ways of thinking and expectations for a new role. In *Five Flavors of Dumb*, the journey of a group of young people who have formed a band, embark on their journey for success led by a deaf girl.

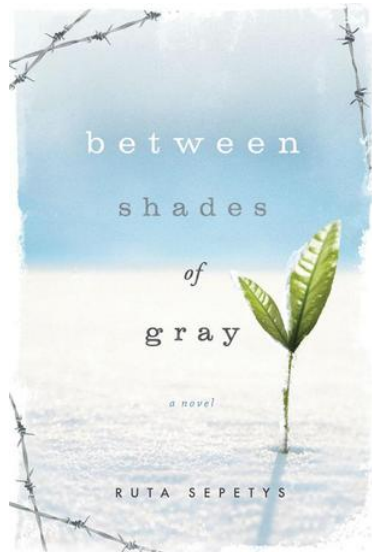
This issue of *WOW Review* is a reminder of the many varied forced journeys in our global society that are evidence of the strength and resiliency of young people whose challenges will resonate with those who read these books. These titles offer many insights and potential discussions that focus on social justice throughout the globe and on the role of culture and ideologies in social contexts at many levels. They also leave readers contemplating the social responsibility of compassion and support for those whose forced journeys have thrust them into our communities and lives. Such awareness for learners of all ages is critical at a time where refugees daily cross borders, people of all ages seek acceptance of their beliefs and individuality, and children are situated in a mobile society where change brings about new journeys.

Janelle Mathis, University of North Texas

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**Between Shades of Gray**

Written by Ruta Sepetys

Philomel, 2011, 344 pp.

ISBN: 10-0399254129

*The signs were there... but I refused to acknowledge the signs. Only later did I realize that Mother and Father intended we escape. We did not escape. We were taken. (p. 3)*

In 1939, the Russians invaded Lithuania and relocated thousands of Lithuanians on a forced journey to Siberia. *Between Shades of Gray* brings to life this account of history largely unknown by the world. Through the moving account of fifteen-year-old Lina, her mother, and her younger brother, readers are snatched from their homes still in their pajamas, shuffled into cattle cars packed so tightly that it is difficult to breathe, and count the bodies thrown from the train each morning as they move further and further from their homes. Readers hope with Lina that her drawings will make their way to her father who is in a different prison and hold their breath as Lina falls in love with another one of the young “criminals” in their prison camp. A coming of age story under the most extreme circumstances, *Between Shades of Gray* will keep readers enthralled and deeply engaged until the very end of the book.

*Between Shades of Gray* is another story and perspective of the Holocaust, World War II, and its atrocities. What keeps Lina from giving up are her drawings, her family, and her young hopeful spirit. Themes about the importance of identity (both personal and cultural), the strength of family, and the horrors of political oppression and genocide are woven into the story. The story widens readers’ understandings of the Holocaust and the struggle that encompassed all of Europe during the late 1930s through the end of World War II.

This is a great text to be combined with other books in a unit on war or a unit on the power of love and family that transcends unbelievable cruelty. It could also be an example of how the arts can keep the spirit alive even under the direst of circumstances. If a unit on war, this could be used in a text set on World War II or the Holocaust with books such as *Black Radishes* (Susan Meyer, 2010), *Once* (Morris Gleitzman, 2010), and *Traitor* (Gudrun Pausewang, 2010), all of which show young people who question the war and their circumstances, but who also accomplish extraordinary things in spite of the restrictions placed on them. In a unit on how art, music, and writing can overcome the more extreme circumstances, this text could be used with *The Last Book in the Universe* (Rodman Philbrick, 2000), *The Book Thief* (Marcus Zusak, 2007), *You Hear Me?* (Betsy Franco, 2001), and *Out of the Dust* (Karen Hesse, 1997).

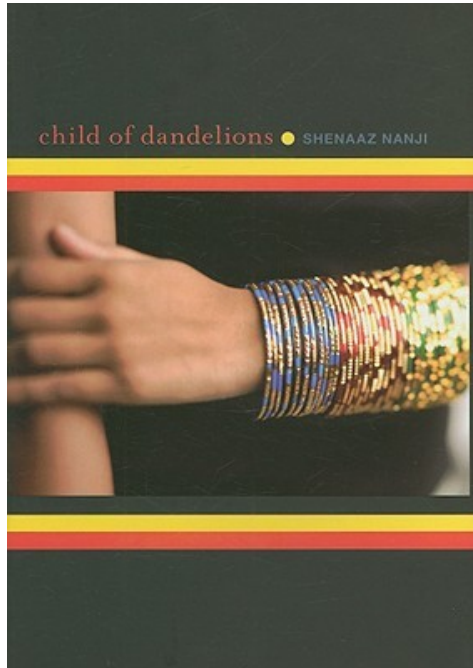
Author Ruta Sepetys based the story on her family's history, drawing from accounts they shared as she was growing up. She also did research in Lithuania. After WWII her family immigrated to the United States, where Ruta was born and raised. More information about the book and the author can be found at [www.rutasepetys.com](http://www.rutasepetys.com) and [www.betweenshadesofgray.com](http://www.betweenshadesofgray.com).

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### **Child of Dandelions**

Written by Shenaaz Nanji  
Boyd's Mill Press, 2008, p. 214  
ISBN: 978-1932425934

*Safely home in the comfort of the sitting room, Sabine heard on the radio that President Idi Amin had had a dream. In the dream God told him to expel all foreign Indians from Uganda. (p. 10)*

Fifteen-year-olds Sabine and Zena are best of friends. Together since childhood, the two Uganda-born girls played together as children and now confide in each other as teens. Their circumstances, however, are very different. Sabine is the daughter of a wealthy Indian

businessman while Zena is the daughter of one of the men who work the farm for Sabine's father. When Idi Amin takes power in 1972, their friendship is tested as they find they are on different sides of the political and ethnic lines drawn by "Dada Amin." While Sabine's family is Ugandan by birth, they are ethnically Indian, and in jeopardy as those who are implementing the law of expelling foreign-born Indians do not notice or care about the difference. It is not until her uncle disappears, however, that Sabine and her parents believe they may actually be in grave danger and their forced journey begins. Based on actual events, *Child of Dandelions* is an excellent text for middle school readers to gain insight into the turmoil and terror of Uganda's struggles under Amin's leadership.

The book presents the growing tension of Idi Amin's political policies and its resulting division of people by showing the dissolution of Sabine's and Zena's friendship. Zena becomes more enamored with the President and his policies and Sabine becomes their target, which parallels the division of people across socioeconomic and racial lines within the country. The novel accurately portrays the political turmoil just prior to the genocide and terror that occurred shortly after the expulsion period of the novel. At the same time, the novel gives younger readers the distance they may need to accommodate the reality that political will or change can often be a violent pendulum swing rather than a gradual readjustment to the status quo. The author's note at the end gives information about the history of the Ugandan Indians prior to their expulsion from Uganda, and would make a great introduction to the novel and to a study on the time period in Uganda or to the topic of human and civil rights.

For middle school students, *Child of Dandelions* would make a great companion to texts such as *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (Ishmael Beah, 2008) and *Zlata's Diary* (Zlata Filipovic, Christina Pribichevich-Zoric, & Janine Giovanni, 2006) to address themes about political oppression and genocide. If studying civil and human rights, additional texts could

include *A Tugging String: Growing Up During the Civil Rights Era* (David Greenburg, 2008); *Sold* (Patricia McCormack, 2006), and *Iqbal* (Francesco D'Adamo, 2005). While these texts focus on individuals fighting for their human rights, *Child of Dandelions* would present readers with the issues about human rights based on ethnicity.

Shenaaz Nadji was born in Mombasa, an island off the African coast and as a child visited relatives in Uganda. Her visits stopped once her relatives were expelled from Uganda in 1972. Currently living in Canada, Nadji received her MFA at Vermont College and is a writer of other children's and young adult books. Her website is <http://www.snanji.com/>, where more information about her books and life can be found.

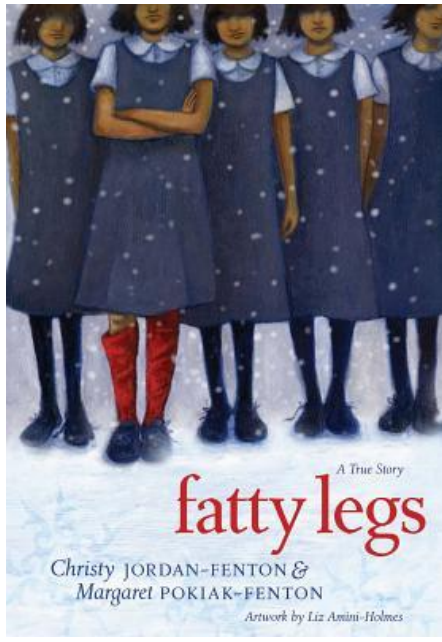
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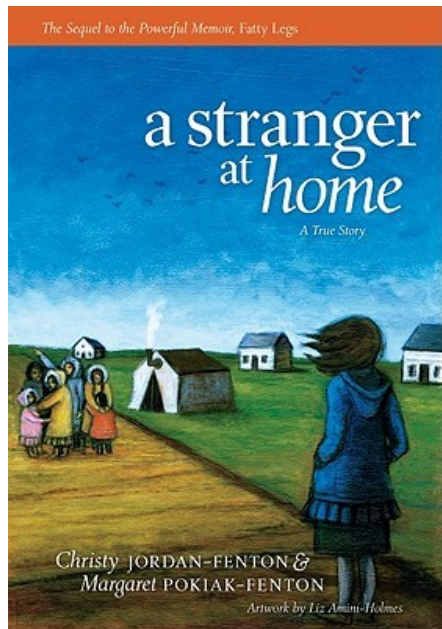
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**Fatty Legs: A True Story**

Written by Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton  
Illustrated by Liz Amini-Holmes  
Annick Press, 2010, 112 pp.  
ISBN: 978-1554512461



**A Stranger At Home: A True Story**

Written by Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton  
Illustrated by Liz Amini-Holmes  
Annick Press, 2011, 124 pp.  
ISBN: 978-1554513611

Beginning with *Fatty Legs: A True Story*, these two books comprise the story of young Margaret Pokiak growing up in the high Arctic during the early twentieth century. At eight she wants to go to school and learn how to read in English. The problem is that missionary Christians run the only school teaching English. The nuns look and act differently from most of Arctic nomads and the school is far from where they live. Despite the long trip, the missionaries come looking for the children and force them to attend their school. Margaret has an older sister who has been to this school but her sister's stories of the terrors and pressures of

the school are ignored by Margaret and she convinces her father to send her there.

Margaret soon learns that her free spirit and love for learning are challenged at every turn in her new life. Her encounters with a teacher known as the Raven, a black-cloaked nun with a hooked nose and bony fingers that resemble claws, immediately puts Raven on the defensive. The nun, in turn, immediately dislikes the strong-willed Margaret. Raven humiliates her at every turn and finds insignificant reasons to poke fun at Margaret. Raven gives her red stockings when she has a perfectly fine pair of grays (a school color), making Margaret the laughingstock of the entire school, and she burns the stockings. Thus, the battle of wills continues. Sister MacQuillan is the opposite of Raven and steps in when life is unbearable for Margaret. There is no learning to read at the beginning of the school year, instead the students are taught to clean themselves and their

surroundings. They are forced to work in the fields and throw away buckets of refuse. These tasks are new and distasteful to the students from the Arctic, but they have to do it anyways because their families are far away. The nuns also intercept the letters that students write home to ensure that nothing negative about the school is sent home. Margaret and others are prisoners in the school and miss their free lifestyle. Due to an especially strong winter, the students cannot visit their families at the end of the year and are forced to endure another year within the suffocating school walls. Margaret vows never to come back once she goes home.

*A Stranger At Home: A True Story* is a sequel and continues the childhood memories of Margaret Pokiak. This story begins at the end of the two grueling years when Margaret was forced to stay at the boarding school and not able to see her family. She endures all kinds of humiliation at the hands of the nuns but learns a lot more than reading in English. At ten she finally travels to be reunited with her family in the Arctic; she can hardly contain her anticipation. She finds that two years have altered her beyond recognition, and she has forgotten the things that were second nature to her including her own language.

As she comes ashore, Margaret spots her family, but her mother refuses to recognize her and repeats that Margaret is, "Not my girl." It is at this point that she realizes how much she has changed not only outwardly but also psychologically. She resides in a "third space" marked as an outsider by her own people. She has forgotten not only her language but also the stories of her people and her ancestors. She can't even stomach the food her mother prepares which she used to love and dreamed of when she was a prisoner in the boarding school.

As she is so different from her former self, she starts referring to herself as two separate people: Olemaun her real name as her older self and Margaret as her new self with new ways. "I said grace silently in my head six times, once for each of them [her family members] and once for Olemaun, because Margaret knew about kneeling and bowing and praying, but Olemaun did not" (p. 43). Margaret tries to force her newly learned mandatory religion (Christianity) on her family because she wants to protect them from Hell. When she insists on reading the Bible and praying before eating, her father reacts angrily and says, "I have read the Bible...just stories. That's all I found in it, so you can leave that God business at the school" (p. 43). She does not seem to be able to move away from that influence. Other people from her tribe stay away from her for fear she will adversely influence their children with her foreign ways and religion. Her friends are not allowed to be with her. Her experiences of ostracism from her own people are so great that she feels one with a "large, dark-skinned man" (p. 47) who comes to sell pellets and is referred to as the Devil "Du-bil-ak" because of his physical persona.

After many emotional, psychological, and physical struggles she finally settles into her old life and relearns a lot that she has forgotten, especially her language. Her father is a gentle presence who guides her through this unlearning and relearning process. Her mother later accepts her differences and supports her. Her interactions with her younger siblings and family are carefully developed, but there is no mention of her older sister whose influence made her want to attend the school in the first place.

In the sequel, Margaret once again needs to go back to the abhorred school as it the only choice for education for her younger siblings and she is the one who can protect them as they are now being forced to attend by the nuns. The author's note explains that Margaret did go to the school and provided the necessary scaffolding to her sisters so that they did not forget their language, stories and ways.

The author, Margaret, is the real protagonist of the novels and it is her life events that she and Christy, her daughter-in-law, use to inform the writing of these books. Christy lives in British Columbia. The first book is spontaneous and the truth of the story weaves together with the storytelling but the writing is not well developed. The second novel is written better than the first one and keeps the audience captivated. There are actual photographs from 'Olemaun's Scrapbook' that lend authenticity to the anecdotes and stories. There are photographs added as sidebars within the actual narratives that explain a term or direct the reader to the photographs at the end of the books. The author's notes lend clarity and credibility to both narratives. The art by Liz Amini-Holmes, is beautiful with emphasis on deep vibrant colors. The expressions of the characters are captured well. Even though the illustrator is from San Francisco she seems to cross the cultural boundaries on wings of imagination by evoking an authentic cultural atmosphere and facial features. Having lived in Catholic convent boarding school when I was growing up in Pakistan, I saw many similarities with the incidents mentioned in this story specifically the letter writing and censorship and differences in treatment between Christians and Muslims. As Muslim girls, we were made to scrub church floors and undertake other menial jobs for nuns and the Christian girls while our Christian counterparts were protected and favored.

This story is one of many about forced journeys and 'education' by missionary Christians within the regions that the Western nations colonized and occupied. It was especially difficult for indigenous peoples from regions settled by western societies, such as Australia and the United States. First Nation people and American Indians have many books capturing these events with similar thematic threads, such as: *The Indian School* (Gloria Whelan, 1996), *Indian School: Teaching the White Man's Way* (Michael L. Cooper, 1999), and *Boarding School Seasons American 1900-1940* (Brenda J. Child, 1998).

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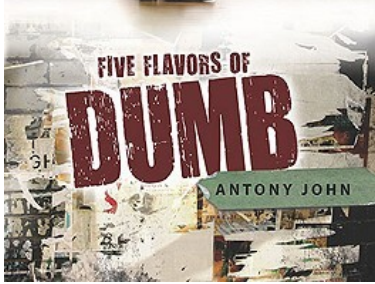


### **Five Flavors of Dumb**

Written by Anthony John

Dial Books, 2010, 338 pp.

ISBN: 978-0803734333



After winning a local Battle of the Bands competition, Dumb becomes their high school's most popular student rock band—without a manager. Piper is definitely not a rock band's first choice for manager; her extracurricular activities include chess club and she is profoundly hearing impaired. An extraordinary moment of boldness, however, pushes her to ask for the job and to promise a paying gig within a month's time in exchange for her share of the profits. Piper sees this managerial role as a way to replenish the college fund that her parents have recently spent to pay for cochlear implants for her baby sister. The novel follows this misfit band on its journey as it grows from its three

founding members— “one egomaniacal pretty boy, one silent rocker, and one angry girl”— to include “one talentless piece of eye candy and one nerd-boy drummer” (John, n.p.). With each recording session, radio interview, and live performance, the reader discovers the true depth of each character, which goes beyond their initial tag lines. Additionally, parallel attention is given to Piper's hearing family; the strain of her parents' decision to treat her sister with cochlear implants adds to the greater story. Finally, at the heart of the novel is rock and roll; John, with a strong background in music, writes the novel with a reverence for popular music— particularly the work of Jimi Hendrix and Kurt Cobain.

Books can provide students with a chance to “go beyond a tourist perspective of gaining surface-level information about another culture” (Short, Evans, & Hildebrand, 2011, p. 34). John does this by helping us understand Piper's membership in Deaf Culture. Her abilities are seen as assets: lip reading allows her access to private conversations and, as a shrewd manager, she uses sign language to obscure her intentions from a crooked promoter. Furthermore, this glimpse into her life shows the many ways Piper communicates with family members, friends, and teachers (e.g., ASL, speaking, Instant Messaging on the computer, and texting).

This novel has been honored by two major awards: the International Reading Association deemed it a Notable Book for a Global Society (NBGS) and it won the Schneider Family Book Award from ALA for the young adult category. Both of these designations reflect the high degree of cultural authenticity in the book. During his speech at the Schneider Disability Forum, John spoke of the importance of this award to writing and publishing books about people with disabilities: “It gives teens a voice who for so many years had no voice in literature. But also, just importantly it gives all readers the opportunity to read about characters that had previously not existed in children's literature” (quoted by Sullivan, 2011).

Likewise, Dr. Katherine Schneider, founder of the award, stated that the winners are “stories about people and the people with disabilities in them are not super heroes, they are just people. I think it helps kids without disabilities to understand what life is like with a disability. And the more they

understand the less they'll avoid their classmate who has a disability" (as quoted by Sullivan, 2011). To make his portrayal of Piper authentic, John shared in his acknowledgements section that he sat in on an ASL class, spoke with a professional at the St. Louis Children's Hospital Department of Audiology for a hearing aid tutorial, and even contacted the financial aid office of Gallaudet University (Piper's school of choice).

*Five Flavors of Dumb* would be appropriate for independent reading at a ninth grade level, but I could see it being well-received as a read aloud in the middle grades (6-8). Caldecott winner, Brian Selznick's (2011) new book, *Wonderstruck A Novel in Words and Pictures*, also features a protagonist who is deaf. Because of its setting in the Pacific Northwest, and its emphasis on rock, this novel could be paired with Randy Powell's (2003) *Tribute to Another Dead Rock Star* and Blake Nelson's (2004) *Rock Star Superstar*.

## References

<http://antonyjohn.net/>

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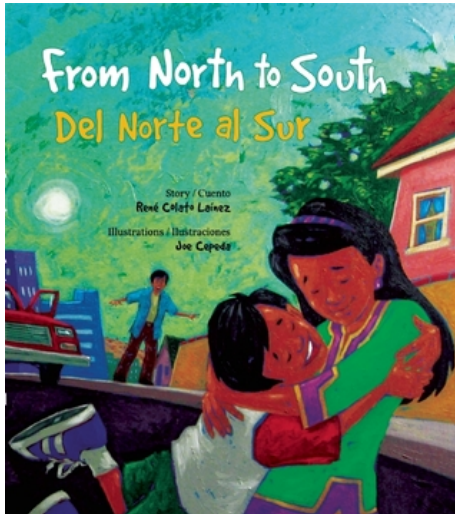
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**From North to South**

Written by René Colato Laínez

Illustrated by Joe Cepeda

Children's Book Press, 2010, N.P.

ISBN: 978-0892392315

Young José excitedly hurries Papá to begin their trip from San Diego to Tijuana, Mexico where they will visit Mamá for the first time and bring her clothes and items she needs from home. Two weeks prior Mamá was deported when she could not produce her immigration papers while working in a factory. José and Papá head across the border to spend the day with Mamá at Centro Madre Assunta where she is staying. They meet her friends, some of

whom are working to earn the money they need to travel north and others who are children separated from their parents. Mamá takes everyone to the garden where they plant seeds and José has the idea of planting seeds in cans that the children can give to their parents. After decorating the cans, the children plant their seeds. Throughout the day José shares with Mamá how much he misses her and wants her to come home. Mamá assures him her lawyer is getting the papers together. The story ends with Mamá telling José a story before he and Papá depart and José dreaming of Mamá coming home again.

This tender bilingual story reveals the pain and heartache many undocumented immigrants and their children experience when they are forced to journey back to their homeland. While these situations are complex, *From North to South* sensitively and effectively conveys how they affect children and families. The story ends with José waiting and hoping for Mamá's return, leaving readers to wonder what the future holds for José and his family and highlighting the waiting and hope experienced by many families in similar situations.

Author René Colato Laínez was born in El Salvador and came to the United States in 1985 with his father to escape a civil war. In an introductory note, Laínez explains that as an elementary school teacher, he has had students who were born in the U.S. but whose parents were not and were forced to leave. Through his students he knows firsthand how traumatic separations can be. El Centro Madre Assunta, where José's mother lives in the story, is a place in Tijuana that houses women and children who have been deported. Laínez donates a portion of the royalties from the book to El Centro Madre Assunta.

Cepeda's bright illustrations pick up on authentic Mexican culture and emphasize the love and hope the family has in the midst of a difficult situation. The faces of the characters are expressive, highlighting the emotions of the situation. The endpapers show a map of southern California and northern Mexico so readers can see where San Diego and Tijuana are located.

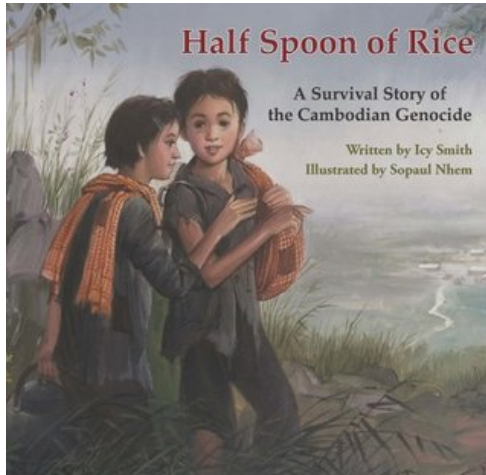
This book would work well in a text set that examines issues related to immigration. Other books in this text set might include: *Friends from the Other Side /Amigos del otro lado* (Gloria Anzaldúa, 1997), *My Diary From Here to There/Mi diario de aquí hasta allá* (Amada Irma Pérez, 2009), and *My Shoes and I* (René Colato Laínez, 2010).

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*Half Spoon of Rice, A Survival Story of the Cambodian Genocide*

Written by Icy Smith

Illustrated by Sopaul Nhem

East West Discovery Press, 2010, N. P.

ISBN: 978-0982167588

*I feel like I can't go any further. But when we approach what looks like a dead body, I find new strength to keep moving.*

Forced journeys are often found in history when political groups seeking control work to create a powerless, often classless, society. Such is the case in Nat's story that narrates the Cambodian genocide in the 1970's. One-fourth of the country's population died of torture, execution or starvation as the Khmer Rouge army drove people from their homes to work in rice fields. Separated from his family when they reach the fields, Nat meets a young girl, Malis, as they are foraging in the woods for survival. Walking over dead bodies to avoid land mines and eating the legs off frogs, the two young prisoners reflect the violence and harshness of this episode of Cambodian history. Not only is their forced journey to the labor fields a brutal experience, but when the Vietnamese Liberation Army frees them, another treacherous journey ensues as Nat and Malis try to find their families after years of hard work. Both the child's first hand, realistic perspective and the impressionistic oil paintings provide a haunting story that is important for readers of all ages but will require a context for younger readers. Sources list the picture book as for grades 4 – 8.

Based on true stories told by children who survived the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime, the historical accuracy of *Half Spoon of Rice*, according to its publishers, is endorsed by the Documentation Center of Cambodia. A lengthy author's note reveals more about this horrific event. Icy Smith is the author of other books recognized by significant awards that speak to their authenticity. *The Lonely Queue: The Forgotten History of the Courageous Chinese Americans in Los Angeles* (2001) received the Clarion Award for best nonfiction and *Mei Ling in China City* (2008) received the Chinese American Library Association Best Children's Book Award among others. Attesting as well to the authenticity of the visual portrayal of Cambodian history in this book, Sopaul Nhem's work has earned international awards from the University of Cambodia and the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts. He studied modern art at the Royal University of Fine Arts at Phnom Penh, Cambodia. His father was a survivor of the "killing fields" era according to a review by Jack Ong, Executive Director of the Dr. Haing S. Ngor Foundation (review provided by publisher).

*Half Spoon of Rice* can be shared as another insight to the Holocausts that have occurred internationally, such as in *The Cat with the Yellow Star: Coming of Age in Terezin* (Susan Goldman Rubin and Ela Weissberger, 2006) and *Memories of Survival* (Esther Nisenthal Krinitz, 2005). It also can be paired with books on other historical events that place children in dangerous situations where they are separated from families, such as *Brothers in Hope, The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan* (Mary Williams, 2005) or *Henry's Freedom Box* (Ellen Levine, 2007).

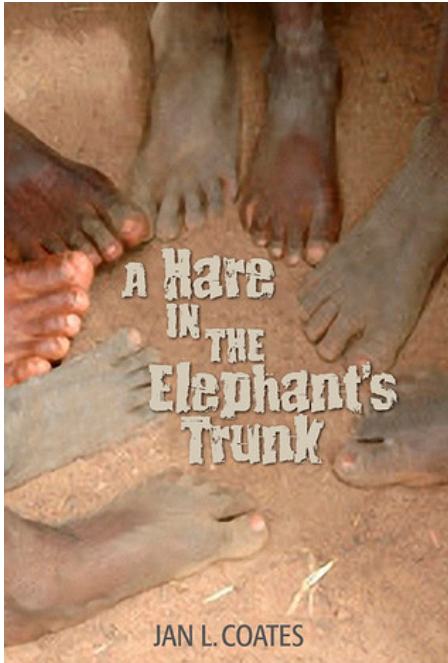


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### **A Hare in the Elephant's Trunk**

Written by Jan L. Coates

Red Deer Press, 2010, 291 pp.

ISBN: 978-08899954519

*It was a very bad sign when boys stopped talking. They were often the same boys who gave up, too hungry, too thirsty, and too tired even for one more step. They just sat down and quietly waited to die. (p.80)*

Such is the world for seven-year-old Jacob Deng who embarks on a remarkable forced journey spanning several years and miles of evading death in its many forms. *A Hare in the Elephant's Trunk* tells the true story of Jacob, a Lost Boy of Sudan, who was forced to roam the country in search of a place to call home that offers

freedom from fear and death. Thousands of Lost Boys are fleeing the brutal civil war that has locked the country in a vice of terror, displacement, and separation from families. Coates' lyrical imagery woven throughout the book describes the war as "spreading across Southern Sudan like a hungry grass fire" (p.19). It consumes livelihoods and lives in its path and leaves survivors struggling to make sense of it all as they seek to rebuild their world without the support of family, shelter and security. Jacob flees his village with his older nephew when it is attacked. He does not know the fate of his mother and sisters. Almost immediately, he must cease to be a boy and begin to shoulder the responsibilities of someone much older.

Selected as a 2011 Outstanding International Book by the United States Board on Books for Young People (USBBY), *A Hare in the Elephant's Trunk* offers readers a unique look into the physical and mental journey of boys turned into men too soon. Readers will connect to the indomitable spirit and strength of Jacob and the other Lost Boys. Like many of the Lost Boys, Jacob lived in a communal home in southern Sudan steeped in tradition and family. Suddenly, violently, his world becomes surreal and unrecognizable as "great hungry gray monsters came growling into the village from the forest, eating up huts and people, their great trunks glowing red as they snorted out their exploding firebombs." (p. 36) Coates' ability to turn an armed and blood-soaked invasion into a beautifully haunting account of events as seen through the eyes of a child is indicative of the writing in this book. To a child bereft of any concept of guns or bombs, the tanks that roll into Jacob's village in the middle of night would be seen as a living breathing monster. These descriptions and others peppered throughout the book act as a salve for the mental wounds that the horrific events in Jacob's life create for the reader. We still feel the impact but are protected enough to be able to continue the story.

Jacob and his nephew join the Lost Boys in their forced journey on the way to the safety of Ethiopia. They endure day after day, step after step of merciless walking in a vague direction. In the midst of the maleness, Jacob misses his mother. All of the boys do. When they share stories of home, it is usually a memory of mother. When lions attack in the middle of the night, it is "Mama!" the boys

ineffectually cry out to save them. Jacob believes with all of his child naïveté, he will find his mother. A stone given to him by her shortly before the invasion buttresses this belief. She told him he should touch the stone to connect to her regardless of where she is. The stone serves as a reminder to Jacob of his mother’s fervent desire for him to pursue an education. This reminder becomes a personal schism as he wrestles making a choice between education and becoming a soldier to protect his country. It may seem that *A Hare in the Elephant’s Trunk* is rife with misery and suffering yet it is primarily a story about the power of perseverance and reward for resilience. The focus is on how Jacob copes and overcomes each setback, disappointment and random brush with death. In the face of overwhelming odds against his survival, Jacob retains the principles his mother has taught him and thrives.

Other relevant books to pair with this novel include *Year of No Rain* (Alice Mead, 2003), *The Lost Boys of Natinga* (Judy Walgren, 1998) and *Warchild* (Emmanuel Jal, 2009). Coats is a Nova Scotian author who has written over a dozen children’s books and received several awards and recognition for her work including the 2011 Publisher Book Award Silver medalist and the 2011 Skipping Stones Honor Award for this novel. She was inspired to write this story after meeting Jacob Deng who was a university student in Nova Scotia at the time he related his story. She says that the book “is a work of fiction inspired by his true story” (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/arts/story/2011/10/24/hare-in-the-elephants-trunk.html>). Interviews with Coats and Jacob Deng are included as an afterward and attest to the book’s cultural authenticity.

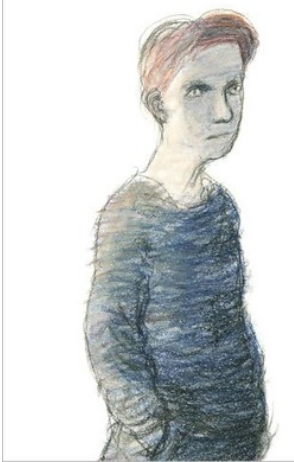
Breshaun-B. Joyner, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM

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**I AM THOMAS**  
Libby Gleeson & Armin Greder



**I Am Thomas**

Written by Libby Gleeson  
Illustrated by Armin Greder  
Allen & Unwin, 2011, N. P.  
ISBN: 978-1742373331

With minimal text and vexing images, *I am Thomas* begins as readers are introduced to Thomas through several pages of illustrations consisting of white background with scattered toys and items reminiscent of his childhood. These items are depicted in color with the simple words, “I am not the child I once was.” As the pages progress, we join Thomas on his life’s journey as he remembers the voices around him giving orders and saying “do as we say, think like us, be like us.” The images of the individuals—parents, teachers, religious leaders, and political leaders—are created in sketches of black and white and reflect their

disappointment, disdain, and anger at Thomas’s failure to conform to their standards and way of life. The black and white images indicate events of the past and also set the tone for the memories as perceived by Thomas that constitute the majority of this story. In some cases the faces in the illustrations that reflect the voices in his mind are almost grotesque, especially in pictures showing the religious figures or the political ones calling for young men to join the army or asking for votes. Thomas’s thoughts are printed in normal font size text while the angry words he is remembering are in large bold print. Occasionally, these words are repeated in gray creating an echo effect that one can imagine reflects what Thomas is replaying in his mind. Even as Thomas responds, saying he is not the child his brother is and not the student others are, he is met with words that imply he is headed for failure. Ultimately, he becomes more withdrawn.

The images on the white pages return to color as Thomas reappears on the page as a young man with the final text that says, “But Thomas would not.” And, the following pages tell the rest of the story in images as Thomas picks up a small yellow bus from among his toys and with a faraway look on his face invites readers to turn the page and watch Thomas boarding a bus with his backpack, ready to continue his life’s journey on his own.

One can only think of the despair of adolescents who never fit in and are consistently told to conform—how to be, how to act—by those surrounding them as they grow up. The message here is universal and yet as uniquely specific as those youth whose interests and resources are seldom tapped in school and in their communities because of their perceived failure to conform. The story serves as a message of courage that is often needed for individuals to resist oppression and pursue their paths and interests in life. Other books that carry this theme as well are *Jose, Born to Dance* (Susanna Reich, 2005) and *The Dreamer* (Pam Munoz Ryan, 2010).

Libby Gleeson and Armin Greder have collaborated on other books: *The Great Bear* (1999) and *An Ordinary Day* (2001). They won the Bologna Ragazzi Awarded in 2000 for *The Great Bear*. This was the first time an Australian book won this award. Libby Gleeson has published over 30

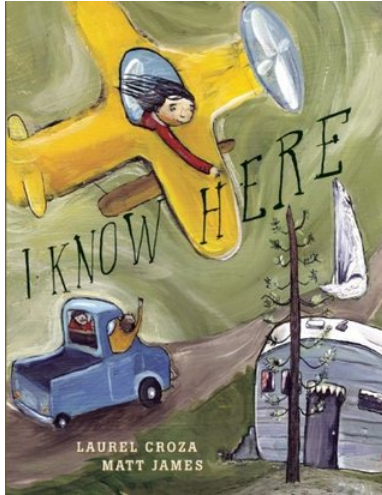
books for children and teens and has won the Children's Book Council for Australia award three times. Armin Greder migrated to Australia in 1971 from Switzerland and taught graphic design and illustration. He illustrated *The City* (2010) and *The Island* (2008), reviewed in this column, and has been nominated for numerous significant awards, including the Hans Christian Andersen Award. The awards bestowed on this author and illustrator attest to the high regard held for this international team and their ability to create a book with universal emotional appeal and significance.

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**I Know Here**

Written by Laurel Croza

Illustrated by Matt James

Groundwood Books, 2010, N.P.

ISBN: 978-0888999238

*This is where I live. I don't know Toronto. I know here.*

“Here” is northeastern Saskatchewan and the third grade girl narrating this story has just learned that her family is moving to Toronto. Her father’s job building a dam is almost completed and, while other members of her family are excited about moving, she is not. She knows “here,” the road that runs between the dam and her school, the forest behind her trailer home where she plays, the hill where she toboggans, the creek where her sister Kathie catches frogs, and the wolves, fox, moose, and other animals that live nearby. Toronto, on the other hand, is only a big red star on the map and a place she doesn’t know. Miss Hendrickson, her insightful teacher, suggests the children draw a picture of what they’ve seen, love about “here”, and want to remember and take with them to Toronto. The young girl plans what she will draw and then, after showing Miss Hendrickson, will fold, put in her pocket and take to Toronto. The story ends with a sense of hope for the future.

Written in the voice of the young girl, the depth of the loss she is sensing and experiencing is very real. Her forced journey will resonate with readers who have also had to leave the place they know and love. For readers who haven’t had to move, the story will help them appreciate the place they know all the more.

*I Know Here* is based on Laura Croza’s childhood experiences. Her father was an engineer who built roads, subways, and dams in Ontario, Quebec, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. By the time she was 14 years old, she had moved nine times. Croza (2011) stated, “I was four when I arrived and barely turned seven when I left. And the memories of that time became the nucleus, the heart, of *I Know Here*...I didn’t do what the little girl in the book does. I didn’t draw a picture of everything I knew and loved and wanted to remember and then fold it up and put it safe in my pocket to bring with me to Toronto. But I remembered.”

Matt James’s acrylic paint and India ink illustrations on panels reflect the setting of the story and, perhaps, the availability of art materials in her one room school. The art is very childlike, with large brushstrokes, and it draws on a rural North American primitive style. The illustrations reveal the world through the young girl’s eyes, including her fears. The endpapers show a map of Canada, from Saskatchewan to Toronto, including some native plants and animals.

*I Know Here* would work well with a text set on journeys that could include such other books as *Brothers in Hope* (Mary Williams, 2005), *Migrant* (Maxine Trottier, 2011), and *My Shoes and I*

(Rene Colato Lainez, 2010). It would also fit in a text set on sense of place with books, such as *Monsoon* (Uma Krishnaswami, 2003), *Recess at 20 Below* (Cindy Lou Aillaud, 2005), and *I Live in Tokyo* (Mari Takabayashi, 2001).

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### The Island

Written and Illustrated by Armin Greder  
Allen & Unwin, 2008, N.P.  
ISBN: 978-1741752663

Some forced journeys follow a pathway of fear and ignorance that leads to racism toward those viewed as “different.” This large format picture book engages readers in the haunting story of a man who is washed up on the beach of an island, provoking tremendous fear from the residents because “he wasn’t like them.” The villagers reluctantly allow him to stay but lock him up in a goat pen. His presence troubles the people and they project their prejudices and hatred upon him. A small sketch of children re-enacting a scene of hatred by their elders is particularly disturbing. Only one person, the fisherman, offers any compassion, arguing that the man is their

responsibility, even though “he is not one of us.” Eventually the hatred and fear grow into a mob and the villagers push him out into the sea on a burning raft. They also set fire to the fisherman’s boat, declaring they will never again eat fish from the sea that brought them this stranger. The final pages show the island surrounded by a great wall with watchtowers, barricaded so that the people will never expose themselves again to a stranger. The text is powerful and evocative with only a few words. Details such as the specific time and place and what makes the man “different” are left unsaid, leaving space for readers to bring their own contexts and situations into their interpretations of the book.

The compelling stark illustrations in charcoal and pastels establish a dark ominous tone to the book that works powerfully with the sparse text. The illustrations amplify the menacing mood of the book, showing a bleak landscape and large contorted bodies that ooze with revulsion and fear. The book is longer and wider than most picture books and the illustrations often fill the page, making them large, bold, and confronting. The expressions on the faces of people convey a strong sense of emotion, ranging from surprise and curiosity to fear, anger, and hatred. The stranger is always depicted as naked and vulnerable. The text and illustrations combine to show how and why racism takes over a community as people build barriers to exclude others in order to “protect” themselves.

First published in Germany in 2002 as *Die Insel*, this visually striking book can be read as a fable, reflecting a message that is timely given the many places in the world in which refugees face detention and discrimination and the ways in which those in power use fear and myths to control thought. Greder is from Switzerland and published the book first in Germany, perhaps as a commentary on the pogroms and ethnic cleansings of Europe. The dark illustrations are reminiscent of the charcoal artwork created by Jews in Nazi concentration camps during the Holocaust. Greder migrated to Australia in 1971, and so the book also could reflect a critique of the actions of the Australian government in imprisoning refugees in detention camps on islands off the coast of Australia as well as paying Indonesia to detain refugees before their boats reach Australian shores.



This picture book for older readers provokes discussion and discomfort for readers and would work well within explorations of prejudice and racism as well as inquiries into refugees and human rights. The Australian publisher, Allen & Unwin, provides a useful set of teachers' notes on their site, /<http://www.allenandunwin.com/default.aspx?page=94&book=9781741752663>. In addition, Lorraine Wilson, an educator from Melbourne, published a vignette of the ways in which she engaged students in drama and writing around this book as part of a unit on refugees (see <http://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/stories/storiesiii2/4/>).

Greder has written and illustrated other picture books with difficult emotions and themes, such as *The City* (2010), *I am Thomas* (2011), and *The Great Bear* (written by Libby Gleeson, 1999). He has received a number of international awards, such as the Bologna Ragazzi Award, and has been nominated for the Hans Christian Andersen Award. His illustrations reflect his European background with his use of charcoal. He has lived in Australia since 1971 and has been shortlisted for the CBCA Picture Book of the Year a number of times, including for this book. He worked as a graphic designer and taught design and illustration in an art institute. This book could be read alongside books about the Holocaust, such as *The Children We Remember* (C. B. Abells, 1983) and *Let the Celebrations Begin* (Margaret Wild, 1991), and books about racism, including picture books such as *Whitewash* (Ntozake Shange, 1998), *Freedom Summer* (Deborah Wiles, 2005) and *The Other Side* (Jacqueline Woodson, 2005), or novels such as *Witness* (Hesse, 2003), *The Goats* (Brock Cole, 1999), *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* (Gary Schmidt, 2006). Another possibility is a unit on refugees where it could be paired with *The Arrival* (Shaun Tan, 2006), *The Lost Thing* (Shaun Tan, 2000), *Refugees* (David Miller, 2004), *The Color Home* (Mary Hoffman, 2002), *The Long Road* (Luis Garay, 1997), and *My Freedom Trip* (Frances Park, 1998). Another possibility are books reflecting different types of refugee, detention, and concentration camps such as *My Secret Camera* (Frank Dabba Smith and Mendel Grossman, 2008), *Baseball Saved Us* (Ken Mochizuki, 1995), *Dia's Story Cloth* (Dia Cha, 1998) and *Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of the Sudan* (Mary Williams, 2005). Another powerful pairing is with the famous painting, "The Scream," by Edvard Munch.

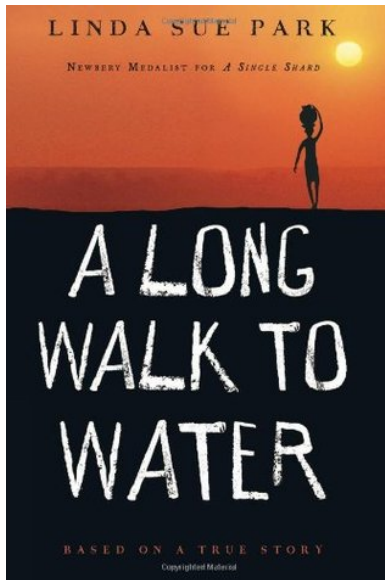
This picture book is evocative and disquieting, inviting readers into reflection and dialogue on the ways in which we create fear and hatred toward the unknown, the different, and the consequences of that hatred.

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### A Long Walk to Water

Written by Linda S. Park

Clarion, 2010, 128 pp.

ISBN: 978-0547251271

*I overcame all the difficult situations of my past because of hope and perseverance that I had. I would not have made it without these two things. (p. 117)*

With Post-Its, highlighter, and a Sharpie pen in hand, I “talk” to my books while reading. I usually finish the read having made a few personal responses, comments for unit and/or text set ideas, background research notes, and related sources. With the exception of

*Between Shades of Gray* by Ruta Sepetys (2011), I don’t think I have ever had such visceral responses and so many notes as with *A Long Walk to Water*, a novel based on the true story of Salva Dut, one of the Lost Boys of Sudan. To say this is a compelling read is an understatement. It is part of the grippingly horrifying story of the Second Sudanese Civil War, a story where thousands of young boys were forced to flee from their families and homes to avoid servitude as child soldiers and the mass genocide in Southern Sudan (see the U.S. 2002 Sudan Peace Act). Park weaves two voices in the telling of her novel. On the first page, we meet Nya in 2008 and Salva Dut in 1985. In alternating chapters, each tells their own story.

Nya is eleven years old and a member of the Nuer tribe. She is on her way to fetch water for her family. She must make this trek twice a day, every day. Her task takes all morning, then she has something to eat, and repeats the trek again, arriving home in late afternoon. Every year when the pond dries up, Nya’s village moves to an encampment near a lake. While the lake is more convenient for collecting water, the villagers only stay there during the dry season for fear of fights with the Dinka. “The Dinka and the Nuer were enemies—had been for hundreds of years” (p. 114). At the lake, it takes Nya 5 hours of digging through the mud to get a small amount of water. The old, young, and weak often suffer from drinking this lake water, including Nya’s younger sister, Akeer. At great cost, Nya and her mother take Akeer to a clinic where they are told about the parasites and bacteria in the water and the need to purify it by boiling—an impossibility. “If her mother tried to boil such a small amount, the pot would be dry long before they could count to two hundred” (p. 45). Several months later, after their return to the village, two visitors arrive asking about the water.

Salva is also eleven years old and a Dinka, but his story begins in 1985. He is daydreaming in class, when suddenly they hear the sound of gunfire. His teacher tells the boys, “Go quickly, all of you.... Into the bush. Do you hear me? Not home. Do not run home. They will be going into the villages. Stay away from the villages—run into the bush” (p. 6). This is Salva’s first-hand introduction to the war that had begun two years earlier. He walks thousands of miles with others to an Ethiopian refugee camp where he spends six years. In 1992, after the Ethiopian government collapses,

soldiers forcibly close the camp and drive the refugees into the Gila River—the border between Ethiopia and Sudan—swollen with rain water and filled with crocodiles. “The soldiers started shooting into the river; aiming their guns at the people who were trying to get across. *Why were they shooting at us?*” (p. 78). Their rescuers are now their enemies and they are forced back into southern Sudan and the ongoing war.

A year and a half later, walking with 1200 other boys, Salva arrives at the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya. After two years of barely surviving in a camp with 86,000 other young boys, he decides to leave for Ifo Refugee Camp further southwest. It takes him several months of walking and once there, he is befriended by an aid worker who teaches him how to read. Not long after, he is one of 3,000 chosen to immigrate to the United States and spends eleven years in Rochester, New York with his “new family.” During this time, he makes one brief trip to southern Sudan when he learns his father is alive and in a hospital. While visiting his father, he learns his mother, sisters, and one brother is alive; two of his brothers died in the war. Upon his return to the U.S., Salva begins to put a plan into action that will help his family and the southern Sudanese (see Water for South Sudan: <http://www.waterforsudan.org/>). His plan is to drill water wells in southern Sudan, and it is at this point, in 2009, where Aya’s and Salva’s stories merge. Salva is one of the two visitors asking about the water in Nya’s village. Salva and his crew drill a well and as Nya tastes the fresh, clear water, she realizes her life is forever changed.

In an Author’s Note, Park describes the backdrop for the events of this novel, giving a brief history of the Second Sudanese Civil War. She relates how she and her husband met Salva after learning about his Water for [South] Sudan project and explains that her husband “traveled to Sudan to see the wells firsthand” in 2008. Park is a Newbery winning author and is known for the research that precedes her work and that is evident in the authenticity of her narrative.

Other books that inform about the *Lost Boys* are *Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan* (2005, Mary Williams), *The Lost Boys of Sudan: An American Story of the Refugee Experience* (2005, Mark Bixler), and *One Day the Soldiers Came, Voices of Children in War* (2007, Charles London). Two documentaries that might serve as useful resources are: *A Long Walk to Water* by Linda Sue Park, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GkxkisRUmM> and *God Grew Tired of Us* directed by Christopher Dillon Quinn and Tommy Walker, 2006. Additionally, the powerful writings and art of some of the Lost Boys can be found at <http://www.chgs.umn.edu/museum/exhibitions/lostBoys/lostBoysCry.html>

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