The Good Braider by Terry Farish

Book Talk:

The Good Braider is the story of Viola, a young Sudanese woman who fights past horrific circumstances and huge obstacles to live in safety in the United States. The Good Braider is one of those books that can bring a reader closer to understanding a life very different from his or her own. Author Terry Farish wrote this book about a young female Sudanese refugee, based on her work recording oral histories of refugees and working with immigrants through the New Hampshire Humanities Council. Viola, the character Farish has created, is a shining star. She is bright and resilient despite the atrocities she has witnessed…and even experienced herself.

Farish does not shy away from including the dark and awful realities of warfare for women and children – abuse, intimidation, starvation, and rape – but she does so in language that is poetic and accessible to young readers, rather than graphic. And throughout these experiences, Viola proves to be a tremendous heroine. She is frightened and intimidated by the obstacles facing her, but she continues to be the backbone of her family as they escape Sudan.

And although the book recognizes that Viola has more opportunities for education in the US, it does not glorify American culture. Farish weaves in the cultural clash that immigrants experience and highlights the ways in which young refugees sometimes have to compromise their cultural values in order to fit in among their US peers.

The Good Braider is a beautiful narrative of a girl who has encountered a rollercoaster of life experiences. Although it is fictional, it is a powerful glimpse into what it may be like to be a refugee living in the United States.

[Book talk above is excerpts from a review]: Review: The Good Braider by Terry Farish

Posted on January 3, 2013 by Brianna from the following website:

http://slatebreakers.com/2013/01/03/review-the-good-braider-by-terry-farish/

Other fantastic web resources for this novel from the author include the following:


http://goodbraider.com/
This is the website created by Terry Farish with lots and lots of resources about the Sudan.
"The Good Braider" is a novel set in South Sudan and Portland, Maine. The story of a teen and her family's experience of flight from war in Juba, Sudan, travel to Cairo, and finally to Portland will help students and book club members to understand more about Sudan's long war, the experience of contemporary refugees, and the resilience of the human spirit. "The Good Braider" is a young adult novel that has received critical acclaim and named an SLJ Best Book of 2012. It has also been adopted by college classes and book clubs. The questions below were created by Cathy Eaton's Contemporary Fiction class at the New Hampshire Technical Institute and members of the Main Street Congregational Church book club in Amesbury, MA.


Discussion Questions about "The Good Braider"

1. Why is the novel called "The Good Braider"?
2. "All men in Sudan will want to marry you," Viola's mother tells her in Part I of the novel. "You are a girl from Juba." (p. 19) What do these lines tell you about Viola? How would you describe her relationship with her mother while they live in Sudan?
3. "The Good Braider" is written in free verse. How does the choice of this style affect you and your understanding of Viola's story?
4. Why are the chapters broken up like journal entries or tiny chapters? What do you think the author's intention is?
5. Elephants are mentioned frequently throughout the story. They are also used to divide the book into three parts. What is the significance of elephants to the story?
6. What does Viola mean when she says in Cairo that her hair is broken? (p. 81)
7. The poet Naomi Shihab Nye wrote about the main character, Viola: "You will never again encounter a refugee from anywhere without remembering Viola and her family." Do you see similarities across cultures and time periods in a refugee's journey to make a new country their home?
8. How do you interpret the mother's act of punishment when she and Viola live in Portland?
9. Do you see parallels between Viola's relationship with her mother and U.S. teens with their parents?
10. Why did the author write from Viola's point of view? Would it have worked if she had written from third person or from the mother's point of view?
Nonfiction Tie-Ins:

**Darfur : African genocide (#27939T0)**

by Xavier, John  
Hardcover  1st ed.  
64 p. : ill. (some col.), col. map ; 25 cm. $23.95

Title Details  
**Title:** Darfur : African genocide / John Xavier.  
**Publisher:** Rosen Pub., p2008, c2008  
**ISBN-13:** 978-1-40421-912-0  
**ISBN-10:** 1-40421-912-9  
**Dewey:** 962.404  
**Interest Level:** YA  
**Series:** In the news  
**Included in These Sets/Series:** In The News Set 2 (Rosen)  
**Subjects:** Sudan History.  
Darfur (Sudan) Ethnic relations.  
Genocide Sudan Darfur.  
Crimes against humanity Sudan Darfur Region.  
**Classifications:** Nonfiction  
**Notes:** Includes bibliographical references (p. 58-61) and index. Presents an overview of the crisis in Darfur and the systematic slaughter of the people by the Sudanese army and militia bands called the janjaweed; and examines the causes of the conflicts and efforts by the international community to bring the violence to an end.  
**From the Publisher:** Examines the humanitarian crisis in Darfur, including how the geography and history of the country have affected the crisis, and why Darfur matters to the rest of the world.

**Reviews & Awards**

Multicultural Review 12/01/07  
Wilson's Junior High School 01/09/10  
Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA) 02/01/08

**Fierce & true : plays for teen audiences (#0041JJ2)**

Paperback  xiii, 219 p. : ill. ; 23 cm. $17.95

Title: Fierce & true : plays for teen audiences / Children's Theatre Company ; Peter Brosius and Elissa Adams, editors.  
**Publisher:** University of Minnesota Press, p2010, c2010  
**ISBN-13:** 978-0-8166-7311-7  
**ISBN-10:** 0-8166-7311-X  
**Dewey:** 812  
**Interest Level:** YA  
**Subjects:** American drama.  
Teenagers Drama.  
**Classifications:** Nonfiction  
**Notes:** Anon(ymous) -- The lost boys of Sudan -- Five fingers of funk -- Prom. Contains four plays that were originally commissioned by the Children's Theatre Company and written to entertain and educate young people and their families.  
**From the Publisher:** Established in 1965, the Children's Theatre Company (CTC) of Minneapolis earned its reputation as the flagship theater for young people in this country by staging plays that both entertained and challenged children and their families. Around the age of twelve, however, young people tended to stop coming to CTC, perceiving that they had outgrown what the theater could offer them. In an effort to reach out to and engage these young people, the CTC began to commission and produce plays aimed at a twelve- to eighteen-year-old audience, focusing on the complexities, idiosyncrasies, and epic dilemmas in the lives of young people.

**Reviews & Awards**

School Library Journal 01/01/11  
Wilson's Senior High School 10/01/11  
Wilson's Junior High School 09/01/11
Genocide (#19872Y6)
by Winckelmann, Thom

Hardcover 64 p. : ill. (some col.), col. maps ; 24 cm.
$23.95

Title Details
Title: Genocide / by Thom Winckelmann.
Publisher: Erickson Press, p2009, c2009
ISBN-10: 1-60217-975-1
Dewey: 364.15
Interest Level: YA
Series: Man's inhumanities
Included in These Sets/Series: Man's Inhumanities

Subjects: Genocide.

Notes: Includes bibliographical references (p. 58-61) and index.; Introduction: understanding genocide -- Defining the problem -- The Armenian genocide -- The Holocaust -- The Cambodian genocide -- Global bystanders. Describes the meaning and history of genocide, acts of extreme genocide including the Nazi Holocaust of World War II, cases of genocide in the Sudan and in Rwanda, the Armenian genocide of 1915, and in Cambodia.

Accelerated Reader
ATOS Reading Level: 6.5
Interest Level: UG
Point Value: 1
Quiz: 126583EN

Reviews & Awards
Booklist 10/15/08
Library Media Connection 08/01/09

Lost boy, lost girl : escaping civil war in Sudan (#0458QB6)
by Dau, John Bul

Hardcover
159 p. : ill. (some col.), col. maps ; 22 cm.
$13.61

Title Details
Title: Lost boy, lost girl : escaping civil war in Sudan / by John Bul Dau and Martha Arual Akech, with Michael S. Sweeney and K.M. Kostyal.
Publisher: National Geographic, p2010, c2010
Dewey: 962.404

Subjects: Dau, John Bul.
Akech, Martha Arual.
Refugees.
Africans Biography.
Women Biography.
Sudan.

Classifications: Autobiography
Nonfiction

Interest Level: YA

Included in These Sets/Series: Children's Books Of The Year 2011 - Special Interests
JUVENILE NONFICTION / Biography & Autobiography / General
JUVENILE NONFICTION / History / Africa
JUVENILE NONFICTION / People & Places / Africa
JUVENILE NONFICTION / Social Science / Sociology
Notes: John Bul Dau and his wife, Martha, describe the hardships they experienced, including violence, famine, and war, while growing up in the Sudan and explain how they escaped the region to start a new life.

From the Publisher: In alternating chapters John Bul Dau and his wife Martha Arual Akech tell of their African Childhoods and show African life and values at their best, at the same time providing searing accounts of the hardship, famine, and war they and their people faced during civil war in Sudan. John Bul Dau grew up on a traditional cattle-centered farm in Duk county in southern Sudan. When Sudanese civil war brought northern soldiers to his village in a nighttime raid, John fled into the bush to save his life. He was one of thousands of lost boys who fled their homeland. He lived through hunger exhaustion, and violence, finally finding shelter in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya. And it was at the Kenyan refugee camp Kakuma where John met Martha. In 1989 Martha Arual Akech fled into the bush with her younger sister trying to escape violence in her Sudanese village. This was the start of a terrifying journey that tore her away from those she loved and eventually brought her to Kakuma where she spent nine years. Girls at the camp were being sold into marriage and were not allowed education provided to the boys. Martha eventually came to the United States where she adjusted to a new world and built a new life. Like the other books in the memoir series, this is a story of strength, survival, and an unbreakable spirit. John and Martha’s stories are a testament to human resilience and kindness, and a perfect story to educate and inspire young readers.

Accelerated Reader
- ATOS Reading Level: 5.6
- Interest Level: MG
- Point Value: 5
- Quiz: 138717EN

Lexile Measure: 900

Reviews & Awards
- Book Links 10/21/10
- Booklist 11/15/10
- Horn Book 05/01/11
- School Library Journal 11/01/10
- Wilson’s Junior High School 09/01/11
- Wilson’s Senior High School 10/01/11