

FATHER OF THE LOST BOYS

YUOT A. ALAAK

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YEAR LEVEL: Years 4–8

ABOUT THE BOOK

During the Second Sudanese Civil War, thousands of boys were displaced or orphaned. In 1989, Mecak Ajang Alaak led the Lost Boys on a four-year journey from Ethiopia to Kenya to protect them from becoming child soldiers. This is the abridged account of that extraordinary true story.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Yuot A. Alaak is an emerging Western Australian writer whose short story 'The Lost Girl of Pajomba' was anthologised by Margaret River Press in *Ways of Being Here*. He has appeared twice at Perth Festival Writers Weekend and his memoir *Father of the Lost Boys* was shortlisted for the 2018 City of Fremantle Hungerford Award and published by Fremantle Press in 2020. It was subsequently shortlisted for the Western Australian Premier's Book Awards (2020) and the NSW Premier's Literary Awards (2021).

Yuot is a former child refugee from South Sudan and was part of the globally known 'Lost Boys of Sudan'. He currently lives in Perth with his family where he works as a mining professional, having attained degrees in geosciences and engineering. When not writing or mining, Yuot loves to relax with family and friends over a barbecue.

THEMES

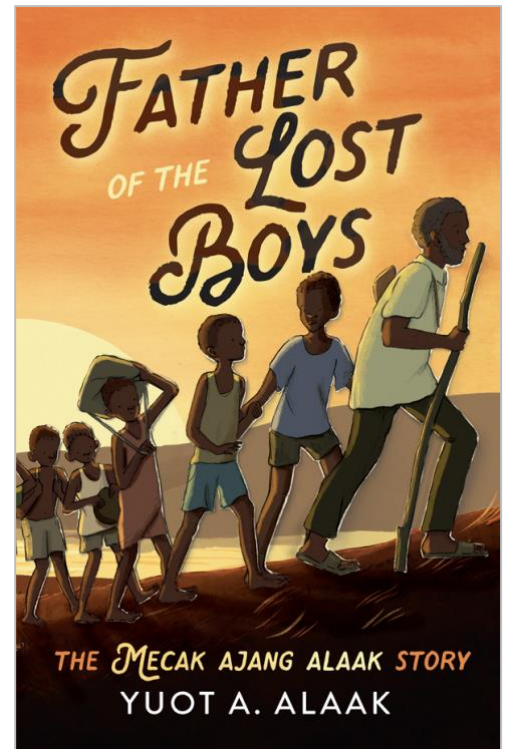
- South Sudanese cultures and histories
- Second Sudanese Civil War
- Lost Boys of Sudan
- East African histories
- Refugee experiences
- Migration
- Australian multiculturalism
- The power of education

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

- Y4–8 English
- Y4–8 Humanities and Social Sciences

USEFUL WEBSITES

- South Sudan, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade: dfat.gov.au/geo/south-sudan
- Refugee Camps, UNHCR: unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/camps
- Kakuma Refugee Camp, UNHCR: unhcr.org/ke/kakuma-refugee-camp



CLASSROOM IDEAS

Discussion questions

1. How is a memoir different to an autobiography? What features of *Father of the Lost Boys for Younger Readers* make it a memoir?
2. Macquarie Dictionary defines a refugee as **'someone who flees for refuge or safety, especially to a foreign country'**. Discuss different ways a person can become a refugee (e.g. political, environmental) and how this is different to a migrant.
3. What does 'multiculturalism' mean in an Australian context?
4. What aspects of Dinka life and customs are described in the book's early chapters? List as many as possible, including rites of passage (traditions relating to birth, marriage, death), family life, gender roles, daily duties / work, housing, dress, food, sports, and other aspects of Dinka culture described by the author.
5. What threats do the Lost Boys face throughout the book on their way to Kakuma? What measures do Mecak Ajang Alaak and others take to protect the boys?
6. **'But my father is adamant that the pen is a more powerful weapon than the gun'** (p. 66). In what ways is the pen mightier than the gun? Why does Mecak Ajang Alaak insist on giving the boys the chance of education?

History and geography

1. Study a map of Africa. Which countries does South Sudan share a border with? Make a list.
2. On a photocopy of the maps on pages 6 and 7, chart the journey made by the author, Yuot A. Alaak, throughout the book, starting in Bor Town and ending in Nairobi.
3. Create a country profile for each of the following four countries and include information like the official name, capital city, population and major religions or traditions:
 - a. South Sudan
 - b. Sudan
 - c. Ethiopia
 - d. Kenya
4. Research the history of southern Sudan (South Sudan since 2011) from 1800 to the present day and present your findings in a multimedia presentation to share with the class.
5. Throughout the book, the author describes his experience of living in refugee camps for most of his childhood, including Kakuma. Research information about refugee camps in the world today and focus on the following questions:
 - a. What is a refugee camp?
 - b. Who administers it?
 - c. What are living conditions like?
 - d. How many people live in refugee camps today?
 - e. By what means did they arrive there?
 - f. How long did it take them to reach the camps and what threats did they face along the way?
 - g. How long are they likely to stay in the camps and where might they go after?

Creative writing

- Find examples of figurative language that the author uses to describe something. Discuss how this might help a reader to connect with the narrative.
- Imagine the book from a different boy's perspective and write a short story about his experiences of the events in the book and where he is now.
- Write a short piece of journalism about the Kakuma Refugee Camp. Imagine you are interviewing a range of people involved with it, such as authorities, refugees and aid workers.

The Arts

- Using descriptions from the narrative, have students create artwork of their visualisation of an aspect of the setting, e.g. the jungle, the river crossing or the refugee camp, using their own choice of medium.