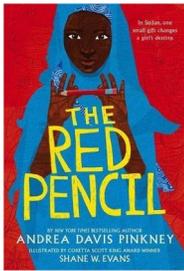


# Books by the Stack



## *The Red Pencil* by Andrea Davis Pinkney

After her tribal village is attacked by militants, Amira, a young Sudanese girl, must flee to safety at a refugee camp, where she finds hope and the chance to pursue an education in the form of a single red pencil and the friendship and encouragement of a wise elder.

**Why you'll like it:** Free verse. Vivid imagery. Powerful.

**About the Author:** Andrea Davis Pinkney is the New York Times bestselling and award-winning author of more than 20 books for children, including *Bird in a Box* and several collaborations with her husband Brian Pinkney, including *Sit -In*, *Hand in Hand*, and *Martin & Mahalia*. She lives with her family in Brooklyn, NY.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Amira's birthday is an important family occasion. What is so special about her twelfth birthday? What do her parents, Dando and Muma, say about her birthday? What do their words tell you about Amira?
2. Amira's best friend Halima and her family leave the village and move to Nyala, a bustling city. Halima's father is searching for opportunity. What does he expect to find in the city? Why do you think Amira's family is not moving to the city?
3. Amira says that her friend's parents are modern people not stifled by tradition. What are differences between the modern and traditional Sudanese ways of life? Which does Amira prefer? Why?
4. Dando uses words like persecution, rebellion and genocide to describe war. Muma uses words like armed, militia, bandits and renegades to describe the Janjaweed. How are these words alike and different?
5. The moon appears throughout the story as a greatly influential symbol. Explain why Sayidda Moon is such an important force in Amira's village? What is the tradition of waking the moon?
6. On the night that Leila, Amira's sister, was born, how did the family know that she would be "different"? How did the family react when they saw her? Why do you think they reacted that way?
7. Despite a loving relationship, Amira and her mother clash in an ongoing difference of opinion. What subject do they disagree on? Why do you think Amira's mother feels the way she does? Why does Amira feel the opposite?
8. A significant part of Sudanese life and culture is *goz*. What does Amira mean when she refers to *goz* as Darfur's great blanket? Why does she have such a deep reverence for it?
9. Amira describes the way that she draws in the following manner: "My hand and my twig and my sparrow do the dance on the sand." Why does she use these words? What does sparrow mean in the context? What words would you use to describe drawing?
10. Dando and Amira share a game called "What Else is Possible?" Why is it a favorite game for both of them? How do you think they feel when they play the game?
11. Old Anwar and Dando agree that Amira should learn to read. However, they face the objection of Amira's mother. What arguments would you offer to persuade her to agree with them?

- 12.** Amira notices “a strange shadow in people’s eyes.” How does she respond when she looks at the faces of the villagers? What is meant by “eyes tell what is inside”?
- 13.** In the wake of a horrific raid by Janjaweed, the villagers must flee the safety and security of their homes. Describe their experiences during the journey to Kalma in terms of their emotional states and physical challenges.
- 14.** The refugees finally arrive in Kalma. What are Amira’s impressions of her new home? How do they compare to the farm life she left behind?
- 15.** Amira, her mother, Leila, and Gamal are greatly affected by the outcome of the raid. How does each cope with grief in the aftermath? How do their behaviors change?
- 16.** Amira has never seen a television before. What role does the “flicker box” play in the story? How does Amira react to it? What new meaning does it have for her when she likens it to the displacement camp?
- 17.** Miss Sabine from Sudan Relief visits Kalma to give the children pencils and paper. With all hands outstretched to receive the gifts, she makes a gift to Amira. Why do you think she gave the red pencil to Amira? How does Amira compare it to the twig she had in the village?
- 18.** When Amira shows her red pencil to Old Anwar, he responds, “It suits you...Such a bold color. Strong.” After she shares her drawings, he looks closely and says, “Healing.” What is the message he is conveying to her?
- 19.** Amira wants to learn to read very much. Old Anwar offers to teach Amira to read in secret at night by lantern and not tell Muma. Do you think that this is a good idea? Why or why not? How do you think Muma will react when she learns of this plan?
- 20.** Amira is grateful to Old Anwar for teaching her to read, but her wish is to “have lessons in a real school with other girls, with Halima.” Knowing the family has no money to send her to school, she shares her feelings anyway. Should she have told Old Anwar about her wish? Why or why not?
- 21.** There were no hedgehogs on Amira’s village farm. Why is she so fascinated with this unfamiliar creature? Why does she tell Sayidda Moon that her big wish is to be “a hedgehog, slipping off to school”?
- 22.** Amira has made her decision. She is leaving to go to Nayla at attend the Gad School. However, she has “itchy doubt.” Why do you believe she is so apprehensive? How does she manage and overcome these feelings?
- 23.** The last verse of the story is titled “Flight.” How does this word reflect the essence of the story? What other word could you use to describe the culminating theme?

*(Questions provided by publisher)*



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