

The Good Braider
by Terry Farish
An Educator's Guide

Introduction: The Good Braider by Terry Farish is an important book that chronicles the life of a teenage refugee girl from what is now South Sudan to Portland, Maine. The book depicts the struggles associated with fleeing one's homeland, adjusting to life in a new culture, and the hard earned resilience needed to survive. Farish provides intimate details that could have only been learned by listening carefully to members of the Sudanese community as they told their stories. The book is informative and moving and an important contribution to the genre of literature that's documenting the lives of refugees around the world. This educator's guide is written for students from grades eight through twelve and appropriate for English language learners. It consists of a character list, suggested vocabulary words and a model for teaching them, comprehension questions, and ideas for further exploration. I have made connections to the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy>) when the standard fit the literacy task.

Part One:Character List

Viola: A teenager, narrator of The Good Braider, from Juba in what is now South Sudan, member of the Bari tribe, also known as "Keji," firstborn girl

Andrew: young man from Portland, Maine who Viola befriends and experiences the world of cross-cultural dating

Viola's Mother: Also known as "Yumis" or Tereza

Habuba: Viola's Grandmother

Uncle Marko: Viola's uncle who lives in Portland, Maine. Son of Habuba

Francis: Viola's little Brother

Kiden: Viola's little cousin

Gewndolyn: Viola's 17 year old neighbor in Juba, the only person with a garden where Viola plants "grounduts" - peanuts

Jacob: a friend of Viola's mother who can lead the family out of South Sudan

Lokolumbe: a boy Viola's age and of the same Bari tribe who she meets at the Church of the Sacred Heart known as "Church of the Sudanese." He is cofounder of "The Viola and Lokolumbe Night School"

Jackie: Viola's cousin who has been living in Portland, Maine. Her mother's name is Rita.

Abby: Viola's peer mentor from Catholic Charities. Viola refers to her as "Miss America Abby"

Freida and her young son Jamal: friends of Viola's Mom

Lado: a member of the Sudanese community in Portland, Maine. He works in a local restaurant called Ezo African Restaurant.

Mrs. Mejia: Viola's English as a second language (ESL) teacher at Portland High School

Poni: a "girl from Juba" who is living in Portland, ME. Viola refers to her as "Sudanese-4-Life Poni" due to her commitment to the liberation of South Sudan

These are not technically characters in The Good Braider but are organizations, places, and a symbol with such significance to Viola, her family, and/or the many refugees who flee war, they deserve recognition.

Church of the Sudanese: formally known as The Church of the Sacred Heart, a Catholic church located in Cairo, Egypt, serves as a place of refuge for those fleeing the war in South Sudan. This church also represents the numbers of organizations, individuals, governments, and neighbors worldwide who offer refuge to displaced people. Catholic Charities in Maine, Doctors Without Borders (often the first), and The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: UNHCR, This agency oversees the protection and safety of refugees worldwide. "The agency strives to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another State, with the option to return home voluntarily, integrate locally or to resettle in a third country" (unhcr.org)

Catholic Charities of Maine: an agency in Maine that supports refugees as they resettle in Portland and Lewiston, Maine

Kennedy Park: one of many public housing developments in Portland, Maine where new immigrants and refugees initially live

Elephant: a symbol of strength and hope that shows up at important times throughout Viola's journey from Sudan to the United States

Part Two: Vocabulary Selection and A Model for Instruction

The list below contains words that are either from the pages of The Good Braider or **more commonly** about the themes, topics, or experiences depicted in the book. It's important to choose academic words that students will see in a variety of contexts throughout their academic careers. I consult Averil Coxhead's Academic Word List when compiling groups of words students should know. (<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/resources/academicwordlist/>)

Common Core Standard: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

Vocabulary Associated with The Good Braider

abandon
acculturate
advice
agrarian
allegiance
astonished
bribes
bride price/wealth
coerced
collaborators
confide
conscription
convert
courtship
defy
diaspora

discipline
discrimination
dishonor
diversity
document
dysentery

elders
empathy
flee
generation
grief
groundnuts
haggle
hesitate
honor
humiliation

identity
incidence
innocence
intervention
manipulate
migrate
modesty
mourning
participate
peers
perception
qualifications
rebellious
reception
recount
resilience
role

sacrifice
sanctuary
separation
solemn
status
stress
symbolic
talisman
tradition
traditional knowledge

traumatized
trigger
trust
UNHCR
vocation
wailing
wares

It is important to devise a systematic way to teach and learn vocabulary. The table below is an example of how I present key vocabulary words to students. The document serves as a way to talk about important words and how they relate to the reading. Much of my inspiration for teaching vocabulary comes from Dr. Kate Kinsella from San Francisco State University. I have adapted her method for teaching vocabulary and always follow the same set of steps each time I introduce new words. These steps are listed below:

1. Introduce the word and its various parts of speech. Have students repeat the word since they may not have many opportunities to practice the pronunciation in a nonthreatening environment.
2. Discuss the meaning of the word and provide ample examples of the word's meaning while using it in context. Check for understanding by asking students to verbally fill in the blank as you relay a story and pause where the vocabulary word should be inserted.
3. Discuss the image and have students fill in the blank of the example provided.
4. By this time, students should have a good idea of what the word means and how to use it. Have them write their own sentence with the word and share with their classmates.
5. Students can be taught to create this vocabulary table on their own and store it electronically.

word
meaning
image
example
your sentence

acculturate (v)
acculturation (n)
the process by which a human adapts to or borrows traits from another culture

Viola knew she had to _____ to American society if she wanted to be successful.

agrarian (adj)

relating to farming or farmers

South Sudan is an _____ society.

bride price (n)

a payment of some kind given to a woman's family before "marriage"

Habuba encouraged Viola to study because she believed it would increase her _____.

conscription (n)

when people, particularly boys, are forced to join the army

Viola was always concerned Francis would be _____ into the army.

Things to consider:

- A natural extension of presenting words in this manner is to create a "word wall" that students and teacher can frequently reference. Post the words in a visible place in the classroom. Students need repeated exposure to the words to own them.

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- Find meaningful ways for students to utilize the words while speaking and writing. One way to do this is through quick writes. Discuss the writing prompt and have students write for fifteen to twenty minutes. You may choose to have students bring the paragraph through the revision and editing process in subsequent classes. **Four examples of writing prompts follow:**

→ Viola likes Andrew and knows that her relationship with him will help her **acculturate** to life in the United States. Andrew is teaching Viola many things about life in Portland, Maine. Have you lived in another culture where you have had to **acculturate**? Is there one person or activity that helped you **acculturate**? Write a paragraph about **acculturation**. What are some of the challenges and joys associated with **acculturation**? Be sure to utilize the word **acculturate** or **acculturation** in the paragraph.

→ Viola and her mother are from the city of Juba in an **agrarian** country, South Sudan. She turns to her family's **agrarian** knowledge when she plants groundnuts in Gwendolyn's garden as a way to earn money. What is your experience with agriculture or an **agrarian** lifestyle? What are some of the benefits of living an **agrarian** lifestyle? What are some of the challenges? Write a paragraph about **agrarian** living and be sure to utilize the word **agrarian** in the paragraph.

→ Viola's grandmother often refers to her **bride price**. She knows Viola will be more "valuable" if she is educated. What is a **bride price** and how would education increase a woman's **bride price**? Write a paragraph about **bride price** and be sure to utilize the word **bride price** in the paragraph.

→ **Conscription** of young boys into the army is common in many parts of war-torn Africa. What impact does **conscription** have on the lives of children and their families? Write a paragraph about **conscription** and be sure to utilize the word **conscription** in the paragraph.

However you choose to teach vocabulary, it's important to be consistent and provide multiple opportunities for students to interact with the words.

Part Three: Comprehension Questions

Common Core Standard: Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Common Core Standard: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

Common Core Standard: Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.

Common Core Standard: Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

"Be Free" Pages 13-17

1. The first section of The Good Braider begins rather care-free with Viola returning from fetching water, hearing Congolese music, and noticing a boy from her Bari tribe standing in a doorway. What begins as two youngsters simply noticing each other and walking down the street together, turns horribly tragic. What happens and what is the source of the conflict between Viola (the narrator), the boy from her tribe, and the "light-skinned" soldier?

"Girl from Juba" Pages 18-22

1. Why do the women go to visit the courtyard of Viola's house? (p.18)

1. Why does Viola's mother say, "No one is on the side of the women....?" (p.19)

1. Viola recounts stories of how people have fled southern Sudan. Viola mentions three of those ways on page 20. What are the ways in which people have fled Sudan?

1. What is a bride price and what has Viola learned to increase her bride price? (p.21)

"Elephant Bone" Page 23

1. In this section you are introduced to the elephant bone which will travel with you, the reader, throughout the rest of The Good Braider. What is the significance of the bone to Viola and her mother? (p.23)

"Gwendolyn's Garden" Pages 24-25

1. Why are gardens scarce in Juba? (p.24)

1. What is Viola's motivation for planting "groundnuts" - peanuts- and what arrangement to care for the plants does Viola make with Gwendolyn ? (p.24-25)

1. The simple task of fetching water or gathering firewood is risky and dangerous in many parts of the world, particularly in war-torn countries and around refugee camps. What do you think are some of the dangers Viola and her mother face as they go out to get water? (p.26)

"Daughter Dreaming" (Pages 27-29)

1. Viola is cooking aseeda, a porridge made of flour and water, and her mother harshly reprimands her for burning the aseeda and for not paying attention. What is her mother's rationale for slapping her across the face? Was Viola's mother's behavior warranted? Why or why not? (p.28)

"No Escape" (Pages 30-33)

1. It is estimated that 250,000 children are fighting in wars all over the world (peacedirect.org). What is Viola's fear for her younger brother Francis? (p.31)

1. Rape as a weapon of war is on the rise around the world. "And while Amnesty International cites ongoing conflicts in Colombia, Iraq, Sudan, Chechnya, Nepal, and Afghanistan, the use of rape as a weapon of war goes back much further." (Smith-Spark,2004) Viola sadly becomes a victim of a heinous rape. What impact do you think this will have on Viola's life? (p.32)

"Palm Oil" (Pages 34-36)

1. Quinine is a naturally occurring substance from the cinchona tree which was discovered by the Quechua, indigenous people of the South American countries of Bolivia and Ecuador. Quinine was the first treatment for malaria. It comes as no surprise that Viola's mother had quinine in the house since malaria is common in many parts of Africa. However, Viola's mother was not concerned about Viola getting malaria. Why did Viola's mother want her to take extra quinine? (p.35)

1. Where did Viola get the five small coins that had a cow imprinted on each one? (p.36)

"Quinine" (Pages 37-38)

1. What is Viola's concern (What is she worried about?) when Francis says, "We might go on a journey?" (p.38)
2.

"Daughter of Experience" (Pages 39-41)

1. Why is Viola's grandmother, Habuba, happy Viola had a dream about an elephant? (p.39)

'Dawn" (Pages 42-43)

1. In this section, Viola relays two alternative ways of leaving Juba. One is a recommendation by Marko and the other has to do with the four coins. What are the two options for Viola and her family to leave Juba? (p.42-43)

"Food" (Pages 44-45)

1. Viola asks, "Habuba," I say, "am I a child? I mean in America, would I be a child? Because if I am a child, maybe I can go to

school. I know English." Why is Viola unsure whether she will be a child in America? (p.45)

"Thyme" (Pages 46-47)

1. What does Habuba say will increase Viola's bride price? Do you think education increases the value of a person? Why or why not?(p.46)

"Last Offer" (Pages 48-50)

1. The soldier visits the courtyard of Viola and her mother and he has brought sugar. What does he want in exchange for the sugar? (p.48-49)

"Go" (Pages 51-52)

1. Why is this section titled "Go!?" Who is going and who is not going? Where are they going? (p.51-52)

1. Habuba once again gives Viola advice about how to bring the family wealth. What does Habuba recommend Viola do? (p.52)

"Shadows with Guns" (Pages 53-55)

1. The SPLA is the Sudan People's Liberation Army. Why are the SPLA and the government soldiers a threat to Viola and her family? (pp. 53-55)

"Flight" (Pages 56-57)

1. Finally, Viola, her mother and Francis leave Juba. They leave Habuba behind. How do the three of them exit Juba? (pp.56-57)

"Khartoum to Us Is Thirst" (Pages 58-59)

1. Once Viola and her family arrived in Khartoum, they went to some camps for southern Sudanese outside the city and along the way

Francis and Viola were thirsty. They find water in a barrel that is for animals to drink. What are the health risks related to drinking this water?

1. Is Khartoum their final stop? Where are they going? (p.59)

“Wadi Halfa, Northern Sudan” (Pages 60-65)

1. Viola, Francis and their mother arrive in Wadi Halfa in northern Sudan and get on a “steamer,” a boat, to Aswan in Egypt. What happens to Francis along the way and what do people think is the cause of his problem? (pp. 62-63)

“Church of the Sudanese” (Pages 66-68)

1. Viola and her family arrive in Cairo, Egypt and seek refuge in the Church of the Sudanese (the real name is the Church of the Sacred Heart.) Viola's brother Francis dies here. What impact do you think Francis' death will have on Viola and her mother?

“United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees” (Pages 69-71)

1. Two important events happen to Viola in this section. The first event gives Viola hope and the second event makes her angry. What are the two events?

“Waiting to Become a Refugee” (Pages 72-73)

1. Are Viola and her mother the only people in Cairo waiting to resettle in another country? (p.73)

“Minutes” (Pages 77-78)

1. Viola says, “All of us away from each other. All of us eating alone. Only connected by minutes.” What is she talking about?

“Tall Girl Wants Job” (Pages 79-80)

1. What kind of work do Viola and her mother get? (p.79)

“Sahara”

1. Why doesn't Viola braid her hair anymore? (pp. 81-82)

1. Lokolumbe belongs to the same Bari tribe as Viola and the two of them become good friends. What are the two stories he tells Viola? (pp. 82-83)

"Viola and Lokolumbe English Night School" (Pages 84-86)

1. What is the activity that bonds Viola and Lokolumbe? (pp. 84-86)
1. How does Viola think she can bring honor to her small brother? (p.85)

"Blue Card"

1. What's the significance of the blue card? Why is there some disappointment for Viola?

Part Two: Elephant Footsteps: Portland, Maine 2002-2003

"White" (Pages 93-95)

1. What's the name of the organization that helps Viola and her Mother when they first arrive in Portland, Maine? How does this organization help them? (pp. 93-95)

"Kennedy Park" (Pages 98-101)

1. Kennedy Park is a collection of apartment buildings in Portland, Maine where many new immigrants first settle. There is a sizable Sudanese community living in Kennedy Park. Viola's cousin Jackie comments, "If you live in Kennedy Park, you remember. The elders make sure you remember." What are some advantages and disadvantages for Viola to have many Sudanese people living in the same community?

"Miss America Abby" (Pages 102-104)

1. What is Viola's first impression of Portland High School? What was Viola's relationship with English when she lived in Juba? (p.103)

"Dish"

1. What kind of pressure about going to school does Charles put on Viola? (p.106)

"My Teacher" (Pages 110-111)

1. What are the responsibilities of an "African daughter?" Do these responsibilities sound familiar to you? (p.110)

1. Mrs. Mejia is Viola's English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher at Portland High School. What advice does Mrs. Mejia give Viola about studying? List two recommendations. Do you agree with Mrs. Mejia's advice? (pp.110-111)

"Barber Foods" (Pages 119-120)

1. Many new immigrants get their first job at a frozen chicken dinner factory called Barber Foods in Portland. Viola works at Barber Foods as well as has many other responsibilities. Why does Viola think her mother gives her so many responsibilities? (pp.119-120)

"Africa Magic" (Pages 121-122)

1. Viola finally contacts her grandmother by telephone in Africa. What information does Viola share with Habuba? List three things. (p.121)

"Soccer Team" (Pages 126-127)

1. Viola has met Andrew, an American boy, a couple times and she begins to imagine two things she can learn from him. What are two things she thinks Andrew can teach her? (p.127)

2.

"How to Talk to a Boy You Have Use Of" (Pages 130-132)

1. Many new immigrants' homes look and feel different. What does Viola think is "African" about her house? What comment does Andrew have about the tea?

"House Rules" (Pages 135-137)

1. Jackie is talking about Viola's mother and says, "She is all African." "She's not split like you and me." What is Jackie talking about? (p.137)

"Foods A-Z: Pie" (Pages 138-140)

1. Viola gets enough courage to visit Andrew's house because he has been absent from school. What reason does Viola give for developing a relationship with Andrew? Do you think Viola might have another reason for spending time with Andrew? (P. 138)

"People of the Rain" (Pages 144-145)

1. Viola says to Andrew, "In Africa the moon fills the sky." What are some of the things she really wants to say to Andrew? (p.145)

"White Girl's Braids" (Pages 146-147)

1. Lado wants Viola and her friends to braid the hair of a white girl. Viola lists the significance of braids to an African girl. What does Viola think the white girl would not understand? (p.147)

"We Do Not Do This in Africa" (Page 148)

1. Why is it "dangerous" for Viola to meet with Andrew? (p.148)

"Stick Shift" (Pages 150-153)

1. Andrew says to Viola, "Your life back home where you were, if you ever want to talk, you can tell me..." What does Viola reveal to Andrew about her life back in Sudan? (pp. 151-152)

2.

Part Three: Elephant Songs

"War" (Pages 157-158)

1. Why is Viola's mother punishing her? How does she punish Viola? (pp. 157-158)

"Burn" (Pages 159-163)

1. Why is there a conflict between Viola, her mother, and the Portland Police? (pp. 159-163)

"Doctor" (Pages 164-166)

1. The doctor who takes care of Viola learns the elders from the Sudanese community are counseling Viola's family. The doctor says, "I hope to God they know what they're doing." How do you think the Sudanese elders would counsel Viola's family? How would it be different from how the Portland Police would counsel the family? (p.166)

"Habuba" (Pages 173-175)

1. Viola talks with Gewndolyn via telephone who shares sad news with Viola? What did Gewndolyn tell Viola? (p. 175)

"Mrs. Mejía Who Gave Me Three Things" (Pages 178-186)

1. "I am not doing well. I am not American. Or Sudanese. I'm not in Sudan and not really in Maine. Or maybe I'm in both of them at the same time. I'm in someplace I'm making up." Viola's feelings are very common among new immigrants. What is difficult about being caught between two cultures like Viola is? (p.185)

2.

1. Viola confides in Mrs. Mejía her many problems from her past in Sudan and her current problems with her mother in Portland. Viola says, "Even talking to you. This story about the soldier.... my people would never talk about it." Viola finds comfort in sharing her problems with Mrs. Mejía but realizes that people from her culture don't talk about such difficult problems. What is your experience with sharing your problems with somebody you trust? Do you think it's helpful to share your problems? Is it part of your culture to talk about what's bothering you? (p. 185)

1. Mrs. Mejía gives one piece of advice to Viola, "I'm going to tell you one thing." What does Mrs. Mejía say to Viola about her rape in Sudan? (p.185-186)

2.

"Accident on the Highway" (Pages 187-191)

1. More tragedy strikes the Sudanese community in Portland when the wife of Charles, Kadat, is killed in a car accident. Even while mourning, Charles gives Viola advice. What does he say to Viola? Why do you think Charles says this now? (p. 190)

"Shift Change" (Pages 192-194)

1. The title of this section has two meanings. The first refers to the changing of work crews at Barber Foods where the employees are from a diversity of countries and also a shift or change in Viola's mother's thinking about dating. How was the mother's dating experience different from what Viola is experiencing in Maine? (p. 193)

"Braiding" (Pages 199-201)

1. Viola is acknowledged by her peers for being smart and a possible asset to the new Sudan. What is Viola's most challenging part of learning English? Knowing that Viola speaks two other languages, Bari and Arabic, why do you think it's difficult for Viola to learn this aspect of English? (p.198)

1. Viola's return to braiding hair could be seen as healing or a turning point in her life. Describe the situation where Viola braids hair again. (p.198-200)

"When Peace Comes" (Pages 202-204)

1. Viola's mother knows she must adapt to life in the United States and says, "The elders say we must" - she pauses- "educate ourselves in American ways." What does Viola's mother allow Viola to do? How does Viola feel about her mother's announcement? (p. 203-204)

"Elephant Trunk" (Pages 207-210)

1. Many things come together for Viola in this chapter of the book. She meets Andrew again, she shares the news that she passed the driving test, she rides in Andrew's boat and recognizes the elephant trunk in the stars. How do we know Viola is living more fully in Maine now?

"Three Brothers" (Page 211)

1. Viola never forgets her friend Lokolumbe from the Church of the Sudanese in Cairo, Egypt. She buys him a book and thinks about the letter she will write to accompany the book when she mails it to Cairo. Viola says, "I will tell him my American story." Pretend you are Viola and write a letter to Lokolumbe. What will Viola say about her life in America?

"Girl from Juba" (Pages 212-213)

1. "I'm an American girl in Portland, Maine. But I am also a girl from Juba." So ends the final chapter of The Good Braider. Why is Viola's quote significant? Do you think Viola is prepared for the next chapter of her life? Why or why not? (p.213)

1. Write the next chapter of Viola's life. Will she graduate from Portland High School and continue on to college? What will she study and choose for a career? How will her relationship with her mother evolve? Will she marry Andrew?

Part Four:Extension Activities: Research Ideas

Common Core Standard: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

The topics listed below serve as suggestions for further study by your students:

1. Many countries in Africa have been colonized by European countries. What impact has colonization had on African countries?

1. The civil war in Sudan continued for many years with thousands of lives lost. Read about the history of Sudan's civil war. Is there peace in Sudan today?

1. South Sudan is the world's newest country. What can you learn about this new nation? Is Darfur part of South Sudan? Why or why not?

1. Conflicts continue among tribes of South Sudan. What are some of the issues between different tribes in South Sudan? What is the nature of the conflict between the Dinka and Nuer tribes?

1. The author of The Good Braider mentions many different plants in the book. Choose two or three plants below to learn about: peanuts, thyme, quinine, tamarind, okra, acacia tree, palm oil. What do these plants look like? Where do they grow? What are they used for?

1. Learn more about Congolese music. What is tcha tcho? Use youtube to listen to Congolese music. What are your impressions of the music? Put together an MP3 file of Congolese music.

1. What is the process for becoming a refugee? How does a person from a war-torn country become a refugee. Use the internet to learn more about refugees around the world.

1. With the aid of the internet, create a poster or a slide presentation showing various styles of braiding hair in Africa.

1. Rape is finally being recognized as a weapon of war. Recently in India there have been large protests for the country to do more in protecting women against rape. Learn more about rape as a weapon of war. Is it on the increase? Which countries today have the largest problems with rape?

1. A bride price is common in many parts of the world whereas a dowry is common in other parts of the world? Compare and contrast a bride price and a dowry? Is there an equivalent to either a bride price or a dowry in "American" culture?

1. The elephant bone is treasured by Viola and shows up again and again as a symbol of strength and courage when Viola needs it the most. Reread The Good Braider and describe the different times the elephant appears. Are there animals in your culture that represent particular strengths?

1. Waterborne diseases (cholera, typhoid, giardia, amoebas) are a major killer of children in developing countries around the world. These diseases can be readily treated with little cost. Research various waterborne diseases that cause sickness and death. How can these diseases be prevented? What are the treatments for some of these diseases and how expensive are the treatments?

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