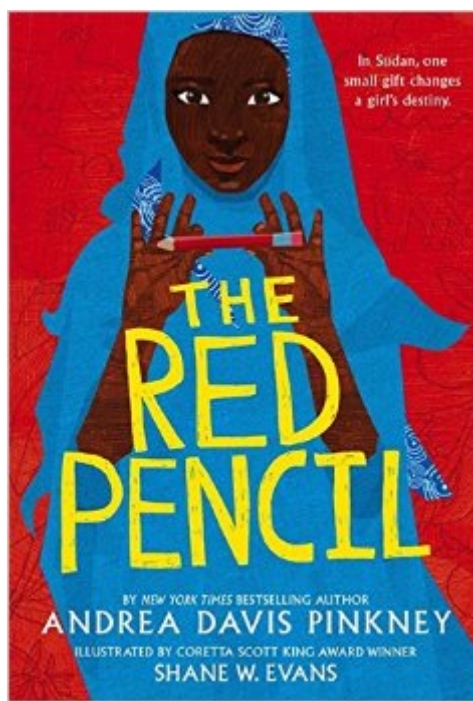


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# The Red Pencil



## Synopsis

The powerful story of one girl's triumphant journey, inspired by true tales of life in Sudan -- now in paperback. Life in Amira's peaceful Sudanese village is shattered when Janjaweed attackers arrive, unleashing unspeakable horrors. After losing nearly everything, Amira needs to find the strength to make the long journey on foot to safety at a refugee camp. She begins to lose hope, until the gift of a simple red pencil opens her mind -- and all kinds of possibilities.

## Book Information

Paperback: 368 pages

Publisher: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers; Reprint edition (November 3, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0316247820

ISBN-13: 978-0316247825

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 1 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (28 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #15,499 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #3 in [Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > Africa](#) #10 in [Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Explore the World > Africa](#) #10 in [Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Violence](#)

Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 4 and up

## Customer Reviews

Pinkney's language is delicious, worthy of reading and rereading as she creates a vivid picture of the placid family-filled life of 12-year-old Amira and then a life that is tragically devastated by the Janjaweed militia and Amira's escape to a dead-end refugee camp. I can't read realistic fiction that takes place in a real place that is still at war without wanting to know more and this might be an opportunity for students to do the same. I fell in love with Amira, her life, her losses, and her plight and immediately started researching the issues in this area of the world. To start, the refugee camp in the book - Kalma - still exists ten years after this story takes place and seems to be the permanent home of 130,000 displaced refugees. Schools for girls like Kalma have been started there. I also was intrigued by the details about Amira's life on a farm before the Janjaweed burned her home and village - the traditions, the foods, the ways of life--all so vivid because of the well

written text. I'd like to read more about this as well. Back to Pinkney's text - it's just stunningly beautiful, filled with poetic, figurative language, written in narrative verse to help the reader access Amira's experience. Just flipping back through the book, I wanted to stop every few pages and read again. This book would be worthy of just enjoying reading, of studying for content, and of studying for language or as a mentor for writing.

*The Red Pencil* by Andrea Davis Pinkney, illustrated by Shane Evans "5th grade and up" Realistic Fiction/Novel in Verse "Release date: September 16th, 2014" I was completely enchanted by this book. Enjoyed the novel completely. It reminded me of other novel in verse I read recently- *Serafina's Promise* by Ann E. Berg. It was interesting to imagine life focused on the farming and raising of animals. Imagine life disturbed by deathly duststorms. Imagine life stuck in the middle of a conflict and the loss of loves and hope. Imagine life having to move on to a new place as a refugee. This book was brilliant. I appreciated how the reader can be lost in the story. How the tough life situation is clearly survivable and hope can come in risk. My only disappointment was that the book ended before I was ready to see the conclusion. I desperately want to know what happens next. \*Of course I love the element of growing with reading and writing and expansion of hope with those skills gained. I found it interesting to read how at the refugee camp there was a television going 24/7 and the children could watch American shows and learn their letters with one show. Highly recommended.

Are the ethnic cleansing and large-scale violence against civilians a topic that can be raised with readers between eight and twelve years of age? Pinkney and Evans' *The Red Pencil* shows that this is indeed possible. Their brilliant rendering of the large-scale violence that took place in Sudan's westernmost province of Darfur in the years following 2003 respects both the sensibilities of young readers and the dignity of the victims. The story is told in the form of a series of free verse poems and pen drawings. It begins with twelve-year old Amira takes on life in her agrarian village in South Darfur in 2003, just before the violence erupts. The poems of this part of the book give the reader Amira's perspective on her chores, her lost tooth, an overheard quarrel between grown-ups; her village's crops, the moon; her father and mother; the birth of her physically challenged sister; the neighboring boy; the girlfriend who leaves the village to go to school in the city; a typically Sudanese haboob or dust storm; the birth of a little lamb, and the special twig with which Amira draws in the sand both what she sees around her and what she imagines. Evans' evocative and imaginative illustrations not only represent the spirit of

Amira's own drawings but also beautifully capture the Sudanese physical environment. Interspersed with these glimpses of life in the village are a few stark poems about war. In one such poem Amira's father explains to her that they are living in a time of war: "Brothers are killing each other/ over the belief/ that in the Almighty's eyes/some people are superior" (p. 21). In another her mother tells Amira about a potential attack by Janjaweed, "evil men on horseback" (p. 59). When the attack materializes (p. 110), village and fields are burned down and the survivors, including Amira and her family, have to flee. Amira's father (Dando) is killed. As they make the long, harsh, and dangerous trek to the refugee camp of Kalma, Amira misses her father: "I pretend Dando is walking alongside me,/ holding my hand,/ helping me through this./ I pretend/ so, so hard,/ with my whole heart./ But it's fruitless./ This so-hard pretending/doesn't work./ My father's footprints, nowhere" (p. 127-128). The first part of the book ends with this long walk to safety. The Red Pencil's second part describes life in the refugee camp and Amira's long journey from traumatized silence (she stops speaking) to hope and healing. The red pencil given to her by a relief worker helps her on this journey of recovery. Whether Amira will be able to fulfill her hope of going to school remains an open question. In the Author's Note at the end of the book, Davis Pinkney gives the book's backstory. How her travels in Africa and visits to many African schools made the violence in Darfur especially real to her; how she drew on news reports and numerous interviews with people who lived through the violence, and how the actual story of a traumatized girl in a refugee camp who gradually reconnected with the world around her after receiving a pencil and a writing tablet became her inspiration for this fictional account. "This story has been heavily vetted and factchecked," Davis Pinkney adds (p. 312), and this extra effort, in addition to her research and creative imagination, has most definitely paid off. The result is a book that can and deserves to be read to, with, and by English-speaking readers of middle-school age everywhere. Andrea Davis Pinkney is a highly accomplished and award-winning author, who has written many works for children and young adults, including illustrated books about aspects of African American history such as *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride*, *Let it Shine: Stories of Black Women Freedom Fighters*, *Duke Ellington*, and *Boycott Blues: How Rosa Parks Inspired a Nation*. Illustrator Shane W. Evans is equally accomplished and has illustrated books such as *Bintou's Braids* by Sylviane Diouf; *Did I Tell You I Love You Today?* by Deloris Jordan and Roslyn Jordan; and *Free at Last!* by Doreen Rappaport. The Red Pencil is in all aspects a remarkable achievement. It comes highly recommended. Reviewed by Lidwien Kapteijns, Ph.D. (Wellesley College) Published in Africa

I cannot wait to share this book with my students. It will make a wonderful companion to "A Long Walk to Water" and "Running for My Life". Perfect novel in verse for my low, reluctant readers. Also it contains so many memorable lines, it will make a great read aloud.

Don't you love discovering things you didn't know, while reading a fabulous book? This one is going to be a hit in the classroom, with kids who love learning, with anyone who appreciates gorgeous writing and a perfect story. I marked so many passages to reread. Like the mosquito poem on p. 197! Can most children reading today in our country even imagine a place where girls are kept from school? Fortunately, Amira has someone who believes in her: "That child is good with sheep and wheat. I believe she could have a gift for learning letters." And the sadness that Amira feels: "Words, like tugged teeth. Yanked from every part of me." It's hard to properly convey the experience of visually reading words placed perfectly on each page. This novel-in-verse not only is a joy to look at, it's a reading experience you'll shouldn't miss.

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