

HOME OF THE BRAVE

Historical • Ethical • Cultural Context Packet

CENTRAL IDEA

What does it actually take to hope again after losing almost everything — and is hope something you simply have, or something you build?

Novel: Home of the Brave by Katherine Applegate

Setting: Minnesota, with flashbacks to Sudan

Designed for: Advanced readers in grades 4–6, with adaptable supports

TEXT USE

Use a teacher-approved copy of the complete novel, structured in four parts and an epilogue. This resource supplies original prompts and no reproduced passages.

How to Use This Packet

Kek is a fictional character, but his story is grounded in a real, well-documented history of Sudanese civil war and mass displacement. Read for source authority, purpose, and limits, and treat the real history with the seriousness it deserves.

Accuracy safeguard

The Second Sudanese Civil War (1983–2005) killed an estimated two million people and displaced about four million. This is real, documented history — not a device invented for the novel. Treat it with the same care you would any account of real, mass human suffering.

Source Routine

- Identify the authoring institution and its expertise.
- Separate fact, interpretation, and speculation.
- Ask what the source can establish and what it cannot.
- Record access date and exact URL.

1. Sudan's Civil Wars and the Lost Boys and Girls

The Second Sudanese Civil War (1983–2005) killed an estimated two million people through violence, famine, and disease, and displaced about four million. During this war, an estimated 20,000 or more boys, many as young as five or six, were separated from their families and walked hundreds of miles to refugee camps, later becoming known as the “Lost Boys of Sudan”; roughly 4,000 were eventually resettled in the United States, with the largest population settling in Omaha, Nebraska.

Inquiry question

How does this real history change how you read Kek's account of losing his father and brother and being separated from his mother?

Novel Connection

Context Evidence / Source Note

Limit or Complication

2. Refugee Resettlement in the United States

Refugees admitted to the United States go through a lengthy vetting and paperwork process, often coordinated by resettlement agencies such as the International Rescue Committee, Catholic Charities, and Lutheran Social Services, which help with housing, school enrollment, and connecting family members who may be separated across different countries or camps.

Inquiry question

How does knowing this real process change your understanding of the Refugee Resettlement Center scenes in the novel?

Novel Connection

Context Evidence / Source Note

Limit or Complication

3. Ambiguous Loss: The Psychology of Not Knowing

Researchers who study grief describe “ambiguous loss” as the particular difficulty of not knowing whether a missing loved one is alive or dead, which can make mourning and moving forward more complicated than after a confirmed death. This has been documented specifically among Sudanese refugees separated from family members during the civil war.

Inquiry question

How does this concept help explain why Kek clings to hope about his mother, even when he's told the odds of finding her are slim?

Novel Connection

Context Evidence / Source Note

Limit or Complication

4. Novels in Verse: A Literary Form

A novel in verse tells a complete story using poetry instead of standard prose paragraphs, often using short lines, white space, and spare language to convey emotion economically. This form has been used by several acclaimed authors of realistic and historical fiction for young readers.

Inquiry question

What does telling Kek's story in verse make possible that a standard prose narration might not?

Novel Connection

Context Evidence / Source Note

Limit or Complication

5. Whose Story Is It? A Fair Look at the Novel's Reception

This novel has been widely praised for its accessible, empathetic portrayal of a refugee child's experience, winning several awards. Some readers and critics have also raised fair questions about whether an author writing outside a community's own lived experience can fully and accurately represent it, and have wished for more direct acknowledgment of the author's research process.

Inquiry question
What would you want to know about an author's research process before deciding how much to trust a story like this one?

Novel Connection

Context Evidence / Source Note

Limit or Complication

Curated Starting Sources

Source	Use	Caution
International Rescue Committee (IRC): the Lost Boys of Sudan	Authoritative account of the real refugee resettlement history	Focuses on the IRC's own role; corroborate broader figures elsewhere.
Migration Policy Institute or UNHCR: Sudan displacement data	Current, sourced figures on Sudanese displacement	Figures change over time; use the most recently dated source available.
A reputable grief-research source on “ambiguous loss” (e.g., work by Dr. Pauline Boss)	Accurate psychological framework for unresolved loss	A general framework; individual grief experiences vary.
Reviews and interviews discussing the novel's reception (e.g., trade publication reviews)	Fair, varied perspectives on the book's strengths and limits	Reviews reflect individual opinions; look for a range of views.

Source Evaluation & Synthesis

Source / Access Date	Authority & Purpose	Claim Supported	Limit / Corroboration

Fact–Inference–Judgment Check

FACT I can verify:

INFERENCE I draw:

JUDGMENT I defend:

Historical Accuracy & Ethics Audit

- ☐ I present Sudan's civil war history with accurate, sourced figures, not vague generalization.
- ☐ I treat Kek as one fictional character, not a stand-in for every refugee's experience.
- ☐ I distinguish ambiguous loss (a real psychological concept) from a simple plot device.
- ☐ I present fair, varied critical perspectives on the novel's reception, not just praise.
- ☐ I distinguish empirical claims (historical death tolls, resettlement processes) from ethical claims (how to read this story responsibly).
- ☐ I cite exact sources and access dates.

Synthesis Question

Which context lens most changes your understanding of Kek's hope — and where does the story resist that lens?
