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Novel in Verse Response  
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### *The Red Pencil*

*The Red Pencil* by Andrea David Pinkney is a heart wrenching and beautiful story that follows the life of a 12-year-old Sudanese girl named Amira. She lives a peaceful life in a small village in Southern Darfur with her family, tending to the crops and doing “women’s work,” yet she longs to attend school to learn how to read and write; nonetheless, her simple life is shattered when the Janjaweed Militia attack and destroy their village. Pinkney depicts Amira’s journey as a refugee through her striking illustrations and remarkable poems.

This novel in verse would be great for middle-grade through adult readers. As a young adult myself, I honestly learned a lot from the story and I believe young readers would highly benefit from reading it as well. *The Red Pencil* is not only poetic realistic fiction; it is historical fiction in the sense that it informs children and adults alike about the war in Darfur. Living in the western world, this is a part of the world that we usually do not hear much about and it is definitely not in the average elementary school curriculum. Pinkney’s use of poetry enables the book’s heavy material to be easily attainable for readers. It is not a difficult, dull textbook that explains past events, more so, it is a simple read that you can get much more out of. It’s unique format and diverse topic allows readers to learn about a different world and culture.

A central theme/motif in *The Red Pencil* is the importance of dreams.

Throughout the novel, Amira is determined to achieve her dream of attending school. Her life is wonderful, but she knows there is something more out there; furthermore, she does not want to spend her life cooking, cleaning, raising a family, and being locked in a “hut of tradition...with no windows for letting in fresh ideas” (Pinkney \*\*\*). However, when she tells her mother of this desire to learn, she says that reading and writing are a waste of time. Amira’s passion to achieve her dream is the driving force in the entire novel; consequently, her dream teaches her about herself as a young adult and about the world around her.

A clear example in the novel that shows Amira’s excitement for learning is when she has a daydream where she is wearing a Gad School toob and singing the

ABC’s,

“Playing, dancing,  
learning-words fun.  
This dream.  
A glory-sun,  
splashing!”  
(Pinkney, 2014, p. 288).

This short passage is important because it shows how happy Amira is just thinking about going to school. She literally dreams about herself living out her dream and you can almost feel the happiness from the words. Pinkney’s word choice completely emphasizes the emotions in the novel. She calls Amira’s dream “A glory-sun, splashing,” which oozes the feelings of joy and pleasure. These simple words are

saturated with meaning and clearly exude the happiness that Amira feels when she thinks about her dream.

#### Works Cited

Pinkney, Andrea Davis, and Shane Evans. *The Red Pencil*. New York: Little, Brown, 2014.

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