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TEACHER'S GUIDE

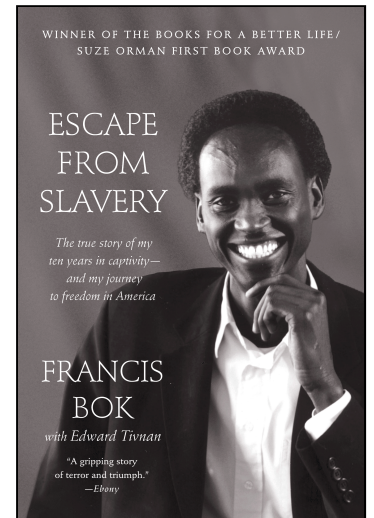
Escape from Slavery

The True Story of My Ten Years in Captivity—
and My Journey to Freedom in America

by **Francis Bok**
with **Edward Tivnan**

“A gripping story of terror and triumph . . . An important document on the plight of millions of people being held as slaves today.”—*Ebony*

“A remarkable, powerful, exceptionally well-told story, equally riveting and heart-breaking . . . The persistence of slavery in the world makes this a work that can't be ignored.”—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)



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Booklist,
Kirkus Reviews, Boston
Globe, San Francisco Chronicle,
USA Today, Entertainment
Weekly, Christianity Today,
Accelerated Reader

TO THE TEACHER

In *Escape from Slavery*, Francis Bok presents a remarkable autobiography exhibiting grace, clarity, honesty, and a wisdom gained from surviving a decade in captivity. At times shocking, frightening, or infuriating, this modern slave narrative is, however, ultimately as inspiring as it is alarming. *Escape from Slavery* is a truly unforgettable personal account that will challenge—and change—every student who picks it up.

The memoir begins when Bok is a seven-year-old Dinka boy. It is May of 1986, and young Bok has been sent by his mother to sell eggs and peanuts at a bustling market near his home village in southern Sudan. But his life is suddenly shattered as Arab raiders burst into the marketplace. They are armed with rifles and long knives—and they immediately start murdering the Dinka men and women. As Bok writes in Chapter 1: “The Dinka Men were lying all over the marketplace. My parents were back at our farm . . . I saw more dead bodies than I could count—some without heads, others looking as if they had just decided to lie down in the dust and go to sleep. How did I feel? People always ask me how I felt at that moment, and all I can answer is that I had never felt such terror, confusion, and helplessness before—or since. I wanted my mother; I wanted my father to pick me up onto his shoulders and carry me away from this. I felt so many feelings at once that I suddenly felt nothing. My entire body and mind turned numb as I waited to be killed.”

But he was not killed. Instead, Bok was held with all the other children who had been gathered up in the marketplace by the Arab raiders. These children were then strapped to horses and donkeys and carried away. Thus Bok began a life of slavery—a life of cruelty, captivity, and forced labor amid a family of rich Muslim farmers. For a full decade, Bok lived alone in a shed near the goats and cattle that were his responsibility. Fed with table scraps, slowly learning bits of his masters' unfamiliar language and religion, he had almost no human contact apart from his captors.

Finally, after two failed attempts to escape—each bringing severe beatings and death threats—Bok successfully fled his Arab captors at age 17, a dramatic break-away on foot that he felt was his very last chance. Yet his slavery did not end there, for even as Bok made his way toward Sudan's capital city of Khartoum, others sought to deprive him of his freedom. Determined to avoid that fate and discover what had happened to his family on that terrible day back in 1986, Bok persevered through prison and refugee camps for three more years—at last winning the attention of United Nations officials and being granted passage to America in 1999.

Now a student and anti-slavery activist living in Boston, Bok has made it his life's mission to combat world slavery—and this mission, of course, is at the very core of *Escape from Slavery*. Indeed, Bok's is the first voice to speak for an estimated 27 million people now being held against their will in nearly every nation, including the United States. *Escape from Slavery* is at once a riveting adventure, a story of desperation and triumph, and a window into world that few have survived to tell.

**PRAISE FOR
ESCAPE FROM SLAVERY**

“A touching modern-day slave narrative that is more than just an account of [Bok's] journey from childhood to manhood under the worst of circumstances. It is an inspirational story meant to heighten support for the anti-slavery movement of the 21st century, and it most likely will . . . Pages of historical details are eye-opening and provide a glimpse into what can happen when religion is the impetus in the governing of a nation . . . An informative and inspiring read.”—*The Boston Globe*

“[Bok] takes the Sudanese government and world leaders to task for their indifference to his people's suffering. Although he was at first an unwilling ambassador, he has become a leading voice for the anti-slavery movement in the United States.”
—*Detroit News and Free Press* (rated 4 out of 4 stars)

“It is [the author's] simple account of being a child cut off from his family and culture that shows the inhumanity of slavery. Bok's saga provides another—more contemporary—perspective on slavery for Americans reckoning with their own troubling history of such inhumanity.”—*Booklist*

“As if Bok's story isn't gripping enough, his poignantly candid commentary on Sudan's Islamic nationalist government and the millions of enslaved Sudanese will prove equally mind-blowing, A-.”—*Entertainment Weekly*

This Teacher’s Guide is primarily divided into two sections, which both appear immediately below. The first, “Reading and Understanding the Book,” will help students with reading comprehension, conceptual appreciation, following the narrative, and interpreting the contexts of *Escape from Slavery*. “Questions and Exercises for the Class,” the second section, will enable students to think more broadly or associatively about Bok’s memoir—both individually and as a class. A brief final section offers some “Suggestions for Further Study.”

1. Chapter 1 (“The Raid”) details when and where and how Francis Bok was captured. Summarize these facts. What do we learn of the home life Bok enjoyed before his abduction? Describe his family and personal background: his parents, siblings, relatives, and friends—and their culture, livelihood, etc.

2. Define the Arabic word *abeed*—that is, explain the two different meanings of this term. How do these dual meanings reflect the views of certain Arabs?

3. Identify Bok’s tasks, responsibilities, and burdens as a slave. Whose slave is he? Describe Bok’s masters, and describe how they treat him. What is he forced to do?

4. Early in his account, Bok writes of his captors: “The one thing I could not take was being unable to understand what these people were saying.” How does Giemma react when he first hears Bok addressing him in his own language? First explain Giemma’s reaction, then explain what Bok learns from this scene about his own “situation.” What sort of plan does Bok begin making as Chapter 4 ends?

5. In Chapter 5, Bok is given a new name. What is it? What does it mean? Who gives it to him? Is it a fitting or accurate name? Explain. What other names does Bok acquire over the course of his saga? How would you characterize the relationship between name and identity as a theme running through *Escape from Slavery*?

6. Who is Bejuk? Where does Bok meet him? What language do they speak when meeting for the second time? And why is talking in this language so dangerous?

7. Looking back on where he stood with Giemma and his family at the outset of his seventh year with them, Bok writes: “While I did not know I was a slave, I certainly knew I was not free.” Try to explain, or give context to, this distinction.

8. Were you surprised at Giemma’s decision to spare Bok’s life in Chapter 8? Explain. And why do you think Giemma decided to do so? Also, describe the “double game” Bok talks about in this chapter. Could you yourself ever “play” such a dualistic game? Explain why or why not.

9. How old is Bok when he successfully escapes from Giemma? How does he do it? Where does he go? And what happens when Bok seeks out the aid of the *bolis*?
10. Who is Abdah? How do he and Bok meet? What does he do for Bok—and, more importantly, what do his deeds mean to Bok in a larger, more personal, or philosophical sense? How do Abdah's actions change the way Bok views Muslims? Also, describe the man Bok encounters at the end of Chapter 9. Who is he? Where is he from? How does he assist Bok on his journey? And why does he do so?
11. Define the Arabic term *jabarona*. Why is this an apt name for the district in Khartoum where the Dinka refugees live? Who is Garang, and why does he give Bok food and shelter? Also, what does Bok do in Jabarona that leads to his arrest?
12. What is the “process” described in Chapter 11? Explain the steps involved in this procedure. Why does Bok deem himself an attractive candidate for the process?
13. Reviewing Chapters 12 and 13, identify the key individuals and groups who helped Bok on his remarkable trek to America—his contacts in Jabarona, on the black market, in Cairo, at the UN office, etc.
14. Where in the United States does Bok first live upon emigrating in August of 1999? Who looks after him? What does he do to earn money? Describe both the difficulties and delights that Bok experiences as a newly arrived American—for example, his feelings about the food, the clothes, his apartment, city life, television, etc. And why does Bok then decide, midway through Chapter 15, to move to Iowa?
15. What is the AASG? Why is Bok at first not interested in working with this organization? Who or what changes his mind? Describe the work that Bok starts doing for this group. Where does this work take him? What does it entail? And how would you characterize Bok's influence on this group?
16. On his first day at the AASG office, Bok learns some alarming facts about the continuing presence of slavery in the world today. Paraphrase these facts. Approximately how many slaves are estimated to exist worldwide? Were you surprised by this number? Explain.
17. Who is Charles Jacobs? What does he do for a living? Why does Bok admire him so? Describe the bond these two men share.
18. Toward the end of Chapter 16, Bok tells a story about meeting a girl named Christy. Who is she? What lesson does Bok take away from their brief meeting?
19. How does Bok finally learn the fate of his parents, his family? What most likely happened to them? How, at first, does Bok deal with this news? And how does he continue to deal with it, even today?

20. Chapter 18 is entitled “The Education Francis Bok.” Why is getting an education so important to Bok? What does it mean to him? What doors does he believe it can open? And how do Bok’s ideas about education and America itself reflect one another? Also, why do Bok’s classmates at the Boston Evening Academy initially tease and belittle him? What is it that changes their view of Francis Bok?

21. At one point—while discussing the still-ongoing attacks by Arab raiders on the market town of Nyamlell, where he himself, at 7, was captured for enslavement in 1986—Bok writes: “To me this cultural damage was almost more upsetting than the violence to people.” Specify the “cultural damage” that Bok is referring to here.

22. Bok’s memoir more than once appreciatively documents the actions of a man named John Eibner, as well as those of Christian Solidarity International, the organization Eibner directs. Specifically, Bok details the efforts by Eibner and CSI—in Sudan and elsewhere—to conduct slave “redemptions.” Describe these acts of “redeeming”—how and where they are done, for what cost, by what logic, etc. And why does Bok also note that such “redemptions are controversial, even among human rights groups?” Explain the controversy at hand, and explain how you view this issue. Do you applaud these acts? Do you condemn them?

23. How and when is Francis Bok able to get back in touch with his long lost brother, Buk Bol? What does our narrator learn about his older brother? What do they say to each other? Why does Bok tell his brother that “guns are not the only way”—and how does Buk Bol respond to this?

24. Define the Sudan Peace Act. When was it signed into law? What does this act ensure or provide? Explain how Bok, Charles Jacobs, and others at the AASG were involved with both the creation and promotion of this act.

25. Near the conclusion of his Afterword, Bok says he hopes to someday “go back to Sudan to retrieve what I lost by growing up in the north.” Why does Bok equate “real freedom” with “the ability to go back home” in the first place? Explain what has to happen—what must change—before Bok can return to his homeland.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES FOR THE CLASS

1. Bok, our hero and narrator, refers to this memoir as “my own attempt to offer documentation of the existence of slavery in Sudan: my life, my story.” But before exploring the book as an exposé of contemporary slavery, discuss what you learned from it about the geography, politics, culture, and history of Africa—especially Sudan. Revisit the map that begins this book, explaining how each of these points figures into Bok’s account: Nyamlell, Khartoum, Wadi Halfa, Cairo, and the Nile.

2. Bok's memoir is a story of several cultures, peoples, societies, languages. As a class, define the following vocabulary words—all of which appear in this book. These are Dinka terms: *muycharko*, *ajak*, *murahaliin*, *Juur*, and *djellabah*. These are Arabic: *abuya*, *jedut*, *salaam aleikom*, and *aleikom al-salaam*. These are Egyptian: *hunga bunga* and *sayiheen*. Also, identify and define other terms you learned herein.

3. "Today," Bok writes early on, "about twenty percent of the people of southern Sudan [are] Christians, adopting the version of Christianity of the local missionaries who happened to move to their area." (The other eighty percent believe in a traditional African religion.) The government of Sudan, by contrast, is (as Bok notes elsewhere) "a Taliban-like Islamist regime committed to ruling the entire country according [to] the Koran." Explain how this conflict manifests itself throughout Bok's memoir. Why do you think one critic said this book gives us "a glimpse into what can happen when religion is the impetus in the governing of a nation?"

4. The first speech Bok gives about his life as a slave occurs at the Southern Baptist Church in Roxbury, Massachusetts. Why does the pastor introducing Bok tell the children in his congregation that they especially "need to hear" Bok's words? If you were to recommend Bok's account to a certain audience, who would it be? Why?

5. Basketball, expensive sneakers, all sorts of music on the radio: Bok finds much to enjoy in American pop culture. But what about the difficulties of his Americanization? Discuss the problems Bok faced in adjusting to life here. Also discuss what you learned from this book about emigrating to (or gaining citizenship in) the U.S.

6. Ever since he started telling his life story publicly, Bok reports, from time to time, someone will call him a liar. Who are the people doing this? After conducting some outside research, prepare a report summarizing the historical context of Bok's life as both a slave and war-victim in Sudan. But also explain why this history is disputed.

7. "During my stay in the United States," writes Bok in his Afterword, "and thanks to my education—especially my readings in American and South African history—I have learned that even great walls of racism can be knocked down." As a class, explore how America and South Africa have evolved, and are still evolving, in this regard—and how, Bok hopes, Sudan might someday follow them.

8. Many readers of Bok's memoir will be shocked to learn that slavery still exists today, and that several million people are currently enslaved worldwide. In Sudan, of course, the problem is especially severe, and this brings us to the central question of Bok's Afterword: "How could the rest of the world let such terrible things happen to my people?" How does Bok's friend and mentor Charles Jacobs answer this urgent query? Explain the racist undertones that Charles identifies within the international human rights community. Do you agree with him? Why or why not?

Some of these suggestions come directly from the pages of Bok's memoir; others are recommended for students hoping to expand on its key lessons, themes, and ideas.

A READING LIST:

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain; *American Slavery: 1619-1877* by Peter Kolchin; *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* by James Weldon Johnson; *Beloved* (and various other writings) by Toni Morrison; *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs; *Kaffir Boy* by Mark Mathabane; "My Career Redeeming Slaves" (in *Middle East Quarterly*, December 1999) by John Eibner; *Narrative of the Life of an American Slave* by Frederick Douglass; *Up from Slavery* by Booker T. Washington; *War and Slavery in Sudan* by Jok Madut Jok; and writings by and/or about Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Harriet Tubman, Abraham Lincoln, John Brown, Mahatma Gandhi, etc.

RESOURCES ON THE WEB:

www.iAbolish.com [the AASG website; often mentioned by Bok]
www.amnesty.org [the Amnesty International website]
<http://members.aol.com/casmasalc/> ["CASMAS: The Coalition Against Slavery in Mauritania and Sudan"]
www.forefrontleaders.org/index.php ["Forefront: A Global Network of Human Rights Defenders"]

VIDEO OR DVD POSSIBILITIES:

"The Civil War" (the PBS documentary series; created by Ken Burns); "The Color Purple" (the 1985 movie; directed by Steven Spielberg); "Roots" (the classic TV mini-series; based on the book by Alex Haley); "Witness to Apartheid" (a 1986 documentary film; directed by Kevin Harris and Sharon I. Sopher); and "The Underground Railroad" (a 1999 television documentary; hosted by Alfre Woodard).

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Francis Bok is an associate at the Boston-based American Anti-Slavery Group (AASG). In 2000, he became the first escaped slave to testify before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in hearings on Sudan. Bok speaks throughout the United States and has been featured in *The Boston Globe*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Essence*, and on Black Entertainment Television.

Edward Tivnan has collaborated on, and is the author of, several books. A reporter and staff writer for *Time* magazine, he helped create ABC's *20/20* program. He has appeared on numerous radio and TV shows. Tivnan lives in Chatham, New York.

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A LONG WAY GONE, Ishmael Beah
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THE NATURAL, Bernard Malamud*
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