

# What Is The What Dave Eggers



What is the What is a novel by Dave Eggers that delves deep into the harrowing yet inspiring journey of a young Sudanese boy named Valentino Achak Deng. Published in 2006, the book is a blend of fiction and memoir, framed as a narrative that recounts Valentino's experiences as a "Lost Boy" of Sudan. Eggers' work not only captures the brutal realities of war and displacement but also highlights the resilience of the human spirit and the quest for identity amidst chaos. This article aims to explore the themes, narrative style, and impact of What is the What, as well as its broader implications in today's world.

## Overview of the Novel

What is the What tells the story of Valentino Achak Deng, who flees the violence of the Second

Sudanese Civil War, eventually becoming one of the many "Lost Boys" who sought refuge in various countries. The narrative oscillates between Valentino's memories of his homeland and his experiences in the United States, reflecting on the stark contrasts between his life in Sudan and his new life in America.

## Plot Summary

The novel begins with Valentino, who is now in the United States, being robbed in his apartment. This triggering event serves as a catalyst for him to recount his past. The story takes readers back to his childhood in Sudan, detailing the brutal circumstances that forced him to leave home. Key plot points include:

1. The Outbreak of War: Valentino's life changes drastically when the civil war erupts in Sudan. Violence and chaos engulf his village, leading to the separation from his family.
2. The Journey to Refuge: Valentino embarks on a perilous journey with other children, facing hunger, violence, and loss as they travel across dangerous terrain in search of safety.
3. Life in Refugee Camps: The narrative captures the struggles of living in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya, where thousands of children live in precarious conditions.
4. Resettlement in America: Valentino eventually finds a new home in the United States, where he grapples with culture shock, identity, and the challenges of assimilation.

## Character Development

Valentino is not merely a victim of circumstance; he is a fully realized character who embodies resilience and hope. Throughout the novel, readers witness his growth and struggle with:

- Identity: Valentino's quest for identity is a central theme. He grapples with being a Sudanese immigrant in America, often feeling caught between two worlds.
- Trauma: The psychological impact of his experiences is profound. Valentino's memories are marked by trauma, but they also reveal his strength and capacity for forgiveness.
- Community: The importance of community is another crucial element. Valentino's interactions with fellow refugees and the people he meets in America illustrate the significance of connection and support.

## Thematic Exploration

What is the What explores various themes that resonate deeply with readers:

### War and Displacement

The novel shines a light on the devastating consequences of war. It explores how violence uproots lives and creates a generation of displaced individuals. The portrayal of the "Lost Boys" serves as a poignant reminder of the innocent lives disrupted by conflict.

## **Survival and Resilience**

Valentino's journey is one of survival against all odds. His ability to endure and find hope in bleak circumstances speaks to the human spirit's resilience. The narrative emphasizes that while circumstances can be harsh, the will to survive and thrive can prevail.

## **Cultural Identity and Assimilation**

The challenges of assimilation are vividly depicted through Valentino's experiences in America. He faces prejudice and misunderstanding but also finds moments of acceptance and belonging. The clash of cultures raises questions about identity and the meaning of home.

## **Narrative Style**

Eggers employs a unique narrative style that enhances the emotional impact of the story.

## **Blending Fiction and Memoir**

The novel is based on the true story of Valentino Achak Deng, which gives it an authenticity that resonates with readers. Eggers' blending of fiction with memoir allows him to explore complex themes while remaining grounded in real experiences.

## **First-Person Perspective**

The use of the first-person perspective allows readers to intimately connect with Valentino's thoughts and feelings. This narrative choice makes the experiences more personal and compelling, fostering empathy and understanding.

## **Impact and Reception**

What is the What has received critical acclaim for its powerful storytelling and poignant themes. It has sparked discussions about immigration, war, and the plight of refugees.

## **Award Recognition**

The novel has garnered several awards, including:

- The American Book Award for its contribution to literature.

- Named a New York Times Best Seller, reflecting its popularity and resonance with a wide audience.

## **Influence on Social Awareness**

Eggers' work has played a significant role in raising awareness about the ongoing humanitarian crises faced by refugees and displaced individuals worldwide. It invites readers to reflect on their own privileges and the importance of compassion in addressing global issues.

## **Conclusion**

What is the What is more than just a novel; it is a powerful testament to the human spirit's resilience in the face of adversity. Through Valentino Achak Deng's story, Dave Eggers invites readers to confront the harsh realities of war, displacement, and the search for identity. The narrative not only captivates but also educates, urging society to acknowledge and support those who have been affected by conflict.

In a world that continues to grapple with issues of displacement and migration, What is the What remains a relevant and poignant reminder of the need for empathy and understanding. It challenges us to consider what it means to belong and the lengths to which one will go to find home. As readers close the book, they are left with a sense of hope and a call to action: to listen, to learn, and to advocate for those whose stories deserve to be told.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is 'What Is the What' by Dave Eggers about?**

'What Is the What' is a novel by Dave Eggers that tells the story of Valentino Achak Deng, a Sudanese refugee and one of the Lost Boys of Sudan. It explores his harrowing journey from war-torn Sudan to the United States, highlighting themes of displacement, identity, and resilience.

### **Who is Valentino Achak Deng?**

Valentino Achak Deng is a real-life Sudanese refugee whose experiences inspired the protagonist of 'What Is the What.' The novel blends his autobiographical elements with fiction to convey the struggles and triumphs of his life.

### **What genre does 'What Is the What' belong to?**

'What Is the What' is classified as a fictional memoir or a biographical novel. It combines elements of autobiography with narrative storytelling to depict the life of Valentino Achak Deng.

### **How does Dave Eggers approach the theme of loss in 'What Is**

## **the What'?**

Dave Eggers addresses the theme of loss through Valentino's experiences, including the loss of family, home, and cultural identity. The narrative poignantly conveys the emotional and psychological impacts of these losses on refugees.

## **What impact did 'What Is the What' have on public awareness of the Sudanese refugee crisis?**

'What Is the What' raised significant public awareness about the plight of Sudanese refugees and the broader issues related to the civil war in Sudan. It humanizes the experiences of refugees, fostering empathy and understanding among readers.

## **Did 'What Is the What' receive any awards?**

'What Is the What' was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and has received numerous accolades for its powerful narrative and social relevance, helping to establish Dave Eggers as a prominent voice in contemporary literature.

## **How does Eggers blend fiction and reality in 'What Is the What'?**

Eggers blends fiction and reality by incorporating actual events and personal stories from Valentino Achak Deng's life while crafting a fictionalized narrative. This technique enhances the emotional weight of the story while making it accessible to a wider audience.

## **What is the significance of the title 'What Is the What'?**

The title 'What Is the What' reflects the central question of identity and existence that Valentino grapples with throughout the novel. It symbolizes the search for meaning amid chaos and the struggle to define oneself in a world of displacement.

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