

A CITYWIDE BOOK CLUB

*JOIN US
for community
book discussions and
other free events.*

September 20
through
October 18
2008

*Thousand Oaks Reads is a
citywide program sponsored
by the City of Thousand Oaks
Library and many generous
community partners.*



Dave Eggers, author



What Is the What *by Dave Eggers*

For more information,
visit the Thousand Oaks Library
and www.thousandoaksreads.org

FROM THE DIRECTOR:

Welcome to the 2nd annual **Thousand Oaks Reads — One City One Book**. This citywide program invites us to become a community of readers, all reading and discussing the same book at group discussions and other events held throughout the City.

The enormous success of last year's inaugural citywide reading club, featuring Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, has been a driving force in the planning of this year's program. The 2008 selection, *What Is the What* by Dave Eggers, is a compelling and timely novel that is sure to stimulate thought-provoking discussion. The book's topics and themes inspire a month-long series of programs including panel discussions, film screenings, dramatic readings, music and art events, and a much anticipated afternoon with the author.

Copies of the book are available for check-out at the Grant R. Brimhall Library and the Newbury Park Branch and can be purchased at the Library Foundation Store and local bookstores.

I encourage you to get involved. Join one or more of the discussions. Attend the special events. Enter the essay contest. Reap the rewards of coming together as a community to share a common experience through literature.



Stephen R. Brogden, Director of Library Services

When we open a book together, ~
~ we close it in greater harmony.

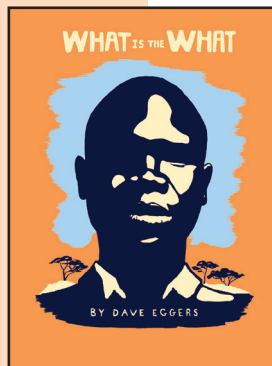
ABOUT THE BOOK:

What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng by Dave Eggers

This book tells the story of Valentino Achak Deng's odyssey from his village in southern Sudan to temporary shelter in Ethiopia, to a refugee camp in Kenya, and finally to Atlanta, as one of the thousands of children who became known as the Lost Boys of Sudan. On their journey that starts with destroyed villages and the loss of their families, the children encounter minefields and massacres, loneliness, fear and starvation, wild animals and the cruelty of humans, but also the comfort of fellowship and surprising examples of human kindness.

The story is "intense, straightforward, lit by lightning flashes of humor, wisdom and charm." (Francine Prose, *The New York Times Book Review*); it is filled with adventure, suspense, tragedy, and, finally, triumph.

What Is the What was published in late 2006. It was a National Book Critics Circle Award Finalist for fiction.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dave Eggers grew up near Chicago and attended the University of Illinois. He now lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with his wife and daughter.

Eggers is the author of three previous books. His memoir *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (2000) was a bestseller and finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for General Non-Fiction. In addition, he wrote two novels: *You Shall Know Our Velocity!* (2002); and the story collection *How We Are Hungry* (2004). In 1998, he founded *Timothy McSweeney's Quarterly Concern*, a literary magazine that comes out in a different form every issue, publishing famous as well as unknown writers. Together with its offshoot, McSweeney's Books, an independent publishing house in San Francisco, it strives to give authors more control over their work.

In 2002, Dave Eggers opened 826 Valencia, a writing lab for young people in San Francisco, where he teaches writing to students and runs a summer publishing camp. There are now branches of 826 in New York, Los Angeles, and other major cities across America. He is also an editor and contributor to the annual *The Best American Nonrequired Reading*. He has co-edited two books of oral histories, including *Surviving Justice: America's Wrongfully Convicted and Exonerated* — the first in a series called *Voice of Witness*. *Voice of Witness* books illuminate human rights crises around the world through accessible and teachable oral history-based books.

Eggers met Valentino Achak Deng in January 2003 in Atlanta, where Valentino had been living since being resettled in the United States in 2001. Valentino's friend, Mary Williams, founder of an Atlanta-based organization called the Lost Boys Foundation, and author of *Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan*, put him in touch with Dave Eggers.

Thus began years of collaboration — lengthy interview sessions, many e-mail exchanges, several trips between Atlanta and San Francisco, a joint journey to Southern Sudan and Deng's hometown of Marial Bai, and ultimately the completion of the book, *What Is the What*.



Meet critically acclaimed and award-winning author Dave Eggers on Saturday, October 11, 2:00 p.m. at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza Fred Kavli Theatre for the Performing Arts.



Dave Eggers with Valentino Achak Deng.

Photo by Michael Robinson Chavez, *The Washington Post*. Printed with permission.

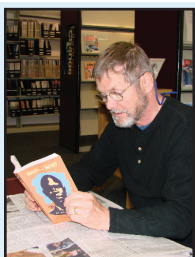
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Did you know the plight of the Lost Boys before you read this book? Did it change what you thought about the situation?
2. What details from *What Is the What* impacted you the most?
3. In what ways is Valentino's story both unique and universal?
4. What are Valentino's most appealing qualities—as a character in his own story and as a narrator of that story?
5. Is a personal story of the violence and oppression in Sudan more valuable than any purely historical account could be? What emotions does Valentino's story arouse that a more objective treatment may not?
6. What does a child understand about war? What doesn't a child (usually) understand about war?
7. What is the "what" of the *What Is the What* story? Does the novel point to a solution to this riddle?



Selected questions courtesy of Bess Newman (for About.com);
Randomhouse.com and freelibrary.org.

More discussion questions are available on the **Thousand Oaks Reads** website www.thousandoaksreads.org.



RELATED RESOURCES:

The website of the Valentino Achak Deng Foundation:
www.valentinoachakdeng.org/

The publisher's website with frequently asked questions about the book:
www.mcsweeneys.net/books/whatisthewhat.faq.html

General country information about Sudan:
Library of Congress Country Studies
lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/sdtoc.html

CIA World Factbook
www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/

The library's **One City – One Book** website:
www.thousandoaksreads.org/

NEW THIS YEAR

* ESSAY CONTEST:

The Theme: Leaving Home

"Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in." — Robert Frost

But "home" is sometimes elusive, and the search for something that feels like home can make for a memorable journey. The concept of home, belonging, separation from family, and survival are major themes of *What Is the What*. Reflecting on our own experiences is one way to respond to these themes.

How it Works:

In no more than 800 words, tell a story about leaving home, but finding home too.

It may be your own story, or that of a family member or friend.

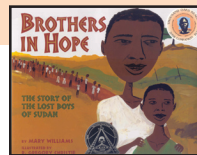
A winner will be selected from each of the following categories: High School (age 14 - 18), College and Young Adult (age 19 - 29), and Adult (age 30 and above). The winning essays will be read aloud to the community at the **Thousand Oaks Reads One City One Book** author event featuring the celebrated author of *What Is the What*, Dave Eggers at the Civic Arts Plaza Kavli Theatre on October 11, 2008.

Essays may be dropped off with an entry form at the Grant R. Brimhall Library or the Newbury Park Branch Library no later than 9:00 p.m. on **September 24, 2008**.

For more information, and the contest entry form, visit:
www.thousandoaksreads.org/essay.htm

* COMPANION TITLES:

A new feature this year is the introduction of three suggested "companion titles" that deal with similar themes, and offer opportunities for multi-generational reading and discussion:



Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan by Mary Williams;
Illustrations by R. Gregory Christie
Suggested for children, grades 3-4.

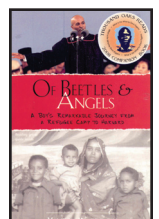
An orphaned 8-year-old treks hundreds of miles seeking safety from civil war in Sudan.



Home of the Brave
by Katherine Applegate
Suggested for children/young adults, grades 4-9.
An African immigrant to America makes a journey from hardship to hope.

Of Beetles & Angels: A Boy's Remarkable Journey from a Refugee Camp to Harvard
by Mawi Asgedom

Suggested for young adults, grades 7-9.
The memoir of a boy who flees civil war in Ethiopia to eventually realize his dream of a Harvard education.



For more information on the companion titles, see
www.thousandoaksreads.org/companion.htm

COMMUNITY BOOK DISCUSSIONS

Book discussions about *What Is the What* are open to the public. No registration is required.

Monday, September 22, 7:00 p.m.

Barnes & Noble Booksellers

160 Westlake Boulevard, (The Promenade)

Thousand Oaks • 805-446-2820

Wednesday, September 24, 7:00 p.m.

Newbury Park Branch Library

2331 Borchard Road, Newbury Park • 805-498-2139

Saturday, September 27, 10:30 a.m.

Grant R. Brimhall Library

1401 E. Janss Road, Thousand Oaks • 805-449-2660

Wednesday, October 1, 7:00 p.m.

Grant R. Brimhall Library

1401 E. Janss Road, Thousand Oaks • 805-449-2660

Saturday, October 4, 10:30 a.m.

Newbury Park Branch Library

2331 Borchard Road, Newbury Park • 805-498-2139

Tuesday, October 7, 7:00 p.m.

Newbury Park Branch Library

2331 Borchard Road, Newbury Park • 805-498-2139

Monday, October 13, 7:00 p.m.

Borders Bookstore

125 W. Thousand Oaks Blvd., Thousand Oaks • 805-497-8159

Tuesday, October 14, 7:00 p.m.

Grant R. Brimhall Library

1401 E. Janss Road, Thousand Oaks • 805-449-2660

Saturday, October 18, 10:30 a.m.

Grant R. Brimhall Library

1401 E. Janss Road, Thousand Oaks • 805-449-2660

Thousand Oaks Reads would not be possible without the generous support of the following local businesses and organizations.



Grant R. Brimhall Library: 805-449-2660; Newbury Park Branch Library: 805-498-2139

SPECIAL EVENTS

All programs are free and open to the public.
Tickets are required for the Author Event on October 11.

Thousand Oaks Arts Festival. Saturday & Sunday, September 20 & 21, 10:00am – 5:00pm. Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza lawn, 2100 Thousand Oaks Blvd., 805-449-2660, ext. 258. Visit the **Thousand Oaks Reads** booth and help create murals for display in the libraries.

Film Screening: *God Grew Tired of Us*. Thursday, September 25, 6:30pm. Grant R. Brimhall Library, 1401 E. Janss Road, Thousand Oaks. 805-449-2660. The story of three “Lost Boys” from the Sudan who are forced to leave their homeland. 90 min.

Fern Davye presents *Liaisons in Literature*. Sunday, September 28, 2:00pm. Grant R. Brimhall Library, 1401 E. Janss Road, Thousand Oaks. 805-449-2660. Fern astonishes and engages audiences with her electrifying readings of literary works resonating the themes of *What Is the What*. Recommended for teens and adults.

CLU Faculty Panel Discussion. Thursday, October 2, 7:30pm. California Lutheran University Lundring Events Center, 60 W. Olsen Road, Thousand Oaks. A panel of CLU English, history and political science professors will respond to the themes and content of *What Is the What*; lend insight and pose questions about the relevance of this dynamic story for our global society.

Book Arts Workshop. Saturday, October 4, Session One: 10:00am – 1:00pm; Session Two: 2:00 – 5:00pm. Newbury Park Branch Library, 2331 Borchard Road, Newbury Park. 805-498-2139. Create a handmade book reflecting the themes of *What Is the What*. This class is taught by California artist and teacher Marcia Moore. All materials and tools will be supplied. **Registration is required.** Recommended for teens and adults.

DAFRA - West African Dance & Drum Ensemble. Sunday, October 5, 2:00pm. Grant R. Brimhall Library, 1401 E. Janss Road, Thousand Oaks. 805-449-2660. All ages will enjoy this lively performance representing the rich tapestry of Africa.

An Afternoon with Dave Eggers. Saturday, October 11, 2:00pm. Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza Fred Kavli Theatre, 2100 Thousand Oaks Boulevard. The award-winning author presents a reading and discussion followed by a book signing. Admission is free but tickets are required. Pick up free tickets at the Grant R. Brimhall Library (805-449-2660) or the Newbury Park Branch (805-498-2139), **beginning September 22. Limit two per person.**

Film Screening: *African Queen*. Monday, October 13, 1:00pm. Grant R. Brimhall Library, 1401 E. Janss Road, Thousand Oaks. 805-449-2660. Two diametrically opposed people find themselves thrown together in war-torn Africa. Directed by John Huston.

Reflections: Africa. Thursday, October 15, 7:00pm. Grant R. Brimhall Library, 1401 E. Janss Road, Thousand Oaks. 805-449-2660. Community members who have worked in Africa, or on Africa's behalf, reflect on their experiences.

Film Screening: *Hotel Rwanda*. Friday, October 17, 6:30pm. Grant R. Brimhall Library, 1401 E. Janss Road, Thousand Oaks. 805-449-2660. The true story of a hotel manager who saves over 1,200 lives during the 1994 Rwandan conflict. Rated PG-13.

For more information on any of these programs, visit the Thousand Oaks Library and www.thousandoaksreads.org