

Akual's Story

From "The World in Portland Project," Project Zero,

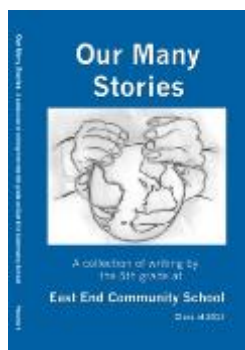
Context: The excerpts of a student interview you are about to read stem from the World in Portland Project – part of the Interdisciplinary and Global Studies Initiative at Project Zero. This project brought together Project Zero researchers and practitioners from the Portland Public Schools in Maine to re-envision pedagogies, classroom cultures and professional development approaches geared toward nurturing global competence—the capacity and disposition to understand and act on issues of global significance—among all learners. Like so many urban school districts around the world, over the last decade, Portland has witnessed an accelerated growth in the number of immigrant and refugee families it serves, now representing 36 % of the student population.

Akual, a 5th grade student at East End Community School, is in a writing conference with a volunteer writing coach. She is sharing the latest draft of her story, *The Lost Boys of Sudan*, and describing how she came to write this piece.

"My uncle Majok said he comes from the Lost Boys of Sudan. When I told this to my teacher she told me I come from a big history and she showed us a documentary of the lost boys of Sudan," Akual tells the volunteer. She picks up her iPad and plays an excerpt from the video of the interview with her mother. "How did you know about the Lost Boys of Sudan?" Akual asks. Her mother responded, "They were very young people... 7, 9, 12 years old in Sudan, everybody left. The people with the guns took the children away... or they ran away. I was older. I had my own son then. It started in 1983."



Akual pauses the video to explain, "So Majok never fled with his mom. That's how I took it. I heard what my mom was saying and I took it from that perspective. She said 'Kakuma,' so I used that in the story. But I researched it more because I didn't know what it was. I found out 'Kakuma' was a refugee camp... I think it is hard to come to America. This is from my mom's perspective... I am going to tear up."



the emotion of recalling her mother's story, pauses for a moment before continuing. "I think the history of Sudan is a great thing to write about. Some people know the Lost Boys as a group of boys who were lost. They were not *lost*. They were *captured*. Some were tending cattle. It says here (referencing a video her teacher shared with the class when Akual had begun to research her story), 'I got captured when I was tending cattle. They brought me to a refugee camp. I had to hide a lot of things.' The boys had to hide things [because] they could be killed just for having a picture of their family. I included that in my story." Akual's story narrated the reunification of her mother and uncle from three perspectives: her mother's, her uncle's, and her own. Her story, together with those of her peers was published in a book titled "The Many Stories of Portland"

Our Project Zero team visited Akual again nine months after the publication of her story. She was in 6th grade. We began this interview showing her a few minutes of her videotaped conversation with her coach.

Interviewer Can I ask you a question? What gave you the idea to write your story from these different perspectives in the first place?

Akual I learned it from my homework teacher and my reading teacher too. They were talking about perspective. And I really did not know what a perspective was. What are these perspectives? I do not know the word! But then, I was,.. 'what if I put this on my story and have different perspectives of people; ...they [my readers] could tell whose perspective it was if I had bolded letters saying: "Maria's perspective", "Majok's perspective", "Mary's perspective". And then Miss Melton said that it would be a good idea if I did that. I remember that! ... and Miss Smith said it would be a good idea.

Interviewer And do you think that it turned up well doing it that way?

Akual Yes! (with emphatic node)

Interviewer Do you think it is in any way important to learn to take perspective? Or maybe not so much?

Akual Perspective work is really important in life, though. Because you will find out how it is to be in a person's shoes. And how they For example, if a bully is picking on someone, you don't know how they feel in their shoes, you don't know what they are going through, you do not know anything about them, they are picking on them, just they are making them stressed!

And so, if you are writing about that person, you know how they feel; you can predict how they feel; you can infer...from all these texts I learned that a person is feeling sad, is going through a lot; but you don't know that. That's important about perspectives. You have to know how your person feels (pauses). How the person acts (pauses). Looking through the eyes of someone (long pause).

Have you guys heard the song of Kate Perry? Roar? She has the eye of the tiger. That part is like she has the perspective of the tiger... You can see through their eyes and see from their perspective. You can act like a person, or like follow that person for a whole day and you will see their perspectives. Like in the music video, she says: "I got the eye of the tiger (singing) dancing through the fire." She has the perspective of the tiger! And you know that by what she's saying and then she says: "And you're gonna see me roar" (singing and gesturing)

And THAT's a perspective!