Writing Options

Using the video seen, create your own story:

Describe your walk to the water source:

- What do you see on the way?
- What do you talk about as you walk?
- How long does your walk take?
- Describe the scene at the water hole.
- How do you collect the water?
- How do you feel on your walk back to your village?

Five Minutes of writing exercise (choose one scenario):

- Describe a day in your life before access to clean water
- Describe a day in your life after access to clean water.
- What is your hope for the future?
- What would say to people in the US?
- What would you tell us about where you live?
- What does water mean to you?

After reading “A Heartbreaking Need for Clean Water”, describe how each of the people in the story’s life would be different with access to clean water:

- Dilium, the mother
- Kidame, the seven year old girl
- Medin, the infant son
- The other women of Echele

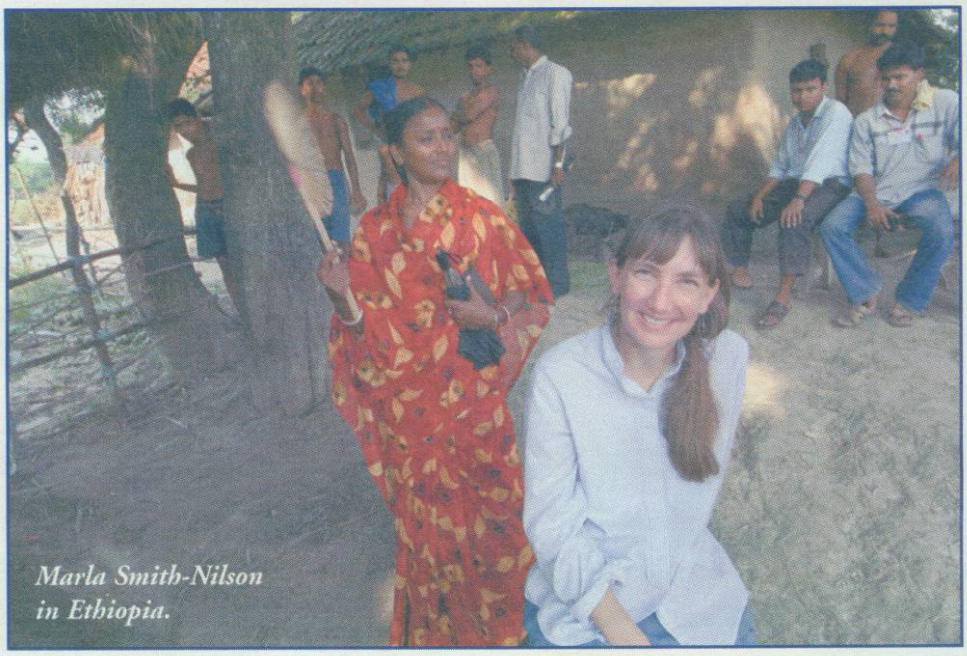
Also see Water 1st Art Activities curriculum for writing activities with art and photography.

A heartbreaking need for clean water

By Marla Smith-Nilson, Executive Director, Water 1st International

THE WORK THAT I do is often described by statistics: More than 1 billion people worldwide do not have access to safe water. Five million people die each year because of water-related disease. But I think the problem is best described by the real people behind the numbers.

One of them is Dilium Araya. Born and raised in Echele, a village in northern Ethiopia, 30-year-old Dilium was already the mother of six children when I met her in 2004.



Marla Smith-Nilson in Ethiopia.

At 5 a.m., Dilium awakens to nurse her infant son, Medin, and make a breakfast of injera bread and chick-pea soup for her family.

Around 6 a.m. Dilium and her 11-year-old daughter, Asmaraha, strap empty 5-gallon plastic containers on their backs and begin the walk to collect water. It's a 14-mile journey that takes them six hours to complete.

Dilium leaves Medin at home under the watch of her 7-year-old daughter, Kidame. While Dilium is gone, Medin misses two feedings. Dilium once told me that some days she doesn't have enough breast milk for Medin, and I thought of the calories she was burning simply collecting water.

When we reach the water source, the sight breaks my heart. It's a hole in the middle of a dry riverbed with women lined up waiting their turn to scoop out, cup by cup, their daily water. Goats and other animals meander nearby. Feces cover the ground. This is not just a water hole for humans, and it is clearly not drinkable water, but there is no other option for this village of 500 people.

After filling her water container, Asmaraha bends over deeply to get the 40-pound vessel up on her back, the ropes visibly pulling her little shoulders tightly together.

For the rest of the day, Dilium prepares food, makes coffee and takes care of the family's chickens and goats. She skips lunch herself so that the rest of the family can have more food. In the evening, if there is time, she will make a second trip to the water hole.

> ***"I don't know how such women and men maintain their families and their spirits and still literally say a prayer of thanks every day for what they have been blessed with."***

Dilium has lost one child so far to diarrhea, caused by drinking unsafe water. Every woman I met in Echele had lost at least one child. When I asked Dilium what she does when her children are sick, Dilium said that she carries them to the nearest health clinic, which is 18 miles one way on foot.

I am humbled by women like Dilium. I don't know how such women and men maintain their families and their spirits and still literally say a prayer of thanks every day for what they have been blessed with. I am a mother too. My son Calvin is a 6-year-

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old kindergartner, and Melina is 4. One of Calvin's favorite ways of protesting my requests is to deem them "not fair." Calvin has learned from experience that this doesn't go over well with me, especially when I have just returned from Ethiopia or somewhere else. I say, "What was that, Calvin?" and he rolls his eyes and says, "I know, Mom. I know. At least I have water."

Truthfully, this is something that I really struggle with. Every day, my job is about trying to help people who have really been dealt an unfair hand in life — they don't even have water or a simple toilet. I struggle with my own decisions about the kind of life I lead as I try to comprehend "What is my fair share?"

I'll probably never know the answer to that question, but I do feel that as a person who by the sheer luck of my birth has access to wealth and opportunity, I must show compassion. Real compassion. Not just emotion or good feelings, but compassion that commits. Compassion that acts.

I believe that the work of Water 1st represents that kind of real compassion. Through the safe water and sanitation projects we support around the world, I see communities transformed from places where children routinely die of preventable diseases to places where children live healthy lives. From places where women and girls spend their days carrying water to places where girls have time to go to school. There are also benefits we can't measure but we know are greatly valued by the people we serve, such as privacy and dignity and a life free from the drudgery of carrying water.

Every single individual on earth has both the potential and the right to live a decent life. It's my belief that the water projects we support are the first large step on that path.

Water 1st International is a ParentMap *Giving Together partner. For more information, visit* www.water1st.org.