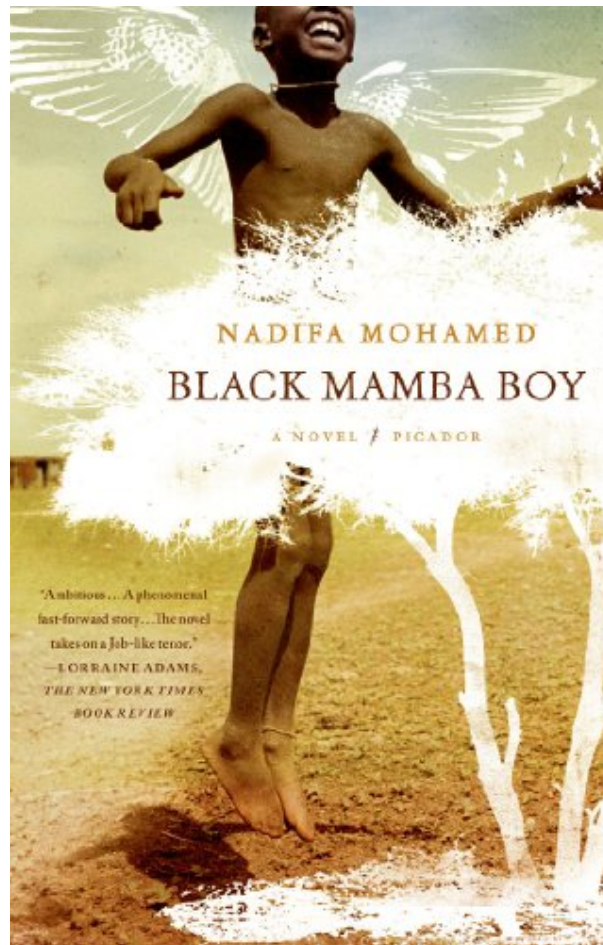
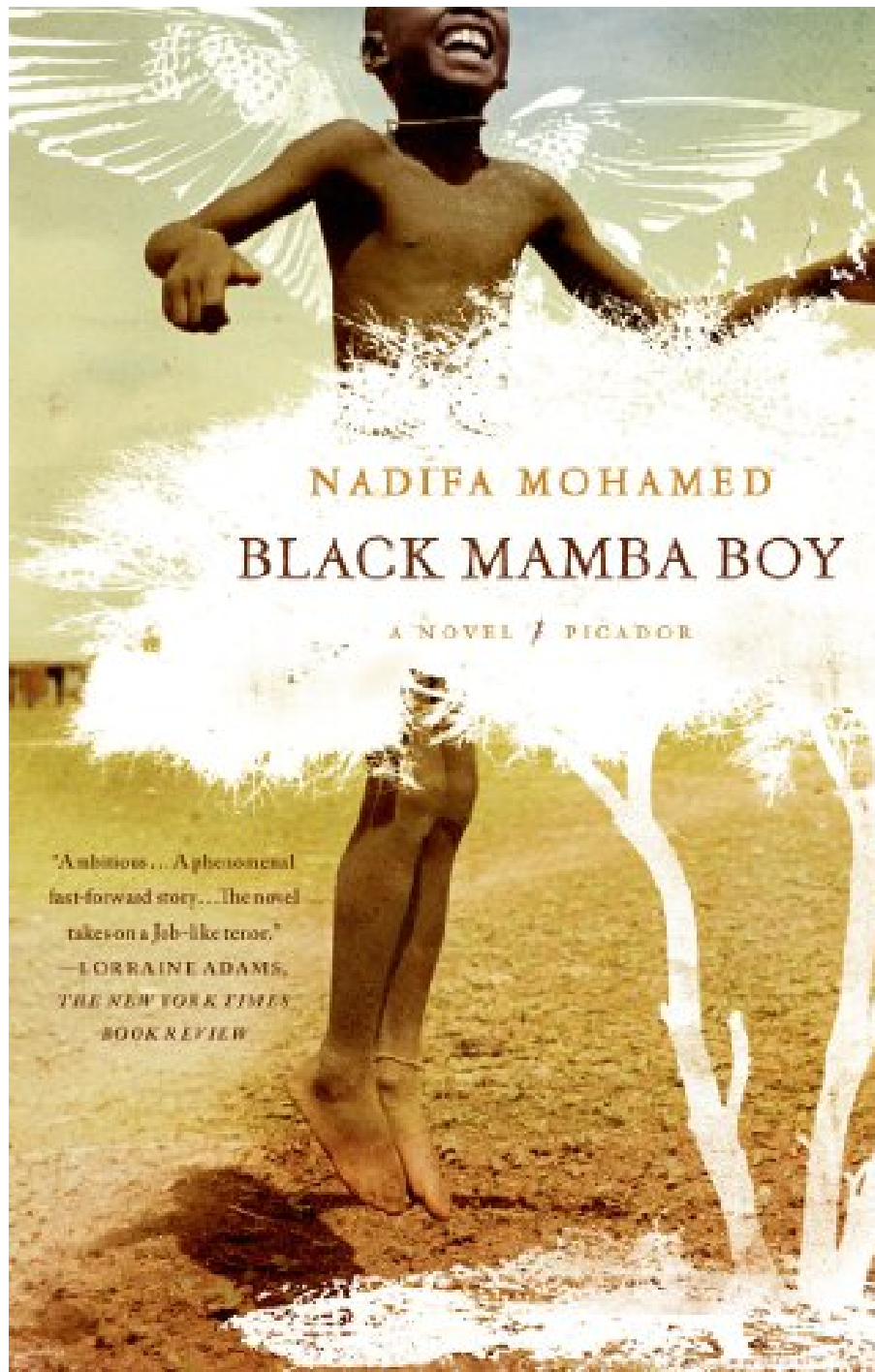


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From Publishers Weekly

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Set on the rough streets of Yemen in 1935, **Black Mamba Boy** tells a slice of history that seems all too modern. When Jama and his mother are abandoned by his father, they move to Yemen to try and make a new life. Rejected by the relatives they live with, Jama spends most of his days on the street. When his mother dies young, she leaves him with 100 rupees, which he decides to spend searching for his father. His journey takes him over 1,000 miles. Like other heartbreaking tales of child abuse and abandonment, **Black Mamba Boy** can be hard to take at times. But this debut novel is worth reading through to the end. --Marta Segal Block

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Yemen, 1935. Jama is a "market boy," a half-feral child scavenging with his friends in the dusty streets of a great seaport. For Jama, life is a thrilling carnival, at least when he can fill his belly. When his mother—alternately raging and loving—dies young, she leaves him only an amulet stuffed with one hundred rupees. Jama decides to spend her life's meager savings on a search for his never-seen father; the rumors that travel along clan lines report that he is a driver for the British somewhere in the north. So begins Jama's extraordinary journey of more than a thousand miles north all the way to Egypt, by camel, by truck, by train, but mostly on foot. He slings himself from one perilous city to another, fiercely enjoying life on the road and relying on his vast clan network to shelter him and point the way to his father, who always seems just a day or two out of reach.

In his travels, Jama will witness scenes of great humanity and brutality; he will be caught up in the indifferent, grinding machine of war; he will crisscross the Red Sea in search of working papers and a ship. Bursting with life and a rough joyfulness, *Black Mamba Boy* is debut novelist Nadifa Mohamed's vibrant, moving celebration of her family's own history.

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Most helpful customer reviews

7 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

An excellent story!

By Edith A. Campbell

To me, the Middle East is a true crossroad of the world and this really comes to light in *Black Mamba Boy*. In the book, it seems Jama's quest takes him throughout the entire region where he is exposed to so many languages, foods, colors and vistas that they can't help but enrich and educate him. His survival depends upon him learning to know when to trust people and situations because he thinks he has no one but himself to rely upon.

It's hard to remember how young Jama actually is when he loses his parents because he spends so much of his life hustling to stay alive. Jama shifts from place to place, first to find his father, then I think because he's just unable to stay in one place because he never has. He wonders throughout lands in Africa and in the Middle East learning what it's like to be a foreigner in his own land because he has no family and because the British and the Italians are claiming and redefining the territory. His wondering is not aimless, he does have purpose in his adventure.

There is a mystical nature to the book reference in the title. Also, Jama's parents appear to him in visions to provide guidance and comfort. In fact, there's a lot to this book. It is steeped with the history of the beginnings of WWII, colored with the geography and spiced with food and language. There are a few clunky passages but it is a well told story. This is one of the few books recently that I didn't try to skim through passages and finish quickly. I actually let myself savor each word so that I could create a movie in my head while reading.

I could have used a foldout map and a glossary to help with comprehension, but terms that I needed to know could be figured out in context. Situations feel real because they are based upon the life of the author's father. This may be more of an adult book than YA but an interested teen could enjoy this book. It would be good to suggest to someone who has read and enjoyed *The Kite Runner*, *Three Cups of Tea* or *Purple Hibiscus*.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Passport to Paradise?

By Coordinator Clive

A beautiful, elegantly written poignant story, which underlines 'white man's' stupidity in not recognising all

people on Earth are equal irrespective of their color, creed or religious belief. Mocked, beaten and degraded by men revelling in their power, Jama always walked forward into the unknown searching for his father until he was afforded a 'vital piece of paper' that determined where he could or could not go! Thank you Nadifa for a truly outstanding book and which fully deserves to receive accolades by the score. I cannot wait for your next 'story' as I'm sure it will be as rivetting as Black Mamba Boy!

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

A latter day Homeric epic

By keetmom

Nadifa Mohamed retells a fascinating tale of forgotten history in a literary style evocative of Gabriel Marquez's magical realism accounts of his forebears. In this case, the main character, Jama, is drawn from the true life adventures of Mohammed's father who overcame the worst of poverty, brutality and war in a epic journey through Somalia and Ethiopia in the 1930s. Jama is sustained throughout by a strong sense of destiny, the guiding presence of his late mother and the kindly help of strangers. The language and settings reflect in equal measure half-remembered family legends, reshaped through repeated tellings and the harsh realities of life for a small, vulnerable boy fending for himself. Perhaps a little overlong in the end, "Black Mamba Boy" opens important windows on the past.

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