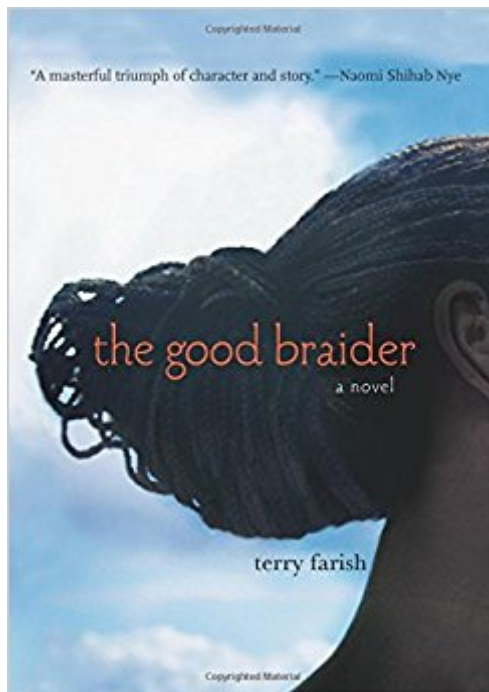


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The Good Braider



Synopsis

The Good Braider was selected as the 2013 Bank Street College of Education Best Book of the Year and a Book of Outstanding Merit. In spare free verse laced with unforgettable images, Viola's strikingly original voice sings out the story of her family's journey from war-torn Sudan, to Cairo, and finally to Portland, Maine. Here, in the sometimes too close embrace of the local Southern Sudanese Community, she dreams of South Sudan while she tries to navigate the strange world of America—a world where a girl can wear a short skirt, get a tattoo, or even date a boy; a world that puts her into sharp conflict with her traditional mother who, like Viola, is struggling to braid together the strands of a displaced life. Terry Farish's haunting novel is not only a riveting story of escape and survival, but the universal tale of a young immigrant's struggle to build a life on the cusp of two cultures. The author of The Good Braider has donated this book to the Worldreader program.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

****STARRED REVIEW**** Gr 9 Up—The Good Braider follows Viola on a journey from her home in ravaged Sudan to Cairo and finally to the folds of a Sudanese community in Maine. Viola's story, told in free verse, is difficult to read without a constant lurking sense of both dread and hope. In the opening scene she gazes at the curve of the back of a boy walking the street in front of her, only to view his senseless execution moments later. This tension never completely dissipates, though it takes on different forms throughout her story; by the end it is replaced not by the fear of execution or of the lecherous soldier who forces her to trade herself for her family's safety, but by the tension of walking the line between her mother's cultural expectations and the realities of her new country. Yet while Farish so lyrically and poignantly

captures Viola's wrenching experience leaving her home, navigating the waiting game of refugee life, and acculturating into the United States, she's equally successful in teasing out sweet moments of friendship and universal teenage experiences. Viola's memorable, affecting voice will go far to help students step outside of their own experience and walk a mile in another's shoes. Jill Heritage Maza, Montclair Kimberley Academy, Montclair, NJ
August 2012

****STARRED REVIEW**** Like Mark Bixler's adult book *The Lost Boys of Sudan* (2005), this powerful novel tells today's refugee story from a young viewpoint, but here, the Sudanese teen is a girl. In free-verse poems, Viola, 16, remembers being driven from home in the brutal civil war, then the long, barefoot trek to Khartoum and Cairo, escaping landmines and suffering hunger along the way, until at last she and her mother get refugee status, board a plane, and join her uncle in Portland, Maine's Sudanese community. Never exploitative, Viola's viewpoint will grip readers with its harsh truths: the shame of her rape in Sudan and the loss of her "bride wealth"; the heartbreak when her little brother dies during their escape; her wrenching separation from her grandmother. The contemporary drama in Maine is also moving and immediate. At 17, Viola is thrilled to go to school, and she makes friends, even a boyfriend who teaches her to drive: but can he get over her rape? Always there is her mother, enraged by the new ways. An essential addition to the Booklist Core Collection feature, "The New Immigration Story." • Hazel Rochman, July 1, 2012

5 Platypus for *The Good Braider* by Terry Farish I need to start off by saying that at first I was completely put off by the free verse written style of the novel. I even put the book down because I never read a book written that way and assumed it must have been a mistake. The only mistake was my way of thinking after realizing it was done on purpose. I decided to give it a second chance and quickly immersed myself in Viola's story. I truly couldn't put this book down. I just found this story to be so engrossing and enlightening. I actually feel that this is a story I will not forget. Kudos to the author for shining a light on the plight of a Sudanese refugee. The story truly came alive in my mind and I felt everything Viola felt. The research was really well done. Even though the author isn't from the Sudan, I felt she captured the true essence of that region. Overall, this is a great novel that I would highly recommend.

Brave and bold, *The Good Braider* by Terry Farish is told through the voice of Viola, a young

immigrant teen who escapes with her mother from war-torn South Sudan to a refugee camp in Cairo and then to a new home in Portland, Maine. Viola is haunted by the life she left behind — the people she has loved, the violence she has endured, and the natural beauty she remembers — as much as she is fearful and uncertain in her new life as an American living in Portland. The story is written in free verse, and the vibrant story-telling entices any young reader or adult. Both Viola and her mother, Tereza, struggle. They are learning the ropes in their new lives, working in a chicken packing factory, building a community of Sudanese within Portland, keeping up with the news and family left behind in South Sudan. Other more mundane tasks pose challenges as well, including learning how to drive in the U.S., to check out books from the public library, and to speak English. Acculturation comes easier — though it is by no means easy — for Viola who also attends high school, slowly making friends with a teacher, a social worker, and other students. As Viola poignantly observes, “no one from America is from America.” When romance sparks between Viola and a red-haired classmate named Andrew, a cultural collide erupts, straining reaches a literal boiling point Viola’s relationship with her mother. Well researched, this novel is an excellent accompaniment to learning about the conflict in South Sudan, the world’s newest country, which is one of the poorest in sub-Saharan Africa and also one of the most oil-rich. The civil war left tens of thousands of South Sudanese dead, and over 2 million were forced to flee their homes. The Good Braider does not shy away from some violent scenes, so we recommend using discretion and reading at the middle school level and above. The novel is also a way for educators to explore the long process of becoming a refugee to the U.S. Each year the President, in consultation with Congress, determines the numerical ceiling for refugee admissions. For Fiscal Year (FY) 2016, the proposed ceiling is 85,000. In FY 2015, a third of refugee arrivals to the U.S. came from Africa.

Additional Resources

- *A Land of Refuge or Refusal? Perspectives on the Refugee Experience in the United States* — In this American Immigration Council lesson plan, students analyze key ideas in an academic article that provides background on the refugee experience in the United States. After analyzing author’s claims and evidence, students apply one of those claims to the current refugee crisis in order to answer the question: how is America a land of refuge, refusal, or both?

An awesome book! I live in the Portland area so it was particularly interesting to me. I had to keep checking to see if it was true! I had no idea we have so many Sudanese people here. I appreciated learning about the difficulties of getting here, what it’s like to be from a war torn country and the

challenges faced trying to assimilate into another culture. Well, worth the the read!

In the culture of Africa, a girl's hair tells the story of her life. In the young-adult novel *The Good Braider*, author Terry Farish, has used the metaphor of braiding to tell the story of Viola, a refugee from war-torn Sudan who has been granted political asylum in Portland, Maine. When we first meet Viola, she lives with her grandmother, mother, and young brother in the village of Juba, located in the southern region of Sudan inhabited mostly by people following Christian beliefs. Muslim Soldiers have come from the north of Sudan to coerce the southern Sudanese to convert to Islam; a bloody civil war has been raging for many years. Viola, her mother and brother escape from Juba, traveling to Karthoum and onward to Cairo where eventually Viola and her mother are granted political asylum and permission to travel on to Portland, Maine to join Uncle Marco and other Sudanese refugees. Submersion into the more free, relaxed culture of life in the United States continues to be fraught with turmoil, but Viola is guided by a strong totem; and as the story comes to a close, the reader feels confident that Viola will succeed in the life she has been given. *The Good Braider* is a moving tale of persistence against what appear to be insurmountable odds both for Viola and for the young country of South Sudan. *The Good Braider* is an excellent book.

This was my second reading because the story and history was growing dim, but I remembered how much I liked it the first time. This is the type of book I like best, one about other cultures. It was choice to read about the culture clash that takes place by coming to America, Land of the Free, much more of a challenge for the older generation than the younger. The "generation gap" is very clearly shown. This story reminded me that America was meant to be a land of refuge, a melting pot, as outlined by the Statue of Liberty's heart-rending yet hopeful WELCOME to immigrants "yearning to be free." All our immigrants have a touching story to tell. This story inspires one to help them fit in, learn English, know the rules and laws of driving, assist them to get jobs, and while learning American ways, keep what is good from their former culture.

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