

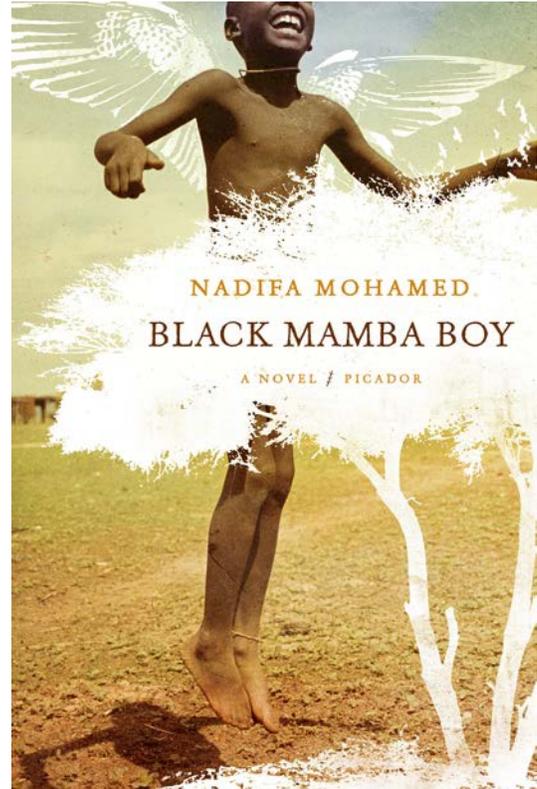
READING GROUP GUIDE

Black Mamba Boy

A Novel

by Nadifa Mohamed

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Black Mamba Boy* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Black Mamba Boy*.

About the Book

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.

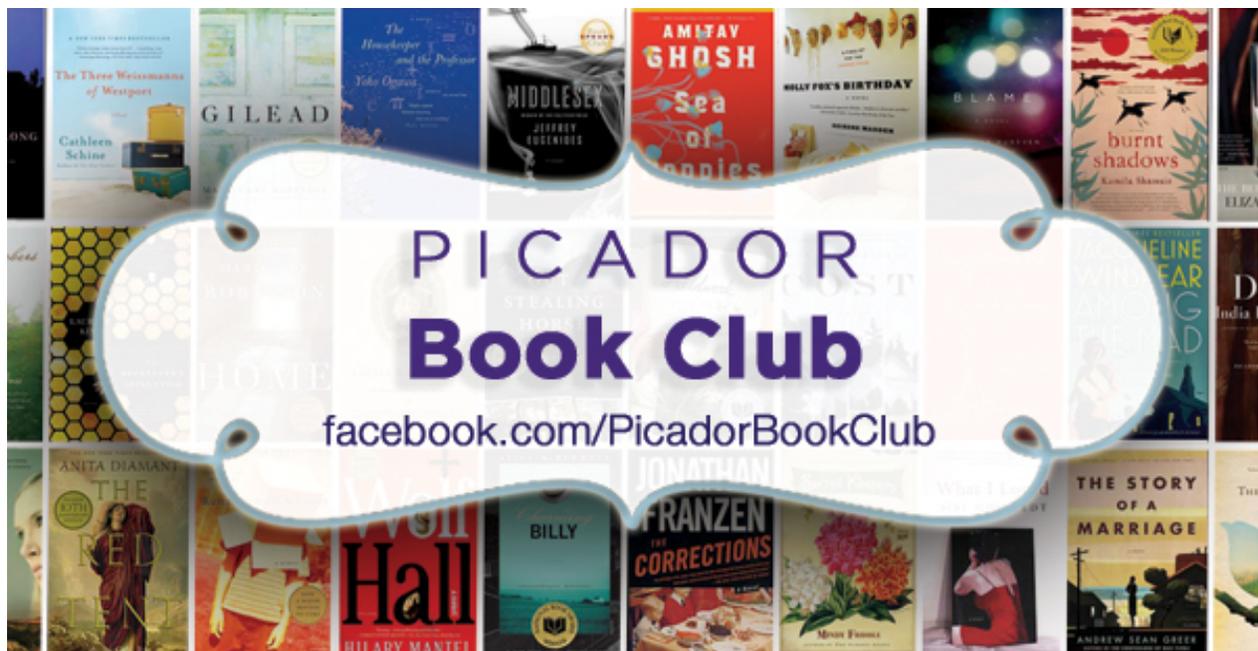
About the Author

Nadifa Mohamed was born in Hargeisa, Somalia, in 1981 to a merchant marine father and a mother from a politically active family, and was trapped in exile when civil war erupted. She studied history and politics at Oxford, and has worked as a film researcher and scriptwriter.

Discussion Questions

1. Jama often suffers from being an "outsider": first as a "market boy", later as an orphan. But what advantages does he gain from being an outsider during his journey?
2. Jama's mother tells him he is destined to be lucky because of her encounter with a Black Mamba snake during her pregnancy. In what ways does this prediction prove to be true?
3. Jama and his friends Abdi and Shidane are witness to and victims of horrific acts of violence. How do Jama and Abdi choose to respond to this violence? How does it affect each of their lives?
4. Jama comes of age during an incredibly turbulent time. How do the larger historical concerns of colonialism and fascism affect Jama's everyday life?
5. What kind of role do women play in Jama's life?
6. How does Jama's understanding of his mother change after he learns he is a father?
7. Jama keenly feels the lack of connection with his father, and is acutely concerned with becoming a man. Which characters offer him the best versions of manhood? Do you think Jama has figured out how to be a man by the end of the book?

8. Do you think Jama's decision to leave Bethlehem and Gerset was a wise one? Would you have made the same choice?
9. During his travels, Jama often runs up against the national boundaries drawn by British and Italian colonizers. How important is country to Jama, versus the importance of family and clan?
10. Jama becomes an orphan early on in his childhood. What sorts of families does he manage to create for himself during the course of his journey?



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