



***Kaffir Boy: The True Story of a Black Youth's Coming of Age in Apartheid South Africa* by Mark Mathabane**

Farrar Straus Giroux Books for Young Readers, Macmillan Children's Publishing Group, 1986

ISBN: 9780025818002 (Hardcover)

BOOK SYNOPSIS

The classic story of life in Apartheid South Africa.

Mark Mathabane was weaned on devastating poverty and schooled in the cruel streets of South Africa's most desperate ghetto, where bloody gang wars and midnight police raids were his rites of passage. Like every other child born in the hopelessness of apartheid, he learned to measure his life in days, not years. Yet Mark Mathabane, armed only with the courage of his family and a hard-won education, raised himself up from the squalor and humiliation to win a scholarship to an American university.

This extraordinary memoir of life under apartheid is a triumph of the human spirit over hatred and unspeakable degradation. For Mark Mathabane did what no physically and psychologically battered "Kaffir" from the rat-infested alleys of Alexandra was supposed to do—he escaped to tell about it.

REVIEWS AND PRAISE

"In this powerful account of growing up black in South Africa, a young writer makes us feel intensely the horrors of apartheid." — [Publishers Weekly](#)

"*Kaffir Boy* is a book full of a young man's clumsy pride and sorrow, full of rage at the hideousness of circumstances, the unending destruction of human beings, the systematic degradation of an entire society (and not only black South African society) in the name of a fantastic idea. — [Los Angeles Times](#)

"Like . . . Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land* . . . in every way as important and exciting." — *The Washington Post*

"This is a rare look inside the festering adobe shanties of Alexandra, one of South Africa's notorious black townships. Rare because it comes . . . from the heart of a passionate young African who grew up there." — *Chicago Tribune*

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

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- No. 1 on Washington Post Bestsellers list
- No. 3 on New York Times Bestsellers list
- Christopher Award - Winner
- American Library Association's Outstanding Books for the College-Bound and Life-long Learners list

MEDIA AND RESOURCES

- [New York Times interview](#)
- [New York Times interview](#)
- [SFGate interview](#)

RESPONSE TO CHALLENGES

[Thief River Falls, MN](#) - *Kaffir Boy* is a memoir of growing up in apartheid-era South Africa and the racial brutality of that time. Class discussion of literature like *Kaffir Boy* gives students an opportunity to learn about and discuss disturbing but significant historical events. Precluding students from reading material with difficult themes and language would deprive them of exposure both to historical works and vast amounts of important literature, including Shakespeare, major religious texts such as the Bible, the works of Flaubert, Joyce, Faulkner, contemporary books such as *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, *Beloved*, and many of the texts regularly assigned in high schools throughout the State of Minnesota. The school district would potentially put its students at an educational disadvantage in college if it did not introduce them to challenging literature of this sort in high school.

***A NOTE ON AGE RANGES**

A publisher-suggested age range covers the gamut of readers that publishers envision using the book, whether for independent reading, family sharing, group study, or in other ways. Educators have the best sense of the appropriate age range for the diverse learners they work with and understand these ranges vary depending on a book's intended use.

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