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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Laurie Halse Anderson. *Ndito Runs.* New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996. 32 pp. $15.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8050-3265-9.

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Kenya is the setting for this picture book, and from the illustrations one might guess that it is supposed to be set in a Maasai village. Ndito is a young girl who is on her way from her home in the village to the school which is some distance away. She is filled with energy and runs all the way to school. As she runs, Ndito conjures up images of different animals and imagines herself to be these animals in flight. She pictures herself as everything from cranes, to ostriches, to flamingos.

By dwelling on the animals, this book indulges in a common Western preoccupation with animals in Africa and Kenya in particular. It is said that the author, an American, drew on her own childhood imagination for this story. The author might have done better to tell the story in an environment to which it was better suited (in her case, as a young girl in Syracuse, New York) rather than to superimpose such a story on a Kenyan girl whose dreams would be unlikely to center on animals in the romanticized fashion that the author describes. This book also veers towards confusing stereotypes through its illustrations that juxtapose Ndito, dressed in Western school uniform but barefoot, and the rest of her family dressed in traditional garments. Nevertheless, despite its weaknesses, this is an animated story, filled with energy and appropriate for primary school-age children.

For the most part, the book remains age-appropriate, except for the last sentence, "Through her Africa, across her Kenya, over her highlands to school." This is a gramatically incomplete sentence and the intended meaning is too abstract and romanticized for young children. From an artistic perspective, the illustrations are very well done and accurately depict the types of landscape one finds in East Africa. The illustrations mirror the accompanying text and add to the energy of the story.

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