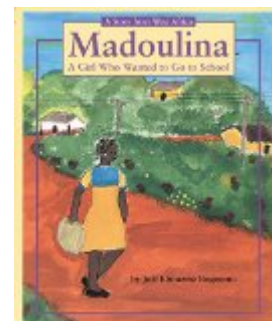


Joel Eboueme Bognomo. *Madoulina, A Girl Who Wanted to Go to School.* Penn: Boyds Mills Press, 1999. 32 pp. \$14.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-56397-769-5.



Reviewed by Maggie Canvin

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This is a well-presented, attractive picture book in which a Cameroonian child, Madoulina, tells the story of how she was able to go to school despite family problems. It is fully illustrated by the author. The pages are not numbered. The story is set in a suburb of Yaounde, a large city in Cameroon, West Africa. Yaounde, like most major towns, has poor districts as well as more prosperous areas. The focus of this story is the attitude and economic difficulties faced by an eight-year old girl, Madoulina, who lives in one of these poor districts and who wants to go to school. Madoulina tells how her father has abandoned the family and she has to help her mother support the family by selling fritters, rather than going to school like her younger brother. She meets her younger brother's teacher, Mr. Garba, who explains to her mother the value of educating girls and offers an economic solution Madoulina's problem. Madoulina then returns to her friends at the school, catches up with the lessons she has missed, and Mr. Garba becomes part of her family.

The main difficulty with the story is that it is not clear at the beginning that Madoulina has al-

ready begun school and has "dropped-out" because of the family problems. There is a lot of inconsistency about this aspect of the story. On page twelve, it is mentioned by the children who are teasing her that Madoulina had the hope of becoming a doctor. This is the first indication that she had been to school and is oblique. When questioned by the teacher as to why he had not seen her in school, she says on page fourteen "I was supposed to start the first year of regular school but" And on page 24 she says "what joy! I was going back to school. Once more I could play with all my friends, and best of all, my dream of becoming a doctor could come true." This is the first time that it is explicitly mentioned that she has been to school. We then find that she has missed three weeks of the first class, but yet she can already read and write as she is able to copy and learn her missed lessons. It is unclear what sort of school Madoulina had been to earlier, if she had only missed three weeks of the first year of regular school.

The setting and characters are quite realistic to this part of Africa, and are appropriately

dressed. The characters are consistently portrayed in the same dress which aids identification. The eight year old child, Madoulina, who tells the story, is portrayed sympathetically, and aspects of her life are brought out. Madoulina's mother is portrayed as "uneducated" and a statement is made that "My mother had never been to school. She just needed to understand what an education was." Her attitude to the education of girls is presented as a problem but this changes by the end of the story. The teacher appears to be from a different ethnic group and Muslim by dress. He is portrayed as a positive, pro-active person who tries to find a creative solution to the family's problem, and then follows through by caring enough to visit every day.

This book will be useful as class material to show the problems some children in Africa face and to discuss differences in attitudes to education and child labor.

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