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Niki Daly. *Jamela's Dress.* New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999. ii + 30 pp. $16.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-374-33667-7.

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Published on H-AfrTeach (June, 2001)

Buy This Book

Jamela's Dress was chosen as one of the Honor Books for the African Studies Association annual Children's Africana Book Awards in 2000. This delightful story tells how a little girl gets carried away, literally and figuratively, with her mother's new fabric destined for a wedding party.

Jamela dons her mother's unsewn fabric and parades through the street. She is photographed by a journalist whose picture is published, declaring, "Kwela Jamela African Queen." The fabric is ruined during the outing, but the photo wins a cash award, and all is forgiven when mother receives new fabric in time to make dresses for herself and Jamela for the wedding celebration.

The book is fun to read and the story is believable, whether or not that is important to young readers. It could happen to any youngster, being carried away with the beauty and volume of the pretty fabric, wrapped majestically around the body. Jamela certainly enjoys her 15 minutes of fame. She enters a make-believe world where she is queen and everyone admires her, saying "Kwela Jamela," an interesting expression explained by the author in an endnote.

Daly's illustrations bring the story to life; Jamela is adorable; her mother appears understanding; her friends are fun and wacky. Background buildings represent common house styles and business structures. The clothing is typical of urban areas, as are the other "adornments" in the illustrations: bicycles, chickens, skate boards and the pet dog.

This story deserves a place in primary school libraries. It is a happy story about a happy family (although there is no father mentioned). The pictures move the story with fun and glee during the daring stroll and with compassion during the time when "Mama was so upset that she couldn't even look at Jamela."

Buy this book and enjoy it with your own children and grandchildren. It will serve as a catalyst for similar stories in your family's history.

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Citation: Marylee S. Crofts. Review of Daly, Niki, *Jamela's Dress.* H-AfrTeach, H-Net Reviews. June, 2001.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=5213

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