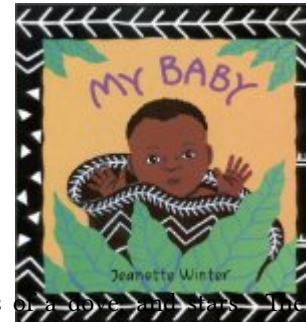


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Jeanette Winter. *My Baby*. New York: Frances Foster Books, 2001. 32 pp. Ages 2-8. \$16.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-374-35103-8.

Reviewed by Maggie Canvin (School of Education, University of Reading, England)  
Published on H-AfrTeach (March, 2002)



I highly recommend this book for use as a story book for pre-school children and to stimulate discussion for children ages 5-8. This is a well-presented, attractive, un-numbered, hardback picture book. Each page is fully illustrated with clear, attractive, bordered pictures. The first-person story of a Malian Bglan (mud cloth) artist develops through the book, which takes us from her childhood to the arrival of her own baby. The process of Bglan cloth painting is described in detail, and the starkness of the black and white Bglan borders contrasts well with the sumptuous colours of the main pictures. The book draws a nice parallel between the artistic creation of Bglan cloth with the birth of a baby. The process of Bglan painting is portrayed in a way that will catch a child's imagination and could be used to stimulate project work in a classroom.

Nakunte Diarra is the child of a Malian Bglan painter. We are told that black and white Bglan cloth is used for special occasions. The first 6 pages describe her childhood as she learns the craft from her mother and becomes a craftswoman herself. Then we are introduced to the fact that she has married and is expecting her own baby. She starts work on a special Bglan cloth for her baby. Over the next pages we see the detailed work that goes into producing one of these cloths. Nakunte tells her unborn baby about the wonders of her world and symbolically incorporates these into the cloth including a drum-shaped border, checks that mimic a leopard's spots, the pattern of a snake, a scorpion's tail, fish bones, an iguana's tongue, a crocodile's leg, the chameleon's tail,

calabash flowers, footprints. When the rains come, the Bglan cloth is finished and the baby is born. Finally we see the happy couple with their baby who is wrapped in the special Bglan cloth.

The book is set in Mali in West Africa. Although this is stated, there is no indication to the reader in the text that Mali is in Africa, apart from the way the characters are drawn. The setting and the characters are realistic, in a stylized way, for this part of Africa. The characters are drawn in a very consistent way which is attractive to a young reader. The main characters wear the same design of clothes which is good for identification. However, the clothing that Nakunte wears is not typically Malian in style for an adult woman, apart from working in a compound, and her shoulders should be covered. The men's clothes and hats are quite accurate although men do not normally wear headscarves as Nakunte's husband does. None of the people in the book wears shoes. This is an inaccurate portrayal of African life in Mali, where even in a village people wear "flip-flops." Only young children go without shoes and this is not encouraged because of possible damage to feet.

The processes described in the book are very accurate and give an excellent picture of both the artistic and production processes involved in producing the Bglan cloth. The story develops well and is consistent. The main character is portrayed sympathetically and positively. This book makes a good contribution to literature about Africa for children.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-aftrteach>

**Citation:** Maggie Canvin. Review of Winter, Jeanette, *My Baby*. H-AfrTeach, H-Net Reviews. March, 2002.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=6045>

Copyright © 2002 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at [hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu](mailto:hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu).