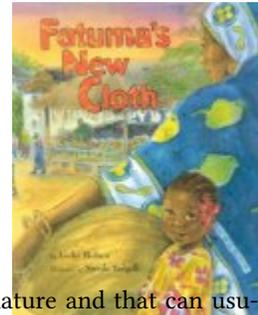


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Leslie Bulion. *Fatuma's New Cloth*. Illustrations by Nicole Tadgell. North Kingstown, RI: Moon Mountain Publishing, 2002. 29 pp. Ages 4-8. \$15.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-9677929-7-2.

Reviewed by Gloria Creed_Dikeogu (Ottawa University, Ottawa, Kansas)
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Fatuma's New Cloth is a charming story about a little East African girl, who visits the market with her mother in order to purchase kanga cloth for a new dress. During her trip to the market, Fatuma helps us explore the East African perception of the world as she learns about her peoples' culture and traditions. Fatuma also comes to learn that different people have different opinions and that they may interpret things very differently. This is especially apparent in her experiences in buying the kanga cloth and her favorite drink, chai, a tea that is commonly prepared and served amongst East Africans.

Although the book's storyline is simple, and is written with the young child as the audience, its depth can be enjoyed by anyone with an interest in learning more about East African culture. We watch Fatuma silently learning from her mother what she needs to know, in order to grow up and take on the responsibilities of an African woman. She is eager for the time when she will dress like her mother, sew like her mother and finish her schooling. Alongside the character of Fatuma, we learn how chai is made and how much Fatuma enjoys drinking it with her mother and family. We learn the importance of the market in the life of Fatuma's community and see how she interacts with each of the vendors at the market, where in time, she will learn the skills she needs to bargain and purchase goods to take home to her family. We also learn about the social importance of kanga cloth in East Africa. Kanga cloth is a colorful printed cotton cloth with traditional motifs, that is usually bought in pairs, to be worn by both women and men in East Africa (predominantly Kenya and Tanzania) as part of their daily dress. Each kanga cloth carries a slogan that could be

political, social or religious in nature and that can usually be interpreted with an ambiguous meaning, such as the new blue cloth that Fatuma buys at the market. The saying on Fatuma's cloth is a social saying which compares people with chai. The color of the chai is like the outer appearance of a person, while the flavor of the chai is compared to the hidden or unseen person, or the added ingredient, which is sugar. The story of Fatuma's new cloth is not about chai or kanga cloth, but about a child's journey into social learning and understanding, and we enjoy that social learning experience with her.

Experience the sights, colors, sounds and tastes of East Africa with Fatuma and her mother. This book is a feast to be enjoyed by readers of any age. To young readers, the story will be perceived to be simple and straightforward, and yet it also offers them a lot to think about. The illustrations are rich and colorful and fit the main themes of the book, which focus on the social importance of kanga cloth and chai in the lives of East African communities like Fatuma's.

This book is highly recommended and is appropriate for any age interested in learning about African culture and tradition.

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