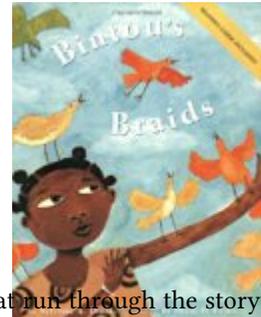


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Sylvianne A. Diouf. *Bintou's Braids*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2001. 40 pp. \$14.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8118-2514-6; \$6.99 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8118-4629-5.

Reviewed by Wendy Fall (Dakar, Senegal)  
Published on H-AfrTeach (April, 2004)



The great charm of this book is the way that Bintou is presented in her surroundings, both the real and the imaginary. In her real world, Bintou is observant and takes the reader through some of the important events that mark her life as a young West African girl: hair braiding and decoration, baptism ceremonies for babies, young women dancing, and grandmothers' special friendships with granddaughters. Bintou's dreams have to do with her future: her eventual development into a charming and stylish girl who can wear "real" braids the way older girls and women around her do. We learn that braids must be earned, and we share Bintou's hopes that she will grow older and wiser so that she can wear the intricate braid styles she so desires. During the course of the story, Bintou uses intelligence and courage to get help for two boys who are drowning, an act that brings her into another phase of her young life.

Other interesting themes that run through the story include the importance of age grades or age cohorts in West Africa, the closeness of family and community, the positive fanfare associated with the birth of a baby, girls' bravery, and the special place that grandparents can play in a child's life. The colorful illustrations will capture the imagination of most young readers. Children will especially respond to the naming ceremony of the baby. The idea of a new child being welcomed with delicious foods, music, and a special name which is announced to a crowd will appeal to a young child's sense of his or her own importance. An added bonus of this tale is the presence of a visitor from the diaspora, making it truly a work of the twenty-first century. This sense of the "transnational" adds value to a narrative that is already rich in word imagery and illustrations.

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