

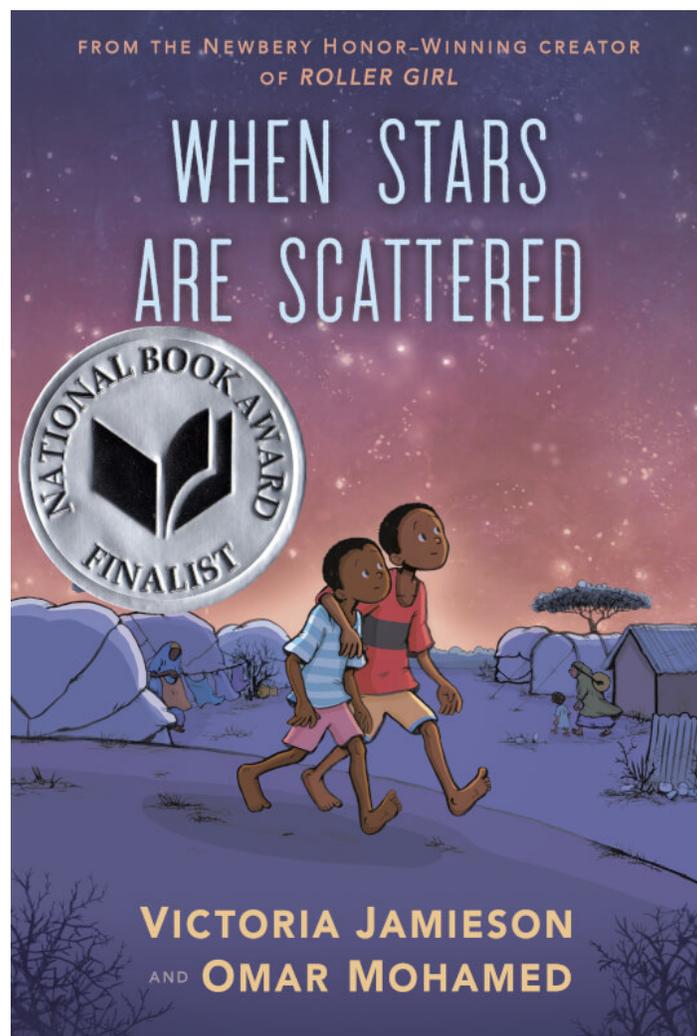
RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Review

When Stars Are Scattered by Victoria Jamieson and Omar Mohamed

by Anna Sedlock-Reiner



WHEN STARS ARE SCATTERED BY OMAR MOHAMED AND VICTORIA JAMIESON

Victoria Jamieson and Omar Mohamed (2020). *When Stars Are Scattered*. (Color by Iman Geddy). New York: Penguin Random House.

When *Stars Are Scattered* is a graphic novel illustrated by Victoria Jamieson, who also wrote the Newbery award-winning *Roller Girl* in 2015. The book is told from the perspective of Omar Mohamed who, as a child, fled from his home in Somalia to a refugee camp in Kenya called Dadaab, currently the largest in the world.

Omar flees from Somalia because his life is in danger; some people shot his father when Omar was very little and his brother was just a baby. This may have been one of the saddest parts in the book because Omar was playing with his favorite toys when he turned and saw people shoot his father. Omar immediately ran to his mother and, since he was so little, he couldn't really tell her exactly what had happened, but she understood. Omar's mother then told him to go to his neighbor's house and that she would come and get him when she could.

Omar and Hassan ran until they came to their neighbor's house and, by then, the people with guns were everywhere. They had no choice but to leave Somalia, so they walked for miles. They had nothing to eat except maybe some little bits of food that they found along the way, and nothing to drink either. Omar began to grow very skinny and tired.

Their group began to grow as more people escaping from their homes joined them. But then it also began to shrink: The people with guns would find and corner them, steal their clothes and food, and so people in the group began to die.

Finally, Omar and a very small group of other refugees arrived at Dadaab. He and his brother Hassan had a lot of illnesses--malaria, malnutrition, dehydration, and more. They were placed in the refugee camp's hospital and cared for until they were mostly better. But Hassan never fully recovered and was only able to say one word: "Hooyo." (Toward the end of the book, it is very moving to find out what "hooyo" actually means in Somali.)

After reading the book, I did some research on the walking distance between Somalia and Kenya, and well... it's really, really long: about 271 hours (approximately twelve days) and 1,347.5 kilometers. And it would have taken even longer than that because Omar's group had to stop to rest.

Most of the book shows Omar and Hassan living in Dadaab. It also showed me what it was like to live in a refugee camp and the terrible conditions the brothers found there. Sometimes Omar and his brother had food, but most of the time they didn't. They lived in little tents and played soccer with crumpled-up plastic bags. They each had one pair of clothes. I tried to think about what that would be like, and it's really hard to imagine. For girls and women, the situation was even harder. There were fewer girls in the

classes at school than boys, and that meant that not many of them made it to middle or high school. A lot of girls weren't even allowed to go to school at all. In the book, the characters Maryam and Nemo help bring this to the reader's attention.

I could not put *When Stars Are Scattered* down! The story moved along quickly even though their life in Dadaab lasted for more than 15 years. I also liked that, even though it showed you many terrible things that happened, it was also from the perspective of a kid—so, despite the circumstances, the book showed the regular things kids do in their lives no matter where they are. I also liked that the relationship between Omar and Hassan was a big part of the book: Other kids tease Hassan because he can only say one word, and they think that means he's dumb. But Omar is able to see that Hassan actually does understand things, he just can't express them with words. Omar feels protective of Hassan, and, with the help of his best friend, is able to realize that Hassan can also be his own person and doesn't always need Omar's help.

I really recommend this book! Enjoy!



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