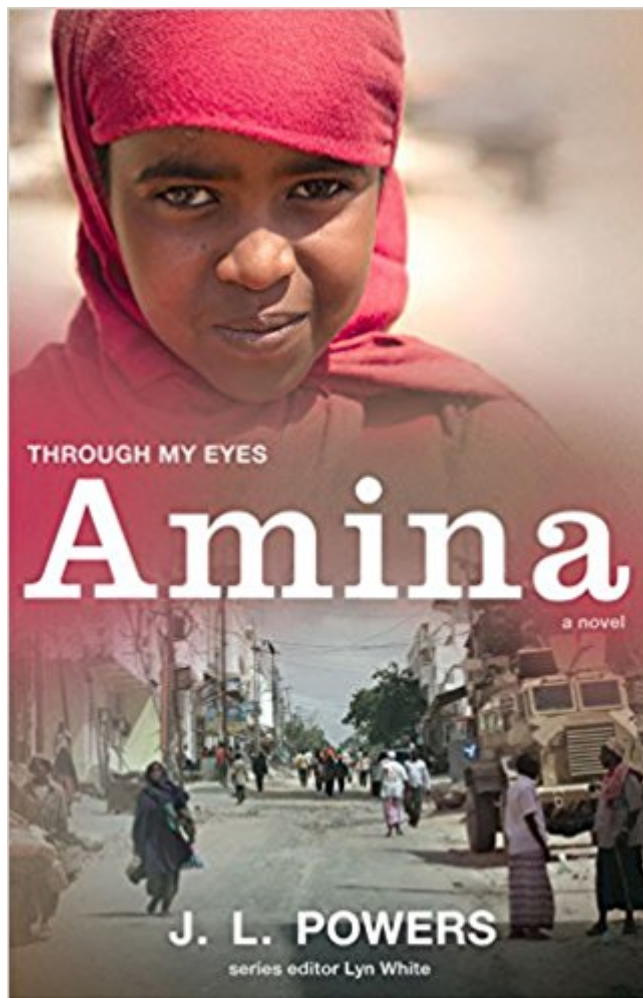


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# Amina: Through My Eyes



## Synopsis

A moving, fictional account of one child's life in a conflict zone, in Mogadishu, Somalia. Amina lives on the edges of Mogadishu. Her family's house has been damaged in Somalia's long civil war, but they continue to live there, reluctant to leave their home. Amina's world is shattered when government forces come to arrest her father because his art has been officially censored, deemed too political. Then rebel forces kidnap Amina's brother, forcing him to become a soldier in Somalia's brutal ongoing war. Although her mother and grandmother are still with her, Amina feels vulnerable and abandoned. Secretly, she begins to create her own artwork in the streets and the derelict buildings to give herself a sense of hope and to let out the burden of her heart. Her artwork explodes into Mogadishu's underground world, providing a voice for people all over the city who hope for a better, more secure future.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"This book is rich with realistic, complex details about Islam, agency, urban life, and friendship. Amina's story is at once culturally specific, unique and universal, so that readers from all walks of life will find moments of connection. Politically relevant, this timely story offers many opportunities for classroom discussion." —Booklist

J. L. Powers is the author of two previous novels, *The Confessional* and *This Thing Called the Future*, and the editor of a number of books, anthologies, and journals. She is a regular contributor

to The Pirate Tree, a blog on social justice and children's literature. She lives in San Bruno, California. Lyn White is a primary school teacher-librarian and ESL teacher with more than 20 years of experience.

This is a well-researched book written for young adult readers. It is the story of a Somali teenage girl, called Amina, as she lives through a very difficult time probably between 2006 and 2011 during which a good part of Somalia's capital Mogadishu was controlled by the jihadist movement Al-Shabaab. The narrative is in Amina's voice, as is true for all books of the "Through My Eyes" series. Amina loses two family members to Al Shabaab. First, armed men come and take away her father because Al Shabaab disapproves of his paintings and critical spirit. Then her older, soccer-loving brother Roble is kidnapped in the street. At the same time, Amina's family cannot turn to its rich neighbors, on whose son (Keinan) Amina has a crush, because they are helping Al Shabaab in return for financial gain. Amina is drawn to making art, like her father, but she is also drawn to creating it in public spaces, mostly in abandoned buildings, at great risk. However, as her family, now consisting of her pregnant mother, grandmother, and herself is left without any income and begins to starve, she feels compelled to give up on making art, even if only temporarily. No longer able to attend school, Amina must roam the streets to find or steal some food just to help the household survive. Four developments eventually bring some improvement in Amina's life and provide a conclusion to the story: she succeeds in selling one of her father's paintings; with Keinan's help, she manages to find a midwife so that her mother gives birth to a healthy little girl, the troops of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) help drive Al Shabaab out of Mogadishu, and Amina begins to make art again. Overall, the author's representation of Amina's thoughts and feelings about her family members and Keinan, is very persuasive, and the ways in which she depicts and provides context to the destroyed city and its resilient inhabitants are realistic and respectful. However, this novel also has some drawbacks. First, too many aspects of Amina's story remain unresolved. When the story concludes, peace has been largely restored and Keinan is allowed to come and visit Amina. However, the reader is left in the dark about the fates of Amina's father and brother and about the total lack of household income that had earlier caused the family to starve. Second, why does the author have to squeeze comments about female genital cutting into the story? The suggestion that, because of

this practice, Amina's mother and grandmother take more time when using the toilet (p. 62) is puzzling; does the author really think that older women are still infibulated? Third, the author depicts Amina and her family as in total isolation. No one calls them from in or outside Somalia; no one in the Somali diaspora sends them money or reaches out to get their news. In the period 2006-2011, in the heart of Mogadishu, this is not a realistic representation and undercuts the dynamism of the account. Fourth, although the story has many beautiful descriptions (e.g., p. 83, Amina's prayer) and metaphors (e.g. p. 74, Amina's anger as "a missile seeking heat"), the description of the stench and sight of Amina's mother's threatening miscarriage (p. 143) is too revolting for a book for young adults. Finally, while the author succeeds in presenting Amina's collages and paintings as creative and imaginative, she renders the young girl's verbal art as artless and dull (e.g. pp. 71, 131). L. Powers is the well-respected author of two other novels for young adults (*The Confessional* and *This Thing Called the Future*), as well as a picture book (*Colors of the Wind*), the story of blind artist and champion runner George Mendoza. *Amina* is a solid book about a challenging topic and place. It deserves to be widely read and comes recommended. Reviewed by Lidwien Kapteijns, Ph. D., Wellesley College. Published in *Africa Access Review* (February 28, 2016). Copyright 2016 Africa Access

Are you ready for any eye opening tale of a world that takes away the comforts of life and challenges family's to their extreme? *Amina* is reality check for the mass and humbling story written in beautiful flow. My the war zone kids if the word find a light if peace that will one day bring prosperity. Thank you for telling their tale J.L. Powers.

I like series of this book I recommend this book to teenagers.

I just finished reading *Amina*, and I must say, it deeply touched me. As an adult woman, I have been aware of the difficulties of women in certain countries of the world. I've even written a few master's level papers on such (including women in Islamic-controlled countries), so I'd guess I'm even a little more aware than most. The story of *Amina* brought me to tears several times, both over the hardships she endured and over the relentless hope she exhibits in her art. The simple, straightforward way that *Amina* tells her story is disarming and endearing and sobering. I so wanted to reach through the pages and hug this girl. As I looked up from the book several times, I saw my own daughters, squarely in the age range intended for this book. I would indeed encourage them to

read it, to help them understand what is happening in this world, both politically and religiously, and how some people use the one to advance the other, often with the consequences of seriously harming women and children. I would probably allow my teen to read it independently, but some of the scenes would be too disturbing for my tween to read independently. There were also a couple of realities that were mentioned but not explained (like female circumcision and child soldiers). Overall, an excellent book that simply states the grim reality that many girls endure without pushing any agendas, other than protection and education of girls.

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