

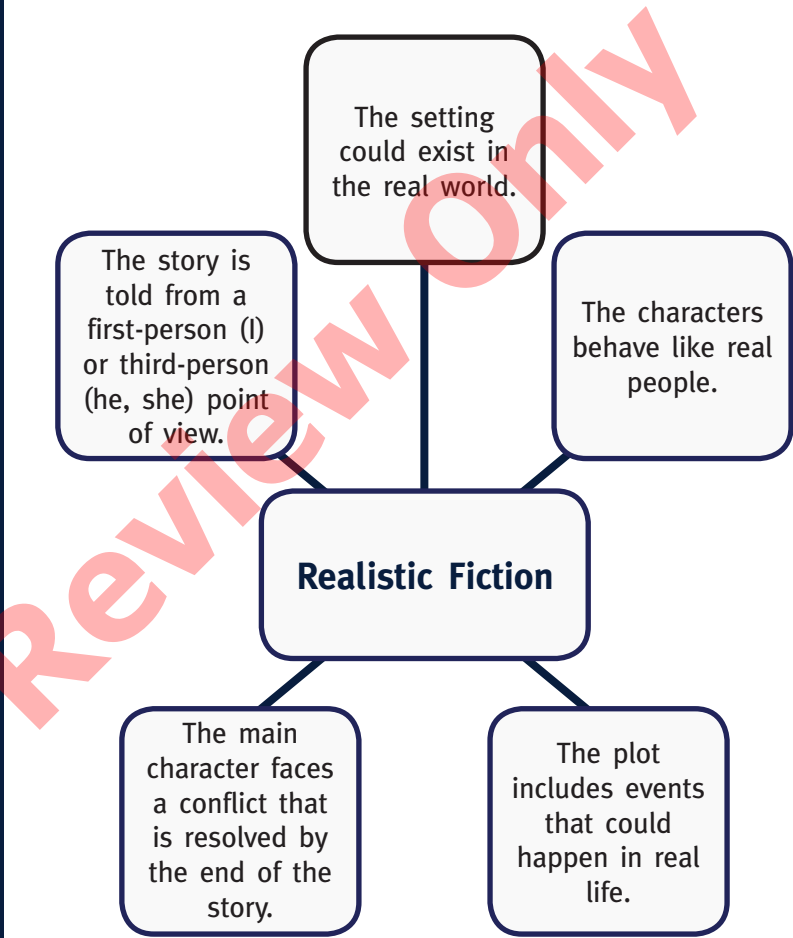
WARSAME

by Said Salah Ahmed with Jessica Cohn
illustrated by Elkanah Mpesum



Realistic Fiction

Look for the genre features noted below as you read this book. Use the features to help you understand the text.



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Warsame's Welcome

"Warsame?"

Ms. J. J. tried to get the attention of the young boy who was daydreaming in the front row of her class. She smiled and tried again in a louder voice.

"Warsame?"

Warsame looked up and smiled shyly in return.

In the back of the classroom, Joshua snorted. "Earth to Warsame. Wake up, dude. What kind of name is War-suh-meh, anyway?" he said.

Warsame bowed his head.

"Joshua, see me after class," the teacher said. "We'll come up with the right way for you to say how sorry you are."



“Okay,” Joshua said, sitting up straighter. Then, under his breath, he added, “You’re sorry, Warsame.”

Patricia turned to face Joshua. “I heard that,” she said, “and you know what I think? I think that’s really mean!”

The teacher was not pleased. It was early in the school year, so all the students were new to her classroom, but Warsame was also new to Minneapolis. She wanted him to feel welcome.

“Remember our rules about showing respect,” Ms. J. J. said.

When she had the class’s attention again, she stood next to Warsame. “Do you know what I think?” she said kindly.

“I think our names are different, and yet not so different at all. Warsame’s last name is Ibrahim, and Tom’s is Abraham. They are actually the same name, just in different languages—Arabic and Hebrew.”



The teacher smiled at Tom, who sat next to Warsame. Tom nodded.

Ms. J. J. said, “What does your first name mean, Warsame?”

Warsame looked down. “I can’t say,” he said in a low voice. When he looked up again, the teacher smiled with encouragement.

“In Somali,” Warsame said, finally, “*war* means ‘news,’ and *same* is like ‘blessing.’ So it means ‘news of a blessing.’”

He looked at the floor again.

Patricia said, “I like that.”

“News of a blessing,” the teacher repeated. “I like that, too. You know, my mother named me Jane because it has to do with mercy, or kindness, and she liked that. Names fascinate me,” the teacher continued. “Patricia’s last name, Noah, is the same as Nimco’s last name, Nuh.”



Patricia and Nimco looked at each other and smiled.

Nimco shyly raised her hand. Ms. J. J. nodded. "My name is Nim-OH," she said softly. "People say it wrong. My name is spelled in Somali, which is not like English. The C is silent, not a K sound."

Joshua snorted again. He seemed ready to say something, but Ms. J. J. gave him a hard look, and he stayed quiet.

Patricia said to Nimco, "Why didn't you tell us sooner?"

"I wanted to," said Nimco, "but I am new here, like Warsame. I want to make friends."

Warsame rested his eyebrows in his palm. Nimco looked at her desktop.

"No one is more sorry than I am, Nimco. Thanks for setting the record straight," Ms. J. J. said.



Warsame's Struggle

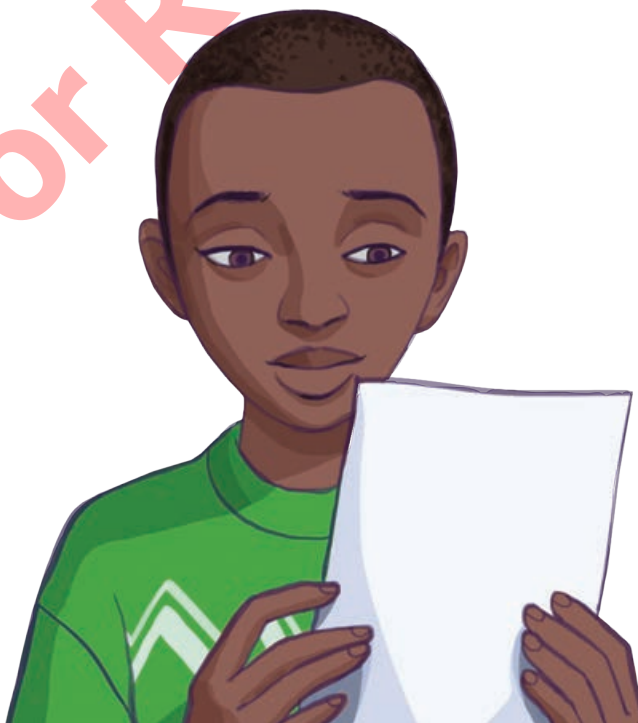
“Okay, everyone, get your writing caps on.” Ms. J. J. held up a stack of papers from her desk.

“We’re going to be beginning our creative writing assignments here in class. You may be developing characters, choosing their names, and plotting what happens to them, and why,” she said. “As you may remember from our discussion last week, names are important. When an author writes a story, one of the first decisions she makes is what to name the characters. Instead of a story, you may choose to write a song, or a poem, or a report, or another form of written expression.”

Ms. J. J. handed Nimco a sheet while announcing, “This literature handout will help us get started.”

As she gave Warsame his sheet, she said, “Warsame, maybe you can tell us the Somali word for *literature*.”

“*Suugaan*,” he said.



Ms. J. J. repeated *suugaan* carefully. “I think we’ll be learning lots about Somali words because we are lucky enough to have Nimco and Warsame here.”

Nimco smiled shyly. Warsame looked at his shoes.

“This box in the middle is for what you want to write about,” Ms. J. J. said. “Around the box, you brainstorm ideas, like where your story takes place.”

On the board, she drew a box and wrote the word *zoo* inside. “Maybe you want to write about a zoo. So you brainstorm and ask questions. Will it be funny? Serious?”

Joshua frowned. Tom said, “And then what ... ?”

The teacher said, “After you plan your writing, you will write a draft and share your writing with the rest of us. And you know what? One poet, one storywriter, and one reporter will go on to be part of a big reading in the gym—on the night of Open House.”

Several students groaned.

Patricia brightened. “They call it the Word Jam. My sister, Marcela, was in it last year. She got to share her story with the whole school!”

“That’s right,” said the teacher. “Three of us will perform at Word Jam, but all our writing and art will hang on the walls at the open house. All of us will take part.”

“Now, you can make up a story,” said Ms. J. J., “or you can tell about something that really happened. You can report something from your life rather than tell a story.”

When everyone understood the assignment, they broke into small groups to discuss their plans. The classroom filled with whispers, scratching pens, and moving chairs.

Bill, who worked with Patricia, Koa, Warsame, and Nimco, told them, "I'm going to write a story. I don't like poetry."

Patricia said, "You like hip-hop music, and that rhymes."

"That's different," said Bill.

"There are too many ideas to choose from," Warsame whispered to Nimco. "They all sound hard in English. And to read in front of people is scary to me."

Ms. J. J. overheard Warsame. "Everyone will get plenty of time to practice reading aloud," she said, "so it won't be as hard as you think."

Warsame said, "I won't be able to read a poem."

"What about a story?" said Ms. J. J. "Maybe there's a story you liked when you were little that you could tell in your own words."

Nimco smiled. "I know a lot of old stories from Somalia, Ms. J. J. So what if I tell a good Somali story *my way*? I can share it in English."





“That’s a great idea,” said the teacher, who then turned to Koa. “Koa, what about you?”

Koa said, “I was thinking about writing a news report, telling about the Hmong Village my parents are from and my dad’s tea shop, like a reporter.”

“Great!” said Ms. J. J. She saw a confused look on Nimco’s face and added, “Koa’s family is from Southeast Asia. Right, Koa?”

“Right, Hmong people don’t have one country. They are people from the highlands of southern China, Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand,” Koa explained.

Koa looked over to Warsame. “Maybe you can come up with a poem or story about being Somali.”

“Yes,” Ms. J. J. said. “Think about it, Warsame.”