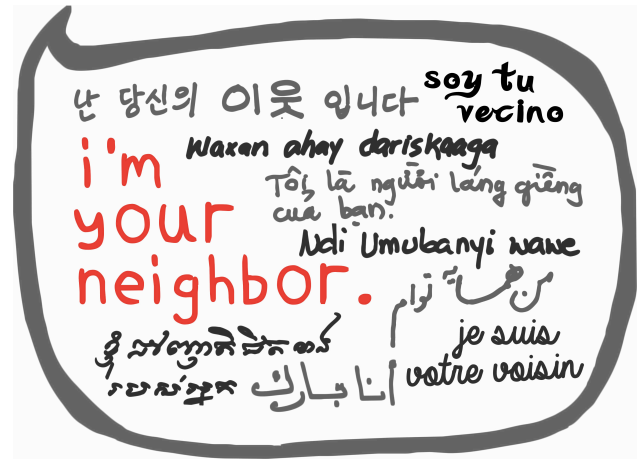


Thank you for reading this *I'm Your Neighbor, Portland* book.

"The true meeting takes place when the book opens, and a stranger reads about — and comprehends — a stranger." —Amit Majmudar, author of *The Abundance*.

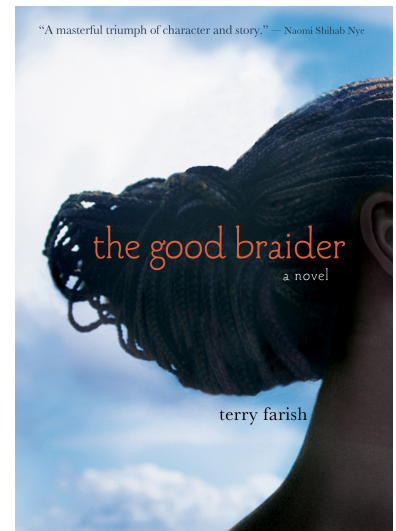
We hope that this book has introduced you to some of your neighbors' stories and as Amit Majmudar said, allowed you to "comprehend a stranger."



## Discuss

Consider exploring these questions after reading *The Good Braider* by Terry Farish.

- What has Viola gained by coming to Portland, Maine as a refugee? What has she lost by leaving her home in Juba, South Sudan?
- How does Viola and her mother's relationship change once they are in the U.S.? Is it regular conflict between a parent and a teenager or is there more going on?
- Were you surprised about the obstacles Viola and her mother faced once they were "safe" in America?
- Viola's mother allows her to spend time alone with Lokolumbe, but is angry when she is alone with Andrew. Why does her mother view the two boys differently? Have you had a friendship or relationship with someone with a background very different from yours?
- When you read about Viola's life and hear about the human rights atrocities and war in Sudan, do you feel like the U.S. should intervene? Or is taking in refugees of war enough?
- Viola speaks Bari and Arabic in South Sudan and learns English in Cairo and Portland, Maine. What languages do you speak and have you ever been in a situation where you struggled to understand the language around you?



- When Viola invites Andrew to her Kennedy Park apartment, she realizes that her house is very "African" (pages 130-132). Look around your home, are there things that have been passed down or saved from your family or a former country?
- *"I am not doing well. I am not American. Or Sudanese. I am not in Sudan and not really in Maine. Or maybe I'm in both at the same time. I'm in some place I'm making up."* Viola is caught between two cultures and countries. Have you ever felt pulled strongly in two different directions?
- After reading ***The Good Braider***, what have you learned about the South Sudanese people and the Sudanese community in Portland, Maine?
- When did you or your ancestors come to the U.S.? Did you or they share any of Viola's experiences of immigration?

## Explore

### **Why do new arrivals come to Maine?**

According to Catholic Charities in Maine, refugees in Maine have come from over 25 countries in: Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, Former Soviet Republics, Middle East, Eastern Africa. Current refugee populations that are coming to Maine are from Somalia, Sudan, Congo, Ethiopia, Burma, Iran and Iraq. Trends in refugee resettlement mirror the conflicts and tragedies that are happening worldwide and as such, Maine has most recently assisted in the resettlement of Eastern African and Middle Eastern refugees.

While a refugee may be a primary refugee, meaning they arrive directly in Maine, many are also secondary migrants who are moving to Maine from another place in the U.S. In many cases, the secondary migrants moving to Maine are leaving initial resettlement sites that are large urban areas where they had been resettled in low income neighborhoods plagued by gangs, drugs, and high rates of violent crime. They fear for the safety of their families and move to states like Maine, to reunify with relatives, friends, and community members who live here and commend Maine's safe communities, schools, and affordable housing. Secondary migrants come to Maine for the same reasons that many other groups of new residents do. They come here for, "The way life should be."

### **What is the political, cultural, and historical setting of the book?**

The novel opens in Juba, in southern Sudan in 1999 during the decades-long war between the north and south of the country. The story is fiction, but set in the political context of the war. Under British colonization, the two regions were united even though they had a long history of hostility because of religious and cultural differences. Viola and her family are southern Sudanese. People of southern Sudan identify with African cultures

and practice tribal faiths and Christianity. The people of northern Sudan are predominantly Muslim and identify with Arab cultures. These two regions of Sudan have been at war for more than fifty years. A united group of southern tribes formed the Sudan People's Liberation Party after the northern government imposed Islamic law over the non-Muslim south in 1983.

Two million people of the South were killed in the wars that the International Criminal Court identifies as genocide. The ICC issued a warrant of arrest for President of Sudan Omar al-Bashir for atrocities against the people of southern Sudan and the western region of Darfur. In 2005, al-Bashir and southern Sudanese rebel leader, John Garang, signed the Comprehensive Peace Accord bringing an end to direct conflict in the south. In 2011, the people of the south voted in a referendum to either be united with the north or become its own country. Nearly 99% of the region voted for independence and South Sudan became an independent nation with Juba as the capital city. *The Good Braider* concludes in Portland, before the Peace Accord of 2005 is signed.

Even though South Sudan exists as an independent nation, Sudan Armed Forces atrocities continue against civilians and humanitarian workers. Eric Reeves, a professor at Smith College, has documented the wars in Sudan since 2002 on his site, [Sudanreeves.org](http://Sudanreeves.org). Reeves writes in 2012, "The Sudan Armed Forces have continued their aerial onslaught against civilians in Darfur and various border regions of northern Sudan at the direction of the National Islamic Front/National Congress Party regime in Khartoum [capital of Sudan]."

### How do I learn more?

Terry Farish offers many resources to explore South Sudan and the lives of the Sudanese in America on her website.

Visit [goodbraider.com](http://goodbraider.com) for:

- Non-profits working with and for the Sudanese community
- Web links to educational sites and commentary on the Sudanese conflict and people
- Educator's and book club guides for the book

## Engage

**EAT** at the restaurant where Viola works in the novel. **Asmara Restaurant** at 51 Oak Street in Portland, ME serves Eritrean cuisine.

**SHOP** at East African groceries. **Safari Grocery and Restaurant** at 30 Washington Street in Portland, ME serves Moroccan, African, and Egyptian cuisines.

**LISTEN** to music by a South Sudanese musician. **O.D. Bonny** is a rap artist from South Sudan and lives in Portland, ME. His song, “Girl from Juba” was written in honor of the novel, *The Good Braider*.

<https://soundcloud.com/odbonny>

**CELEBRATE** South Sudan’s independence with the South Sudanese community on July 9<sup>th</sup>.

**VOLUNTEER AND SUPPORT** Portland based organizations helping the Sudanese community here and in Africa.

- **Global Portland Maine** provides a database for various local organizations helping East African immigrants and refugees around the Portland area.  
<http://globalportlandmaine.com/international-community-groups/african/>
- **Action for Self Reliance (ASERELA)** is an organization that helps Sudanese immigrants adjust to a new life in Portland and support those who return to Sudan. [www.aserela.org/about-aserela/](http://www.aserela.org/about-aserela/)
- **Fur Cultural Revival** is a non-governmental, non-profit organization committed to broadening the public’s awareness of genocide in Darfur, serving the needs of the Darfur community residing in the greater Portland area, and preserving the Fur tribal culture <https://sites.google.com/site/furculturalrevivalme/>
- **Sudanese School Lunch Program** is the project of Aruna Kenyi, author of *Between Two Rivers*. He is fundraising money to return to Sudan and implement a school lunch program at a rural primary school.  
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Sudanese-School-Lunch-Program/235835363128721>

## Read

From *I Remember Warm Rain*:

- “The Photograph” by Aruna Kenyi
- “A Day in Three Worlds” by Hassan Jeylani
- “Travels” by Ridwan Hassan
- “The Journey” by Jackson Benjamin

From *New Mainers*:

- Khadija Glued, Somalia
- Mary Otto, Sudan
- Jaden Li Eung, Cambodia
- Jelilat Oyettunji, Nigeria

***I'm Your Neighbor, Portland: Book Guide: The Good Braider*** by Terry Farish (Skyscape)

Titles set among East African immigrants and refugees:

Ages 6-8

- ***My Name is Sangoel*** by Karen Lynn Williams and Khadra Mohammed, Eerdmans Books (Set in Sudan and Sudanese America community)
- ***The Color of Home*** by Mary Hoffman, Penguin Group (Set in Somalia and Somali America community)
- ***Brothers in Hope*** by Karen Lynn Williams and Khadra Mohammed, Eerdmans Books (Set in South Sudan and Sudanese America community)
- ***The Storyteller's Beads*** by Jane Kurtz, Harcourt Children's Books (Set in Ethiopia)

Ages 13+

- ***Between Two Rivers*** by Aruna Kenyi, The Telling Room (Set in South Sudan and Sudanese American community)
- ***A Hare in the Elephant's Trunk*** by Jan Cotes, Red Deer Press (Set in South Sudan and Sudanese Canadian community)
- ***Home of the Brave*** by Katherine Applegate, Square Fish (Set in Sudan and Sudanese American community)
- ***Of Beetles and Angels*** by Mawi Asgedom, Little, Brown and Company (Set in Ethiopia, Sudan and Ethiopia American community)
- ***A Long Walk to Water*** by Linda Sue Park, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (Set in Sudan)