

Further Reading

NONFICTION

The Mayor of Mogadishu: A Story of Chaos and Redemption in the Ruins of Somalia by Andrew Harding

Aman: The Story of a Somali Girl as told to Virginia Lee Barnes and Janice Boddy

City of Thorns: Nine Lives in the World's Largest Refugee Camp by Ben Rawlence

The Ungrateful Refugee: What Immigrants Never Tell You by Dina Nayeri

One Goal: a Coach, a Team, and the Game That Brought a Divided Town Together by Amy Bass

FICTION

What Is the What by Dave Eggers

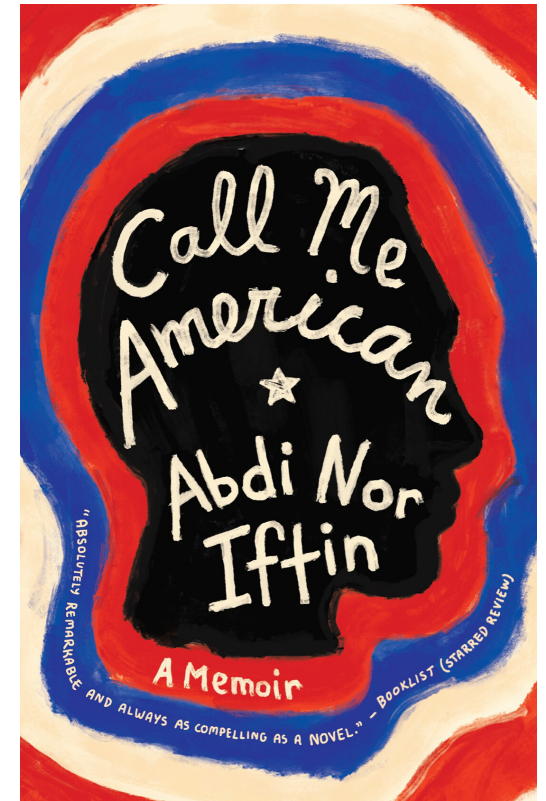
The Orchard of Lost Souls by Nadifa Mohamed

Crossbones by Nuruddin Farah

About the Author

Abdi Nor Iftin currently lives in Portland, Maine where he works as an interpreter for Somali immigrants. He is studying political science at the University of Southern Maine, and he plays soccer every Saturday in a melting-pot league of Americans and immigrants from around the world.

Iftin also frequently shares his dramatic, deeply stirring story with folks across the nation. From intimate glimpses into the immigrant experience to timely talks on refugee rights, Iftin encourages audiences to consider new perspectives and redefine their notions of what it means to be American.



Book Discussion Guide

About the book

Abdi Nor Iftin first fell in love with America from afar. As a child, he learned English by listening to American pop and watching action films starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. When U.S. marines landed in Mogadishu to take on the warlords, Abdi cheered the arrival of these Americans, who seemed as heroic as those of the movies.

Sporting American clothes and dance moves, he became known around Mogadishu as Abdi American, but when the radical Islamist group al-Shabaab rose to power in 2006, it became dangerous to celebrate Western culture. Desperate to make a living, Abdi used his language skills to post secret dispatches, which found an audience of worldwide listeners. Eventually, though, Abdi was forced to flee to Kenya.

In an amazing stroke of luck, Abdi won entrance to the U.S. in the annual visa lottery, though his route to America did not come easily. Parts of his story were first heard on the BBC World Service and This American Life. Now a proud resident of Maine, on the path to citizenship, Abdi Nor Iftin's dramatic, deeply stirring memoir is truly a story for our time: a vivid reminder of why America still beckons to those looking to make a better life.

Discussion Questions

1. What did you know about Somalia before reading the book? How did reading Abdi's story change your understanding of Somalia?
2. Discuss what American action movies meant to Abdi as he was growing up in the shadow of civil unrest. What role can art and popular culture play in times of strife?
3. What character traits enabled Abdi to cope with and ultimately rise above the instability of his childhood and early adulthood in Somalia and Kenya?
4. How does this memoir fit into our current cultural and political conversation about immigration and asylum?
5. What do you think is the primary message of the book?
6. Once Abdi moves to the United States, do you think his "American dream" still exists?
7. How does Abdi approach his own story? With a sense of irony, sympathy, distance, comedy, or something else entirely?
8. How does the author's story impact you? Does Abdi's memoir change the way you think about your own life story? If so, how?