



SOFTIE

DELVE DEEPER READING LIST



After years of fighting injustice in Kenya, daring and audacious political activist Boniface “Softie” Mwangi decides to run for political office. But running a clean campaign against corrupt opponents with idealism as his only weapon proves challenging. Special Jury Award, Sundance Film Festival. A POV co-production.

Contributors

Susan Conlon

ADULT NON-FICTION

Addario, Lynsey. *It's What I Do: A Photographer's Life of Love and War*. New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2015.

War photographer Lynsey Addario's memoir is the story of how the relentless pursuit of truth, in virtually every major theater of war in the twenty-first century, has shaped her life.

Eldon, Kathy. *In the Heart of Life: A Memoir*. New York, New York: HarperOne, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2013.

In 1977, Kathy Eldon moved with her husband and two children from England to Kenya, where she found freedom as she had never known it before and was ready to push back from her old, restrictive life into this tumultuous new world as a journalist and writer, she embraced the energy and creativity of Kenyans, both black and white. But her world collapsed when her twenty-two-year-old son, Dan—an artist and photojournalist on assignment for Reuters—was stoned to death by an angry mob in Somalia, killed by the very people he was trying to help. Kathy's journey through this tragic loss was deeply spiritual as she discovered that, in many ways, Dan was still ever-present in her life.

This gripping international saga includes a passionate love, a dangerous coup in Kenya, and a compelling glimpse into a woman on the brink of self-discovery. After her son's murder, Kathy began to publish his art, which gained popularity worldwide and—together with her daughter, Amy—launched a global foundation celebrating Dan's work as a creative activist. Throughout Kathy's exploration of profound tragedy, we find the secrets to not only surviving, but being truly, gloriously alive.

Elkins, Caroline. *Imperial Reckoning; The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya*. New York, New York, Holt Paperbacks, 2005.

As part of the Allied forces, thousands of Kenyans fought alongside the British in World War II. But just a few years after the defeat of Hitler the British colonial government detained nearly the entire population of Kenya's largest ethnic minority, the Kikuyu - some one and a half million people. In *Imperial Reckoning* Elkins provides an account of the unraveling of the British colonial life.

Hilsum, Lindsey. Colvin, Marie. *In Extremis: The Life and Death of the War Correspondent Marie Colvin*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018.

When Marie Colvin was killed in an artillery attack in Homs, Syria, in 2012, at age fifty-six, the world lost a fearless and iconoclastic war correspondent who covered the most significant global calamities of her lifetime. In *Extremis*, written by her fellow reporter Lindsey Hilsum, is an investigation into Colvin's epic life and tragic death.

MacArthur, Julie (Editor). *Dedan Kimathi on Trial: Colonial Justice and Popular Memory in Kenya's Mau Mau Rebellion*. Athens, Ohio, Ohio University Press, 2017.

Dedan Kimathi on Trial unearths a piece of the colonial archive long thought lost, hidden, or destroyed. Its discovery and landmark publication unsettles an already contentious history and prompts fresh examinations to its reverberations in the present. This critical edition also includes provocative contributions from leading Mau Mau scholars reflecting on the meaning of the documents offered here and the figure of Kimathi in a much wider field of historical and contemporary concerns. These include the nature of colonial justice, the moral arguments over rebellion, nationalism, the end of empire, and the complexities of memory and memorialization in contemporary Kenya.

Wainaina, Binyavanga. *One Day I Will Write About This Place*. New York, NY: Farrar Straus & Giroux 2012.

In this compelling memoir, Binyavanga Wainaina tumbles through his middle-class Kenyan childhood out of kilter with the world around him. Named a 2011 New York Times notable book, Wainaina evokes family, tribe, and nationhood in joyous language.

Maathai, Wangari. *Unbowed: A Memoir*. New York, New York, Anchor; Reprint edition, 2007.

In *Unbowed*, Nobel Prize winner Wangari Maathai recounts her extraordinary journey from her childhood in rural Kenya to the world stage. When Maathai founded the Green Belt Movement in 1977, she began a vital poor people's environmental movement, focused on the empowerment of women, that soon spread across Africa. Persevering through run-ins with the Kenyan government and personal losses, and jailed and beaten on numerous occasions, Maathai continued to fight tirelessly to save Kenya's forests and to restore democracy to her beloved country.

Wrong, Micheala. *It's Our Turn to Eat: The Story of a Kenyan Whistle-Blower*. New York, New York, Harper Perennial; Illustrated edition, 2010.

In January 2003, Kenya was hailed as a model of democracy after the peaceful election of its new president, Mwai Kibaki. By appointing respected longtime reformer John Githongo as anti corruption czar, the new Kikuyu government signaled its determination to end the corrupt practices that had tainted the previous regime. Only two years later, Githongo himself was on the run, having secretly compiled evidence of official malfeasance throughout the new administration. Unable to remain silent, Githongo, at great personal risk, made the painful choice to go public. The result was a Kenyan Watergate.

ADULT FICTION

Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *A Grain of Wheat*. New York, NY: Penguin Books; Penguin Classics, 2012.

Set in the wake of the Mau Mau rebellion and on the cusp of Kenya's independence from Britain, *A Grain of Wheat* follows a group of villagers whose lives have been transformed by the 1952–1960 Emergency Period. At the center of it all is the reticent Mugo, the village's chosen hero and a man haunted by a terrible secret. As we learn of the villagers' tangled histories in a narrative interwoven with myth and peppered with allusions to real-life leaders, including Jomo Kenyatta, the story unfolds in which compromises are forced, friendships are betrayed, and loves are tested.

Owuor, Yvonne Adhiambo. *Dust*. New York, NY: Knopf, 2014.

When a young man is gunned down in the streets of Nairobi on the day of the tumultuous 2007 election in Kenya, his grief-stricken father and sister bring his body back to their crumbling home in the Kenyan drylands. The murder stirs up memories long since buried, and the truth unfolds with secrets that were hidden deep within the shared past of a family and their conflicted nation, stretching back to a shocking political assassination in 1969 and the Mau Mau uprisings against British colonial rule in the 1950's.

Vassanji, M.G. *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*. New York, NY: Knopf, 2004.

In 1953 Kenya, as the world celebrates the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, the lives of a group of friends — two children of Indian descent, an African boy, and two young British siblings — are forever transformed by the growing violence of the Mau Mau uprising against British rule and a guerrilla raid that hits shockingly close to their home.

Verjee, Iman. *Who Will Catch Us As We Fall*. London, UK: Oneworld Publications, 2016.

Growing up in Nairobi of the 90's, a boiling pot of racial tension and conflicting cultural taboos, Leena and Jai are raised to believe in a Kenya full of possibility and potential. But as they come of age and venture into a world of underground activists beyond the confines of their tight-knit East Asian community and closely guarded, gated compound, they start to see a country divided by deep ethnic allegiances and on the brink of something very sinister.

Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi, *Weep Not Child Ngugi*, New York, New York: Penguin Random House, 2012

Two brothers, Njoroge and Kamau, stand on a garbage heap and look into their futures: Njoroge is to attend school, while Kamau will train to be a carpenter. But this is Kenya, and the times are against them: In the forests, the Mau Mau is waging war against the white government, and the two brothers and their family need to decide where their loyalties lie. For the practical Kamau, the choice is simple, but for Njoroge the scholar, the dream of progress through learning is a hard one to give up.

The first East African novel published in English, *Weep Not, Child* explores the effects of the infamous Mau Mau uprising on the lives of ordinary men and women, and on one family in particular.

Wa Ngugi, *Mukoma Nairobi Heat*. New York, New York: Melville International Crime, 2011.

Detective Ishmael is investigating the murder of a young woman found on the doorstep of an African peace activist, Joshua Hakizimana. Ishmael suspects that the crime is racially motivated but receives a mysterious phone call, "If you want the truth, you must go to its source. The truth is in the past. Come to Nairobi." His journey for the truth will take him to a place where history can get you killed.

NON-FICTION FOR YOUNGER READERS

Burns, Kylie. *Cultural Traditions in Kenya*. New York, NY: Crabtree Pub. Co., 2015.

Celebrates a year of holidays and traditions representing Kenya's many cultural groups and presents the strong tradition of song and dance in Kenya and also how family occasions are celebrated. Part of the series Cultural Traditions in My World. (Ages 7-9.)

Deedy, Carmen Agra. *Fourteen Cows for America*. Atlanta, GA: Peachtree Publishers, 2016.

Presents an illustrated tale of a gift of fourteen cows given by the Maasai people of Kenya to the U.S. as a gesture of comfort and friendship in the wake of the attacks of September 11, 2001. (Ages 6-10.)

Kirk, Daniel. *Rhino in the House*. New York, NY: Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2017.

This is a nonfiction picture book for young children. It tells the true story of Anna Merz, a wildlife protector in Africa, and Samia, a black rhinoceros she saved after it was abandoned by its mother. Anna devoted her life to protecting the wildlife of the region, founding a reserve in Kenya called Lewa Downs to care for them (Ages 4-8.).

Nagara, Innosanto. *A is for Activist*. New York, NY: Seven Stories Press, 2016.

The alliteration, rhyming, and vibrant illustrations make the book exciting for children, while the issues it brings up resonate with their parents' values of community, equality, and justice. This engaging little book carries huge messages as it inspires hope for the future, and calls children to action while teaching them a love for books. (Ages 3-7.)

Nagara, Innosanto. *The Wedding Portrait*. New York, NY: Seven Stories Press, 2017.

Here are stories of direct action from around the world that are bookended by the author's wedding story. He and his bride led their wedding party to a protest, and were captured in a photo by the local newspaper kissing in front of a line of police just before being arrested. (Ages 6-9.)

Nivola, Claire A. *Planting the Trees of Kenya: The Story of Wangari Maathai*. New York, NY: Frances Foster Books, an imprint of Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Macmillan Publishers, 2008.

Wangari Maathai, winner of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize and founder of the Green Belt Movement, grew up in the highlands of Kenya, where fig trees cloaked the hills, fish filled the streams, and the people tended their bountiful gardens. But over many years, as more and more land was cleared, Kenya was transformed. When Wangari returned home from college in America, she found the village gardens dry, the people malnourished, and the trees gone. How could she alone bring back the trees and restore the gardens and the people? (Ages 5-9.)

Meyerowitz, Joel. *Seeing Things: A Kid's Guide to Looking at Photographs*. New York, NY: Aperture Foundation, 2016.

Aimed at children between the ages of eight and twelve, *Seeing Things* is an introduction to photography that asks how photographers transform ordinary things into meaningful moments. In this book, photographer Joel Meyerowitz takes readers on a journey through the power and magic of photography: its abilities to freeze time, tell a story, combine several layers into one frame, and record life's fleeting and beautiful moments. The book features the work of masters such as William Eggleston, Mary Ellen Mark, Helen Levitt, and Walker Evans, among many others. Each picture is accompanied by a short commentary, encouraging readers to look closely and use their imagination to understand key ideas in photography such as light, gesture, composition-and, ultimately, how there is wonder all around us when viewed through the lens. (Ages 10-13.)

FICTION FOR YOUNGER READERS

Conway, David. *Lila and the Secret of Rain*. London, UK: Frances Lincoln Children's Books.

For months the sun has burned down on Lila's Kenyan village. It is too hot to gather firewood, too hot to weed the garden, even too hot to milk the cow. Without rain the well will run dry and the crops will fail. Lila is so worried that when her grandfather whispers to her the secret of rain, she decides to go and talk to the sky herself. How Lila saves the village by telling the sky the saddest thing she knows. 6-9 years old, picture book. (Ages 6-9.) [Children's Picture Book.]

Cunnane, Kelly, illustrated by Ana Juan. *For You As A Kenyan Child*. New York, NY: Atheneum Books for Youth Readers, Simon and Schuster, 2006.

Imagine you live in a small Kenyan village, where the sun rises over tall trees filled with doves. You wake to the sound of a rooster's crow, instead of an alarm clock and the school bus. Your afternoon snack is a tasty bug plucked from the sky, instead of an apple. And rather than kicking a soccer ball across a field, you kick a homemade ball of rags down a dusty road. But despite this, things aren't that different for a Kenyan child than they would be for an American kid, are they? (Ages 4-8.) [Children's Picture Book.]

Jamieson, Victoria and Omar Mohamed. *When Stars Are Scattered*. New York, NY: Dial Books for Young Readers, 2020.

Based on coauthor Mohamed's childhood after fleeing Somalia on foot with his younger brother, this affecting graphic novel follows the brothers' life in a Kenyan refugee camp. (Ages 9-12.) [Graphic Novel.]

Nyong'o, Lupita. *Sulwe*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2019.

When five-year-old Sulwe's classmates make fun of her dark skin, she tries lightening herself to no avail, but her encounter with a shooting star helps her understand there is beauty in every shade. (Ages 4-8.) [Children's Picture Book.]

Mugo, Anthony. *Never Say Never*. Nairobi, Kenya: Longhorn Publishers, 2012.

Daniel Muthini Njoki, the son of a poor, single mother, is arrested and taken to a remand home in Murang'a, then to Getathuru Reception Centre. He is subsequently transferred to other approved schools: Kericho, Othaya, and finally Kabete, where he sits and passes the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education. The doors to a university are now open. Although he is innocent of wrongdoing, the book probes the question of who engineered his arrest difficulties, and examines the challenges, and the hopes of getting an education in Kenya. (Ages 12+.) [Young Adult Fiction.]

Mutinda, Danson and Eric Walters. *Hockey Night in Kenya*. Victoria, British Columbia, Canada: Orca Book Publishers, 2020.

Kenyan orphans, Kitoo and Nigosi, spend their days studying, playing soccer, helping their elders with chores around the orphanage and reading from the limited selection of books in their library. When the librarian gives Kitoo a copy of *Sports Around the World* he becomes fascinated by an image of the Canadian national men's ice hockey team. Then one day the fates align and Kitoo finds a pair of beat up old roller blades, he teaches himself to skate and dreams of one day playing hockey like the men in his book. But you can't play ice hockey in Kenya, can you? (Ages 6-8.) [Children's Fiction.]