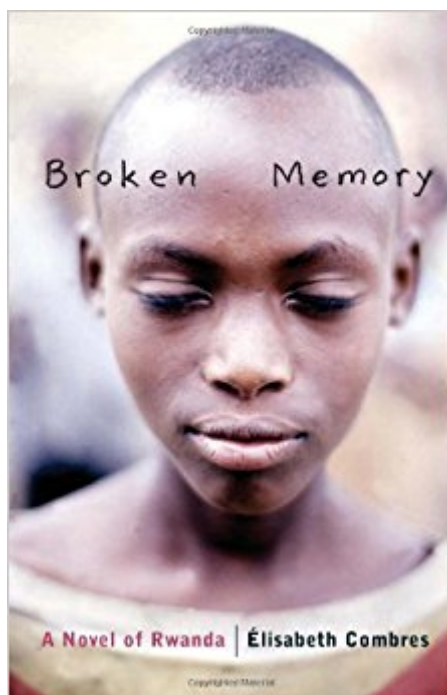


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Broken Memory: A Novel Of Rwanda



Synopsis

Hiding behind the old sofa, five-year-old Emma does not witness the murder of her mother, but she hears everything. And when the assassins finally leave, the young Tutsi girl somehow manages to stumble away from the scene, motivated only by the memory of her mother's last words: "You must not die, Emma." Taken in by an old Hutu woman, Mukecuru, Emma is still haunted by nightmares long after the war ends. When the country establishes gacaca courts to allow victims to face their tormenters in their villages, Emma is uneasy and afraid. But through her growing friendship with a young torture victim and the gentle encouragement of an old man charged with helping child survivors, Emma finds the courage to return to the house where her mother was killed and begin the journey to healing.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Grade 6 "When Emma, a Tutsi, was five years old, she hid behind the sofa while soldiers murdered her mother. She was taken in by a Hutu woman, and now, at 14, she faces the demons haunting her. When she hears that the soldiers who took part in the 1994 genocide will be brought to trial at a gacaca court in her hometown, she must decide whether to step forward and testify on behalf of the dead. Emma begins to find her voice and strengthen her opinions as she meets with others in her situation. An epilogue reveals that Emma, now 24, lives in her parents' house and has been able to make peace with her past. Based on interviews with Rwandan refugees, this novel is a testament to the struggles of those who survived these unspeakable atrocities. Though the prose is lyrical and the chapters are short, the subject matter makes the book a challenging read." Kelly

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Terrific book.

A thought-provoking story that should be watched by everyone.

Very unsettling story but the author did a dynamic job making the story come off the page. Since reading this book I think of the Rwanda story on a daily basis. The book leaves many questions in my mind but gave me a bigger picture of what is going on in a world unknown to the ordinary American.

Broken Memory by Elisabeth Combres is a novel of Rwanda, originally written in French, but translated to English. There are only 138 pages in this book, yet the story is powerful, as we follow Emma's life after the genocide in her country that took her mother from her. Orphaned, Emma eventually finds a Hutu woman to care for her, but continues to have nightmares of what she has gone through. She is befriended by an elderly gentleman who has seen more than his share of tragedies, and a young boy who also survived the genocide though his family did not. Over time Emma's memories of what she went through return. When she makes a trip to her old home, now a heap of ruins, she is able to remember her mother, and finally let go of some of her nightmares. This is a powerful story about an event that devastated Rwanda. I have read memoirs written for adults about the genocide, but have not seen a single book for young adults until now. This is an important book, giving a voice to those who suffered.

The Holocaust story has been told multiple times and in multiple ways but Rwanda was its own type of Holocaust. Over a course of almost 4 months, it is estimated that between 500,000-1,000,000 people were slaughtered. It was like wiping out a city the size of Atlanta- not with a bomb but through very vicious means like with machetes. The political reasons why this happened is not touched on in the story of the book. What the author does is peel back all those layers and center the story on a 13 year old orphan girl. At 5, her mother tells her, "You must not die." Days later, the mother is dead. The child has to then depend on the kindness of a woman from the "enemy" tribe who has experienced a loss of her own. This book is about the girl's journey to healing depending

on unlikely characters to repair the constant nightmare of the fateful day when her mother was taken away from her. She remembers everything about that day except her mother's face and it is this broken memory that she wants to recover. The book is fair to both sides of the conflict, especially apparent in a scene when many of the former killers are brought to justice within Emma's community. The story personalizes the conflicts we rage that can spiral out of control and lets us know who the real victims are. I would recommend this book to social studies teachers because it is a quick read and not overly graphic.

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