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YOUR

Easy Peasy

**GUIDE TO
AFRICAN FICTION**



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If we haven't met yet—or if a friend sent you this guide—I'll do a quick (re)introduction.

I'm Sophia, the person behind soowrites. I write stories about people who look like me, speak like me, and experience life in ways that feel familiar. In other words: I write about Africans, mostly Nigerians.

When I'm not writing fiction, I'm usually reading, thinking about African literature, or hunting for answers to questions like: Why does *Things Fall Apart* have so many different covers? All in service of sharing what I learn with you on my website.

And yes, I nap. Often. Short naps, long naps—you name it. I'm not one for social media, so instead of looking for me on X or Instagram, find me on soowrites.com or in your inbox if you subscribe to my newsletter, [Between Sentences](#).

There I share reflections and insights about African fiction, reading, and paying attention to the space between words.

But that's not why you picked up this guide. So go ahead—turn the page, dive in, and enjoy.

I can't wait to introduce you to the world of African fiction.

Now, if you've ever felt curious (or confused) about African literature and fiction, you're not alone.

I was in that same place until an acquaintance shared a link to a short story that made it to the Caine Prize shortlist, *When A Man Loves A Woman* by Nana-Ama Danquah, and I instantly fell in love.

With African fiction, not the acquaintance. Although I totally appreciate him. Thank you, Abdulkareem Abdulkareem!



So, my curious friend, here's a simple guide to help you understand it.

NO HEAVY TEXTBOOKS, NO TECHNICAL TERMS.

*Just good
vibes*

And... a spoonful of knowledge

WHAT IS *African Fiction* ANYWAY?

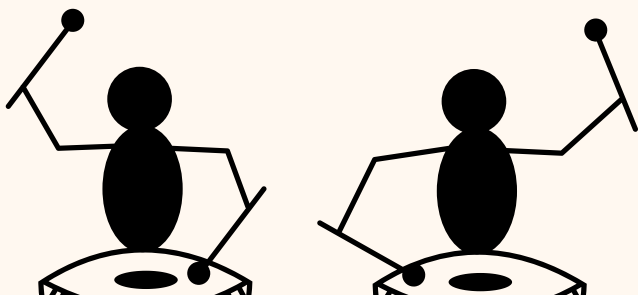
African fiction refers to stories written by African authors, for Africans (and the rest of the world) and set within African contexts like culture and the African experience.

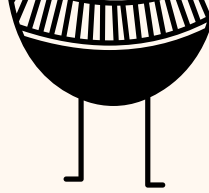
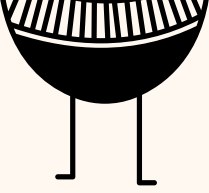
NOTE:

I used the phrase 'African experience' because we are talking about fiction in the context of Africa, not because there is one African experience. There isn't just one African experience because Africa is a continent having 54 whole countries, each with its own unique experience.

African fiction is a part of the larger 'African Literature', which is a vast world of both oral traditions (folktales, songs, proverbs, and poetry) and written literature (essays, drama, memoirs, and, of course, fiction).

From folktales told under the moonlight to the novels in your e-book reader today, African fiction captures the magic that is Africa by showing how Africans see, feel, dream, and fight to be heard in this noisy world.





The Evolution Of African Fiction!

ORAL TRADITIONS:

This was before colonisation, and during this time stories were passed down orally from generation to generation. E.g. Gatanan gatananku.



COLONIAL ERA WRITING:

Like the name implies, this refers to writing produced during the colonial period. These pieces usually highlighted themes like resistance to colonialism.



POST-INDEPENDENCE FICTION:

Fiction written after a country gained independence from colonial rule. These works highlighted themes like corruption and the challenges with transitioning from colonial rule to self-governance.



MODERN AFRICAN FICTION:

This is the fiction you see popping up today, dealing with today's realities and experimenting with genre, language and form.

HERE'S SOME THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW:

1. African Fiction is as Diverse as Africa Itself

Like I stated earlier, Africa isn't a country—it is a continent boasting of 54 countries! So, when delving into African fiction, expect different styles, languages and cultures in the stories you find.



2. African Fiction is Deeply Rooted in Storytelling

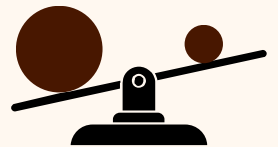
If you ask me, we were storytellers before we were ever anything, really. Before books, we shared wisdom through folktales, myths, and proverbs. These forms demand a good grasp of storytelling to keep the listener engaged.

Because of these oral forms of storytelling, modern African fiction feels like a call and response, with the words on the page calling and your heartstrings responding. 🔥



3. African Fiction Addresses Both Big and Small Issues

You'll find novels about colonialism, war, migration (japa), and political issues—but also about family, crazy Lagos men and a girl who wants to enlarge her bumbum.



4. African Fiction Challenges Stereotypes

African fiction challenges the 'single story' of Africa often seen in the media. You know the one—the bare-chested people living amongst the animals in the Savannah, or if we're lucky, the images of malnourished children living in slumps. African fiction shows the real, the complex, and the deep, often using humour to pass these messages across.



Themes You're Likely to Spot in African Fiction

ALTHOUGH I WOULDN'T ADVISE YOU BEGIN YOUR JOURNEY INTO AFRICAN FICTION BY SEARCHING FOR THEMES, HERE'S A FEW GENERAL THEMES YOU WOULD FIND IN MOST AFRICAN FICTION. THESE THEMES DO NOT DEFINE AFRICAN FICTION, BUT THEY ARE THE ECHOES OF DECADES OF PUBLISHED WORKS BY AUTHORS WITH 'SIMILAR' LIVED EXPERIENCES.

- **Colonialism and its impact**
- **Struggles for independence and identity**
- **Tradition vs Modernity**
- **Feminism and the role of women in society**
- **Corruption and leadership challenges**
- **Resilience and hope**

REALLY THOUGH, THERE ARE MORE FUN WAYS TO GET INTO AFRICAN FICTION THAN THROUGH ITS THEMES. THE WORD 'THEME' GIVES ME GOOSEBUMPS—IT SOUNDS WAY TOO SERIOUS AND IT HAS A WAY OF STIFLING A NOVEL'S FULL EXPRESSION. BUT NO KNOWLEDGE IS A WASTE, SO I HOPE YOU LEARNED SOMETHING.

Authors To Consider



Chinua Achebe

**The father of modern African fiction
(Things Fall Apart)**



Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

The Queen (Half Of a Yellow Sun)



Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o

**Proponent of the use of African languages in
writing (Weep Not, Child)**



Tsitsi Dangarembga

**Voice of the Zimbabwean experience
(Nervous Conditions)**



Nnedi Okorafor

Pioneer of africanfuturism (Binti)

How To Start Reading African Fiction (And Not Get Overwhelmed)

Start small. Short stories in online magazines, Caine Prize's list of finalists, Commonwealth Short Story Prize, fiction anthologies, or a published collection of short stories.

Feel free to drop a story if it is not working for you. Do not force yourself through a story—it takes away the enjoyment and you'd probably associate African fiction with displeasure. We don't want that.

Pick stories that sound interesting to you. Check the summary, read reviews, read the synopsis, and if these interest you, get the story. An easy way to find stories you would enjoy is through the biting curiosity you get from reading about the story.

Join a book club or online community. Although this is not my jam, a community of like-minded people can be really fun and helpful.

Pick stories that are relatable to you. If you must make a choice between a coming-of-age story and a story about the art of Fly Fishing, chances are you relate more to the former because coming of age is a universal experience but Fly Fishing is quite niched. Don't force yourself to experiment when you are just starting—instead, get a feel for African fiction from the stories that feel more like home and try the wild books later.

Follow African literary prizes like the Caine Prize for African Writing to remain up-to-date and to find new and amazing writers. Who knows? You might even find your favourite author this way.

Mix old and new writers. Explore both the pioneers and the newer voices. It gives a more balanced understanding of what African fiction is.

Finally, don't worry about 'reading everything'. Don't put yourself under pressure to read a novel from a Zimbabwean author, then one from a Nigerian author, and another from a Ugandan author. You'll get there when you get there. Just enjoy the stories as they come, no pressure.



HERE'S A LIST OF QUICK STARTERS JUST FOR YOU!

*First, a list of the very stories that got me hooked on African fiction.
You know they won't disappoint.*

- When A Man Loves A Woman by Nana-Ama Danquah
- Fisherman's Stew by Jowhor Ile
- All Our Lives by Tochukwu Okafor
- Skinned by Lesly Nneka Arimah
- It Takes A Village Some Say by Nana Nkweti
- Five Years Next Sunday by Idza Luhumyo

*Then novels and short story collections... (You can refer back to
Authors to Consider for more)*

- Like a Mule Bringing Ice Cream to the Sun by Manyika Sarah Ladipo (Novella)
- Anthills of the Savannah by Chinua Achebe
- Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
- A Small Silence by Jumoke Verissimo
- Stay With Me by Ayòbámi Adébáyò
- A Broken People's Playlist by Chimeka Garricks
- What It Means When a Man Falls from the Sky by Lesley Nneka Arimah
- Nights of the Creaking Bed by Toni Kan
- Only Big Bumbum Matters Tomorrow by Damilare Kuku
- Honey and Spice by Bolu Babalola
- Homegoing by Yaa Gyasi
- Freshwater by Akwaeke Emezi

African fiction is not something you master, but something you experience. So, step into the world of African fiction with my suggestions, then find what works for you from there. Let it surprise you, let it move you and let it open doors to places you never imagined.

With Love, Sophia 