



X

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Cowritten by Malcolm X's daughter, this riveting and revealing novel follows the formative years of the man whose words and actions shook the world.

I am Malcolm.

I am my father's son. But to be my father's son means that they will always come for me.

They will always come for me, and I will always succumb.

Malcolm Little's parents have always told him that he can achieve anything, but from what he can tell, that's nothing but a pack of lies—after all, his father's been murdered, his mother's been taken away, and his dreams of becoming a lawyer have gotten him laughed out of school. There's no point in trying, he figures, and lured by the nightlife of Boston and New York, he escapes into a world of fancy suits, jazz, girls, and reefer.

But Malcolm's efforts to leave the past behind lead him into increasingly dangerous territory when what starts as some small-time hustling quickly spins out of control. Deep down, he knows that the freedom he's found is only an illusion—and that he can't run forever.

X follows Malcolm from his childhood to his imprisonment for theft at age twenty, when he found the faith that would lead him to forge a new path and command a voice that still resonates today.

X Details

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Author : Ilyasah Shabazz , Kekla Magoon

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From Reader Review X for online ebook

Kathy says

I've read 2 young people's bios of Malcolm X - Malcolm X: By Any Means Necessary: By Any Means Necessary by Walter Dean Myers and a Lerner one not worth finding - but I enjoyed learning about Malcolm Little or Detroit Red. How he kept running away from everything he knew but couldn't seem to shake what he'd learned as a child. His hustling and his romantic exploits made me forget how old he was during this time. The author's note was very helpful. Great for MS or HS.

Quirkyreader says

I got this book free from my local library as part of the Great Michigan Read. I am rather glad that I picked it up.

One of the authors was Ilyasah Shabazz, one of Malcom X's children.

What resonated with me the most about this story was that I have been to many of the places that Malcom went to in the Lansing and Mason, Michigan area.

Granted this story is fact based fiction, it is a good starting point to learn about Malcom X's early life and what the culture of racism was like in the North before the Civil Rights marches and Freedom Rides of the 1960's.

History happened and it can't be erased. The best thing to do is learn from the events that happened and make sure they don't happen again.

Lindsay says

You know, at the beginning, I wasn't totally taken by this book. Part of it might have been that the time hopping didn't work for me so much, though I appreciated its purpose, but I've also been pretty overwhelmed by the rest of my life which has provided ample distraction. However, by the time everything was going pretty much in straight chronological order, I was bummed to put it down, and by the end, it was nearly impossible to even pause reading. By the end, I was totally bowled over. Shabazz and Magoon paint such a thorough picture of Malcolm's complex youth, and even though it's a fictionalized biography, it gives a deeper context to his life and legacy. It's been a while since I've read such a beautifully crafted character, fact or fiction--there is some incredible artistry going on in the authors' collaboration. I want this to get into as many hands--teens and adults--as possible.

A great effect, as I'm sure is one of the main intentions of this book, is that I really want to read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* for real now. I tried reading it several years ago, but I found it difficult to dig in...I was probably too immature. So I read a lot *about* him instead, and watched the movies and documentaries and all, but it's high time get back to it.

Read it.

Alex (not a dude) Baugh says

Ilyasah Shabazz, youngest daughter of civil rights activist Malcolm X, has already written two books about her famous father, but now she, with Kekla Magoon, has written a fictionalized version of his youth and the circumstances that led to his conversion to the Nation of Islam. *X*, a novel makes for fascinating, gritty reading that once you start will be hard to put down, even if you have already read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* by Malcolm X and Alex Haley (yes, the author of *Roots*).

Almost from the beginning, Malcolm Little's life is filled with strife, anger, and disappointment. Living in Lansing, Michigan, his father, Earl Little, a black activist, is killed, pushed in front of a streetcar most likely by the Black Legion (a splinter group of the KKK) when Malcolm is 6 years old. As a result, the Little family is forced to live in abject poverty, his mother working only when she could pass herself off as white and get a job.

Malcolm is an intelligent, straight A student, even becoming class president in junior high, but he has always been a bit of a wild child as well, mostly stealing food to help feed his family. When the authorities finally succeed in having his mother committed to a mental institution against her will, the now teen aged Malcolm, his brothers and sisters are all placed in different foster homes. Malcolm is stunned when a teacher he likes tells him that he "didn't need a high school diploma to be a nigger." (pg 83) Suddenly, Malcolm realizes that what he often took for friendliness by the white kids was racism, plain and simple. Naturally, when his half sister Ella comes to Lansing from Boston, and invites Malcolm to come live with her, he jumps at the chance to get away and start over.

In Boston, Malcolm has a room and bed of his own plus plenty of food to eat, but his eyes are also opened to the racism that still surrounds him, and it doesn't take long for him to become completely disillusioned about the lessons his father had taught him about pride and equality for black people. And it doesn't take long for him to discover liquor, jazz, drugs and women, particularly one white woman named Sophia as ways to shut out what he knows to be true.

But life soon becomes very dangerous and dark for Malcolm in Boston, and after seeing Harlem in New York, he decides that is where he belongs, where he can start over again. But it doesn't take long for trouble to find him in Harlem and Malcolm is forced back to Boston. Malcolm has never let go of Sophia, even after she marries, and once he is back in Boston, she proposes a scheme that will bring Malcolm, his friend Shorty, Sophia and her sister an abundance of money. But when he is caught by the police, Malcolm is sent to prison and it is there that he is really able to start over, finally finding his true self when converts to Islam.

X, a novel is narrated by Malcolm but you need to remember that it is a historical fiction and the perspective is not that of the real Malcolm X. The story begins in Harlem, in 1945 with Malcolm fleeing from a numbers runner he cheated but immediately and continuously begins to move fluidly between his past and his present. Shabazz and Magoon don't spare the reader much in writing about the kind of gritty debauchery Malcolm fell so easily into, but they also make it clear that his self-destructive behavior resulted from a combination of disillusionment with this father's teachings, cruel racism, feeling that he can't change any of it, and the desire to keep these truths at bay in a constant haze of women, liquor, and reefer.

I found this to be one of the most compelling novels I have read in a long time. My only complaint is that I thought a few short footnotes would have been useful to explain some people young readers may not be familiar with, for example, Marcus Garvey. And although there are useful notes in the back of the book and a timeline of Malcolm X's life, it is kind of annoying have to flip to the back to find something. But, I also

think it is the kind of novel that will lead you seek out more information about this controversial but often misunderstood man regardless of what you may think of his activism.

No matter what you feel about X, a novel, it is definitely a book that will make you think.

This book is recommended for readers age 14+

This book as received from the publisher, Candlewick Press

This review was originally posted at Randomly Reading

Melissa says

A historical fiction of the early adolescent life of Malcom X, when he made a lot of questionable decisions and buried a lot of grief in unproductive ways, that in all likelihood served to help transform him into the man he would later become. This story may be fiction, but it is written by his daughter, with all the conversations, history, and family letters to supply the structural facts and timeline of the story. She also does a great job at the end discussing which figures in the narrative are real, composites, or otherwise. It's an easy read of a young man, disillusioned with the world by a very young age, and all his attempts to start fresh and bury that grief.

Marina says

This is an incredible novel, it builds up slowly and falls into place at the end.

I don't know much about Malcolm X aside from the little bit we learned in high school. I was hesitant to read a YA fictional novel based on him when I heard about it, but the fact that his daughter co-wrote it made me secure that it will be handled with care and respect.

This novel is certainly hard to read; we see racism and how it beats down and defeats young Malcolm. From when he first becomes conscious of racism as a child, when he realizes just what the "n" word means, how despicable white people can be even when they see you as a friend. Malcolm sets off on the wrong path and he falls fast and deep. But it's the only road many African-American young men see themselves taking because every other opportunity is not available to them.

I found Malcolm to be an unlikable character for most of the book, but he is still a good character. He does bad things, he becomes arrogant, he falls into the easy city life of being a drug dealer and then a thief. He does not want to be better... and he knows he's running from a person he could be. But I think this characterization is very important. His relationship, the fact that he loved a white woman, and how that plays into his future rhetoric. It shows that he's still somewhat naive about some things, even though he is living the hard life.

We get to see Malcolm's life, his downward spiral, his fall, his lowest point, and then the beginning of his rise to greatness. The novel ends there. With a promise of a man to come, the man his father and his mother wanted him to be, the man he will be.

Madi(Licious) says

OK THIS BOOK HAS ME SHOOK!!!!!!!!!!

So this book was incredible I really felt it the entire way I don't know what all that passion was but it worked in the beginning when Malcom was a good old family man I was in love with his character but then he became Red and I lost that love for him but then in prison I loved him again!!!

I would recommend this to anyone mature enough to read about drugs/sex/violence/etc.

Mississippi Library Commission says

X by Ilyasha Shabazz, Malcolm X's daughter, and Kekla Magoon follows the life of a young Malcolm X before he became a great human rights activist. Even though this is a work of fiction, *X* is based on the real life of Malcolm X and his actions from boyhood until his arrest for theft at the age of 20. This is a great novel that will challenge teen readers while teaching them more about the human rights movement and the work of Malcolm X.

Monica Edinger says

Fictionalized history is a tricky business. On the one hand, the past is a wealth of fascinating material for use in creating imaginary worlds. On the other hand, those doing that creating can't go wild, they must honor the historical truth the best they can, especially when they are writing about real people from not so long ago. And so we come to *X: A Novel*, a gritty and glorious rendering of Malcolm X's youth by his daughter Ilyasah Shabazz with Kekla Magoon.

Friends tell me trouble's coming. I ease out of the restaurant onto sidewalk, gun in my pocket. Hand in there, too, keeping it close for good measure. I gotta get back to my pad, and quick now. One foot in front of the other. Keep my head down, hope no one sees me.

These first tense sentences introduce readers to the young Malcolm. It is 1945 Harlem and he is clearly in trouble. Big trouble. By the next page we know more about the trouble and more about Malcolm. He's shrewd, clever, and at this moment very scared, rueing the direction his young life has taken. And then we are taken back to 1940 Lansing, Michigan where we see a younger Malcolm setting out on his new life. The novel goes on, fluidly moving back and forth in time, filling in elements of the young man's history. There is family: a tragically lost father, and supportive siblings. After a childhood of profound poverty, Malcolm leaves for the city, exploring exciting and darker places, girls, drugs --- a very different world from that of his childhood. Settings are remarkably evoked, the dire poverty and horrific racism of Lansing swirling in and out amidst the jittery jazz environments of Boston and New York. Shabazz and Magoon do a remarkable job generating atmosphere, balancing family love in the face of dire circumstances against the pulsating energy of a self-assured young man swaggering through Harlem streets in a fine zoot suit and a conk. At times the language is blunt and challenging, appropriately in this fierce rendering of the youthful development of an iconic figure of America's past.

The story of a reckless young man finding himself, *X: A Novel* is historical fiction at its best --- an artistic exploration of a part of a renowned person's life, one that stays true to his time and place.

At educating alicie.

Laura says

I wanted to like this, but it was hard to read about Malcolm's life spiraling out of control for most of the book. Most of the book is him making selfish and/or bad choice one after another. Until the very end, it was a pretty hard read with little redemption.

Kelley says

Read for "Great Michigan Read" 2018

This novel is one of the most powerful book I've read. I was born the same year that Malcolm X was assassinated. The only thing I "knew" was that he was a radical man. Wow, has my thinking changed! This novel, written by his daughter, shows the reader Malcolm's life from birth through his incarceration.

After reading the novel and seeing the struggle that the Little family lived in Lansing, I'm appalled at the behavior in the 30's and 40's. I'm appalled at the realization that things haven't changed all that much. I feel like I've gained such insight into the mind of this child. He wanted to be a lawyer and his favorite teacher told him to be realistic. He figured out that his father was murdered and pushed onto the streetcar tracks. He watched the welfare people come and send him away to foster care, send the other children to live with relatives and send his mother to a mental institution for 22 years! He had no power , no control over his own life.

The most excruciating part for me is that there is rampant and real racial discrimination emanating freely from those in the highest political offices of this nation. The fact has been staggering to me; now I'm so incredibly sad that our country cannot seem to come together for any reason.

The very last line of the book, words from Malcolm's father than helped him through: "I am my father's son. They will always come for me. But I will never succumb."

Ricki says

Some books just stick to our bones and *X* by Ilyasah Shabazz and Kekla Magoon will remain with me forever. It kept me awake late at night, and I was floored by the captivating writing. This is a very special book and well worth the hype it has received. I plan to use it in my future Methods classes because there are so many themes and topics for discussion. Most texts are written about Malcolm Little's later life, but this book encapsulates his early years---this restless young man is dissatisfied with his circumstances and attempts to make a name for himself. He does not always make the best choices, but he learns from his many mistakes, and his spirit will inspire readers. I highly recommend this book for all readers. Malcolm has a lot to teach us.

Full review with teaching tools: <http://www.unleashingreaders.com/?p=6472>

Skip says

A novelization of the formative years of Malcolm X, written by the middle of his five children with Betty Shabazz and co-authored by the talented Kekla Magoon, following Malcolm from his birth in Omaha to his childhood in Flint & Lansing to his teenage years in Boston's Roxbury neighborhood and Harlem, and finally to prison. The book's strengths are its raw honesty, authentic speech, and reflections of oppression and pervasive racism, the destabilizing and destructive effects on Malcolm of a murdered father and depressed mother, who was eventually institutionalized. On the other hand, I think that daughter Ilyasah, who was three when her father was assassinated and who forged a compelling story from anecdotes of relatives, has idealized some of Malcolm's actions and decisions, most especially his conversion to Islam. It is crystal clear that Malcolm had no guiding force in his early life, other than narcissism.

The substantive endnotes are an excellent resource, helping to sort out facts from fiction. I actually skipped back to them in the middle of the book, and in retrospect, would have liked to read them first.

Kelly says

What an excellent read.

This is a fictionalized account of Malcolm X's youth. It's told in a few different time lines, and the way that his past informs his current situation and his future, are really woven together nicely.

Perhaps the thing that makes this most stand out, aside from how historically important the story is, is that Malcolm wasn't perfect in his youth and it comes through in the story. But it's done in a way that would be relatable to young readers especially -- people who make an impact aren't perfect but indeed, are human and make poor choices.

Without doubt, this would make an excellent classroom or book club title, and I can see teens picking this up to further what they've read in Malcolm X's autobiography AND picking this up then being excited about picking up the autobiography.

Great historical fiction.

?LEAH? says

4.5 Out Of 5 "The Pathway to X" STARS

A somewhat harsh, albeit enlightening, fictionalized history about Malcolm X. Centering on his informative childhood to young adult years. I learned some things and had some things laid bare for me. The audio by Dion Graham lends a very authentic voice and is well done.

At the end of the story, his daughter speaks about her dad and then there is a couple chapter's telling all about what they (Shabazz and Magoon) kept true to his story and what they embellished on. Plus an additional timeline of his life. I read this for a reading challenge (X title) and this is one of those instances where I'm content a reading challenge compelled me to choose something I wouldn't have normally had on my radar.

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~MY RATING~

4.5 STARS - GRADE=A-
????????????????????????????

~BREAKDOWN OF RATINGS~

- Plot*~ 4.5/5
- Main Characters*~ 5/5
- Secondary Characters*~ 4/5
- The Feels*~ 4/5
- Pacing*~ 3.8/5
- Addictiveness*~ 4/5
- Theme or Tone*~ 4/5
- Flow (Writing Style)*~ 4.5/5
- Backdrop (World Building)*~ 5/5
- Originality*~ 5/5
- Ending*~ 5/5
- Book Cover*~ *Awesome!*
- Narration*~ 4.5? by Dion Graham with Ilyasah Shabazz
- Setting*~ Lansing, MI, Boston, MA, and Harlem, NY
- Source*~ Audiobook (Scribd)