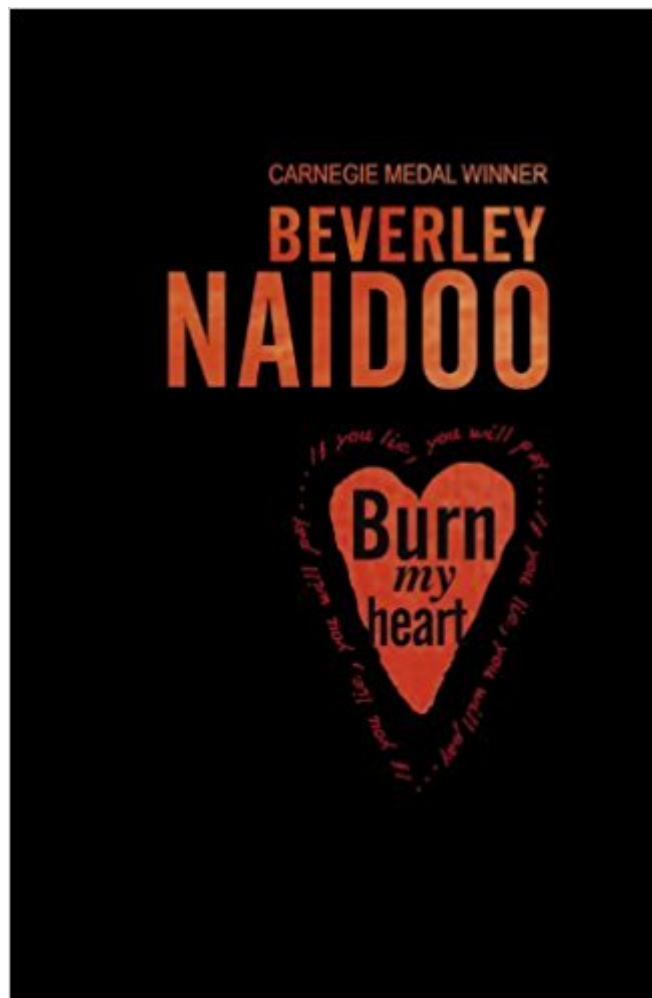


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# Burn My Heart



## Synopsis

The Mau Mau *–* the name of a secret society that once struck terror into the hearts of British settlers in Kenya. An episode in history that ended in a State of Emergency, with violent and brutal acts dividing a nation. This is an intensely personal and vivid story of two boys: one black, one white. Once they were friends even though their circumstances are very different. But in a country riven by fear and prejudice, even the best of friends can betray one another . . .

Internationally acclaimed and award-winning author Beverley Naidoo explores new territory in this beautifully realized and moving story set in Britain's colonial past.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 - 17 years

Grade Level: 7 - 12

## Customer Reviews

Alternating its focus between Mathew, a white farmer's son growing up in Kenya during the 1950s, and Mugo, a native African close to Mathew's age, this novel paints a grim picture of British imperialism and revolution. Mathew and Mugo have been lifelong friends, even though Mugo has been a trusted servant in Mathew's household since the day he saved the then six-year-old Mathew by killing a snake. But the friends' loyalty is tested when rumors of deadly uprisings against white settlers sweep the country, and two groups, the Mau Mau (a band of angry revolutionaries) and red hats (police guards trying to control the Mau Mau), become a threat. Examining the effects of hatred and distrust, Naidoo (*The Other Side of Truth*) casts steadfast Mugo as a far nobler and more likable figure than Mathew, who fails to stand up for Mugo at critical moments. If the author's political

message overshadows characters' development at times, the book successfully evokes the fears and moral dilemmas plaguing both European and native Africans in the post-World War II era. Ages 10 and up. (Jan.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Starred Review. Grade 6-9 • Naidoo sets this novel in Kenya in the early 1950s, at the beginning of the State of Emergency, which led to the deaths of tens of thousands of Kenyans. Mathew Grayson, son of a prosperous white farmer, and Mugo, son of the Kikuyu man in charge of the horses on the farm, are friends, with all the complexities and inequalities inevitable in such a relationship. As the secret and illegal Kikuyu opposition grows, the differences in the lives of the two boys become sharper and clearer. Then Mathew and a boy from school accidentally cause potential danger to explode into disaster. Naidoo is at her signature best when describing the relationships between the settlers and the indigenous Kenyan people: her careful description of the dialogue and the characters' visible responses is all it takes to lay bare the poison of racism. The story is grounded in the boys, seen through the collision between Mathew's childish reality, and the far scarier adult reality that Mugo, only a little older, is forced to accept. As the strands of the story finally come together and ignite in a literal conflagration, the narrative is heart-stopping. Mathew is faced with a dilemma that will ultimately test his courage: will he tell the truth and risk his standing in the settler community, or will he betray Mugo? The consequences are terrible and brutal. In addition to being an extremely effective tool in ethics discussions, the story will speak powerfully to readers concerned about justice and human rights, as well as those simply looking for a well-told story. • Sue Giffard, Ethical Culture Fieldston School, New York City Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Mathew and Mugo are friends. Mathew is white, and Mugo is black, working in the kitchen of Mathew's parents in Kenya. Their story is set during the troubled 1950s known as "The Emergency" by the British colonialists. Mugo is frequently responsible for the younger boy even though he has slight control over him. Mathew knows little of the troubles between the races, and has his mind set on adventure. He gets more than he bargained for when he slips through a gap in the new fence his father has built around their property, forcing Mugo to follow him into the bush in order to protect him. Mugo is a well-intentioned boy, who, through no real fault of his own, ends up on the wrong side of his father, Mathew's father, and the Kikuyu fighters known as the Mau-Mau. When his immature

friend starts a fire for which he is afraid to take responsibility, Mugo and his father are blamed, tortured, and imprisoned. Mugo and his family suffer injustice at every turn and are ultimately deported with Mugo realizing that he is now responsible for his family. The author tells the stories of the two boys in alternating chapters. She captures the thoughts and emotions of both, especially Mugo, who suffers to the extent that his heart burns within him. Justifiably.

"Mugo knew the story of his grandfather's adventuring spirit. When Baba was a little boy, Grandfather had gone away to Nairobi. He found work with the British army, and when a big war started between the British and Germany wazungu [white people], Grandfather went to help carry the wounded soldiers."However, when Mugo's grandfather was away from home, a family of wazungu had arrived in an oxcart. The mzungu man, the head of this family, had a piece of paper called 'proof.' It said that he had paid money for this land and that now it belonged to him! Grandfather's younger brothers had protested that there must be a mistake. They showed the mzungu man the place where their ancestors were buried near the grove of sacred mugumo trees. This was their land, their sacred place. Their family had lived here under their mountain Kirinyaga for generation after generation. But the mzungu man insisted that the 'proof' of his ownership was on his piece of paper. He would let them stay on the land if they helped him build a house, clear away brush, and work on what he called 'his farm.' Mugo's family had been stunned. There was no choice but to work for the new wazungu. This was how Baba first began to herd cattle for the Grayson family when he was not much higher than his mother's hip."Decades later, when the story begins, it is 1951 in Kenya. Baba is an adult (and father) in charge of the stables. He has spent his life here, next to the mzungu man's son Jack Grayson, who has grown up to become the bwana [master]. Just as his father had been with Jack Grayson, young Mugo has been a big brother figure to the slightly younger Matthew Grayson. Tensions are rapidly mounting in 1951 Kenya. The British colonialism does not permit any sharing of power with the native Kenyans. The decades of frustration experienced by the Kenyans have led to the political movement called the Mau Mau, a secret society "whose members took oaths and swore to fight unto death to get back their land." It is amidst this dramatic historical setting, and between the white boy's family and the black boy's family, that suspicion, treachery and deceit will lead to heartbreak, torture, and tragedy. (And you know very well who is going to get the bitter end of this deal.)"Mugo looked up to see the pistol pointing at them."Told in alternating chapters by the two teen characters who have grown up like brothers, the two hundred tensely engaging pages of BURN MY HEART make for a perfect introduction to British colonialism. I sure wish I had eye-opening books of this quality when I was in

ninth grade, trying to make sense of the diversity of African geography and cultures, and the history that connects this tale to crises and issues in various corners of that continent today. And I'd love to listen in as readers debate which of these characters deserve what praise and blame for what takes place, given that all of the young characters have been born into an existing, unconscionable system.

Eleven-year-old Matthew Grayson and thirteen-year-old Mugo are more than best friends. Together, they have adventures in the Kenyan bush with Matt's trusty dog, Duma. Kenya in the 1950s seems like the perfect playground. There are elephants, impalas, and hyenas that live in the acres and acres of "Grayson Country," land that Matt's grandfather bought from the British government. Mugo and his family are Kikuyu, native Kenyans who have lived on the land for as long as anyone remembers, and now work as servants. While Matt and Mugo's friendship crosses social, economic, cultural, and racial barriers, the political atmosphere pushes it to a breaking point as their differences increase in number and severity. In *BURN MY HEART*, Beverley Naidoo crafts a story about how fear can destabilize the strongest friendships. The escalating conflict between British settlers and a group Kikuyu call the Mau Mau is told through the tight lens of the two boys. While she voices both political sides and reveals problems of both the British settlers' treatment of the Kikuyu and the Mau Mau's destructive and coercive methods for unity, readers will be as torn as Matthew and Mugo in choosing sides. Matt's friend, Lance Smithers, is charismatic and fun, but, like his father, views the Kikuyu as sub-human. Likewise, Mugo watches as people he admires and respects join the Mau Mau. This novel transcends its historical context. Naidoo creates characters that are faced with difficult choices, but it never seems like they are examples in a social science lesson. Readers will find her characters at times frustrating, but it is satisfying to experience how they mature and change. The author is particularly successful in not only showing how hard it is to make the right decision, but also the difficulties of determining what is right and wrong. *BURN MY HEART* is a compelling novel. Five stars. Reviewed by: Natalie Tsang

I read this because it was on the list of recommended reading for the 7th grade NYS curriculum. I enjoyed it and felt it tied nicely to "A Long Walk to Water" (which is required reading). It was a bit of an easier read compared to other books in the 7th grade curriculum and would engage a struggling reader.

This is a story of two friends that are members of two very different groups, who are together until

the accusations start. A good read, couldn't put it down.

The condition of the book was expected (some folds and wear). However, when I opened the package, there was a strong stench. I had to air it out before I could actually go near it.

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