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Growing Yams in London

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

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The title highlights the 14-year-old heroine's Ghanaian background. Makeeda lives in North West London with her family: her parents and annoying younger sister, Delphina. But, if Delphina can be a thorn in the side, she's nothing compared to Makeeda's glamorous cousin, Tanisha, over from the States. Makeeda can't forget her sense of displacement when Tanisha came to stay with the family five years ago, having lost her own mother (Makeeda's Aunt Jennifer).

Now all Makeeda's old jealous feelings threaten to resurface, just as she's engaging with her first serious relationship with a young DJ, Nelson. How can she see him in the face of her family's strictly traditional views on boyfriends? And then there is the complex web of her school friendships to negotiate, alliances and loyalties shifting unsettlingly ? sometimes within in the space of an MSN conversation.

Yet throughout the confusions, Makeeda is groping her way towards a firmer sense of herself and her place in the world. Despite her history teacher's opposition, Makeeda determines to choose Yaa Asantewaa, Queen Mother of the Egweso people, for her project on an inspirational woman, instead of the more predictable Mary Seacole. Miss Hipman thinks Makeeda's research skills are not up to the challenge, but Makeeda is out to prove more than her academic credentials, relishing the renewed sense of connection to her culture that the project brings.

Acheampong accurately captures the roller-coaster of young teenage emotions, although at times the excitable, media-savvy tone of the dialogue, through which much of the story is told, can appear at odds with the seriousness of its themes. There is a fine authorial line to tread between reflecting the 'mediated' world of young teens and succumbing to it linguistically: **Growing Yams** balances precariously, but with some panache upon the line and it will be interesting to see how this young author develops. There is still an urgent need for novels reflecting different cultures within Britain and this is a welcome new voice.

Running Order:

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