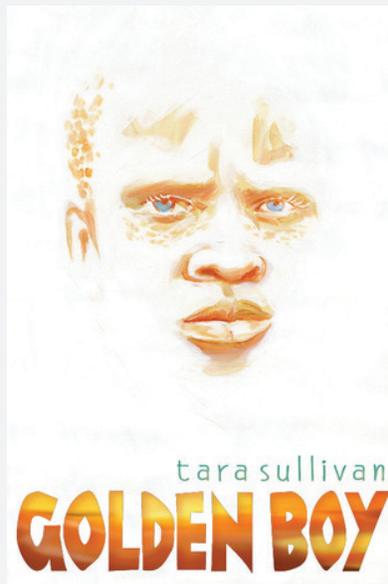


## First Opinion: The Third Layer of Ebony Wood

Sullivan, Tara. *Golden Boy*.  
New York: Penguin Group, 2013. Print.

*Nancy Tolson*



Tara Sullivan's coming-of-age novel brings forth the tragic issues that are taking place in Tanzania today. Poaching for ivory throughout Tanzania has killed over half the elephant population within the country. And due to the superstitious beliefs of some of the Tanzanian people, poachers also hunt down albino people throughout the country for profit.

Through the voice of Habo, an albino boy, the dangers that surround his life are revealed. Superstition has become problematic. Many people believe that the body parts of albino children bring good luck. Many of these children live tragic lives in Tanzania; they are abandoned, mutilated, and even killed. Poachers receive large rewards for the bodies or body parts of albino children from waganga (witch doctors). According to the nongovernmental organization (NGO) report of Under the Same Sun (UTSS) Children with Albinism: Violence & Displacement that was submitted to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2013), "Since 2007, belief in these myths has resulted in 72 documented deaths in Tanzania, and 49 survivors including victims of mutilation" (3).

Habo's family is evicted from their home in Arusha and must travel to the home of his mother's sister in Mwanza. The sun is not kind to delicate albino skin or on eyes that are just

as delicate as the skin. The journey is long, and Habo must stay covered from the elements as well as the people who are just as rough as the sun with their looks and cruel words.

Mwanza is not a good fit for Habo; once more he stays hidden. But tragedy strikes when his existence is revealed to a poacher. Habo grows up quickly for the sake of survival. He knows that his skin is the burden in his life. With a poacher after him, he must maneuver his way out of town. Staying in the house has paid off, for he knows where the money jar is kept, and this will help fund his train trip to Dar es Salaam, a safer place for albino people.

Like the ebony wood the blind sculptor, Kweli, gives to Habo, *Golden Boy* has three layers. The rough, dark bark represents Habo's isolation that even included his not attending school. The middle section of ebony is a pure, white wood that reflects the visible reason why Habo must stay hidden. But it is the center, the heart of the ebony wood, the thickest, darkest, and richest part of the wood used, that brings Habo into the life and hands of Kweli. Through the carvings of the Makonde pieces, Habo can release his own fears and disappointment. Only through Kweli's training and care does Habo find himself and discover how brave he can be the next time trouble occurs.

Tara Sullivan did not create a didactic novel that bumps through for enlightenment sake. This is a story of a boy coming of age, walking through adversity, while stepping into acceptance.

### **Works Cited**

Sullivan, Tara. *Golden Boy*. New York: Penguin Group, 2013. Print.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. "Children with Albinism: Violence & Displacement." NGO report of Under the Same Sun (UTSS), 2013.

### **About the Author**

**Nancy Tolson** is an associate professor at Allen University in Columbia, South Carolina, where she teaches in the Humanities Department. Nancy has written numerous articles as well as the book, *Black Children's Literature Got De Blues Aesthetic: The Creativity of Black Authors and Illustrators* (2008).