

Title: *The Black Flamingo*
Author: Dean Atta
Genre: Realistic Fiction

Reviewer's Name and Grade: Sarina P., 9th Grade

Date Reviewed: February 19, 2021

The Black Flamingo is about a mixed-race gay teen named Michael who struggles with his identity. Over the course of the book, he falls in and out of love with several boys, and also in and out of friendship with his best friend, Daisy. The first half of the book focuses on his childhood, and how the way he grew up affected him. He grew up without a father, and his sister's father is not the same as his. He is close with his other relatives, though, and visits them often. In the middle of the book, he ends up in college, where he joins the drag society. The drag society is run by Mz. B, who teaches Michael the basics of drag. Michael is also interested in poetry, so there are many of his poems throughout the chapters.

A large portion of the second part of the book is devoted to Michael preparing for his first drag show as his persona, The Black Flamingo. The name comes from a black flamingo that had been spotted while he was on vacation. The way it stood out stuck with him. Soon before the show, Michael gets a message from his childhood best friend, Daisy. The two of them stopped talking after Daisy admitted that two women being together made her uncomfortable. She tells him that she is actually a lesbian, and that it was really just internalized homophobia. Michael performs a monologue and poetry at the show. He also makes a list of people who have inspired him, including Mz. B. One of his past hookups, Jack, attends the show and is offended at the way Michael presents himself. Michael and Jack get into an argument after the show in front of the audience. The book concludes with Michael and Mz. B reconciling after the show.

*Did the plot (for fiction) or presentation of information (for nonfiction) keep you interested?
Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?*

The book's pacing was good, although I expected the drag plotline to start earlier. The poems were a nice way to break up the sections of the book.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

This book wasn't as PG as I thought it would be. Because it talks about sex and drugs (without going into heavy detail about either), I would recommend it for at least 9th graders.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

I would recommend this book to people who are interested in social justice. It would also be best if you already understand a lot about the LGBTQ community before reading, because if this is your first time reading about the community you might get some wrong ideas.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

Like I mentioned previously, it would be best if you know about the LGBTQ community already. Some of what the book portrays is very stereotypical, so it's important to note that not all gay men act like this. It seems like Michael falls in love with every guy he meets, which is a potentially harmful stereotype.

4 stars: I enjoyed this book and found it worthwhile reading

While there were some unrealistic moments of dialogue and some LGBTQ portrayal was a bit stereotypical, I still enjoyed the book and the plot kept my attention. I liked the subtle character descriptions, and the way the book was formatted made it interesting to read.

Reviewer Name and Grade: Lea N., 8th Grade

Date Reviewed: March 26, 2021

“The Black Flamingo” is a coming of age novel written about Mike, Mikey, Michael, or one of his other many nicknames. The book is written from the first person's point of view, and the story takes place during the 21st century, in London. The book starts when the protagonist first comes into the world as Michael Brown, half Jamaican, half Greek. His father leaves two months later, refusing to raise his son and claiming that he was “too young to be a dad”. On his seventh birthday, Michael decides that he wants to be like his mother: Michael Angeli, as he feels no connection to his father who left. A year later, he becomes a big brother. His sister’s name is Anna. Right from the beginning, Michael was “different”. Rather than playing with Ninja Turtles or toy cars, he wished for one thing and one thing only: a doll. More precisely, a Barbie. As he was growing up, he slowly came to realise that his behavior was actually his sexuality; he was gay. Whether it be secretly kissing the boys behind the trees when nobody was watching during Kiss Chase, or watching drag with his little sister, or being invited to all the girly sleepovers without hesitation, the little hints were littered around before he himself accepted his identity when Michael discovered he had a crush on Rowan, one of the boys in his new school. There he befriends Daisy, a girl who would become one of his closest and oldest friends. She accepts his hesitation without missing a beat, and they become friends, all the while keeping just out of harm's, or the popular girls', way. The period of time before college is an interesting one; Daisy grows so close to Michael’s family that sometimes he wonders whether his mother loved Daisy more than she loved him and Anna. A couple of things happened during that span of time. Mikey(Michael) spent break with his Greek grandparents, as well as Anna and his mother and Daisy, who was invited by his mother. He makes out with a boy in a graveyard. He even goes to a gay club, where Daisy shows signs of homophobia when she says that the idea of two women sleeping together makes her sick. He graduates and goes to university. It is there, in university, where, after cycling through multiple clubs(LGBTQ+ society, African Caribbean society, and Greek society), he finds one that seems to speak to him. Drag. From this point on, many things happen, identities get lost and found, Michael who was Mikey becomes Mike, then the Black Flamingo, and love comes and goes. In short, during university, life happens. Life happens as it always does.

Did the plot keep you interested?

Absolutely! The plot was very well made and was extremely believable, making it all the more enjoyable to read.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?

Not only was the pace of the book just right, but so was the style. It was made in such a way that it seemed the whole story was one big poem, and the pace contributed small parts to the big picture at the perfect times.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

I would say that this book is appropriate for young adolescents and up(7th grade and up).

What type of reader would you recommend this to?

I would recommend this to someone who is questioning their identity, sexuality, or just themselves. The book is empowering, in a nice, cozy way, so anybody could pick it up and have a good time reading it, really.

What other type of information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

I think it would be helpful to know that even though the style of the book may seem a bit odd, and certain things may seem a little vague, the further you read, the further the writing sucks you in. I think it is also important to know that even if this was the story that the author chose to write, many stories just like this one occur, and every one is beautiful in their own way. Mentally tough people weren't raised in easy situations.

Rating:

Out of five stars, *I would give this book a five star rating.* It was written in an unconventional way, but in a way that fit the story. The pace was just right, not describing every little thing, not suddenly skipping five years of a life. The characters were all 3D, all of them having more personality than the first impression. The protagonist changed throughout the novel, yet remained the same. It was such a wonderful jumble to read, there isn't a single thing I would change about the story.

Reviewer Name and Grade: Alivia Y., 8th Grade

Date Reviewed: March 31, 2021

The Black Flamingo starts with our protagonist Michael Brown's 6th birthday. The setting is in London. On his 6th birthday, he had wanted a barbie doll but had been given a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles action figure. He was upset over this, and his mother promised she would give him a Barbie the next Christmas. His friends then arrive, and in this area, he mentions being mixed. His father is colored, and his mother is white. His birthday ends, and then he talks about Emily, a girl who had attended his birthday party, and how her playroom has 42 barbies. His attention is drawn towards the Goddess of Beauty, who Emily says resembles Michaels's mom. He tells Emily that he's going to ask his mother for the Goddess doll for Christmas. On Christmas morning Michael is greeted with a Barbie, he was a bit disappointed to find that it wasn't the one he wanted but it was a barbie. Michael then goes to his father's house, to have dinner with his father's family. On his 7th birthday, he requested for his last name to be changed from Brown to his mother's name, Angeli. He starts school, and afterward when he's 8 he meets his new younger sister, Anna. Michael starts singing lessons and loves to play with Anna. But his mother says that they are not half of anything, just brother and sister. It is shown that he is a bit different than the other kids, he is only interested in the boys, in a romantic way. Micahel gets into an all-boys singing school in Camden. He gets into a fight and leaves the school. In his second year of middle school, he is in a Catholic school. He meets his new best friend, Daisy. It is shown for the first time, Michael coming out verbally to Daisy as gay. They get bullied because Michael is gay, and Daisy is a bit of an outcast. Michael starts to question "how gay he is" because he thinks about kissing Daisy. Michaels almost kisses his crush Rowan, and later on, gets enough courage to ask him out. Rowan says he is bisexual, but he does have a girlfriend. He says that Michael is brave. The new boy, Kiernan, comforts Michael. Micahel starts to crush on Kiernan, and even dreams about him. They go on vacation to Cyprus for Easter, someone on the beach calls him handsome, beautiful, or brave. Michael doesn't feel handsome, beautiful, or brave. People have started suspecting Daisy to be Michaels's girlfriend,

although Michael is gay. Michael then has dreams of being a black flamingo, along with Kiernan, as he had seen a documentary on the black flamingo. The weekend before Michael turns 17, he watched a colored drag queen movie and thinks it is awesome. The girls who bullied Michael for being gay are put in the same drama group as him but they apologize for bullying him. He goes to a gay club with Daisy, but Daisy comments on how Michael is going to have to protect her from lesbians. She goes on saying homophobic things, directed towards two women sleeping together. They leave the club due to this argument. Michael heads to University and would be living with 4 other people in a flat. Michael joins many clubs, but he never really feels at home at any. He finally goes to a club for Drag, and he finally feels comfortable. He meets a man named Jake at an open mic show, who he talks to, and ends up bringing Jake to his room. Michael loses his virginity, Jake stays the night but the next morning Jake says he'll text Michael who later realizes that he never got the man's phone number. On his birthday, Daisy calls saying she apologizes for what she had said, saying it was internalized homophobia and that she now has a girlfriend. Michael finds Kiernan at a club and they kiss. Michael is starting to feel more at home at the Drag club, and he does amazingly at his performance, his character titled "The Black Flamingo". Jake was at the performance and yelled at him to "be a man" after the performance. Michael stands up for himself and finally understands who he is. Michael is brave but insecure, and eloquent.

Did the plot keep you interested?

The plot did keep me interested, it was really interesting to see this point of view, and how this character saw things. The poems scattered in the poem were extremely well written, as well as this entire book.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?

The pace of this book was a bit too quick in some areas, but it was mainly fine. The book could have focused on some areas longer.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

I think this is appropriate for 9th-12th, or even higher than 12th. I think this because there is mentioned sex, as well as drugs.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

I think I would recommend this book to a variety of people, as long as they are accepting, like fiction with a strong, and different protagonist.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

This book involves sex, as well as drugs, and bullying. There are amazing poems in this book, and if the reader isn't accepting and open then they shouldn't read this book.

Rating:

I would rate this book 5 stars. It was honestly just an amazing book, the characters were great, and the character development for the protagonist was amazing. How he became brave and strong, and finally knew who he was. The poems in the book and the format of the book were incredible, just the way it was written was excellent. I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book.