

**Title:** *The Awakening of Malcolm X*  
**Author:** Ilyasah Shabazz and Tiffany D. Jackson  
**Genre:** Historical Fiction

**Reviewer Name and Grade:** Alexander H., 11<sup>th</sup> Grade

**Date Reviewed:** September 13, 2022

The book The Awakening of Malcolm X: A Novel, describes a man named Malcolm Little. It takes place during his prison sentence and after, in the 1940s and 50s. It takes place in Charlestown State Prison and Norfolk County Prison, both near the Boston metro area. The main character is Malcolm, with side characters including his siblings-Wilfred, Hilda, Philbert, Reginald, Robert, and Yvonne-and Shorty. In the beginning of the book, Shorty is Malcolm's partner in crime. They are sentenced to 8 to 10 years in prison after being betrayed by Malcolm's white girlfriend Sophia. Upon arriving at Charlestown Prison, Malcolm is disgusted. He interacts with other inmates including Norm, who can be described as brainwashed, and Bemby, who is studious and intelligent. Malcolm and the other inmates are relentlessly subjected to racism from the guards. They can be thrown into "the hole," or solitary confinement at any time. Malcolm is at first mainly visited by Ella, his half sister, who is trying to transfer Malcolm to a better prison. At the end of part 1, Reginald writes to him, saying he can free him. However, Reginald only intended to introduce Malcolm to Islam, which all of Malcolm's siblings have already converted to. He mentions Allah, a god that black people can look up to, and Elijah Muhammad, a messenger of Allah. Disappointed, Malcolm is angry until Bemby introduces him to the prison library, where he spends almost all of his free time. At the end of part 2, Malcolm finds out he is being transferred to Norfolk County Prison. Upon arrival, he feels like it's heaven compared to his old prison. Malcolm sees his old partner Shorty, and the two begin talking again after many years apart. The warden states the theme of the prison is rehabilitation. Malcolm studies at the new prison's much larger library. However, one night the guards conduct a search, which makes Malcolm realize he is still a prisoner and trapped. He begins to feel anger again, until Philbert and Reginald visit and Reginald tells him to write to Elijah Muhammad. When he does, he feels lifted from a curse of self-loathing. He begins studying black history at the library, learning of all the atrocities committed against black people by whites. He later joins the debate team and is shaped by his experiences there. He becomes more awakened inside and connected to Allah. One day, he advises his fellow black inmates not to take the typhoid shot, in which he and a few others including Shorty are transferred back to Charlestown. In there though, Malcolm is more at peace, and tries to preach to the other inmates. He tells them about Islam, Allah, and black history. When Malcolm is released, he changes his last name from Little to X, stating that Little was just a last name the whites gave to his enslaved ancestors. Malcolm continues to preach to the black people of America, advocating for black nationalism, and becomes an extremely influential figure for the African civil rights movement.

*Did the plot (for fiction) or presentation of information (for nonfiction) keep you interested?*

The book plot was interesting and kept me hooked. Since I knew Malcolm X was a real person who would become extremely influential, I wanted to see what he thought at every step or turn.

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

The pacing of the book is a little inconsistent, with the beginning being dragged out and the end racing by.

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

The book should be read by someone in at least high school. There are multiple swears in the book, including the n-word. There are violent scenes and harsh realities about America's past which may not be suitable for young readers.

*What type of reader would you recommend this book to?*

I would recommend this book to a reader who wants to know about what the 1900s were like for people of color. The book is a perfect representation of what it was like, with its harsh reality.

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

It would be helpful for teens to firstly know who Malcolm X is. Malcolm X was one of the most influential figures of the civil rights movement, and knowing who he is before knowing his backstory is crucial. It also generally helps to know that America during the book's time period still had Jim Crow laws and segregation. Finally, the reader should know that the book was written by Malcolm X's daughter which helps make the storytelling more authentic.

*I rate this book 4 stars.*

I enjoyed the book very much. There was heartbreak and anger for the main character. However, throughout the story, he began developing into a new person with the help of Allah. It was pleasing to see this development. There are several key moments that initiated this process. First is Bembry recommending Malcolm to go to the library in part 2. He gives Malcolm his dictionary and tells him to copy as much of it as he can every day. Another extremely influential event is when Malcolm begins writing to Elijah Muhammad. After he writes back, Malcolm feels lifted from a curse and begins his ascent into the leader he would become. There are more examples of Malcolm being heavily influenced by something, all of those shaping him into the great leader he would become.