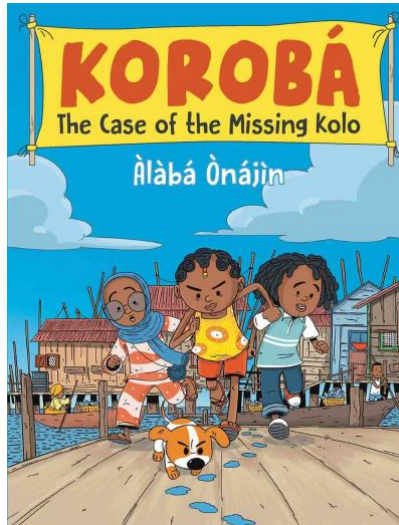


Q&A with Àlàbá Ònájìn



1. As a child growing up in Nigeria, what were your favourite books when you were the same age as the readers of KOROBÁ, and did you read a lot?

During that period, my preferred literary works included the Famous Five series by Enid Blyton, the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories by Carolyn Keene, the Tintin comics by Hergé, and the Asterix comic series created by Goscinny and Uderzo. I don't exactly consider myself an avid reader, but that's largely because books were a luxury I didn't often have growing up. Still, I made the most of what I had, and those moments were pure magic – curled up outside under a tree, immersed in an adventure or mystery, with nothing but blue skies above.

2. What made you want to write for children?

Creating books for kids is a labour of love – I want them to experience that same magic I felt getting lost in stories as a child. Being swept up in a narrative is an incredible feeling, and it's stayed with me all these years. I'd love for other kids to have that same experience, and for it to shape their own memories and imaginations.

3. How did you come up with the characters and setting for KOROBÁ?

I have been profoundly fascinated by the resilience and resourcefulness of the Makoko community in Lagos, where inhabitants have adapted to a unique aquatic environment and sustain themselves primarily through fishing. Despite facing significant challenges, the community's capacity to thrive in this context is truly inspiring. This setting resonated with me, prompting me to feature it as the backdrop for my mystery series. The characters in my series are deeply personal, with each one drawing inspiration from various aspects of my own personality and experiences, allowing me to craft multidimensional and relatable figures.

4. Did you work on the text first or the art first--or both simultaneously?

The text always comes first. I would normally work out the plot and once all the narrative pieces fall into place, I start to develop the script, tighten all loose ends and perfect it before I move to the art.

5. The Booklist review of the book says, "Key cultural details are woven seamlessly into the excitement, suspense, and revelations of a cracking good mystery, complete with all the clues a deductive reader might need." What do you think of that description?

The Booklist review is very spot on. I love when reviews and readers point out such elements in my work because I am not just writing a mystery story, I am also educating readers on the unique cultural aspects of my home country so readers can not only enjoy the mysteries but also learn something about a world they may not know much about.

6. what art materials do you use or do you create on screen?

I currently create digital artwork using Procreate on my iPad. Having drawn with traditional media throughout my life, I've adapted to digital tools for convenience and versatility.

7. How does it feel publishing your first children's book in the UK?

It's truly surreal. Having relocated to the UK via the Global Talent route, I'm thrilled to be contributing to the UK's vibrant publishing community.

8. Anything else we should know?

Koroba is a story I started developing about fourteen years ago and it has gone through many changes to arrive at the perfect idea I have today, and it has been fun developing this mystery series set in West Africa. I am finally happy that children in other parts of the world can read, enjoy and learn about what it's like to grow up in my part of the world.

I am currently working on Book 2 of Koroba's adventures titled 'Koroba and The Broken Masterpiece.' Book 2 further showcases life in the community, focused on what going to school is like for kids in that part of the world and it's equally a fun read like the first book.