



## Pemba's Song: A Ghost Story

*Marilyn Nelson , Tonya C. Hegamin*

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A Newbery Honor winner collaborates with a new writer in this hip-hop-inspired historical thriller.

Pemba knows she's not crazy. But who is that looking out at her through her mirror's eye? And why does the apparition call her "friend?" Her real friends are back home in Brooklyn, not in the old colonial house in Colchester, Connecticut, where none of this would have happened if Daddy were still alive. But now all Pemba has is Mom and that strange old man, Abraham. Maybe *he's* the crazy one.

Thank goodness for Pemba's Playlist and the journal she keeps. There are so many answers deep inside that music. And so much is revealed in Pemba's poetry — the hops she writes and those coming through her iPod. Phyllys, an eighteenth-century slave girl, has answers, too. They billow out from her ghostly visits to Pemba, visits that transform both girls in ways neither expected.

In this supernatural tale, the voices of these two characters entwine to put a new spin on a paranormal story of friendship.

## Pemba's Song: A Ghost Story Details

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Author : Marilyn Nelson , Tonya C. Hegamin

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# From Reader Review Pemba's Song: A Ghost Story for online ebook

## Alexa Hamilton says

Thankfully only 108 pages long or I would not have made it through the slang that was trying too hard and the Marilyn Nelson poems that I somehow thought would be more gripping. The book may actually have been too short to really tell a story, so resorted to stereotypes and bad slang.

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## Kelly says

Pemba moves from NYC to Connecticut unwillingly. Torn from her best friend and boyfriend, the only world she has ever known, to live in small-town New England, populated primarily by white residents. Her house appears to be haunted, and this is somehow related to the local history that Abraham, an older black man who has befriended Pemba and her mother, has been researching.

I *so* wanted to love this book. And I did enjoy aspects of it. Pemba's narrative voice is strong and authentic, and her poems are fantastic: introspective and relatable, but still genuine teen. Also, an authors' note explains that the history of Colchester, Connecticut (the setting) that is related in the book is real, which I didn't know before I read, so I found that fascinating.

The downside? The ghost story never took off for me. It read more like a mystery, lacking in the atmospheric tension requisite for a ghost story. The paranormal element of the story, which I won't reveal here, is certainly a focus, but definitely lacks a seamless integration with the character and her backstory.

Surprisingly, the prose writing feels like an early draft rather than a finished piece. Transitions between paragraphs are really abrupt, and I didn't feel as though there is enough dialogue to "cover" characters' actions within scenes. A few minor plot details are introduced but not really resolved, particularly the one regarding Pemba's father. The poetry that is the voice of Phyllis only confused me, but that might be because I don't understand how the paranormal connection between Phyllis and Pemba works.

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## P. says

Maybe I'm used to reading problem novels, but this seemed to be resolved in way too pat a manner. It was based on real history--I wish it hadn't felt rushed. But I can also see it giving a middle-school kid a thrill and maybe an interest in history.

I was also hoping it would be the ghost of Phyllis Wheatley, but it wasn't.

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## Rebecca says

Teen ghost story (with hip-hop poems and journal entries) is a good way to learn about history. I like the

character Abraham and the relationship between him and Pemba. I'd like to see this made into a movie.

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### **Yanely Martinez says**

Do you like ghost stories to scare you so you can think about it a lot? Well if you do i recommend this book its a ghost story so much mystery. I thought this book was really cool because it has a lot of mystery to it and if you really need to think about it to know whats really going on.

The book takes place in NYC and then it took place in Connecticut because they moved. Pemba is a girl in the story shes a girl from the hood and her and her mom are the only people living in the house because her dad died when she was little. When they lived in NYC she had a boyfriend and she had her really close friends then one day her mom said we are moving and they moved to Connecticut and she was mad at her mom. The type of conflict that goes on in the story is person vs. person because she has a lot of problems in her life like her dad died, and her moving, and losing her friends and she looked in a mirror at her new house in her mom"s room and she sees a girl in the mirror and she feels different. I think the theme of this book is mystery because there is a lot of mysterious things going on and she has to solve them. She solves her problems by listening deep into her music and she rereads her journal she has and she finds deep answers in the music and her journal.

A major event that changed the character was when she noticed the girl in the mirror she told herself "after I saw her in the mirror I felt so different inside I couldn't look myself in the mirror no more." The setting is important to the book because it's part of the problem because she misses her friends and she had her childhood there and she moved far away.

I liked how she just passed by her mom"s room and she noticed something in that mirror like she took one glance and saw something then she sat on the bed and looked into the mirror closely and then she saw a girl. What i found interesting was that this guy named Abraham they met him when they moved to their new house I liked how he told Pemba that there was at least only 3 families who lived in that house because they said something is going on in there and they would move and they would only stay there like 3 or 4 weeks.

I give this book 5 stars because the mysteries to this book got me thinking a lot and surprised me. I would recommend this book to someone who loves to solve mysterious and likes to find out things to put everything together to know what they are talking about. So I hope u read this book because it really got me thinking.

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### **Tiffany says**

This started interesting, but the end was really confusing.

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### **Educating Drew says**

FIRST holla to POC on the cover. Especially because it's a MIDDLE GRADES book man. And I tell you what, teaching at a school where the minority are the white kids, it means a lot to my kids to see POC on the books that I bring in. AND it's especially thumbs up in my book because THIS ONE isn't about gangs.\*

Pemba is in high school. She's groovin' in the city, learning her step moves and listening to hip-hop when her mom decides that they need to move to someplace a bit more wholesome. Like a small town in CT where she swears she's got to be the only black person. Well, except for this goofy old man named Abraham.

As soon as she enters her new house though she begins to have this weird unexplainable moments of blackouts and headaches intermingled with what she concludes are odd daydreams. Finally the frequency of them leads her to confide in Abraham and together they unravel a mystery, and murder, and a an untold slavery story.

I LOVED this little book and read it in one quick setting. It's the perfect read for a kid who wants to get into a spooky spirit for Halloween. In fact, it didn't make it a day on my desk before one of my students picked it up. For any of you Read-A-Thoners who want to find a quick read, I would recommend this one for sure.

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\* My students dig the gang books, mind you, but COME ON!!! Every black or Hispanic person is not in a gang.

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### **Warren says**

Pemba is a young African-American girl whose father died in Iraq. She and her mother move to Colchester, Connecticut. There strange things begin to happen to her. The ghost of a young slave girl wants her to put things right. It is a good fast read.

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### **Aliyah says**

I loved this book. I read it in 2 days. I though it was amazing how Abraham was able to help her. I also think it was amazing how she was able to connect with Pllyll's and helped solve what was left behind. I loved how her boyfriend was so protective. I just though the whole book was amazing!

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### **Sue says**

Read it in half a day; breath of fresh air compared to what I usually read.

Gotta say, though: didn't care much for the "rhyme" and "poetry" portion of the thing. Could've done without that format.

Bumped it down from a 4-star to a 3-star because of the weak ending -- explained in a poetry fashion and summarized, out of sync with the rest of the book's pace.

Ugh, ruined it.

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### **Shawnta says**

Pemba's Song was a breathtaking triumph of a novel. I really appreciated the simple plot-line and dual story that existed in this title, similar to the M+O 4evr by Tonya Hegamin, which has a dual narrative, also of a

slave.

The life of this young girl felt very close to home with young people from Brooklyn, and could engage young readers on a journey of what life would be like if they had to move away, to the far off land of Connecticut.

Recommended for readers of urban fiction, who are capable of moving outside of the genre, but not sure where to start; also, recommended for readers of historical fiction, as it places history into our everyday lives. I would say the age range could start from 11 yrs old.

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### **Mary Ann says**

This is a modern ghost tale, showing the intersection between Pemba and Phyllis. I really liked the voice that the author created for Pemba - she was believable and I could relate to her struggle moving from the city to a small town in Connecticut. I don't think the authors got the right balance with the ghost story - there just wasn't enough there to flush it out. I was stuck more in the confused state than understanding what Phyllis went through.

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### **Day Sibley says**

It was around my junior year of high school when I read M+O 4ever, by Tonya C. Hegamin; I thought it was gonna be my top favorites, but I felt the story line between Opal and Hannah didn't fit, so I ended up not liking the book. When I saw that Tonya co-authored with Marlyn I said to myself "maybe it'll be good this round".

Moving on...

Almost from the beginning to end there's a shift through the protagonist language. To put it simply, one minute Pembas' talking like she's from the hood, then the dialogue text makes her sound proper. In the book it clearly stated Pemba was from Brooklyn, New York.

So key thing to remember folks, don't change the language style of the character!

There were a few perks from this book, but one really stood out to me. I liked when Pemba made reference how the majority of people, don't really show much creditability to the (historically) Black-Americans who came before: Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King Jr., and Rosa Parks. With this subject alone we need to look up other folks who've made a difference.

I think overall the book was okay; I just wish it wasn't so fast paced. I wanted to get to know Phyllis more than what the author's delivered, and again with the language style, she was a slave--therefore she didn't speak proper! I could've done without the poetry also.

Sorry if I sound a little harsh.

Check out my blog: [TheYoungBookCollector.blogspot.com](http://TheYoungBookCollector.blogspot.com)

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## **Debra Gastelum says**

Pemba's Song is one of those mystery-type ghost stories. I enjoyed the story and I really liked the character, Abraham, who is based on a real person. It's a quick and easy read and would be a great book to use for the Summer Reading Project. This one would be great to use for the following topic because it includes the Colored School, which does exist.

"Do research on a topic brought up in your book. Write a one page paper on your topic. Explain why that topic is important."

In fact, I think I'm going to learn more about it just because I think it's interesting.

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## **Aaron says**

Pemba and her mother move from Brooklyn to a small town near Hartford, Connecticut when her mom gets an opportunity at a dream job. The two have been living alone since Pemba's father died in the Iraq War. They find themselves in a beautiful historic home that dates back to the colonial period.

It is in this home that Pemba starts to experience flashbacks from the perspective of a slave girl who used to live in the house with the original owner. Phyllys, the slave girl, was witness to a crime that was not properly identified or prosecuted. During the flashbacks, Pemba passes out, scaring both herself and, later, her mother.

As she attempts to figure out Phyllys' secret, Pemba is also working with Abraham, a local African American who is living in the local library due to hard economic times, as he is working to research the local School for Colored Children in order to make it a historically-recognized building. He is hoping to capture the rich history that African Americans contributed to the area by telling their story.

Using the library archives, information about the Colored School, and papers found in her new home, Pemba and Abraham work to sort out the mystery so they can help Phyllys rest in peace and help make Pemba feel as if her new home is a place she wants to live even though it is not the big city she grew up in.

The writing in this tale is incredibly rich, balancing Tonya Hefamin's narrative from the perspective of Pemba and the rich historical perspective in Phyllys' words with Marilyn Nelson's poetic writing. My only complaint is that after the big build-up, the conclusion is incredibly abrupt. I felt a little robbed as I wanted more detail about what happened to Phyllys and those around her.

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