



# AFIA IN THE LAND OF WONDERS

BY MIA ARAUJO

## The Story

Afia has always felt like half of a whole. Her twin sister, Aya, is perfectly happy with fulfilling their family's expectations of them. But Afia dreams of exploring the world beyond her secluded cliffside home of Dafra.

When she meets a charming shape-shifter named Bakame, who dazzles her with promises of a magical land called Ijábù, Afia decides to take her destiny into her own hands. Although it will mean leaving everything she has ever known behind, including her beloved sister, Afia follows Bakame into the forbidden forests surrounding Dafra, from which no one has ever returned.

Filled with magical sights, a charismatic Queen, and her intriguing court, Ijábù is everything that Afia has ever dreamed of. But she soon discovers that nothing is as it seems, and this fantasy world demands a terrible price. With the help of a mysterious trickster, Afia must evade the Queen's hunters and the lost dreamers of Ijábù, who wish to pull her deeper into their web. Now, Afia must find the courage to survive while standing on her own—or risking losing herself completely to the wonders of Ijábù.

Debut author-illustrator Mia Araujo weaves an extraordinarily luminous and beautiful story, inspired by Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, about what it takes to find your true self, even if it means facing your deepest fears.

## Reading Group Questions

1. Can you find any similarities between Afia's experiences in Ijábù and Alice's experiences in *Wonderland*? In what ways are Afia and Alice similar? In what ways are they different?
2. Afia faces many obstacles and struggles during her adventures in Ijábù. Think of one example and explain how Afia overcomes it. What does she learn from the experience?
3. Afia's parents have high expectations of her and her sister, Aya. Why do you think it was important for Afia to leave home? Why do you think her sister, Aya, stayed?
4. The book's ending leaves the state of Afia and Aya's relationship ambiguous. Do you think Aya forgives her sister? What does their reunion look like? Would you be able to forgive your sibling in a similar situation? Why or why not?

## About the Creator



Photo © Mia Araujo

**Mia Araujo** is an Argentine American artist and writer, born and raised with her twin sister in Los Angeles, California. She co-hosts *Painted in Color*, a BIPOC art podcast on YouTube. Mia graduated as valedictorian from Otis College of Art and Design, with a BFA in Illustration and a minor in Creative Writing. She has shown her work in galleries and conventions across the US and around the world, and her illustration work has been commissioned by Penguin Random House, Wizards of the Coast, HBO, and the *Washington Post*. Her debut illustrated novel, *Afia in the Land of Wonders*, is a blend of her passions for visual storytelling and prose, a project that she has dedicated over a decade to crafting. Learn more at [art-by-mia.com](http://art-by-mia.com).

## Creator Q&A

### What inspired you to write and illustrate this story?

Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is one of my favorite stories, and for years I'd wanted to write and illustrate my own version. My personal connection to the story deepened in 2012, when I left home for the first time—I had to figure out who I was on my own, apart from my sister. So I wrote this story to reconnect with her and show her how much she means to me.

### You've been an artist for many years now. What led you to also become a writer? What part of the writing process do you find the most challenging? Most fun?

I grew up devouring books, especially fantasy and fairy tales, and really loved writing stories as much as I enjoyed drawing. But I stopped writing after minoring in Creative Writing in art school, and focused entirely on my drawings and paintings until 2012. It was very difficult to gather the courage to write again when I started this book.

The most enjoyable part of writing for me is seeing my characters come to life, writing their conversations and interactions, watching them struggle, change, and grow. The most challenging part is being vulnerable enough to get to the painful experiences, memories, and emotions. But this helped the story evolve beyond what I could have imagined at the outset. It also led to a lot of growth, both personally and creatively, and I'm beyond grateful for that.

### Of all the supporting characters in *Afia in the Land of Wonders*, who was your favorite to write, and why?

Definitely Ojike! I love irreverent characters like the Cheshire Cat, Anansi, Bugs Bunny, and Puck from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I wanted Ojike to have that touch of chaos, playfulness, and humor.

### Can you share more about your research process for this book?

I read and educated myself as much as possible on my inspiration for the world of Djiombé—the 10th-16th century kingdoms of West Africa and the Saharan trade routes that connected the African continent with the rest of the world at that time. I researched names, history, mythology, foods, and technology; the lavish kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai; the libraries, universities, and learning centers of Djenne and Timbuktu. I looked to the writings of Ibn Battūta, who wrote some of the only firsthand accounts still available today of everyday life in these kingdoms. I also read West African stories to balance out the European influence of the fantasy stories of my childhood. I wanted to imply that Ijábù draws people from all over, and didn't want to link too strongly to any real world cultures, so I used a range of influences for the palace and the Sonu, and wove in my own fantastical touches and Wonderland references, such as the crystal mines (the looking glass) and shapeshifting magic (Carroll's animal characters). I did my best to create a cohesive feeling within this fictional world.

Ultimately my choices in the world-building and research were guided by my desire to highlight the grandeur of the West African kingdoms of the middle ages, and to inspire more people to research these kingdoms themselves. While this book reflects my admiration for those places and people, it is not an accurate representation; it is a combination of my own interests, worldview, and what I want to see more of in the world.