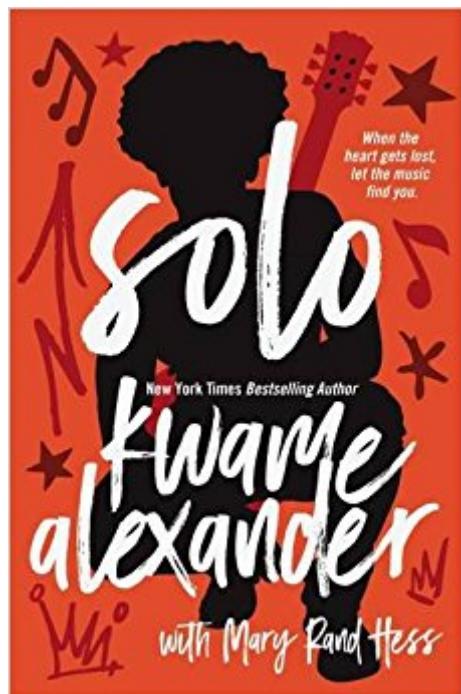


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# Solo (Blink)



## Synopsis

New York Times bestseller! A contemporary hero's journey, brilliantly told. A Kirkus Reviews, starred review A rhythmic, impassioned ode to family, identity, and the history of rock and roll. A Booklist, starred review A many readers will identify with Blade's struggle to find his place in a family where he feels like an outsider. -- PW (Publishers Weekly) "the authentic character development and tone will strike a chord with young adults. A School Library Journal From award-winning and New York Times bestselling author Kwame Alexander, with Mary Rand Hess, comes Solo, a YA novel written in poetic verse. Solo tells the story of seventeen-year-old Blade Morrison, who knows the life of a rock star isn't really about the glitz and glamour. All the new cars and money in the world can't make up for the scathing tabloid covers or the fact that his father is struggling with just about every addiction under the sun—including a desperate desire to make a comeback and regain his former fame. Haunted by memories of his mother—who died when Blade was nine—and the ruin his father's washed-up legacy and life have brought to the family, Blade is left to figure out life on his own. But, he's not all alone: He's got the friendship of a jazz-musician mentor, Robert; the secret love of a girlfriend, Chapel; and his music. All may not be well in the Morrison home, but things are looking up for Blade, until he discovers a deeply protected family secret—one that further threatens his relationship with his family and has him questioning his own identity. Thrown into a tailspin, Blade decides the only way he will understand his past and begin his future is to find out the truth behind the music and himself. He soon sets out on a journey that will change everything he thought to be true. His quest lands him in Ghana, stuck in a village just shy of where answers to the secret can be found. There, Blade discovers a friendship he couldn't have imagined, a people founded in family and community, and a reconciliation he never expected. With his signature intricacy, intimacy, and poetic style, Kwame Alexander explores what it means to finally come home. Solo features a stunning dust jacket with embossing and gloss.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Betrayed by those closest to him and stunned by a family secret, 17-year-old Blade Morrison flees his comfortable but chaotic life as the son of a drug-addicted rock star. Seeking answers and closure, Blade travels to the Ghanaian village of Konko, where he gains new perspective on family and belonging. Writing in free verse, Alexander and Hess, who recently collaborated on *Animal Ark*, strongly communicate Blade's frustration and disappointment ("I have taken for granted/ the palm trees of Cali... planted by Spanish missionaries/ in the 18th century.... They don't belong here./ And neither do I"). Lyrics from Blade's songs (and interspersed references to songs from Lenny Kravitz, Metallica, and others) emphasize the importance of music in his life, both as a link to his family and as a way to express himself.

Blade's interactions with his father, a Ghanaian young woman named Joy, and a child named Sia are especially poignant, so much so that these secondary characters can draw focus. But many readers will identify with Blade's struggle to find his place in a family where he feels like an outsider. -- PW (Publishers Weekly)Blade Morrison begins his story by disclosing, "I am / the wretched son / of a poor / rich man." Master storytellers and poets Alexander (The Crossover, 2014) and Hess (The Day I Met the Nuts, 2009) have joined forces to pen a rhythmic, impassioned ode to family, identity, and the history of rock and roll. The only things 17-year-old Blade can count on as the wealthy but neglected son of famously erratic rock god Rutherford Morrison are his soulful guitar ballads and his girlfriend, Chapel. When Rutherford disappoints Blade one time too many and they end up fighting, Blade's sister reveals a long-guarded family secret. Suddenly the music leaves him; when Chapel is no longer there to anchor him either, Blade sets out to discover more about his own past. A mix tape of classic rock hits guides him from Los Angeles all the way to the small village of Konko, Ghana, where a delay in his journey brings him unexpected fulfillment. Scattered throughout the novel in verse are some of Blade's original rock ballads, though every poem feels like a song, pulsing with Alexander's signature lyrical style. Blade ends up finding much more than what he

expects: self-discovery, community, and a deeper understanding of what family means.

**HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY:** Alexander has a history of appealing to teens of all sorts, and a Newbery to his name; don't expect this collaboration to stay on shelves long. (Booklist) Two Starred view from Media Break! The 17-year-old son of a troubled rock star is determined to find his own way in life and love. On the verge of adulthood, Blade Morrison wants to leave his father's bad-boy reputation for drug-and-alcohol-induced antics and his sister's edgy lifestyle behind. The death of his mother 10 years ago left them all without an anchor. Named for the black superhero, Blade shares his family's connection to music but resents the paparazzi that prevent him from having an open relationship with the girl that he loves. However, there is one secret even Blade is unaware of, and when his sister reveals the truth of his heritage during a bitter fight, Blade is stunned. When he finally gains some measure of equilibrium, he decides to investigate, embarking on a search that will lead him to a small, remote village in Ghana. Along the way, he meets people with a sense of purpose, especially Joy, a young Ghanaian who helps him despite her suspicions of Americans. This rich novel in verse is full of the music that forms its core. In addition to Alexander and co-author Hess's skilled use of language, references to classic rock songs abound. Secondary characters add texture to the story: does his girlfriend have real feelings for Blade? Is there more to his father than his inability to stay clean and sober? At the center is Blade, fully realized and achingly real in his pain and confusion. A contemporary hero's journey, brilliantly told. (Verse fiction. 14-adult) (Media Break) The 17-year-old son of a troubled rock star is determined to find his own way in life and love. On the verge of adulthood, Blade Morrison wants to leave his father's bad-boy reputation for drug-and-alcohol-induced antics and his sister's edgy lifestyle behind. The death of his mother 10 years ago left them all without an anchor. Named for the black superhero, Blade shares his family's connection to music but resents the paparazzi that prevent him from having an open relationship with the girl that he loves. However, there is one secret even Blade is unaware of, and when his sister reveals the truth of his heritage during a bitter fight, Blade is stunned. When he finally gains some measure of equilibrium, he decides to investigate, embarking on a search that will lead him to a small, remote village in Ghana. Along the way, he meets people with a sense of purpose, especially Joy, a young Ghanaian who helps him despite her suspicions of Americans. This rich novel in verse is full of the music that forms its core. In addition to Alexander and co-author Hess's skilled use of language, references to classic rock songs abound. Secondary characters add texture to the story: does his girlfriend have real feelings for Blade? Is there more to his father than his inability to stay clean and sober? At the center is Blade, fully

realized and achingly real in his pain and confusion. A contemporary hero's journey, brilliantly told. (Verse fiction. 14-adult) ★ Kirkus Reviews, \*starred review (Kirkus) Gr 7 Upfront Blade Morrison is on shaky ground. The death of his mother years ago still haunts him, and he's continually disappointed by his father Rutherford, a rock legend who has long grappled with drug and alcohol addiction. Rutherford's humiliating behavior at Blade's high school graduation, Blade's older sister Storm's revelation of a devastating family secret, and his girlfriend Chapel's betrayal send the teenager reeling. Looking for answers, he heads to Ghana, where he begins to heal. This novel in verse reverberates with the energy of spoken word poetry. Alexander and Hess have a knack for making ordinary language seem lyrical, and the narrative is conveyed through dialogue, text messages, and news reports as well as through Blade's terse, first-person, present-tense musings. References to rock and roll songs and artists as varied as Lenny Kravitz, Guns N'Roses, and Stevie Nicks give the book an infectious rhythm. Though the writing is at times slightly unpolished, it perfectly captures the teenage voice. Blade is all highs and lows, veering sharply from the intoxicating embrace of first love and lust to feelings of heartbreak and alienation. Some conflicts are wrapped up too neatly and others are forgotten entirely, but the authentic character development and tone will strike a chord with young adults. VERDICT Hand to music lovers, reluctant readers, fans of spoken word poetry, those who appreciate Alexander's work, or anyone seeking a tale of self-discovery. — Mahnaz Dar, School Library Journal (School Library Journal)

Kwame Alexander is a poet, speaker, educator, and New York Times bestselling author of twenty-four books, including *The Crossover*, which received the 2015 John Newbery Medal for the Most Distinguished Contribution to American Literature for Children. His other works include the novels *He Said, She Said* and *Booked*, as well as his nonfiction debut, *The Playbook: 52 Rules to Aim, Shoot, and Score in This Game Called Life*. He is the cofounder of LEAP for Ghana, an international literacy program. Visit him at [KwameAlexander.com](http://KwameAlexander.com). □ Mary Rand Hess is a poet, screenwriter, editor, and author of several books, including *Animal Ark: Celebrating Our Wide World in Poetry and Pictures* (National Geographic, 2017), which she coauthored with Deanna Nikaido and Newbery Medalist Kwame Alexander. □ □ □

As soon as I knew it was written by Kwame Alexander, I knew it would be a hit. I love the way he has woven musical lyrics into the story. Boys and girls will relate to the honesty and

raw emotions present in this story. Thank you, Kwame for touching us with your gifts of storytelling. This is a YA story but would be perfect for mature 5th graders and middle school students. It is the story of 17-year-old Blade Morrison. A young boy who has grown up with a has-been rock star father. Blade is searching for his own identity and trying to escape the reputation of his father.

Blade Morrison is made of music. His father is an old rock star, his sister is trying to become a rock star. Blade writes loves songs and hopes his dad won't find a new way to embarrass him today. After an embarrassing situation during graduation, Blade learns a secret about himself and begins a journey not only to find himself, but a new love and appreciation for his family. When I began reading Solo, I thought that the format was a poem. I quickly found out that it's written as a song. The music of Blade's life. This format made the book easy to read and appreciate the beauty behind each song and chapter. It was a very interesting way to present Blade's story and I really enjoyed the rhythm and pace carried by it. The plot of the book builds up quickly and coasts to the end. I mean this in the best way possible as once I hit 50% I had finished the book long before I was ready for it to end. The characters of the book are flawed but genuine and they come alive through the lyrical way the story is presented. While maybe we were supposed to dislike Blade in the beginning (he's described by his family as selfish), I think that while he may not have seemed like it, he wasn't so much selfish as trying to make his family better. When traveling Blade learns a new appreciation for his family and all the blessings in his life. The change not only in Blade, but also in Rutherford (his father) was subtle and loving. While I wasn't expecting the end, rather than disappointed, I was happy for Blade. Overall I gave the book four moose tracks because I felt that some of the characters, like Storm, were flat, while Sunny, and our short glimpses of her, made her more dynamic. I feel like Uncle Steve could have been left out completely because he added nothing to the story overall. Like my review? Check out my others at [the-pink-moose.com](http://the-pink-moose.com)

Blade has grown up with all sorts of privileges as the son of a rock star, but the big house and huge parties come at a cost. His father is always humiliating him, like when he crashes (literally) Blade's graduation ceremony where Blade is meant to give a speech. His father tries to clean up his act regularly, but it never seems to stick and he returns to drugs and alcohol. Blade also misses his mother terribly after her death. When Blade finally confronts his father about his behavior, a family secret is revealed that changes Blade's perspective

permanently. He sets off to discover his own history, a journey that takes him to Ghana, a place entirely different than the one he has been living in. Newbery-Medal winner Alexander has crafted another amazing verse novel here. He moves firmly into teen territory here, with a 17-year-old protagonist who is truly on a journey to discover himself. Alexander starts the novel with the excess of a rock legend's life and then beautifully changes the novel mid-course to Ghana and people who live as a strong community with few luxuries. The two settings could not be more different nor could what Blade feels while he is in each. Ghana is vividly depicted as is Blade's reaction to it, rich with people and place. Alexander's poetry writing is superb in both settings. Yet it truly comes alive in Ghana, particularly with Joy, Blade's guide and inspiration while there. Just as Blade cannot look away from Joy, neither can the novel nor the reader since she is so captivating. Throughout the book, there are questions asked that are deep, about wealth and poverty, about privilege and race, about addiction and recovery, about parenting and failure. This is a rich book filled with lots to discover and discuss. A great read that will be enjoyed by even those teens who may not think they'd like a verse novel. Appropriate for ages 15-18.

Solo is the story of Blade Morrison, a seventeen-year-old of a rock star that has fallen from grace. Blade is tired of living the life of glitz and glamour and wants to find more in life. His mother died when he was nine leaving him and his sister to deal with the aftermath of their father's addictions. When Blade discovers a deep held secret within the family, it threatens to throw everything into a tailspin and threaten his relationship with everyone around him. This sets him on a journey across the country to discover the truth about who he is and how that will shape the rest of his life. Solo is one of the clearest examples of not judging a book by its cover I have ever read. The premise sounded very interesting, but when I opened and realized it was told in poetic verse I was initially turned off. Poetry is usually not my kind of thing. I have a hard time getting into poetry and the flow of the story told that way. I decided to give Solo a chance and as the story progressed with each poem, I found myself entranced and pulled into the story. There was such an intimacy to the characters and the way they interacted with one another. I read this in one day and enjoyed the flow much more than I imagined I would. This is the type of story that is for poetry readers, but also for those that enjoy a good story with heart and will leave readers thinking of their family and friends in a different way. So, if you are like me and open the pages of this book and think it isn't going to be your cup of tea, give it a few pages and enjoy the story for what it is. You won't be disappointed! I received a complimentary copy of this

book from the publisher. The views and opinions expressed within are my own.

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