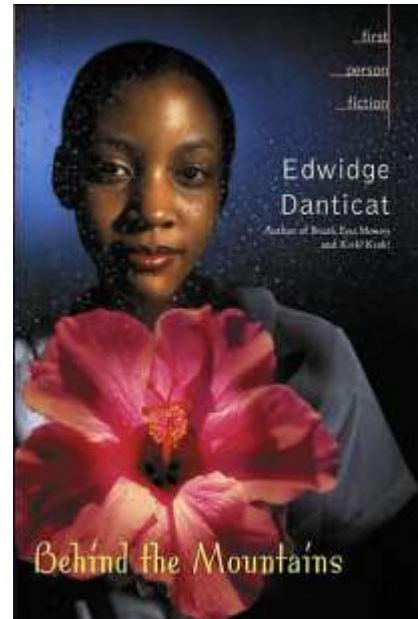


"Behind the mountains are more mountains"

Haitian proverb



Behind the Mountains

Edwidge Danticat

HarperCollins Children's Books 2002

Grade Levels

6-8

Curriculum Area

Language Arts • Social Studies • Art

National Language Arts Standards

NL-ENG.K-12.7 EVALUATING DATA

Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems.

They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources [e.g., print and non-print texts, and artifacts].

NL-ENG.K-12.8

DEVELOPING RESEARCH SKILLS

Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

National Art Education Standards

NA-VA.4 UNDERSTAND THE VISUAL ARTS IN RELATION TO HISTORY AND CULTURES

Students know and compare the characteristics of artworks in various eras and cultures.

Students analyze contemporary and historic meanings in specific artworks through cultural and aesthetic inquiry.

Students describe and compare a variety of individual responses to their own artworks and

to artworks from various eras and cultures.

National Social Studies Standards

NSS-G.K-12.2 PLACES AND REGIONS

Students should understand how culture and experience influence people's perceptions of places and regions.

Objectives

To gain knowledge of literature, art and history of Haitian culture.

To explore life in Haiti during its transformation from military rule to democratic rule.

To learn how to relate literature to important social issues.

Overview

Using eloquent language steeped in the language of proverb and the folklore of her native Haiti, Danticat paints a moving portrait of family as its members are caught in the physical, emotional and economic turbulence surrounding Haiti's transformation from military to democratic rule. Celiane and her family are forced apart as their father leaves Haiti to find work in New York City. Then Celiane's mother is wounded in cross fire during the electoral process. As the family leaves to escape the violence, Celiane bears

witness to the continued struggles that coming to a new country can present. She records these experiences in her diary, offering her readers a first-hand account of immigration, through insightful and sensitive teenage eyes.

Activity

Author's Background

Edwidge Danticat was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti on January 19, 1969 at the height of the Duvalier dictatorship in Haiti. When she was two years old, her father André emigrated from Haiti to New York, to be followed two years later by her mother Rose, leaving the young Danticat to be raised by her aunt and uncle. It was during these years that she was exposed to the Haitian practice of storytelling [American Immigration Law Foundation <http://www.aifl.org/notable/iaa/ny2000/danticat.htm>]

Activity

Start developing a background on Haiti prior to reading the book. Using the websites sited in the *Internet Links*, research the following for background in order to introduce the book to young adults.

Information about Haiti

- Haiti is located in the Caribbean and is 10,714 square miles of coastal land and inland mountains. This nation has a total population of 7.2 million and shares an island with the Dominican Republic.
- The capitol city of Haiti is Port-au-Prince.
- Spanish, French and African influences can be found in Haiti's social customs, religious observances, language and cuisine.
- Leading exports are coffee, sugar and bauxite.
- Leading import is food. While Haitians grow food, most is exported for market. Livestock, besides goats and chickens, do not thrive well in Haiti.

Therefore, most meats and dairy products are imported and/or reserved for the well to do. A lack of appropriate and available land for agricultural cultivation limits the amount and type of foods Haitians are able to farm.

- Poor nutritional health among Haitian children makes them 50 pounds lighter and 6 inches shorter – on average – than a child of the same age in the United States. Infant mortality is a major dilemma. Of 1000 live births, 71 Haitian babies will die before age one. The United States' infant mortality rate

is 7:1000.

- Life expectancy for Haitian men is 52.8 years. Life expectancy for men in the United States is 73.4 years.
- Daily, average caloric intake for men and women in the United States is 3700; in Haiti this intake level is 1740.
- 56% of Haitians are undernourished.
- Most of the Haitian population eats one meal a day, generally consisting of rice and beans.

[Hunger in a Global Economy, Bread for the World Institute, 1998]

Activity

Discussion Points

Characters

Celiane seems to be very anxious when it comes to talking to or writing to her father while she is in Haiti. What causes this anxiety? How does it lessen once she arrives in New York? Celiane describes herself as more of a country person than a city person. In what ways does she seem to change while adjusting to staying in Port-au-Prince, Haiti and when she is in Brooklyn, New York?

Manman, Celiane's mother, must take care of her children while their father is away in New York. How has the strain of their Papa being away affected her? How do Manman's sickness and injury change her? In what ways does she expect Moy to be "the man of the house" and "her little boy" at the same time?

Moy has taken on the responsibilities that his father left behind and goes to school to be a tailor even though he wants to be an artist. Why do you think he remains in school to be a tailor when he loves art so much? How does Moy seem to change when he stays in the city - Port-au-Prince and Brooklyn? In what ways does Moy struggle to become a "man" in his parents' eyes?

Papa, Celiane's father, moved to New York to raise money for his family to move there. How do you think his being away for so long has affected each person in the family? In what ways must he now adjust to his family being together? How does Celiane's letter to him at the end of the story change him?

Tante Rose, Papa's sister, lives in Port-au-Prince and works as a nurse. In what ways does she help Celiane's family while they are in the city? Why is there such a struggle between Tante Rose and Manman?

Settings and Theme

One of the proverbs in the book is "Behind the mountains are more mountains", which means that once you overcome one problem, there will always be more waiting to be solved. How does this apply to this story? In what ways does family help in overcoming such obstacles?

In her journal, Celiane writes that she was afraid living in a different country and learning a different language would make her a different person. Is that true? Explain. If this were something that you had to do, how would it change you?

Proverbs are used many times in this story. Celiane says a proverb "makes a picture for you and you must discover for yourself how to interpret it". How would you interpret the proverbs below and why did you interpret them the way you did?

"Little yams make a big pile."

"The empty sack does not stand."

"Sweet syrup draws ants."

"Don't look down your nose at old rags. Remember, they fit you before."

How does Granpé Nozial's story about the man who brings the ice from the city to the mountain explain both when the family came back from Port-au-Prince and when they were leaving for New York?

At the end of the story, the family comes together to live in a wonderful new apartment. Do you think this is the end of their struggles in America? Explain what other "mountains" they might find behind the mountains they have just overcome.

[Source- *Reading and Writing Sourcebook*. "The Story of My Body". Robert Pavlik and Richard Ramsey. Wilmington, Massachusetts: Great Source-Houghton Mifflin Company. 2001. Pages 183-195.]

Resources

Books, Essays, Poems Written by Edwidge Danticat

Danticat, Edwidge. *After the Dance: A Walk Through Carnival in Jacmel*. New York: Crown Publishing. 2002.

Danticat, Edwidge. *Anacaona, Golden Flower, Haiti, 1490*. New York: Scholastic, Inc. 2005.

Danticat, Edwidge. *Behind the Mountains*. New York: Scholastic, Inc. 2002.

Danticat, Edwidge. *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. New York: Random House. 1998.

Danticat, Edwidge, editor. *Butterfly's Way: Voices from the Haitian Diaspora in the United States*. New York: Soho Press, Inc. 2001.

Danticat, Edwidge. *The Dew Breaker*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 2005.

Danticat, Edwidge. *The Farming of Bones*. New York: Penguin Group. 1999.

Danticat, Edwidge. *Krik? Krak?* New York: Vintage Books. 1996.

Resources

"American Immigrants: Part I." Petersborough, New Hampshire: *Cobblestone Magazine*. December 1982.

"American Immigrants: Part II." Petersborough, New Hampshire: *Cobblestone Magazine*. January 1983.

Budhos, Marina. *Remix: Conversations With Immigrant Teenagers*. Holt, 1999.

Greenberg, Judith E. *New Comers to America: Stories of Today's Young Immigrants*. New York: Scholastic Library Publishing. 1996.

Maestro, Betsy. *Coming To America: The Story Of Immigration*. Scholastic, Inc., 1996.

Robert Pavlik and Richard Ramsey. *Reading and Writing Sourcebook*. "The Story of My Body". Wilmington, Massachusetts: Great Source-Houghton Mifflin Company. 2001.

Reiff, Tana. *Boat People*. Globe Fearon Publishers. 1999.

Sandler, Martin W. *Immigrants*. Harper Collins Publishers, 1995.

Westridge Young Writer's Workshop. *Kids Explore America's Hispanic Heritage*. John Muir Publications, 1992.

Internet Websites

Learn About Haiti and Haitian Arts, Archaeology, Literature, Music, and History

American Museum of Natural History-Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou
<http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/vodou/>

ArtMedia Haiti
<http://www.artmediahaiti.com/>

BBC News-January 2000-Appeal for Haitian boat people
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/587774.stm>

Discover: Arts and Crafts- A History of Haitian Art
<http://www.discoverhaiti.com/artsynop.htm>

Double Minority: The Haitians in America Lesson Plan
<http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1989/1/89.01.08.x.html>

The Evolution of the Haitian Diaspora in the USA
<http://www.haitiusa.org/modern/evolution.php>

Haiti-Art, Music and Dance
<http://www.webster.edu/~corbetre/haiti/art/art.htm>

Haiti's Coup 2004
<http://www.africaspeaks.com/haiti2004/>

Haiti-LANIC
<http://www.lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/haiti/>

HaitianArt.com Haitian and Caribbean Art
<http://www.haitianart.com/>

Haitians-History and Culture
<http://www.culturalorientation.net/haiti/hintro.html>

Haitian Proverbs
<http://haitianproverbs.com/>

Haitian Proverbs, Riddles, Jokes and Folktales
<http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/43a/index-fb.html>

The Haitian Revolution PBS Online
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part3/3h326.html>

The New Americans for Educators/PBS-Contributions of Immigrants
http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/newamericans/foreducators_lesson_plan_05.html