

"Sometimes you have no control over what will happen next, as I discovered the year I was twelve years old..."

Lynn Joseph



The Color of My Words

Lynn Joseph

HarperCollins Children's Books 2000

Grade Levels

9-12

Curriculum Area

Language Arts • Social Studies

National Language Arts Standards

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 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 provide a range of culturally diverse literature meeting students' needs to understand themselves, understand worldviews and other cultures.

To provide meaningful, authentic opportunities to read vocabulary in a variety of contexts; language in a cultural context.

To gain knowledge of literature, art and history of the Dominican culture.

Overview

Growing up in the Dominican Republic, twelve-year-old Ana Rosa understands the power of words because she herself is a writer. Her family supports her aspirations, even though some of their neighbors find them unrealistic. From her vantage point at the top of her beloved gri gri tree, she takes in everything she observes, in both the natural and the human world, and transforms it into poetry. When the government announces that it is going to bulldoze the working-class neighborhood in which Ana Rosa and her family live, her brother Guario organizes a community resistance movement. But words, with all their power, cannot save Guario from the powerful forces against which he struggles. They do, however, help Ana Rosa tell his story, as well as her own. A lyrical first-person narrative strongly evokes a people and a place in an engaging, accessible story that does not shy away from some of the hard truths.

Activity

Author's Background

Lynn Joseph is the author of many picture books for children about her island home of Trinidad including *The Mermaid's Twin Sister*, *A Wave in Her Pocket*, *An Island Christmas*, and *Jump Up Time: A Trinidad Carnival Story*. Previously a lawyer with the City of New York, she now lives and works in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Activity

Explore the balance between personal freedom and government intervention in Lynn Joseph's *Color of My Words*, a story addressing a young

girl's struggle to write and be heard in a society without protection for the freedom of expression.

"Sometimes you have no control over what will happen next, as I discovered the year I was twelve years old. . .

Activity

Perhaps you're already using some activities to build critical literacy in your classroom. If you read novels written from the point of view of a child from another culture or set in another country, you're providing an opportunity for your students to stand in the shoes of another: that is critical literacy. If your students hear stories about people who practice religions different than their own or if they consider the differences between their lives and the lives of people like them. If you ask you students to write from the point of view of someone much older than they are, that's critical literacy. These activities all serve the same purpose: they help the student to see the world through someone else's eyes, to learn to understand other people's circumstances and perspectives and to empathize with them.

Activity

Levels of engagement with other cultures

What can we do to build cultural literacy skills in our classroom? Social justice and Multicultural curricula provide a good starting point for building understanding.

James A. Banks has identified five dimensions of multicultural education. They are: content integration, the knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, an equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture and social structure (Banks, 1995). Multicultural Content Integration deals with the extent to which teachers use examples and content from a variety of cultures and groups to illustrate key concepts, generalizations, and issues within their subject areas or disciplines. The knowledge construction process describes how teachers help students to understand, investigate, and determine how the biases, frames of reference, and perspectives within a discipline influence the ways in which knowledge is constructed within it (Banks, 1996). Students also learn how to build knowledge themselves in this dimension. The following chart is the Levels of Integration of Multicultural Content with Level 1 being the lowest or entry point. (James A. Banks. 2002)

Level 4 The Social Action Approach Students make decisions on important social issues and take actions to help solve them.
Level 3 The Transformation Approach The structure of the curriculum is changed to enable students to view concepts, issues, events, and themes from the perspectives of diverse ethnic and cultural groups.
Level 2 The Additive Approach Content, concepts, themes, and perspectives are added to the curriculum without changing its structure.
Level 1 The Contributions Approach Focuses on heroes, holidays and discrete cultural elements.

Resources

Banks, James. *Level of Integration*. Seattle, Washington. 2002. [Personal Communication]

Joseph, Lynn. *Jump up Time: A Trinidad Carnival Story*. New York: Clarion Books, 1998.

Joseph, Lynn. *Island Christmas*. Sagebrush Education Resources. 1996.

Joseph, Lynn. *The Mermaid's Twin Sister: More Stories From Trinidad*. New York: Clarion. 1994.