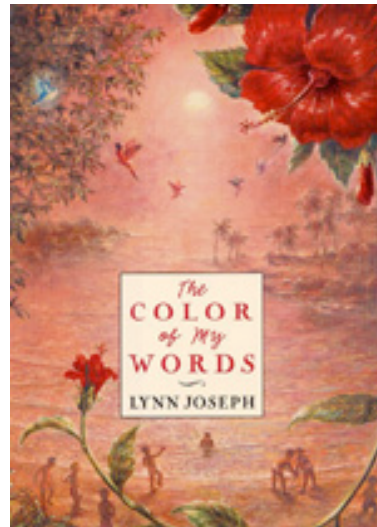


"Sometimes you have no control over what will happen next, as I discovered the year I was twelve years old..."

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

Twelve-year-old Ana Rosa is a blossoming writer growing up in the Dominican Republic, a country where words are feared. Yet there is so much inspiration all around her -- watching her brother search for a future, learning to dance and to love, and finding out what it means to be part of a community -- that Ana Rosa must write it all down. As she struggles to find her own voice and a way to make it heard, Ana Rosa realizes the power of her words to transform the world around her -- and to transcend the most unthinkable of tragedies.

Activity

Author's Background

Lynn Joseph is the author of many picture books for children about her island home of Trinidad including *A Wave in Her Pocket*, *An Island Christmas*, and *Jump Up Time: A Trinidad Carnival Story*. Lynn Joseph's *The Color of My Words* is a moving story for young adults that captures many elements of the culture in the Dominican Republic: dancing the merengue, sitting up in a gri gri tree, eating huge plates of arroz con dulce (rice pudding), shopping at the colmado. Joseph paints a life that is lush and brightly colored in spite of serious economic deprivation.

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. . .

Ana Rosa is a blossoming young writer growing up in a poor seaside village in the Dominican Republic. At twelve, she finds herself faced with turning points that will make up who she is--watching her brother's search for a future, learning to dance and to love, and finding out what it means to be a part of a community.

But in a country where words are feared, Ana Rosa must struggle to find her own voice and the means for it to be heard. Gradually she learns that her words have the power to transform the world around her-celebrating what is most beautiful on her island and transcending even the most unthinkable of tragedies."

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.

Activity

Explore and discuss 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.

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.