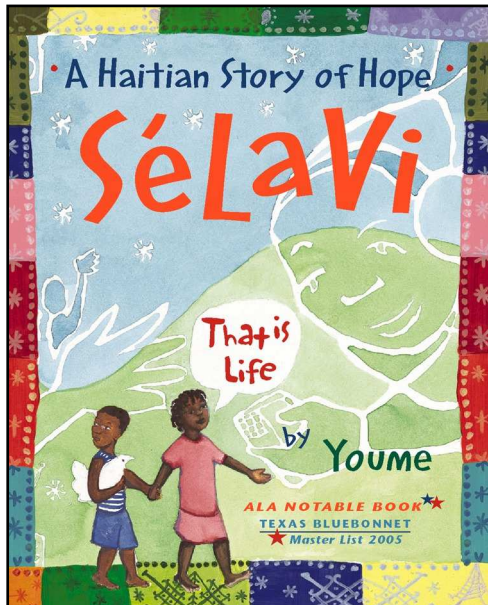


Teacher's Guide to
SÉLAVI

A Haitian Story of Hope

by **Youme**

With an essay by Haitian writer, Edwidge Danticat



AWARDS

- Texas Blue Bonnet Master Award List, 2005
- Notable Books for Children, 2005, ALA
- Jane Addams Peace Award, 2005

THEMES

- Street children
- Homeless persons
- Haiti
- Community building
- Global change

CRITIC'S PRAISE

Publishers Weekly

Youme, an artist and activist, makes a powerful debut with this true story of Port-au-Prince's street children. As one of many orphaned or homeless boys and girls in war-torn Haiti, Sélavi ekes out an existence searching for scraps, doing odd jobs and avoiding the military police. Youme's experience as a community muralist informs every picture. Her work emits a streetwise sense of lyricism and urgency. The palette darkens with acts of violence, and lightens to reflect images of hope. The book's animating belief that people can come together as "a mighty river" of change and caring is genuinely inspiring. (*Ages 5-up*)

Kirkus Reviews

Beautiful illustrations using watercolor, photographs, collage, and techniques like batik make vivid Sélavi's life. He and others are real, as Danticat's essay indicates, and their home and the radio station may now be abandoned as Haiti surrenders to unrest. A strong message of caring for the children and for each other rings through the kinds of sorrows too many children face in the world. Picture book/non-fiction. (*Ages 6-9*)

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BOOK SUMMARY

This story is about Sélavi, a homeless boy living in the midst of civil unrest. One day he is invited to live with other street children who have made their home in a banyan tree. Learning others have similar stories, he experiences the benefits of group survival and cooperation until a police raid occurs. On his own again, Sélavi goes out and seeks adult help to build a home for street children who will care for themselves.

As a result, a group of Haitian adults and children show how they can work together. In the spirit of care and community, they build a shelter and from there, they start a radio station. Run by and for children, the station not only becomes a global voice for being heard and understood, but serves as an effective outreach for other homeless children.

TEACHING OVERVIEW

This book offers high appeal content and meaningful artwork for readers of all ages. For classroom applications, it serves as an effective discussion tool and is most suited for the upper primary or lower elementary grade reader.

Of value to children, the story message explores homelessness as a topic and universal theme. In general, young readers will gain an awareness about a world larger than their own. In particular, they will discover that homeless people are everywhere while also internalizing a truth about homelessness, namely that its existence is both close to home and faraway, and is in communities both big and small.

LESSON PLAN ACCOUNTABILITY

This Teacher Guide contains comprehension strategies with content-based questions and learning activities. Divided into the areas of Before, During and After Reading sections, all activities and questions provide coverage of generalized Language Arts content standards in the skill areas of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and visual literacy. Learner objective goals include: empathetic thinking, discussion skills, and outreach awareness/community involvement.

For teacher convenience and assessment purposes, this guide offers a final section called Curriculum Coverage and Extensions. This section addresses lesson planning and accountability. Learning skills and content objectives covered throughout the guide are listed. For thematic units and inter-disciplinary applications, this section also contains specific activities in the areas of Social Studies, Math and Art.



COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES

BEFORE READING

Invite students to study the front cover and title of the book and make predictions about the story based on their observations. Have students articulate what the artwork of the front and back cover reveals about the story and its plot. Before reading the inside back flap about the author, write the author's name (Youme) on the board and ask students what they think about her name.

Write the word "homeless" on the board and ask students if they know the meaning of the word. Point out the suffix "less" and discuss its meaning with the group. Brainstorm other words that end with the suffix "less." Define the words.

Pose the following sample comprehension and discussion questions. As an alternative, assign the above questions as a written and/or take home assignment.

1. Does anyone know or have any of you seen someone who is homeless?
2. Where can homeless people be found? (i.e. they can be found everywhere, near or faraway, in communities of all sizes, etc.)
3. What might a homeless person need other than a home?
4. How could a person who is homeless get his or her needs met?

Make three columns on a large piece of poster or chart paper with these headings: *What We Know*; *What We Would Like to Know*; and *What We Found Out*. Find out what students know and do not about Haiti. List their observations under the first two headings. Inform them they will be returning to this poster and its headings as follow-up activities.

Before beginning the story, locate where Haiti is on a map as a group. Ask students to pay attention to details in the book that pertain to Haiti as a country, its culture, its history, its people and its politics.

AS READING PROGRESSES

Read and/or assign reading times for independent readers into three segments in line with the book's lay-out and format: *Text of story*; *Youme's commentary*, *captions and orphanage photographs*; and *essay by Haitian writer, Edwidge Danticat*.



SEGMENT ONE: Text of story

Read the book to the class (or assign the book individually for independent readers) up to Youme’s commentary and photographs of the actual orphanage. Stop after each page and have students discuss and/or do the following:

1. Identify key items or images in the illustrations and in the borders that frame the pages. How do they add meaning to the text of the story?
2. Hypothesize and/or predict what may happen next.
3. Describe the motives, behaviors, and feelings of the characters.
4. Analyze the plot as you go. Explain or evaluate why what is happening, is happening.

SEGMENT TWO: Commentary, captions and photographs

Structure the discussions of the this segment into the four captions: *Is this story really true?*; *The Family of Sélavi*; *Working Together*; and *On Call-In Shows*. Read and discuss the written information in each section, and evaluate the photographs and repeated use of certain illustrations.

Discussion Objectives:

Cover, explore, and focus on the following main themes: *Keep hope alive*; *Homeless but not hopeless*; *Sense of belonging*; *Group cooperation*; *Common good*; and *Philanthropy*.

Ask students what they think the following quotations from the book mean:

- Tell them we are here, that we are no less than wealthy children, and that there should be a place for everyone at the table.
- Every child deserves to be heard.
- All children are people.

Visual Literacy Objectives:

For the photographs, have students study the photos by Youme and Jennifer Cheek Pantaléon carefully. Ask why they think these particular photos and particular illustrations were selected? What do these photos reveal about the lives of these Haitian children? What can be observed from the facial expressions of these children about their personalities and outlook on life?

SEGMENT THREE: Essay

Write Danticat’s quote, “*My birthplace, Haiti, is a land of incredible beauty...*” on the board. Have students finish her thought with “because” followed by their own reason-based response.

Read as a group or (assign individually to independent readers) the entire essay. Use the map and photographs for mini-lessons on geography and world awareness. Revisit

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the poster. Add information under the heading “What We Found Out” based on what they now know about Haiti.

AFTER READING

Have students research a specific aspect about Haiti (individually or in small groups). Brainstorm possible topics (i.e. foods, culture, language, geography, economy, etc.). Require use of a variety of resources (i.e. Internet, library resources, magazines, periodicals, newspapers, guest speakers, etc.). Ask them to give mini-oral presentations based on their findings. Return to the poster and add any final observations where appropriate.

Ask students to compare and contrast Haiti with the United States. Have students graphically represent their observations: Venn diagram, Graphic organizer, Columns and quadrants, etc.

Direct students to the pages of the children living in the banyan tree. Have students reread the stories that those children shared about how they became homeless. Ask students to select one of the character’s stories based on who they can identify with the most in terms of personal understanding. Have students write a letter that supports or personally connects with the character. Or ask students to create a poem in response to what the character’s life story made them feel or think deep down.

Review the following slogans and quotations used elsewhere in the book. Have students select one as a writing prompt or title and write a short narrative.

- Sélavi, That is life
- The mighty river
- Food for all people
- Respect for all people
- We will write our messages in the air where they cannot be painted out.
- “All children need a neighbor or a friend who will keep an eye on them.”
(Ronald Joseph)


CURRICULUM COVERAGE AND EXTENSIONS

Language Arts

Productive Skill areas: Writing and Speaking

Writing Skills: Response to text/others; description skills; writing for a variety of purposes—to express, to discover, to reflect; narrative writing; creative writing, poetry; journal writing; letter writing; inquiry/research.

Speaking skills: Response to text/others; description skills; individual/group discussion skills; exploration of universal themes; presentation skills.



Receptive Skill areas: Reading and Listening

Reading Skills: Setting purposes for reading; prior knowledge; prediction skills; word identification; vocabulary development; story elements—main ideas, character development, plot development; connection to personal experience; cultural characteristics; inquiry/research.

Listening skills: Enjoy and appreciate input of others; connection to personal experience.

Viewing skills: Visual Literacy

Viewing skills: Interpretation skills; evaluation of author's choice; illustrations as extension of text meaning.

Generalized Standards:

Cognitive development skills: Critical thinking; comprehension skills; compare/contrast skills; vocabulary development—constructing meaning, key words; identification of main topics; cultural characteristics; emotional intelligence; empathetic reasoning skills.

Social Studies

Curriculum content coverage: Map skills; geography; acts of democratic citizenship; group cooperation skills; giving and sharing for the common good; philanthropy.

Specific Activities:

1. Define philanthropy as a group. Aim for an understanding that it is the giving and sharing of time, talent, or treasure intended for the common good. Organize a food and clothing drive. When a sufficient amount of items have been collected, invite someone from the community who works for a local food pantry or shelter to pick up the items. Thank students for their efforts. *Be sensitive if someone in your class has had some personal experience with being homeless.
2. Do a different group project that helps people in the community (i.e. clean-up work, hospital or nursing home visits, chores for those in need, etc.). Have students journal about their feelings from the experience of helping others.

Math


Curriculum content coverage: Data collection/organization; graphs/charts/tables; problem-solving skills; computation skills; understanding the meaning of mathematical operations

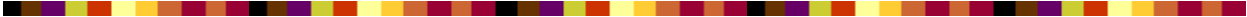
Specific Activities:

1. As items come in from the clothing and food drive (see activity #1 above), have students create a graph of the items collected.

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2. Have students research the currency used in Haiti and its current value compared to the US dollar. Using the exchange rates and amounts, have students create math story problems using a variety of mathematical operations. Use their work as hand-outs/worksheets for the class.

Art

Curriculum content coverage: Art appreciation; art history; muralism, artist techniques—collage, batik, water color, photographs; photography and photo realism

Specific Activities:

1. Have students observe the author's use of murals, collage, and batik throughout her work in the story. Emphasize that the author is a muralist. Have students imitate the art from the book. Ideally, search out a place in the community where students can paint a mural on a wall. If not, use a wall or window in your school or classroom. Otherwise, they can use long rolls of butcher paper and then hang it the hall.
2. Do a mini-lesson on muralism and famous muralists like Diego Rivera. Ask students if they know of murals in their community or neighborhood. If possible, take a field trip in your town or city, and hold follow-up discussions about their meaning, message, symbols and/or purpose.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Youme Landowne

Youme (whose parents made her name up from the words “you” and “me”) is an artist and activist. She grew up in Miami, Florida, and Woods Hole, Massachusetts, listening to stories, reading her way through libraries, building tree houses and making books.

Youme’s work has taken her to Nairobi, Kenya, where she wrote and illustrated for Rainbow Magazine; to Kyoto, Japan, where she worked as a graphic artist; to Santiago de Cuba as a participant in Inter Nos, a collaborative mural project; and to Port-Au-Prince, Haiti, collaborating with children to paint murals and document their stories through drawings and the written word. She became a professional community muralist working with Precita Eyes Mural Art Center in San Francisco, California.

Youme now lives in Brooklyn, New York, where she works with Groundswell, a public arts organization, and Teachers & Writers Collaborative.