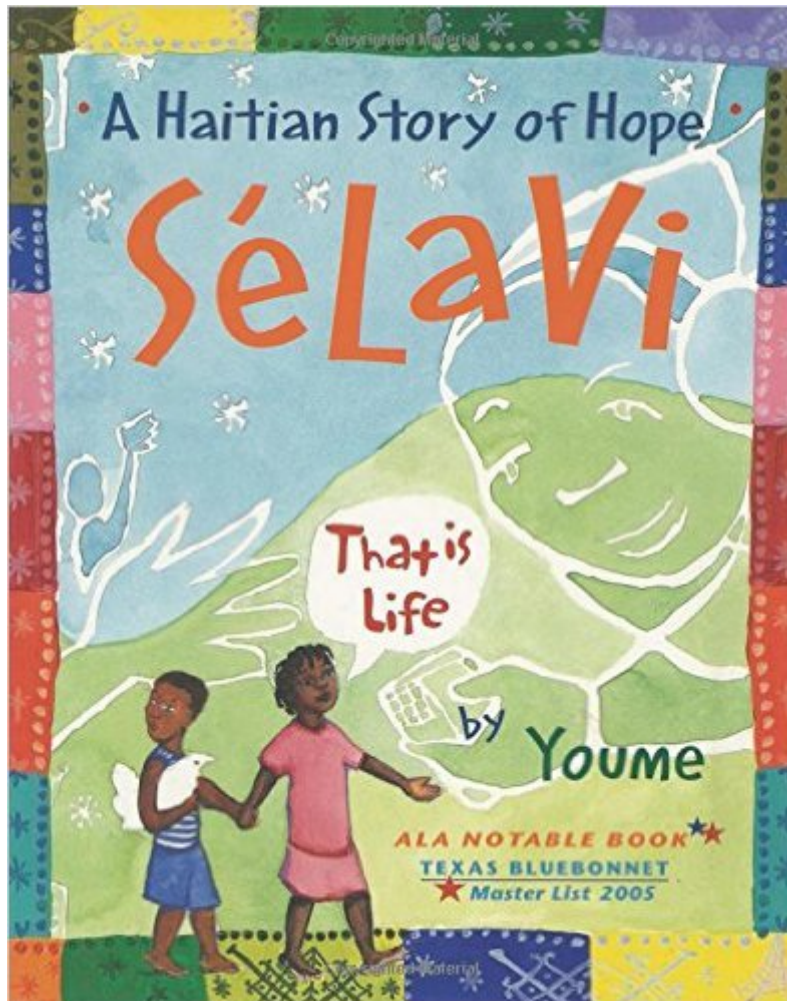


The book was found

Selavi, That Is Life: A Haitian Story Of Hope



Synopsis

Not so long ago and not so far away, people with guns could take a family, burn a house and disappear, leaving a small child alone in the world. • So begins the true story of Selavi, a small boy who finds himself on the streets of Haiti. Selavi finds other street children who share their food and a place to sleep with him. Together they proclaim a message of hope through murals and radio programs. Youme is an artist and activist who has worked with communities in Kenya, Japan, Haiti and Cuba to make art which honors personal and cultural wisdom. Edwidge Danticat, Haitian author, adds an essay to Selavi.

Book Information

Lexile Measure: 660L (What's this?)

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Product Dimensions: 8.3 x 0.4 x 10.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars • See all reviews (13 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #306,997 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #100 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Homelessness & Poverty #104 in Books > Children's Books > Biographies > Social Activists #110 in Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Explore the World > Central & South America

Age Range: 5 - 7 years

Grade Level: 1 - 2

Customer Reviews

This is a gracefully written, beautifully illustrated book that introduces young readers to a complex true story of hardship and resourcefulness, persecution and triumph. As a former teacher, I think it would also make a strong teaching tool to introduce the concept of human rights to young readers. While the story has painful moments, the pages also contain joy, humor, and levity. The book does not condescend or oversimplify. It trains a keen child's eye, perceptive to all the colors of life, on the people and politics of Haiti.

The story, as you can read in the descriptions above, is an amazing and powerful one. The book itself could be filled with negativity, but it seems to barely flitter over the negative spots... what, exactly happened to Selavi's family? The upheaval and chaos of revolution and political instability is not mentioned directly, though a knowledgeable (not a young) reader would be able to recognize it. The young reader is able to recognize the central theme: We are all drops of water, but together we can create a mighty river. Teamwork and community are powerful forces against evil. The illustrations are beautiful and meaningful. I enjoyed reading the endnotes by Danticat, which helped fill in some of the gaps of the story.

Selavi: A Haitian Story of Hope is the story of a homeless child befriended by other street children living in Haiti, who all look out for one another sharing food and companionship. Together they find a caring community and a voice to create a radio station run by and for children. A true story with a positive message, that vividly presents the poignant difficulties street children face in daily life.

This creative non-fiction book tells the story of young orphan children living in Haiti. Left parent-less due to fighting, violence, and poverty, these children band together and become a family of their own. This beautiful tale of love, compassion and goodwill narrates the real-life story of an orphan boy, Sélavi, and other children like him who created their own orphanage, extending a hand to all those other children in need. Eventually these same orphaned children began a radio show called *Radyo Timoun*, where they, to this day, advocate for children's rights. At the back of the book is an essay written by Edwidge Danticat, one of the most prominent and prolific contemporary Haitian writers, sharing some personal experiences and historical context to frame Youme's story. As many of you know, we frequently feature Danticat's books on our blog. In this particular essay, she notes that "My birthplace, Haiti, is a land of incredible beauty, but for many, it is also a place of great sadness." Youme's tale does a lovely job of embodying these two dualities—the laments of many of Haiti's children, as well as their inspiring courage, hope and beauty. Danticat also shares some historical facts: "In 1804, the slaves (of Haiti) revolted and won their independence, making Haiti the first black republic in the Western Hemisphere. Along with the American Revolution, Haiti's was the only successful rebellion in North America." Danticat's essay continues with additional information on both Haiti's history and contemporary Haiti, contributing a valuable component to this story and especially to the use of this story in the classroom. Finally, Danticat's essay concludes with one final wish: "Being a child of Haiti myself, I can only hope that Sélavi's

story will be repeated in the lives of many other children, among them future writers, radio and television journalists, who will continue to tell and show their stories in such moving and powerful ways that the rest of the world will no longer be able to neglect them.

Yume's story is one attempt at elevating and drawing attention to these children's powerful stories. The story starts with a little orphan boy roaming the streets of Haiti. He has no family and no name. The narration describes a climate of violence and discord, pointing to moments of political unrest in Haiti's history: "Not so long ago and not so far away, people with guns could take a family, burn a house and disappear, leaving a small child alone in the world." One of the first illustrations also shows an imaginative map of Haiti using only green and white paint, and pointing out general markers such as "Nord" (North), "Ouest" (west) and "Sud" (South). Port-au-Prince is also marked as "P" (its Haitian name). Underneath "P", there is an image of the little boy sitting all alone on a bench in Haiti's capital. This illustration symbolizes the young protagonist's immense feeling of loneliness. However, this image also symbolically places the plight of Haiti's orphan children on the map, raising awareness of and educating readers about this situation. In other words, the young protagonist, although feeling very alone, is one of many, many other orphan children living in Haiti, a humanitarian crisis deserving of attention. This particular illustration also complicates the often over-simplified conception of Haiti by outsiders: the rest of the map is made up of blurry, washed-out and highly generic images of the cardinal directions, stick figures, amorphous homes and squiggles. The protagonist is illustrated clearly and discernibly using brown and red paint, grabbing the reader's attention. Not only does this draw focus to the subject of the book, but it also interrupts a generalized and simplified representation of Haiti with realities that, like Danticat states, "the world will no longer be able to neglect." As the story progresses, the protagonist meets another young boy, an orphan just like himself. The boy introduces himself as "Ti Fr". However, when he asks the protagonist for his name, the protagonist must respond that he doesn't have one: "You can name yourself," "Ti Fr" said. "Like my name means Little Brother. We could call you Hungry, Sleepy, or Little Traveler," "I am all those things," the child said. "And that's his life." From then on they called him "S" (S). Ultimately the protagonist's new name, and the title of the book, will embody the hardships of the past as well as the hope and potential for the future: That is life. "S" introduces him to a group of other orphan children. Although they have each experienced devastating pasts, just like "S", they are tremendously

compassionate and generous, offering SÃ©lavi some of their water, mangoes and avocados. As SÃ©lavi begins to integrate himself into this new community, readers will learn of some of the other children's stories, the continuing obstacles that they face, and the goals and projects that they are now undertaking, all the while being exposed to some of Haiti's landscapes and sociological conditions. Throughout the story these children show great perseverance and ingenuity as they successfully create a shelter in Haiti's capital for other homeless orphans, as well as a kids' radio show in order to continue educating and raising awareness. In the back of the book readers will also find a note from Youme where she explains how she came up with the story, while extrapolating upon some historical details about the real-life SÃ©lavi, TiFrÃ© and their inspirational group of activists. Youme explains how SÃ©lavi, TiFrÃ© and many other people all worked together to make a home for Haiti's orphaned children. They called the home Lanfanmi SÃ©lavi, which can mean either "Family is life" or "SÃ©lavi's Family". The original shelter no longer exists, but a newer model has been built and children still live there today. These children also created a radio station called Radyo Timoun, meaning "children's radio," where they continue to go on air advocating for the rights of children. The emissions are now international, and people all over the world can access them. Youme also includes photographs of the children playing and working together: "The family of SÃ©lavi is an extended family with a strong sense of community. Just as with any family, there are many chores, including washing clothes, preparing food and cleaning up after meals. The work is always more enjoyable when the tasks are shared. In addition, Working together also means playing and talking together. Like children everywhere, the kids in SÃ©lavi's family have learned about life and community by working and playing and talking together." This is an important point of Youme's story and educators could take this opportunity to ask their students about ways in which they've learned about life and community by working and playing and talking together. The example set by SÃ©lavi and the other orphans reinforces values of community and comradery. In addition, the point that this is like children everywhere helps foster tolerance by finding common ground amongst people from different cultures. As mentioned in my earlier post, some of these books could be useful for lessons on compare and contrast. For one, humanistic values of community, learning, life and compassion are some beautiful commonalities to be emphasized across cultures. For access to the full review and additional resources, check out our Vamos a Leer blog at teachinglatinamericathroughliterature.com

I brought this book for my 7 year old daughter. As a Haitian parent, I want to educate my children about their heritage as much as possible. I found the book to be uplifting and inspiring. The book showed my daughter how lucky she was and how people, including children, can do anything they set their mind to. It also reminded me that there is still much work to be done.

Many adults do not know the rich history of Haiti and so to have a book that can educate children as well as adults is great. Although, this book focuses on some of the sadder parts of Haiti's history it still shows the richness and strength of its people. For children, this book is a lesson in teamwork, collaboration, love, and pride.

Very well written. Great service and fast shipping. Thank you

My students were wrapped by the reading of this story and I was able to tie-in learning the watercolor resist style of painting seen in some of the illustrations.

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