Caroline's Wedding Study Guide

Caroline's Wedding by Edwidge Danticat

Contents

Introduction

“Caroline’s Wedding,” by Edwidge Danticat, is the last story in the collection *Krik? Krak!*, which was published in 1995. The story features the narrator and protagonist, Gracina (Grace) Azile, who, with her mother and sister Caroline, has immigrated to the United States from Haiti. It describes the cross-generational and cross-cultural conflicts triggered by Caroline’s wedding to a non-Haitian man. Danticat introduces her readers to traditional stories, games, beliefs, and rituals from a culture that is little known or understood outside Haiti. In particular, the story explores the role of storytelling and tradition, and the relationship between mother and daughter, in creating social and family cohesion. Against the background of Haiti’s violent history, the individual stories of the pain and suffering experienced by the different characters unfold and interlink. Although the focus is on Haiti’s culture and history, many of the collection’s themes, including memory, loss, dispossession, and the resilience of the human life and spirit in the face of extreme circumstances, have a broader relevance.

Author Biography

Edwidge Danticat was born on January 19, 1969, in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, to André Miracin (a cab driver) and Rose Souvenance (a textile worker) Danticat. When Edwidge was two years old, her father emigrated from Haiti to New York, to be followed two years later by her mother. Remaining in Haiti, the young Danticat was raised by her aunt and uncle. During these years she was exposed to the Haitian tradition of storytelling. Danticat's aunts and grandmothers would call out, "Krik?" and she would reply, "Krak!" as a signal to the storyteller to begin. Her formal education in Haiti was in French, but at home Danticat spoke Haitian Creole.

Danticat joined her family in Brooklyn, New York, in 1981, at which time English became her third language. She attended junior high classes in Brooklyn but had difficulty fitting in with her peers. In her isolation, she turned to writing about the people of her native country.

Danticat's parents wanted her to pursue a career in medicine, and with the aim of becoming a nurse, she attended a specialized school in New York City. However, she soon abandoned this course and earned a degree in French literature from Barnard College, where she won the 1995 Woman of Achievement Award. She was awarded a Master of Fine Arts degree from Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1993. Her thesis at Brown was her highly acclaimed first novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994). In 1998, the television celebrity Oprah Winfrey picked the novel for her book club and introduced its author to a mass readership. Subsequently, Danticat published a collection of short stories, *Krik? Krak!* (1995), and the novels, *The Farming of Bones* (1998), *Behind the Mountains* (2002), and *The Dew Breaker* (2004). Danticat also edited a collection of writings by Haitian authors entitled *The Butterfly's Way: Voices from the Haitian Dyaspora in the United States* (Soho Press, 2001).

Danticat gained critical acclaim for her portrayals of the Haitian experience both in Haiti and the United States and for her lyrical use of language. After completing her master's degree, she taught creative writing at New York University and the University of Miami. She also worked with filmmakers Patricia Benoit and Jonathan Demme on projects on Haitian art and documentaries about Haiti. As of 2006, Danticat lived in the Little Haiti neighborhood of Miami and regularly returned to Haiti to visit friends and family.

Danticat's work has attracted many awards and award nominations. In 1994, her novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* won fiction awards from the following magazines: *Essence*, *Caribbean Writer*, and *Seventeen*. In 1995, her short story collection *Krik? Krak!* was nominated for a National Book Award. In 1996, *Granta* magazine named Danticat one of its Best Young American Novelists. In the same year, a short story, "Between the Pool and the Gardenias," published three years earlier in *Caribbean Writer*, won a Pushcart Prize for short fiction. In 1999, Danticat's novel *The Farming of Bones* gained an American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation. *The Dew Breaker* was nominated for a 2004 National Book Critics Circle Award and a PEN/Faulkner Award in 2005.

Plot Summary

When “Caroline’s Wedding” opens, Grace Azile is leaving a Brooklyn courtroom, having just received her certificate of U.S. citizenship. When she calls her mother (Ma) to tell her the news, Ma advises her to hurry and get her passport, as that is what is truly American. Grace has to temporarily trade in the certificate at the post office to get a passport. She feels anxious without it, since when her mother was pregnant with her sister Caroline, she was arrested in a sweatshop raid and spent three days in an immigration jail.

Grace reaches home to find her mother preparing a pot of bone soup. Ma holds the traditional Haitian belief that bone soup has the magical power to separate lovers, so she has served it every night since Caroline announced her engagement. Ma disapproves of Eric because he is Bahamian and not Haitian.

Caroline was born without a left forearm. Ma thinks the cause was a drug that was injected into her by a prison doctor after the sweatshop immigration raid and that Caroline was lucky to have been born at all. Unlike Grace, Caroline was born in the United States.

Ma calls Grace into her bedroom. She is upset that Eric’s courtship of Caroline is different from how she was courted by her daughters’ father, which took place in Haiti and was formal. Grace and Caroline’s father (Papa) is now dead.

One night, Caroline and Grace play a traditional Haitian free association game around the word, “lost.” The game was taught to them by Ma, who learned it as a girl. Ma appears and asks them to go with her to a mass for a dead Haitian refugee woman. Grace goes, but Caroline does not. The Catholic Church they attend holds services tailored to the Haitian community. The priest reads out the names of refugees drowned at sea that week. Many are known to members of the congregation. He says a prayer for the dead woman, who gave birth to a baby on board the boat. The child died, and the mother threw the baby overboard and then jumped into the sea after it, drowning herself. Grace thinks of the Haitian belief that there are spots in the sea where Africans who jumped off the slave ships rest, where those who die at sea can choose to join their long-lost relations. The priest asks the congregation to remember those they have loved and lost. As screams erupt in the congregation, Ma suddenly gets up and leaves.

Caroline and Eric plan a civil ceremony. Ma wants Eric to bring his family to their house to court her favor and to have his father ask her blessing, according to the old Haitian custom. Caroline tells Grace that she dreamt of Papa the previous night. It is ten years since he died. After Papa’s death, Ma told her daughters to wear red panties, in the belief that this would ward off his spirit so that he would not mistake the daughters for his wife and try to lie with them at night. For some time after he died, Caroline and Grace had the same dream: they try in vain to catch up with him as he walks through a deserted field. They disobeyed Ma and did not wear the red panties, as they wanted Papa’s spirit to visit them.

Grace tells Caroline that the son of their Cuban neighbor, Mrs. Ruiz, was recently shot by the pilot of an airplane after trying to hijack the plane to go from Havana to Miami.

Grace recalls that when she and Caroline were younger, they used to wish that one day the rest of Caroline's arm would burst out of Ma's stomach and float back to her. Caroline likes to have her stub stroked, but no one does, out of fear of giving offense. Caroline says that if she were to cut the vein that throbs below the surface of her stub, she could bleed to death.

Grace dreams that she sees her father at a masked ball but cannot get close to him. By his side is Caroline. Grace screams in protest that they are leaving her out. When alive, he remembered everything about their life in Haiti and its traditions and beliefs.

Preparations are under way for Caroline's wedding, which is a month away. Though Ma does not want to attend, she pretends that this is the "real wedding" she wants for her daughter, so that Caroline does not resent her. However, she is not going to cook a wedding-night dinner, as is the custom. Grace decides to throw a wedding shower for Caroline. Ma disapproves because to her a shower seems like begging.

Ma, Caroline, and Grace go to Eric's house for dinner. Ma is as unenthusiastic about Eric's cooking as she is about him, and Grace thinks he should have hired a Haitian cook. To save Ma's feelings, Caroline goes home with her and Grace even though she would rather stay the night with Eric. Ma warns Caroline that people are known by their stories and that she should value herself and guard against being the subject of gossip. After Ma falls asleep, Caroline calls a cab and returns to Eric's place. Grace dreams of Papa: this time, she is on a cliff and he is leaning out of a helicopter trying to grab her hand to rescue her.

Grace was born when her parents were poor and living in a shantytown in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. They called her their "misery baby," and Ma thought she might die. Desperate to find a way to leave Haiti, Papa got a visa by taking vows in a false marriage with a widow who was leaving Haiti for the United States. A few years later, Papa divorced the woman and sent for Ma and Grace. While he was alive, this was a secret that Grace and Caroline were not supposed to know.

Caroline's wedding shower takes place. After the guests leave, Ma gives Caroline her present, a silk teddy. Privately, Grace tells Ma that she did not think such things were to her taste, but Ma replies that she cannot live in the United States for twenty-five years and not be affected by it. Ma fears that Caroline is marrying Eric because she thinks he is the only man who would marry her, but Grace suggests that he may love Caroline. Ma remarks that people's hearts are made of stone. Grace suspects that this is a result of her hurt feelings when Papa married the widow. Ma brings out a bag of Papa's letters that he wrote to her from the United States while she was still in Haiti. The letters address practical matters but never mention love.

The night before her wedding, Caroline tries to make Ma understand why she and Eric are getting married in a small civil ceremony: they do not wish to spend all their money

on a big wedding. Eric has a friend who is a judge, and he will perform the ceremony in his office. Ma says that such a “mechanical” affair is typically American.

Caroline puts on her wedding dress for Ma and Grace to see. She is also wearing a new false arm. She has been having phantom pain in her arm such as amputees experience, and her doctor told her that the false arm may make it go away. When Ma points out that Caroline is not an amputee, she says she feels like one because of the pressure of the wedding. Ma says, “In that case, we all have phantom pain.”

Caroline wakes on her wedding day looking ill, with a pain in her arm which makes her not want to get married. Ma says she was the same on the morning of her own wedding. Ma boils a traditional concoction with leaves, gives Caroline a bath, and rubs the leaves over Caroline’s body. Ma tells Caroline that she is looking forward to visiting her in her new house.

Caroline, her family, and Eric arrive at Judge Perez’s office for the ceremony. Grace cannot help but feel that Caroline is divorcing her family for a new allegiance. After the ceremony, Caroline feels better. At lunch, Grace toasts Caroline, saying that she will never be gone from the family and reflecting that this is something Ma might have said. Caroline and Grace bid each other a tearful farewell.

That night, Ma receives a bunch of red roses from Caroline. She keeps sniffing them and calls her daughter “Sweet, sweet Caroline.” Grace dreams that she is sitting with her father beside a stream of rose-colored blood. As they look at the stars, Papa tells Grace that wherever she is, she can see them. He tries to play a question-and-answer game with Grace, asking her what landscapes they would paint if they were painters and what she would name a daughter. Grace does not know how to answer. He tells her that she has forgotten how to play the game. She wakes, for the first time frightened of the father who appears in her dreams. She asks her mother what she thought of the wedding. Ma tells Grace that when Papa left her in Haiti to move with the widow to the United States, she made a charm to keep his love but knew his feelings for her had changed. Then she shows Grace Papa’s romantic, respectful proposal letter. She adds that Caroline’s wedding was nice.

Grace’s passport arrives. For the first time, she feels secure in the United States. She reflects that her whole family has paid dearly for this piece of paper. She visits Papa’s grave to show him the passport.

While making bone soup, Ma reports to Grace that she has told Caroline that she will keep her bed for whenever she wants to use it, a turnaround from her previous stance that she would get rid of the bed the day Caroline got married. Grace drops a bone into the soup, and the splash leaves a red mark on her hand. Grace asks Ma the questions Papa asked her in her dream. Ma says that as the older woman, the first question belongs to her. She asks Grace one of the questions from traditional Haitian question-and-answer games, one that Papa often asked Grace: why, when you lose something, is it in the last place you look? Grace knows the answer: because once you remember, you stop looking.

Characters

Eric Abrahams

Eric is Caroline's fiancé, whom she meets while working as a teacher in a school where he is a janitor. He is originally from the Bahamas, and Ma disapproves of him because he is not Haitian. Eric has a learning disability and is slow of speech. Though Ma calls him a "retard," Grace knows that he has a good heart and sincerely cares for Caroline.

Carl Azile

See Papa

Caroline Azile

Caroline is the younger daughter of Hermine and Carl Azile and the sister of Grace. She was born in the United States and has most assimilated the ways of her adopted country. Caroline was born with a missing forearm, due to a drug that was injected into her pregnant mother after a sweatshop raid. Caroline's wedding to Eric is the incident that incites the cross-cultural and cross-generational conflict between her and Ma. Caroline avoids direct confrontation with Ma, reacting to Ma's hostility to her marriage with a mixture of long-suffering tolerance, irritation, and small deceptions, such as pretending to sleep at home before her wedding when she is really sleeping with Eric. Caroline and her mother achieve reconciliation when Caroline feels ill before her wedding. Ma gives her a bath and rubs her body with a traditional Haitian herbal concoction, which revives her. The episode involves Caroline surrendering to her mother's love and wisdom, something that she has resisted previously. Caroline acknowledges the connection made by sending her mother a bunch of red roses, which carries the symbolism of the color red (used in the story variously to suggest Haiti, the violence and suffering of Haiti's past, and life itself) and the symbolism of Sor Rose, the mythological founder of Haiti.

Grace Azile

Grace, whose full name is Gracina, is the protagonist and narrator. She is the eldest daughter of Hermine and Carl Azile (known in the story as Ma and Papa) and the sister of Caroline. While Grace was born in Haiti, at the story's opening, she has just obtained U.S. citizenship. In the cross-cultural and cross-generational conflict between Ma and Caroline, Grace acts as a mediator, since she remains connected to her native culture (Haiti) and her adopted culture (the United States). She has a strong sense of the importance of Haitian tradition and becomes disturbed when she can no longer answer the ritualistic questions asked by her father in her dream. She seeks, and finds, the

answers by asking Ma, an episode that affirms the central role of the mother-daughter relationship in sustaining cultural identity and community.

Hermine Azile

See Ma

Ma

Hermine Azile, called Ma, is Grace and Caroline's mother and the widow of Carl Azile (known as Papa). She is strongly attached to Haiti and its traditions and expects her daughters to feel the same way. Initially, she seems never to have left her native land, as she makes no concessions to her adopted country, the United States. Her own harrowing story emerges over the course of the short story: she was separated from her husband when he immigrated to the United States by entering into a false marriage with a widow. While she waited until she could join her husband, she witnessed his falling out of love with her and never recovers from this grief. In addition, after she finally arrived in the United States and was pregnant with Caroline, she worked in an illegal New York sweatshop, which was raided. She was then injected by a prison doctor with a drug that she believes caused Caroline to be born without a forearm.

Ma rules her family with a tyrannical attitude and is intolerant of Caroline's adoption of American ways. She uses old Haitian voodoo ritual, the making of bone soup, against her daughter, in the belief that it has the power to separate Caroline from her fiancé. She criticizes Eric's informal courtship of Caroline and their plans for a civil wedding, which she dismisses as "mechanical" as well as typically American. She is rude about Eric because he is not Haitian. During the course of the story, however, she begins to make small concessions to Caroline's status as a young American Haitian, buying her a very un-Haitian silk teddy for her wedding present and, most significantly, telling Caroline that she looks forward to being a guest in her and Eric's house. The turning point comes when Caroline feels ill before her wedding and Ma is able to use her knowledge of a traditional herbal cure to revive her. Caroline's acceptance of the old Haitian ways softens Ma's attitude, reawakens the love between mother and daughter, and heals their relationship.

Papa

Carl Azile, called Papa, is father to Grace and Caroline and the husband of Ma. He has been dead for twelve years when the story begins but remains a vivid character in the story, appearing in dreams to Grace and Caroline. In the dreams that are recounted earlier in the story, he is an elusive figure, and Grace is always attempting in vain to connect with him. Because he has a perfect memory for the traditional stories, games, and rituals of Haiti, in the cross-cultural conflict of the story, he represents the old ways of Haiti. Grace finally connects with him in a dream that she has on the night of Caroline's wedding, but he is disappointed, and she is disturbed, when she fails to give

the right answers to the ritualistic questions he asks. For the first time, she feels afraid of him, which symbolically suggests that she fears losing connection with her roots in Haiti.

Papa suffered, just as his wife and countless other Haitian refugees did. He left his wife and family in Haiti in order to immigrate to the United States through a false marriage. Later, he divorced the woman and arranged for his family to join him. By this time, he seems to have ceased to love his real wife (Ma). He died of untreated prostate cancer, which suggests that he could not afford health care.

Judge Perez

Judge Perez, a friend of Eric, performs the marriage ceremony in his office for Eric and Caroline.

Mrs. Ruiz

Mrs. Ruiz is a Cuban neighbor of the Aziles who attends Caroline's wedding shower. Her son has recently been shot by an airplane pilot while trying to hijack the airplane from Havana, Cuba, to Miami.

Themes

Cross-Generational and Cross-Cultural Conflicts

"Caroline's Wedding" explores the conflicts set off in the Aziles, a family of Haitian immigrants to the United States, when one of the daughters, Caroline, decides to marry a non-Haitian man. The Aziles embody a situation common to many immigrant families to the United States at the time the story was written. The older generation (Ma and Papa) clings tenaciously to the culture of the home country, Haiti, and find American ways strange; the younger daughter, Caroline, who was born in the United States, has been completely assimilated by her adopted country; and the older daughter, Grace, who was born in Haiti but has lived for many years in the United States, embodies elements of both cultures and acts as an intermediary between Ma and Caroline.

Diaspora and Discontinuity

Haiti has been afflicted with political unrest and violence that have led to waves of refugees fleeing to the United States, among other countries. "Caroline's Wedding," in common with many of the *Krik? Krak!* stories, examines this phenomenon. Grace accompanies Ma to a service for a Haitian woman and her baby who died on their way by boat to the United States. Grace's own family, too, escaped poverty by immigrating to the United States. The price paid for greater security and freedom is, however, often severe, and the story shows the terrible effects of diaspora (dispersion of people from a single region into far-ranging locations). Grace's father had to take vows in a false marriage to gain entry to the United States. Her mother, left behind in Haiti until he divorced the woman and sent for her, had to watch from afar as he fell out of love with her. When she first arrived in the United States, she was imprisoned after a sweatshop raid and injected with a drug that she believed caused her daughter Caroline to be born without a forearm. When Grace receives her certificate of U.S. citizenship, she remarks that her entire family has "paid dearly for this piece of paper." Indeed, she says, "It had cost my parents' marriage, my mother's spirit, my sister's arm."

Traditional Stories, Games, and Rituals

Krik? Krak! takes its title from a Haitian storytelling tradition. In Haiti, which has experienced high levels of illiteracy, the oral tradition of storytelling is beloved. It is customary for the person who has a story to tell to ask a potential audience, "Krik?" If they want to hear the story, they shout back, "Krak!" Then the storyteller begins. As a collection of stories, *Krik? Krak!* implicitly engages the reader in this ritual.

In addition, a major theme of "Caroline's Wedding" concerns how the broken continuities wrought by the Haitian diaspora are countered by traditional stories, games, beliefs, and rituals. These stories create a cultural identity and a sense of community between individual Haitians and different generations of Haitians. When a person has lost family

or relatives, those people live on in their stories. In “Caroline’s Wedding,” Danticat particularly emphasizes the central role of women in passing these traditions from mother to daughter. Tension arises in the story between Ma, who wants the old traditions to continue, and Caroline, who seems to be turning her back on those traditions by paying them scant attention and by marrying a non-Haitian.

Memory and Loss

In keeping with the themes of diaspora and of a dispossessed people, the concept of loss is emphasized throughout the story. Loss is highlighted in the traditional free-association game that Caroline and Grace play with the word “lost,” in which Grace describes herself as “the *lost* child of the night,” whose mother and father are also lost.

Many of the characters have lost people, places, and things that were cherished by them. Ma has lost her homeland and has twice lost her husband, first to a marriage of convenience and then to death; she fears that she will lose Caroline through her marriage to a non-Haitian; Caroline and Grace have lost their father; Papa lost his mother to typhoid fever; Caroline lost her forearm; members of the congregation at the mass for the drowned Haitian realize that they have lost friends and relatives as the names of dead refugees are read out; the Cuban Mrs. Ruiz lost her son; and the Bahamian Eric has lost his family. Grace’s dreams about her father are characterized by unsuccessful attempts to catch up with him, be rescued by him, or get close to him. Only in the final dream that Grace recounts does she succeed in interacting with her father, only to be rebuked by him for forgetting (losing) the old Haitian traditions.

Violence and Suffering

The violence of the history of Haiti and the suffering of its people is not explicitly shown, but it is suggested as being ever-present just below the surface of life, just as Caroline’s vein throbs just below the surface of her stub: As she says, a slice through the vein would make her bleed to death. Grace is Ma and Papa’s “misery baby” because of the poverty her parents suffer in their Haitian shantytown; the sweatshop raid and subsequent imprisonment in which Ma is caught up is her terrifying introduction to her adopted country, the United States. Her being injected with a drug that may have harmed the unborn Caroline is a violation comparable to rape. Haitians are not the only people who suffer such violent episodes: the son of the Cuban Mrs. Ruiz is shot when he tries to hijack an airplane from Cuba to Miami (possibly in an attempt to escape from Cuba).

Paradoxically the violence and suffering endured by the Haitian people in their scattering also brings them together as they share their stories. At the mass for the drowned Haitian woman and her baby, members of the congregation scream as they recognize people among the list of names of the refugees who have drowned at sea in just that week. This graphically confirms Ma’s assertion that “all Haitians know each

other” and shows how the community is held together through pain and suffering as well as love.

Style

Short Story Cycle

In her epilogue to *Krik? Krak!*, Danticat likens the act of writing to braiding the hair, in that it is a matter of bringing unity to a number of unruly strands. The book is a short story cycle, in which each story can be read in isolation, but it also links to other stories in the collection. In “Caroline’s Wedding,” Grace accompanies Ma to a mass for a drowned Haitian woman and her baby; this is the same woman whose story is told in the first story in the collection, “Children of the Sea.” The effect of this linkage is to emphasize the power of storytelling to establish identity and recreate community for people who have suffered diaspora. This is confirmed by two of Ma’s remarks: “all Haitians know each other,” and “We know people by their stories.” Ma’s own story, of her broken marriage and violent pregnancy with Caroline, emerges during the course of the short story. It helps to define who she is and why she acts as she does. In a lifetime of discontinuity, she understandably wishes everything to continue as it was in Haiti.

Symbolism

Caroline’s missing forearm, as well as being a believable element of the story on a literal level, also carries a weighty poetic symbolism. Caroline’s forearm fails to develop as a result of an act of violence and medical malpractice (Ma is injected with a drug when imprisoned after a New York sweatshop raid). Thus the missing arm is a kind of war wound, a scar gained during a time of danger. Because Ma stresses that the unborn Caroline could have died as a result of the drug, the episode suggests a major group of themes of the entire short story cycle, having to do with aborted or violent pregnancies and infanticide. This theme in turn, as Jana Evans Braziel points out in her essay, “Défilée’s Diasporic Daughters: Revolutionary Narratives of *Ayiti* (Haiti), *Nanchon* (Nation), and *Dyaspora* (Diaspora) in Edwidge Danticat’s *Krik? Krak!*” symbolically enacts the arrested or aborted development that Haiti has suffered during its many periods of unrest.

Caroline’s arm also represents the homeland from which Caroline has been cut off by her parents’ flight to the United States. This is especially true because Caroline is the only member of the family to be born in the United States. Grace remarks that “Caroline liked to have her stub stroked . . . Yet it was the only part of her that people were afraid of.” This circumstance reflects the dilemma experienced by many people who have lost a place or person they loved. There may be times when they want to remember the loved one and talk about the person, but other people steer clear of the subject because they do not wish to give offense or because they feel uncomfortable discussing it. Thus, the bereaved person is isolated by grief and pain. In the case of the Haitian people, including Caroline, the suffering and persecutions of the past both isolate them from society in general (when Grace receives her passport, she says, “It was like being in a war zone and finally receiving a weapon of my own”) and brings them closer to one

another (as in the mass at the church). When Grace and Caroline were younger, they fantasized that one day the rest of Caroline's arm would burst out of Ma's stomach and float back to her and she would be complete. Symbolically, this dream reflects the longing for wholeness felt by the dispossessed person.

Another symbol is that of Sor Rose. According to Haitian folklore, Sor Rose was the black African slave woman who was raped by her French master and gave birth to the nation of Haiti. Danticat scatters references to the color, name, or object called "rose" and to literal or symbolic rape throughout the stories in *Krik? Krak!* These references suggest, as Jana Evans Braziel posits in her essay, "Défilée's Diasporic Daughters," that Danticat is consciously invoking the Sor Rose story. The refugee woman from the first story in *Krik? Krak!*, "Children of the Sea," who is remembered in the mass that Ma and Grace attend in "Caroline's Wedding," was raped by a soldier, gave birth on the boat to the United States, and when the baby died, she threw it into the sea, then jumped overboard after it, drowning herself. In "Caroline's Wedding," Ma is injected, while a captive, with a drug that caused a birth defect in Caroline. This may be seen as a violation akin to rape, a forced invasion of someone's body. The violence of this symbolic rape breeds death: the unborn Caroline could have died, and the adult Caroline is conscious that it would only take a slice to the vein that throbs below the surface of her stub to make her bleed to death. In the violent story of Haiti, the symbolism suggests, death is ever-present, just beneath the thin surface of life.

Grace's dream that she and her father are sitting beside "a stream of rose-colored blood" is probably another reference to Sor Rose. This interpretation is confirmed by Grace's remark that the stream of blood is beautiful, at which Papa's face begins to glow. Papa's purpose in the dream is to reconnect Grace with her roots by engaging her in the question-and-answer game, in which he asks her what traditions she will pass on to her children. While sitting by the stream of blood, they gaze at the stars, and Papa tells her, "If you close your eyes really tight, wherever you are, you will see these stars." The symbolic implication is that shared stories, by which suffering (a river of blood) is transfigured through the art of the storyteller, unify the scattered Haitian people.

The word "rose" also appears in the story when Caroline sends a bunch of red roses to Ma. This gesture comes after Ma has revived an ill and despondent Caroline just before her wedding, using a traditional Haitian treatment that involves giving her a bath and rubbing boiled leaves over her body. Before this incident, Caroline shows little interest in Ma's traditional Haitian attitudes and beliefs. But for the first time, she surrenders to Ma and is rejuvenated. The gift of roses is Caroline's recognition and honoring of the wisdom and loving care conveyed by the rituals and customs that Ma has preserved.

The Color Red

Red is the color of blood and therefore of lifeblood, but it is also the color of violence, danger, and potentially, death. In "Caroline's Wedding," red is used symbolically to suggest the violence, bloodshed, and suffering of Haiti's history, and, ultimately, the land of Haiti itself. Ma has a red port-wine mark on her neck, which she believes stems from

unsatisfied cravings during pregnancy, a reference to the hunger she suffered in Haiti. Ma tells her daughters to wear red panties after their father dies, as according to Haitian tradition, the color has the power to keep away the spirit of her dead husband. Caroline's awareness of the possibility of her bleeding to death from a sliced vein links with Grace's dream on the night of her sister's wedding.

The red symbolism recurs in the final scene. Grace, disturbed by her failure to remember how to play the ancient game with Papa in her dream, goes to Ma for help. As she drops a bone into Ma's bone soup, the splash creates a red mark on her hand. It is a fitting time for Grace to receive the blood-like mark of her homeland on her body, as she is about to learn from Ma the lesson that escaped her under Papa's interrogation.

Historical Context

Violence and Political Unrest in Haiti

Haiti's history is one of violence and political unrest, and its population has been subjected to many occupations and enslavements. Haiti is situated in the western part of an island called Hispaniola; the eastern part is called the Dominican Republic. Hispaniola was inhabited by the Taino and Arawak peoples (classed as indigenous peoples of the Americas) when in 1492, the explorer Christopher Colombus landed and claimed the island for Spain. The Spanish enslaved the indigenous people and imported African slaves to mine for gold. In the 1600s, French, Dutch, and British pirates established bases in Haiti. In 1664, France claimed control of the western part of the island, calling it Saint-Domingue. The colony prospered, growing sugar and coffee. The population was divided into ruling white Europeans, free black people, and black slaves. The majority of slaves were African-born, since harsh conditions meant that the Haitian-born slaves were unable to increase their population.

Inspired by the French Revolution, in 1790 and 1791, free and enslaved black people revolted against the French rulers of Saint-Domingue. Three black leaders of the revolution emerged: Toussaint L'Ouverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, and Henri Christophe. Finally, the revolutionary forces defeated the French, and in 1804, the nation declared its independence. It was named Haiti after the old Arawak name for the island, Ayiti. Dessalines became the first emperor of Haiti but was murdered in 1806, setting a pattern of violent fates for Haitian leaders, which was only broken in the 1990s. Throughout the nineteenth century, Haiti was ruled by a succession of presidents, whose periods of office ended prematurely through coups and revolutions.

In 1915, Haiti was invaded by the United States and remained under its military occupation for nineteen years. The invasion was prompted by fears that a popular revolution against Haitian dictator Jean Vilbrun Guillaume Sam threatened the business interests of the United States and a suspicion that Haiti was too closely aligned with Germany during World War I. An unsuccessful yet popular revolt against the U.S. occupation led to the deaths of around two thousand Haitians. Thereafter, a certain order was established. However, opposition to the occupation grew among the Haitian population, prompted by the perceived racial prejudice of the occupiers. Particularly hated were the forced-labor gangs, in which roads and other infrastructure were constructed under the direction of the U.S. military. Escapees could be shot, and the gangs were seen as another form of slavery.

After World War I, the U.S. occupation of Haiti was increasingly questioned both within the United States and internationally. An incident in which U.S. Marines killed ten Haitian peasants who were marching to protest economic conditions helped to prompt the complete withdrawal of U.S. forces in 1934. For the next fifty years, Haiti was ruled by a series of dictators supported by the United States. The first waves of Haitian refugees to the United States coincided with the 1957 installment of Dr. François

Duvalier (“Papa Doc”) as president after an election that many believed was manipulated by the army. Duvalier maintained power through his secret police, the Volunteers for National Security, nicknamed the Tonton Macoutes. The Tonton Macoutes terrorized the population with torture, killings, and extortion. They murdered hundreds of Duvalier’s opponents and sometimes hanged their corpses in public view as a warning to would-be rebels.

Upon Duvalier’s death in 1971, his son Jean-Claude Duvalier (“Baby Doc”) took over the presidency. His regime became known for corruption, and much of the population sank into poverty. These people formed another wave of refugees who fled to the United States in the 1970s and early 1980s. In “Caroline’s Wedding,” Grace and Caroline’s parents belong to this wave of refugees. With the election of Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1990, the flow of refugees briefly stopped, only to resume shortly afterwards when Aristide was deposed in a coup. Aristide returned to office in 2001 but was again deposed in 2004.

René Préval was elected president in 1996 and was remarkable for the fact that he left office after serving a complete term (he was again elected president in 2006). All previous presidents had died in office, been assassinated or deposed, overstayed their prescribed term, or been installed by a foreign power.

The country’s history of forced occupations and enslavements, violent depositions or murders of its leaders, and aborted development is symbolically suggested in “Caroline’s Wedding” and other stories in the cycle by references to rape, violent and aborted pregnancies, and infanticide.

Voodoo

In “Caroline’s Wedding,” Ma’s beliefs are a mixture of Catholicism (she goes to mass) and voodoo (she invokes the magical powers of charms and bone soup), which as of 2006 remained the dominant religion in Haiti. Voodoo is a polytheistic religion that includes a belief that objects can be imbued with magical properties that can be used to affect the outcome of events. It is based on a variety of African religions, with elements of Catholicism superimposed.

Voodoo has long been viewed with fear and contempt by many white colonials, but its development was partly a reaction to the suppression by white Europeans of the religious beliefs and practices of African slaves. Rather than abandon their old faiths, the slaves created a new faith, which helped them endure the hardships of their lives and at the same time to avoid persecution by their owners.

Critical Overview

When Danticat's short story collection *Krik? Krak!* was published in 1995, it cemented the reputation that Danticat had begun to build with her earlier debut novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994). The collection was nominated for a National Book Award and was warmly received by critics, who welcomed Danticat's humanizing of Haiti, a country that had been largely ignored by writers and artists and that had mainly been the subject of news reports focusing on political upheaval and violence. In her *Boston Globe* review, "Danticat's Stories Pulse with Haitian Heartbeat," Jordana Hart praises Danticat's "honest and loving portraits of Haitian people" which have "smashed the numbing stereotypes created by a barrage of media accounts of Haitian poverty, misery and death."

In an interview with Danticat for Knight-Ridder/Tribune News Service, Margaria Fichtner makes comments on Danticat's novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* that could easily be applied to *Krik? Krak!* Fichtner notes the novel's emotional complexity and its portrayal of the burdens of history, politics, and culture upon the lives and hearts of women, adding that it has "much to say about what it is like to be young, black, Haitian and female wandering in a world too often eager to regard all of those conditions as less than worthwhile." Fichtner calls *Krik? Krak!* "a collection of interrelated stories celebrating Haitian home life, tradition and myth and the ennobled lives of people who have lost everything but a rich will to survive."

In his review of *Krik? Krak!* for *World Literature Today*, Hal Wylie singles out "Caroline's Wedding" for particular praise, on the grounds that this story is "the most penetrating in exploring the psychology of assimilation." Wylie notes that the Haitian stories featured within the story help the characters "in finding the essential values of life—the foundation for a character able to resist life's traumas." The story of Caroline's wedding, he writes, "shows the relationship of family stories to the larger social rituals, also important in people's finding their way in the urban labyrinth."

In her review entitled "Stories Resound with Haiti's Tragedy, Spirit," for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Wendy Sheanin also notes the "legacy of pain" carried by each member of Grace's family. Against this legacy, Sheanin writes, the stories demonstrate "the healing and affirming power of storytelling," in the sense that stories "provide spiritual sustenance, whether they are told to escape harsh reality or to pass the time on board a doomed refugee boat or to fantasize about a better life." Sheanin draws attention to the story cycle structure, whereby the interrelatedness of stories reinforces the sense of community among the scattered Haitian exiles. She praises Danticat's "honesty, coupled with her wit and subtlety," which combine to yield "powerful stories that remain with us long after we close the book."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Robinson has an M.A. in English. She is a writer, editor, and former teacher of English literature and creative writing. In the following essay, Robinson examines how continuity and community are sought in the Haitian diaspora in Edwidge Danticat's "Caroline's Wedding."

The central event of "Caroline's Wedding," the marriage of a young woman from a family of Haitian immigrants living in the United States, acts as the focus for a number of cross-generational and cross-cultural conflicts. While these conflicts threaten to divide the Azile family, by extension, similar conflicts also affect the wider Haitian community, whose members find themselves separated from friends, family, and homeland due to the diaspora caused by Haiti's historical instability. The story opens with Ma making bone soup, an old Haitian ritual that she hopes will separate Caroline from her fiancé, Eric. Ma disapproves of Eric because he is not Haitian and no one in her family has married outside before. In addition, Eric's courtship of Caroline has been very different from her own husband's courtship of her. It has been informal, has involved pre-marital sex, and has been lacking in the traditional romantic, respectful courtship rituals that she proudly remembers her husband following in seeking her own hand. Worst of all, Caroline's marriage will take place not in a church, but in a judge's office. Ma compares the two and finds Caroline's arrangements disappointingly "mechanical" and typically American. The conflict is a typical clash of generations and cultures.

The words of the song suggest that being partially outside one's own culture, as Haitian immigrants to the United States such as Grace necessarily are, enables one to understand it better.

However, throughout the course of the story, Ma slowly and reluctantly becomes used to the idea of Caroline's marriage. It is suggested, though not made explicit, that she comes to an understanding that the old ways that she has championed for so long have their limitations. This conclusion is revealed through the slow unfolding of Ma's own tragic story, which makes clear that any advantages that Ma's marriage had over Caroline's in terms of romance and ritual were outweighed by internal weaknesses and hostile circumstances. Ma's happiness did not last. First poverty then Papa's marriage of convenience to another woman and departure for the United States helped to destroy the fabric of the marriage. While Ma continued to love her husband, he appears to have ceased to love her. Ma never gets over the grief: "My heart has a store of painful marks . . . and that is one of them."

It is open to question whether Ma's admission of the truth about her marriage mellows her attitude toward Caroline's, but the parallels suggest that this is the case. Ma's marriage to Papa had all the traditional external formalities in place but was wrecked by betrayal, unrequited love, and grief. Caroline's wedding to Eric lacks traditional ritual,

but their relationship is one of mutual trust and caring, and they almost certainly know one another better than did Caroline's parents before their wedding. The gap between Ma's expectations of her marriage and the reality prompts her late in the story to ask Grace to destroy all traces of Papa's courtship of her and their marriage after her death. Such an act would be the exact opposite of Ma's usual determination to preserve the old ways and memories at all costs.

Caroline, for her part, also subtly changes in her attitude toward Ma's traditional Haitian beliefs and practices during the course of the story. With her chemically straightened hair and non-Haitian fiancé, Caroline appears to have completely assimilated the ways of her adopted country, the United States. Her attitude toward Ma's attachments to the old rituals, such as making bone soup and attending mass, varies from good-natured tolerance, engaging in small deceptions to save Ma's feelings (such as going home after dinner at Eric's but then secretly catching a cab back to Eric's so that she can sleep with him without upsetting Ma), to plain irritation. It is clear that Caroline has no emotional attachment to Haiti's traditional beliefs—certainly not as much as Grace. Grace was born in Haiti and retains a strong sense of tradition, yet she has just been delighted to receive her U.S. citizenship. She acts as a conduit and mediator between Ma and Caroline, explaining and justifying the ways of each to the other.

The turning point for Caroline begins when she feels ill just before her wedding. This part of Caroline's journey is expressed through the symbolism of her missing forearm. When she appears in her wedding dress wearing a new false arm, she explains that she has been having phantom pain in her arm such as amputees experience, and a doctor told her that the false arm may make it go away. When Ma points out that she is not an amputee, Caroline replies that the pressure of the wedding is making her feel like one. Ma says, "In that case, we all have phantom pain." As Caroline prepares to leave Ma's home and marry the non-Haitian Eric, the pain in her arm symbolically suggests that she is more attached to her homeland and her home than she consciously realizes. Ma's comment about phantom pain underlines the symbolism. She is referring to the sense of loss that refugees and dispossessed people feel. The false arm may symbolically indicate the myriad ways that people suffering loss try to compensate and feel whole again; getting married is one way; becoming a citizen of one's adopted country is another.

Ma rescues Caroline from her pain. She takes care of her, gives her a bath, and revives her with a traditional Haitian herbal treatment. What is more, Ma knows exactly what Caroline needs because she felt the same on her wedding day. In giving herself up to Ma's care, Caroline is brought to surrender to and honor the accumulated wisdom of countless generations of Haitian women. It is evident that Ma's attitude towards Caroline's marriage has thawed when she tells Caroline that she is eager to be a guest in her new house, the first overture she has made towards the couple in their new life together. The episode shows the relationship between mother and daughter to be unique and irreplaceable. It emphasizes the continuity that will overcome their physical separation through Caroline's marriage. Each comes to understand and accept the other. Danticat's use of Haitian ritual and tradition underlines this point. At the beginning of the story, Ma employs an old Haitian ritual—the making and serving of bone soup—

against Caroline, to try to separate her from Eric. But at the story's end, she turns to the healing ritual of the herbal bath to calm and support her daughter before her marriage.

Traditions such as these enable Haitians everywhere to reconnect with lost loved ones, culture, and homeland through times of suffering and diaspora. But keeping those traditions alive depends upon memory. In Laura Jamison's review for the *San Francisco Examiner* of *Krik? Krak!*, "The Exquisite Tales of Edwidge Danticat," Danticat is quoted as saying, "In Haiti, memories are important. They give you hope for the future if present circumstances are not very good." Memory is a major theme of "Caroline's Wedding." It is also one of Grace's chief preoccupations. Grace finds that preserving the memory of Haitian traditions is not easy in the face of modern life in a very different country. She becomes upset when her father, in a dream on the night after Caroline's wedding, accuses her of having forgotten how to play the question-and-answer game. He asks her, "What kinds of legends will your daughters be told? What sort of charms will you give them to ward off evil?" For the first time, she feels afraid of him. She feels disturbed at her loss of the traditions that he kept alive in his perfect memory and of the safeguard that they offer against fear and insecurity. She intuitively knows the importance of such games in maintaining her cultural identity and her closeness to her family members, both dead and alive. Finally, she is driven by this experience to seek from Ma what she has lost.

In the Haitian tradition, Ma answers Grace's question by asking another. She asks Grace, "Why is it that when you lose something, it is always in the last place that you look for it?" On one level, this is Ma's wry reference to what she sees as her daughters' neglect of the old Haitian ways that she espouses; in their new lives in the United States, she has become the last person they consult. On a deeper level, it is a profound statement about the paradox of memory, summed up in the old Haitian proverb that provides the answer to Ma's question. Grace knows the answer to this question well: "Because . . . once you remember, you always stop looking." While memory keeps alive the history and culture of Haiti, a feat performed to perfection by Papa, once one has remembered, one ceases to seek. The absolute success of memory means the end of seeking, which ultimately means the loss of living history and culture. This paradox is summed up in the Haitian song that is playing on the radio immediately after Grace's dream in which she fails to answer her father's questions about the traditions of the country:

Beloved Haiti, there is no place like you.
I had to leave you before I could understand you.

The words of the song suggest that being partially outside one's own culture, as Haitian immigrants to the United States such as Grace necessarily are, enables one to understand it better.

Source: Claire Robinson, Critical Essay on "Caroline's Wedding," in *Short Stories for Students*, Thomson Gale2007.

Topics for Further Study

• Research the flow of refugees from Haiti in the 1970s and 1980s. Write a report on the reasons for their flight, where they settled, and how they fared in their adopted countries. You may confine your research to one region if you wish.

• Interview one or more refugees from Haiti or another troubled country. Compile a presentation in writing, on film, on CD, or on audiotape, on their experiences before, during, and after their flight.

• Research the history of Haiti and write an essay or give a class presentation on some of the problems faced by that country in the past and the present. Include in your report some possible solutions suggested by informed sources, whether implemented or theoretical.

• Research the phenomenon of Haitian refugees seeking to come to the United States in (1) the 1950s and (2) the 1970s–1980s. What are the similarities and differences between the two flights? Consider such factors as socioeconomic group(s) affected; reasons for leaving; mode of travel and fate while traveling; and fate in adopted countries.

• Study the folklore and voodoo religion of Haiti. Create a factual report or a play, a short story, a film, CD, dance, poem, or painting based on your findings.

Compare and Contrast

- **1970s:** Before 1971, waves of Haitian refugees flee to the United States and other industrialized countries as a result of Dr. François Duvalier's ("Papa Doc") regime of persecution. Many are middle-class and educated. After his death in 1971, the waves of refugees increase. Most refugees in this second group are poor people, fleeing the miserable conditions under the corrupt regime of François Duvalier's son, Jean-Claude Duvalier ("Baby Doc").

- **1990s:** After Haiti's president Jean-Bertrand Aristide is deposed in a coup in 1990, the Organization of American States, the United Nations, and the U.S. government begin to impose sanctions on Haiti. The number of Haitian refugees grows as poverty intensifies under the sanctions. Sanctions are in place from 1990 until 1994, when Aristide is reinstated as president.

- **Today:** According to the United Nations, in 2005, due to continuing political instability around the election, there is a steep increase in asylum seekers from Haiti to industrialized countries. As of 2006, Haiti remains one of the poorest countries in the world.

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- **1970s:** The term, boat people, refers to refugees, including those from Haiti, who risk their lives on unsafe, overcrowded boats to escape oppression or poverty in their home countries. During the 1970s and 1980s, between 50,000 and 80,000 boat people arrive without authorization in Florida. An unknown number drown at sea.

- **1990s:** In 1990, the flow of Haitian boat people temporarily stops following the presidential election of Jean-Bertrand Aristide. By late 1991, however, following Aristide's deposition in a military coup, the flow of Haitian boat people resumes. Between 1991 and 1994, thousands of Haitians flee the country, mostly by boat. Some who flee are accorded refugee status and are resettled in the United States, but others are repatriated.

- **Today:** After the military regime is removed in 1994, numbers of Haitian boat people decline. As of 2006, the Haitian diaspora in the United States continues to grow, fueled by the arrival of friends and relatives of the Haitian immigrant population and by internal growth, as second- and third-generations are born into Haitian-American families. The Haitian government begins to try to attract members of the Haitian diaspora to Haiti, especially as investors.

What Do I Read Next?

- Stories by Danticat that can be read alone yet connect with “Caroline’s Wedding” and that deal with Haitian and Haitian American themes are collected in *Krik? Krak!* (1995).

- Danticat’s debut novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994), explores the theme of Haitian immigrants to the United States, who struggle to adjust to their adopted culture without losing touch with the old Haitian ways.

- A number of interviews with Danticat about her work are collected at www.haitiglobalvillage.com/sd-marassa1-cd/d-conversations.htm (accessed October 18, 2006).

- *The Butterfly’s Way: Voices from the Haitian Dyaspora in the United States* (2001), edited by Edwidge Danticat, is a collection of autobiographical literary essays and poems, alongside some pieces of social and political analysis, written by thirty-two Haitian exiles. Themes include migration, childhood, cross-generational differences, return to the homeland, and the future.

- Amy Tan’s novel *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) focuses on mother-daughter relationships in families exiled from their native country—in this case, China. The novel is divided into short vignettes, which are rather like short stories.

- *The Oxford Book of Caribbean Short Stories* (2002), edited by Stewart Brown and John Wickham, is a collection of fifty-one short stories by twentieth-century Caribbean-born writers, including Gabriel García Márquez, V. S. Naipaul, Patrick Chamoiseau, Juan Bosch, and Alicia McKenzie, as well as Danticat.

- Charles Arthur’s *Haiti in Focus: A Guide to the People, Politics, and Culture* (2002) provides an accessible introduction to Haiti’s history, politics, economy, society, people, culture, and environment, and includes tips on what to see for those traveling to Haiti.

Further Study

Aristide, Jean-Bertrand, *In the Parish of the Poor: Writings from Haiti*, translated by Amy Wilentz, Orbis Books, 1990.

In this book, Aristide, a former president of Haiti, gives his view of the problems in Haiti and their possible solutions. The book has been used in classrooms to provoke discussions on social justice. It includes some of Aristide's sermons (he was once a Roman Catholic priest).

Chin, Pat, Gregory Dunkel, and Sara Flounders, *Haiti: A Slave Revolution: 200 Years after 1804*, International Action Center, 2004.

Haiti's slave revolution and its resistance to occupation and dictatorship are recounted through the art, poems, and essays collected in this anthology. Topics include Haiti's impact on the United States, the effects of U.S. embargoes against the country, and reasons given for occupation.

Farmer, Paul, *The Uses of Haiti*, Common Courage Press, 2005.

This book is an impassioned critique of U.S. policy in Haiti by a physician and anthropologist who at the time of publication had worked for twenty-five years in the country. Farmer traces the history of injustices in Haiti, from the eighteenth-century slave economy to the 1915 invasion by the U.S. Marines, and the subsequent U.S. support of dictators such as "Papa Doc" Duvalier.

Metraux, Alfred, *Voodoo in Haiti*, Pantheon, 1989.

Metraux describes the lives and rituals of the Haitian voodoo priests and investigates the origin and development of the religion.

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's"For Students" Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on "classic" novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals— helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man–the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. • Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author’s time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes “The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,” a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children’s Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

“Night.” Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the “Criticism” subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on “Winesburg, Ohio.” Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335–39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. “Margaret Atwood’s “The Handmaid’s Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,” Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9–16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133–36.

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