Seth and Samona Study Guide

Seth and Samona by Joanne Hyppolite

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Introduction

At the center of Joanne Hyppolite's novel for young adults, *Seth and Samona*, is the idea of having faith in human beings, of accepting differences and hoping for the best from others. The novel is narrated by Seth Michelin, an eleven-year-old boy whose family has immigrated from Haiti to Boston, Massachusetts. Seth's parents, grandmother, and numerous aunts and uncles still follow many of the cultural practices that they followed in the old country, while Seth and his brother and sister are faced with blending their cultural tradition into the world where they live now. Samona Gemini is Seth's classmate and his closest friend, even though he goes out of his way to pretend that he is embarrassed by her. Like Seth, Samona does not exactly fit into the social atmosphere of their fifth grade class. While Seth is quiet and withdrawn, Samona is loud and outgoing, given to lying, bragging, and drawing attention to herself. Seth repeatedly calls Samona "crazy" and he pretends to pity her because she will never have friends until she acts "normal." Still, it is obvious from the way he acts toward her that, despite what he says, he admires her for the freedom that he lacks. *Seth and Samona* was the winner of the second annual Marguarite de Angeli Prize, and has won critical and popular acclaim for Hyppolite.

Author Biography

Seth and Samona is Joanne Hyppolite's first book, published when she was twenty-six years old. Hyppolite was born in Les Cayes, Haiti, in 1969, but her life in that country was brief: like Seth in the novel, her family moved to the United States when she was young, just four years old. She grew up in Dorchester, a predominantly Haitian area of Boston, which is where the novel takes place. After earning a bachelor's degree in creative writing from the University of Pennsylvania, she went on to study at the University of California at Los Angeles, where she earned her master's degree from the Department of Afro-American Studies. *Seth and Samona*, which was published in 1995, was awarded the Second Annual Marguerite de Angeli Prize from Delacorte Press, which published the book. Hyppolite's second novel, *Ola Shakes It Up*, is about a nine-year-old girl who moves from the city to a placid suburban community and tries to make it as lively as her old Boston neighborhood. Currently, Joanne Hyppolite lives in Miami, Florida, where she teaches and writes and is studying for her doctorate degree in Caribbean literature. Asked what her inspiration for writing is, she responded, "Life. It continually surprises one. If you can capture a piece of that in your writing, then you've accomplished something."

Plot Summary

Mrs. Fabiyi's House

This book is about the begrudging friendship between the narrator, Seth Michelin, who lives in Dorchester area of Boston, and a schoolmate of his, Samona Gemini. They are both eleven years old and in fifth grade. Seth's family is from Haiti, and Samona's mother, who is raising the children by herself, is a poet and an undercover reporter for a disreputable magazine. After a short background about how they met two years earlier, the first of their adventures begins. It happened, as Seth's narration explains, "last Wednesday," when Samona raced up to him on the sidewalk, insisting that he accompany her to Mrs. Fabiyi's house. Mrs. Fabiyi is a strange neighborhood lady from Nigeria who threw cold soup on them the previous Halloween. She has not be around for more than a week, and Samona says they should go and see if she is ill, although when pressed she explains that her real reason for wanting to go is because her cat has gone over there and she wants to make sure it is all right. To get Seth to go, she reminds him that Mrs. Fabiyi's house is a mystery to all of the children at school, and entering it would make them "the coolest kids in the fifth grade."

They take food to Mrs. Fabiyi, but at first they find her house empty. As they are walking down a dim, deserted corridor, a panel opens in the wall and the weird old woman comes out waving a piece of wood at them. Samona explains that they brought the food for her, in case she was sick, and Mrs. Fabiyi thinks this is funny. She was just away visiting her sister in Nigeria, she explains. She threw cold soup on them on Halloween as part of the Trick or Treat fun. She invites them in and they see her house decorated with African art and find the cat playing with Mrs. Fabiyi's cat. At the end of the second chapter, Samona stuns Seth by announcing that she is going to participate in the Little Miss Dorchester pageant.

The Wake

Returning home from Mrs. Fabiyi's house, Seth encounters the strange sight of several of his aunts and uncles gathered in his parents' living room, with the lights dim and the curtains drawn. One aunt who never drinks is drinking, an uncle who always laughs is not laughing, and an aunt who always prays is praying. Seth feels panicky before they tell him that his grandmother's sister, Matant Margaret, has died. She is a distant relative who lived in a nursing home, and Seth hardly knew her. His older brother and sister, Jean-Claude and Chantal, go about their normal lives□especially Chantal, who talks on the phone with her boyfriend Jerome and is disappointed because she will have to miss a date with him because of the wake. Still, Seth's grandmother is so overcome with sorrow that she takes to her bed. Seth does not know what to make of all of this sorrow, and he does not know what a wake is, only that he will miss school later in the week to attend one.

The next day Samona tells Seth and his younger cousin Enrie that her brothers had been to a wake for her aunt Delia the year before. When Seth points out that Aunt Delia is still alive, she explains that it is because the wake was successful, that the mourners prayed so hard that Aunt Delia rose up from the dead. Seth does not accept her explanation, but the whole time at the wake he is alert, in case Matant Margaret should rise up, shaking everybody's hands. At the wake, Seth observes his relatives who have come from all over the country and from Haiti and Canada, and their respect for Matant Margaret makes him feel sorrow for her death. The day after the funeral he goes to Samona's house with food left over from the funeral and he observes the chaotic situation of her family. Returning home, he talks to his father about how strange the people in the Gemini household are, and his father explains that, "Different doesn't mean bad. It just means different."

Jerome

The following Sunday Seth hears his brother and sister fighting again: Jean-Claude does not approve of her dating Jerome, especially since she sneaks out to see him without their parents' permission. She does not like the way her family casts her into the traditional female role, expecting her to do all of the cooking and cleaning and to grow up to be a nurse, when she has higher aspirations, and Jean- Claude thinks that Jerome put these ideas in her head. He leaves the house after saying, "I could kill Jerome for all of the trouble he's making for her," and mentioning that he is going to see Reggie, a tough, gun-toting gang member. Seth cannot get away to follow Jean-Claude until he has taken his grandmother to church, but then he sneaks away and goes to the Baptist church where the Gemini family worships, to ask Samona's older brother Anthony for help in finding Reggie.

Anthony takes Seth and Samona in his car to where he thinks Reggie might be staying, and he orders the children to stay in the car while he goes in. While he is gone, though, they see Reggie walk by, so they run after him. Samona calls out his name, and Reggie turns on them with his gun drawn, but Anthony stops him before he shoots. Reggie tells them that Jean-Claude had been there but had already left for the 7-Eleven, where Jerome works.

They find Jean-Claude outside of the store, and he explains that he came to fight with Jerome but that he could not bring himself to do it. He still feels guilty, though, for having thought about it. When they go home, Chantal says that she is going to tell their parents that she is dating Jerome, and about her plans for the future.

The Beauty Contest

When Seth tells his family that Samona plans to enter the Little Miss Dorchester beauty pageant, he is surprised that they are supportive of her. Chantal is glad that someone with talent is going to be in the contest, while Jean-Claude doubts that the judges will be able to appreciate her beauty because she is black. The more people mention her

attributes, the angrier Seth becomes, because he refuses to admit that she is either good-looking or talented. To prepare for the competition, Samona practices with Bessie Armstrong, another girl in their class who is popular. She goes to Seth's house and has her hair and makeup done by his sister, mother and grandmother. She begins going over to Mrs. Fabiyi's house, but Seth cannot tell why. He begins to worry that she will lose her individuality if she changes too much in order to win the competition.

All of the members of both families attend the Little Miss Dorchester pageant. Samona creates a stir when she comes out on stage with a Nigerian dress and a colorful headdress. For the talent portion, she wears a worn old shirt and carries a basket on her head. When it is time to perform, though, she freezes with stage fright. In order to help her loosen up, Seth, who throughout the book acts embarrassed by Samona's behavior, stands in front of the stage and does the "funky chicken" dance that Samona often did. Laughing at him eases her stage fright, and Samona gives a rendition of Sojourner Truth's famous "aren't I a woman?" speech. She wins second place and the approval of a teacher who had disliked her previously, and Seth, who has always grumbled about her antics, congratulates her. In response, she sticks out her tongue at him, comforting Seth that being in the contest has not changed her completely: "That's when I knew for sure that the old Samona was still there."

Chapters 1 and 2

Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Seth and Samona is Joanne Hyppolite's novel about two friends, Seth Michelin and Samona Gemini, fifth graders at a public school in Boston in the mid 1990s. The story includes important lessons for pre-teenage children about racism, loyalty and individuality in an ever-changing world.

As the story begins, Seth Michelin describes the first time he saw his friend, Samona Gemini. Samona was a new student being introduced to Mrs. Gray's third grade class in a Boston grade school. Seth remembers Samona's nasty faces as she stood behind Mrs. Gray, who was trying to let the other children know a little bit about Samona. Seth also remembers thinking that Samona was wild because she was wearing red underpants under her white skirt, and everyone could see them.

From that day, Seth thinks that Samona is wild and crazy, and she lives up to that reputation every day. Seth has entered into some crazy plans with Samona, too, such as the time last summer when they went door-to-door selling a special shampoo Samona had concocted. Unfortunately, Samona never told Seth that the key ingredient in the shampoo was horse manure, which accounted for the horrible smell coming from their handful of customers.

Seth compares his conservative family with Samona's unusual home life. Seth's family, which is quiet and reserved, comes from Haiti, and his grandmother still speaks Kreyol in spite of the fact that she has been living in America for several years. In contrast, Samona lives with her mother, a single parent who writes poetry and goes undercover to write stories for a magazine.

Seth tries to avoid Samona if possible because he knows she will bring some sort of wicked adventure with her, but today Seth cannot escape the loud-mouthed Samona, who yells at Seth from across the street about his going to the bathroom behind a tree. Mortified, Seth joins Samona just to hush her up, and Samona announces her plan of going to the house of Mrs. Fabiyi, the Nigerian woman who all the children consider a witch.

Seth thinks Samona has lost her mind to go to Mrs. Fabiyi's because the old woman threw cold vegetable soup on them last Halloween. There is no telling what she will do if they show up again. Samona wants to go because Mrs. Fabiyi has not yelled out of her window for several days, and Samona thinks she and Seth should visit the old woman and take some food in case she is sick. Samona is also curious to see if her cat, Nightmare, is in Mrs. Fabiyi's house because Nightmare has been missing for a few days.

Samona's mother has spent the grocery money on lottery tickets, so there is no good food at her house. Seth offers up his kitchen for their food hunt. Seth is supposed to go to his piano lesson this afternoon, but he and Samona pack up a little bit of food and slip out of the house before Seth's grandmother can remember about the lesson.

Seth and Samona arrive at Mrs. Fabiyi's dilapidated house and climb the rickety stairs to her third floor apartment. The hallway is very dark, and there are no doorknobs to indicate where Mrs. Fabiyi's apartment is. Suddenly, a door swings open out of the wall, and Mrs. Fabiyi emerges swinging a stick. When she realizes that there is no intruder, simply the inquisitive Seth and Samona, the old woman calms down and invites the pair inside.

Seth is relieved to find that the apartment looks normal, furnished with wicker furniture and decorated with some wooden African carvings hanging on the walls. Mrs. Fabiyi takes Samona to the balcony where Nightmare is playing with Mrs. Fabiyi's cat, Egusi. Samona informs Seth that Mrs. Fabiyi has not been sick but had gone to Nigeria to visit her sister. Seth realizes that Mrs. Fabiyi is not a witch at all, simply a person from a different country with different customs and clothing. Mrs. Fabiyi laughs when she finds out that all the children think she is a witch and invites Seth and Samona to visit again any time.

With their mission accomplished, Seth and Samona leave Mrs. Fabiyi's house with Nightmare in tow. On the walk home, Samona reveals to Seth that she is going to city hall today to register for the Little Miss Dorchester contest. Seth is incredulous that Samona would consider entering a beauty contest, but Samona is confident that she can win.

Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

The story is set in Boston in the late 1990s and is told from the perspective of the narrator, Seth Michelin. This narrative point of view means that the reader understands the plot line from Seth's perspective and is privy to Seth's thoughts and emotions as he views and processes the events that occur.

The story begins with Seth recalling his memory of seeing Samona for the first time in third grade. A couple years have passed, and the two are now eleven and in the fifth grade. Seth's perspective of Samona being a pest and a nuisance could be disguised reactions to his feelings about her. Boys of this age are beginning to like the company of girls but do not understand or know how to explain the new feelings about these types of friendships. This may explain Seth's irritation at Samona's crazy ideas and the fact that he still goes along with her plans and adventures when he could choose to ignore her completely.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 Summary

Thoughts of Samona entering a beauty contest are pushed aside when Seth arrives home to find the house dark and quiet with some relatives huddled together whispering. One of Seth's aunts rushes to hug him as she cries, and his uncle rescues him from her grip and tells Seth that his grandmother's sister, Matant Margaret, has died. Matant Margaret was an old lady who was living in a nursing home because she no longer could remember any people in the family, even Seth's grandmother.

Seth finds his older brother and sister, Jean-Claude and Chantal, in his bedroom watching television. Chantal paints her fingernails and talks on the phone to her new boyfriend, Jerome, whom Jean-Claude does not like at all. Seth recalls meeting Jerome for the first time and being annoyed because Jerome muttered something about Seth's family being typical Caribbean after Seth explained that the women in the family did most of the housework.

There is something about Jerome that Jean-Claude does not like either, but he will not tell Seth the reason for his dislike. It is possible that Jean-Claude does not like the fact that Jerome quit school last year to work full time at a convenience store and does not have much future. Jean-Claude would like Chantal to date boys who are interested in education and making a better life.

Seth leaves the bedroom to walk down the hallway. He sees his grandmother asleep in his mother's bed. Seth's mother is sitting in a chair by the bed with her eyes closed, and yet she calls out to Seth to come into the room. Seth's mother, Manmi, tells Seth that his grandmother is just very sad about Matant Margaret's death, even though Matant Margaret was very old and people knew she would not live much longer.

Seth can sense that Manmi is very sad and would just like to close her eyes again, so Seth leaves the bedroom. His father, Papi, has come home from making the funeral arrangements. Papi tells the children that they will attend the wake tomorrow evening after school, and Seth is not sure what a wake is but plans to ask someone later on.

The next day at school, Samona fills Seth in on the details of a wake. Seth and his younger cousin, Enrie, speculated on the event all the way to school, and Samona is incredulous that the boys do not understand the word. Samona recalls the death of her aunt last summer and tells Seth and Enrie that before a funeral, there is a wake, a gathering of friends and relatives of the dead person.

At a wake, the people sing and pray really loud so that if the dead person is not really dead, he or she will wake up and demand to be let out of the coffin. This information does not calm Seth's anxiety about the upcoming event. Seth finds himself gripping the

edge of Jean-Claude's jacket as Seth and his family enter Morton's funeral home that evening.

Seth is unnerved because of the loud praying and singing reverberating from the building, and he sees little groups of people all over the big room with Matant Margaret's coffin right in the middle of all of them. Seth is relieved to see his grandmother and rushes to hug her, but the old woman's eyes never leave the coffin of Matant Margaret.

After Seth realizes that the chances of Matant Margaret rising from the coffin are very slim, Seth begins to view the wake not as a frightening experience but one of sadness. Seth recalls stories of Matant Margaret saving money to move from Haiti to America and then making money to bring family members to live with her. Seth remembers hearing about Matant Margaret's kindness toward her own great grandfather when he began to lose his senses near the time of his own death. Seth also thinks about Matant Margaret being his grandmother's sister and how sad his grandmother must be. Seth knows that he would be sad if Chantal died. Toward the end of the wake, Seth realizes that Samona lied about the meaning of a wake, and he vows to chastise her the next time he sees her.

On Saturday morning, Seth's household is still filled with relatives who have come to Boston to attend Matant Margaret's funeral. When Manmi asks Seth if he will take some of the surplus food to Samona's mother, Seth is anxious for the chance to leave the noisy house for a while.

Chantal announces that she is going to accompany Seth on his delivery, but once outside, Seth realizes that Chantal has used this excuse to leave the house so that she can meet Jerome. Seth does not like being part of any deception and asks Chantal why she takes such risks to meet someone like Jerome. Chantal says that she likes Jerome because he is the only person who really listens to her and understands her dreams. Manmi and Papi want Chantal to become a nurse and marry a nice Haitian boy, but Chantal does not know if she even wants to get married. Chantal talks about the difficult life that people in their native country of Haiti are experiencing. She is considering a diplomatic career to help people. Seth does not know how to view Chantal in this new light and promises to keep her secret about meeting Jerome. The two part company.

Seth arrives at Samona's house and lets himself in the basement door, as is his habit. Seth is surprised to see Mrs. Gemini working in the basement on an art project, and the two talk for a little while about Seth's family. Seth leaves the food which Manmi has sent over. Before Seth goes upstairs to see Samona, Mrs. Gemini thanks Seth for being a good friend to Samona.

Upstairs, Samona's sister Leticia is practicing a vocal scale in preparation for her latest career choice of becoming an opera singer. Samona's two brothers, Anthony and Nigel, are sitting on the floor surrounded by encyclopedias and discussing the need to develop another creative project. Samona has assumed Leticia's duties as a psychic on a psychic hotline and is providing answers to a caller from some note cards provided by Leticia.

Seth likes Anthony and Nigel and wonders about Anthony's life now that he is no longer in a gang. Time spent at a juvenile detention facility was good for Anthony, who now takes art classes in preparation for a career as an architect. Nigel is just as motivated, but his interests lie in engineering and computers.

Seth visits with the Gemini family for a little while and then returns home, where he meets Papi sitting on the front steps of the building. Papi has just returned from his soccer game, and he asks about Samona, whom Seth still thinks is a strange girl. Papi advises Seth to view Samona as a unique individual because she knows who she is and does not require any validation from anyone else for her sense of self.

Papi counsels Seth to be tolerant of people who are different from him because being different does not mean that someone is wrong. Papi reminds Seth of the Haitian young boy who came to the school without knowing how to speak English. Seth and Samona tutored the boy to help him adjust to life in America. Papi advises Seth to remember Samona in this wonderful context instead of focusing on her differences. Papi is not yet ready to enter the noisy house filled with relatives either, so Papi and Seth head to the soccer field for a little practice time.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 Analysis

Seth is growing up quickly as he experiences the first death of a family member. This experience evolves from being a mystery shrouded in Samona's tall tales to one of genuine sorrow and empathy. The author wants the young readers of this book to understand that it is normal and right to feel sadness when a person dies, not only for that person but also for the people who loved that person and who will miss him or her.

The theme of culture and heritage introduced in the beginning of the book becomes even more fully explained as Seth recalls Matant Margaret's life and her struggle to find a better life for herself and her family in America. The author wants the reader to understand the importance of having role models who lived with courage and perseverance, qualities which are often downplayed in today's instant gratification culture.

The author attempts to provide life lessons in the discussion of Chantal's boyfriend, Jerome, as well. Jean-Claude feels that Chantal should not spend her time with Jerome because he is not trying to make a better life for himself. This is an important lesson to impart to young readers about staying in school and achieving the highest education level possible in order to live a full and prosperous life.

The author takes another opportunity to drive home the point about the futility of life in a gang and the importance of achieving a good education in order to get a good life. Samona's brothers are on good tracks to promising futures in spite of a challenged childhood, and the author wants to make the point that not all African-American children raised in single parent homes live with no direction or life purpose.

Papi is also a wonderful role model for Seth by providing insight about the differences in people and how these differences should be appreciated and not scorned. The author shows the benefit of a strong male role model in a black family which is counter to so much negative information and stereotypes of black families, especially those living in large urban areas.

Chapters 6 and 7

Chapters 6 and 7 Summary

The next morning, Seth awakens to the sound of Chantal and Jean-Claude fighting. Seth would like to pull the covers over his head and go back to sleep, but it is Sunday morning. His grandmother will be at his door very soon telling Seth to get up and get ready for church. Suddenly, Jean-Claude is in the bedroom, and Seth asks whether the fight between Jean-Claude and Chantal this morning was about Jerome.

Jean-Claude does not think that Chantal knows how bad Jerome is for her. Seth is bothered when Jean-Claude says, "I could kill Jerome for all the trouble he's making for her." Normally, Jean-Claude is a non-violent person, choosing to end conflict with discussion and understanding. Seth is nervous about Jean-Claude's volatile behavior this morning.

Suddenly, Jean-Claude announces that he needs to go see Reggie, a gang leader in a nearby neighborhood. Reggie is known to be a tough guy who has spent time in jail, and Seth knows that whatever Jean-Claude wants with Reggie, it cannot be positive. Jean-Claude sneaks out of the house to avoid Manmi's questions about his not going to church.

Seth's concern makes him go to Chantal's room to see if she knows what is going on. When Chantal opens her bedroom door, Seth realizes that she has been crying, and she pulls Seth into the room, locking the door behind him. Seth explains his conversation with Jean-Claude, and Chantal is now even more upset than she was before Seth arrived.

Before long, Seth's grandmother is banging on the bedroom door, demanding to be let in. Seth takes this opportunity to head to the bathroom for a shower and time to think. Seth remembers that Samona's brother, Anthony, used to be friends with Reggie, so it is possible that Anthony could tell Seth where to find Reggie and, hopefully, Jean-Claude.

Seth arrives at church with the family, makes the excuse that he wants to attend Sunday school in the basement and then makes his exit outside. With a prayer on his lips that he will not be punished for lying in church, Seth begins to run toward the Baptist church where Samona and her family will be attending services.

Seth is able to locate Samona, Anthony and Leticia in the congregation and slides into the pew beside them to urgently whisper the reason for his surprise visit. Samona, Leticia and Anthony follow Seth outside, where Seth can explain his situation better. Seth is afraid that Jean-Claude has gone to find Reggie to help him kill Jerome. Anthony suggests that this does not sound like something Jean-Claude would do but does not want to take any chances. If he is wrong, then something disastrous might happen. Leticia heads to Seth's house to check on Chantal while Anthony moves toward his car

and reluctantly agrees to let Seth and Samona accompany him in his search for Reggie and Jean-Claude.

Samona is the first one in the car to recognize Reggie walking down the street. Anthony pulls the car over, and Seth and Samona jump out, running up to Reggie, who reels and pulls a gun. Fortunately, Anthony is right behind the two young people and yells at Reggie not to shoot the gun.

Reggie recognizes Anthony and puts the gun away. Anthony asks Reggie if he has seen Jean-Claude this morning, and Reggie answers that Jean-Claude met him earlier to give a reading lesson. Reggie had a personal conflict, so Jean-Claude went to find Jerome at the convenience store.

Back inside the car, Anthony chastises Seth and Samona for running after Reggie and jeopardizing their safety. Samona and Anthony begin to argue in loud voices, and Seth contemplates the situation that they may encounter at the convenience store. He hopes for the best.

When the group pulls up at the store, Seth sees Jean-Claude out in front with his head in his hands as if he is carrying a heavy burden. Jean-Claude is understandably surprised to see Seth, who tells his older brother that he has come because he is concerned for Jean-Claude's safety. Jean-Claude hugs Seth as Samona emerges from the convenience store announcing that there has been no altercation. Jerome even gave Samona a free drink.

Jean-Claude tells about the talk he has had with Jerome. Chantal is not happy at home because no one really listens to her or tries to understand her dreams of becoming something more than a nurse or some other traditional female occupation. Jerome is the only person who truly understands Chantal's life, and Jean-Claude feels bad not only because he has misunderstood Chantal, but also because he has misjudged Jerome, who really loves Chantal.

Now that the situation has been diffused, Seth views the morning's events and feels partly to blame for overreacting to what he has witnessed, but he feels that Jean-Claude should also share some blame for thinking that he knows what is best for everyone all the time. Apparently, Jean-Claude understands this and vows to speak to Chantal when he gets home.

Anthony and Samona drop Seth off at his church just as the congregation is leaving. Seth re-joins his family, which does not know that he has not been attending Sunday school this morning. When Seth arrives home, Chantal and Jean-Claude are in the kitchen talking, and Chantal announces that she is going to share her hopes and dreams with the family tonight. She hugs Seth for her concern for both Jean-Claude and herself.

Chapters 6 and 7 Analysis

In this section, the author addresses the topic of gangs that is so pertinent for young people living in large urban areas. Providing a positive message to young readers, the author presents Anthony as a former gang member who has been reformed. Although Reggie has not given up the gang lifestyle, he is making positive strides by taking reading lessons from Jean-Claude.

Jean-Claude is a positive role model for Seth as well as other young men in the neighborhood because of his position of non-violence and promotion of education. Jean-Claude is also strong enough to admit that he has made a mistake by judging Chantal and Jerome's relationship and that he needs to be more tolerant of other people's desires instead of assuming that he knows the correct solution for everyone else's challenges.

The author also introduces the topic of religion and shows that people can cooperate and unify in positive efforts in spite of their religious preferences. Seth's strict Catholic upbringing and church experience is greatly contrasted with the rousing service Seth views at Samona's Baptist church, complete with its female minister, a gesture of equality which is not yet practiced in the Catholic Church.

The theme of women's rights is very important in the book, and Chantal becomes the champion for breaking out of traditional Haitian customs, which dictates marriage, children and possibly a limited career for its women. Seth originally disliked Jerome for making negative comments about Haitian restrictions, but now that Jean-Claude understands Chantal's dreams, Seth also understands that women have the rights and abilities to accomplish many things.

Chapters 8, 9 and 10

Chapters 8, 9 and 10 Summary

Manmi grounds Seth for two days after she finds out that Seth skipped his piano lesson and went to Mrs. Fabiyi's house. Jean-Claude and Chantal are both grounded indefinitely for their latest trouble, so the Michelin household is not a very happy one lately. Manmi and Papi listen to Chantal's dreams and wishes but still make her do her chores around the house. Surprisingly, Seth's grandmother agrees with Chantal's ideas about women's rights and makes Seth and Jean-Claude clean the bathroom.

Now that Seth has some time home from school to think about things, he thinks about Samona and the Little Miss Dorchester beauty pageant entry. Seth just cannot imagine the gawky, outspoken Samona ever winning a beauty contest. Samona is the smartest girl in class, but no one would ever say she is beautiful.

One night at dinner, Seth tells his family about Samona's plans to enter the contest, and Manmi and Chantal tell Seth to invite Samona to come over at any time if she needs any help in getting ready. Seth's family, with the exception of Jean-Claude, thinks that Samona has beautiful features and stands a good chance of winning the contest. Seth does not share his family's enthusiasm for Samona's chances of winning and is anxious to find her at school the next day. He wants to convince her to drop out of the pageant to avoid embarrassing herself.

The first opportunity Seth has to speak to Samona at school is when he sees her showing her beauty pageant entry form to Bessie Armstrong, a classmate who has participated in the pageant before. From that day on, Samona spends all her time with Bessie huddled in girlish conversations and giggles. Seth is both pleased and perplexed that Samona has found someone else to shadow.

One afternoon, Seth returns home from playing basketball to find his mother, grandmother and sister all huddled around some girl he does not recognize. Not until she speaks does Seth realize that this lovely girl is Samona. The women have added hair extensions to Samona's natural hair and applied makeup with a heavy hand to create the creature that Samona has envisioned for the pageant. Samona also begins to spend more time at Mrs. Fabiyi's house, but she does not ask Seth to accompany her. Seth never sees Samona alone anymore and never gets the chance to tell her not to change too much and lose herself just to win a contest.

When the evening of the pageant finally arrives, Seth and his family sit in the front row of the theater so that they can support Samona in her efforts. Seth sees Mrs. Fabiyi enter the auditorium dressed like an African queen, and all the people stare at how regal she looks in her native dress.

As the pageant begins, each contestant steps up to the microphone to introduce herself, and Seth is nervous as Samona's turn approaches. In contrast to the pastel, frilly dresses worn by the other girls, Samona walks onto the stage dressed in a beautiful Nigerian costume. The audience is audibly impressed as Samona announces herself with poise and confidence before it is time to move on to the talent portion of the contest.

When Samona's turn to perform arrives, she enters the stage dressed in a ragged skirt and a shirt with holes in the arms, while she carries a big basket on her head. As the audience waits for Samona's performance, all Samona can do is stare straight ahead, paralyzed with stage fright.

Lacking any other ideas, Seth does the first thing that comes to mind in order to break Samona of her onstage trance. Seth jumps up from his seat and begins to dance the funky chicken, which is Samona's signature dance when the two of them are playing around. Soon the audience sees Seth's erratic movements and begins to laugh at him. The pageant director is hot on Seth's trail to remove him from the aisle, but fortunately, Samona has caught Seth's impromptu dance and is laughing in spite of herself.

From that moment, Samona relaxes and begins abolitionist Sojourner Truth's monologue of "Ain't I A Woman?" The audience is moved by Samona's performance and rises to its feet in a standing ovation. At that moment, Seth is convinced that Samona deserves to win the contest.

Finally, the judges' decision comes, and Samona wins the first runner up position, to which the audience registers its displeasure. Both Seth and Samona's families go backstage to congratulate Samona, who is overjoyed and brimming with a new confidence. Seth tells Samona that he thinks she deserved to win, and when she sticks out her tongue at him, Seth knows that the old Samona is still inside.

Chapters 8, 9 and 10 Analysis

The theme of racism occurs in this section, related to the beauty pageant and the typical negative expectation that the "whitest" black girl will win. Jean-Claude tells the family that Samona's chances are very slim for winning because, "When people say 'Black is Beautiful,' they usually mean the brighter the black, the more beautiful." Jean-Claude is reaching a point in his life when he encounters racial prejudice, but Seth and Samona are still in a relatively protected world and do not have the encumbrance of worrying about prejudices and stereotypes just yet.

By appearing in natural African dress and by delivering the Sojourner Truth monologue, Samona rejoices in her African heritage. The secret visits to Mrs. Fabiyi's house have provided Samona not only with a beautiful garment made from authentic Nigerian fabric, but also the authenticity and purpose of a black woman's soul as evidenced by Samona's impassioned delivery of the famous monologue written by Sojourner Truth in the mid-1800s.

The author uses the literary technique of irony when the normally reserved Seth risks embarrassment to bring Samona out of her stage fright in the auditorium. Typically, it is Seth who is embarrassed by Samona's antics, and now he is making the ultimate gesture of friendship so that Samona can succeed. This book contains many lessons for young people, including tolerance, loyalty, individuality and achievement, and the author presents them in current dialogue and situations that make the plot believable, real and inspiring.

Characters

Bessie Armstrong

Bessie is a pretty girl in Seth and Samona's class at school. When she talks to Seth, admiring him for having the nerve to go to Mrs. Fabiyi's house, he is flustered and unable to talk. Later, when she is preparing for the beauty competition, Samona becomes friends with Bessie. She tells Seth that Bessie's mother does not like noise, so she has to play quietly, and that there is no fun around her house, and they both pity her.

Mrs. Fabiyi

In the beginning of the book Seth and Samona fear Mrs. Fabiyi, a strange old Nigerian woman who lives on their block. The previous Halloween, she had thrown a pot of cold vegetable soup on them, and all of the children are afraid of the strange things she keeps in her house. Samona talks Seth into skipping his piano lesson and going to Mrs. Fabiyi's house, using the excuse that they are worried because she has not been around for some time but actually because Samona is worried that the old woman has stolen her cat. They find out that she had been away visiting her sister, that the cat was visiting Mrs. Fabiyi's cat, and that the soup was her attempt to play a trick on Halloween, to have some fun with them. Later in the book, Samona visits Mrs. Fabiyi in preparation for the Little Miss Dorchester contest, and Seth visits on his own to find out what Samona is up to, learning to relate to her as a person and not as a witch.

Anthony Gemini

Samona's older brother used to be involved with gangs, but he quit that after being arrested and spending a short time in the juvenile detention center. He has a scar on his face from a gang fight. Now he works on drawing because he wants to be an architect. Anthony is a friend of Reggie, the tough street gang leader whom Seth thinks his brother is going to see for help against Jerome, and so Seth goes to Anthony for help in finding Reggie before his brother can. They take Anthony's convertible and race over to where Reggie is staying, and Anthony acts as a mediator between Reggie and the kids.

Binta Gemini

Samona's mother is a poet of some accomplishment, having once been featured on a Public Broadcasting System special about poets from the Black Power movement of the 1960s. Because she cannot make much money writing poems, she also does undercover investigative reporting for a news magazine, the *Intruder*. The date whom she brings with her to the Little Miss Dorchester beauty pageant, Mr. Biggs, is an ex-minister from the Nation of Islam that she is investigating for the magazine. Mrs. Gemini

calls Seth "Young King" because "she always says I look like I have the burden of a kingdom on my shoulders." She was never married to Samona's father, who left them shortly before they moved to Boston two years earlier.

Leticia Gemini

When Leticia found out that her boyfriend Tyrone was cheating on her, Samona tells Seth, she invited him over and baked him a meatloaf with dog food, to point out that he had behaved like a dog. Samona's older sister runs a psychic hot line from the phone, and when she is busy she has Samona talk to her customers. On the day that Seth visits her family, Leticia is busy practicing opera singing, having seen Leontyne Price on the television. Before Chantal started dating Jerome, Leticia and she were best of friends, and when it is feared that Jean- Claude has gone to fight with Jerome Leticia's first reaction is to go to Chantal for support.

Nigel Gemini

Samona's other older brother, Nigel, is the one who has never been in trouble. He is studying at Boston College to be an engineer, and at home he is an inventor. He has had his family crushing grapes in a plastic swimming pool so that they can make Gemini Wine, but he later admits that this was a bad idea because wine has to sit for about fifty years before it is any good, and so even though their children will someday become rich off of the idea it won't help in the present. While Seth is over at the Gemini house Nigel comes up with the idea of making a love potion out of vegetables, and he and Anthony race out into their mother's garden to steal what he hopes will be the necessary ingredients before she finds out.

Samona Gemini

Samona is a strong-willed individualist, unafraid to speak her mind and willing to try out new clothes and new ideas without fear of embarrassment. She sells shampoo that has manure in it doorto- door, she takes a wrong turn at the zoo and ends up in the middle of Monkey Paradise, and she leads Seth to Mrs. Fabiyi's house spreading the wild story that the old lady stole her cat and ate it. Samona's overactive imagination and her impetuousness are reflected in her home life, in her mother's creativity as a poet and as an investigative journalist and her siblings' various schemes to make money. In the last section of the book, readers are made to worry for Samona because she looks headed for embarrassment at the Little Miss Dorchester competition. This concern is heightened by the fact that, as Seth points out, so much of Samona's identity involves acting without self-consciousness, so that embarrassment would change her completely: "Samona couldn't do anything because she was trying to be somebody normal. Only this somebody normal didn't have Samona's guts or her attitude." Seth is so concerned about what would be lost by Samona becoming "normal" that he embarrasses himself in order to make her laugh and feel at ease.

Granme

Seth's grandmother lives with his family and shares a room with his sister Chantal. She does not speak English, only Kreyol, the combination of French and English that is the dialect of Haiti. When her sister dies, relatives come from all over the United States and Canada to pay homage to Granme□"It was a real big deal that she was the oldest living person in the family," Seth explains. Granme is steeped in tradition and sometimes confused by American ways, such as when she complains about Samona's hairstyle.

Manmi

Seth's mother is a nurse at the hospital. She has a new hairstyle and she likes it, even though it did not seem that she would: as Seth once pointed out to Samona's mother, "Haitians *like* to be old-fashioned." Seth's mother holds strongly to Haitian tradition and the Catholic church.

Chantal Michelin

Seth's sister has one of the hardest roles in her family. Because of the sexist traditions of Haitian culture, she is treated as if she is only good for menial labor, even though as an American citizen she is fully aware that she can accomplish much more than she is allowed to. According to tradition, she should grow up to be a housewife or a nurse, but Chantal wants to work in politics and help people. Added to her quest for independence is the age-old problem of her family being protective of her as she reaches the age where she wants to go out with boys. Her relationship with Jerome is secret until the episode where Jean-Claude goes out to fight with him; after that she decides that it is best to be honest and tell her parents about Jerome, but they still decide that she is too young to start dating.

Jean-Claude Michelin

Seth's older brother is a pacifist, well respected in the streets for stopping fights and for working with gang members who want to make their lives better. He is concerned with his identity as a black man and rejects traditional American concepts of "beauty" as a way of excluding black people and making them feel inferior. Jean-Claude is somewhat old-fashioned in his views: when Chantal develops the idea of being an independent woman, Jean-Claude assumes that the idea was put into her head by her boyfriend Jerome, and he becomes so angry about it that he almost gets into a fight with Jerome, in spite of the fact that fighting goes against his deepest beliefs. He comes to his senses in time, though, and the fact that he nearly committed such a rash action makes him reconsider his beliefs and realize that he was treating his sister in a sexist way instead of letting her be her self.

Seth Michelin

The narrator of the novel, Seth is in fifth grade, the son of Haitian immigrants. His exploits in this novel include confronting the old neighborhood woman that all of the children fear, attending his first wake, and trying to keep his older brother out of a fight, but the main focus, that keeps all of these different stories together, is Seth's development of a sense of who he is. Like many children of immigrants, Seth practices the customs of the old country when he is at home, including speaking French and eating Haitian food. When he goes to school, though, he is like the other American kids, playing basketball with his friends, shy around girls. The novel strongly implies that, even though he often complains about Samona's strange behavior, he actually admires it, going out of his way to find out what she is up to even while he is complaining that he would like her to leave him alone. Since Seth is so conscious of his family's old-world ways, his attraction to Samona seems to be the way that she can be comfortable with her position as a social outcast. The fact that the members of his family and Bessie Armstrong think well of Samona raises suspicions about whether she is really the social outcast Seth tells readers she is, or if he just emphasizes her bad points in order to help himself deny his attraction to her.

Papi

Seth's father once dreamed of being an airplane pilot, but he could not afford lessons and could not join the Air Force to learn to fly, so he works at the airport, in the baggage section of Air France. He plays on a soccer team, the Mighty Spiders, on weekends.

Reggie

Reggie is a gang member well-known in the neighborhood. He has been in jail twice already, even though he is only sixteen. Jean-Claude works with Reggie, trying to keep him out of trouble. He has taught Reggie how to read, with the hope that he could better himself. When Jean-Claude races out of the house, angry at Jerome, he says that he is going to see Reggie, and Seth worries that he might ask Reggie to beat Jerome up or even kill him. When Anthony helps him find Reggie, Seth runs after him with Samona, and she calls out Reggie's name. He pulls his gun on the children before Anthony arrives and prevents him from shooting.

Tone

See Anthony Gemini

Themes

Racism

The main characters never experience racism directly within this story, but the effects of life within a racist society surround them. One clear example of this is shown in Jean-Claude's fatalism about how the Little Miss Dorchester competition will turn out: Some light-skinned, long-haired little girl that conforms to the judges' twisted concepts of beautiful will win as usual," he says sarcastically. "When people say 'Black is Beautiful,' they usually mean the brighter the black the more beautiful." He ends up being wrong□although people are upset when Samona does not win, no one suggests that the judges were motivated by racism. Because Seth and Samona interact only with other black characters in this story, and because they understand their social discomfort to be unique to their personalities (Samona's because she is a free spirit, Seth's because of his Haitian background), they do not dwell on the pressures of racism. The older characters recognize the social disadvantages caused by racism, but they do not make much of this burden when understanding their own potential.

Death

A child's first experience of death is always an important event, and Hyppolite features Seth's brush with death in an extended segment of this story. The mystery of death is dealt with calmly and with humor, by having Seth half-believe Samona's tall tale about the deceased person coming back to life at the wake if the mourners pray hard enough. This explanation serves a higher purpose than just providing readers with laughs at Seth's expense, though: it helps to focus his attention on the intensity of the grief felt by those around him. Although he is not very familiar with the dead woman, his grandmother's sister, and he does not know the out-of-town mourners who have come to stay with his family, still he recognizes their sadness. He is able to accept the strangeness of a formal wake because he expects even worse supernatural strangeness. Thinking about the deceased, Matant Margaret, Seth recalls a story he once heard about her loving relationship with her own grandfather, and the fact that she did not cry at his wake, even though they were very close. This helps him deal with his fear and concentrate on the good things he has heard about Matant Margaret's life.

Culture Clash

Both Seth and Samona have problems fitting into society. For Samona, the problem is caused by being and individualist and non-conformist, which are traits that her mother seems to encourage in her children. Seth repeatedly makes a point of how unpopular Samona is and how he thinks he should stay away from her, even though he always finds some reason, however weak, to go and see her. "You'll get a terrible reputation," he tells her at one point, regarding her lying. "That's why I don't like to hang around with

you□." Still, when he sees her dressed up for the beauty pageant he realizes how bad she feels about being an outcast from the dominant culture, and he thinks of what a shame it would be for Samona to change her unique personality just to fit in. With his own family, Seth and his brothers and sisters have to struggle against their parents' Haitian traditions, because they understand American society better than their parents ever will. Jean-Claude is admired in the streets as someone who can bring peace to violent situations□"Everybody trusts Jean-Claude"□but in his parents' house he is talked about derisively because of his new, modern haircut and the earring he wears. For Chantal it is worse: she knows what women can accomplish and she has high expectations for herself, but her family assigns her the traditional role for a woman, to clean and cook.

Difference

At the end, when he does Samona's "funky chicken dance" to get her to loosen up and forget her stage fright, Seth shows that he is accepting the parts of her personality that he always tried to keep away from. Even though he admits that he likes the new look that his grandmother, mother and sister give Samona, he worries that changing her exterior will change what is unique inside. When she becomes friends with Bessie Armstrong, Seth's values are confused. He previously admired Bessie for her good looks, but now Samona looks like Bessie; he had wished Samona was not so different from the other girls, and Samona had become more average for the competition; still, he panics at the thought of Samona losing her uniqueness. Even though the talent that Samona chooses to display for the sow□ a dramatic rendition of Sojourner Truth's speech□ is a personal, individual choice, it is not one that she is entirely comfortable with, or she would not freeze up as she does. By making her laugh with his parody of her old, goofy style, Seth shows how much he appreciates what is unique about her.

Style

Point of View

Seth Michelin is the narrator of this story, and as a result the events that readers see are filtered through the mind of this eleven-year-old boy. For the most part, this is what makes the story interesting. He comes from a Haitian family and lives in the working-class section of a big city during the 1990s, and this is a perspective that is not often shown in books. Readers find that their expectations about the types of people who live in Seth's world are overturned by reading this story. Not only does Mrs. Fabiyi, the strange old lady, turn out to actually be nice, which is a standard turn of events in many children's stories, but *Seth and Samona* breaks stereotypes with characters like Anthony, a former gang member who had gone on to college; Reggie, a current gang member who is learning to read and is slowly breaking away from the culture of violence; Chantal, who is respectful of her parents' Haitian and also rebellious; and Bessie Armstrong, who is pretty and popular but who can also be seen with pity because of her joyless home life. Readers come to understand these characters and others because of Seth's interaction with them, and their unique qualities make perfect sense because Seth accepts them so casually as part of his world.

As a narrator, though, Seth cannot be trusted entirely. Like most typical eleven-year-old boys, he is not willing to admit that he likes a girl, especially a girl who is as unique and exotic as Samona. As a result, he often makes a point of complaining about her and he puts her down with mild insults. This is clear from the book's first page, telling of their first encounter. Seth is captivated by Samona because he can see her underwear, and he cannot stop staring at her, but rather than admit any attraction, as he tells the reader, "Right then and there I thought, 'That Samona Gemini is one crazy girl and I plan to stay away from her.'" Of course, he does not, and the rest of the book is about adventures that they have together, with Seth weakly making excuses about how fate throws them together time and again in spite of his "lifelong plan of avoiding her."

Episodic Plot

Unlike most novels, which follow one story from beginning to end, *Seth and Samona* is told as a series of episodes. The story of their visit to Mrs. Fabiyi's house is completely finished before the episode about the wake for Matant Margaret begins; the next story, about Jean-Claude and Jerome, begins just after the visitors who came to town for the funeral leave; and the plans for the Little Miss Dorchester contest are only seriously discussed after that plot line is finished. There are some overlapping points between these stories, so that none of them could actually stand alone without having a few sentences edited out. For instance, the beauty contest is mentioned as early as the end of Chapter 2, and Mrs. Fabiyi, who Samona learned not to fear in the first section, helps Samona in the last. Chantal's relationship with Jerome is just mentioned in the section about the wake, preparing readers for the time a few chapters later when it will be at the

center of the plot. And the fact that Mr. Biggs, who is Mrs. Gemini's date for the beauty pageant, is an ex-Nation of Islam minister is referred to back in chapter 5, when she says that she has a magazine assignment to investigate an exminister. The plot is easy to follow because it consists of four short stories instead of one long, complex one, but it also connects those stories together smoothly.

Climax

Even though this novel consists of four stories, the end of the final one is clearly the high point of the book. Each of the individual stories has something to tell readers about courage, about family, about meeting social expectations and going beyond them, but it is Samona's triumphant performance at the Little Miss Dorchester competition that summarizes what the book is all about. For one thing, it strikes a balance between Samona's goofy, childish behavior of earlier escapades and the "new Samona," the one with curled hair and makeup, which Seth fears will erase all of the individuality from her. Also, the finale shows Seth changing, loosening up from his attitude about Samona's youthful fun. His chicken dance in front of the entire auditorium shows that, when it comes down to it, despite his complaining, he will do what he has to do to help his friend Samona, and also that her oddball behavior is more important to him than social acceptance. It is telling that Samona's performance at the book's climax is Sojourner Truth's speech, which supports the rights of blacks, women and the poor, who have in the past been made outcasts in American society. Samona is striking a blow for individuality by using the intellectual approach of history, while Seth supports individuality with unique behavior. In this moment they both reverse roles and come to see the world from the other person's perspective.

Historical Context

Haiti

The country that Seth's family comes from, Haiti, is an island in the Caribbean Sea. It is part of a string of islands known as the West Indies, which stretches from the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico to the coast of Florida. There are about 7.2 million people in Haiti, of which roughly seventy-five percent live in poverty (by comparison, the U.S. poverty rate was fourteen percent in 1995). The country has a history of poverty, which has itself caused even worse poverty. There is no industry, and only about one-fifth of the land can be used for farming because careless farming techniques in the past have leeched all of the nutrients out of the soil. Diseases, from AIDS to tuberculosis, run rampant because the country has no resources for an effective public health policy. The country has little hope of keeping up with the technological boom, since only forty to forty-five percent of the population knows how to read. Newspaper circulation is three per one thousand people; there is one telephone per 164 people, and one television for every 260 people. The life expectancy for men is 47 years of age, and for women it is 51, while in the United States it is 73 for men and 79 for women.

The main reason for Haiti's poverty is its economic development throughout history. European culture came to Haiti in 1492, when Christopher Columbus landed there. It was a base for the slave trade in the 1700s, which has led to a population descended from African heritage and to the country's French influence, which is evident in the *kreyol* language Seth's grandmother speaks (*kreyol*, commonly spelled *creole*, is a mixture of French, English and African dialects). In 1801 Haiti declared itself free from France, but its history had been a struggle to hold onto its freedom. From 1915 to 1934 the country was occupied by the United States in order to keep France and Spain from establishing forces in the Western Hemisphere.

After World War II Haiti came under the control of the Duvalier family. François Duvalier was elected in 1957, and by 1958 he declared absolute rule, outlawing his political rivals. When he died in 1971 his son Jean Claude Duvalier took control. Popular unrest drove him into exile in 1986, after which chaos ruled, with a quick succession of governments. In 1990 Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a Roman Catholic priest and advocate of the poor, was elected, but the military refused to let him rule, and he was driven into exile. Aristide's supporters continued to stand up to the government, and in return the government fought the people, committing numerous atrocities and human rights violations. In 1994 United States diplomatic forces forced the military leader to let Aristide return to the office that was rightfully his. He ruled until his successor was elected in 1996.

Sojourner Truth

The speech that Samona recites for the talent part of the Little Miss Dorchester competition is one of the most famous speeches in American history. It was given by former slave Sojourner Truth at the 1851 Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio. She as born with the name Isabella in 1797 or 1798 in upstate New York. She was a slave from the time of her birth until slavery was abolished in New York in 1828. After that, she became a Protestant preacher and worked with the poor in New York City. She changed her name to Sojourner Truth in 1843 and took off preaching across the country. She became involved in the movement to abolish slavery, and then later in the Women's Rights movement.

There is some doubt about the actual wording of her famous "Ain't I A Woman?" speech because the person who is said to have written it down, Frances Gage, who was president of the convention, did not publish it until twelve years later. Still, there is no doubt about the powerful effect of the speech. It was given after the convention had been addressed by several male ministers on the subject of male superiority, claiming that God meant men to be superior because Jesus was a man and because men were intellectually superior. Sojourner Truth's re sponse was not rehearsed or in any way planned: she just walked to the podium and spoke to the audience.

For the next twenty years, Sojourner Truth traveled the country, speaking and preaching. She met with President Lincoln in 1864 to encourage him to go ahead with his plans to free the slaves. In 1875 she retired to Battle Creek, Michigan, where she died in 1883.

Literary Heritage

Haiti has always been one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere, and as a result literature has not been a high priority for its inhabitants. To this day, between twenty and forty-five percent of the country's inhabitants are unable to read, and those who have been able to attain an education have used it to fight against the country's debilitating poverty. In addition to this, women have been abandoned to a secondary position in Haitian society, as is seen in *Seth and Samona* by Chantal's struggle against her parents' expectations that she will be a housekeeper or take a menial job. As a result of these conditions, there is not a very large canon of writing by Haitian women.

The first novels by Haitian women began appearing around 1934, at the end of the U.S. occupation of the country. As with many cultures, the first female authors wrote romances, writing to an audience of other women, not taken seriously as literary artists. For the following decades, Haitian writers in general, and women in particular, were virtually ignored by American and European literary establishments. It was only during the 1960s, with the ascendancy of the Civil Rights movement and the Women's Rights movement, that individual writers from Haiti began to make their mark. By the 1990s, when the excessive violence and repression if the Duvalier government and its military successors became international news, the world was hungry for information about Haiti. In response to the repressive government, a literature of social consciousness and rebellion had grown up among the people who had escaped Haitian poverty but could not forget it. Most of the Haitian writers who have established any degree of fame are, like Joanne Hyppolite, emigrants who have left the country and are looking back on the life that they once knew.

Critical Overview

Since its first publication in 1995, *Seth and Samona* has been lavished with critical praise, with its admirers only infrequently able to find small points to question. The book's publisher, Delacorte Press, awarded it the second annual Marguarite de Angeli Prize for that year. It has become a staple on lists of books that offer multicultural views to school children and among books concerned with bringing the Haitian experience to readers of all ages. Most reviewers have felt that this novel offers compelling characterizations, realistic situations and a look at the lives of blacks in America, Haitian-Americans in particular, that looks at important social issues without preaching. As the review in the *School Library Journal* explained it for library purchasing boards that were considering this book for their collection, "the dialog and characterizations combine flawlessly to give Seth a loud, clear voice; through him, readers come to know Samona, who is a special person indeed." A similar publication, *The Horn Book Magazine*, which reviews children's books for parents and educators, proclaimed that "Seth's narration rings true in this laudable first novel."

The few weaknesses that reviewers have been able to find in the novel have never been considered cause to give it a bad overall review, and their disappointments are seldom consistent from one reviewer to the next. For instance, while the *School Library Journal* commends the books' use of Seth as a narrator, Martha Merson, of Boston's Adult Literacy Resource Institute, wondered whether, given, the events portrayed here, Seth is really the best character to have tell the story. "I keep wondering if Hyppolite made the right decision in choosing Seth's perspective," she wrote. Merson then went on to consider the consider the book's requirements: the different aspects of this particular corner of Dorchester that Hyppolite wanted to examine and the fact that the novel would be less fun if readers had Samona's view of life told directly by her. Her conclusion was that "only a peer of Samona's situated on a Haitian family could give us such a broad view"□in other words, Seth was the right narrator after all. Merson's review begins with noting that the book is "beautifully written," but ends with the observation that "I felt vaguely dissatisfied with the book.

Another reviewer who felt just slightly displeased was Hazel Rochman, who examined it for *Booklist* when it was published. Overall, she was impressed, but she did express one slight twinge of regret over the fact that the book's social message was not integrated more throughout the story. "Some of the episodes are contrived," Rochman noted, "and the messages about black pride are sometimes too spelled out, but they aren't simplistic messages." As with Merson, she recognized that the things she liked least about the story might be necessary to convey the things she liked the most.

Bob Corbett, former publisher of a magazine about Haiti called *Stretch*, reviewed the book from the perspective of an immigrant from Haiti, and found that *Seth and Samona* examined the problems of being the first generation n a family to grow up in a new country "with sensitivity, insight, and engaging characters." Like all of the book's other reviewers, Corbett was impressed with Hyppolite's ability to write about Seth's life and situation with such honesty, and his added perspective made him even more

enthusiastic about this novel: "certainly any Haitian-American family facing these sorts of immigrant issues would be well advised to introduce the book to pre-teens and teens of their household, and read it themselves in the bargain."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

David Kelly is an instructor of creative writing and composition at the College of Lake County and Oakton Community College. In this essay he traces the evolution of Seth's family away from the sexist Haitian tradition by focusing on the character of Jerome, who never actually appears in the novel.

It is obvious that the most important character in Joanne Hyppolite's novel *Seth and Samona* is Seth, the book's narrator. The second most important character is his friend Samona, although, if her name had not been in the title, this would not be so obvious. If her name were left out of the title, readers might be inclined to miss her importance, interpreting her as a strong comic relief and a character who shows Seth something about himself in the end, but not completely crucial if one reads this book as the tale of an immigrant family's period of adjustment to contemporary American society. Even though Samona is close to Seth, his immediate family is closer□at least, in the beginning of the story.

Seth's family is a typical immigrant family in the way that they have a closer understanding of each other than of the people in the world around them. Little is said of their parents' social relations outside of their immediate family, but through Seth's eyes readers come to know Seth's relationships with Samona and her family, with his male friend Skid and with Samona and Bessie Armstrong. His brother Jean-Claude has social relations outside of the family with Reggie, a street tough. And his sister Chantal has an American boyfriend, Jerome. It is only natural that all of these relationships would act to bring the close-knit Michelin family apart, not in any tragic way, but in a way that is necessary in order to integrate their Haitian family into their new society. Various Haitian customs are mentioned, from foods to folktales, but the strongest element of Haitian culture affecting this family is its attitude toward women and their place in society. For Boston in the 1990s, the Michelins' attitude toward women is quite noticeably narrow. The character that does the most to change it, and consequently to change Seth's family from Haitians living in America to actual Haitian-Americans is not Samona but Jerome, the one character who never appears in the book.

Unlike Samona, Jerome is taken by members of Seth's family as a threat. Jean-Claude and his parents feel the need to protect Chantal from Jerome's corruptive influence. To some extent, this is not a reaction based in Haitian culture or any other culture, it is just the age-old struggle of parents and siblings looking out for their own. On the other hand□from the perspective which Chantal sees it□their rule against her dating anyone is excessive in American culture and too steeped in the Haitian tradition of keeping girls at home, where they could train to be good housekeepers or to work menial jobs until they are ready to marry. At the end of the book, when Seth's parents have learned that Jerome's intentions are probably honorable and that Chantal is probably sensible in her ambitions, they still keep a close reign on her social life, prohibiting her from dating in a way that few modern American families would.

For Jean-Claude, Jerome represents more than the general threat of what might happen when Chantal starts to date. He dislikes Jerome for who he is, not just as a potential suitor to Chantal□at least, so he says. His hatred is so intense that his family and friends believe Jean-Claude, who ordinarily stops violence in the neighborhood, could do something out of character, may even commit murder. Though he is from the younger generation, Jean- Claude's view of Jerome is colored by the old Haitian prejudices.

Early in the novel, Seth explains that Jean- Claude sees Jerome as "a lost brother with no future." Jerome has dropped out of high school and he works full-time at the 7-Eleven. Since he obviously isn't lazy□he works full-time at his job□ Jean-Claude's anger would appear to stem from the fact that Jerome is not pursuing an education. There is little about him that marks him as lost, though. There is no sign that he dislikes learning, and he in fact seems intelligent, if intelligence is to be measured by curiosity. Seth, who is as uneasy about Jerome as his brother, is most disturbed by his eyes, which he says "always seemed to be looking at everything like he was trying to take it apart and understand it." Jerome is not lazy, he is not unintelligent, and he is not selfish□Samona finds out that the reason he is working is to support his mother. There is no clear reason for Jean-Claude to dislike Jerome except for the fact that he is dating his sister□if that is all, then his anger is a bit intense.

it is ironic that Jean-Claude should think so badly about Jerome, considering that he does not hold anything against Reggie, who seems a truly "lost brother." Reggie has been in jail twice, he has no real address and he carries a gun, but Jean- Claude accepts him, offering him help and hope. Jean-Claude can cope with gangster and criminals on a social basis, but he cannot cope with someone who he feels is a threat to his sister, and so he ends up imagining Jerome to be the real criminal. It is ironic that Seth explains that "Jean-Claude did not have a good reason not to like Jerome" just before explaining his brother's religious mission toward society's toughest elements: "They call Jean-Claude 'the savior' out on the streets 'cause he's always the one to step in and stop a fight or of he hears about something going down, he'll go and try to talk people out of making trouble. Everybody trusts Jean-Claude." In dealing with Jerome, 'the savior' (or, as he's later called, J.C., the initials he shares with Jesus Christ) is not only incapable of preventing trouble, but he starts it himself.

Late in the book, when tension between Chantal and her family is at its height, Jean-Claude offers the closest thing he is to give for a reason for hating Jerome: "Chantal doesn't know what's good for her. I could kill Jerome for all the trouble he's making for her." He is redirecting his anger toward Chantal, assuming that she is not responsible for her actions, seeking, in a sexist way, the nearest man around to bear the brunt of the anger he feels for her. From an earlier scene in which she explained herself to Seth, readers know that Chantal in fact does know what is good for her. What Jean-Claude interprets as "trouble" is her wish to break away from the role assigned to females in the traditional Haitian household, and the reason he assumes that Jerome is making it for her is that he cannot, in keeping with the tradition of sexism, believe that she is capable of making her own trouble. His parents may be too cautious in refusing to let their daughter date, but Jean-Claude, as a member of the generation that is growing up in

America, should be able to tell his sister's thoughts from those her boyfriend has planted in her mind. His worldview is centered around the ideas of males, though, from the Haitian ways of previous generations, so that Jean-Claude, who can see that beauty contests treat blacks as inferiors, does not see that he is treating women as incapable of making intelligent choices independently. When he finally does realize the truth about Chantal, how she feels suppressed by her family and how she aspires to greatness in the service of humanity, Jean-Claude learns from Jerome that the whole problem has been caused by underestimating his sister. "He was telling me stuff I should have already known about Chantal," he explains.

Jerome is not the cause of Chantal's desire for independence, but he is linked to it, and this makes him a very important element to the story. The violations that Seth and Jean-Claude link to him, such as her lying to her parents, her staying out late, and her dissatisfaction with her role in the household, are nobody's responsibility but her own. "He listens to me," Chantal explains, when Seth wants to know why she is attracted to Jerome: there is no dizzy talk of love, no spiteful glee about teaching her parents a lesson, just relief that someone, finally, is taking the time to understand her and to take her ideas seriously.

Samona's family is anything but typical, but it is a good model in this story for a family setting where males and females are treated equally. While Seth's sister Chantal is expected to clean and cook, Samona's sister Leticia, who is Chantal's age, has her own business, a horoscope phone line. She runs it poorly, leaving her customers to the mercy of an eleven-year-old, but at least the business is hers to run foolishly if she wants to, and no one has forbidden her to pursue it. When Seth talks to Chantal about her dreams, he remembers once when the entire class laughed at Samona's dream of being an astronaut, how she went home at lunch time and brought back her mother to show that she had support. Chantal's dream to be a politician and someday help the impoverished and oppressed people of Haiti is realistic, noble. . .and forbidden in her household. In Samona's household, they may have dreams that are unlikely, but at least Leticia's plan to be an opera star is considered to be of equal importance to Nigel's plan to be an inventor.

The resolution of the crisis over Jerome's influence comes when Jean-Claude realizes that, not only is Jerome not a threat, but that he was wrong to pay such little attention Chantal. He realizes that Chantal has been treated poorly, that there is much more to her life than cooking and cleaning: it is an important breakthrough for Jean-Claude, bringing him into the modern American way of thought, breaking from his Haitian past. It just as much a moment of revelation for Seth, who understands that his understanding of women as secondary citizens will not suffice to explain the world anymore. "Jean-Claude thinks he knows what's best for everybody," Seth muses. "He tries to change people and usually it's for the better, but he was wrong about Jerome and Chantal. They don't need changing. It was Jean-Claude who needed to do some listening."

There are several results from this. One is that Seth, seeing himself reflected in Jean-Claude's sexist attitude toward Chantal, begins to wonder about his own relationship with Samona, and whether he has failed to take her as seriously as he should. "Was I

being like Jean-Claude?" he thinks, feeling guilty about constantly dismissing her ideas as "crazy." The complexity of Seth's relationship with Samona has less to do with gender roles than with his constant repression of his attraction to her as a woman (as is made clear by his nervousness when matters of sex or beauty come up), but his self-awareness is nonetheless a good sign for his chance at a relatively stable future with her.

The other result of all of this is that, at the command of their grandmother, the member of the household most firmly entrenched in Haitian tradition, Seth and Jean-Claude are forced to scrub the bathroom. For males in a Haitian home to do any household chores represents a severe break with tradition, but the bathroom has special significance in this story. When he had to wait while Chantal scrubbed the tub, Jerome muttered, just loud enough for Seth to hear, a judgment that cursed the sexist tradition of the whole family: "typical Caribbean." Now, with boys taking part in the cleaning, the family is more typically American.

Source: David Kelly, in an essay for *Literature of Developing Nations for Students*, Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

In the following review of Joanne Hyppolite's first novel Seth and Samona*, Lyn Miller-Lachmann gives an favorable overview of the novel's plot and its well-sketched characters, but notes that the weakness of the novel may be it's overabundance of subplots and secondary characters, leaving the work feeling less unified than a novel should feel.*

Seth Michelin is a proper Haitian-American boy, studious and serious. His sixth-grade classmate, Samona Gemini, is an African-American girl, the child of an artist and a brilliant prankster who is always getting Seth caught up in her schemes. Yet when Seth's older brother, Jean-Claude, goes ballistic over their sister's boyfriend, Seth convinces Samona and her older brother to follow Jean-Claude and stop him before someone gets hurt. To compound Seth's worries, Samona is changing. On a whim, she signs up for a neighborhood beauty pageant. Pretty soon, she is hanging out with a prissy, feminine girl she used to hate, wearing a fluffy hairdo, and stewing over the right dress.

Hyppolite's principal characters are well drawn as they deal with each other and with the changes of early adolescence. The Haitian-American author portrays Seth's family and his working-class Boston neighborhood in a convincing and affecting manner. Though there is the hint of danger and violence, she presents characters who genuinely care about each other and about their own futures. The theme of pride in one's heritage is evident throughout. If there is one flaw in this generally well-written work, it is the overabundance of secondary characters and subplots, which threaten to make this first novel more a series of vignettes than a unified story.

Source: Lyn Miller-Lachmann, "Seth and Samona," (book review) in *Multicultural Review,* Vol. 5, No. 2, June, 1996, p. 90.

Critical Essay #3

In the following review, Joanne Hyppolite's novel, Seth and Samona*, is called an unusually ambitious first novel about a Haitian-American family, showing promise for Hyppolite as a writer though at times the novel is overly burdened with subplots and complications.*

An unusually strong cast populates this ambitious first novel, set in Boston. Narrator Seth Michelin, the youngest of a closely knit Haitian American family, has spent two years trying in vain to distance himself from Samona Gemini, the kooky, flamboyant daughter of a free-spirited poet who happens to be a friend of Mrs. Michelin. The warmth□and the strict codes of honor and propriety□that bind Seth's family prove a powerful attraction to Samona, just as they will to the reader, while Seth's fresh voice adds witty counterpoint. Hyppolite errs, however, in adding too many complications. Seth's older brother, for example, serves essentially as a mouthpiece for observations on being a person of color in America; there's also a brief foray into a neighborhood of gun-toting youths and some discussion of women's roles in traditional families. The plot wobbles under so much baggage, and the final story lines, about Samona's participation in a girls' beauty pageant, lose their force. Even with these flaws, Hyppolite's promise is unmistakable, and readers will hope for encore appearances from her characters.

Source: "Seth and Samona," (book review) in *Publisher's Weekly,* Vol. 242, No. 25, June, 19, 1995, p. 60.,

Topics for Further Study

Explore the stories of some famous women whose families came from countries that did not encourage women's independence, and report on how they overcame the difficulties put in their way.

Are American beauty contests becoming more open to people who look like Samona, or are they still steeped in the European concept of beauty, favoring girls with fair skin? Provide evidence to support your answer.

After Christianity, voodoo is the most common religion practiced in Haiti. Read about voodoo cultural practices, and explain what aspects of his family's background may have helped Seth believe Samona's story about what goes on at a wake.

Chantal expresses the wish to go back to Haiti and help the people there who are politically oppressed. Report on the situation in Haiti in 1995, when this novel was published, and what it is like today.

Find a recording of James Brown's song "Superbad," and choreograph your own funky chicken dance to it.

In this book, Jean-Claude teaches Reggie, a gang member, to read, and Anthony returns to school after a stay in the juvenile detention center. Explore the statistics on gang members who reform, and report on the programs that show the most success.

What Do I Read Next?

Edwidge Danticat was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in the same year that Joanne Hyppolite was born. Her collection of short stories about Haitians and Haitian-Americans, titled *Krik? Krak!*, was published the same year as *Seth and Samona* and was nominated for the National Book Award.

Taste of Salt is a novel of modern Haiti by Frances Temple, capturing local traditions and customs. It was written at about the same reading level as *Seth and Samona*. Published in 1991 by Orchard Books, New York.

Joanne Hyppolite's other novel to date is *Ola Shakes it Up* (1998), about a child, Ola, who moves from the city to an all-white, rules-andregulations controlled suburb, and proceeds to initiate her own "Operation Shake 'Em Up" to bring a little life to the place.

Nine-year-old Gillian and her best friend Hank are the main characters in Amy Hest and Jacqueline Rogers' *Getting Rid of Krista*. Tired of the attention always given to her older sister, Gillian schemes to have her discovered by producers and taken away to Broadway.

Fans of the unusual aspects of Samona's family might appreciate the even more eccentric family in Sid Hite's *Those Darn Dithers*, published in 1996. It is the story of a family of entertainers and inventors, less realistic than this book but just as imaginative.

Famed actor Ossie Davis has written a novel about the Civil Rights Movement for young adults, called *Just Like Martin*, about a fourteenyear- old straight-A student and pastor at his church, Isaac Stone, and his relationship with his Korean War-veteran father during the turbulent 1960s.

A more sinister view of the urban experience is seen in *Fast Talk on a Slow Track*, by Rita Williams-Garcia, about eighteen-year-old high school valedictorian Denzel, who decides to pass up his opportunity to go to Princeton and instead becomes a door-to-door salesman. The book chronicles his competition with a rival salesman, Mello, who is an unwed father, illiterate and a drug user.

Anne-Christine d'Adesky's novel *Under the Bone* is an acclaimed, but disturbing, novel about life in Haiti in the 1990s, with the social turmoil and resultant violence that is only alluded to by Hyppolite.

Further Study

Chancey, Myriam J. A., *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women*, Rutgers University Press, 1997.

When Haitian politics is discussed, the role of female artists is usually underrepresented. This book takes a strongly feminist approach toward events and literature. This is one of the few books that addresses the history of radicalism in Haitian women's literature and the way that the political history of the country throughout the twentieth century affected it.

Rochman, Hazel, review, in *Booklist*, May 1, 1995.

This collection is very non-political, choosing examples that celebrate life over those that are meant to promote an agenda.

Rotberg, Robert I., *Haiti: The Politics of Squalor*, Houghton Mifflin, 1971.

This dated history does not have the most recent information about the country, but it does give a good and thorough background of what life was like up to the 1970s.

Bibliography

Campbell, Elaine, and Pierette Frickey, eds., *The Whistling Bird: Woman Writers of the Caribbean*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998. Review in *Horn Book*, 1995.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Literature of Developing Nations for Students (LDNfS) 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, LDNfS 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 LDNfS 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 LDNfS 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 LDNfS 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 LDNfS 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

LDNfS 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 Literature of Developing Nations 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 LDNfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LDNfS 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 Literature of Developing Nations for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Literature of Developing Nations 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 LDNfS 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.□ Literature of Developing Nations for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

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

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Literature of Developing Nations 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 LDNfS, 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 Literature of Developing Nations for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of LDNfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Literature of Developing Nations for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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