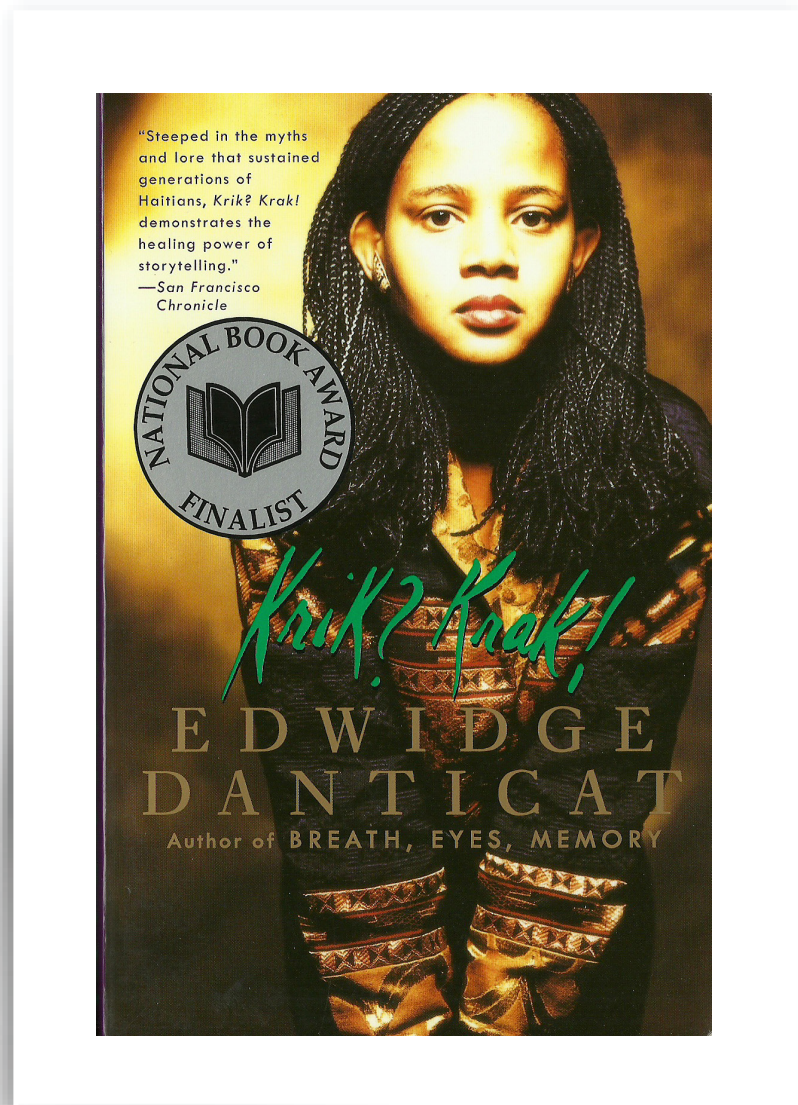


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teaching latin america through literacy



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Educator's Guide

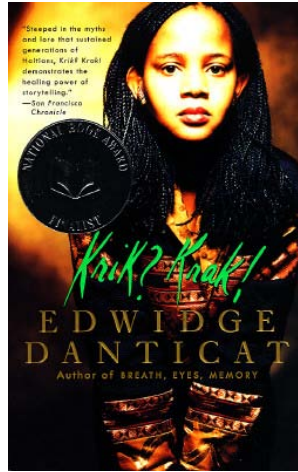
Krik? Krak!

Written by Edwidge Danticat

Published by Vintage Contemporaries

Random House, 1996

ISBN: 9780679766575



BOOK SUMMARY

When Haitians tell a story, they say "Krik?" and the eager listeners answer "Krak!" In *Krik? Krak!*, her second novel, Edwidge Danticat establishes herself as the latest heir to that narrative tradition with nine stories that encompass both the cruelties and the high ideals of Haitian life. They tell of women who continue loving behind prison walls and in the face of unfathomable loss; of a people who resist the brutality of their rulers through the powers of imagination. The result is a collection that outrages, saddens, and transports the reader with its sheer beauty.

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

- National Book Award Finalist

AUTHOR'S CORNER

A little bit about Edwidge Danticat:

“When you write, it's like braiding your hair. Taking a handful of coarse unruly strands and attempting to bring them to unity . . . Some of the braids are long, others are short. Some are thick, others are thin. Some are heavy. Others are light.”— Krik? Krak!



Edwidge Danticat has been writing ever since she was a small girl of nine. While her parents thought that writing would never be more than a hobby for her and urged her to pursue another career, Danticat proved them wrong. At the age of twenty-six, in 1995, she became a finalist for the National Book Award for *Krik? Krak!* Danticat, drawing on her experiences as a Haitian-American, writes of one of the most underrepresented cultures in American literature using a style which is both poetic and passionate. Having also received the 1995 Pushcart Short Story Prize and fiction awards from *The Caribbean Writer*, *Seventeen*, and *Essence* magazines, she is now widely considered to be one of the most talented young authors in the United States.

Danticat was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in 1969. Because her parents immigrated to New York when she was very young, Danticat was raised by an aunt whom she loved dearly. It was during these early years that Danticat was influenced by the Haitian practice of story-telling which developed because much of the population was not literate at the time. Danticat says that the memories of Haiti are still extremely vivid in her mind, and that her love of Haiti and things Haitian deeply influences her writing.

In 1995, *Krik? Krak!* (Soho Press), a collection of short stories about Haiti and Haitian Americans before democracy, was published as Danticat's second book. In an interview for NPR, Danticat said this of her book: "I wanted to raise the voice of a lot of the people that I knew growing up, and this was, for the most part, . . . poor people who had extraordinary dreams but also very amazing obstacles. " These stories receive their title from the Haitian tradition of the storyteller calling out "Krik?" and willing listeners gathering around and answering "Krak." Danticat has finally, and beautifully, written down the Haitian tradition. In 2009 Danticat was awarded the prestigious MacArthur Fellowship. (Taken from *Voices from the Gaps*, <http://voices.cla.umn.edu/artistpages/danticatEdwidge.php>)

For more on Edwidge Danticat check out the links below:

- Two articles on Danticat from the LA Weekly
<http://www.webster.edu/~corbetre/haiti/literature/danticat2.htm>
- A transcript of an interview with Danticat
http://www.freewilliamsburg.com/still_fresh/edwidge.html
- A video of an interview with Danticat from the “Sunday Arts”
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v= laWVbxEhoM&feature=related>

USING *KRIK? KRAK!* IN THE CLASSROOM

There is no question that *Krik? Krak!*'s short stories are gritty. Danticat doesn't hold back any punches as she gives us a glimpse into the reality of Haitian life through the nine short stories included here. Her prose is both beautiful and simple—it's part of the genius of her work. The clarity and subtlety of her writing stands in stark contrast to the heaviness of what her stories share. Rarely can an author translate such depths of emotion and paint such lasting images, much less in the span of a short story, as Danticat does.

The power of these stories is found in their examination of the lives of ordinary Haitians trying to survive the brutality of both of the Duvalier regimes. Taking place in Port au Prince, the fictional Ville Rose, and New York City, the majority of her stories focus on the lives of individual women. They force us to acknowledge both the plight and the unending strength of these Haitian women. They are a testament both to the survival and the depravity of the human spirit. Poverty, hunger, corruption, and torture are depicted alongside resiliency, faith, dignity, and hope. As we become familiar with Danticat's characters, moved and pained by the seemingly increasing distance between their hopes and their lived reality, we are forced to realize that it is the actions of other humans that have created such painful experiences. Not all of Danticat's characters survive; in fact, many do not. But what continues to remain is the spirit of hope, the determination to hold on to what it really means to be Haitian, even after one has escaped to the United States. Quite creatively, Danticat weaves a more circular connection among the female characters of her stories, alluding to related lineages. While there are connections among the stories through references to other characters or events, each story can stand on its own, making it easy for a teacher to pick and choose which stories would be most appropriate for his or her class.

Due to much of the content, *Krik? Krak!* is most appropriate for high school age readers. While *Krik? Krak!* may be quite unlike other literature typically included in our classrooms, it is for this reason that we should use it. Not only does Danticat provide an excellent example of literary style, she shares the often overlooked history of Haiti, providing our students with an engaging and personal account of what life has been like for some of the United States' closest neighbors. One that they may never hear otherwise.

RELEVANT
HAITIAN
HISTORY

With the exception of the details regarding Danticat's life, the following timeline is excerpted and adapted from "Haitian Historical and Cultural Legacy: A Resource Guide for Teachers."

1957

François "Papa Doc" Duvalier becomes president in a fraudulent election. In 1964, he declares himself president for life.

1969

Edwidge Danticat is born in Haiti.

1971

François Duvalier dies and is succeeded by his nineteen-year-old son, Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier; *Danticat's father immigrates to New York*

1973

Danticat's mother immigrates to New York.

1981

Danticat immigrates to New York.

1986

Jean-Claude Duvalier and his family flee into exile in France.

1987

National Governing Council, headed by Lieutenant General Henri Namphy, is formed.

1987

A new constitution is adopted in a national referendum.

1987

Voters are massacred as they attempt to vote in presidential elections. The election is canceled.

1988

Leslie Francois Manigat is elected president in military-run elections boycotted by the population and all of the major candidates.

1988

Manigat is overthrown by General Henri Namphy. Namphy is overthrown by General Prosper Avril. Avril is installed as president.

March, 1990

General Avril resigns after nationwide protest. As a constitutionally designated successor, Supreme Court justice Ertha Pascal-Trouillot becomes the first woman president of Haiti.

Children of the Sea

Pages 3-29

1. What kind of a picture is painted of Haiti in the first story? What is life like there? How would you describe it? Give examples from the story to support your answer.
2. Is either of our main characters/journal writers really free? He is in a small boat on the open sea, while she must stay in her home away from the potential violence—does either have the freedom to do what they want? Is there anything they can do to change the situation?
3. Who or what are the *macoutes*?
4. What does the black butterfly represent?
5. Do you think they ever get to read each other's letter? Why or why not?
6. Why do you think the author chose journal entries as the format for "Children of the Sea"?

Nineteen Thirty-Seven

Pages 33-49

1. Who or what is the Madonna? What is the significance of the Madonna statue in "Nineteen Thirty-Seven"?
2. What is the Spanish-speaking country mentioned on page 33?
3. What happened at the Massacre River? (pg. 33-34, 40-41, 49)
4. Why had the women been arrested and jailed? (pg. 38)
5. What became of Josephine's mother in the end?

A Wall of Fire Rising

Pages 53-80

1. As Little Guy prepares to recite his lines for his father, Lili tells her son to remember that he is a great rebel leader, and that it is the revolution. Guy replies "Do we want him to be all of that?" What do you think Guy means by this question? (pg. 55)
2. Why are Little Guy's parents so moved by the speech their son gives? Remember what Haiti is like and their social position in Haiti. What is that speech symbolic of? What did that speech promise Haitians during the revolution? (pg. 56-57)
3. What do you think the hot air balloon symbolizes, especially for Guy?
4. Why do you think Guy kills himself in the end? Think about some of the things he says to Lili in the story to help you answer—
". . . I remember my father, who was a very poor struggling man all his life. I remember him as a man that I would never want to be" (pg. 75)
". . . But look what he gave us instead. He gave us reasons to want to fly. He gave us the air, their birds, our son" (pg. 68)
"Don't you ever want to be something new?" (pg. 73)
5. Think about the following quote from Little Guy's lines on pages 79 and 80. What do you think they mean in light of the purpose of the story?

“There is so much sadness in the faces of my people. I have called on their gods, now I call on our gods. I call on our young. I call on our old. I call on our mighty and the weak. I call on everyone and anyone so that we shall all let out one piercing cry that we may either live freely or we should die.”

Night Women

Pages 81-88

1. What story does the mother tell her son to explain why she dresses up at night? (pg. 86).
2. The narrator is a night woman—what does this mean? What is her job?

Between the Pool and the Gardenias

Pages 89-100

1. Where does the narrator find the baby? Who does the baby look like? (pg 91-93)
2. The narrator lists a number of women’s names on page 92 that she would like to name the baby. Have we heard any of these names before? Who do the names refer to? What does this tell us—are the characters in the stories connected?
3. What do we learn about what has happened to the women from the earlier stories in the book? (pg. 94)
4. What are some of our first clues that there is something wrong with Baby Rose? (pg. 93, 97)
5. What do the narrator’s employers say about her? (pg. 95)
6. What happens to the narrator in the end? How does this compare to what has happened to the other women she’s related to?

The Missing Peace

Pages 101-122

1. Ville Rose was the place where the family in the first story flees for safety. According to this story is it still safe? What has happened in Ville Rose?
2. Why do French and American journalists want to visit Ville Rose? (pg. 106)
3. What is the significance of the main character’s name “Lamort”? What does it mean? (pg. 109)
4. What is the journalist looking for? (pg. 111-112)
5. What happens when Emilie and Lamort go to search the mass burial site? (pg. 117-118).
6. How does Lamort change at the end of the story? What does she ask for? (pg. 122)

Seeing Things Simply

Pages 123-141

1. Why does Princesse want to make pictures? (pg. 140)
2. What do you think of the juxtaposition of the violence of the cock fighting and the beauty of art in the story? Is this important?

New York Day Women

Pages 144-154

1. What is different about this story? Think about the location, or where this story takes place.
2. What does the narrator discover about her mother in "New York Day Women"?
3. Thinking back to the story "Night Women," what is the difference between Day Women and Night Women?
4. Why is the narrator so surprised to see her mother out? Think about the things she says about her mother, how she describes her.

Caroline's Wedding

Pages 155-216

1. The narrator says that her family has always been anxious about papers—why is this? (pg. 158)
2. How is this family connected to the women in previous stories? (pg. 165)
3. At the mass they read the names of 129 refugees who've died at sea that week, trying to leave Haiti. Thinking about all you've read in the previous stories, do you understand why they risk their lives to leave? Would you? (pg. 167)
4. Who do you think the woman is that they mention on page 167? Is the story familiar?
5. How do the traditions of Haiti remain, even though families have immigrated to the United States? What parts of Haitian culture do they continue?
6. What do you think the following lines of a song mean?
"Beloved Haiti, there is no place like you.
I had to leave you before I could understand you" (pg. 212)
7. What does she mean when she writes of her passport, "We had all paid dearly for this piece of paper, this final assurance that I belonged in the club. It had cost my parent's marriage, my mother's spirit, my sister's arm." (pg. 214)
8. Compare and contrast the two daughters. How are they alike and how are they different?

Epilogue: Women Like Us

Pages 217-224

1. The author makes a number of comparisons between writing and braiding hair. How does she compare the two? Do you agree with her comparisons?
2. To be a writer was not looked well upon. Why is this? Think about what the narrator says on page 221.
3. For the narrator, writing has become the way to stay connected to her past, to honor those who came before her and made it possible for her to make it to the United States. Read the last paragraph of the last page. What does her writing represent?

HISTORY

Reflective Writing Questions:

1. Danticat was born in Haiti in 1969. She didn't move to the U.S. until she was 12. Knowing this, why do you think she chose to write this book? What does it tell us about Haiti? Why do you think it was important for her to tell these stories?
2. What do all of the stories have in common? Think about the main characters and the narrating voice.
3. Oftentimes in the stories, the past plays a role in the present, informing or influencing it. Describe a time when this happens and how the past was significant for what happened in the present.
4. In a number of the stories, Danticat references the fear society has of certain women. This is specifically mentioned in "1937" and "Between the Pool and the Gardenias". Why do people fear these women? Thinking about the political, social and economical state of Haiti, what purpose does it serve to create myths of fear around these women?

Common Core Standards Addressed:

K-12

Reading

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

- Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

Writing

Text Types and Purposes

- Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Production and Distribution of Writing

- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

- Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.
- Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support

analysis, reflection, and research.

1960-1990: Historical Events in Haiti

Most of the stories take place between 1960 and 1990. Research Haiti, find out what was happening in Haiti during this time. Were there any major national events? What was going on politically during these three decades? Have students present their findings to the rest of the class. Expand this project by having some students research the present state of Haiti and present their findings to the class. Then, as a whole class, discuss what, if any, changes there have been in Haiti. How are things different politically, socially, economically, etc.?

Haiti and the Dominican Republic: The Conflict

The story often alludes to conflict or tension between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Using appropriate materials, research the history of these two countries, how they were formed, and what happened to create this conflict. Is the conflict just one-sided? Is it that one country dislikes another?

Dictators

Different dictators are mentioned in the stories—the Duvaliers from Haiti and Trujillo from the Dominican Republic. Using appropriate print and online resources, research these two men. What happened during their periods of power? How long were they in power? Were they liked by their people? How did they maintain their control over their countries? Create a report, poster, power point, or some other way to present your findings to the class.

RESOURCES

Vamos A Leer blog

<http://teachinglatinamericathroughliterature.wordpress.com/>

The online accompaniment to the LAIP's Vamos a Leer teacher-oriented book group, this blog provides a space for exploring how to use literature to teach about Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latinos in the United States. In addition to promoting discussion, the blog also shares relevant resources and curriculum materials.

Latin American & Iberian Institute

<http://laii.unm.edu/outreach>

The Latin American & Iberian Institute (LAI) receives resources from the U.S. Department of Education to support K-12 teachers teaching about Latin America. Our goal is to provide a supportive environment for teachers across grade levels and subject areas so they can bring regional and linguistic knowledge of Latin America into their classrooms. As such as we provide curriculum materials, professional development works, and many more resources - nearly all of which are available on our website.

Haiti: History Embedded in Amber

<http://www.fhi.duke.edu/haitiamber/process.html>

“Haiti: History Embedded in Amber” was a collaborative project produced in the Haiti Laboratory of the Franklin Humanities Institute during the 2010-2011 year. Led by renowned artist Edouard Duval-Carrié, it brought together faculty, graduate, and undergraduate students, and visitors in the process.” Participants each studied the complexity of Haiti history and created amber-lacquered art pieces to discuss the many different facets.

Haiti: A Slave Revolution: 200 Years After 1804

<http://www.iacenter.org/haiti/>

In similar fashion to Howard Zinn’s “A People’s History,” this website overviews and supplements a book that is “a people’s history....[that links] historical events to current realities and show[s] a continuity of oppression and resistance” (preface). Edwidge Danticat is one of the many noted contributors to the anthology.

Haitian Historical and Cultural Legacy: A Journey Through Time: A Resource Guide for Teachers

http://depthome.brooklyn.cuny.edu/habetac/Publications_files/Haitian-Historical.pdf

This online document is a resource “for teachers of grades K through 12. The idea of this book was initiated by the Haitian Bilingual/ESL Technical Assistance Center (HABETC) at City College under the direction of Myriam C. Augustin, the former director of HABETAC. This is the realization of [a]...team of committed, knowledgeable, and creative writers, researchers, activity developers, artists, and editors.

Video interview with author: Edwidge Danticat Visits Her Roots in Haiti

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VdyFedpeoIo&feature=related>

“The prize-winning, young novelist from Haiti and Brooklyn spoke frankly in this interview given in Miami, Florida, in June 2003. Danticat is the first Haitian woman to compose a novel entirely in English, and she is also the first author to bring the Haitian/American experience to American literature. In our conversation she talked about the dictatorship in Haiti, the experience of being separated from her parents for eight years, racism, valuing the self, her sense of mystery, the creative process, writing, her audience, and her dreams, and she ends with a reading from her second novel, “Krik? Krak!. ”

The NYTimes on Edwidge Danticat

http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/reference/timestopics/people/d/edwidge_danticat/index.html

A collection of NYTimes articles published about the author and a selection of web resources.

ABOUT THIS
GUIDE



Written by staff at the UNM Latin American & Iberian Institute (LAI), **Vamos a Leer Educator's Guides** provide an excellent way to teach about Latin America through literacy. Each guide is based upon a book featured in the Vamos a Leer book group. For more on Vamos a Leer, visit our blog at bit.ly/vamosaleer. For more materials that support teaching about Latin America in the classroom, visit the LAI online at <http://laii.unm.edu/outreach>. This guide was prepared 04/ 2012 by Katrina Dillon, LAI Project Assistant, and Kathryn Peters, LAI Graduate Assistant.