

PS 39 Diversity and Inclusion Book of the Month: January

Book Title: *Serafina's Promise* by Ann Burg

Grade Level: 4th / 5th

Book Description:

Serafina made a secret promise
to go to school and learn to read
so she can become a doctor
with her best friend, Julie Marie.

But following her dream isn't easy-
endless chores, little money
and stomach-rumbling hunger
all test her resolve.

When an earthquake hits
and separates Serafina
from friends and family,
she encounters her biggest test of all.

Serafina made a secret promise.
Will she survive to keep it?

Discussion Questions:

- As Serafina slogs through her daily chores, her surroundings echo the difficulty of her life: "The sun presses against my neck / like a burning rock. / One more hill, and I'll be home. / Beside me a row of thirsty shacks / leans against the mountain / like faded cardboard weeds." How does the setting of the story help to shape the difficulties in Serafina's life and to help define her as a character?
- Serafina's grandmother, Gogo, shares the troubled and violent past of their family when she talks about how Serafina's grandfather was taken away by the Tonton Macoutes. Before being abducted, the grandfather had been teaching his wife and daughter how to read. He said, "Education is the road to freedom." How does her grandfather's statement about education influence Serafina's hopes and the promises she makes for her own future?
- On a walk to the city, Serafina discovers a heart-shaped rock that she clutches as she discusses with her father her desire to get an education. When she returns home, Serafina presents the special rock to her mother who has been opposed to letting

Serafina attend school. Why is Serafina's gift of the heart-shaped rock to her mother significant?

- The flood is a pivotal event in Serafina's life. She feels that as her house is washed away, so are her courage and her dreams. How does the aftermath of the flood reveal the true spirit of Serafina and her family?
- What lessons does Serafina learn about the process of going to school and how does her impatience help to steer her direction when seeking help for her sick baby brother?
- At the end of the story, Serafina and her heart-shaped rock have survived the earthquake. How does the rock symbolize Serafina's promise to herself and to her family?

AND / OR

Book Title: *The Hundred Dresses* by Eleanor Estes

Grade Level: 4th / 5th

Book Description:

Eleanor Estes's *The Hundred Dresses* won a Newbery Honor in 1945 and has never been out of print since. At the heart of the story is Wanda Petronski, a Polish girl in a Connecticut school who is ridiculed by her classmates for wearing the same faded blue dress every day. Wanda claims she has one hundred dresses at home, but everyone knows she doesn't and bullies her mercilessly. The class feels terrible when Wanda is pulled out of the school, but by that time it's too late for apologies. Maddie, one of Wanda's classmates, ultimately decides that she is "never going to stand by and say nothing again." This powerful, timeless story has been reissued with a new letter from the author's daughter Helena Estes, and with the Caldecott artist Louis Slobodkin's original artwork in beautifully restored color.

Discussion Questions:

- In *The Hundred Dresses*, a new girl in school is the target of bullying. Why do you think she is picked on? Have you ever noticed a situation at school where someone is being bullied?
- Wanda is a Polish immigrant that moves into a small town in Connecticut. What challenges do you think that she and her family have before them?
- Have you ever been new to a school? How did you feel on your first day? What was difficult? Was it easy to meet people and make friends? Or, have you ever had a new student in your class? How did you react; did you welcome them or were did you see others welcome them?
- The girls at Wanda's school are constantly competing over who has the prettiest and the most dresses. Is there something (clothes, shoes, cell phones) at your school where students try to outdo each other? How does it affect their actions or the way they treat

each other? Are there students that don't get involved with these social pressures? Why do you think they choose not to compete with others?

- By the end of the book, Maddie decides she is never going to stand by and say nothing again. If she ever heard anybody picking on someone because they were funny looking or because they had strange names she'd speak up. Even if it meant losing Peggy's friendship...she would never make anybody else so unhappy again." Why is this an important conclusion?