



About the Book: *Brother, I'm Dying*

From the best-selling author of *The Dew Breaker*, a major work of nonfiction: a powerfully moving family story that centers around the men closest to her heart—her father, Mira, and his older brother, Joseph.

From the age of four, when she was placed in his care after her parents left Haiti for a better life in America, Edwidge Danticat came to think of her uncle Joseph, a charismatic pastor, as her “second father.” Listening to his sermons, sharing coconut-flavored ices on their walks through town, roaming through the house that held together many members of a colorful extended family, Edwidge grew profoundly attached to Joseph. He was the man who “knew all the verses for love.”

And so she experiences a jumble of emotions when, at 12, she joins her parents in New York City. She is at last reunited with her two youngest brothers, and with her mother and father, whom she has struggled to remember. But she must also leave behind Joseph and the only home she’s ever known.

Edwidge tells of making a new life in a new country while fearing for the safety of those still in Haiti as the political situation deteriorates. But *Brother I'm Dying* soon becomes a terrifying tale of good people caught up in events beyond their control. Late in 2004, his life threatened by an angry mob, forced to flee his church, the frail, 81-year-old Joseph makes his way to Miami, where he thinks he will be safe. Instead, he is detained by US Customs, held by the Department of Homeland Security, brutally imprisoned, and dead within days. It was a story that made headlines around the world. His brother, Mira, will soon join him in death, but not before he holds hope in his arms: Edwidge’s firstborn, who will bear his name—and the family’s stories, both joyous and tragic—into the next generation.

Told with tremendous feeling, this is a true-life epic on an intimate scale: a deeply affecting story of home and family—of two men’s lives and deaths, and of a daughter’s great love for them both.



About the Author: Edwidge Danticat

Edwidge Danticat was born in Haiti and came to the United States at the age of 12. She is the author of several acclaimed works of fiction including *Krik? Krak!*; *Breath, Eyes, Memory*; and 2004’s *The Dew Breaker*. She is the editor of *The Butterfly’s Way: Voices from the Haitian Diaspora in the United States* and *The Beacon Best of 2000: Great Writing by Women and Men of All Colors and Cultures*. She has been a finalist for the National Book Award, the PEN/Faulkner Award, and the National Book Critics Circle Award, and is an American Book Award winner, as well as the winner of the first Story Prize. She lives in Miami with her husband and daughter.

Photo: Nancy Crampton

Biography and synopsis courtesy of Alfred A. Knopf/A Division of Random House, Inc.

Discussion Questions for *Brother, I'm Dying*

1. Why do you think Danticat chose to begin her book with Paul Auster’s quote: “To begin with death. To work my way back into life, and then, finally to return to death. Or else: the vanity of trying to say anything about anyone?”
2. Much has been written about the authenticity of memoirs, especially those that recall very specific details about events long in the past. Danticat says she used personal observance, official documents, and family stories to create this remembrance of her father and uncle. How effective is she in telling her family’s story, using this technique?
3. How would you compare and contrast the use of memoir with both nonfiction reporting and fiction storytelling as a successful means of relating the immigrant experience in this country?
4. Danticat describes her father’s letters to her as a child in Haiti as “dispassionate” in his attempt to avoid what she referred to as “mine fields” of emotion. Do you see any similar restraint in her writing style in this memoir?
5. Danticat’s uncle’s experience in the US was horrific. Her father died of a debilitating illness. What is this ultimately a depressing story?
6. What role does food play in the lives of the Danticats, both the American and Haitian branches of the family? What other elements of cultural identity do you think sustain people dislocated from their homes?
7. Danticat’s immigration story is somewhat unique in that she has seen this country from two perspectives that reflect the experiences of her father and uncle— US the haven for escaping despotism and US the invader and perpetrator of hostility and cruelty. Are there lessons for Americans from these dual roles that our country has played in the lives of immigrants?
8. What insights does the book give into the Haitian sense of community, beyond what you may have read in headlines and news stories about that country?
9. What role do you think storytelling plays in the lives of immigrants, and especially the children?
10. Did you learn anything in this book that raised questions or made you think differently about immigration issues currently being debated both locally and nationally?
11. Ms. Danticat came to this country from Haiti as a child and continues to advocate for the rights of child immigrants. What do you think were the ingredients of her success in this country?
12. Why do immigrants come to this country? Consider Ms. Danticat’s father’s quote on page 251: “If our country (Haiti) were ever given a chance and allowed to be a country like any other, none of us would live or die here (United States).”



About the Book: *Esperanza Rising*

When Esperanza and Mama are forced to flee from Mexico to a farm labor camp in California, they must adjust to a life without fancy dresses and servants. Now they must confront the challenges of hard work, acceptance by their own people, and economic difficulties brought on by the Great Depression. When Mama falls ill and a strike for better working conditions threatens to uproot their new life, Esperanza must relinquish her hold on the past and learn to embrace a future ripe with the riches of family and community.



About the Author: Pam Muñoz Ryan

Born December 25, 1951, and raised in Bakersfield, California, in the San Joaquin Valley, Pam Muñoz Ryan claims a heritage that is part Spanish, Mexican, Basque, Italian, and Oklahoman. Her maternal grandparents came from Mexico in the 1930s. She says "I am the oldest of three sisters and the oldest of 23 cousins on my mother's side, so many of my childhood memories revolve around big, noisy family gatherings." After graduating from college she taught school, had four children, returned to San Diego State University for a master's degree, worked in school administration and

finally began writing after a friend encouraged her. Her books include *One Hundred Is a Family*, *The Flag We Love*, *A Pinky Is a Baby Mouse* and *California, Here We Come! Esperanza Rising* is based on her grandmother Esperanza Ortega's stories of her life. Her grandmother grew up in a wealthy household in Mexico but came to the United States in the 1930s and worked in a labor camp. Her daughter, Ms. Muñoz's mother, was born in the camp. *Esperanza Rising* won many awards, including the Pura Belpré Medal and the Jane Addams Children's Book Award; it was also an American Library Association Top Ten Best Book for Young Adults, and an Americas Award Honor Book.

Discussion Questions for *Esperanza Rising*

1. What do you think it would be like to have a Quinceañera and be married at 16?
2. If you were Mama, would you marry without love just to save yourself and your daughter? Why or why not?
3. The author offers pearls of wisdom throughout the book. Choose one and tell us what you think it means and how you think it connects to the story.
"No hay rosa sin espinas." (*There is no rose without thorns.*)
"Aquel que hoy se cae, se levantará mañana." (*He who falls today may rise tomorrow.*)
"Es más rico el rico cuando empobrece que el pobre cuando enriquece." (*The rich person is richer when he becomes poor than the poor person when he becomes rich.*)
"Aguántate tantito y la fruta caerá en tu mano." (*Wait a little while and the fruit will fall into your hand.*)
4. On p. 75, Miguel says, "In the United States...even the poorest man can become rich if he works hard enough." Do you think this is really true? Why or why not?
5. How do Mama and Esperanza change over the course of the story, and what do you think makes them change?
6. Why do you think the author names each chapter after a food? How does this tie into the story Esperanza tells Abuelita on p. 246?
7. On p. 104, Esperanza and her Mama discuss their new life, and Mama says, "Do you know how lucky we are, Esperanza?" Do you think they really are lucky?
8. What was your favorite part of the book?

Photo, biography and synopsis courtesy of Scholastic Books.



Arlington Reads

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