



Josias, Hold the Book

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Illustrated by Nicole Tadgell

Boyd's Mills, 2006,

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Josias spends his days tending his family's garden in rural Haiti while the friends he plays soccer with in the evening attend school. Every day, when his friends invite him to "hold the book" with them, Josias explains that he has no time for school because everyone in his family has a

responsibility and his is to grow the food to feed them. One season, though, the plants will not grow. Josias tries giving them extra water and more donkey dung but nothing works. Finally, he asks his friend Chrislove to explain the problem to his teacher at school and find out if there are answers in any books. Chrislove returns and shows Josias a book that explains how the Haitian soil is tired and he should try rotating his plants. Josias is faced with the dilemma of needing to learn to read but also needing to work in the garden to feed his family. He talks to his parents about it and, when Josias offers to tend the garden instead of playing soccer in the evening, his parents agree he can go to school and "hold the book."

This moving well-written story offers possibilities for rich discussions on the importance of reading and education, dedication to family, and faithfulness to responsibilities, at the cost of personal sacrifice. Set in rural Haiti where there is poverty and fewer possibilities for attending school, the book helps readers appreciate the lives they have and the education they receive. Elvgren includes an Author's Note that provides information about the social and economic life in Haiti today and typical school experiences for children.

Tadgell's illustrations follow the text closely. The illustrations are double-page spreads in warm watercolors that depict the hot climate and environment. Though the heat results in sparse vegetation in the fields, the beauty of the Haitian countryside is also evident in the illustrations. Josias's sincere efforts to find solutions to his problem come through clearly in his facial expressions, adding depth to his character.

In a text set on Haiti, this book would work well with *Sélavi, That is Life: A Haitian Story of Hope* (Youme Landowne, 2004), the story of homeless children who work together to survive. This text set could also include *Running the Road to ABC* (Denize Lauture, 1996), which depicts Haitian children running through the countryside to and from school. To show the importance and value of schooling and education, *Josias, Hold the Book* could be paired with *Freedom School, Yes!* (Amy Littlesugar, 2001), the story of an African American girl who learns the value of education during the Civil Rights era.

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