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Group 1

Reader Response Journal

July 3, 2010

**Citation:**

Williams-Garcia, Rita. *One Crazy Summer*. New York: Amistad, 2010.

**Plot:**

In 1968, eleven-year-old Delphine and her two younger sister, Vonetta and Fern, travel from New York to Oakland, California to see their long-lost mother Cecile. A poet and printer, Cecile is not happy that her daughters have come for a month-long visit, and send them each day to a summer day camp for the Black Panthers. While the girls struggle with the fact that Cecile is not happy to see them and is not the “mother” they had envisioned, they become immersed in the fight for black equality. In the end, the girls learn how to make things happen, they get to know their mother, and they find their own voices in the process.

**Setting:**

Summer, 1968, in Oakland, California

**Point of View:**

First-person, as told by 11-year-old Delphine

**Theme:**

Mother-daughter relationships, civil rights, Black Panthers, propaganda

**Literary Quality:**

Rita Williams-Garcia has a poetic quality to her writing that would be a wonderful illustration to students as they are learning to write creatively. One really gets a sense of the sister-sister-sister relationship at the beginning of the story as Delphine, trying to explain turbulence on a plane to her scared younger sisters says, “’We push our way up in the clouds; the clouds get mad and push back. Like you and Fern fighting over red and gold crayons.’” I didn’t know about clouds fighting and pushing for a fact, but I had to tell my sisters something. As long as Vonetta kept her fear to one shriek and Fern kept hers to biting Miss Patty Cake, I kept on spinning straw, making everything all right. That’s mainly what I do. Keep Vonetta and Fern in line. “(2) The beauty of Williams-Garcia’s writing comes across again as Delphine explains how important a name is to a person: “A name is important. It isn’t something you drop in the litter basket or on the ground. Your name is how people know you. The very mention of your name makes a picture spring to mind, whether it’s a picture of clashing fists or a mighty mountain that can’t be knocked down. Your name is who you are and how you’re known even when you do something great or something dumb.” (80) William’s Garcia, through her melodic prose brings to life a place and time that was in upheaval – and yet she paints a picture with her words of how children, young children, helped to make that place better – even with their small voices.

**Quality of Illustrations:**

N/A

**Cultural Authenticity:**

This is an excellent historical fiction novel about a period in United States history that was very important to where we are today. Although the book will be enjoyed by children of all races – showing them that even children can affect and be an important part of history and various movements, African-American children will take great pride in knowing children like themselves helped the fight for civil rights. On the author’s website, Rita Williams-Garcia states, “I learned to read early, and was aware of events going on as I grew up in the 60s. In the midst of real events, I daydreamed and wrote stories. Writing stories for young people is my passion and my mission. Teens will read. They hunger for stories that engage them and reflect their images and experiences.” Young readers will connect to the idea in *One Crazy Summer* that even though they are young, they can have a great impact on many people. Just because their bodies are small, does not mean they can not affect change just like adults.

**Trend:**

“Tweens” will like the protagonist in this story – an 11-year-old girl who must act older than she really is because she was forced to grow up and quickly and has many added responsibilities (mainly, caring for her younger sisters). Older “tweens” will still identify with Delphine because she is often mistaken as older than she really is – a train many tweens hope to emulate, since they like to always appear “in the know.”

**Audience:**

Boys or girls in grades 5-8. I could also see this book being used as a class novel when studying Civil Rights and children’s roles in history.

**Personal Reaction:**

I enjoyed this book very much. The language is beautiful and eloquent without being too “flowery.” The images it left in my mind on every page were vibrant and beautiful. I would use portions of this book in a creative writing class to show simile and metaphor, which abound in this book.

**Bibliography:**

Williams-Garcia, Rita. "Writing Stories for Young People is My Passion and Mission." *Rita Williams-*

*Garcia*. Rita Williams-Garcia, 2010. Web. 4 Jul 2010. <http://www.ritawg.com/>.