

## EDWIDGE DANTICAT

EDWIDGE DANTICAT: My name is Edwidge Danticat and I write about Haiti and the Haitian American experience.

*Behind the Mountains* is my first book for young adults. I wanted to write about a young girl who wanted to be a writer and was discovering that process by writing in her diary. So the book came out of a desire to write a more contemporary Haitian American migration experience.

I think mostly when students and teachers alike see Haiti or think about Haiti, it's usually at a moment of such extraordinary disaster. You know, when you have a change of government, you know, violent change of government. Or when you have an extraordinary natural disaster. That's when we tend to make the news, I think.

On a daily basis, you know, ordinary life in Haiti, people don't often get to see that unless they've lived it or unless they've visited. And so I wanted for both the teachers and the students to get a sense that in Haiti, there were little girls who dream, who keep journals, who miss their families.

There's a Haitian proverb: *dèyè mòn gen mòn*, behind the mountains are more mountains. You know, when I think about that proverb and think about, you know, coming here myself, you know, often people think that the happy ending is when you get here. You know, once you've left all these difficult things back in your own country, when you get here, things are going to be okay.

But what people who've actually been through this experience know is that sometimes it's just beginning.

We have a very strong storytelling culture in Haiti, especially in the provinces, in the countryside. And there were several rituals that were you know were involved with storytelling. And one of them, for example, is that you weren't allowed to tell stories in the daytime or something bad would happen. And at night, when, you know, when you started telling the stories, you would have a call and response. You know, like, *krik, krak. Tim tim, bwa sèk*. Different combinations.

So there was this very strong element of, you know, of learning about the culture, learning morals, you know, lessons through the stories, through the folklore.

So that was a very strong part of my upbringing and really the way that I learned about my culture growing up.

My community, the Haitian community, like all communities, is a very complex and layered community. And I often say this that I feel like any community is a chorus and any one of us can only be a voice in a chorus. So I feel like I'm - - you know, there are many voices and I'm one of them.