**Lesson Plans and Resources for *Taste of Salt***

**Table of Contents**

1. Overview and Essential Questions  
2. In-Class Introduction + Supplements  
3. Lesson Plan Suggestions  
4. Reader Response Questions + Vocabulary  
5. Literary Log Prompts + Worksheets  
   - *Character Log*  
   - *How Knowledge Changes Characters*  
6. Analytical Assessments  
7. Creative Assessments  
8. Online Resources  
9. Print Resources  

These resources are all available, both separately and together, at [www.freelibrary.org/onebook](http://www.freelibrary.org/onebook)

Please send any comments or feedback about these resources to [Larissa.Pahomov@gmail.com](mailto:Larissa.Pahomov@gmail.com).
ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

The materials in this unit plan are meant to be flexible and easy to adapt to your own classroom. Each chapter has discussion questions provided in a later section. However, for students reading the entire book, there are several themes that connect the stories. Students should be introduced to one or more the following key questions as they begin reading, and keep them in mind as they work through the book:

The questions address three central and interrelated themes in the collection.

What does it mean for a person to be free?

Why does Djo tell his story to Jeremie? Why does Jeremie tell her story to Djo? Why does telling stories help us survive?

How can people make the world change?

Many of the reader response questions and suggested projects relate to these essential questions. Students are encouraged to ask these questions not only of the characters of the book, but of themselves.

ADDITIONAL LESSON PLANS

This lesson plan, published by Santa Clara University, has a thorough three-week plan focusing on the history of Haiti and with an in-class reading schedule, grammar activities, and other extensions:


Many of the discussion questions in this lesson plan are adapted from the lesson linked above.

Also excellent is Teaching For Change’s “Teaching about Haiti” plans, all available online:

http://www.teachingforchange.org/publications/haiti

This resource includes short articles about different people in Haiti, explanations of Haitian culture and literature, and supplements of poetry.
IN-CLASS INTRODUCTION

This lesson is designed to provide students with a one-class introduction to the book. The lesson can be used to start off a class reading of the text, or to encourage them to read it independently.

As a recipient of One Book resources, the Free Library requires that you devote one class period to introducing Taste of Salt to students, either using this lesson or your own plan.

First Day options:

- Look at the map before page one. What personal connections can you make to Haiti specifically or the region in general? Who has been there? Who has family from there?

- Brainstorm (out loud or on paper) to one or more of the following questions:
  - Tell the story of a trip to the hospital.
  - Who do you tell your secrets and personal stories to?

- Read the first chapter as a class. What is revealed in this section? What questions do you have, that have not been answered yet? Keep a log in class for future reading sessions (or have students keep track on their own.)

- Explore and discover background information about Haiti through the links below, or by reading the summary on the next pages.

- Haiti’s History: Revolution, Subjugation.
Haiti was already the poorest nation in the Western hemisphere before Tuesday's earthquake struck. But it wasn't always that way. Once the small island country was the economic jewel of the Caribbean.

In 1492, on his voyage to America, Christopher Columbus claimed the island for Spain, naming it Hispaniola. But the country’s emergence as an economic power would come 200 years later, when Hispaniola was divided. The Spanish retained control of the Eastern side of the island (now the Dominican Republic), while the Western side of the island was ceded to France.

"Officially the French come into control of what they name Saint Domingue, which is the colony that will eventually become Haiti," said Natasha Lightfoot, a professor of history at New York’s Columbia University.

She said that the French enriched themselves by developing coffee and sugar plantations there: "They actually are able to turn it into the jewel of their crown."

To operate the plantations over the next century, the French would import hundreds of thousands of slaves from Africa, many of whom were literally worked to death. But in 1789, word of revolution in France made its way to its Caribbean colony.

That, Lightfoot said, ignited the slaves to revolt, and the French could not put that rebellion down. Slaves outnumbered the colonists 10 to 1.

Their rebellion would lead to independence for Haiti.

It would also alter the course of a young country called the United States. At the time, the U.S. was looking to buy the French-controlled port of New Orleans. But Napoleon surprised the Americans by offering a much bigger land deal...land the French emperor no longer wanted, after losing his most profitable colony in Haiti.

"Once that's lost, France says, 'Well, you can have the whole of the Louisiana territory, not just New Orleans,'" said Lightfoot.

The Louisiana Purchase would double the size of the United States.

"So the American Midwest as we know it would not really exist without the Haitian revolution pushing France to give up on its design for empire in the Western hemisphere," said Lightfoot.

Haiti became the only nation to gain independence by a slave-led rebellion. Its new flag was derived from the French tricolor, which was turned on its side - and the white stripe symbolically stripped off.
But before withdrawing in 1825, France had demanded reparations for the loss of its economic and human property of 150 million francs - about $21 billion in today's money.

Twenty-one billion dollars ... a crushing debt which, though later reduced, Haiti would not pay off until 1947. As a result, the young country never really got on its feet.

In 65 years, Haiti would have 22 heads of state.

"By the time we get to the 20th century, Haiti is a very unstable place, economically and politically," said Lightfoot.

In 1915, U.S. Marines invaded to restore stability - and extend our sphere of influence. Haiti would remain under U.S. control for the next 19 years.

But nothing could break the cycle of political turmoil.

In 1957, Francois Duvalier, a doctor and union leader, was elected president. Papa Doc's regime became notorious for rampant corruption, torture and terrorism - kept in power by his personal civil guard, the notorious Tonton Macoutes. It's estimated the Tonton Macoutes were responsible for 30,000 deaths.

The United States supported the Duvalier regime at the time, said CBS News correspondent Bert Quint, out of worries about the spread of communism.

Papa Doc was succeeded by his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier, a.k.a. Baby Doc. In 1972 he told "60 Minutes" Mike Wallace, "The aim of my government is to increase the volume of foreign investment, and at the same time promote tourism."

But the Duvaliers' repression crushed the fledgling tourist industry and drove many of the country's educated professionals into exile ... before the U.S. finally helped oust Baby Doc in 1986.

"I can only tell you I hope we can be of help as this interim government goes forward and tries to introduce democracy to Haiti," President Reagan said then.

Haiti has never really recovered ... plagued by an epidemic of political coups, and more recently by nature. Four hurricanes battered the country in 2008.

And now this.

Two centuries ago, in its darkest hour, Haiti rose up from slavery to become a nation.

Somehow it must rise up again.
Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Politician

- **Born:** 15 July 1953
- **Birthplace:** Port-Salut, Haiti
- **Best Known As:** Beleaguered president of Haiti, 2001-2004

He was elected twice to the presidency of Haiti, in 1990 and in 2000, and was forced into exile mid-term both times, in 1991 and 2004.

Born into poverty near Port-Salut, Aristide was educated by Catholic priests of the Salesian Order and, after studying in Haiti and abroad in Rome and Israel, was ordained as a priest in 1983.

During the '80s Aristide became a national figure as a defender of the poor against the oppressive policies of the ruling Duvalier family.

After the fall of the Duvalier regime in 1986, Aristide became more involved in politics, survived several assassination attempts and was eventually expelled from the Salesian Order for advocating revolution.

With popular support and help from the United States, in 1991 Aristide became Haiti’s first democratically elected president. After he had served just seven months in office, however, a military coup sent him into exile, first in Venezuela and then in the United States.

He was restored to power in 1994 and served the rest of his term, stepping down after 1995’s election, in accordance with Haiti’s constitutional ban on consecutive terms.

He won the 2000 election and took office again in 2001 (and survived a coup attempt that same year), but opponents of his Fanmi Lavalas Party held that his claim on the office was illegitimate and accused him of election fraud and corruption.

Seen by supporters as a liberator and by detractors as a dictator, Aristide’s second term as president was marked by the nation’s persistent poverty and civil unrest.

In January 2004 opposition forces began rioting across Haiti and in February surrounded the capital city, and Aristide left the country on 29 February. It’s unclear whether he resigned the presidency voluntarily or was forced out.

Aristide officially left the priesthood in 1995 and married a U.S. citizen, Mildred Trouillot, in 1996. Together they have two daughters.

http://www.answers.com/topic/jean-bertrand-aristide
READER RESPONSE QUESTIONS + VOCABULARY

Chapter 1

Why has Djo been beaten up? Who was he trying to protect? Why do you think the shelter got firebombed?

*Vocabulary:* vendor commotion ward murmur swollen

Chapter 2

Djo is in the hospital, slipping in and out of sleep. When he is dozing, he has many memories of his childhood. How did he first come to meet Titid? What happened after they met? What lesson did Titid teach him and the other boys about stealing?

*Vocabulary:* mournful hopeful prepared fury ledge

Chapter 3

What is the name of the books Djo uses to teach people to read? What does Taste Salt mean? Why do you think the author named this book *Taste of Salt?*

*Vocabulary:* pulpit, peeking, journalists, refrain, solidarity

Chapter 4

Why would the government want Titid dead? What is so threatening about him? He wants the poor people to have a better life and he believes that right now the government is organized to make the rich richer. Does it take courage to fight the good fight and believe in the underdog? How is Titid’s personality impacting the unfolding of the plot?

*Vocabulary:* curable, decent, washboard, renegade, toting

Chapter 5

Why does Djo get angry at Titid? How does Djo resolve this feeling of thinking that he is no longer needed? Was it a successful strategy?

*Vocabulary:* notice, forgive, decisions, opinion, contradict

Chapter 6

What do you think Djo is thinking as he is thrown onto the truck with a hurt shoulder? What do you think is going to happen to him? Do you have any predictions? Does the author do a realistic job of describing the character and his feelings?
Chapter 7

What border are they crossing? What has happened to Djo? Who has he been sold to? What do they grow there? Do you have any ideas about why the slaves who “work” there could never get ahead financially?

Vocabulary: gunnysack, fret, shivers, cane, doze

Chapter 8

Does Djo originally think he will be able to pay back the storekeeper? What does he learn as the chapter progresses? Why is he so angry?

Vocabulary: dominoes, snuffling, vex, anxious, swig

Chapter 9

Djo is having a very difficult time in the hospital. Who does he receive comfort from? Why do you think he finds Jeremie’s company calming? Do you think it is helpful for Djo to know Jeremie?

Vocabulary: disgusted, vitamins, affection, scarred, relieved

Chapter 10

What role does hope play when we are in a tough situation? In what way does hope help Djo endure the hardships he is facing? How do the men at the store discourage Djo from being hopeful?

Vocabulary: insult, two-sided, confusing, squatting, adjusts

Chapters 11-12

Did you know Julio was going to help Djo after reading Chapter 11? What clues did the author give you that perhaps something was about to happen? In Chapter 12, what was your reaction when Julio told him how to escape?

Vocabulary: trickery, irrigation, canal, pesticides, pallets, chaff

Chapter 13

What do you think happens when we die? What happens to our bodies? To our spirits? What does Djo think happened to Donay’s spirit? Djo felt that Donay always put himself last. What does that mean? Do you put yourself first or last or somewhere in between?

Vocabulary: dozing, clings, wake, untangle, orderly

Chapter 14
What does it mean to say someone will live on through another person? How is that possible?

*Vocabulary:* doubts, accidentally, dread, transfusion, noncommittally

**Chapter 15**

In what way does education grant you freedom? It is a theme in this book. Do your parents think education will help you have more choices?

*Vocabulary:* transparent, missionaries, relic, visionary, substantial

**Chapter 16**

What is Jeremie learning from Titid’s sermons?

*Vocabulary:* reliable, self-determination, fussed, ointments, miserable

**Chapter 17-18**

How long has Djo been unconscious? Is Jeremie praying for him? Does she think praying is enough to save him?

*Vocabulary:* threatened, thrashed, hurricane, tremendous, crate

**Chapter 19-20**

Did you find the description of the assassination attempt convincing? Why are rebels trying to kill Aristide?

*Vocabulary:* descend, pleading, cot, tinny, intervals

**Chapter 21**

How long has Djo been working to pay off Donay’s coffin? Will he ever pay it off?

*Vocabulary:* refuse, downcast, hopeless, circulation, harvests

**Chapter 22**

Have you ever helped a stranger? Has a stranger ever helped you? Of what help is the old woman to Djo and Roro? Why did Roro salute the old woman with the goat bone?
Chapter 23 / Epilogue

Why does Djo wait until the very end to tell his story?
Why do Jeremie and Djo have hope at the end? Do you believe that they can make a change?

Vocabulary: acquaintance, temporary, inauguration, gouge, remote
Character Log

Name: ___________________________

In this literary log, it is your job to record any details you notice about Djo *(this side)* or Jeremie *(other side).* On the left, write down the detail – it could be something they said, or did, or thought. On the right, write down YOUR thoughts – what does this show about their character? Use descriptive words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What did you notice about <strong>Djo</strong>?</th>
<th>What does this show about his <strong>character</strong>?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What did you notice about Jeremie? | What does this show about her character?

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Taste of salt” - How knowledge changes characters    Name: ____________________________

Jeremie and Djo learn a lot about their world in the story – and some of it influences them deeply. On the left, write down what they learned. On the right, describe how what they learned changed them. What did they do or think differently afterwards?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What knowledge did they gain or learn?</th>
<th>How did this knowledge change them?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What knowledge did they gain or learn?</td>
<td>How did this knowledge change them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ANALYTICAL ASSESSMENTS

1. Write a review of “Taste of Salt.” Don’t give away the whole story, but DO describe some of the big lessons and themes you got from the book.

2. Create a visual timeline of the book – collect 2-3 events per chapter, and then string them together at the end. (This could be a class-wide project, with each student or group producing a couple of items for the timeline.)

3. Write an essay about something that you wanted to change. When have you felt like Jeremie or Djo in the book?

CREATIVE ASSESSMENTS

4. What do you want to talk about? Use this poem as a basis for your own: http://teachingforchange.org/publications/haiti/poem

   Start with the words “I want to talk about…” and take it from there.

5. What happens after the book ends? Write the next chapter of “Taste of Salt.” Choose whether you want to continue the story in Djo’s voice or Jeremie’s. (Or, write one chapter for each character.)

6. In the collection “Haiti in Ink and Tears” (see Print Resources), several different authors had excerpts based on nine different themes. Read one and write your own work in that stile. Your works can be narrative, dialogue-based, poetic, fictional or true – just like the different pieces in the compilation. Variation: Use a photo gallery of Haiti (see Online Resources) to find further inspiration on the themes.
ONLINE RESOURCES

LITERATURE

Haiti in Ink and Tears: A Literary Sampler

Quaking Conversation
http://teachingforchange.org/publications/haiti/poem
An excellent poem suitable for middle-school audiences.

HAITI

Haiti Snapshot
Six-Slide presentation on the basics of Haitian history, with text descriptions on each slide. Great for an in-class crash course and/or direct student use.

Migration Information Source: Haitian Immigrants in the United States
http://www.migrationinformation.org/USfocus/display.cfm?id=770#top
An interesting compendium of facts and figures, with short paragraphs describing different aspects of the Haitian immigrant population.

Showcase: This Isn’t Show Business
A collection of photographs by Daniel Morel, featured in the essay Acheiropoetis. Powerful images taken immediately after the earthquake, accompanied by an equally powerful short interview with Morel.

From the Archive: Haiti, Alive
http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/01/16/archive-9/?ref=weekinreview
A collection of photographs showing Haiti pre-earthquake. A necessary companion to the photographs in by Daniel Morel.

Haiti Earthquake Multimedia
A comprehensive collection of all multimedia reporting done by the New York Times on the earthquake in Haiti. A wealth of topics and focus points to choose from, with sort slideshows and videos that make great journal prompts and conversation starters.
An Infographic for Haiti
http://www.good.is/post/design-an-infographic-for-haiti-submissions/
A collection of infographics visualizing many of the different facts and figures affecting Haiti after the earthquake.

Additional Guides and Resources

Teaching about Haiti
http://www.teachingforchange.org/publications/haiti
A 43-page PDF originally published in 1994, and then updated in 2010. Compiled by Teaching for Change.

NYTimes: 5 Ways to Teach About Haiti Right Now
http://learningblogs.nytimes.com/2010/01/14/5-ways-to-teach-about-haiti-right-now/?partner=rss&emc=rss
An excellent compendium of resources put together shortly after the earthquake, including links to video, maps, infographics, photos, and aid organizations on the ground in Haiti.

Additional Lesson Plans
This lesson plan, published by Santa Clara University, has a thorough three-week plan focusing on the history of Haiti and with an in-class reading schedule:
Today is a good day to remember that in Haiti, nobody ever really dies. The many thousands who've had the breath crushed out of their bodies in the earthquake, and the thousands more who will not physically survive the aftermath, will undergo instead a translation of state, according to the precepts of Haitian Vodou, some form of which is practiced by much of the population. Spirits of the Haitian dead — sa nou pa we yo, those we don't see — do not depart as in other religions but remain extremely close to the living, invisible but tangible, inhabiting a parallel universe on the other side of any mirror, beneath the surface of all water, just behind the veil that divides us from our dreams.

That extraordinary spiritual reservoir is the source of the Haitian religious view of the world — as powerful as any today. As often as it is misunderstood and misrepresented, Haitian Vodou, with all it carries out of the cradle of humankind’s birth in Africa and combines with Roman Catholicism, has enabled Haitians to laugh at death, as they have too often needed to do.

During the decade-long Haitian revolution that began in 1791 — the only event in human history where African slaves won freedom for themselves by force of arms — a prisoner of the French was awaiting execution by burning. Come, he is supposed to have said to his companions, let us show these people how to die. He climbed onto the pyre himself and stayed there, without uttering another sound, until the fire consumed him.

The energy of souls not lost springs back into the living world, not only through one of the few surviving religions that allow believers to converse face to face with the gods, but also in an extraordinarily rich, fertile and (in spite of everything) optimistic culture. Haiti offers, keeps on offering, a shimmering panorama of visual art and a wealth of seductive and hypnotic music, much of it rooted in the rhythms of ceremonial drumming. For the past 50 years a remarkably vivid and sophisticated Haitian literature has been flowing out of Creole, an ever-evolving language as fecund as the English of Shakespeare’s time. The Haitian world is not all suffering; it is full of treasure. Here are a few of the many voices, native and not, inspired by Haiti. —Madison Smartt Bell

LIFE
I live in Haiti.
The other day in the midst of Port-au-Prince, the great degraded capital city that is my home, I saw a car, an old battered car, a jalopy, falter and sputter and come to a slow halt. It was out of gas; this happens often in my destitute country, where everyone and everything is so poor that the donkeys and horses are starving and even the cars must try to get by on nothing. The man who was driving the car got out and
looked at it, stuck there in the middle of traffic, helpless. Then I saw another face, the passenger. A woman. She looked out of the back window with tears in her eyes, and the driver looked around the street at the unemployed loungers who are always there, and said to them, "She is going to have a baby right here." He told them that he had taken the woman from her home because the midwife was unable to help her. The pregnancy was difficult, and the woman needed to go to the hospital to have her baby. Now the tears were coming down the woman's cheeks. "If we do not get to the hospital, she will die," the man told the loungers. "Her baby will die, too."

The loungers - hungry young men who had never had a job and who will never have a job if my country goes on as it has done for the last half century - looked at the car and heard the man's voice and saw the woman's tears. Their backs straightened, their cigarettes fell to the ground, their eyes cleared. They approached the car, eight of them, leaned over, and put their shoulders to the chore. The driver steered. The woman lay back. Down one long dusty road, a left turn, and down another, through the green and white gates of the State Hospital, and she had arrived.

Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a former president of Haiti, "In the Parish of the Poor" (Orbis Books, 1990).

DEATH

Whenever I have nightmares
It's the tonton macoutes I'm dreaming about
The other night I dreamed
They made me carry my coffin on my back
Everyone on all the Port-au-Prince streets was laughing at me
There were 2 or 3 boys not laughing
The other night I dreamed
They made me dig my grave in the cemetery
Everyone on television was laughing at me
There were 2 or 3 girls not laughing
The other night I dreamed
A macoute squad was getting ready to shoot me
Everyone was laughing
There was an old woman who wasn't laughing
Those little boys and girls there -
If I say more the devil will steal my voice
The old woman
Is Shooshoon Fandal
They brought her to see the macoutes shoot
Her 5 sons on a street in Grand Gosier.

Félix Morisseau-Leroy, "Shooshoon." Translation from Creole by Jack Hirschman and Boadiba.
SONG
I relaxed and let my body vibrate to the sound of the drums when suddenly my eyelids became heavy: I was sleepy. I tried to resist, I threw some cool water on my face, but my eyes closed of their own accord. I fell into a deep sleep with a jug of water clasped in my hands. Yet, I was not completely asleep. I could hear everything that was happening under the arbor. I had the strange sensation that my hands and legs were swaying. I wanted to see them. I put my left arm close to my face. I couldn't see it. It was very, very dark. I tried harder, I eventually saw saffron yellow, then white. When I focused my eyes I realized that I was on my feet dancing before the drummers, still holding the water jug in my hands. Then I stopped paying attention, I let myself go in the dance. At one moment, I said to myself: "My God, how can I stop?" But I couldn't retain this thought: the dance, the sound, the rhythm were all too strong. They led my body to move in a crazy circle. I could hear everything despite the deafening noise of the drums. ... I experienced pleasure in that state between two waters: profoundly asleep and fully conscious of myself.

Mimerose Beaubrun, "Nan Domi" ("In Dreaming"), to be published by Vent D'Ailleurs, France. Translation by Dolores J. Walker.

LONGEVITY
Hold on, it can't be yesterday. Yesterday we weren't open because the mother of one of the girls died. Days and years get scrambled in my mind. I remember everything all at the same time. Us old folks, can we ever mix up places and happenings and memories! We live in a long night with no need to see things in detail since words and actions are constantly melting into elusive colors and sounds. Our night stretches out, unfolding in vagueness, a vast and melancholy mockery of a place outside all chronological constraint, where each fact is a particle on the move. Old people have a special way of celebrating how matter goes on forever, through the baroque art of do-it-yourself, every wound closing and opening again and again. The pathos of capital punishments and last-minute reprieves having lost both charm and glory, the honesty of old age turns out to be the lucid confession of relative values. So, monsieur, perhaps she didn't arrive at that precise moment, but years earlier, during the reign of the great dictator Deceased Forever-Immortal, during the youth of the Prophet, or on that eventful day itself, but a bit earlier or later, when the street already smelled of charred flesh, when the bodies, metals, mud, fire, plastic, and death mingled in a harsh, moist odor of filth, amalgam, and heartbreak.

Lyonel Trouillot, "Street of Lost Footsteps" (University of Nebraska Press, 2003).

GLOOM
From the four corners of the city the fires rise from the heaped refuse and burn our eyes. At the end of dusk, the fire-bugs crucify the misery of Port-au-Prince to shut it up. We walk on, subdued, half blinded by an untrustworthy fog. It is at this moment that night descends over the visage of our Mother. This incomparable face which will never leave you, in spite of the storm fallen into your life, in spite of the fire which devours it.

Yanick Lahens, "La Couleur de L'Aube." Translation by Mr. Bell.
GRACE
There's something surreal about seeing an old friend when we know it's for the last time, a shameful gap between the reality right before our eyes and the kinds of facts our minds can absorb. ...He'd been my keeper, tutor and guide... never complaining, talking us out of tight spots, patiently schooling me in the business of life in this place. To say he was Virgil to my Dante would be stretching it-just a little-and yet he did show me something of hell, and where to look for grace and mercy in the midst of that.
If he ever thought badly of me for needing something from Haiti, this place where so many people already needed so much, he never let it show.
*Ben Fountain, "Impasse Tempête" (Ecotone, 2008).*

RESOLVE
He arrived at Sans Fil (home for the dying) gaunt, febrile and coughing from tuberculosis. Two months later, the tuberculosis was under control. He had gained 30 pounds and was confident that he could now make a living. There was a problem, however; he had no place to go. Undaunted and sporting a huge smile, he left anyway, thanking all of us for helping him. His only possessions were a snapshot of himself taken by a generous visitor, a Liberty Bowl T-shirt, trousers, and a Minnesota Twins baseball cap. Two days later he was back. Day found him lying at the front door, tears streaming down his face, clutching his now tattered picture.
Day was prepared for anything; he was used to Haiti. Louis's shirt was filthy, the trousers torn and the cap, long gone. His eyes were sunken deep into his head and he had lost at least five pounds. He could barely respond to my questions.
"Do you have a family?"
"No."
"Friends?"
"No."
"Did you have a place to sleep?"
"No."
"Where did you sleep?"
"Under the tables in the market place with the crazy people."
"Did you eat anything?"
"No."
"Did you drink anything?"
"No."
There was no way he could survive in the real world of Haiti. This is why so many roamed the streets begging, looking for cars to clean, trying to do odd errands, or becoming prostitutes; it was that or nothing. Many Haitians could not get enough money together to buy food or rent a place to sleep. They forever roamed around, until some social organization helped them, or, more commonly and tragically, they lay down and died.
TENACITY
There is a Haitian saying which might upset the aesthetic images of most women. Nou led, Nou la, it says. We are ugly, but we are here. Like the modesty that is somewhat common in Haitian culture, this saying makes a deeper claim for poor Haitian women than maintaining beauty, be it skin deep or otherwise. For most of us, what is worth celebrating is the fact that we are here, that we against all the odds exist. To the women who might greet each other with this saying when they meet along the countryside, the very essence of life lies in survival. It is always worth reminding our sisters that we have lived yet another day to answer the roll call of an often painful and very difficult life.
Edwidge Danticat, "We Are Ugly, But We Are Here" (The Caribbean Writer, Volume 10, 1996).

MISERY
"It was a sad song - I mean to say that she was sad and that she didn't know any other kind of song. She didn't sing loud and it was a song with no words, her mouth shut the song sticking in her throat like a moan... so what do you want? She sang as the black girls do, as if you're smothering a sob, and this song always ends by beginning again because it is made in the image of misery, and tell me, will misery ever end?"
Jacques Roumain, "Gouverneurs de la Rosée" ("Masters of the Dew") Translation by Mr. Bell.

Madison Smartt Bell teaches writing at Goucher College and is the author of a fictional trilogy about the Haitian revolution as well as a biography of the revolution’s leader, Toussaint Louverture.