

# Mama's Nightingale by Edwidge Danticat, illustrated by Leslie Staub

## Identities & Themes

- Black/African American (Afro-Caribbean: Haitian)
- Immigration/Migration
- Families separated
- Grief/Loss
- Feelings
- Identity safety
- Identity affirmation

## Teacher Reflection Questions

1. When did you first become aware of the lived experiences of immigrants?
2. What positive and negative messages did you receive about immigrants and immigration? How have these messages helped shape your understanding of the immigrant experience for different populations?
3. What support is provided for immigrant students and their families that create a safe environment for learning?
4. When discussions surrounding immigration and immigrants come up, what communities/faces are shown/highlighted? What communities/faces are absent/ignored? Why is that?

## Background Information for Teacher

For many immigrants or refugees, their lives are dominated by the unknown. Saya's mother's stories provide comfort during a difficult time. This encourages Saya to take action in an effort to help her family. It is important to understand and acknowledge the stress and challenges some immigrant families face, whether documented or not. This empathy and knowledge helps reduce bias and prejudice, and, for immigrant children in particular, it eases their transition into a new environment.

**Discussion Hint:** You may have undocumented students in your class or school community, and they may not even know they are undocumented. You may also never know. Talking about immigration can be polarizing, and you may feel uncomfortable. Students might have questions you don't know how to answer. It's important to think about how you will respond to their questions, any anti-immigrant comments, or microaggressions in a way that lets students know they are safe and you are there to support them. Talk with your students broadly about the topic, being careful not to single anyone out. You can also make yourself available for individual follow up questions or one-on-one conversations if students are interested.

For more information on how to best support undocumented students, see this Guide for Educators [https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/media/2017/im\\_uac-educators-guide\\_2017.pdf](https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/media/2017/im_uac-educators-guide_2017.pdf) (American Federation of Teachers). We recommend reading the **Author's Note** about immigration prior to sharing the book. See also the **Immigration/Migration Primer** in this guide.

## Anti-Bias Education Tenets

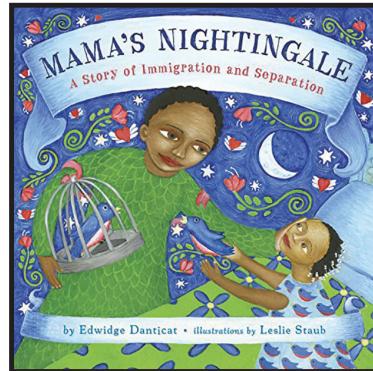
- Empathy & Understanding
- Healthy Complex Identities
- Respect Across Differences
- Notice, Name, & Reject Bias
- Responsiveness & Action

## Social-Emotional Learning Competencies

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Responsible Decision Making
- Relationship Skills

## Read this to the students before reading the book:

*When Saya's mother is sent to an immigration detention center, she sends her daughter bedtime stories to make their separation easier to endure. Inspired by her mother's stories and her father's attempts to reunite their family, Saya uses her own voice to help bring her mother home.*



## Discussion Questions (essential questions bolded)

1. Why does Mama call Saya Wosiyòl in Haitian? What does it mean?
2. **Why is Saya's mother in a detention center? What happened to her and why?**
3. **How does Saya feel when she and Papa visit her mother?**
4. **Have you ever missed someone so much that your belly aches like Saya's did because she missed her Mama? What helped you feel better? What helped the girl feel better?**
5. How does Papa inspire Saya to take action? Why is it important that she tell her own story?
6. **How does Saya's letter create a “ripple effect”? Can you think of other examples where one person's actions caused many more people to act as well?**
7. Mama is at home at the end of the story, but she is still waiting for her papers. What do you think this feels like for the family?
8. **Think about all the different perspectives on immigration that are in this book. Which ones can you name? (Saya, Papa, Mama, the judge, the reporter, people in the community, law enforcement, etc.) How are their views on immigration shaped differently by their experiences?**
9. **When discussions surrounding immigration and immigrants come up, what communities/faces are shown/highlighted? What communities/faces are absent/ignored? Why do you think that is?**
10. How can we support our classmates or school community members who might have a loved one who is detained/incarcerated (for any reason)?

## Journal Prompts & Extension Activities

1. Mama's recorded stories brought Saya comfort while they were separated. Write about what brings you comfort when you are sad or scared.
2. If you could write a letter to help families like Saya's, what would it say? How could you get your school involved to help even more?
3. Sometimes we want simple answers to questions, but there aren't any because the problem is so complicated. Tell about a time when you wanted a simple answer or an easy solution to a complicated question/problem, but nobody could give you one.
4. **Learn More – Meet Young Immigrants:** Scholastic's website on immigration includes stories from young immigrants who came to the U.S. from across the world. Have students spend time exploring the stories. They can make Venn diagrams comparing different immigrant stories or comparing their own lives to one of the immigrants on the website. ([https://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/immigration/tguide/teaching\\_3-5.htm](https://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/immigration/tguide/teaching_3-5.htm))

## Literacy Connections

- Realistic fiction
- Personal narrative
- Identify details in the text
- Compare and contrast events
- Compare and contrast characters
- Identify theme or main message
- Describe characters/Character development
- Character point of view
- Use illustrations/pictures/photos to gain information
- Make predictions
- Make inferences
- Make text connections (to self, text, the world)
- Describe major plot events
- Sequence events
- Vocabulary in context
- Figurative language