

Tales from the Isle of Spice

by Richardo Keens-Douglas



BOOK SUMMARY:

Enter the enchanted world of legendary storyteller Richardo Keens-Douglas. Visit a bottomless lake where there lives an enchanted princess. Meet a sinister woman who walks in moonlight stalking souls. Catch a glimpse of the mysterious boy with an angelic face whose scarred body hides beneath the waves. Inspired by the author's memories of Grenada, each of these three stories displays his infectious belief in the power of the human spirit.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY:

Richardo Keens-Douglas is a playwright, national radio and television host, and actor. He is a masterful narrator of the African-Caribbean experience, whose books engage the imagination.

The biggest influence in Richardo's work is the oral tradition of storytelling. The sound of words is like a song to him, and he tries to make that song as beautiful as possible. As the youngest of seven children, Richardo has fond memories of growing up on the Isle of Spice. "At night, my family would sit on the veranda telling stories and jokes. We had picnics on the beach, and ate mangoes until our bellies were full. There was always laughter and a strong sense of living."

At age 17, Richardo moved to Montreal to attend the Dawson Theatre School. Since then, Richardo has appeared in films and on stage, radio and television across the country. He hosted CBC Radio's Cloud Nine, an anthology of folk tales, musical performances and poetry, and has written many radio plays, including Tell Me a Tale, Once Upon an Island and Caribbean Cindy. Richardo currently divides his time between his home in Toronto and Grenada. He is the host of the Caribbean version of Who Wants to Be a Millionaire.

Pre-Reading Questions

1. Many cultures have folktales that reflect values and traditions. What are folk tales? What are your favourite folk tales?
2. One of the author's favourite pastimes is to get together with his family and tell stories. Who tells stories in your family? What kinds of stories does your family traditionally share?
3. The author Richardo Keens-Douglas is a well-known storyteller, someone who tells stories from memory. What makes a story interesting?
4. The author of this book is originally from Grenada. Why is Grenada called the Isle of Spice? Look up Grenada in an atlas and find out where it is in the Caribbean islands. To find out more about Grenada, borrow books from the public library or try these websites:
<http://www.grenada.org>
<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/caribbean/grenada/>
<http://www.spiceislander.com/>
5. This book is called *Tales from the Isle of Spice*. The first story involves nutmeg trees. To set the mood for the story, try grating whole nutmeg (or use ground nutmeg) over sliced tropical fruits such as banana, orange, mango or guava. After smelling and tasting the fruit, write a list of words that describe the experience. Keep these words in mind as you read the first story.

The Nutmeg Princess

Discussion Questions

1. What motivated the author to write this story? (see introduction)
2. Where does Petite Mama live? How does she make a living?
3. Why are people afraid of Petite Mama?
4. Where and when does the Nutmeg Princess appear?
5. Who are Aglo and Petal?
6. What is Aglo and Petite Mama's relationship?
7. What makes Aglo different from the rest of the village people?
8. What does Petite Mama tell Aglo about the Nutmeg Princess?
9. Why do you think Aglo can see the Nutmeg Princess?
10. Why do people go to find the Nutmeg Princess even though they don't believe she exists?
11. At the end of the story, Petal can see the Nutmeg Princess. Why?
12. What do you think the connection between the Nutmeg Princess and Petite Mama might be?
13. Most folk tales have a moral or message about how to live life. What do you think is the moral of this story? After discussing this question, go back to the introduction and read what the author says this story is about. Do you agree or disagree with him and why?

La Diabliesse and the Baby

Discussion Questions

1. There are many stories of La Diabliesse. Share what you know about this character.
2. How does the author describe La Diabliesse?
3. What does La Diabliesse want?
4. What was the weather like on the night the story takes place and how does it add to the story?
5. Why does Granny allow the woman into the house?
6. How would you describe Granny?
7. How does Granny know that she was visited by La Diabliesse?
8. Who was the little baby Granny protected?
9. What lesson do you feel that this folktale teaches us?

Freedom Child of the Sea

Discussion Questions

1. How does the narrator meet the Freedom Child of the sea?
2. Why does the Freedom Child live in the sea? Why is his body covered in welts and scars?
3. What will happen when the Freedom Child's body is as beautiful as his face?
4. What does the Freedom Child symbolize?
5. What hope do you think there is that the Freedom Child will emerge from the sea?
6. What do you think the author is trying to say in this story?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Freedom Child of the Sea is about the slave trade. Find out more about the slave trade by borrowing any of the following books from the public library:

African Slave Trade by Shirlee Newman, Franklin Watts, 2000.

Days of Slavery by Stuart Kallen, Abdo Pub. Co., 2001.

The Caribbean and Its People by T.W. Mayer, Thomson Learning, 1995. (has a chapter on Slavery And Indenture with information about the Middle Passage)

Or visit these websites

PBS – The Middle Passage

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1p277.html>

Breaking the Silence: Learning about Transatlantic Slave Trade

<http://www.antislavery.org/breakingthesilence/main/04/index.shtml>