

The Colour of My Words Joseph, Lynn

Harper Trophy, New York 2000
Ages 12+
138 pgs

"Sometimes you have no control over what will happen next, as I discovered the year I was 12 years old. But sometimes you do, that's when it is time to take charge because you sure don't know when the chance will come again." So begins *The Colour of My Words*, the story of Ana Rosa, an aspiring writer living in a small village in the Dominican Republic. The protagonist, at age twelve, is very conscious of the constants in her life; her father sitting on the front porch, washing day with her mother, and her dependable older brother Guario. That is, until life-changing events occur on her 13th birthday.

In the Dominican Republic, words are feared. There is political unrest, and people are very poor with not even enough money for writing paper. Guario works to support the family and happily uses some of his hard-earned money to buy notebooks for his younger sister when he discovers how gifted a writer she is.

The story is written in the first person from a child's perspective and it is sprinkled with a kaleidoscope of her colourful poems, music, songs and dancing. Ana's world centers around her family and the extended family of her community. But there are unconscious political and social elements to this story that come through in her writing. There is poverty, political struggle, alcoholism and

exploitation. Like Ana herself, the story is deceptive in its simplicity.



A native of Trinidad, Lynn Joseph beautifully captures the spirit of song and dance that makes the Dominican Republic such a vibrant part of the Caribbean. In *The Colour of My Words*, we catch a glimpse "across the fence" to the other side of a popular tourist destination and witness a small community's political and financial struggles. Ana cannot understand why her love of writing frightens her mother. All her poems and stories are simple and sweet, reflective of the beauty that surrounds her, so how can they be dangerous? But when developers want to take down the village for a new hotel resort, things change forever and Ana learns the power of her words and writing. The spirit of this story is so light hearted you almost miss the seriousness of the message.