

2012 AATF BOOK CLUB *UN PAPILLON DANS LA CITÉ AND UNE TEMPÊTE*

In the January issue of the *National Bulletin* members were introduced to Maryse Condé's book, *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots*. The other two authors, Gisèle Pineau and Aimé Césaire, were selected because their books can be easily taught in advanced high school or intermediate-level college courses.

Students can relate easily to the anxiety and frustration felt by the main character in Gisèle Pineau's *Un Papillon dans la cité*. Félicie receives a letter from her mother, Aurélie, inviting her to move to Paris and leave her beloved island of Guadeloupe where she lives with her grandmother. After arriving in Paris, Félicie meets her stepfather and faces the harsh reality of life in Paris for a girl from Guadeloupe. She often reminisces about her grandmother's proverbs, the flowers, and the friends she had on the island which is shaped like a butterfly. She wants to succeed in school but encounters many difficulties as she tries to navigate the French educational system. She had dreamed of a beautiful house, a loving teacher, and friendly neighbors but instead she finds a run-down HLM, uncaring teachers, and a hostile community. Félicie learns from her new world, survives, and makes friends. Her experiences with racism, culture shock, and questions about her own identity are provocative but relevant to young people searching for their own identities.

The search for identity is also an important theme in Aimé Césaire's, *Une Tempête*. Based on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, an island again plays an important role in the lives of the main characters. Contrary to *Un Papillon dans la cité*, all the action of *Une tempête* takes place on an island where the main character, Prospero, has been exiled. Prospero believes he is inherently superior to the inhabitants of the island, but as the play progresses, he must confront his powerful black slave, Caliban, who refuses to submit to the colonizer. Complicated issues of race evolve in the play between the spirit Ariel, a mulatto, and Caliban. Prospero views the island as a utopia to be exploited, whereas Caliban reveres the island as the sacred ground of his ancestors. As the play develops, students are challenged to delve into the complicated relationship between master and slave.

Condé, Pineau, and Césaire use powerful imagery to convey the themes of

colonization, racial identity, and island isolation in the three works that have been selected for the Book Club. We invite you to join us in Chicago to discuss the books and think about using them in your classes with your students.

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