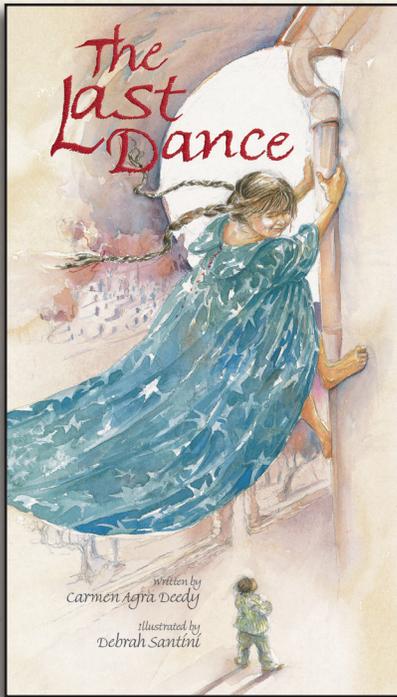


PEACHTREE

READING GROUP GUIDE

GRADES
3-7



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The Last Dance

By Carmen Agra Deedy
Illustrated By Debrah Santini

A beautiful picture book for older readers about life, death, and the enduring power of love from award-winning author and storyteller Carmen Agra Deedy.

ABOUT THE CREATORS



Carmen Agra Deedy is a New York Times best-selling author and renowned storyteller. Her books have received numerous awards and honors. Carmen has performed in many prestigious venues, but children are her favorite audience. Born in Havana, Cuba, she came to the United States as a refugee and, like most immigrants, sees the world from multiple perspectives. She lives in Georgia.



Debrah Santini holds an MFA from the University of Massachusetts Amherst and is a faculty member in the art department at the University of West Georgia. The illustrator of several children's books, she lives in Georgia.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Define history. How do all families have a history? Who in a family is most likely to know its history? What might a person learn from their family history? How is this story about one couple's history? When did their history begin? What was Oppa's role in Bessie and Ninny's history? Discuss what their history teaches the next generation in their family.
- Point of view means who's telling the story. How does the writer of this story reveal the point of view? Note the illustration on the first page of the text. Who is the person in the window? Explain how this illustration draws a visual connection to the person telling the story. How do you know Bessie is reflecting on her life with Ninny?
- Oppa taught Bessie and Ninny "that every human being has the right to three things: To dance . . . To sing . . . To tell stories." How do Bessie and Ninny dance, sing, and tell stories throughout their lives? Explain what Ninny means when he tells Bessie, "Save the last dance for me." Point out how the illustrator reveals dance, song, and story.
- Note the illustration where Ninny has his pipe in one hand and Bessie's hand in the other. Who are the older people in the background? They are painted in lighter yellow tones and appear ghostlike. How does this illustration convey Bessie and Ninny's destination?
- The author uses figurative language to convey certain images. Simile is a type of figurative language that compares two unlike things using like or as. At the beginning of the story, Bessie says, "I can still hear his merry voice ringing out like a chapel bell." Discuss the image this conveys. Find other similes in the story.
- Symbols in literature are objects that stand for ideas, feelings, and emotions. What is the symbolism of the graveyard? As a child, Bessie is afraid of the graveyard. How does Ninny teach her to be unafraid? Discuss the graveyard song that is repeated throughout the book. How does it become Bessie and Ninny's song?
- Study the cover art. What do the stars on Bessie's nightgown symbolize? Explain how the art on the end pages connect to the story. What do the buttons represent? Take a look at the illustration on the last page. How does it explain the title of the book?

