**Serafina’s Promise**

**AUTHOR:** Ann E. Burg  
**PUBLISHER:** Scholastic Press  
**COPYRIGHT DATE:** 2103  
**GENRE:** free verse; historical fiction  
**LEXILE:** 590

**SUMMARY:**  
Eleven year old Serafina’s secret dream of going to school to become a doctor helps her through a hard life in rural Haiti, a life of many chores and little food. Small pleasures and special friends provide bright spots in her hard days. Soon tragedy strikes in many forms, and these bring challenges for Serafina. Will she be able keep the faith that her dreams can still come true?

**BOOKTALK:**  
Imagine your days carrying dirty water from the ravine (no running water in your house), cleaning the chamber pots (no indoor toilets or plumbing), picking bugs out of your rice, and sleeping on a mat in your hut. Oh, yes – and there isn’t much time to play because during each day you do those chores several times.

That is life for eleven year old Serafina. Would you be happy? Read how Serafina manages to find happiness and fun despite her hard life. Then tragedy strikes once, twice, three times. What will happen to Serafina now?

**AUTHOR’S BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH:**  
**AUTHOR’S NAME:** Ann E. Burg  
**Author’s Website:** [http://www.annburg.com/](http://www.annburg.com/)

**Other books written by the author:**  
*All the Broken Pieces*  
*Kate’s Surprise*  
*Pirate Pickle and the White Balloon*  
*The New York Reader*  
*Rebekkah’s Journey*  
*E is for Empire*  
*Time’s Square*  
*Autumn Walk*  
*Winter Walk*

**CHALLENGING WORDS**  
ravine, p.2 (n.) a narrow steep-sided valley commonly eroded by running water.  
squinted, p.14 (v.) to look with the eyes partly closed.
**plantain**, p.21 (n.) a tropical plant, *Musa paradisiaca*, of the banana family, resembling the banana.

**stethoscope**, p.21 (n.) an instrument used in auscultation to convey sounds in the chest or other parts of the body to the ear of the examiner.

**intervenes**, p. 27 (v.) to come between disputing people, groups, etc.; intercede; mediate.

**linger**, p. 29 (v.) to remain or stay on in a place longer than is usual or expected, as if from reluctance to leave

**machete**, p. 32 (n.) a large heavy knife used especially in Latin-American countries in cutting sugarcane and clearing underbrush and as a weapon.

**whiffling**, p. 59 (adj.) to shift about; vacillate; be fickle.

**amaranth**, p. 134 (n.) any plant of the genus Amaranthus, some species of which are cultivated as food and some for their showy flower clusters or foliage.

**lopsided**, p. 195 (adj.) leaning to one side.

**creche**, p. 195 (n.) a small or large modeled representation or tableau of Mary, Joseph, and others around the crib of Jesus in the stable at Bethlehem, as is displayed in homes or erected for exhibition in a community at Christmas season.

**aloë**, p. 201(n.) any chiefly African shrub belonging to the genus Aloe, of the lily family, certain species of which yield a fiber.

**sputter**, p. 232 (v.) to utter or spit out words or sounds explosively or incoherently, as when angry or flustered.

**scour**, p. 251 (v.) to range over, as in a search:

**wince**, p. 290 (v.) to draw back or tense the body, as from pain or from a blow; start; flinch.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. “But I’ll never build a house for a car. People need houses more than cars do.” (p. 68). How is Serafina’s perspective of homes different than yours and mine? Compare/contrast her life and yours.

2. Why does Serafina not wave to Nadia when she sees her at the parade? Have you ever experienced a similar situation when you have done something you were/were not planning on doing? Is there anything you wish you could do differently? (p.71)

3. What happens at the end of Part I of the book? Does Serafina know what is happening? Find descriptive words in the text that help explain this act of nature to help the reader know what is happening even when the narrator does not know. (p.93)

4. Serafina wants to follow her dreams of being a doctor. Her Manman says, “You should be happy with what you have.” What is right? Should you be content or should you have dreams to pursue? Be prepared to share your opinion either in a speech or in written form.

5. What is the symbolism of the heart-shaped rock? (p. 73)

6. Could you live like Serafina? Is she happy or sad? What things help her find her mood and ability to cope with hardship?
ACTIVITIES WITH STANDARDS:

Language Arts:

- Create an anchor chart of ways an author paints a picture with words, including similes and metaphors. Find examples of each through the pages of *Serafina’s Promise*, including the object that the simile or metaphor is being used to describe. Have students work in partners or groups to read the figurative language examples found and then to identify the intended object.

  **5.RV.3.1**: Determine how words and phrases provide meaning to works of literature, including imagery, symbolism, and figurative language (e.g., similes, metaphors, hyperbole, or allusion).

Social Studies:

- Who were the Tonton Macoutes? Have students work in small groups to research this political/military group in Haiti in the 1950’s to determine their purpose, their goals, their methods. Who does this group remind you of in the history of other countries?

  **6.1.16** Identify individuals, beliefs and events that represent various political ideologies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and explain their significance. Examples: Liberalism, conservatism, nationalism, socialism, communism, fascism and popular sovereignty.

Science:

- The lives of Serafina’s family and friends are changed dramatically when an earthquake hits Haiti. The land on which they were living changes significantly as well. Choose an earthquake from this [page](#) by Scholastic and create a digital or paper timeline of that earthquake, including the effects not just on the people of the area, but on the land itself.

  **SC 4.2.3** Describe how earthquakes, volcanoes and landslides suddenly change the shape of the land.
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ACTIVITY SHEET CREATED BY:
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