



'Year of the Sister'

Well-Read Mom Family Supplement

Well-Read Mom's Guide to Bringing the Great Books into Your Home

February: Generating Beauty

Discuss along with *In This House of Brede* by Rumer Godden

In This House of Brede and *Miss Happiness and Miss Flower* are both written by Rumer Godden. Godden spent much of her life abroad, so her depictions of people from different cultures come from her own experience. In both novels, Japanese women find ways to belong in a culture very different from their own. These stories propose that generating beauty can give life.

***Miss Happiness and Miss Flower* by Rumer Godden**

Nona moves from India to England to live with her aunt and uncle, but is terribly homesick for the familiarity of India and her nurse/ayah. When Nona receives two Japanese dolls (Miss Happiness and Miss Flower) she instinctively knows just how homesick the dolls are. As she builds them an authentic Japanese home, she crafts her own comfort in her new situation.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does Nona understand the dolls, when she is coming from India and they come from Japan? What do the three have in common?
2. When Nona turns her attention to designing and furnishing the dolls' house, how does this "turn" help her?
3. Does a creative project ever have a restorative effect upon you? Does doing something generous for another person ever cheer you up when you're unhappy?
4. Nona crafts something beautiful: the dolls' house is beautiful. And her generous *action* in crafting it for the dolls is also beautiful. In what way does beauty save Nona?



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For Younger Readers

***Maybe Something Beautiful: How Art Transformed a Neighborhood* by F. Isabel Campoy and Theresa Howell**

As Mira tries to bring color and beauty to the persons in her neighborhood, she meets an artist with a vision of hope and beauty even more powerful than her own. Mira and the artist draw in the neighbors, and together they transform the neighborhood with murals and music.

Discussion Questions:

1. "Mira" in Spanish means "Look!" Why is Mira a good name for the little girl in the story?
2. Because her name means "Look!," does it seem right that Mira is always full of possibilities? ("Hmm, maybe...") What virtue do we see in Mira's readiness to see beauty? To paint, to participate in beauty? (faith? hope?)
3. The muralists transformed the neighborhood with beauty. Were the people different just on the day they made the paintings? Or did the difference last? What difference do you think this beauty made to the people who walked these streets?

More for younger readers:

Miss Rumphius by Barbara Cooney

Carmela Full of Wishes by Matt de la Peña

How Sweet the Sound: The Story of Amazing Grace by Carole Boston Weatherford

If You Hold a Seed by Elly MacKay