

DISCUSSION GUIDE



Flowers for Sarajevo

Written by John McCutcheon | Illustrated by Kristy Caldwell

HC & CD: 978-1-56145-943-8 | CD: 978-168263-000-6

Ages 7–10 | Historical Fiction
Lexile • F&P • GRL W, Gr 6

ABOUT THE BOOK

Young Drasko is happy working with his father in the Sarajevo market. Then war encroaches on their beloved city. Now Drasko must run the family flower stall alone.

One morning, the nearby bakery is bombed and twenty-two people are killed. The next day, a cellist from the city orchestra walks to the bombsite and plays the most heartbreaking music Drasko can imagine. The cellist returns to play for twenty-two days, one day for each victim of the bombing. Inspired by the musician's response to the tragedy, Drasko finds a way to help make Sarajevo beautiful again.

Based on real events of the Bosnian War, this uplifting story from songwriter and storyteller John McCutcheon demonstrates the power of beauty in the face of violence and suffering. The CD includes a narration and a song by the author as well as performances by Vedran Smailovic, the man who played in the marketplace in 1992 to honor those who died in front of the bakery in the Sarajevo mortar attack.

THEMES

Bosnian War | Community | Beauty
Music | Healing | Peace

BEFORE YOU READ

Ask readers to think about and discuss the following questions:

- What do you know about the Bosnian War?
- Where is Europe? Can you find Sarajevo on a map?

AS YOU READ

Using the accompanying audio CD, play John McCutcheon's song "Streets of Sarajevo" as well as Tomaso Albinoni's Adagio in G Minor, performed by Vedran Smailovic, the Cellist of Sarajevo. Ask readers to think about and discuss the following questions:

- How do these pieces of music make you feel? Why?
- What parts of the story interest you the most?

AFTER YOU READ

Ask readers to think about and discuss the following questions:

- How do you think all these different kinds of people in Sarajevo manage to live together peacefully?
- Goran is the meanest man in the market. Why do you think Milo, Drasko's father, gives him one of his prized roses?
- Why does Drasko's father have to leave? How do you think it makes Drasko feel?
- Drasko thinks he had been pushed to the worst corner of the square. Why do you think the merchants start treating him differently?
- While Drasko has the "worst corner in the square," he also says he has the "best seat in the square." How can that be? Explain.
- Why would someone shoot mortars into the city square? Do you think they meant to harm the people in line at the bakery?
- When everyone else runs away from the explosion, the musicians run toward it. Why?
- If you were Drasko, would you run toward the bakery or away from it? Explain.

- The square is “strangely still” the day after the bombing. Why do you think that is?
- Consider why the cellist decides to dress as if he were going to a concert. Discuss.
- What is the “language we all understand?” How does music speak to different kinds of people?
- Why do you think the cellist would play near the crater of the explosion instead of somewhere else?
- Why do you think no one applauds, or even moves, after the cellist’s performance?
- After the cellist plays for the first time, Drasko tells people that today his flowers are free. Can you think of a reason why Drasko would give away what he should sell?
- Listen to the Adagio in G Minor again. Why do you think the cellist performs that particular piece of music at the bomb site?
- Can you think of a time when you did something nice for someone who was suffering? How did it make you feel?
- With all that has happened, how can the citizens of Sarajevo return to the square?
- Why do you think Goran brings someone to Drasko’s stall? What is the reason behind his change of attitude?
- Why does Drasko leave flowers in front of the bakery? The orchestra hall? At his father’s place at their table?
- What do you think happens to Drasko and his father after this story?
- How do Drasko, his father, and the cellist make Sarajevo beautiful again?
- In what ways—big or small—can you make your world beautiful?

REVIEWS

★ “Beauty will always find a way to rise from violence, but this is a reminder all readers need.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*, **STARRED REVIEW**

★ “Text and illustrations work together to remind readers of the power of beauty in the face of human suffering....

A highly recommended book that highlights the capacity for empathy and humanity, even in a society faced with violence and war.”

—*School Library Journal*, **STARRED REVIEW**

“Moving... A bittersweet account of the power of art in dark times.” —*Booklist*

“[A] powerful story of a musical performance that defied the horror of combat.” —*Publishers Weekly*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John McCutcheon is highly regarded as a singer, songwriter, master musician, legendary performer, and producer. His thirty-eight albums have garnered six Grammy nominations. He is also the author of the award-winning picture book *Christmas in the Trenches*. His original song, on which the book is based, was recently named one of the 100 Essential Folksongs by Folk Alley. John lives in Smoke Rise, GA.

www.folkmusic.com

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Kristy Caldwell grew up in Louisiana and moved to NYC, where she received her MFA in Illustration as Visual Essay from the School of Visual Arts. She has illustrated posters and video projections for professional theater in New York. She now lives in Astoria, a multigenerational, multicultural community whose residents have roots in every part of the world, including Bosnia, the Middle East, and Israel. This is her first picture book.

www.kristycaldwell.com

Peachtree Discussion Guide for
FLOWERS FOR SARAJEVO
prepared by Emily Dowdell

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www.peachtree-online.com

updated 4/13/17