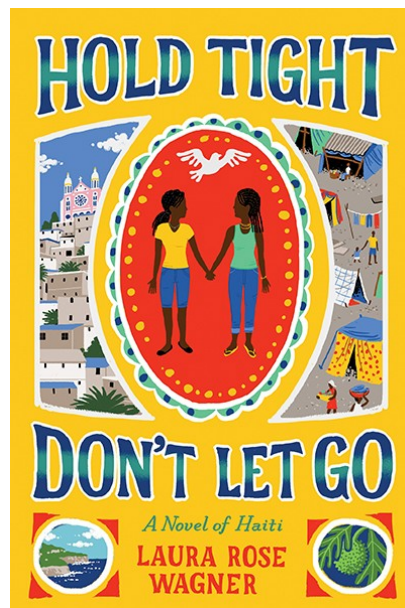


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JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE & LITERACY EDUCATION

**Children and Young Adult Book Review**  
*Middle to High School*  
***Hold Tight, Don't Let Go: A Novel of Haiti***  
**by Laura Rose Wagner**

Student Reviewer: Sierra Rainville  
Educator Reviewer: Daniel Hayes



Wagner, L.R. (2015). *Hold Tight, Don't Let Go: A Novel of Haiti*. New York, NY: Amulet Books.

ISBN: 978-1-4197-1204-3

Pages: 249

### Student Review:

Before reading *Hold Tight, Don't Let Go*, I didn't know much about Haiti. This novel truly opened my eyes to the country, and I began to see the struggle and pain that the people there went through in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake in 2010. Laura Rose Wagner painted an authentic picture of the social conditions in Haiti at the time through the eyes of Magdalie, a young girl whose life was changed drastically by the earthquake. By writing the novel from her perspective, the issues faced by those in Haiti became more personal to the reader. This book was important because it presented the conditions of life in Haiti to an audience who may not know much about the country, and it was done in a poignant way that will make a long-lasting impact on any reader.

“...reading this  
book reminded  
me of what I often  
take for granted”  
- Sierra

I connected with Magdalie in ways that I didn't expect. Her reflections about growing up, dealing with grief, hope, and the importance of family made an impact on me. Even though Magdalie's story was different from anything that I have ever gone through, some of her comments were universally relatable. Additionally, reading this book reminded me of what I often take for granted. Things such as going to the movies, attending school, and having safe drinking water are completely normal in my life, but were not accessible to those living in the makeshift camps in Haiti. These connections that I made to the novel helped Magdalie's story truly come to life, and made it even easier to understand her and some of the emotions she was dealing with.

I enjoyed reading *Hold Tight, Don't Let Go*, and would definitely recommend this book to other high school students. The journey that Magdalie went through and the observations about Haiti, grief, love, and hope that she made along the way were impactful. Not only does this powerful story expose the reader to the harsh realities of life for a young girl in Haiti, but it was an engaging story with complex characters that kept me interested. The combination of the coming of age story with the atrocities of life in Haiti created a novel that was both relatable for young adult readers, and presented important social issues. Although there were times when it was difficult to read because of what Magdalie was going through, by the end of the novel it was her courage and growth that stood out the most.

Sierra Rainville  
*The Canterbury School, Fort Myers, FL*  
11th Grade

### Educator Review:

The novel is a first-person narrative from the perspective of Magdalie, a relatable fifteen-year-old young woman, living in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. *Hold Tight, Don't Let Go* portrays the grand scope of poverty-stricken Haiti through Magdalie's intimate coming-of-age tale. Although Haiti, the earthquake, and poverty are inextricably intertwined with the story's plot, we never lose focus of the universal struggles that Magdalie faces. In this regard, Laura Rose Wagner is able to tap into prior knowledge and maintain relatability while taking her audience on a journey that is likely foreign to most readers.

This book will appeal to any educator attempting to create a space for more socially conscious students. The organic discussions that will undoubtedly flow from Magdalie's circumstances will create lively discussion in

the classroom. Often, novels like *Things Fall Apart* are taught with similar intentions, but characters like Okonkwo possess cultural ideals that are so foreign to American students (for instance, concepts of masculinity and violence that are at odds with our moral fabric) that the novel unintentionally creates further disconnect. Wagner's novel, on the other hand, has a protagonist with modern sensibilities that most students share, making the journey not only palatable, but enjoyable.

The novel explores prostitution and its function within the greater society. Forced to make a choice, Magdalie puts herself in a precarious situation in which she comes dangerously close to engaging in prostitution. This is a red flag when considering the novel as a whole-class instructional tool.

*Daniel Hayes*

*The Canterbury School, Fort Myers, FL*

*11<sup>th</sup> Grade AP Language & Composition and American Literature Teacher*