Sharon M. Draper, interviewed in her home in Cincinnati, Ohio, June 19, 2007.

This is a transcript of the movie available on TeachingBooks.net. It is offered here to give you a quick assessment of the program topics, as well as to enable people with auditory disabilities access to the words.

Because this is a transcript of an edited movie, it should not be used as an assessment of Ms. Draper’s writing. Many of the sentences found here were edited, and all editing decisions are the sole responsibility of TeachingBooks.net.

I was not dreaming of becoming a writer. As a writing teacher, I would pass out papers and pass out assignments, and I had this young man who gave me a contest application. And he actually challenged me. He said, “You’re always making us write stuff. Why don’t you write something sometime.” So I went back, typed up the story, sent it in. Several months later I was informed I had won first prize. It was published in Ebony magazine in December of 1990 —a long time ago.

On Writing
I’m an English teacher. I think as a teacher first and a writer second. So, I purposefully put symbolism and figurative language and metaphor, and all of the things that I would ask a student—as a teacher—to find in a book. I knew what appealed to teenagers. I knew what kinds of books turn teenagers off. And I wanted to write something that would grab them and would get them, so I decided to write a book in a multi-genre format. If you don’t like letters you can read essays, if you don’t like essays, you can read poems. There’s nothing to get bored with.

On Hazelwood High
The “Hazelwood High” books deal with real life issues that young people have to deal with, that sometimes their parents don’t want to admit that they have to deal with. So, I write about a fictional character that has a problem. My books are character based, and the issues develop because of the problems of the characters. For example, in Tears of a Tiger I deal with drinking and driving. I deal with teen suicide. Forged by Fire is about child abuse. Darkness Before Dawn deals with teenagers who think that nothing bad can happen to them, that they can handle any kind of situation, that think they’re grown even though they know they’re not, and get into situations that they say, “Oh my goodness. I didn’t realize that could happen.” Characters drive the story and the issues evolve from the characters.

On Ziggy
Ziggy Man… Ziggy is a wonderful creation. Ziggy is 10-years-old. He is effervescent. He’s Jamaican. They solve local neighborhood mysteries, always with a sense of fun and a sense of adventure and a sense of—oh just joie de vivre. I mean Ziggy’s just fun.
On Copper Sun

_Copper Sun_ came from a different place. I’d never been to Africa, and when I got there, I felt like I belonged, I felt comfortable there. But when I went to this slave prison, as I went through and crawled through that Door of No Return, the stones had been rubbed smooth by all the thousands of bodies that had been pushed through there. And I knew I couldn’t tell the story of all of them, so I decided to tell the story of one. And I chose a girl and I said, “What would it have been like to be 15 and go through this?” Amari’s strength and Amari’s courage, and how Amari finds herself and develops as a character, is something that I think a lot of people can gain something from.

I’m very proud of my heritage, of the women who came before me, who paved the way so I could be who I am today.

Books by SHARON M. DRAPER

- FIRE FROM THE ROCK, Dutton Children's Books / an imprint Penguin Young Readers Group, 2007
- COPPER SUN, Atheneum Books for Young Readers (an imprint of Simon & Schuster), 2006
- WE BEAT THE STREET: HOW A FRIENDSHIP PACT LED TO SUCCESS, (written with The Three Doctors [Sampson Davis, George Jenkins, and Rameck Hunt]), Dutton Children's Books / an imprint Penguin Young Readers Group, 2005
- NOT QUITE BURNED OUT BUT CRISPY AROUND THE EDGES: INSPIRATION, LAUGHTER, AND ENCOURAGEMENT FOR TEACHERS, Heinemann, 2001
- TEACHING FROM THE HEART: REFLECTIONS, ENCOURAGEMENT, AND INSPIRATION, Heinemann, 2000
- JAZZIMAGINATION: A JOURNAL TO READ AND WRITE, Scholastic Press, 1999
• TEARS OF A TIGER, Atheneum Books for Young Readers / an imprint of Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing, 1994

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