

THEME

A Greek refugee realizes the power of heritage when he is exposed to the literary wealth of his native country and encouraged to write his family's story.

SUMMARY

SETTING: WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS, 1950s; Greek village, 1940s

Nicholas Gage recalls how he came to the United States as a nine-year-old refugee. He cannot speak English. He is placed in a class for the mentally-challenged. Four years later his English is better. In junior high school, Nick is placed in a program for students who are planning to attend college. There Nick meets Miss Marjorie Hurd. Miss Hurd teaches English and also runs the newspaper club. One day she tells Nick to write about his past. Nick writes about the nighttime escape from his village in Greece. He also writes about his mother's death and how much he misses her. Nicholas' essay earns him a medal in a national contest. The essay is Nick's first literary work. Nick now understands the power of the written word. He studies journalism in high school and college. He wins the Hearst Award for College Journalism. He receives the award from President John F. Kennedy. After many years, Nick turns his mother's story into a popular book. Gage gets many honors for his writing. For all these honors, he is grateful to Miss Hurd. Gage dedicates this essay to her.

PURPOSE FOR READING:

(1) Contrast the Greek heritage from the Southern American heritage of the mid 1900s.

(2) Point out ways in which Miss Hurd was Gage's "muse."

(3) Using a Venn Diagram, compare and contrast Miss Caroline Fisher to Miss Marjorie Hurd.

(4) Find out about the hardships Gage endured.