

Anna Onichimowska  
*Ten Parts of the World*  
(original title: *Dziesięć stron świata*)

### **About the author**

Anna Onichimowska writes both for children, young adults and adults. A graduate of the Warsaw University in Polish Philology, she devoted her master's thesis to the work of Janusz Korczak, Poland's most influential 20<sup>th</sup>-century children's author, pedagogist and dedicated children's rights advocate. She is the author of over thirty books, numerous theatre plays, tv and radio dramas, as well as scripts for television. Her work has been awarded a number of prestigious prizes both in Poland and abroad (for details see author's website) and translated into English, German, French, Italian, Slovenian, Chinese and Korean. President of the Polish Section of IBBY in the years 1995–2003, she is now a freelance writer based in Warsaw and travelling widely.

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### **About the book**

#### **Basic facts**

*Ten Parts of the World* is a highly readable collection of stories featuring fifteen-year-olds living in different parts of the world today, from Japan to India to Poland and the Ukraine. Showcasing the striking differences in the standard of life and the opportunities available to the teenagers, the stories affirm the power of friendship and the need to hold on firmly to one's hopes and dreams. Suitable for readers aged 12–15, with strong cross-over appeal.

#### **Main points**

What we are depends largely on where we are born, as the author suggests in her foreword. The teenagers in these stories might as well live on ten different planets – rather than in different parts of one world – for the far-reaching diversity of their existence. The contrasts couldn't be more striking. Ethan, born in the affluent United States, suffers from extreme loneliness and an eating disorder, but is otherwise comfortably off; his counterpart Santosh in India is a slave worker from early childhood and lives on a shoestring, but has the comfort of the company of others and is empowered by the dream of freedom. One fifteen-year-old has to earn her living and her family upkeep by selling her body; others are free to worry mainly about school and boyfriends. In one of the stories two such radically different worlds collide: in Senegal, a local girl is about to marry, bear children and keep house despite her outstanding talent for maths, while a not-so-gifted French boy is free to decide what he wants to become, and currently decides to escape into the alternative reality of Second Life.

Highly readable, vividly paced, peopled with interesting characters, containing plenty of dialogue and convincing local colour, these stories are entertaining and at the same time didactic in a discreet, understated way. On the one hand these are stories about first relationships, first sex and average teenage friendships and problems, while making it clear, on the other, that there is nothing "average" or "predictable" or indeed "easy" about the lives of young adults. Allowing a glimpse at the diversity of the world, the different families, with their own sets of values and social, economic and cultural backgrounds, the book cannot help but lend the reader perspective and arouse sympathy, as well as enhance tolerance. The best

example, perhaps, is the story of Magid, a terrorist-to-be growing up in the United States, whose feelings are described with such insight that the only possible reaction is understanding.

Quite importantly, all stories end on a positive note: they seem to demonstrate the author's motto, quoted in her brief address to the readers in the foreword, "you can do anything, if only you believe you can do it." Even the wildest dreams of the protagonists do come true, often despite the disbelief or scorn of others. This book, then, is not only valuable and fun to read, but also hugely uplifting.

## **Detailed summary**

Foreword by the author

### Cesaria: the Samba Queen

The fifteen-year old Colombian is the woman of a primitive bar owner and occasionally his mates. What little she earns she sends to her mother and young brothers and sisters in the country. Dreaming of becoming a samba dancer, on hearing an announcement about an upcoming samba contest on the radio she summons up her courage and makes preparations to leave her old life behind. With a bit of luck, some money from handing over intercepted drugs to the police, the help of a lover, lots of determination and the disinterested friendship of a fellow contestant, she makes it to the finals broadcast on tv.

### Ethan: Hunger

Ethan, an only child, is obese and constantly hungry. Whenever his mother catches him sneaking out to the kitchen for a snack at night, she forces him to stand on the bathroom scales and face how much he weighs. With the parents ashamed of him and the peers laughing at him at school and at parties, Ethan is utterly lonely. When the parents choose to go away for a six-month contract without their son, he moves in with his eccentric grandfather and his house pets and begins to realise what it means to be cared for and to be free.

### Anla: the Sword of the Tuareg

A local girl, a black servant, is asked by a French boy's parents to help him with maths. Scorn and distrust soon develop into friendship as the girl enters the boy's world of virtual Second Life, and he in turn becomes interested in the girl's fate. Despite an excellent mind, the girl is to marry a widowed fisherman, yet there is a competition in Dakar that could provide her with a scholarship... The French boy uses his Second Life avatar to raise money for the trip and the fiancé accepts her desire to study if it should turn out to be possible.

### Magid: T-shirt with a Portrait

Magid, raised in the Muslim tradition, feels well adapted to his American environment. In love with a girl from school, one night he sneaks out to join her at a party, only to find her with his best friend. Enraged, hurt, and feeling totally alien to the culture he had previously accepted as his own, he agrees to take part in a terrorist attack organised by an uncle, aware of the risk, and with unreserved blessing from his fundamentalist family. Armed with a bomb, at the very last moment he decides not to act, seeing among the anonymous heathen faces on the bus the shy face of a blond girl who, he was told, secretly fancied him.

### Kaisa: Midsummer

Hating the idea of spending the holiday with his father's new family (seven children all told), Kaisa joins her friend Annika who invited her to help renovate a cottage. On arrival she realises that Annika's beliefs and lifestyle and new friends are radically different from her own: while caring about eco-friendly living and the deprivation in the Third World and the alterglobalist movement, she finds she doesn't want to live in a commune with no respect for the laws of society, eat leftovers from the garbage cans and have "no strings attached" sex. Luckily, she is mature enough to assert herself and not give in to what she doesn't accept.

### Santosh: The Flying Carpet

Gradually losing sight, Santosh has spent the last three years hand-weaving a silken carpet in the Indian town of Allahabad. He was kidnapped, but many children are sold for their parents' debts, as was his friend and fellow labourer Kabir. They plan to escape along with all the other child slaves during a big local festival, and succeed. A Dutch Red-Cross eye doctor takes Santosh over to Europe and manages to restore his eyesight. Flying back home after the operation, the boy is joyfully looking forward to seeing his family and his bride again.

### Gerda: My Mum's Getting Married

Gerda's mum, a bohemian translator, is getting married – to a woman – on her daughter's own birthday. This is a big event even in liberal Denmark, so Gerda and her family are interviewed, photographed and asked how they feel. Confused and additionally hurt, as her conservative boyfriend dumped her on the eve of their first night together, Gerda is wary and distrustful, even of the nice student Igor with whom she ends up spending her birthday. The next morning, however, she wakes up brimming with energy: she has just realised what she wants to become. She'll be a journalist who always looks for and tells the truth.

### Piotr: Temptation

Piotr, a Polish boy living in Warsaw, meets a girl he likes at a shopping mall and pretends to come from a well-to-do family. Wishing to keep seeing Magda and to impress her, he agrees to pose for nude photos and films in order to earn money. Quickly revolted by this, he quits – but before he does, he introduces Magda to what he does and she, sick of being poor too, is determined not to let this chance pass. Having to choose between what he feels is right and who he feels is right for him, Piotr makes the tough decision to let the girl go.

### Tania: Spirit As a Calm Lake

The Ukrainian youth dream of living in Western Europe, as their home country offers them little; for Tania the extra attraction is her friend Petro, who already moved to Germany. When suddenly presented with an opportunity to take part in karate championships there, she gets her hair done and packs, deciding to leave behind the poverty, the helplessness, the handicapped brother, the violent drunk of a father whom she killed in self-defence, the blackmail attempt by a creepy neighbourhood boy... But she does take along photographs of her family and her love for them.

### Aki: Behind a Wall

Aki's older brother Noburo has not left his room for three years. He willingly cut himself off from the world, as many pressured Japanese young people do, becoming a so-called *hikokomori*. The hard-working parents forbid their younger son to use the computer, for fear of losing him too, but one day Aki starts blogging with Noburo, makes friends with him, and finally coaxes him to leave his voluntary prison and face reality again.