
BOXES FOR KATJE

Author: Candace Fleming

Illustrator: Stacey Dressen-McQueen

Publisher: Farrar Straus Giroux

THEME:

Through acts of kindness and generosity, big and small, we can make a difference to people in need.

PROGRAM SUMMARY:

Boxes for Katje, based on real events, is about a charitable effort that begins with a girl and her family, who send a care package to Holland during World War II, and grows to envelop both communities. Host LeVar Burton introduces helping groups powered by young people -- the Global Ambassadors, who build goodwill and do community service while learning about cultures through international communications and fundraising, and Backyard in a Box, youngsters who create and send kits to help kids in Hurricane Katrina devastated areas re-establish and enjoy their backyard.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

Discuss the concept of “generosity.” Invite students to share examples of times they have been the recipient of another’s generosity and times in which they have given to others.

Brainstorm ways in which children can make a difference in the lives of people in need.

In the story, the townspeople of Olst received some very necessary items, such as soap, food, and warm clothing. Modeling their thinking after the Children for Children group in the Reading Rainbow program, discuss with students items they might put in a box for children who are victims of a disaster (e.g., hurricane or tornado, tsunami, earthquake, volcanic eruption) or wartime destruction. Limit the number of items they can consider so they will debate the importance of each item they want to include.

Discuss with students why the tulip bulbs were a perfect “thank-you” gift for the people in Rosie’s hometown in America.

The ability to give material objects is not the same for everyone. Talk with students about other ways of “giving” that do not require money or goods.

CURRICULUM EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

Chart the sequence of the story in a timeline. Use a series of “boxes” to show what the postman brought each time and which of the townspeople came to see the contents. The story takes place in the time frame of about one year. Have students note the seasons on their timeline.

Locate the Netherlands on a map of world. Explain that the former name of the country was “Holland” and that the people are called “Dutch.” Locate Indiana on a map of the United States. Locate the town of Mayfield on a state map of Indiana.

Invite someone from a plant nursery or garden center to the classroom to show students different ways of planting flowers. Ask the speaker to bring bulbs of different sizes, different types of seeds, and cuttings from flowers and demonstrate how they are planted.

Plant tulip bulbs in a small patch of ground in the school yard. Plant them 6-8 inches deep, scatter a bit of bone meal in the hole, and place the bulbs in with the points facing up. Take pictures with a digital camera to start a photo-essay book of “How a Tulip Grows.” Since the photo-essay project will be nearly year-long, start the book at the time of planting. Have students write the text to accompany the first photos. During the winter, research information on how tulips grow. Books with cutaway illustrations will show what is happening under ground. Have students illustrate these pages in the book they are making. Check on the tulips frequently in the spring so students can monitor the progress of their growth with more pictures. Add the text and complete the book when the tulips have bloomed.

Make a display of “People Who Have Made a Difference.” Work with the library media specialist to locate some short biographies of people whose leadership, acts of kindness and generosity, caring, or courage changed the world. There are many possibilities for research subjects, including Cesar Chavez, Mother Teresa, Dolores Huerta, Mother (Mary Harris) Jones, Jane Addams, Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Harriet Tubman, Helen Keller, Eleanor Roosevelt, Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Biddy Mason, and Nelson Mandela. These three resources will be useful in identifying the names of additional research subjects: *Rabble Rousers: 20 Women Who Made a Difference* by Cheryl Harness (Dutton); *Amelia to Zora: Twenty-Six Women Who Changed the World* by Cynthia Chin-Lee (Charlesbridge), and *Akira to Zoltan: Twenty-Six Men Who Changed the World* by Cynthia Chin-Lee (Charlesbridge). Have students make a poster of their chosen subject. On the poster, they should include the following information: person’s name, dates during which she/he lived, a statement of what the person did (job, accomplishments, etc.), and a statement of how she/he

made a difference in the lives of others. The poster should also contain a picture, either a portrait drawn by the student or an actual photograph (scanned or downloaded). Display the posters in a prominent place in the building.

The author's note at the end of the book mentions the participation of the Children's Aid Society, Catholic Relief Services, and the American Red Cross in sending needed items to Europe after World War II. To provide a little background information on the work of these organizations, consult the internet at the following:

Children's Aid Society URL: <http://www.childrensaidsociety.org>

Catholic Relief Services URL: <http://www.crs.org>

American Red Cross URL: <http://www.redcross.org>

It is important for students to know that these organizations have long histories that preceded World War II and that they are still in existence today to provide relief for people in need around the world.

Organize a service project to benefit the local community. This project might be school-wide or organized on a smaller scale by a grade level or individual classroom. An upper grade could also be partnered with a lower grade in this activity. Possibilities include a food drive (in conjunction with a local Food Bank), a clothing drive, a collection of household goods (work with local agencies to identify a list of needed items), or a book drive. (Work with shelters for homeless people of all ages and shelters for women and children regarding clothing and books.) Invite representatives from the targeted agencies to school to talk about their needs and kinds of items they prefer. As much as possible, students should take responsibility for all aspects of the event: planning and making signs and flyers, setting up collection sites, and recording daily contributions. Food drives and book drives are particularly conducive to math activities. For example, students could estimate the amount of food they collect daily and then weigh it to find the actual total. This information could be posted on a graph and displayed in a hallway so that everyone can see how the drive is progressing. The number of books donated could also be graphed.

Practice random acts of kindness in the classroom on a daily basis. Brainstorm a list of "kindnesses" on a chart, that might include small items such as paying a compliment, picking up something that someone dropped, helping someone up who has fallen on the playground, to bigger items, such as helping a classmate with schoolwork, helping to clean the classroom, running errands, and the like. Leave space on the chart next to each item on the list. Make available tiny stickers or colored dots for students to place next to listed items when they do an act of kindness. (Do not have them identify the dots in any individual way so that the class can see that this is a group effort.) Title the chart, "Watch Our Kindness Grow!"

RELATED THEMES:

homelessness
culture of the Netherlands
Character Counts pillar: Caring
natural disasters

RELATED READING RAINBOW PROGRAMS:

Program #116 Fly Away Home
Program #129 Giving Thanks
Program #142 The Tin Forest
Program #145 Our Big Home: An Earth Poem

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

The author of several picture books and biographies for young people, Candace Fleming states that she considered herself a storyteller from the time before she could even write her name. She says that many of her stories were not true, but her parents called them "imaginative" and encouraged her to write them. She then started to fill notebooks with stories, poems, and plays. She still has the notebooks. Reading to her own children helped her decide to become an author. Candace lives near Chicago.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR:

Boxes for Katje is Stacey Dressen-McQueen's first book for children. She researched fabrics and styles from the time and place setting in order to create the illustrations. She used pencil, oil pastel, and acrylics to create the artwork. Stacey lives with her family in Portland, Oregon.

BOOKS REVIEWED BY CHILDREN:

LUBA: THE ANGEL OF BERGEN-BELSEN
as told to Michelle R. McCann by Luba Tryszynska-Frederick. Illustrated by Ann Marshall (Tricycle Press)

THE LADY IN THE BOX

by Ann McGovern, illustrated by Marni Backer (Turtle Books)

THE LIBRARIAN OF BASRA

by Jeanette Winter (Harcourt)

SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKLIST:

GREAT TULIP TRADE

by Beth Wagner Brust, illustrated by Jenny Mattheson (Random House)

MAMA PANYA'S PANCAKES: A VILLAGE TALE FROM KENYA

by Mary Chamberlin, illustrated by Julia Cairns (Barefoot Books)

SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKLIST Continued:

SAM AND THE LUCKY MONEY

by Karen Chinn, illustrated by Cornelius Van Wright & Ying-Hwa Hu (Lee & Low)

THE MITTEN TREE

by Candace Christiansen, illustrated by Elaine Greenstein (Fulcrum)

LOOK WHAT CAME FROM THE NETHERLANDS

by Kevin A. Davis (Scholastic)

UNCLE WILLIE AND THE SOUP KITCHEN

by Dyanne DiSalvo-Ryan (Morrow)

I CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

edited by Marian Wright Edelman, illustrated by Barry Moser (Amistad/HarperCollins)

UNDER THE LEMON MOON

by Edith Hope Fine, illustrated by Rene King Moreno (Lee & Low)

THE FIRST TULIPS IN HOLLAND

by Phyllis Krasilovsky, illustrated by S.D. Schindler (Doubleday)

HARVESTING HOPE: THE STORY OF CESAR CHAVEZ

by Kathleen Krull, illustrated by Yuyi Morales (Harcourt)

HOW TULIPS GROW

by Joanne Mattern (Gareth Stevens)

RENT PARTY JAZZ

by William Miller, illustrated by Charlotte Riley-Webb (Lee & Low)

DOÑA FLOR: A TALL TALE ABOUT A GIANT WOMAN WITH A GREAT BIG HEART

by Pat Mora, illustrated by Raul Colón (Knopf)

SILVER PACKAGES

by Cynthia Rylant, illustrated by Chris K. Soentpiet (Scholastic)

ALIA'S MISSION: SAVING THE BOOKS OF IRAQ

by Mark Alan Stamaty (Knopf)

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