
FLY AWAY HOME

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Teachers should consider the maturity level and life experiences of their students when viewing this program. Discussion of issues related to homelessness might be sensitive for some students, depending on their past and present home situations. Impressionable younger children might find the issues frightening. It is a good idea to inform parents of your intention to address this topic. Invite them to come into the classroom and view the program with the class, loan them a copy of the video, or inform them of the date and time it will be shown by your local PBS station. Some of the discussion areas and activities described below are more appropriate for older students. Use this code when considering appropriateness: P=Primary, I=Intermediate, P-I=both levels.

THEME:

Homelessness results from a variety of situations, and opportunities exist for people of all ages to make a difference in seeking solutions.

PROGRAM SUMMARY:

The feature book is a touching story of a homeless boy and his father who move from terminal to terminal in an airport, trying not to be noticed and discovered. The boy expresses frustration about being homeless, yet he has hope for the future.

Children whose families have been homeless share how this happened and how it felt. LeVar encourages us to make a difference in our communities. Viewers meet a boy who volunteers at City Harvest, an organization which gathers prepared food for distribution to the homeless, and the girl who began Common Cents, an organization whose members collect pennies and use them to buy items for homeless shelters.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

(P-I) Before viewing, explore with the students the concept of “What is ‘home’?” What is needed in order to have a home? Who makes up a home?

(P-I) Obtain a copy of the book and read it to the students. The story presents opportunities for students to engage in some critical thinking: What do we know about large airports that makes them a possible living space for

homeless persons? Would all airports serve equally well for the homeless? Why or why not? Why do the boy and his father dress in blue? What new problems will be created when it is time for Andrew to start school? What is the significance of the bird in the story?

(P-I) The boy and his father try to make themselves as inconspicuous as possible in the story. Consider other places, besides an airport, that could be a “home” for a homeless person—places where large groups of people pass through who are preoccupied with their own lives. What would that person have to do in order to remain unnoticed in that setting?

(I) Discuss the variety of situations that might cause a family to become homeless. (The program will offer some ideas.) Include in the discussion the understanding that living without a home is short term for some people, but may be longlasting for others.

(I) After viewing the program, discuss different emotions that the homeless young people on the video were experiencing (e.g., fear, anger, sadness, joy, envy, etc.) Have students identify circumstances under which these emotions might surface.

CURRICULUM EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

(P-I) Create a semantic map of the word “home.” Begin with “home” as the center of the map. Brainstorm words connected with home and write them on lines radiating from the center. Have students justify their choice of words by explaining why certain words come to mind when they think of “home.”

(I) Have students collect newspaper and magazine articles related to homelessness and make a bulletin board. One side of the board may be information related to issues about homelessness; on the other side, may be strategies and activities of people working toward solutions.

(I) Using the information they gather, have students devise a plan for raising the awareness of people in their community about the issue of homelessness. What types of information do they want people to know? How do they want to share it—a newsletter, letters to the editor of the newspaper, public service announcements? Once they make a decision, have them prepare some materials for dissemination. Investigate the possibility of a business underwriting this activity.

(P-I) Organize a food collecting drive for the local food bank. This drive may be sponsored by a single classroom, grade level, or whole school. Invite a representative from the food bank to school to talk about their needs and the kinds of items they prefer. Students should take the responsibility for all aspects of the event: deciding what information should go on signs and advertisement flyers, making signs and flyers, setting up collection sites, and recording daily contributions. Individual classrooms might estimate the amount of food they collect daily and then weigh it to find the actual total.

Teams of students could compile the daily weights from each room and add the information to a graph posted in a main hallway where everyone could see how the drive is progressing.

(P-I) In the program, young people collected pennies as a donation to the homeless. An activity of this type could be sponsored by a single classroom, grade level, or whole school. Use the empty jar (or jars) as an estimation jar, and have students estimate the number of pennies the jar will hold. Record the estimates and save for comparison later when the jar is full. As the pennies accumulate, use them for other math activities, including counting money and posing problems such as, “How many pennies make a pound?”

(I) Have students investigate the resources, including agencies and organizations in their own community that assist people who have serious needs. They might start with the telephone directory for a listing. Contact these resources for information about the requirements of the people who need help and the services these resources provide. They may also be interested in contacting Common Cents, 685 West End Ave., New York, NY 10025, about their programs that assist homeless families.

(P-I) Invite an administrator from a homeless shelter to the classroom to talk about the regulations, facilities, and needs of a shelter. Students might use information from this person to get ideas for items besides food and pennies that they could gather (e.g., clothing, books, linens, kitchen utensils, etc.). The students could then decide on strategies for collecting these items and conduct a drive.

(P) Have students brainstorm a list of different types of dwellings, e.g., apartment, cabin, condo, house, mobile home, mansion, etc. Although all of them are places in which people live, discuss the characteristics that make them different from one another.

RELATED THEMES:

different types of homes
relocating to a new place
families
making a difference in the lives of others

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Eve Bunting was born in Ireland, but has lived in California most of her adult life. She is the author of more than a hundred picture books and novels for young readers, including *The Wall*, a **Reading Rainbow** feature book.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR:

Ronald Himler recalls an interest in drawing from the time he was a young child. After art school, he worked as a sculptor and toy designer before he

began illustrating children’s books. He has illustrated many picture books in addition to *Fly Away Home*, including *The Wall*, a **Reading Rainbow** feature book, and *Coyote Dreams* and *Dakota Dugout*, both **Reading Rainbow** review books.

BOOKS REVIEWED BY CHILDREN:

HOME: A COLLABORATION OF THIRTY DISTINGUISHED AUTHORS AND ILLUSTRATORS OF CHILDREN’S BOOKS TO AID THE HOMELESS
edited by Michael J. Rosen (HarperCollins)

THE HOMELESS HIBERNATING BEAR
by Kids Livin’ Life (Gold Leaf Press)

UNCLE WILLIE AND THE SOUP KITCHEN
by DyAnne DiSalvo-Ryan (William Morrow)

SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKLIST:

(I) THE LEAVES IN OCTOBER
by Karen Ackerman (Atheneum)

(I) MONKEY ISLAND
by Paula Fox (Orchard)

(P-I) ERIK IS HOMELESS
by Keith Elliot Greenberg, photos by Carol Halebian (Lerner)

(P-I) THIS HOME WE HAVE MADE
by Anna Hammond & Jo Matunis (Crown)

(P-I) WAY HOME
by Libby Hathorn, illus. by Gregory Rogers (Crown)

(P-I) SHOOTING BACK: A PHOTOGRAPHIC VIEW OF LIFE BY HOMELESS CHILDREN
selected by Jim Hubbard (Chronicle)

(P-I) HOTEL BOY
by Curt Kaufman & Gita Kaufman, photos by Curt Kaufman (Atheneum)

(I) MANIAC MAGEE
by Jerry Spinelli (Little, Brown)

(P) SOMEPLACE TO GO
by Maria Testa, illus. by Karen Ritz (Whitman)

(P-I) SOPHIE AND THE SIDEWALK MAN
by Stephanie Tolan, illus. by Susan Avishai (Four Winds)

(P) SPACE TRAVELLERS
by Margaret Wild, illus. by Gregory Rogers (Scholastic)