

Interdisciplinary Ideas

LANGUAGE ARTS

1. In his book *Crow and Weasel*, Barry Lopez writes, "The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them.... Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive." Write a paragraph relating this quote to the girl's question, "What will feed us now?"
2. Research the cello and write an informational paper or create a poster explaining how cellos are made.
3. Write a personal narrative about a time you shared with a special person. Draw "memory pictures" around the border of your story.

SOCIAL STUDIES

1. In groups of three or four, compile a list of "Fast Facts" about the places mentioned in the story where materials in the cello are found: Germany (maple), France (polish), Honduras (mahogany), Ceylon (ebony), Brazil (soft woods) and Africa (ivory). Locate each place on a world map, find out how and where the specific material is obtained and any information about environmental threats. Present your findings to the class.
2. Research the history and geography of the Balkans. Why have so many wars occurred in this region?

ART

1. Look at some of Marc Chagall's prints such as *I and the Village* or *Blue Violinist*. Compare his paintings to Greg Couch's illustration of the girl with her father. Notice floating images and unusual uses of color and size.

MUSIC

1. Listen to Bach's *Suite for Unaccompanied Cello* while drawing with colored chalk or painting with watercolors.
2. Invite a musician to your class to play the cello or harmonica.

The Cello of Mr. O

Jane Cutler
1999
New York: Dutton Children's Books

COURAGE
Sarajevo, Bosnia
Realistic Fiction
Reading Time: 9 minutes

CONCEPTS

Courage
Loyalty
Hope

SUMMARY

From the first line, this story draws the reader into a little girl's life in a city under siege, where "Nothing is as it was." As daily life becomes more difficult, the grumpy neighbor, Mr. O, bravely plays his cello in the town square. His courageous acts give people hope, and the little girl learns that courage sustains just as bread does. Greg Couch's beautiful watercolors reflect the light and hope of the human spirit even in times of war.

OBJECTIVE

The student will be able to define and discuss courage, loyalty and hope as they apply to the story. The student will observe courage, reciprocity and forgiveness as characters endure difficult life situations.

After the Story

The Cello of Mr. O

DISCUSSION

1. What difficulties does the girl face because of the war? What does she think about?
2. Why does her mother decide to stay in the city and not flee as others have done? What made this a hard decision? What Heartwood attributes does her mother model? Explain.
3. How do the girl's feelings about Mr. O change as the story progresses? Why do you think she made her drawing for Mr. O on a paper bag? Does Mr. O forgive her? How do you know?
4. When the cello is destroyed, she asks, "What will feed us now?" What does she mean? How does music feed people? What kind of music makes you feel good?
5. How can one person's courage make others feel less afraid? Who helps you to be brave and how?

ACTIVITIES

1. Find Sarajevo, Bosnia, on the world map and place a story pin.
2. With a partner, list examples of courage, loyalty and hope in the story. Turn a sheet of paper horizontally and draw a cello or harmonica on the left side. Make wavy lines coming out of the instrument and extending across the paper, giving the impression of music. On the lines write examples from the list.
3. Contact your local American Red Cross chapter to see how your class can become involved in projects that help children affected by war (e.g., raising funds for food packages, collecting toys or warm clothing or showing support through cards and letters).
4. Play, sing or whistle the song, "I Whistle a Happy Tune" from *The King and I*. Analyze the lyrics. Do you agree? Why or why not?

JOURNAL

1. Write about forgiveness in the story and in your own experience. How does forgiving involve courage?
2. Pretend you are Mr. O and make three or four brief journal entries from his point of view.

HOME CONNECTION

Retell the story at home. Talk about how people find comfort and courage when they are afraid. With permission, share family responses at school.

VOCABULARY

mortar
besieged
tracer fire
reassuring

distribution center
mahogany
fusillade