

TEACHERS ACTIVITIES



Theme:

Friendship can bridge differences in age and culture.

Topics For Discussion:

Discuss the concept of "friendship" with students. What is needed in a relationship for friendship to occur? What kinds of friends do we have (e.g., school friends, neighborhood friends, family friends, animal friends, book friends, etc.)?



Discuss with students how friendships with older people are different from friendships with people their own age.



Invite students to share stories about older friends. Who are they? How did they become friends? What do they enjoy doing together?



In the story, Larnel learns about the cultural traditions of Jewish people. Communities are often made up of people from different cultural heritages. Discuss events that celebrate different cultures and take place in the students' own community. In which activities do their families participate? Do their families celebrate their own cultural traditions?

Curriculum Extension Activities:

Obtain a copy of the book to read to the class. Put the events of Mrs. Katz's life on a timeline. In order to make the timeline complete, students may wish to estimate the time in years back to the past when Mrs. Katz met her husband and into the future when Larnel is grown with children of his own.



Invite some experts on cats into the classroom as resource persons. Someone who shows or raises cats could talk about cats' unique characteristics and special needs. A veterinarian could talk about ways to keep a cat healthy and how to be a responsible pet owner.

Adopt a local nursing home or retirement home and arrange periodic visits for the students. Before each visit, brainstorm activities they can do with/for their new friends. (Clear the activities with the administrator of the facility well in advance of the visits so alternatives may be planned if needed.) Allow some time after the visits for students to share what they are doing and learning with their new friends.



Extend invitations to elderly family members or friends of class members to visit the classroom. Find out any special talents and interests these people might have that they would be willing to share with the students. For example, a visiting friend might: teach a craft, share a hobby or collection, play a musical instrument, tell about her/his job, cook with the students, tell stories, read to students, and many other activities.



Brainstorm a list of different types of neighborhoods, e.g., small town, rural area, large urban, suburban, etc. Discuss what makes up a neighborhood in general and identify specific features of the neighborhoods they listed. Have students compare and contrast their neighborhood with that of LeVar's "bubee," Shari.



In the program, LeVar mentions many qualities about an urban neighborhood that he really likes. Ask students to think of an attribute of their immediate neighborhood that makes it special. Have each student draw a picture of this special quality and complete the sentence frame, "_____ makes my neighborhood special." Bind the pages into a book.



Make a cat bulletin board. Have students search magazines and newspapers for pictures, cartoons, and articles about cats. Invite students to bring in pictures of their own cats. Include wild cats as well as pet cats. Have students make labels or captions for all the items on the board. They might wish to research various types of wild cats or breeds of domestic cats—have them add information they find to the bulletin board as well.



Have students make "Lost Cat" posters. Before they begin, discuss the types of items they would expect to see on such a poster.

SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKLIST:

AT TAYLOR'S PLACE

by Sharon Phillips Denslow, illus. by Nancy Carpenter (Bradbury)

LOOP THE LOOP

by Barbara Dugan, illus. by James Stevenson (Greenwillow)

MISS TIZZY

by Libba Moore Gray, illus. by Jada Rowland (Simon & Schuster)

BETTER WITH TWO

by Barbara M. Joosse, illus. by Catherine Stock (HarperCollins)

GOOD MORNING, RIVER!

by Lisa Westberg Peters, illus. by Deborah Kogan Ray (Arcade/Little, Brown)

TIKVAH MEANS HOPE

by Patricia Polacco (Doubleday)

SALLY ARNOLD

by Cheryl Ryan, illus. by Bill Farnsworth (Cobblehill)

HENRY AND MUDGE AND THE HAPPY CAT

by Cynthia Rylant, illus. by Suçie Stevenson (Bradbury)

DOWN HOME AT MISS DESSA'S

by Bettye Stroud, illus. by Felicia Marshall (Lee & Low)

THE VERY BEST OF FRIENDS

by Margaret Wild, illus. by Julie Vivas (Gulliver/Harcourt Brace)

MIZ BERLIN WALKS

by Jane Yolen, illus. by Floyd Cooper (Philomel)

I KNOW A LADY

by Charlotte Zolotow, illus. by James Stevenson (Greenwillow)

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Description:

A long-lasting friendship develops between Larnel, a young African-American, and Mrs. Katz, a lonely Jewish widow, when Larnel presents Mrs. Katz with a scrawny kitten without a tail. The book supports the theme that friendship can bridge differences in age and culture, and LeVar celebrates the beauty and value of cross-cultural relationships as he visits his very own "bubee" and learns to make some traditional Jewish foods.



Social Studies Concepts:

- ◆ culture
- ◆ relationships



Classroom Activities:

Culture

In the story, Larnel learns about cultural traditions of Jewish people. Communities often include a variety of people from different cultural heritages. Discuss your community's culturally-centered events.

Do any students and their families participate? How do they participate? Do their families celebrate their cultural traditions in other ways? Host a class Culture Fair where students share one tradition from their heritage. [See Do-At-Home-Activity.] Invite family members to help demonstrate traditions. Students may wish to set up a display, share some special food and/or music and wear native costumes. [Help students who do not have support from home by pairing them with volunteers who can assist them in researching their cultural traditions.]

Culture

In the program, LeVar mentions many qualities about an urban neighborhood that he likes. Have students think about their neighborhood and identify why it's special – perhaps it's the trees in the park, a special smell from a bakery, neighborhood friends, etc. Then ask students to express this in writing, by completing the sentence frame: _____ makes my neighborhood special. Have students illustrate their sentences, bind the pages into a book and put it in the class library so it's available for students and visitor to read.



Ask the school media specialist to find a variety of books featuring a young person enjoying a relationship with an older person. Read several of these with the class. Then have students form groups of three and invite them to share stories about an older friend, telling who they are, how they became friends, what they enjoy doing together, and what makes the person special. Have students write a friendly letter to their older friend expressing why they appreciate this special friendship.



Relationships

Watch the video again or read the book, Mrs. Katz and Tush, to the class. Have students put the events of Mrs. Katz’s life on a timeline. In order to make the timeline complete, help students estimate back to the time when Mrs. Katz met her husband and into the future when Larnel is grown with children of his own. Have students illustrate the timeline with drawings of favorite scenes from the story.



Relationships

Invite a cat expert (e.g. veterinarian, animal shelter worker, experienced cat owner) to visit the class and share what they know about the unique characteristics and special needs of cats. They could talk about ways to keep a cat healthy, how to be a responsible pet owner, why animals can be very good companions for older people, etc. After the visit, have students write illustrated thank you notes to send to the guest.

Do-At-Home Activity:

Family Traditions

Encourage family members to become involved in the class Culture Fair by asking them to discuss with their child a family tradition related to their culture or heritage, to describe it on a page of paper, and to return the page of paper to class. Students will be able to learn a great deal from their families about their own heritage as they plan what they will share with the class.