

Curriculum Guide

The Christmas Mitzvah

by Jeff Gottesfeld, illustrated by Michelle Laurentia Agatha

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Ages:4-8

Curriculum guide available at www.crestonbooks.co Educational Description: Non-fiction narrative, based on true events. Story elements: plot and character development, problem and solution, author's purpose, illustrations enhance meaning and tone, figurative language: simile, hyperbole, metaphor, humor. Themes: kindness, volunteerism, helping others, holidays, celebrations. Back matter: Author's Note.

Guided Reading Level S, Grade Level Equivalent 4, Lexile Level: 800; CCSS/ELA-Literacy: W.2.1,2,3,5,6,7,8; SL.2.1,1b,1c,2,3,4,6; RF.2.3,3c,3d,3f,4,4a,4c; L.2.3,4,4a,4b,4c,5,5a,5b,6; RL.2.1,2,3,4,5,7,10

Themes:

Problem-solving, kindness, helping others, holidays

Al is Jewish, and celebrates Hanukkah. But he still saw a problem one Christmas Eve. What was his solution? Do you think his idea worked? Explain why or why not.

One thing that Al noticed was that different people celebrate different holidays. How did that difference make it easier for him to help people on Christmas?

Make a list of different holidays you know about and who celebrates them. Can you name three Jewish holidays? Three Christian ones? Three Muslim ones? How about three holidays that aren't based on religion?

What does the word "Mitzvah" mean? How do Al and his son Jonathan explain it to Clarence?

Character:

Do you think Al was right to take on jobs he wasn't used to doing? What does it tell you about his personality that he was willing to do all kinds of things he'd never done before?

How would you describe Al's personality? Point to places in the story where you see what kind of person he was.

Plot:

This story isn't about one specific event or one adventure that leads to a conclusion. Instead it is about a decision that is put into action again and again. Al creates a repeatable behavior to make a difference and solve a problem. How does Al make this decision? What habit does he build? How does he share it with others? How does it work well in this story? How do the author and illustrator keep things interesting? Is humor used to enliven the story? Point to specific examples.

The story is unusual, and still builds to a satisfying ending. Explain how the ending reminds you of the beginning. How do you feel when you finish the story? How do you think the author and illustrator want you to feel?

Al does his Christmas mitzvahs for regular people doing basic jobs – dog walkers, egg farmers, mail sorters, and janitors, among others. The author believes the most important line in the book is this one:

“All the folks easy to dismiss in a world that mistakes wealth for worth.”

Why does the author think this line is important? Do you agree that the world mistakes wealth for worth? How would you define “worth”? What makes a person valuable? Some examples could be, how nice they are, how they look, what they do for a job (Is it important? How?). Come up with your own list of things that you think make a person “worthy.”

Al never seeks fame for his Christmas mitzvahs. Attention comes, but he never seeks it out. Why do you think that is? Do you think it was the right thing to do?

Mitzvah Projects

A Mitzvah is a special kind of good deed, done without expecting any reward. What kind of mitzvahs can you do? How does doing nice things for others make you feel? How do you feel when other people do nice things for you? Write and illustrate your own short story about doing a mitzvah, either something you really did or something you wish you could do.