Law Day 2024

It is so important as we focus on the theme- Voices of Democracy that we not forget to heed and celebrate those who have “voiced” their support of democracy on the front lines. Each has served our country well and some have sacrificed their lives, endured physical injuries or continues to deal with the psychological impact of their “voiced” service on behalf of our democracy. Valerie Pfundstein beautifully makes their voices heard and accessible for young readers and readers of all ages. Law Day, Veterans Day and Memorial Day, are not the only days in the calendar we as a nation should celebrate our Veterans Voices.

10. Veterans- Heroes In Our Neighborhood (Pfun-omenal Stories, 2012)

Author: Valerie Pfundstein

Illustrator: Aaron Anderson

 Topics: Veterans, Building Community, Student Leadership, Student Voices, What it means to be an American, Veteran’s Day, Rights and Responsibilities.

Genre: Non-fiction narrative, non-fiction narrative, authentic classroom based projects, community-based non-fiction picture books.

Grades 3-5.

This story focused on an authentic elementary school project dealing with November Veteran Day observances, offers educators a highly accessible illustrated narrative for introducing this civic topic. For many students and even for many adults, Veteran’s Day, unless they have a family connection to a living veteran or a deceased hero, just offers a day off from work or school. This simple succinct narrative with its well positioned one or two character illustrations, deftly explains what it means to have been a veteran serving one’s country and how after service in any branch of the armed forces, the veteran remains in the community. Through the narrative, the author whose husband served in the military and then became a firefighter, demonstrates to elementary students that veterans are not disconnected heroes for a designated day, but actually are members of their families and communities. The narrative which includes explicit rhyming verse, also details how the veterans who served their country, returned to their communities to also serve. Some of their community roles in the narrative reflect skills they learned as part of their service such as: barber (someone who did that in the military), mechanic, nurse, and firefighter and beyond. In addition to emphasizing that veterans are part of the student community, the author and illustrator actually include several take action projects, students can implement after the read aloud. Most importantly given the high price paid by many who serve, the narrative includes an explanation of Gold Star parents who lose their sons and daughters during their service to our country and to ways take action projects can include cemetery honoring of veterans no longer with us. The back material includes two projects, a trading card or plaque and a portrait gallery. Implementing either of these two projects as a Take Action project can make Veteran Day Observances so live and personal for every student community.

Talking Points:

Before the Read Aloud:

1. Veteran’s Day is coming up. Why is this a designated calendar day for us to learn about veterans? Do we know any veterans? What does it mean to be a veteran in the nuanced way that veteran is used in social studies? Might there be veterans in our school we do not know are veterans? Explain.

Do not provide any answers for the students, but record their responses on an experiential chart which they will revisit after the story read aloud.

During the Read Aloud:

1. What is the project the teacher suggests to the students? Were that project to be assigned in this class, how many persons in our class might be able to identify veterans in our families or neighborhood? What groups might help you or could your research to find more veterans than you or your families know at this moment? How would you do that research?
2. What service roles are there in the military forces beyond ground combat? Identify those mentioned in the story. Answers: paratrooper, mechanic, nurse, medic, air force pilot, sailor, maintenance engineer, radio technician, reservist, and others.
3. How are veterans honored for their service and sacrifice? If a veteran is buried, how can that person be honored for service during the November Commemoration? Why is it important to honor those not related to us, for their service to our country? What wars are in the illustrations for the cemetery which you may or may not have studied?

5. Take Action Project:

Usually at the end of a Read Aloud, the reader or teacher provides a single take action or more than one for students to do as citizens. In this book, author Valerie Pfundstein and illustrator Aaron Anderson have suggested two at the end of their narrative. What are they?

The two take action projects identified by the students will be:

1. Thank you cards or posters for addressed to specific family or local veterans or school staff they identified in their own survey of family, school and community. Of course, there may be an actual active Veterans Association chapter they can reach out and access. Participating in a local or community Veteran’s Day Ceremony or Parade with the signs or cheering from the sidelines is a perfect way to inculcate lifelong appreciation of veteran contributions.
2. A Template is provided at the back of the book for a My Neighborhood Hero trading card or gallery poster of individual local, neighborhood or family connected veterans with details of year, branch, rank and other notes/reflection upon service. Creating this project will of course involve the student in authentic primary source or secondary source research. Most importantly, both these projects will truly honor and celebrate the veterans who are on the receiving hand for them.

Other works middle school students might investigate include:

Gordon Korman, War Stories.

Brenda Woods, The Unsung Hero of Birdsong, USA.

Michael Morpurgo, Half a Man.

Mary Jennings Hegar. Shoot Like a Girl.