

The Lunch Thief

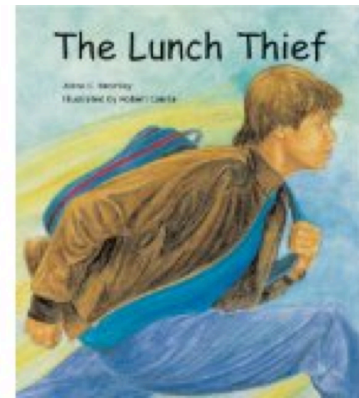
Anne C. Bromley

Illustrated by Robert Casilla

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9 x 10, 32 pages, color illustrations

Children; Grades 2-6



When Rafael sees the new kid Kevin steal his lunch, he doesn't confront him because he doesn't want a fight. After witnessing two more thefts, Rafael moves into action—but with words not with fists. By reaching out to Kevin with kindness, by inviting Kevin to share his lunch, Rafael stops the thefts and makes a potential new friend.

The Lunch Thief can be used for curriculum centered on nonviolence and peacemaking. Discussions might include:

- How to turn an enemy into a friend
- Nonviolent communication skills
- Looks can be deceiving
- Wildfires and ecology
- Disaster relief
- Hunger in our own country

Additional Books

***Playing War* by Kathy Beckwith (Tilbury House, Publishers, 2005)**

When a new boy resists playing "war," the neighborhood kids rethink their game in light of the new boy's experiences.

***The Goat Lady* by Jane Bregoli (Tilbury House, Publishers, 2004)**

Everyone in town complains about the messy goat lady, but after two siblings get to know and understand her, the Goat Lady is revealed as a kind, generous, and friendly person.

***Say Something* by Peggy Moss (Tilbury House, Publishers, 2006)**

Reaching out with friendship helps one girl change from being a silent bystander to doing something positive to counter bullying and teasing in her school.

***Our Friendship Rules* by Peggy Moss and Dee Dee Tardif (Tilbury House, Publishers, 2007)**

Two girls re-establish their friendship after one breaks the trust they share.

***Keep Your Ear on the Ball* by Genevieve Petrillo (Tilbury House, Publishers, 2007)**

How a classroom learns to help a fellow student (who happens to be blind) while still respecting his need

Activity: Getting Inside Kevin's Head/Getting Inside Rafael's Head

Kevin is too proud to share a lunch without paying for it, but not too proud to steal a lunch. Why is that?

- You might start this discussion by asking your students to list Kevin's motivations for stealing lunches. Now list the possible consequences. Then list why Kevin might not ask for help from the school or his teacher to get lunch.
- Rafael does not want to fight. Why not? Why does he decide to bring part of his lunch to Kevin? What happens as a result?

Activity: Debate

Set up two sides and challenge them to support their cause. Here are some debate suggestions:

- Is it ever okay to steal?
- Is charity a crutch for lazy people or is charity a way to help people through hard times?
- Which is more effective: fighting or talking?

Activity: Research Questions

Learning how to gather information is an important part of being a good citizen. Have your students do the research to find out:

- If Kevin went to your school, how could he get lunch without having to pay for it?
- What is the rate of hunger in school-age children in your county, state, and in the U.S.?
- How is "hunger" defined?

An Interview with Author Anne C. Bromley

Why did you write about the San Diego fires?

Fire is to San Diego County as snow is to Maine: a fact of life. It is said that when Cabrillo landed at Point Loma in 1598, he saw smoke rising from the distant eastern foothills. He'd arrived during the fire season (roughly August through early November). Some fire seasons are worse than others, and the firestorms of 2003 and 2007 are, so far, the most extreme on record. Everyone is affected, whether one sees flames leaping across a freeway or one breathes air so toxic, one must wear a surgical mask. So fire is in the back of our minds, and it seemed appropriate to use the fire and its impact on Kevin's life as a way to "explain" his odd behavior and to lead Rafael to a better understanding.

What is your connection to the fires?

I lived within ten minutes of the fire line (I live on the coast). The smoke filled my lungs. I did not see flames, but I had an evacuation pack ready at the front door. The Reverse 911 call was always possible. I had friends in the East County who were evacuated and one whose trailer burned.

What do you like about this manuscript?

Rafael has a strong narrative voice that drives the story forward at a fast clip. Repetition (several days of stolen lunches) draws the reader into the action. Symbols (the lemon cake; the quarter) and a contemporary situation (the wildfires forcing people to be relocated) add depth to the story. The story is structured so that Rafael can resolve the conflict in a manner that is satisfying and shows character growth: he has turned an enemy into a potential friend, and he comes to realize that appearances and behavior can be deceiving.

What is the significance of Kevin offering Rafael a quarter in the last line?

Kevin is happy to have lunch, BUT he will not accept charity. He's too proud for that.

What else can you tell us about the book that would be helpful?

I believe that young readers will gain a great deal from this book. In addition to offering a good story and characters they can relate to, the book presents issues for them to ponder and discuss: the perils of easy judgment; the effects of circumstances on behavior; how to turn someone who seems like an enemy into a potential friend through empathy and understanding.

Internet Resources

Nonviolence for Children

The NonViolence in the Lives of Children Project website has an excellent bibliography for children, which can be found in its resources section at

www.nvpchildren.org

For background on nonviolent communication, please see

www.cnvc.org/

A great list of children's picture books about peace is available at

peacestudycenter.org/resource-lists/picture-books/

Wildfires and the Environment

An excellent and very informative site on wildfires is the San Diego Wildfires Education Project, out of the San Diego State University Foundation. This site includes curriculum and resources, especially on the environmental impact of the wildfires.

interwork.sdsu.edu/fire/purpose.htm

The San Diego Wildfires Education Project also includes statistics and photographs from the 2007 fires and a brief overview of the frequency of wildfires in California and western states:

interwork.sdsu.edu/fire/resources/2007_fires.html

Information on the human health impact of the wildfires that would be interesting material for a class or several classes on air quality is at

sis.nlm.nih.gov/enviro/californiafires.html

Smokey the Bear offers user-friendly explanations about wildfires, fire prevention, and fire safety at this site includes information on prescribed fires as well as an explanation of why fire can be good for a forest

www.smokeybear.com/wildfires.asp

Disaster Relief and Helping Hands

A local newspaper, the Union-Tribune, sponsors a website for those wanting to help or in need of help to communicate. When talking to your class about community and philanthropy, this might be an interesting site to explore:

legacy.signonsandiego.com/news/metro/fireblog/help.html

Hunger and Children in the United States

For a kid-friendly resource on hunger and children, please check out

www.kidscanmakeadifference.org

For teacher/parent/adult perspective, read this commentary, "Lunches, Diets, and Hunger: Suburban America" by Kirsten Anderberg, which appeared on the Hip Mama website first in 2004:

www.hipmama.com/node/3648

For a very thought-provoking site on world hunger (including hunger issues in the United States), that includes teacher information and is written by a worldwide student and teacher team, please see

library.thinkquest.org/C002291/high/index2.htm

For a site on Service Learning and Hunger, please see

www.facingthefuture.org/ServiceLearning/FastFactsQuickActionsforStudents/Hunger/tabid/186/Default.aspx

Another interesting site on world hunger and a curriculum to help students understand the effects of hunger on behavior is

www.feedingminds.org

This site connects you to local food banks and discusses hunger relief:

www.feedingamerica.org