

Military Service Members' Simple Acts of Caring Bring Unity and Hope

'This lesson has 2 stories. The first story is a video and the second short story can be read by the leader or student/s. The lesson can be presented over 1-2 sessions. Instructors should feel free to use whichever discussion questions and activities you think best for your class or group. We advise giving students the sheet with the definitions of the virtues before each session.

Lesson Goals

Help students:

- appreciate how simple acts of caring can establish unity and solidarity with others whom we have little in common.
- appreciate how simple acts of caring can build forgiveness.
- become inspired to live out simple acts of caring within their school and community – even with others whom they may have difficult problems.
- understand how simple acts of caring can give others hope for a better future.
- realize how the virtues of caring, solidarity and hope are relevant and powerful forces for good across cultures and time.
- realize that military service doesn't only involve fighting the enemy, but can also include serving civilians in the areas where service members are deployed.
- appreciate the service of those who have served in the military throughout our nation's history and today, especially as we celebrate Veterans Day.
- become more aware of veterans and active duty service members who live within our communities.

Primary Virtues

Caring: to help others; a caring person lives with empathy in trying to understand another person's situation, compassion in desiring to help others, and then with generosity in acting to help

Hope: confident expectation of achieving a goal or wish

Solidarity: unity from a shared common purpose and / or interest; active loyalty within a group; mutual support within a group; being present with others

Secondary Virtue

Forgiveness: to stop being angry, resentful and desiring vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you; to grant pardon for an offense or debt; to free yourself from anger and another from guilt

Leader Introduction to Story 1

After Germany was defeated in World War II, the major countries that won the war – America, Great Britain, France and Russia - divided Germany and its capital city of Berlin into occupied sectors. In 1948 Russia decided that it wanted to control all of Berlin and so blockaded the area of West Berlin controlled by America, France and Great Britain and prevented those people from receiving food and essential supplies. As the situation became increasingly dire for the citizens of West Berlin, the United States made the decision to airlift supplies into West Berlin to alleviate the suffering of the citizens and to prevent Russia from gaining complete control of the capital. Pilots began flying missions almost non-stop into West Berlin with food, fuel and other essential supplies. One of those pilots, Gail Halverson, noticed how much the children of Berlin appreciated even the smallest piece of candy, and from this observation Halverson developed a wonderful plan.

Film Clip of Gail Halverson, “The Candy Bomber”

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4SWx0XfxVw>

Or

- <https://www.ksl.com/?sid=31563433>

Story 2 – read by the leader or student/s

The Candy Bomber is an inspiring story from our nation’s history. Now let’s discuss a more current story of American soldiers showing their care for others. In 2003 the US invaded the country of Iraq as part of our nation’s war on terrorism. In addition to defeating the dictator of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, we also hoped to help the Iraqi people build a better future for themselves. One endeavor to do this was Operation Iraqi Children, a program set up by American civilians in 2004 that gave Americans a way to reach out to the war-stricken children of Iraq by donating school supplies and sports equipment that were then given by our soldiers to children throughout Iraq. Operation Iraqi Children eventually delivered over a quarter of a million school supply kits, more than half a million toys and thousands of blankets, backpacks, pairs of shoes, and sets of sports equipment.

The need for Operation Iraqi Children can be summarized by this letter from Army Chaplain and Captain Kevin Wainwright which states in part, “We have been working hard to reopen schools that have been closed for three weeks. Insurgents have purposely targeted them with threats and mortar attacks. Once we get the schools open, however, we still face a critical shortage of supplies.Let me share with you this true story about the need over here. We were on a combat patrol and stopped at a cluster of houses along the Tigris River. As the platoon leader spoke with the village men, a large group of children inevitably clustered around us. We started to pass out some food and candy, which they were asking for, until one of them spied the pens a soldier had tucked in his sleeve. One after another of the *children started asking for pens instead of the candy or food.* For you see, over here, one cannot go to school unless you bring your own supplies. We are in a poor area and are doing all we can, but we could sure use your help.” What an incredible reality that the children in this poor area and throughout much of Iraq prefer school supplies over candy and food.

The actual impact that Operation Iraqi Children had with the children they reached is best stated by an email (original spelling maintained) sent from an Iraqi teenager in 2007 and reads in part, “My name is Hadeel and I am 18 years old girl from Iraq, Baghdad. i am very greatful to your help to iraqi children ...its nice to know there still good people in this world...in fact you made alot of kids happy because you gave them the hope of new life and the encouragement and the feeling they are important thank you all and let God bless you!”

The stories of the Candy Bomber and Operation Iraqi Children show us how simple acts of caring can bring others hope and establish unity and solidarity between people with very little in common. Let’s now talk about how these stories speak to our lives.

(Letters: <http://www.operationiraqchildren.org/> - click onto “OIC in Action” and then “Recipients”)

Discussion Question Options *(discussion prompts / answers are in parentheses if needed)*

Before beginning our discussion, let's read over the virtues and their definitions - included within the online lesson as a separate document.

1. How did American soldiers and the American people demonstrate they cared for people in Berlin Germany and the children of Iraq?

2. What are the virtues that Captain Halverson lived out in coming up with his idea and then actually bringing candy to the children of Berlin? (Caring – encourage students to discuss the pillars of caring: first empathy, then compassion and finally acting with generosity)

3. In 1948 when Halverson brought candy to the children of Berlin, it was only 3 years after American bombers nearly completely destroyed their city causing tremendous suffering. Halverson commented in the video that as they brought candy to the children “gratitude breaks down walls”, and he said, the children had “a forgiveness, 8- to 15 year-old (childlike) forgiveness. Pure innocence.”

What does this statement tell us about our ability to forgive? (We have the ability to forgive - even significant acts that cause us pain and suffering.)

4. Halverson’s statement that “gratitude breaks down walls” shows us how simple acts of caring can also bring unity and solidarity between people who were outright enemies – even those fighting each other in war.

Let’s now discuss how this story and Captain Halverson’s statements speak to us today. We’ll consider whether simple acts of caring can encourage forgiveness and build unity between groups who may not like each other, and may even view each other as enemies.

- What walls exist between different groups within our school and community as a whole?

(Please write these on the board).

- Now what simple acts of caring can we do to build forgiveness and unity to breakdown these barriers? No proposed idea for an act of caring is too small, so please propose any simple acts that come to mind.

- Now let’s share some stories where for ourselves, or for someone else, a simple act of caring helped us or someone else to forgive or to come closer together. (This is also a journal writing option below.)

5. Halverson recalled in an interview receiving a letter from a man who as a child had received a bar of Hershey chocolate from one of Halverson’s missions. The man wrote, "The chocolate was wonderful, but the chocolate was not what was important," Halvorsen recalled. "He said, "What was important was that somebody knew I was in trouble, and somebody cared. That stayed with me. And that was hope.”

Along the same theme, the Iraqi teenager who wrote the thank you letter to Operation Iraqi Children wrote, “you made alot of kids happy because you gave them the hope of new life and the encouragement and the feeling they are important.”

What are the thoughts and emotions expressed in these statements that gave the boy in Berlin in the 1940s and the girl in Iraq in 2007 hope for a better future? I'll read their statements again. (Hope came from the fact that somebody cared about them and actually did something for them, also from the knowledge and feeling that they were important to someone else.)

Let’s share some stories where for ourselves, or for someone else, a simple act of caring gave us or someone else a sense of hope? (This is also a journal writing option below.)

6. What can we learn from the Iraqi children asking for school supplies over candy and food? Does this story change how we view and will now approach our own our education?

7. In a different video Halverson said, "If we get outside ourselves in the road of life for someone who is struggling more than you are, then you are going to be rewarded in a way you will never know." What do you think Halverson mean by this?

8. Do these stories surprise you that people in the military have in the past, and still today, go out of their way to help others in need? Does this change your perspective of what it means to serve in the military?

In addition to these stories, in what other ways do people in the military help others in need? (Disaster relief in treating the wounded, finding survivors and delivering supplies; Holiday gifts for children through the Marine Corp Toys for Tots drive)

Journal Writing Options

1. Write about an experience where you, or someone else you know, experienced a simple act of caring and that gave you or another person a sense of hope.
2. Write about an experience where you received or enacted a simple act of kindness or caring with someone else, and that helped you to forgive or to come closer together.

Veterans' Day Extended Activities:

1. Most of us probably know someone who is or has served in the military. If possible, interview that person or someone who knows his or her story. Ask them:
 - what branch of the military did they serve in and what was their job.
 - whether they, or someone that they knew in the service, helped people in need and what this involved.
 - to share what was for them the best part of being in the military, as well as their biggest challenge.Ask students to then share their stories with your group as a whole.
2. Ask students to each make a point of thanking a veteran who served our nation through their military service.
3. Make students aware of Veterans Day activities in your community and encourage them to participate.

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