

TEACHING
TOLERANCE



EARLY GRADES ACTIVITY

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The Gift Book

Assemble "The Gift" book by cutting along the designated lines. Secure with staples. We recommend printing one book in color for whole class reading, as colors play a role in the story narrative. After introducing the book to the class, black-and-white copies can be sent home with students to support reading with parents and guardians.



The Gift

by Jennifer Holladay

*illustration by
Susan Estelle Kwas*



Ms. Gonzales handed out blank sheets of paper.

“Your homework ...,” she began.

“Awwwww!” The students’ groans interrupted her. It was Friday. There wasn’t supposed to be homework over the weekend!

Ms. Gonzales continued, “Your homework, children, is to draw a map of the presents in your neighborhood.”

Max was confused. He raised his hand. “You hid gifts for us in our neighborhoods?”

The final bell rang at that very moment, and everyone ran out the door before Ms. Gonzales could respond.

Max sat in his room looking at the blank sheet of paper.

He was mad about having to do homework over the weekend, especially because he had no idea where to find the gifts Ms. Gonzales had hidden. It didn't seem fair.

But he had to start somewhere. He wrote the words "Max's Map" at the top of the page and drew his apartment building with an "x" on it.

There was a knock at his door, and Chloe walked in. She was Max's best friend.

"You want to watch some TV?" she asked.

"I can't," Max said. And then he explained the homework.

"I know! Let's go to the park," Chloe said. "Maybe she hid the presents there."





Max and Chloe looked everywhere. They looked on the slide and on the swings. They looked in the sandbox and in the trees. They sat on a park bench to pet the friendly dogs who came by with their owners. Big dogs, little dogs, all kinds of dogs.

And they asked the dogs' owners if they'd seen any presents lying around. No one had.

"Where could the gifts be?" Max asked, shaking his head.

"Let's go to Mr. Jack's store," Chloe said.

"Why would Ms. Gonzales hide a present there?" Max asked.

"I don't know, but I'm thirsty," Chloe said.

Mr. Jack's store had the best drinking fountain around. The water was always cold and clear. Chloe gulped and gulped. Max did the same when it was his turn.

"Maybe we should look around," Max said. "This could be a good place to hide a gift."

Mr. Jack sold all kinds of things—paints and seeds and light bulbs and hammers and tools that were a mystery. Like the machine Max was looking at. It looked like a big metal vacuum cleaner, but with claws and blades underneath it.

"Found something you like, Max?" Mr. Jack's voice was deep, but always friendly.

"What is it, Mr. Jack?"

"An electric tiller."

"A what?" Chloe asked.

"It breaks up soil before planting," Mr. Jack said. "Ms. Au came by this morning and rented one. She and the twins were going to start their spring planting today."



Max knew it was unlikely that Ms. Gonzales had hidden the gift at Ms. Au's house. But he and Chloe really wanted to see the tiller in action, plus the twins, Lei and Chen, were their friends.

Ms. Au looked different. She wore big goggles over her eyes and was moving the tiller over the ground. It roared and choked and sputtered and roared again as it chopped into the dirt.

"Hey, Ms. Au! Hey, Lei! Hey, Chen!" Chloe called out with a wave.

The twins were looking at a sheet of paper.

"What's that?" Max asked loudly, trying to be heard over the tiller's roar.

"It's the chart for our garden," Lei said, just as loudly. "We're planting lettuce and leeks and beets—all kinds of vegetables.

We need to make sure we have all the right seeds."

Working together, the four children matched seeds to each section of the chart.

Just then, the tiller fell silent, and Ms. Au let out a big "WHEW!"

"OK, kids, I'm ready for the seeds," she said.

The children found the right spot for each kind of seed and dropped them into the ground.



“I’ll finish up,” said Ms. Au. “Why don’t you kids go to the library? I think it’s snack time over there. And, Max and Chloe, thanks for your help. You’ll have to come back for dinner when it’s time to harvest!”

The library always had books, but on the weekend it also had special events and snacks. Max and Chloe, and Lei and Chen, walked into the events room, expecting their usual treats of lemonade and cookies.

But that’s not what they found. Instead, they found cabbage. Lots of cabbage.

“Yuck!” they all said with a groan.

“It’s actually a very cool vegetable,” said a woman in a white coat.



Max looked at Chloe. Chloe looked at Lei. Lei looked at Chen. Chen looked at the woman. They weren’t sure anything about cabbage could be cool.

“I’m Lecia Price,” the woman said, holding up two big handfuls of shredded purple cabbage. “Want to make it change colors?”

“Cool!” the kids said.



With Ms. Price's help, they put the purple cabbage and water into a blender and turned it on. Then they poured the mixture through a strainer and poured equal parts of the purple juice into two clear bowls.

Ms. Price handed Max and Chloe a spoon with a clear liquid in it. "Vinegar," she said.

She handed Lei and Chen a spoon with a white powder in it. "Baking soda," she said.

"Now, mix the contents of your spoon into one of the bowls."

The liquid in Max and Chloe's bowl turned a reddish color. In Lei and Chen's bowl, it turned a blue-green.

"Whoa! How'd that happen?" Max asked.

"Chemicals," said Ms. Price. "Everything is made out of chemicals. Some things, like vinegar, are acids. Others, like baking soda, are bases."

"What's the cabbage?" asked Lei.

"Cabbage juice is a neutral, in between an acid and a base," said Ms. Price. "It's also an indicator, so when you add an acid or base, it changes colors. The color lets you know which you added."

"Cool!"





On Sunday afternoon, Max sat in his room worried. He hadn't found any of the gifts Ms. Gonzales had left in the neighborhood. The presents hadn't been at the park, or at Mr. Jack's, or at Lei and Chen's house or at the library.

"Well, at least I had fun with my friends," Max thought.

It really had been a fun weekend, a lot better than watching TV, which is what he and Chloe usually did.

When Max arrived in class the next day, he was still worried about his homework. As everyone settled in, Max noticed the other students seemed worried, too. Maybe they hadn't found Ms. Gonzales' hidden presents either.

Ms. Gonzales came in, smiled and said, "I have something to share."

She pressed a button on her computer and a definition for community popped up on the screen.



Community: *all the people living in a particular area or place*

"When I was a little girl, my mom used to say that communities are full of gifts," Ms. Gonzales said. "Looking at the definition, what do you think those gifts might be? Think about it for a couple of minutes and then write down your thoughts."

Max read the words on the board and then thought about what Ms. Gonzales' mom said, and, all of a sudden, it finally made sense!

My neighborhood gave me a lot of gifts this weekend. I got to play at the park with Chloe and meet lots of cool dogs. I got to drink out of the fountain at Mr. Jack's store. I got to plant vegetables at the Au's house, and they invited me to dinner, too. I learned that cabbage is really, really cool. But most of all, I learned to appreciate my friends—old friends like Chloe and Mr. Jack, Ms. Au and Lei and Chen, and new friends like Ms. Price, the scientist. My neighborhood is a community; its gifts are the people. The presents were there all along.





When Ms. Gonzales returned Max's essay and map to him at the end of the week, she gave him a gift at last:

A+

What a gift it is to live in this community!