

CHICKEN SOUP FOR THE SOUL MUSICAL THEATRE TEACHER'S COMPANION

THE TRUE GIFT



Description of the story:

The school's "Secret Buddy" week was supposed to be a supportive exercise where students secretly raised the spirits and esteem of their assigned "buddy" through simple acts of kindness. But it quickly turned into an exercise of materialism – a gifting frenzy, where students are receiving increasingly expensive gifts as the week goes on.

Our main character, Eva, has been trying to connect with the popular kids, and thinks that by receiving wonderful gifts she will be accepted into their group. But instead, her buddy has only given her friendly cards.

On the last day of "Secret Buddy" week, Eva comes to school to find a beautifully wrapped gift on her desk. Her classmates gather around as she begins to unwrap the present, and she is basking in the attention. But her hopeful anticipation is quickly replaced by embarrassment when the removal of the wrapping paper reveals a used candle. Amid laughter and wise cracks, she runs to the bathroom to compose herself. While there, she laughs off the gift as "stupid and lame," and is confronted by Rochelle, who was in a bathroom stall. Rochelle confesses to being Eva's buddy, and runs from the bathroom, upset and even more embarrassed than Eva was. Left alone in the bathroom, Eva quickly regrets how thoughtless and self-centered she had been all week.

Eventually, the two girls reconcile and come to understand that they were both struggling with the same goal: to belong.

Description of the Lesson:

Throughout middle school students compare themselves to other the kids in so many ways, and the delineation between the “haves” and the “have nots” becomes clear. At even this young age, children are bombarded with messages from social media and society about a value system that equates wealth with self-worth. Often, they’ll believe that material possessions can somehow quell their insecurities and give them emotional and social status within their peer groups. This lesson will help students understand that their motivations may be sometimes driven, even subconsciously, by social hierarchy structures. Through literacy-based activities, student-facilitated discussions and educator-led follow-ups, students will not only learn to recognize their own personal value systems, but they will gain a better understanding of their relationships with their family and friends.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Objectives:

1. The value of relationships and whether materialism has a role in those relationships.
2. Avoiding value judgments based on materialism and superficiality.
3. Sensitizing students to be compassionate to other people’s personal situations.

SEL Compliance Checklist

This lesson addresses all five SEL competencies as defined by the Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL):

- ✓ Self-Management
- ✓ Self-Awareness
- ✓ Social Awareness
- ✓ Relationship Skills
- ✓ Responsible Decision-Making

Literacy Prompts (to facilitate conversation and/or writing):

1. When Rochelle came out of the bathroom stall, why do you think she admitted to Eva that she was her Secret Buddy? What does this tell you about Rochelle’s character?
2. Have you ever done something to impress other kids that you have regretted?
3. Have you ever given a gift to someone that they didn’t like? How did that make you feel? Have you ever received a gift that you didn’t like? How did you react?

4. "Generosity is giving more than you can and pride is taking less than you need." - Khalil Gibran. Write a short essay describing what that quote means to you.

Anchor Questions (larger, essential questions that guide students to reflect on their learning):

1. Do you get anything by giving?
2. Does a gift have to be purchased to be valuable?
3. Does expectation play a role in adding value to, or devaluing, gifts?