

A Doll Named Nobody

Giving a doll character through good deeds helps build a child's self-esteem.

by Julie Gilbert-Knight

"In helping others, we shall help ourselves, for whatever good we give out completes the circle and comes back to us."

Flora Edwards

Building character in kids is an important task for both teachers and parents. We want our kids to display such traits as respect, responsibility, empathy, fairness, selflessness and charity. With our help, our kids can grow into contributing adults who are able to think beyond their own personal needs and gratification.

As both a grade 3 teacher and a parent, I was pleased to come across a tool that helps develop kids' characters in a meaningful and creative way. "Who is Nobody" is a process that helps students build self-esteem and confidence by teaching them to take personal and social responsibility for a local or global cause. And, as I discovered in my class, it's highly effective.

Building a somebody

Here's how the "Who is Nobody?" process works. The class is given a doll named "Nobody". Made of denim, the doll has no gender, no features, no identity, no friends, no abilities, no age, no inter-



ests, and no character. Nobody gradually turns into a "somebody" with lots of character as each student takes on a project that helps a living thing (person, animal, environment) by using his/her own unique talents and abilities. Each student gets to take the doll home for a week and decorate it with an object that represents and symbolizes the project he/she has spearheaded. The student then presents the doll, their story and a picture to the class.

My class of 8-year-olds was very excited by their projects, which included:

- ♣ helping soldiers in Afghanistan by sending them used books and videos and creating awareness around the Wounded Warrior Project;
- ♣ helping Shane Bernier, a 7-year-old boy with leukemia, reach his goal of receiving the most birthday cards by his 8th birthday for a world record;
- ♣ collecting pop tabs towards the purchase of wheelchairs;
- ♣ creating awareness about AIDS orphans in Africa, the endangered Panda Bear, and the impact of global warming on the Polar Bear by making posters, making school announcements, informing family and friends, and showing people how they can help;
- ♣ sponsoring a child at Christmas; and
- ♣ starting a used cell phone/inkjet cartridge program in our school.

I witnessed a great sense of delight and accomplishment among my students, thanks to the "Who is Nobody" program. It showed them through experience that they can have a beneficial impact on many issues we face in our communities and globally. Our world is a better place because of the efforts of a group of 8-year-olds!

I was able to bring Nobody into my classroom with the help of the Port Hope Rotary Club. The program's corporate sponsors are The Printing House and Rotary International. Parents and teachers who would like to see the program in their child's school or classroom should go to www.whoisnobody.com to find out more.

Julie Gilbert-Knight is a third grade teacher at North Hope Central Public School and the mother of two teenagers, Jak and Hailiah.

Building character at home

As a parent, you can build confidence and other positive traits in your child by getting him or her to help out in the community. Here are some suggestions for simple things your child can do:

- take on the family composting responsibilities for a month or two;
- sort through toys and games and donate the ones no longer in use to a women's shelter or charity;
- plant flowers for an elderly neighbour;
- hold a sale (garage or lemonade) to raise funds for a cause like an animal shelter;
- make Easter cards for someone in a nursing home or hospital.

Who is Nobody?

This character education tool helps kids build important life skills that will help them for years to come.

The program is particularly effective at:

- building self-esteem and confidence
- developing problem-solving skills
- fostering an optimistic outlook
- developing empathy
- promoting social responsibility
- building community connections
- improving social skills

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