



Discussion Guide for

THE WONDERFUL TOWER OF WATTS

Author:

Patricia Zelver

Illustrated By:

Frané Lessac

Publisher:

Tarnbourine Books

THEME:

In Watts, as in all communities, an appreciation for the people and the structures builds pride in the community, in spite of societal problems and other obstacles.

PROGRAM SUMMARY:

The Wonderful Towers of Watts, narrated by Angela Bassett, explores the beauty and courage of a community challenged daily by violence. In a revealing segment, LeVar meets with children from Watts, who share their hopes, concerns and future aspirations for themselves and their community with viewers.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

Before viewing the program, begin to build a definition of "community" with the students. Identify what makes up a community. Note all of their thoughts on a chart so that they can add to it after they have viewed the program and read books. Extend the discussion to include ideas for how a community can be made stronger.

Discuss with the students the different communities to which they belong, e.g., the classroom community, the community of all the children and teachers at their grade level, the school

community, their own neighborhood, and their town or city. What are some common threads across these communities?

Have the students compare their larger community with the Watts community shown on the program. What features do communities have in common regardless of their location or size?

Pose these problems to the students: In an effort to maintain a nonviolent world, what can children do to help create a peaceful community for themselves? What kinds of choices can they make in an effort to create a productive, safe life for themselves in a community where violence is a problem?

The story presents opportunities for students to engage in some critical thinking: Why did old Sam build the towers? What did the towers represent for him (or mean to him)? What

were his feelings when he moved away? Why did he never come back to see the towers again?

CURRICULUM EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

Have the students think of someone they admire from their community (or neighborhood) and write a short piece about that person and why they admire her/him. Include photographs or drawings. Put all the pieces on a "Local Heroes" bulletin board.

Have students write letters to appropriate community leaders or to the newspaper encouraging efforts to stop violence in our society.

Research background information on the Towers of Watts. For example, how tall are they? In what year were they completed? Have students think of other questions they would like to have answered.

Working in cooperative groups, have students construct towers. Depending upon the availability of materials, there are several ways to do this activity. Students could use a variety of math manipulatives to build table-top towers. They could use recyclable materials to build towers in the classroom. With adult supervision and a greater array of materials, they could construct towers outside on the school grounds. It is important that groups make a plan for their tower before they begin building. The plan may be modified as they work, but it will provide a starting point. With regard to safety considerations, the class as a whole should decide what materials are not appropriate for use and the limitations on size and methods of construction.

View other READING RAINBOW programs that show the vibrancy of different types of communities. Encourage students to notice not only the qualities that make these communities unique, but also the characteristics that they share. Possible programs include: Borregueta and the Coyote

(Mexican-American community), Liang and the Magic Paintbrush (New York's Chinatown), Legend of the Indian Paintbrush (Taos Pueblo, New Mexico), The Milk Makers (farm). My Little Island (Caribbean), The Lotus Seed (Vietnam, Yemen, Russia, South Africa), and others.

Have students interview someone who has lived in their neighborhood (or community) a long time about how it has changed over the years. The class should be responsible for generating the questions they wish to ask in the interview.

Have students conduct a survey of adults about structures in the community that people take pride in. (structures might be physical structures such as an art museum, a statue in the park, or a sports stadium, or they might be less tangible, such as the school system). Conduct the survey schoolwide or even extend it to other schools. Use of the Internet would enable the survey to reach a larger audience. Have the students examine the results for possible categories in which structures that were mentioned could be grouped. Have them think about different types of graphs that might be used to report their results. To extend the activity further; students might make a one page newspaper about community pride, in which they publish their graphs and write short descriptions about the structures mentioned most often in the survey:



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So that students understand some of the story details, locate on the world map and discuss the concept of immigrant. Listen to some music that Old Sam listened to, by Enrico Caruso. Discuss the work of an architect and why towers and tall buildings are designed by architects.

RELATED READING RAINBOW PROGRAMS:

- Tar Beach
- Mrs. Katz and Tush
- A Chair For My Mother

See Curriculum Extension Activities for additional programs

RELATED THEMES:

- community building
- individual decision making
- cultural diversity
- architecture
- landmarks
- city life

About The Author:

Patricia Zelver is best known for her critically acclaimed adult short stories. The Wonderful Tower Of Watts is her second book for children. A native of Oregon, she now lives with her husband in California

About The Illustrator:

Fran(Lessac began her career in art as a filmmaker out of frustration that her art teachers didn't like her work. She returned to painting after she moved to the Caribbean, the setting for My Little Island, a READING RAINBOW feature book. Born in the United States, she currently lives in Australia with her husband and two children.

BOOKS REVIEWED BY CHILDREN:

THE CAR WASHING STREET by Denise Lewis Patrick, illus. by John Ward (Tambourine)

I GOT COMMUNITY by Melrose Cooper, illus.: by Dale Gottlieb (Henry Holt)

NIGHT ON NEIGHBORHOOD STREET by Eloise Greenfield, illus. by Jan Spivey Gilchrist (Dial)

SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKLIST:

SMOKYNIGHT by Eve Bunting, illus. by David Diaz (Harcourt)

WHY DID IT HAPPEN? HELPING CHILDREN COPE IN A VIOLENT WORLD by Janice Cohn (Morrow)

CITY GREEN by DyAnne DiSavo-Ryan (Morrow)

THE BIG BOOK FOR PEACE Edited by Ann Durrell and Marilyn Sachs (Dutton)

MISS TIZZY by Libba Moore Gray, illus. by Jada Rowland (Simon & Schuster)

MEET DANITRA BROWN by Niki Grimes, illus. by Floyd Cooper (Lathrop, Lee & Shepard)

TALKING WALLS by Margy Burns Knight, illus. By Anne Sibley O'Brien (Tilbury House)

THE GREAT PEACE MARCH by Holly Near, illus. by Lisa Desimini (Henry Holt)

TIKVAH MEANS HOPE by Patricia Polacco (Doubleday)

PEACE BEGINS WITH YOU by Katherine Scholes, illus. by Robert Ingpen (Sierra Club/Little, Brown)

IRENE AND THE BIG, FINE NICKEL by Irene Smalls-Hector, illus. by Tyrone Geter (Little, Brown)

Programs Details

Length:

30 minutes

Subject Areas:

Community/Social Issues

Audience Levels:

Ages 6 -11

Order Number:

5-4393SG

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