

Section IV. Response Questions

1. Education is more than academic standards and standardized testing. Education is about reaching the whole child in innovative ways and helping to cultivate tiny humans into kind, productive, and forward-thinking community members. My goal as an educator is to provide students with the skills necessary for lifelong success, along with those skills needed for future academic endeavors. Most of the skills we need as human beings cannot be directly taught through lectures or reading assignments. They must be modeled and refined each and every day. Thankfully, great literature provides us with an engaging way to teach these skills to young children.

Trudy Ludwig published a book titled, "The Invisible Boy." This masterful picture book has powerful illustrations by Patrice Barton that depict a young boy who feels invisible. Through the text of this amazing work, we come to know the main character. Readers see him as gray in a world full of color. For a lesson on friendly letter writing, I gathered my students around the rocking chair and introduced them to Brian, the invisible boy.

First, we looked at the front cover which shows Brian, illustrated in gray pencil, playing alone and drawing on the concrete with chalk. The children shared their thoughts about him and wondered why he was alone. They did not initially notice his gray coloring and I chose not to point it out. During reading, we stopped and talked about the kind things that Brian did that nobody noticed. At this point, my students began to notice his coloring in contrast to the other brightly illustrated children in the pictures. Their natural empathy for others was becoming clear and provided many opportunities to discuss compassion and how simple acts of kindness can truly make a difference. When Brian meets a new boy in class and tries to befriend him, his efforts initially go unnoticed. From my students came a collective "Aww!" They felt for him. They had been in his shoes and were making personal connections to Brian. I knew my audience was hooked.

Section IV. Response Questions Continued

By the time we reached the end of the book, I was practically in tears. I will not spoil the ending for you here, but I promise it will move you. We all wished for more. We wrapped up our discussion about the book by wondering aloud what we could do to help children who feel like Brian. Small groups of children chatted together and brainstormed ideas. What would you say? What would you do? On sticky notes, they wrote their responses and placed them on an anchor chart I had prepared with a line drawing of the invisible boy. As they placed their responses on the chart, my heart was full. "I will play with you," one of them wrote. "I know you are lonely but I will be your friend," wrote another.

We used these sticky notes as a launching pad for writing friendly letters to people who may feel invisible. They wrote beautiful letters and showed their natural compassion for others through their writing. We used these first drafts to learn more about the editing process and I helped guide students through ways to make their pieces stronger and correct errors like capital letters, ending marks, and word spacing. When they were ready to publish their masterpieces, they rewrote their letter to the invisible ones. Students generated writing that included powerful statements like, "You don't need to be alone in the dark." Heart-filling, compassionate letters were written by my first graders to people who feel as Brian did. A lesson on writing friendly letters was so much more than stale direct instruction; more than a worksheet. It was an experience with personal connections and lively discussions about inclusion and kindness. Students were fully engaged because it was deeply personal, and relatable. They generated and edited delightful letters that demonstrated their ability to go beyond the TEKS and they created a memory that will help them retain the writing process. This lesson is a clear example of my passion for the education of young children and positively impacted the social-emotional needs of my growing learners. It may not have been fancy, but it moved the hearts and minds of my students in a positive way. I believe that providing these types of passionate, relatable experiences can make a lasting