Notable Trade Book Lesson
The Champion of Children: The Story of Janusz Korczak
Written by Tomek Bogacki

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Early in his life, Janusz Korczak wanted to improve the lives and futures of children living in poverty. His world-renowned educational practices with orphans have been adopted as standards for educating youth for positive civic participation. Using a trade book about Korczak’s life begins a study of additional champions of youth. This notable trade book lesson provides opportunities to examine the positive ethical values and actions that improve the lives and futures of youth. Such a study has the potential to inspire youth to act for a better future, to investigate the many careers people have who work to improve the lives of youth, and to learn about inspiring people often neglected in the traditional curriculum. Educators, additionally, can learn about the history of progressive education through this lesson.

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<td>Book Summary:</td>
<td>As a child, Janus Korczaka wondered about the poor children he observed in Warsaw, Poland and wanted them to have a better life. He went to school and became a medical doctor, but he found that this was not enough to help children have better lives. He, thus, went to work for the Orphans Aid Society. He examined education for youth in other European nations. In 1912, he became the live-in director of a new orphanage for Jewish youth in Warsaw. He introduced a complete educational program involving youth in their education with the goal of learning to be active citizens with life skills when they graduated. He wrote books for youth in which they were major characters. He also wrote about and spoke on his ideas throughout Poland. When World War II (WWII)brought the Nazis to power in Poland, he was forced to leave the facility and took his orphans and staff into the Warsaw Ghetto. He witnessed the suffering of his orphans as well as that of the children in the streets. He continued caring and educating his orphans as best he could while taking in additional orphans from the streets. Polish people begged him to go into hiding, but he refused to leave his orphans. On August 6, 1942, he was ordered to take the children to the train station. The orphans were observed walking orderly and quietly behind Korczaka to the train. He and his children died in the Treblika extermination camp as part of the Holocaust. Though he perished, his dream continues to live. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) was strongly influenced by Korczaka’s goals and ideas. He is honored throughout the world in statues with children.</td>
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NCSS Standards:
- Time, Continuity, and Change
- Civic Ideals and Practices
- Culture
- People, Places and Environments

Materials:
2. Pictures of several statues of Korczak and youth.
3. Photographs of others who have worked to improve the lives and futures of youth. Examples include: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt, Jerry Lewis, Marlow Thomas, Jesus, Dr. Jonas Salk, and local champions, i.e., teachers, social workers, etc.
4. Glue
5. Small paper plates
6. Scissors
7. Markers
8. Large tube to serve as the base of a totem.

Objectives:
1. Given the examination of the book, *The Champion of Children*, students will clarify the definition of a champion, explaining that a champion makes a long-term commitment to a cause.
2. Students will state the conclusion that champions work hard often facing difficulties to accomplish their goals.
3. Students will arrive at a consensus stating that a champion is not motivated by personal recognition or wealth.
4. Students will research to identify and report on additional champions of children.
5. Students will share their knowledge learned through a group art project honoring those people they consider to be champions of children.

Procedures:

Exploratory Introduction:
1. Begin by asking what are the characteristics of a person for whom a statue might be made?
2. Show several pictures of statues of Janusz Korczak in which there are not smiling faces, and ask students:
   a. What can we observe about the statues?
   b. Why do they think there are so many children in the statues?
   c. How would you describe the faces of the people?
   d. Why do you think there are no smiling faces?
   e. Do the students have other questions prompted by the statues pictures?
3. Transition to reading the book to learn about Korczak. Tell children to see if they can check the accuracy of their answers to the questions discussed.
### Lesson Development:

4. Ask students to respond to the cover picture. Stress that the story contains both sadness and happiness. Show the picture of Warsaw prior to WWII and ask if the children might want to live in this city.

5. Begin reading the book aloud and examining the pictures. Especially observe the faces of the children. Do the faces of the children look happy? Note the changes in the faces after WWII (1939) begins with the invasion of Poland. Ask and discuss the following questions:
   a. What actions did Korczak take to implement his ideas before and after war began?
   b. How were his ideas received throughout Poland and the world?
   c. How did WWII impact the life and service of Korczak to youth?
   d. What do you think is the meaning of the title of Champion?
   e. What do you think about the life of Janusz Korczak? Do you think other people have a similar view of him?
   f. Who might have thought Korczak should have deserted the orphans and saved his own life?
   g. Why do you think Korczak might have been tempted to desert the children? Explain your answer.
   h. While in the Warsaw Ghetto Kroczak kept a diary. In that diary as the end of his work approached he wrote:
      i. “My life was difficult but interesting. That was the life I asked God for when I was young:
      j. God, give me a hard life, but make it beautiful, rich, and noble.”
   k. Do you think God answered his prayer by giving him what he asked to receive in his life?

### Lesson Expansion:

### Closure:

1. Examine the picture of Warsaw at the end of the book after the war. What does this picture reveal about WWII and its impact on Poland and the Polish people? In the years post WWII, do you think people might forget about Kroczak and what he believed and did for youth?

2. Tell the class, “Few people have gone so far as to die in the process of helping children, but many others have stressed the development of Korczak’s interest for the lives of young children. Maybe the interest began later in their lives and not during their childhoods.”

3. Many people help children today and do so following the ideas of Korczak, even though they many not know of his personal story. Ask, “Do you know of the names of people who have worked for
the betterment of the lives of children?”
   a. Perhaps they might ask their parents for suggestions. If help finding people is needed, the teacher might present some pictures for the students to view and students can then search for what these people have done.
   b. Students should draw or copy the pictures and include an important word to illustrate the deeds and attach these to a small paper plate. The plates might be placed on a bulletin board. Or,
   c. The plated illustrations can be used to make a totem pole, attaching the pictures of these people to be honored and remembered on the totem. At the top of the totem attach a large picture of the head of Janusz Korczak. Each child should tell the class why the person they researched should be added to the totem honoring champions of children.

Assessments:
1. Students are attentive to the story.
2. Students offer accurate statements concerning the facts and characteristics shown in the pictures.
3. Students respond to questions with accurate observations and ask questions designed to gather information.
4. Students seek to learn of the acts of other people in helping youth using teacher-approved websites.
5. As students place a representation of their champion on the totem, they will explain the actions the persons took to improve the lives of children.

Suggested Extension Activities:
1. Invite parents or other classes to view and learn about the display.
2. Select several local people who have worked for and with students, including school staff, to come and view the display. Thank in some organized way these local people for their efforts in supporting youth.
3. Examine with the class a copy of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and identify rights that were advocated by Janusz Korczak and illustrated in the book *The Champion of Children*. Ask students to identify those rights of children practiced in the USA and their own school.

Additional References & WebLinks
## Rubric for Research Project

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>3 points</th>
<th>2 points</th>
<th>1 point</th>
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<tr>
<td>Select person that meets the lesson’s</td>
<td>Devoted a large portion of their life to helping children.</td>
<td>Helps youth in some way as a regular part of their daily job</td>
<td>Gives money and words of encouragement for ways to improve the health or</td>
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<td>definition of champion</td>
<td></td>
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<td>safety of children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral Presentation</td>
<td>Explains in several sentences why the person was a champion of children and explains the symbol or picture</td>
<td>Tells what acts the person did that helps children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Picture or artifact selected for the totem</td>
<td>Picture or symbol illustrates person working with child</td>
<td>Picture shows person’s face. Draws a symbol or artifact to represent person’s actions or work.</td>
<td>Picture only of person’s face.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>Voice has enthusiasm for the person and is loud enough to be heard by all</td>
<td>Voice loud enough to be heard by all in the room</td>
<td>Voice cannot be heard by some of the room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>3 or more websites consulted for information &amp; pictures</td>
<td>2 websites consulted for information &amp; picture</td>
<td>I resources consulted for information &amp; pictures</td>
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Author Bio

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