

Beyond the Blackboard

Teacher Guide

Beyond the Blackboard is inspired by a true story.

When Stacey Bess gets her first teaching job, she's shocked. It's not at all what she expected. Stacey (played by Emily VanCamp) is assigned to something called The School with No Name, a space in a homeless shelter that's supposed to be a classroom. The children are all ages, many from broken families, thrown together in a "classroom" lacking essentials like desks and books.

Stacey must tackle her own fears and insecurities as she works to gain the attention and respect of her young students. Using compassion and determination she takes on both nervous school board officials (Timothy Busfield and Treat Williams) and apprehensive parents. Eventually she transforms the barren space into a warm, comfortable environment where the children not only acquire knowledge, but also self-respect and a measure of dignity.

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

DETERMINATION – Discuss Stacey's first week at the school. How were The School with No Name and its students different from what she expected? What was her reaction to these differences? In the beginning of the film, Stacey said "school was a safe place with a glimpse of who I wanted to be." How did her determination change the environment of the shelter school and her students?

POVERTY – Stacey tried to relate to her new students by showing them a photo album of her family and talking about her life. The kids could not relate to her pictures and experiences. Why not? Discuss some of the life circumstances of the students. What types of adversities did they face physically and emotionally? How did their poverty make learning more difficult?

RESOURCEFULNESS – The classroom initially came with almost no supplies and little support from school board officials and reluctant parents. Despite these challenges, Stacey Bess was able to create a warm, safe place for the children to learn. In addition, she was able to earn the support and respect of parents and administrators. Resourcefulness is the ability to find a way to solve problems in a difficult situation. What creative solutions did Stacey find to transform The School with No Name? How did she overcome the lack of supplies, environmental distractions and other issues?



DIVERSITY – Poverty impacts people of all ages, races and backgrounds. The reasons for people being at the shelter are as different as each individual. What are some of the reasons for characters in the film coming to the shelter?

TRUST – The previous teacher placed “shame names” on the board and played movies all day to keep the kids occupied. The students and parents were initially wary of Stacey because they thought she would be the same as her predecessor. What actions did she take to earn their trust? How did trust play a role in the school’s success?

RESPECT – Stacey talked to the children about respect. They began to share their experiences of when they encountered a lack of respect – from police, from a parent or from another person. The classroom could only be a safe, calm and quiet place to learn if everyone showed respect for each other. Discuss how respect or a lack of respect was shown in the film. Why is respect important in your school?

VOCABULARY – Stacey encourages the students to think of words to put on the board to describe their feelings. By giving these feelings names, the children were able to express themselves more clearly. What vocabulary words were used? Why were these words so important to the children?

THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE – When you are worried about finding food and a warm place to sleep, learning in school may seem unimportant. Some of the students asked “Why learn this?” Stacey told the students “If you know it, it is yours.” What did she mean by this statement? Discuss why a thirst for knowledge is important.

HIDDEN TALENTS – Every individual has special skills. Stacey tapped into the artistic talents of Nelson, one of the shelter residents. Nelson was able to help the students express themselves through art. Why is creative expression important to these children? How did experiencing the arts empower The School with No Name?

APPRECIATING WHAT YOU HAVE – The children in the movie had almost no belongings. Despite their circumstances, several of them gave their prized possessions to Stacey. Why is it important to appreciate what you have? Discuss the difference between wanting something and needing something.

CRAYOLA EDUCATIONAL ART ACTIVITIES

PICTURE JOURNAL – When Stacey first got to The School with No Name she was surprised by what she found. She experiences sadness, joy, hope and frustration during her time at the school. Imagine you are Stacey Bess. Write journal entries to talk about your feelings, observations, successes and failures. Draw a picture to accompany each entry using Crayola® Colored Pencils, Crayons or Markers.

MENTOR COLLAGE – In the film, Danny is encouraged by Stacey to be the best person he can be. She helps him to be a leader. In addition, she plans to hold him accountable to continued learning, by giving him a booklist each year until he is eighteen. Stacey served as a mentor to Danny and he in turn mentored his classmates. Create a collage of images that describes someone who has been a

mentor to you. You can use pictures from magazines, drawings and photos. Decorate with Crayola Crayons, Markers or Paints to add color and detail.

COLOR MIXER – Nelson shows that art can be magical by mixing two colors into a different color. He shows the joy that creating a picture can bring. Make your own magic with colors using Crayola Paints. See how many new colors you can make by mixing different amounts of red, yellow and blue. Write a poem about how art, color or creativity inspires you.

UNSUNG HERO DIORAMA – Stacey Bess was a great example of an unsung hero. She gave her time and energy—sometimes sacrificing her own family—to help the shelter residents. She did all of this because she wanted to help, not for any type of personal gain. Unsung heroes are all around us. Create a diorama to display your unsung hero doing something special. You can use Crayola Model Magic® to sculpt the unsung hero and other key elements in the diorama.

BULLETIN BOARD EXPRESSIONS – Stacey and her students created a bulletin board with words that expressed the class’s feelings. Create your own bulletin board inspired by the film. Choose either the “Outstanding in His Field” or “Something to Crow About” theme shown in the shelter school’s classroom. Customize the words and images to fit your class. Decorate with Crayola Crayons, Markers or whatever you like.

WINDOW SCENES – The students in Stacey Bess’s class found ways to make the best of their environment. Be resourceful! Go “beyond the blackboard” to discover other surfaces that are great for learning! Recreate your favorite scene from the movie on windows, picture frames, mirrors and more with Crayola Washable Window Markers and Crayons.

COOL-SCHOOL MODEL – What’s in a name? Why do you think the school did not have a name? Would the school have had an easier transition to success if it did have a name? What would you name the school? Imagine if you could build your own school. Build a model of your school using Model Magic or another Crayola modeling material. Now name your school!

COMMUNITY SERVICE VIDEO – *Beyond the Blackboard* tells the story of how one person can make a difference by serving their community. Search for ways to serve your local community. Spend a few hours participating in your community service project and then write a synopsis of your experience. Take pictures and video of your experience. Create a presentation or movie to show to your class.

SHOW-YOU-CARE CARDS – In the film, the students created Valentines for Stacey to show her how much they cared about her and appreciated her efforts. Design a greeting card for someone important in your life. Draw a picture and create a greeting to explain why this person is special to you. Make your card unique by cutting it into a shape, adding a pop-up image or by making creative cutouts. Try using specialty papers like Crayola Color Explosion® or Neon Color Explosion to make your cards stand out.

PROJECT IDEAS –

