

## Character-Infused After-School Lessons

### The Batboy and His Violin

<p><b>Grade Levels:</b> 4 (can be used with grades 3, 5, &amp; 6)</p> <p><b>Character Focus:</b> Responsibility, Dependability, and Perseverance</p> <p><b>Academic Content Area:</b> English-Language Arts</p> <p><b>Lesson-Unit Duration:</b> Story and discussion takes between 40-60 minutes, depending on student maturity level and the number of questions used for discussion. Each extended activity takes approximately the same time or less. Materials are available for a month-long unit (one lesson per week).</p> <p><b>Author Comments:</b> Bring in a violin, bat, and mittens, etc. To add a mood to the setting, play a CD of violin music while students are working on individual projects. Photos of racial segregation that may be found on the Internet (“whites only” or “coloreds only” signs) are powerful means of communication to students who are growing up at a much later time in history.</p>	<p><b>Book Title and Author:</b> <i>The Batboy and His Violin</i> by Gavin Curtis, Aladdin Paperbacks, ISBN: 0-689-84115-9</p> <p><b>Materials needed:</b> <i>The Batboy and His Violin</i>, pencil, paper or notebook, dictionaries, markers, or crayons. <b>Optional:</b> Vocabulary Log, People Profiles, Character Trading Cards, Worksheets, Perspective Taking: Role Play Guidelines.</p> <p><b>Implementation Strategies Used:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Academic content-based discussion (e.g., literature-based)</li> <li>✓ Role playing</li> <li>✓ Problem-solving discussion</li> </ul>
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#### Lesson Summary

The story takes place in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century in an era of racial segregation. It explores the relationship between a father who has a passion for baseball and his son, Reginald, who has a passion for playing the violin. As the story unfolds, each of them learns to accept and to respect each other’s passion. Students explore positive character traits of the main story characters, the benefits of accepting and respecting differences. They also make comparisons with their own passions and life experiences.

## Academic-Character Objectives

Students will:

1. Identify those characters in the story that are portraying *responsible*, positive behavior, and identify the character attribute, as measured by teacher observation of their responses to discussion and activities.
2. Respect each other's opinions and thoughts, as measured by teacher observation of their listening to the story and to each other with full attention.
3. Demonstrate increased vocabulary by identifying unfamiliar words entering them into their Vocabulary Log, writing sentences with the words.
4. Create analogies during classroom discussions, as measured by their input when they compare or contrast their experiences with the story's theme.

## Into (Motivation and set )

1. Provide the setting for the story. "Today we're going to hear a story about a boy and his father that takes place more than 50 years ago." Give students background information about the time period in which the story takes place (era of segregation, before Civil Rights were in place.) One meaning of Civil Rights is that everyone should be treated equally.
2. Ask the students if there ever was something in their lives that they loved to do so much that they wanted to do it all the time. Ask them to describe how they felt. Discuss that fondness or enthusiasm for something is sometimes called a *passion*.
3. Ask them to listen to the story very carefully to see if they can identify two story characters who had *passion* (Reginald, his father).
4. Ask students to look carefully at the pictures that show the face of the boy, Reginald, and his *expression* when he is playing the violin, his *passion*.
5. Introduce vocabulary. Introduce or review vocabulary: *passion*, *expression*, *sashay* (sa-shay') – to proceed easily, *cleats*, *stomp*, *fiddle*, *violin*, *bow* (for violin-playing), *buff* (to clean or polish), *Negro* (African-American, Black), *segregation*, *compromise*. Ask students to listen for new vocabulary in the story.
6. Ask students to listen for the names of famous composers in the story: *Tchaikovsky*, *Mozart*, and *Schubert*.
7. Ask students to listen for the duties of a bat boy (buff bats clean, line bats up for the players).
8. Ask them to listen for a part of the story that shows *segregation* (having an "all Negro" league, having to sleep in the bus).

## Through (Lesson continues)

9. Read the story. Emphasize character-related concepts and vocabulary words as you read. Pause at the illustrations of Reginald as he is playing his violin. Ask the students to notice his face to see if it reflects his *passion*. At the part of the story in which the Dukes (team) have a winning streak, ask students to predict whether or not they believe this will remain the same through the rest of the story. Ask the students to justify their opinion.
10. Discuss the story and its lessons. *Use as many questions as time permits.*
  - What was the story about?
  - Who are the main characters in the story? (Reginald, Papa, Mama, Dukes, Monarchs).
  - Why did Reginald's father want him to be the bat boy?

- Why do you think Reginald kept correcting his father about calling the *violin a fiddle*?
- Ask students to explain the positive character traits that were shown in the story. (Responsibility, *trustworthiness* – following through by Reginald with his duties as bat boy; *respect* for the father, *perseverance* by Reginald in the pursuit of his violin-playing passion; *perseverance* by Papa in his confidence in the Dukes baseball team)
- Identify story characters who had *passion*. How do you know they had passion?
- Identify Reginald’s *passion*? (Violin). How do you know it is a passion? What challenges does he have in following his passion? (Papa does not appreciate his talent; he calls his violin playing “fiddling.”)
- What *passion* does Papa have? (Baseball). How do you know it is a *passion*? What challenges does Papa face in his career? (His team does not win games. His good players are recruited by white baseball teams.)
- What *compromise* does Reginald make? (He agrees to be a bat boy, but is allowed to take his violin to practice.) What *compromise* does Papa make? (He agrees to let Reginald play during the game.)
- Do you agree or disagree there is a value in compromising? Why or Why not? (Each person gets a little of what they need or want.)
- Use the story to explain how *respect* is part of *compromise*. (The boy respected his Papa when asked to be a bat boy.)
- Ask the students how Reginald must feel when the Dukes’ players continue to hit home runs, as he is playing his violin. How must Papa feel when the Dukes’ players continue to hit home runs, as Reginald is playing his violin?
- What is your passion and how would you feel if someone you love did not respect what you cared about?
- If you lived in this time period of discrimination, how would you have felt to have to sleep in the bus, instead of in a hotel?
- Can you give an example of how something that you didn’t like at first turned out to be a good thing?
- What things do you have to consider when you have a passion that you want to follow? (Costs, convenience for family members, fairness to other family members, balance with your responsibilities and duties, how it affects other people in your life.)
- Did the story end the way you thought it would? If you were the author of this story, how would the story end?
- Even though the Dukes didn’t defeat the Monarchs, in your opinion, did the story of “The Bat Boy and His Violin” have a good ending? Why do you have that opinion? (Reginald learned that he liked being a bat boy, Papa appreciated the violin-playing. Family and friends enjoyed Reginald’s concert.)
- Is there a person in the story you are similar to? How are you different from that same person?
- What lesson did you learn from the story? (Accept others’ interests if they are different from your own; you might be surprised at the benefits for both of you, etc.)

### **Beyond** (*Application, extensions and assessment*)

- Review the story and the lessons learned before you conduct an extended activity or assessment. Review how *compromise* usually gives each person something that they want. Check for evidence of student understanding.
- Use the following activities as different lessons on different days *or* provide your class with a selection of activities from which to choose on a given day.
  - a) **Vocabulary:** Use the *Vocabulary Log*. Look up definitions in the dictionary. Write the words in a sentence.
  - b) **Literary expression:** Ask the students to find the following literary expressions in the story. Have them describe the meaning.

“...the way a mosquito skims a summer pond”  
“Cooped up inside all the time it’s a wonder the boy doesn’t sprout mushrooms.”  
“Kinda makes the hairs on the back of my head do a jig.”
  - c) **Research:** Do research on Negro Leagues. Read more books or do an Internet search on the topic of *segregation*.
  - d) **Discussion:** Ask the students to pair up. Review the definition of *passion*. Students talk to each other about their personal passions. Have students report about the other student’s passion.
  - e) **Journal Prompt:** Describe your *passion*. Tell whether it’s an expensive or low-cost interest to follow. Tell whether or not you are improving as you follow your *passion*. Describe any challenges you have as you follow your interest. How will you meet the challenges?
  - f) **Role Plays** (See *Perspective Taking: Role-Play Guidelines*) Character Profiles
    - The scene is at home. Have a student play Reginald practicing his violin. Have another student play Papa commenting to Reginald about wanting him to play baseball instead.
    - The scene is the ball field. Have students positioned at the bases as the Dukes. Have Reginald playing the violin in the background. Have someone ready to catch home runs. Show what happens as each player goes to bat, and hits a home run.
  - g) **Character Profiles Worksheet:** See *People Profiles Worksheet*.
  - h) **Trading Card Activity:** Students will design a *trading* card of a person of character from the story using art materials in a visually pleasing way. See *Character Trading Card Worksheet*.

Written by Erica Chappell

## Vocabulary Log

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Story \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** First, list new words from the story. Then, list the page number on which the word appeared. Then write the dictionary definition. Finally, write a sentence using the word.

Word	Page Number	Define the word and use it in a sentence.
1.		_____
2.		_____
3.		_____
4.		_____
5.		_____
6.		_____
7.		_____
8.		_____

## People Profiles

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

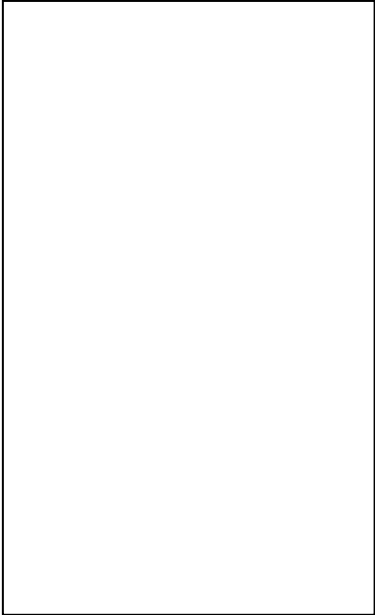
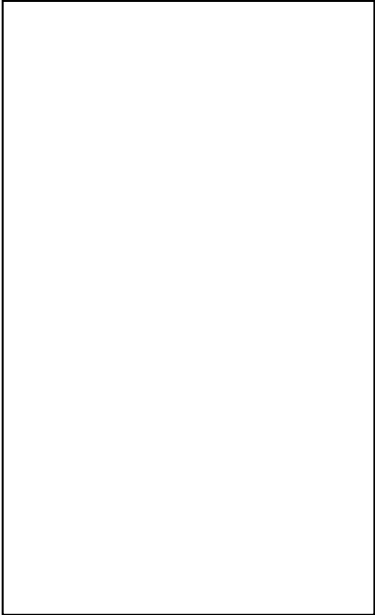
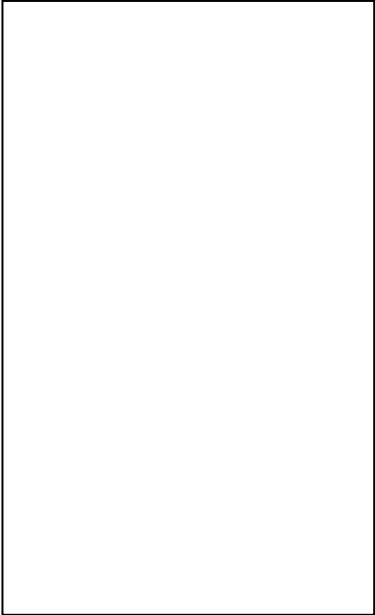
Story \_\_\_\_\_

Character name from the story	Which character trait best describes this person?	Example of positive character
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

List characters from the story in the first column. In the second column, choose a trait that best describes the character in the story. In the third column, give an example from the story describing how the character showed this trait.



## Character Trading Cards

<hr/> <i>Name of Story</i> <hr/>	<hr/> <i>Name of Story</i> <hr/>	<hr/> <i>Name of Story</i> <hr/>
<i>Character in Story</i>  	<i>Character in Story</i>  	<i>Character in Story</i>  
<hr/> <b>Character Trait</b>	<hr/> <b>Character Trait</b>	<hr/> <b>Character Trait</b>

### Directions

1. *Front of card:* Draw a colorful picture of the character from the story. Then list the character trait that best describes this person. Example: respect
2. *Back of card:* Write an example of how this person portrays the character trait.

### A Tip

Cards can be cut up, laminated, organized in binder sleeves and used as trading cards.





## Perspective Taking: Role-Play Guidelines

*“Perspective taking or role taking—the cognitive ability to discern another person’s point of view or emotional state—is a key ingredient of empathy, a sensitivity to the plight of others” (Beland 2003).*

**Because empathy sets the standard for our relationship with others it is a core skill in developing ethical values and bringing them to life. Empathy inspires one to act with care and justice. Perspective taking includes the cognitive ability to:**

- Recognize others’ feelings through physical, verbal, and behavioral cues
- Infer how others may be feeling by imagining oneself in their shoes (Beland 2003, p 10)
- Identify facial expressions and situational cues associated with different emotions
- Recognize different emotions within themselves
- Listen to others when they express their thoughts and feelings
- Practice taking the roles of others in the same or different situations
- Look for similarities between themselves and others.

**The strategies to provide these opportunities are wide ranging and differ with the age and developmental stages of students. They include but are not limited to:**

- Using literary characters and character analysis to have students put themselves in the character’s situation
- Reflecting on their own thoughts and feelings through journaling and pair share
- Using visual art to interpret thoughts and feelings
- Cooperative or collaborative learning activities where students practice the behaviors of respect and responsibility
- Using authentic problem-solving activities where students have to look at different perspectives, interviewing others to identify similarities
- Moral dilemma discussions
- Class meetings
- Role play (some versions of role play are called simulation).

*Using brief role play in the classroom supports the development of the behaviors associated with empathy, respect, responsibility, and integrity. Role play develops perspective taking and appeals to the kinesthetic learner as well. Linked to perspective taking, role play helps students understand social behavior, their roles in social interaction, and ways to solve problems more effectively. (Joyce & Calhoun 1996).*



**Role play situations can be generated from content area studies such as role playing a literary character, an historical person or event, as well as authentic issues of students. While there are many variations of the components of a role play the following is a basic guide.**

### **Elements of a Role Play**

#### **1. Set the context and the situation or scene.**

Keep in mind the students needs, interests, and developmental level.

Use situations that are authentic for the students; ask students for suggestions.

It can be a problem, a conflict, or an open-ended situation.

For younger students, identify or predict any language that may be needed.

To encourage role taking, ask students to remember how they felt and what they thought in a similar situation.

Start with simple situations and then move to more complex situations.

#### **2. Identify roles.**

Consider the abilities and personalities of the students.

Roles can be developed and suggestions made or roles can be open ended and allowed to evolve.

#### **3. Identify audience focus.**

To encourage active listening among the audience, a question or prompt may be given to the observers. Students can discuss, talk about, or write responses.

Norms of behavior for the audience may be reviewed.

#### **3. Follow up.**

After the role play, ask key questions of the role players as well as the audience that tap into the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of the role play. To develop perspective taking use questions such as:

Did you feel the same as \_\_\_\_? Why or why not?

What questions do you have for \_\_\_\_ about what happened?

What would you have done or said differently?

What would you have done or said the same?

What were you thinking or feeling about when you \_\_\_\_\_?

How do you know that \_\_\_\_ was feeling \_\_\_\_\_?

#### **4. Debrief the students.**

Review the different roles, the audience reaction, and remind children this is a role play.

*Finally, the role of the teacher in role play is one of “traffic controller” helping the flow of traffic and avoiding bottlenecks, but not telling individuals which way to go (Jones 1982 cited in Thompkins, p.5).*

