

Oakland's Fire-Fighting Peacemaker

Bravery

Service

Responsibility

Quick Thinking

Willingness to Lead

STORY

As a child, Ray Gatchalian was taught to help others. "We're here to inspire one another, to bring out the best in each other," his father told him. When Ray's Oakland, California neighborhood was about to go up in flames in the largest urban wildfire in U.S. history, Ray organized a dozen- .curious onlookers into a makeshift fire brigade that saved many homes and inspired one of the volunteers to become a fireman. "Fighting the fire with Ray changed my life," he says.

Reflection Questions

1. How did Ray turn a group of curious onlookers into a makeshift fire brigade?
2. If someone asked you to participate in a dangerous activity,
3. Would you trust him /her? Would you trust yourself to make the right decision?
4. How important is teamwork and cooperation?
5. If there was a fire in your home or your neighborhood, what would you do?

Lessons You Can Learn

1. Inviting people to help others and do the right thing can bring out the best in them.
2. The words of wisdom your parents share with you can make a life-long impression.
3. You never know when you might change someone's life.
4. Strive to make a difference wherever you go.

ACTIONS

Language Arts and Fire Safety and Prevention

- Ask students to imagine they were living in a homeless shelter. What would their lives be like? Write daily in a journal as if they were, then a report comparing their real lives.
- Research and develop a list of services for homeless people in your community.
- Conduct a Don't Waste Food campaign using posters and information leaflets.
- Write a report on the roots of homelessness in America. Investigate the rate of domestic abuse among homeless women and children. Create a timeline noting changes in the mental health system and rise in homelessness. Study the effect of lost jobs in a community. (Also see story, Changing People's Minds on page 300)
- Research innovative approaches in various states to helping homeless people. Brainstorm with students about how such ideas could be brought to your community. Write a letter to local representatives and state officials with your recommendations.

Community Service

- Schedule an appreciation day for local firefighters. Make a thank-you poster for them, and / or bring them treats on Halloween.
- Add a school vs. Fire Department fundraising softball game to Field Day activities.
- Participate in a neighborhood watch or tenant patrol to prevent fires or vandalism.
- Make sure you have smoke detectors in your house and replace your batteries every year.
- Organize a CPR course. Ask students to write about an experience with a fire, or near fire emergency. What did they learn from this experience? Read this essay aloud in class.