

Polishing the Big Apple

Annette Williams

New York

☀ Values

- Chutzpah
- Imagination
- Courage
- Responsibility
- Determination
- Social Emotional Learning

☀ Reflection Questions

Do you know anyone who was once on welfare and now has a job? How did they do it?

By volunteering, Annette built her self-esteem and job skills. What skills do you think you could learn from volunteering with an organization in your community?

When you visit your park or go for a nature walk, do you pick up the trash?

Do you have a favorite park near your home or in a campground, you like to visit?

☀ Lessons Learned

When we volunteer, we can learn, develop skills and build our self-esteem.

Everyone has something to give -- and when we do, we get a lot accomplished.

Celebrities can be role models and champions for good causes in the world.

Most people would be surprised to learn that Annette Williams, a former welfare recipient, has a good friend and partner named Bette Midler who founded the New York Restoration Project (NYRP). Annette had been on welfare for 10 years when she was hired by Bette to help clean up New York City parks. "I love this city," Bette says. "The degradation was heartbreaking and unacceptable." She founded the NYRP with funds from a special benefit performance of her film, *First Wives Club* and \$250,000 out of her own pocket. Annette, her staff and a team of volunteers and Welfare to Work people have carted away over 50,000 pounds of refuse and restored six New York City parks to their natural beauty -- while rebuilding their own lives and working their way to financial independence. Bette simply says, "I really feel that if everybody did their part it would be a beautiful world."

☀ Language Arts: SEL & Diversity

Research the history of New York City's Central Park. Who designed it; how long did it take to build; what value does it have for people in the city; what does it cost to maintain it? Ask students to select 5- 10 national parks in America and study how they have changed since 1980. What are the effects of inconsiderate people on the plants and animals in a park? Have a class discussion about what can be done to preserve our country's parks.

☀ Social Studies : Diversity

Create a list of safe places where young people can explore nature in your community. Contact your local parks and recreation services. Investigate how many people are employed now vs. 1980. Work with them to develop a list of ways that young people can do to help keep the parks safe, clean and enjoyable for everyone. Write an article for the newspaper, share this story from the book and invite people to help clean-up the parks.

☀ Community Service : Service Learning

Schedule a clean-up day in your park or neighborhood -- with Arbor Day, Earth Day and invite the community to join with you. Post fliers and send invitations to parents. Organize a camping trip to a state or national park. Invite parents to join you. Bette Midler and Annette Williams are featured on the educational video.