

Mercedes and the Chocolate Pilot

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This book is based on a true life event about a pilot who flew missions across Berlin, Germany after the end of WWII. These missions were different from those flown by most pilots. After the defeat of Germany, the country was divided among the Allies who had defeated Hitler. On June 24, 1948, however, Russia's leader, Joseph Stalin, moved to take all of Germany, and he cut off food and supplies to the West Berlin Allied sector. To avoid another world war, British and American forces flew more than 277,000 missions to deliver millions of tons of food and supplies to the 2.2 million people, deep within Russian territory. One most compassionate pilot, Capt. Halvorsen, dropped chocolates and candies to the children of West Berlin, knowing how difficult wartime was for children who could not fully comprehend what was happening around them. This story tells how this act of kindness changed the life of one young girl and connected her life to Capt. Halvorsen's.

Here are some curricular connections for those of you who want to bring this book into your classroom:

### **Guided Reading Block**

Some of the skills that lend themselves well to this text are...

Cause and Effect – This narrative is an opportunity to teach a chain of causes and effects. You might want to use a graphic organizer that helps students visualize the chain, such as:



Genre: This is an interesting book of historical non-fiction. So often we don't think of narrative non-fiction. It surely does make history come alive to personalize it in this way!

Sequence of Events – The story is arranged chronologically and lends itself well to a typical sequence map.

Character Development – Both the pilot and the young girl can be explored. What about their actions reveals their character? How did the author choose to share the traits with the readers?

Research – Students may want to research the real event and life of Captain Halvorsen. They will be delighted to know that he is alive today and has flown similar missions of mercy in different countries. The book mentions some of these countries. Your students may want to explore the conflicts in those countries and why Capt. Halvorsen would think that children would need what he has to offer.

Timelines – Students may want to construct a timeline of the events around the time of the Berlin Lift.

Discussions - You might have some lively discussions about such topics as...

Should the pilot's missions have been condoned since he was commissioned by the military and using military equipment but was performing a civilian act?

What can children be expected to understand about war?

For older students: How can war be explained to young children?

### **Self-Selected Reading Block**

This book would make a wonderful read-aloud as well as a great addition to the SSR baskets for students at most grade-levels through middle school and beyond. First and second grade teachers should preview the content for appropriateness.

### **Writing Block**

In this book, there is a story within the story, one that tells of the power of the written word. Have students recall the numerous examples of written communication and the impact felt by each of those communications. How do we come to realize the importance of each form of written communication in this story?

In the form of a mini-lesson, share the approach taken by this author who focused on the extraordinarily personal perspective of The Berlin Lift. Would a mere recounting of the facts have been as effective as the point of view of one child involved in the Lift? The way this author narrowed the focus helped us to understand the life and times so much better!

Share with students the different opportunities this author took to set the stage before the story, to give the history following the event, and to share the events that followed in Capt. Halvorsen's life.

Discuss with students how different the events would have been had the young girl not written a letter to the captain. So often we think about writing letters for reactions and responses, yet we fail to do so.

### **Social Studies**

This book lends itself to the study of WWII. Which countries were allies of the United States? Who were the leaders of these countries during this time? What happened to Berlin in the years following WWII? Clips on the Internet may even give students a first-hand look at the wall between East and West Berlin. In what ways have the major countries involved in WWII changed in present times?

### **Health/Community Studies**

(Note: In the informational section prior to the main story, the author mentions the types and quantities of foods that were included in the airlift. You may want to withhold that part until after students have had a chance to explore the activities below.)

If students are studying nutrition, put them in small groups after reading this story to determine what they feel should be included in a mercy mission such as the one described in the story. Have students come up with a list of the kinds of foods would be necessary to sustain a population of people of all ages. What special needs would different age groups have? You might assign each small group a different age group: elderly, children, babies, young women/men, middle aged men/women. Of the list that students compile, have them rethink the list in terms of what can be shipped and dropped by air in the way that supplies were dropped in The Berlin Airlift. What products might be possible to ship and drop today that were not available in the 1940's or which were not available in the same form as today? How would certain products need to be packaged to protect the contents?

Hope you'll enjoy this book as much as I have!