

Book Drive and Bake Sale

By Margaret Lee

As a seventh grade language arts teacher, my student service-learning projects often come directly from something the students have read about people in need. In 1998, my students read a Baltimore Sun article about the plight of an inner-city elementary school which had lost its entire library collection in a flood. Students quickly mobilized and collected more than 7,000 children's books for the school. In 2000, my students organized and carried out a bake sale fundraiser for the Harlem Park Community Organization after reading about the financially threatened summer program for children in that neighborhood. [Best practices:](#)

- I have found that middle school students are very passionate in their desire for justice. In situations in which they feel a "wrong" has occurred, they are very quick to try to correct it. Students often approach me with community needs they have heard about and wish to address through a student service-learning project.
- Through their student service-learning projects, my students have used their language arts skills in "real world" applications. From writing a business letter to the principal to request support for the project, to careful reading comprehension to phoning the governor's office, students put their skills to the test in valuable learning situations.
- Students need constant reflection in the course of a large scale project. The reflection piece gives them an opportunity to remain focused and motivated. Sometimes, reflections are journal entries, letters to friends, or drawings. Other times, reflection takes place in the form of a musical selection or even a class circle discussion.
- There is no doubt that facilitating students to complete a service-learning project can sometimes be more effort than simply completing some of the steps myself. Therein lies the real challenge for me as a teacher. I am constantly reminding myself that my role is to guide the students. I tell them up front that the project's success is dependent upon their responsibility for it.
- Through service learning projects, my classes have established partnerships with non-profit agencies, government veterans organizations, community programs, and retail businesses.
- When my students identify a community need, the first thing we do is hold a planning meeting. I make students responsible for producing and following a detailed plan and I serve as a guide and resource for them.
- Service teaming often produces the best opportunities to teach students. They are enthusiastic and eager to learn the skills and factual information needed to carry out their project successfully. I have often found that the most reluctant of learners in typical classroom situations are the ones who truly become engaged and "shine" in service-learning situations.