

Mercedes and the Chocolate Pilot

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Synopsis: This true story takes place in West Berlin during the post-World War II humanitarian Berlin Airlift. During a 15-month period, allied forces flew over 277,000 missions, dropping more than 2.3 million tons of supplies. One pilot, Lt. Gail S. Halvorsen, included packets of candy with handkerchief parachutes for the children as part of his daily flights. This story focuses on the relationship he developed with one young recipient, seven year old Mercedes Simon.

Themes: American and World History, humanitarianism, friendship, hope

Author Information: Margot Theis Raven is a writer and journalist who has worked in radio, television, magazines and newspapers. She particularly enjoys writing nonfiction and historical fiction for children, doing a wonderful job of portraying difficult times through the courageous eyes of the people who live through them.

Activities: Provide younger students with a brief history of World War II, with information such as: It happened over 60 years ago in Europe (locate Europe, particularly Germany, and the United States on a globe), Americans were trying to help Europeans live a free life, etc.

Read other books with a friendship, hope, or humanitarian theme, such as: Passages to Freedom by Ken Mochizuki

Fly Away Home and I Like the Way You Are by Eve Bunting

That's What Friends Are For by Florence Parry Heide

Fables from Aesop, such as Androcles and the Lion

Numerous others- check your library card catalog and fill a table with books on these themes for students to read

Mercedes and the Chocolate Pilot provides a wonderful opportunity to discuss genre and work on book location skills. Discuss the difference between fiction, including historical fiction, and non-fiction. Have the students discuss what genre each book belongs in and locate the appropriate area in the library

Write about a personal experience when someone made your life happier

Discussion Questions:

What does "humanitarian" mean?

Was Lt. Halvorsen a humanitarian?

How did his actions make a difference to Mercedes, Peter, and the other children?

Do you think his actions changed his own life? Why or why not?

Do you have to be a pilot to be a humanitarian?

Do you have to be a grown-up?

How can we be humanitarians? Why should we?

What is hope? Is it important? Why or why not?

Are there any heroes in this book? Who and why?