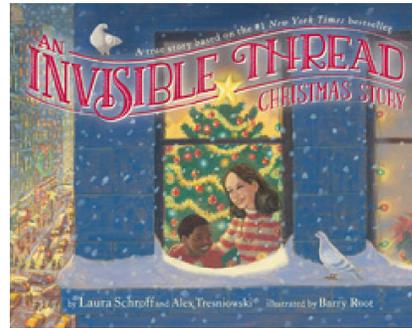


A Reading Group Guide to

An Invisible Thread Christmas Story

By Laura Schroff and Alex Tresniowski

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About the Book

Alone and hungry, eleven-year-old Maurice stood unnoticed on a New York City street corner, asking strangers for spare change to buy food. People passed by him, as if he were invisible, until a woman passed him, then doubled back to look him in the eyes. She offered him a meal, words of hope, and eventually friendship. In this sweet picture book, Laura Schroff retells the first Christmas that she and Maurice spent together, which was the first time Maurice celebrated the holiday, and the first time he ever received a present. She shares how Maurice in turn gave her a small white bear—which she later learns is the only thing he had that he could truly call his own—to show her how grateful he was for all that she’s done for him.

This true account based on a story from the original book for adults, #1 *New York Times* bestselling *An Invisible Thread*, shows how small acts of kindness and a helping hand can change lives. It is a moving Christmas story that goes beyond the holiday season and offers inspiration to last through the year with its example of openheartedness and kindness.

Discussion Questions

Choose the questions and activities that work best with the age and interests of the child or class you are sharing this book with.

1. At the beginning of the story, Maurice stands on a street corner and asks strangers for money to buy food. People pass by him as if he were invisible. Have you ever felt invisible—that no one could see you or understand how you were feeling? What was that like?
2. When Laura walked by Maurice, she noticed him. He wasn’t invisible to her. Why do you think Laura was able to “see” Maurice and understand that he needed help? How do you think it feels to have someone stop to help you?
3. Why do you think it was special that Laura took Maurice to lunch rather than just giving him money and walking on?

4. Maurice and Laura didn't have a lot in common. In the book he says that, "Some people don't understand how we can be friends, because we're so different, but we're great friends." Why do you think they became friends?
5. Maurice felt that Christmas with Laura and her family was the best ever. He loved the food, he loved the presents, but most of all he loved his new friends and the way they made him feel. What do you love most about your holidays and celebrations?
6. If you were able to invite Maurice to your home for any holiday, what would it be like? Who would be there? What kinds of food would you serve?
7. At Christmas dinner, Laura's family gave thanks and appreciation for all they had—and special thanks for the presence of their new friend Maurice. How do you think that made Maurice feel and why?
8. Why do you think Maurice gave Laura his teddy bear? How did it make Laura feel? How do you think it made Maurice feel?
9. In a note at the end of the book, Maurice writes that Laura changed his life. Do you agree? How do you think his life would be different if he never met Laura?
10. The author dedicated the book "To all the children like Maurice who see the world from the outside looking in." What do you think she meant?
11. This book is about small acts of kindness and how they can make a big difference. Make a list of some of the things people in the book did that showed their kindness.
12. Can you think of a time in your life when someone did something kind for you? What did they do?
13. Can you think of a time when you did something kind for someone else? What did you do?

Extension Activities

1. Vivian Paley, in her book for adults, *The Kindness of Children*, writes about how just hearing stories about kindness can inspire kindness in the listener. Make a list of books and stories that have kindness as a theme. You can ask your librarian for suggestions, and then share your favorites with the class. A good place to start: *The Lion and the Mouse* by Aesop with the moral: "No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted."

2. This book is based on a true story. Think of a time when someone did something kind for you. Write or illustrate your own story. Make a collection of “kindness stories” to share with the class.

3. Find famous sayings about kindness. You can search on the Internet for kindness quotations. Copy and make a collection of some of your favorites. Share them in class and tell why you like them. Here are a few to start you off:

When given the choice between being right or being kind, choose kind. —Dr. Wayne W. Dyer

Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible. —Tenzin Gyatso, Fourteenth Dalai Lama

Never look down on anybody unless you’re helping him up. —Jesse Jackson

A warm smile is the universal language of kindness. —William Arthur Ward

4. Illustrate your favorite quotations about kindness. Make a “kindness calendar,” with a quote for each month to inspire kind deeds. Decorate it and give it as a gift, or hang it on the wall in class or in your room.

5. Words have power to make people feel good or bad. Make a list of kind words and put them up around the room. Make a kindness acrostic—with a kind word for each letter of the word *kindness*. See how many words you can think of. Or, write a kindness poem—using the letters of the word *kindness* to start each line of the poem.

6. Trace the shape of your hand on a piece of paper. Write a quote or a favorite kind word on each finger. Cut it out and put it on a bulletin board, or attach the paper hands with string or tape to make a hands-across-the-class kindness mobile.

7. Sharing food and eating together is one way to show love and caring. Find a recipe for cookies and make a batch to give to someone. Make sure there is an adult to supervise. Whom would you give your treat to? Why? Or, try making sandwiches, with the help of an adult, to donate to a local food shelter. How did it make you feel to do something for someone in need?

Small Acts of Kindness

We learn kindness by the example of others who are kind and we “teach” kindness to others with our own acts of kindness. Kindness is a gift that is passed on from giver to giver. The habit of kindness grows stronger with each act of kindness. As with most things, we learn by practice. Kindness doesn’t have to be something big. Very often it is the small everyday acts of kindness that mean the most. Some small acts of kindnesses can be very powerful. You can add to the world of kindness with your own actions. Here are just a few things to start you off.

1. Smile. Make someone’s day brighter. It’s amazing how something so simple can be so powerful. Smiling is catching. One smile can turn into many, as people pass their smiles on, one at a time.

2. Hold a door open for the next person. Give up your seat on the bus to an older person or help someone by carrying packages.
3. Help around the house—without being asked by your parents or caregiver. You could clean your room or take out the garbage or do simple things like clearing the dishes from the dinner table, mowing the lawn, raking leaves, or shoveling snow.
4. You can help out a neighbor by offering to shovel snow, mow the lawn, walk the dog, or carry packages. Surprise them with a batch of homemade cookies.
5. Make your own holiday or birthday cards. There is something very special about a homemade, handwritten card. Send one to your grandparents, siblings, or perhaps to a child in a hospital ward or a soldier far from home.
6. Give the gift of your time. Spend time with a grandparent, a new kid in school, a younger sister or brother. Ask them about their day. Listen to what they have to say. Sometimes, just sitting next to someone while they watch television or read a book can be an act of kindness.
7. Call, Skype, or e-mail your grandparents, aunts, uncles or cousins. Tell them how much you love them.
8. Ask the new kid at school or someone you don't usually socialize with to join you at your lunch table, or invite him or her to play a game together at recess.
9. Say something nice to someone who seems sad or needs some cheering up.
10. Remember it is also important to be kind to animals. Start by thinking of your own pet. Make sure your pet has plenty of water in hot weather, is kept warm in winter, and gets plenty of exercise. How about an extra hug or tummy pat to make everyone happy, including you? Volunteer at an animal shelter or help to raise money to support animal causes.
11. Volunteer at a nursing home or soup kitchen. As a class, you can organize to wrap sandwiches for a soup kitchen or deliver library books to homebound neighbors. Be creative and think of a class "kindness project."
12. Set up a kindness jar in your classroom to raise money for a special charity or cause. Sell kindness calendars, host a bake sale, have a car wash, put on a concert, or even put on a talent show in order to add money to the kindness jar.

13. Maurice gave Laura a small white teddy bear for Christmas. Start a teddy bear drive and donate them to a local charity, hospital or shelter.

Laura has great suggestions at the end of her book and even more on her website about how to perform small acts of kindness. You can also visit Laura's website <http://aninvisiblethread.com/> to share your stories and to learn more about helping others.

For even more ideas, check out these sites:

Random Acts of Kindness: <https://www.randomactsofkindness.org/additional-classroom-materials>

Kids Activities Net: <http://www.kidactivities.net/category/random-acts-of-kindness.aspx>

Remember, "one small act of kindness can change a life forever."

Guide written in 2015 by Judith Rovenger. Judith is on the adjunct faculty of Long Island University and has taught at Columbia, Wesleyan, and Rutgers Universities. Her area of specialty is in ethics and emotional intelligence in literature. She is the former director of Youth Services at the Westchester Library System (NYS).

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