



Granddaddy's Gift

By Margaree King Mitchell, illustrated by Larry Johnson
(New York: Bridge Water Books, 1997)

Summary

Little Joe loves her granddaddy so much she would rather stay home with him than go to school, but Granddaddy tells her she needs to go to school so she will have choices when she grows up. Granddaddy shows his own courage and determination by studying for the Constitution test so he can become their town's first black registered voter.

Initiating Activities

1. Ask all of the students who were born between January 1 and March 15 to leave their seats and stand at the side of the room. Tell them they represent minorities in the United States. Then ask the seated students to count off by twos: 1's who represent white women, should join those at the side of the room; 2's, who represent white men, should remain seated. Next, ask those who live in a rented apartment or house to stand. Tell half of these to join the students at the side of the classroom and allow the others to be seated. Explain to students that those who are seated represent the people who could vote when our nation was just beginning. In half the states, all white males could vote, while in the other half, only white males who owned property could vote. Allow time for students to react to this mini-simulation.

2. Discuss with students why voting is important in a democracy. Share with them a memorable story about your own experiences voting. Tell them that the story they are about to read is about many things, but especially about the right to vote and how precious it is.

Discussion Questions

1. Why didn't Little Joe want to go to school? Why did Granddaddy say she should go? Who do you think was right? Give reasons for your answer.

2. What are segregation laws? Are these laws good or bad? Why?

3. Describe what happened when Granddaddy first tried to register to vote. What bad things happened to the family after that? Was voting worth the trouble the family experienced? Why or why not?

4. Who do you think burned the church? How did the members of the church react? Were you surprised by their reaction? Explain your answer.

5. What happened when Little Joe went to register to vote for the first time? What was her grandfather's gift to her? How do you think she felt about this gift?

Follow-up Activities

1. Point out that the Constitution test is no longer required for voting. Clarify that, although understanding the Constitution is a good idea for everyone, the test was unfair because only some people (generally African Americans) had to take it and their education had been limited by circumstances in the country at the time so they had little chance to learn about the Constitution. People who have moved to the United States and want to become citizens do have to take a test that includes some questions about the Constitution and government. They must study for the test by themselves or in special adult classes.

2. Encourage students to talk to their parents about their experiences registering to vote and voting. Did they have any difficulties? What are their most memorable experiences?

3. Make other books on voting available to students. Examples are *The Day Gogo Went to Vote*, by Elinor Batezat Sisulu (Boston: Little, Brown, 1996) and *Ballot Box Battle*, by Emily Arnold McCully (New York: Knopf, 1996). Conduct a class discussion comparing and contrasting the various efforts to gain the right to vote.

Adapted from *C Is for Citizenship: Children's Literature and Civic Understanding*, by Laurel R. Singleton (Boulder, CO: Social Science Education Consortium, 1997). Used by permission of the author.