

SECOND GRADE LESSON JANUSZ KORCZAK

STUDENT'S STORY

*"I am not here to be loved and admired,
But to act and love.
It is not the duty of people to help me,
But it is my duty to look after the world,
And the people in it."*

There was once a little boy who dreamed big...his dream was to change the world by helping the poor and hungry children in his city. The boy, Henryk, later known as Janusz Korczak grew up loved and well fed in a nice home near a majestic castle in Warsaw, Poland. One dreary day as dark clouds gathered in the sky threatening rain, the boy walked home from school when for the first time he noticed many homeless children, most were dressed in rags and looked hungrily at the boy. He wished he could do something to help them. As he continued walking, he imagined himself a king with a golden crown on a white horse helping all the children. When he arrived at home, he told his grandmother all that he saw and he vowed to help those in need. He shared his idea of throwing money to the children, he wished to get rid of money so there would not be poor or rich children and he continued to imagine himself as a generous king saving the children from their suffering. His grandmother listened to him and encouraged him to continue his dream.

Little Henryk continued his days at school which he found to be unpleasant, the teachers severely punished the children for the slightest mistake. He dreamed again about how one day he would help children receive the love and respect they deserved. When he was still young his father became sick and after a few years passed away. Henryk began to tutor other children after school to help pay for food and clothing. He also wrote short stories and won a prestigious money award. That is when he decided he needed a pen name and became Janusz Korczak. He has been called that ever since. Even though his family struggled and had to move out of their comfortable home into a poorer area of the city, he took food to the children in most need. He knew that little by little, with compassion and commitment, he could make a difference in the lives of those around him.

When he was old enough, though he loved to write stories, he decided to become a doctor. He knew he could help those suffering through medical care. He went to school and became a pediatrician, a doctor for children, working in the Jewish hospital during the day, then tending to the poor families for free in the evening. If they could not pay for the medicine, he often gave them the money they needed. But, that was not enough for Janusz Korczak also known as Dr. Korczak...he used the power of words to help and heal people. He used his words to write and spread his message of children's rights. His dream that each child be well fed, nourished, and treated with love spread far and wide.

His big dream led him to building and becoming the director of two beautiful and renowned orphanages, one for Jewish children and the other for Catholic children, homes where children without parents could experience family, love and receive an education. Now,

Dr. Korczak became a father, a father for two hundred children! These children were given a special task, they created with him a children's court run by the children themselves. If a rule was broken, the children decided the punishment...Korczak taught that the most important verdict was forgiveness. He vowed that each mistake is a lesson learned. The children were given the utmost love and respect and learned to be self-sufficient. The older children helped the new children that arrived and showed them how things worked in the orphanage. They lived as one big family. Though running the orphanage was a lot of work, Korczak always found time to tell stories and teach the children useful skills. They participated in the daily chores, such as sewing, cooking, carpentry, and gardening but also enjoyed playing games, sports, and hiking the countryside during the summer camps. Dr. Korczak knew that children needed to learn these daily tasks as well as enjoy themselves with fun and games. They even started a weekly children's newspaper that reached children all over Poland.

Thus Korczak's dream to help those most in need...the young, the poor, and the helpless came true. And to this day, there are some people that were in his care as children in the orphanage that have grown to be adults. They speak of Dr. Korczak with glowing hearts, remembering the loving family life they had and are ever grateful for all that they taught him. Though, he never wore a golden crown seen by human eyes or rode a white horse...if you close your eyes and think of him...you just may see his crown shining ever so brightly as he gallops on his stead with purpose towards all children with loving and open arms.

NOTES FOR THE TEACHER

- 1) *During his lifetime anti-semitism in Poland was prevalent leading up to the Holocaust. You may wish to include this in your story, "at certain times in history people were treated with discrimination, were looked upon as different and treated unkindly based on their differences. This was taking place while Janusz lived in Warsaw, Poland. At that time, the Jewish people were treated with discrimination. He and the children in one of his orphanages were Jewish and experienced this injustice."
- 2) **The Champion of Children*, by Tomek Bogacki, a picture book of Dr. Korczak's life, you may want to include in your classroom or school library for the students' own reading.
- 3) *Vocabulary to highlight: pen name; compassion, advocate, commitment, orphanage, court, self-sufficient, rights