Getting Parents Involved

by Vickie Butts and Patty A. Finch

Getting parents involved in the educational process is a goal of most teachers. Achieving that goal is not always easy, particularly in a school without a history of parental involvement. The barriers to such involvement may be economic, language, cultural difference, or lack of communication.

Reading and Writing and Pets

Perhaps more so than in other subjects, fostering a student’s love for reading and writing is more likely to see those activities as worthwhile.

As teachers, we are aiming not only toward a literate generation but also toward a generation that will read and write for pleasure.

In today’s society in which most homes, no matter how humble, have a TV but may not have books or magazines, how can we encourage parents to model a love for reading and writing?

As humane educators, we also are aiming toward a generation of responsible pet owners. How can we also encourage parents to model responsible pet ownership, when there may be no pets in the home?

Carole Bruce, a first-grade teacher at Webster Elementary School in Watertown, Wisconsin, has at least one answer to those questions. She is the originator of a highly patterned after the popular Clifford from the series by Norman Bridwell, published by Scholastic Books.

Enduring stuffed toy dog and an opportunity for both parents and students to learn about pet care. In addition, youngsters who would like to have a pet of their own welcome the chance to work together.

Responsible Pet Ownership

That’s just the beginning. Clifford also comes with an impressive collection of vet items donated by generous students. The collection is kept in Clifford’s own bag and accompanies him wherever he visits. It includes food and water dishes, a leash, and grooming brushes.

Once Clifford leaves the classroom with his temporary host, he becomes “real” in a sense for the younger with whom he is staying. Like a real pet dog, he needs to be fed, watered, groomed, sheltered, and loved. Clifford provides parents and children with an opportunity to discuss responsible pet care, as learned about in the classroom, and to share in the care of Clifford.

“Because Clifford is a special project,” explains Carole, “even the children who previously forgotten sharing of books can be exposed to such involvement.”

Parent-Child Teamwork

A visit from Clifford is a chance for parent and child to work together. He comes with a bag full of Clifford’s own books, including such titles as Clifford, The Small Red Puppy; Clifford, The Big Red Dog, and Clifford’s Good Deed.

For some families, the visit is a catalyst to a new or renewed sense for the youngster with whom he is staying. The parent can listen in as the child reads to Clifford; and except in cases of language differences, read a story or two aloud themselves.

Clifford provides wonderful companionship and an opportunity for both parents and students to learn about pet care. In addition, youngsters who would like to have a pet of their own welcome the chance to work together.

Your Own Clifford

Clifford has provided here a copy of the introduction she always sends along with Clifford to each new family he visits. The dog toy that Carole uses is available from Scholastic Book Clubs, Inc., 201 East McCarty Street, Box 750, Jefferson City, MO 65102.

The ever-popular Clifford books may be ordered from your local bookseller or by writing to Scholastic Book Services at the above address.

Why not try asking the engaging Clifford into your own classroom? You may find him to be one of the best teaching partners you’ve ever had!

About the Author...Vickie Butts is education director of the humane Society of Jefferson County in Jefferson, Wisconsin.

Clifford, the Big Red Dog, and first-grade teacher Carole Bruce are partners in teaching. Carole holds Clifford’s bag of pet care items, which include food and water dishes, a leash, grooming brushes, and Clifford’s favorite books.