

SURVIVOR TREE

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TEACHING TIPS

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Readers respond in multiple ways, including making connections to themselves, their communities, and their literacy experiences; pursuing their curiosity through discussion, inquiry, and self-expression; and changing their attitudes and behaviors. This guide provides suggestions and resources for supporting and extending students' authentic reading responses. Select activities and resources that best meet the needs and interests of your students.

READ AND DISCUSS

Read aloud *Survivor Tree* and discuss the book with students. What information or ideas stood out? What questions do students have? Collect and organize their questions and ideas on chart paper or an online platform like Flipgrid, and/or invite students to record their thinking in their notebooks. Where can students go to answer their questions or learn more? Generate a list of general resources students might use for inquiry such as websites, other books, school library databases, and people in your community. Students can add specific resources under these categories later. Students' questions and a list of accessible resources provide a foundation for deeper inquiry and focused discussion. This guide includes several resources for reading and discussing *Survivor Tree* to get you started!



PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

1. The 9/11 Survivor Tree symbolizes resilience and hope. Invite students to write in their notebooks about moments in their lives when they felt overwhelmed, upset, sad, or stressed because of events around them. What events have caused them stress? How did that event affect them? What has helped them reduce stress or develop a more hopeful outlook? Who do they turn to for support? Share one or two experiences of your own and invite a few students to share if appropriate. Focus the discussion on strategies and resources that help students overcome stressful situations and traumatic events—not students' stories of hardship or trauma. Model and set expectations for inclusivity and acceptance of all families and life experiences—recognizing that many young people can feel uncomfortable sharing opinions, preferences, or experiences that reveal differences or struggle. Encourage interest and respect for each other.
2. People often recognize or honor significant events or people in their lives with celebrations, ceremonies, and memorials, or observing “special” days like anniversaries. How do students celebrate or honor personally important events or people? Have they attended ceremonies like funerals, weddings, or graduations? What family traditions or rituals do they connect with special days or people? What memories do they have? Do they keep artifacts or mementos like programs, clothing, or photos that remind them of the significant people and events in their lives? Ask guiding questions and encourage students' authentic questions and responses. In their notebooks or other writing space, invite students to brainstorm a list of important events and people or the items they keep to remember them. Share one or two personal examples and invite a few students to share. Students can select one topic or memory from their lists and write personal narratives or poems, make collages, or respond in other ways. Create a class “memorial” of students' writing and artwork and publish them in a class book, museum display, or blog.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

“For a community to be whole and healthy, it must be based on people’s love and concern for each other.”

—Millard Fuller

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3. The ability to access community support and resources helps people recover from hardship and tragedy and fosters resilience. Invite community members who provide health and safety services (including mental health services), food and housing assistance, childcare, and other local aid organizations to talk with students about needs in your community and the support their agencies and organizations provide. Contact local colleges and universities for any educational programs or materials they may offer. Before discussions with community members, students can research local agencies and organizations and develop questions and discussion topics.

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS

4. Work with students to create an inspiration wall (in your classroom or a virtual space) of quotes, song lyrics, phrases, artwork, and other mixed media. Choose media and materials that communicate encouragement and celebrate community. Invite students to create personal inspiration “walls” in their notebooks or virtual spaces. What visuals and words inspire them? Why? Throughout the year, students can add to their class and individual walls and use their notebook inspirations for writing and art activities throughout the school year.
5. In many communities, people plant trees in memory of loved ones or to commemorate significant events. Each year, the 9/11 Memorial and Museum donates seedlings from the Survivor Tree to three communities who have experienced recent tragedies. Communities receiving seedling commit to caring for the trees as symbols of hope and resilience. Invite students to research the Survivor Tree seedling program and learn more about the communities who have received seedlings, or research: memorial tree programs, the history of other notable memorial trees like the Oklahoma City bombing survivor tree, or other memorial trees in your local area. How can students get involved? Is there an opportunity to plant memorial trees in your school community?
6. Take a nature walk with students in an outdoor space like a park or school playground. Guide students to focus on the sights and sounds of the environment around them. Encourage them to linger and focus their attention on one aspect of the environment such as listening to birdsong, watching one insect, examining a tree, or feeling a breeze on their skin. Give students three to five minutes to silently focus. You can repeat the activity by moving to another spot and encouraging students to focus on something new. After returning to class, invite students to reflect on the experience. What do they notice about the environment around them? How does this activity make them feel? How can nature influence their feelings and attention? Students can record their observations and reflections in their notebook and/or discuss their thoughts with a partner, but do not require students to take notes during the mindfulness exercise or immediately afterward. Give them time to experience the physical and mental aspects of mindfulness before directing their attention elsewhere.

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS

- Learn more about the 9/11 Survivor Tree and the Survivor Tree Seedling Program at the official 9/11 Memorial & Museum website
- The American Psychological Association offers a resilience guide for parents and teachers
- *Psychology Today's* Seven Skills of Resilience

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