



Classroom Guide

Title: **Mr. George Baker**

Author: **Amy Hest**

Illustrator: **Jon J. Muth**

Theme: It is never too late to learn something new – learning is a life-long endeavor.

Program Summary: Harry sits on the porch with 100-year-old Mr. George Baker who can dance and play the drums but goes to school, just like Harry, so he can learn to read. LeVar explores how learning is an ageless adventure as he introduces “The Steppers,” a group of senior women who are learning to dance and perform, and the Ferrara family who runs a bakery where the youngest to the oldest have been mixing up sweet treats for five generations.

Topics for Discussion:

Discuss with students what is necessary to get really good at doing something. Invite them to talk about something at which they are experts.

Pose the question that LeVar asks in the program: “What would you like to learn to do?”

Discuss how people learn to read. Ask students how they would go about teaching someone to read.

Mr. George Baker and Harry are very good friends. Invite students to talk about their elderly friends and what they enjoy doing together.

Curriculum Extension Activities:

Investigate the availability of local community groups of elderly people who sing, dance, or otherwise perform, and invite them to do a program for the students.

Mr. George Baker is a “drummer man.” Collaborate with the music teacher to learn about drums and famous drummers. Look at different kinds of drums and how they are played (with fingertips, drumsticks, heel of one’s hand, etc.). Listen to recordings and/or watch videos of drummers performing.

Have partners work together to figure out a rhythm that involves an arrangement of hand claps, foot taps, table taps, and the like, and teach it to the rest of the class.

Enlist the aid of the library media specialist and have students do research on individuals who are known for their achievements well into their later years. Subjects



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might include the following people: Stan Lee, Toni Morrison, Vera Wang, Laverne Cox, Betty White, Steve Carrell, George Washington Carver, Helen Keller, Benjamin Franklin, Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, Thomas Edison, Duke Ellington, and others. The focus of the research should be on the accomplishments of the person.

The first-person narration of Mr. George Baker is an excellent example of a writer's voice. Have students write a brief description of an elderly friend or neighbor using details about what the person looks like, how the person dresses, and something she/he does well, like what Harry writes about George. They might start their descriptions the way Harry starts his: "See this (man/woman)? That's _____."

Extend invitations to elderly family members or friends of the students to visit the classroom. Find out any special talents and interests these people might have and invite them to share with the students. For example, a visiting friend might: teach a craft, share a hobby or collection, play a musical instrument, talk about her/his job, cook with the children, tell stories, read to students, and do many other activities.

To promote positive attitudes toward aging, explore the students' concepts of what it means to be "old." Have them cut out pictures of older people from magazines and attach them to a chart or bulletin board. Discuss the reasons for their choices. Along with the pictures, record their responses to the question, "What does it mean to be old?" Ask them to name some people (including famous people) whom they perceive to be "old." Brainstorm two lists with students: "What older people can do" and "What I can do." Have students compare and contrast the two lists. After students have had opportunities to interact with elderly people, through some of the activities below, revisit the charts to see if they have altered their thinking.

Enlist students in compiling a "Top Ten Books Every Child Should Read" for the school. Discuss with students what the criteria might be for inclusion on the list e.g., a good story (ask them to elaborate on what makes a story "good"), beautiful illustrations, likable characters, appeal to everyone, a long-lasting favorite, etc. Have them decide how they will solicit nominations for the list from other classrooms in the building. They might do an intercom announcement, send an e-mail to each room, and or write a letter to each class, briefly mentioning the criteria and asking for three titles of books that each class thinks should be on the list. Once the nominations are in, students can compile the Top Ten list. Arrange to display the ten books in the library media center, a central hallway, or another prominent place in the building. Send a copy of the list to the public library and local newspaper.



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Book Review:

Grandfather Counts by Andrea Cheng, illustrated by Ange Zhang

Supplementary Booklist:

Papa's Mark by Gwendolyn Battle-Lavert, illustrated by Colin Bootman

The Wednesday Surprise by Eve Bunting, illustrated by Donald Carrick

Abuela's Weave by Omar S. Castaneda, illustrated by Enrique O. Sanchez

Miss Tizzy by Libba Moore Gray, illustrated by Jada Rowland

A Story for Bear by Dennis Haseley, illustrated by Jim LaMarche

Saturdays and Teacakes by Lester L. Laminack, illustrated by Chris Soentpiet

The Piano by William Miller, illustrated by Susan Keeter

Tomás and the Library Lady by Pat Mora, illustrated by Raul Colón

The Hard-Times Jar by Ethel Footman Smothers, illustrated by John Holyfield

Grandma's Records by Eric Velasquez

Related Themes:

- dance
- cooking
- friendships

Related Reading Rainbow Programs:

- Program #93 – Mrs. Katz and Tush
- Program #118 – How to Make an Apple Pie and See the World
- Program # 55 – Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters

About the Author: Born in New York City and raised on Long Island, Amy Hest aspired to be a writer from an early age, but “I never thought my life was exciting enough for a



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writer,” she says. Her love for books, however, led her to become a children’s librarian and later to work in children’s book publishing. All of this time she was writing and now has more than 30 books published, including *Reading Rainbow* feature book, *The Purple Coat*.

About the Illustrator: Jon J. Muth was a well-known comic book artist for 20 years before he became a children’s book illustrator. Jon attributes the success of his work to his ability “to make myself small and run around inside my stories, to think like a child.” He views his illustrations as more than “decoration,” and considers the connection between words and pictures most important.