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The Write Stuff: Kiva kids remember GIs; Young scribes cheer up troops

By Wendy Miller, *Independent Newspapers*

Students sometimes doubt whether lessons they learn in the classroom will translate to the outside world. Youngsters at Kiva Elementary School, 6911 E. McDonald Drive, have discovered one that does.

They are sending letters and pictures to U.S. troops serving overseas. Some were sent to brighten the soldiers' spirits for the holidays, but all are meant as year-round connections back home and messages of support.

"It's a wonderful integration of reading, writing and civics," Kiva teacher Mary Martine said. "Even in the third-grade letter-writing curriculum, it presents a wonderful opportunity to use these real-life experiences.

"Kids often ask me, when are we going to use these skills? Well, here it is," she said.

Mrs. Martine began the project last year with her second-grade class. She switched this school year to teaching third-grade. As a result, she has the same classroom of students.

"It's literally a continuation of last year's writing project," she said.

Second-grade students in Paula Leikam's class at Kiva got involved after parent volunteer Lisa Barnitt read a column last month in the Town of Paradise Valley Independent. It encouraged readers to remember U.S. Armed Forces overseas when addressing Christmas cards and was prompted by PV resident Christine Hess's efforts to support troops with cards, letters, pictures and plush animals.

The class used time allotted for its masterpiece art class to write letters and create pictures. The activity satisfied a curriculum requisite to learn how to write a friendly letter.

"Students need to be able to put their thoughts into words, and at this level, they're doing such a great job of getting their thoughts to the paper," Mrs. Leikam said.

The exercise also teaches students how to revise their thoughts as needed and the six traits of writing: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency and final presentation, Mrs. Leikam added.

Mrs. Hess helped both Kiva classes as well as a fifth-grade class at Highland Lakes School in Glendale, Ariz., find soldiers with whom they could correspond.





Over the past year, the PV woman mailed overseas more than 3,000 Beanie Babies and other small plush animals for soldiers to distribute to children in the countries in which they are serving.

Mrs. Hess read requests for children's correspondence on the Web site www.anysoldier.com. She was delighted when the Kiva teachers agreed to participate.



"It's vital to send the troops correspondence and keep up their morale," Mrs. Hess said. "It tells the servicemen and women what's on the mind of our 'future leaders.' I feel we support them through our children. It's important for our kids to learn to give and share, plus it sharpens letter-writing skills. These little people will remember one day that they did something nice for their fellow Americans.

"Little by little we are making a difference. Every raindrop makes a puddle," she added.

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