



Boxes for Katje

Candace Fleming , Stacey Dressen-McQueen (Illustrations)

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Simple seeds of friendship grow into something extraordinary

After World War II there is little left in Katje's town of Olst in Holland. Her family, like most Dutch families, must patch their old worn clothing and go without everyday things like soap and milk. Then one spring morning when the tulips bloom "thick and bright," Postman Kleinhoonte pedals his bicycle down Katje's street to deliver a mysterious box – a box from America! Full of soap, socks, and chocolate, the box has been sent by Rosie, an American girl from Mayfield, Indiana. Her package is part of a goodwill effort to help the people of Europe. What's inside so delights Katje that she sends off a letter of thanks – beginning an exchange that swells with so many surprises that the girls, as well as their townspeople, will never be the same.

This inspiring story, with strikingly original art, is based on the author's mother's childhood and will show young readers that they, too, can make a difference.

Boxes for Katje is a 2004 Bank Street - Best Children's Book of the Year.

Boxes for Katje Details

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From Reader Review Boxes for Katje for online ebook

N_Colleen says

Candace Fleming's Boxes for Katje is an inspiring story that is great for readers aged 5-10. The illustrations seen on every page are packed with color, pattern and historical detail done in mediums such as colored pencils, oil pastels, and acrylic. Based on true events that happened in May of 1945 Katje, a girl from Holland receives a letter and a small box sent from America. After World War II Katje's family and town is left with very little. When this box arrives with soap, socks, and chocolate Katja is very grateful and writes back to her friend from America telling her how much she enjoyed the gifts and about the state in which their town is in. As the months pass, Katje continues to receive much needed items from her friend in America that helps get the whole town through the harsh winter. Katje and people that live in the town are so thankful for their American friends generosity that after the cold winter they send a box from Holland to America.

This is a great story to help teach children about the importance of giving not receiving. Teachers and parents will love this book because it lends itself so well in showing why it is important to help others. School these days are often helping organizations or heading up their own service learning projects. This book would be excellent to jump start ideas and show how good deeds can help people all over the world.

Lana Hoffman says

"After a young Dutch girl writes to her new American friend in thanks for the care package sent after World War II, she begins to receive increasingly larger boxes."

This is an enjoyable story with a heart warming lesson about kindness. The author is able to show Katja's character through her actions. Children can learn the goodness that comes from sharing with others by reading Katja's story. Children can also learn about charity and the satisfaction that comes from being a giving person who helps those in need. This is also a great book for teaching children how to infer. They have many opportunities to practice this skill throughout the story. The illustrations enhance the text. Children will enjoy taking a picture walk with this book. The book jacket is engaging and the end pages are beautiful! I especially liked how the author explained the true story about the boxes at the end of the book.

Délice says

Boxes for Katje by Candace Fleming, illustrated by Stacey Dressen-McQueen is a special book I discovered on a difficult day a few years ago. I was feeling suicidal and decided to go sit in the children's books section at the library. I picked this book up and as I read it, tears flowed. It was the exact message I needed that day. Based on a true story, this book tells of a little girl in post war Holland, who receives a care package from a little girl in the U.S. This is just the beginning of a beautiful pen pal relationship. The little American girl is touched by the Dutch girl's gratitude for the small gifts, and generosity with each gift. As she learns of the magnitude of the Dutch community's poverty, her heart and generosity grow and she sends bigger and bigger packages. Both of the girls' entire communities end up being impacted by this small act of kindness that grows and grows.

In light of the sickening turn our nation's immigration and refugee policies have taken, I am experiencing so much grief today instead of celebration. This is the second year that I have chosen to conscientiously object to the Independence Day festivities. I have dedicated myself to listening to the voices of the marginalized people groups in our nation and learning about our country's true beginnings which has led to a heart that just keeps breaking more and more. The message of kindness, compassion, generosity of this book reminds me that there have been shining moments in our history. I am committed to fostering these values, teaching them to my children, voting for laws that are based in them and for politicians that represent them. .

When I read this book to my 7 year old son a few nights ago, I started crying so hard I could hardly read the words out loud. A book that moves you that much is worth paying attention to. Please do your heart a favor and read this beautiful masterpiece. ?

Carolynne says

This book got an extra star because I used to live in the Netherlands and it rang really true for me. By the time I lived there, the war had been over for more than 20 years, and there was plenty of chocolate, wool, and soap, but people still remembered the privations of the War years and those right afterwards, when this story takes place. The people I knew were careful of whatever they had and made do with modest collections of supplies.

This book is based on the experiences of Fleming's mother in 1945, when she sent a box of much needed items (toothpaste, soap, and socks) to a Dutch family. In *Katje's Boxes*, Katje writes back and tells Rosie that there is no sugar to be found in Holland. In reality, Katje's father wrote back and asked for cans of meat, or powdered milk. In both cases, when the American families find out how scarce these items are, they collect items from friends and neighbors and send what they collect. The pen-pal friendship of these two little girls, Katje and Rosie, leads to supplying necessities for the whole village. Finally, Katje and her neighbors are pleased to repay their American friends. A heart-warming story, with richly colored acrylic illustrations that capture the delight of the families on both side of the Atlantic.

Pair this book with *One Thousand Tracings: Healing the Wounds of World War II* by Lita Judge, another book of memories of making connections with survivors of WWII. Also compare it with graphic novel *A Family Secret* by Eric Heuvel for more family recollections of the war. Lexile measure is 460.

L12_danielle says

Katje is a young girl living in Olst, Holland shortly after World War II. Little is left of her town and her family, like so many others, must go without everyday essentials such as milk and soap. One morning, Postman Kleinhoonte arrives at Katje's door with a mysterious box from America. The box has been sent by Rosie, a girl from Indiana. The package is part of a program called The Children's Aid Society which helps collect and send hard-to-find items to the kids in Holland. As the story progresses, Katje continues to receive box after box from Rosie and each time she writes her a nice note to thank her as well as to hint at what sorts of items the people from her town are struggling to live without. Out of the goodness of her heart, Katje shares her newfound treasures with her neighbors and fellow townspeople.

I read Boxes for Katje aloud to my 5th graders the other day and they really enjoyed Stacey Dressen-McQueen's gorgeous illustrations and the sweet story of friendship and compassion between Katje and Rosie. They had many questions about WWII and the destruction it left for the people of Europe. This book could tie in very nicely with a study of WWII and the aftermath for the Europeans. It also correlated with our school wide affective goal of eliminating bullying/disrespectful behavior and the promotion of kindness amongst all. I would recommend it for students in K-5.

N>Allie I says

Set in a tiny Dutch town of Holland right after World War II, Boxes for Katje is the perfect example of a historical fiction tale. Due to the ending of the war, all of the people living in the town of Olst had very little to survive on. Most of the necessities they needed were scarce.

We meet a little girl named Katje very early on in the story. AS the postman comes by on his bike, he shouts out, "I have a box for Katje- a box from America!" As soon as Katje opens the box she finds the unthinkable- a cake of soap, wool socks and chocolate! At this time, these items were far and few between! As Katje reaches into the box further she finds a note that simply says, "Dear Dutch Friend, I hope these gifts brighten your day. Your American Friend, Rosie." When Katje realizes that she has just received a very special and generous gift, she immediately writes back to her pen pal.

Katje and the Rosie begin a friendship through letters. Katje tells Rosie what she doesn't have and Rosie sends what she needs (because at this time, America was not in need like Holland). Katje does not keep all the items she receives, instead she gives out the gifts to people in her village who are in need (even more than she!) AS Rosie sends more gifts, the gifts get bigger and bigger. It turns out Rosie tells her friends and townspeople of the lack of necessities in Holland, and the gifts become bigger and more plentiful.

This lovely tale of friendship and heartache is incredibly realistic. The strong bond these two very different girls make is clear to be ever-lasting. I would use this book for second grade all the way through junior high. I would use it to show how we can help each other, to start a pen pal unit, to show how other countries are effected by war (later grades), or even how to help people who sometimes cannot help themselves! I would highly recommend this book to teachers and parents alike!

Sarah BT says

Boxes for Katje is an incredibly heartwarming book. While the book is based on a true story, the author has taken artistic liberty and made the characters children instead of adults as in the real life story. It was actually Katje's father who wrote back asking for supplies, not Katje herself. Although the book may not be entirely factual, the story does maintain its uplifting message of generosity.

The artwork is colorful and the reader is transported to Holland through Dressen-McQueens illustrations. Readers can spot the similarities between cultures in the illustrations-friendly neighbors, a cat lounging in the yard, people talking on the street. By adding these, readers can discover that these two girls are not that different.

Boxes for Katje is a great read for all ages and one that will be sure to inspire readers to give.

When I first read this one, I thought it would be the perfect tie-in to any community giving event. I would use Boxes for Katje to kick off a canned food drive that the library was sponsoring (maybe a food for fines drive?). I would also tie in historical events with today and explain to students that even today there are people who are in need and we can help

Crissy says

Absolutely loved it. Every library should own it. ❤?

L13 Tracy Beling says

California Young Reader Medal: Picture Books for Older Readers - 2006

This book was simply wonderful! I read it and then watched the DVD of the story. The movie is basically a narration of the story while the camera pans over the illustrations. I liked that I could focus on the looking at the illustrations while hearing the story. When I read the book I missed some of the details of the pictures.

This story is set after World War II when the countries of Europe were still devastated by the war. People from the US began sending boxes of necessities to different countries in hopes of giving them a little assistance. Katje receives one of these boxes in Olst, Holland and sends a thank you letter back to the little girl, Rosie, that sent her the box from the States. Rosie notices that Katje and her town need even more. Over the next year, more and more people from Rosie's community get together to continue sending more packages to Katje and the people of Olst. Through this experience they grow to be friends.

This book has wonderful themes of friendship, and taking care of others through community service. In my school, every class spends time during the 4th quarter on a leadership project. This would be an excellent book to read to a class to kick off the project. The best part is that the story is based on true events.

At the beginning of the DVD and in the back of the book, the author, Candace Fleming, explains that this is a story which was inspired by the true events of her mother's childhood. Her mother is portrayed by Rosie and she did send a box to a girl named Katje in Holland. The events in real life played out very similar to those in the book.

Dolly says

This is such a sweet and heartwarming tale about relief efforts following WWII. Based on a true story, this tale follows a small town in the Netherlands and the people who lived there. They were so devastated by the war and had very little to eat, and clothes worn thin and ragged.

Due to the efforts of American charities, packages of badly needed items were delivered all over war-torn Europe and this tale focuses on the pen-pal friendship that develops between two little girls, Katje and Rosie.

I love that it shows the good that is done when people donate food and clothing items to people who are needy - it just reinforces the lesson I am trying to teach our girls when we do the same.

This book was selected as one of the books for the February 2014 - Kindness discussion at the Picture-Book Club in the Children's Books Group here at Goodreads.

Kathryn says

What a wonderful story! I'm giving this book five stars, even though I was not a huge fan of the style of illustrations (though I appreciated all the details and the warmth portrayed in them) because the story is so important and made even more powerful and touching because it is based on a true story involving the author's mother.

After WWII, when much of Europe was devastated and her people struggling with threadbare clothing and not enough food, organizations in America such as the Children's Aid Society sent boxes to the families in need. In this story, young Katje in Holland gets a box from an American girl named Rosie. "What luxuries!" Katje and her mother and the mailman cry, as they take out a cake of soap and a pair of wool socks (sad that these are considered "luxuries"; the postman remarks how Holland is a sock-free country since the war) and, perhaps most luxurious of all, a chocolate bar. With her kindness and generous spirit, Katje shares the chocolate bar with her mother and the mailman. But there are so many other good people in her town who go without... When she writes her letter of thanks to Rosie, her plight inspires Rosie and her friends to do even more for Katje and her townspeople.

This is a beautiful story of friendship and generosity, and I loved the ending!!! Highly recommended! Be sure to read the author's note, too. Its theme is one dear to me because, while I certainly think that organizations giving aid can be a good and very helpful thing, I feel it is even more powerful when there is a personal connection. Rosie was no doubt inspired to send that first package by a general sense of humanity, and perhaps some encouragement from grown-ups; but what really made the generosity blossom was when she felt that personal connection with Katje; when the girl in Holland became not just a distant name on a list, but a real girl who held the pencil and wrote a letter back to her, who ate the chocolate and wore the wool socks, and saw so many others doing without. This story reminded me a bit of 84, Charing Cross Road and how Helene sent goodies back to her friends in post-war England, and how knowing them and how they appreciated and used the things she sent made her wish to keep sending more. Just beautiful!

Laura Noto says

Summary-

Boxes for Katje is a picture book for K-3rd grade readers. It features the main character, Katje, a girl that lives in the tiny Dutch town of Olst in 1945. Times are hard after the war, and the people in her town do not have a lot of clothes or food. One day Katje receives a package from America. The mailman explains that The Children's Aid Society is helping Americans send packages full of important items to people overseas in need. She is happy to get the package and she generously shares the rare and special treat inside. Later she writes a thank you letter to the girl who sent the package, Rosie. Throughout the book Rosie and Katje write letters to each other and Rosie continues to send Katje bigger and more helpful packages. The things she sends her include sugar, clothes, canned meat, and other items that they don't have access to in Olst. Every

time a package comes, Katje shares the contents with her neighbors, friends, and family. The winter is especially hard for Katje because of the lack of food, clothing, and heat. Rosie's church and school put together a food drive and help give Katje a miracle.

Response-

A teacher could use this book for a few different reasons. It could show the importance of charity, the influence of writing to a pen pal, or the ability that a lot of children have to make a big difference to someone else. I enjoyed that Rosie gave Katje little items at first (chocolate, socks, and soap) and it made a huge difference to Katje. This book could help American students stop taking what they have for granted. They also may put more effort into food and clothing drives that are so common in public schools.

At the end of the book there is an author's note. This book is based off of a true story, however when it happened in real life the packages were primarily sent by adults. Young, inspired students may become upset by this. This picture book also "sugarcoats" the sadness of everyone in Katje's village. They were starving and freezing. Some of these people actually had to eat tulip bulbs to avoid death, and this book shows them all smiling and colorfully dressed. I guess it makes the facts easier for a younger child to deal with. Other than the misrepresentations, I think it was a good story with a positive message; kids can make a difference.

Erin says

In Candace Fleming's *Boxes for Katje*, we are sent to post-World War II Olst, Holland. The war has wreaked havoc on many of the families in Holland, including Katje's. They have little access to everyday comforts like sugar, clothing, and soap. One day, Katje receives a package from the postman. In the package is a bar of soap, wool socks, a bar of chocolate, and a letter from an American girl named Rosie. Katje responds to Rosie, telling her that the chocolate brought them so much joy as they have no sugar to make sweets with. Not long after that, another box arrives, bigger than the last, filled with bags of sugar. Katje generously shares the sugar with neighboring families and responds to Rosie that the gift will help feed the thin, little children living next door. Throughout the harsh winter, packages of increasing generosity continue to arrive and Katje selflessly spreads the "wealth" with her community. Finally, Katje decides to send Rosie a gift in gratitude-tulip bulbs she can plant.

This is a beautiful story with a heartfelt message. The illustrations are warm and capture the quaintness and community of the tiny Dutch town. Rosie and Katje's letters are adjacent to the illustrations, bringing their exchange of words to life. The author also uses several Dutch names and phrases throughout the text, contributing to the authenticity. Readers can't help but smile and feel warmed by the generosity and heartfelt gratitude each young girl brings the other.

This would be a great story for a range of elementary readers. This would be a great text to accompany a social-emotional learning unit on kindness, compassion, and generosity. It would also help readers develop empathy for those less fortunate. Older readers could discuss the power of words and how two girls living on opposite sides of the world were able to make such a difference in each other's lives. This would also make a great mentor text for an introductory unit on writing friendly letters.

Cathy Traccarella says

Wow! Author Candace Fleming wrote such a captivating story it made me cry twice. The story is historical

fiction based on an experience the author's mother had in 1945 when she sent care packages to a Dutch girl after the war. Reading about how Katje and others in her town in Holland were so thankful for what the Americans sent over to them during the long winter made me tear up the first time I read the book. A few days later I read the book again and got choked up when reading about how generous Kaje was with her new bounty and how the Americans were so enthusiastic about sending more when they knew there was a need. What a great lesson about appreciating what you have and sharing with others.

This book is for students grades K-3rd and there is so much you could do with a read-aloud. There are mentions of hardships the characters go through but the focus is on the exchange between the two girls from different countries. There are the concepts of sharing and people in need to discover and discuss as you make your way through the story. Older students can use inference to discuss the impact from the war. There is even an ongoing mention of tulips in the story that would a great literacy link to a plant unit in science. What a moving (true) story to show students the power of kindness and giving and how one person can make a difference in the lives of others.

Julia Drescher says

This story is set in Holland and takes place after World War II. There is little left in the town of Olst where Katje lives. Katje is a young girl who one day receives a box from America. The box is from another girl through the Children's Aid Society. The box contains soap, socks, and chocolate. Katje is grateful for these items and shares them with her mother and postman. There was also a letter included from Rosie, the sender. Katje sent a letter to Rosie expressing her gratitude. She explained that the chocolate was delicious and sugar is rare in her town.

The story continues with more boxes from Rosie to Katje. Each box is bigger than the last, containing more useful/valuable items. Katje is always grateful, and always shares the items with her neighbors in Olst. Rosie's town gets involved and they are able to send many items of food and clothing to Katje and her town.

At the end, Katje sent Rosie a box. The box contained tulip bulbs, as this is how she could express her gratitude and share what she had to give with Rosie.

This is a great book to use with younger students to teach about community and helping others. The girls are likely 8-10 years old and the illustrations are very colorful and vibrant. While it is a great read with a great message, I don't believe it would be appealing to boys in second grade or higher unless it was used as a basis for discussion. The message is wonderful and would be a great text to use when discussing pen pals or community service projects with students in younger elementary grades.
