



## Classroom Guide for **CHRISTMAS MAKES ME THINK**

by **Tony Medina**  
Illustrated by **Chandra Cox**

### Reading Level

\*Reading Level: Grades 1-2

Interest Level: Grades K-4

Guided Reading Level: J

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 2.8/.5

\*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

### Themes

Holidays, Environment/Nature, Sharing/Giving, Homelessness, African American Interest

### Synopsis

A young boy anticipates the coming Christmas holidays with no school, special foods, lots of presents, and trimmed trees. As the boy reflects on these traditions, he begins to think about all the trees that are cut down, the animals slaughtered for holiday meals, the excessive number of unneeded gifts, and the people who are hungry and homeless. The boy then considers ways to address these problems and make Christmas a true time of giving and sharing. This book was praised by *School Library Journal* for “its different look at the Christmas holiday.”

### Background

Christmas has always been a favorite time for Tony Medina. He says, “It was when my family and friends came together to share good times and good feelings—not to mention good food and presents!” However, as he grew up, Medina encountered people who had no place to live and he began to realize that not everyone was as lucky as he. With family and friends, he collected food and clothing for the homeless in his Harlem neighborhood. Medina recalls, “We stayed up all night cooking, until we could barely keep our eyes open. We fed over two hundred people, even whole families.” Readers of *Christmas Makes Me Think* will recognize this spirit of Christmas from Medina’s story.

**Teaching Tip**

This is an excellent selection to include in your collection of holiday books.

**BEFORE READING****Prereading Focus Questions**

Before introducing the book, share the background information with students. Then you may wish to set the stage for reading with questions such as the following.

1. Why do people celebrate holidays? What are some ways they celebrate them?
2. What is your favorite holiday? Why? What is special about it?
3. With whom do you usually spend your holidays?
4. Why is education important? How can it make a difference in your life?
5. What are some things you enjoy sharing with others? How does sharing make you feel?

**Exploring the Book**

Display the book and discuss the title with students. Ask them what might Christmas make them think about. What thoughts might the boy in the story be having?

Study the illustrations and encourage students to determine how the artist created them.

Read the dedications. Ask students if they offer clues to the story, and to the author's and illustrator's feelings.

**Setting a Purpose for Reading**

Have students read to find out why Christmas makes the boy think and what he thinks about.

**VOCABULARY**

Students will be familiar with most words in this book, but you can reinforce meaning with this activity. Draw two large outlines of Christmas stockings on the chalkboard. Label the first stocking **nouns** and the second stocking **adjectives**, and write the words below in each stocking. Review that a noun names a person, place, or thing, and an adjective describes a noun. Then have students take turns making up oral sentences using at least one word from each stocking.

<b>Stocking 1:</b>	<b>Nouns</b>	<b>Stocking 2:</b>	<b>Adjectives</b>
time	presents	favorite	chocolate
cake	turkey	big	bright
tree	pigs	colorful	fancy
lights	bulbs	lots	nice
toys	clothes	good	homeless
shoes	stocking	hot	
hats	scarves		
soup	songs		

### **AFTER READING**

#### **Discussion Questions**

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation. Encourage students to refer back to the book to support their responses.

1. Who is telling this story? How do you know?
2. How does the boy feel about Christmas in the beginning of the story? How do his feelings change? Why do they change?
3. Why does the boy worry about Christmas trees?
4. How does the boy change his mind about turkeys and pigs at Christmas?
5. What does the boy realize about his toys and clothes?
6. Why does the boy think he should share his presents?
7. What does the boy mean by being "new" Santas?
8. What is the message of this book?

#### **Literature Circles**

If you use literature circles during reading time, students might find the following suggestions helpful in focusing on the different roles of the group members.

- The **Questioner** might use questions similar to those in the Discussion Questions section of this guide to help group members explore the book.
- The **Passage Locator** might look for ways that the boy's feelings change.
- The **Illustrator** might draw scenes from the book using different media.
- The **Connector** might find other books with holiday themes.
- The **Summarizer** should provide a brief summary of each section that the group has completed.

- The **Investigator** might collect books and other materials with ideas for helping in a school or community.

\*There are many resource books available with more information about organizing and implementing literature circles. Three such books you may wish to refer to are: *Getting Started with Literature Circles* by Katherine L. Schlick Noe and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 1999), *Literature Circles: Voice And Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse, 2002), and *Literature Circles Resource Guide* by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 2000).

### **Reader's Response**

Use the following questions or similar ones to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to what they have read. Suggest that students respond in reader's journals, oral discussion, or drawings.

1. Do you agree with the boy's ideas of how to celebrate Christmas? Why or why not?
2. What would you give up to make things better for someone else?
3. The boy suggests that people could just visit a tree and give it presents. What present would you give a tree?
4. Lots of children have toys they don't ever play with. What ideas do you have for "recycling" such toys?
5. How could people make Christmas last "a week, a month, or even a year"?

### **Other Writing Activities**

You may wish to have students participate in one or more of the following writing activities. Set aside time for students to share and discuss their work.

1. After reading *Christmas Makes Me Think*, students might write their own holiday stories.
2. Some students may wish to write a proposal for a class activity to help others. Suggest students brainstorm ideas with a partner or in a small group beforehand.
3. Have students turn to the page showing the boy sitting on a pile of presents. Ask them to imagine a gift that might be in one of the packages and then write a description of the gift without naming it. Students can then read their descriptions aloud for classmates to guess the gift.
4. Some students might enjoy writing a menu for a holiday celebration.

### **ELL/ESL Teaching Strategies**

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English language learners or who are learning to speak English as a second language.

1. Make key words as concrete as possible by linking them to the art. Use the list of nouns in the Vocabulary section to help students make associations.

2. Read the story aloud slowly, repeating lines for emphasis. Invite students to join in on subsequent readings.
3. Use the illustrations in the book to expand students' understanding and vocabulary. For example, for the first illustration the following statements could be made: The boy has on a blue jacket. He is carrying two bags. His mother is coming out of a store. There is a bike in the store window. There is a tree in the window.

### **INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES**

To help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas, you might try some of the following activities.

#### **Language Arts**

1. Point out to students that some of the lines in this book rhyme, then challenge students to identify the rhyming words. Follow up by having students write their own rhymes about a holiday they enjoy.
2. Draw attention to the line "and presents piled to the moon." Explain that this is an exaggeration. Tell students that writers sometimes use exaggeration to get the attention of readers when making a point. Encourage students to think of common exaggerations that people use and then to try writing their own.

#### **Social Studies**

1. At the end of the book, the author lists several ways that students can help out in their community. You might use the book as a way to launch your own class project for making a difference in terms of the environment, service programs, or helping the needy.
2. Start a bulletin board display of news clippings about different kinds of community celebrations. Place a United States map in the center of the display. Arrange the articles around the map and use colored yarn and thumbtacks to link each celebration with the town or city in which it takes place.

#### **Math**

Remind students that in the book, the boy hands out hats and gloves and scarves to homeless people. Present math problems relating to this idea. For example: It costs two dollars for a pair of mittens. How much will the boy need to buy ten pairs to give away? Have each student make up a problem, then set aside time for students to present their problems to the class for solving.

#### **Science**

In the story, the boy thinks it would be better to visit a tree and give it presents rather than cut down lots of trees to decorate. Have students look into other ways that communities deal with Christmas trees. For example, some people buy living trees that can be planted later. Others buy artificial trees that can be used for many years. Some communities recycle discarded trees by making mulch from them.

When students have completed their research, hold a tree conference. Based on their findings, students might consider making recommendations to your own community.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Tony Medina** grew up in the projects in the South Bronx of New York city. He graduated from Baruch College with a B.A. in literature, and is currently an associate professor of creative writing at Howard University. Medina is known as a children's book author and a poet, and was chosen by *Writer's Digest* as one of the top ten poets to watch in the new millennium. In addition to *Christmas Makes Me Think*, Medina is the author of the children's books *I And I: Bob Marley*, *Love To Langston*, and *DeShawn Days*, and is a contributor to *Love To Mamá: A Tribute To Mothers*. As an advocate for literacy among today's youth, Medina emphasizes not only the importance of being able to read, but of loving to read. As a young reader, his favorite book was *Flowers for Algernon* by Daniel Keyes. Medina has also written extensively for an adult audience, including several volumes of poetry.

### ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

**Chandra Cox** is an artist whose paintings and sculptures have been exhibited throughout the United States. She earned her B.A. at Hampton University and an M.F.A. at The Ohio State University. She has traveled extensively in West Africa and much of her work reflects African patterns and forms. Cox is presently the Director of the College of Art and Design at North Carolina State University in Raleigh. *Christmas Makes Me Think* was her first picture book. The illustrations were created from cut paper, paint, pastel, and colored pencil.

### Book Information

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### RESOURCES ON THE WEB

Learn more about *Christmas Makes Me Think* at

[http://www.leeandlow.com/books/34/pb/christmas\\_makes\\_me\\_think](http://www.leeandlow.com/books/34/pb/christmas_makes_me_think)

### Also by Tony Medina

**DeShawn Days:**

[http://www.leeandlow.com/books/41/hc/deshawn\\_days](http://www.leeandlow.com/books/41/hc/deshawn_days)

**Love to Langston**

[http://www.leeandlow.com/books/81/hc/love\\_to\\_langston](http://www.leeandlow.com/books/81/hc/love_to_langston)

**BookTalk with Tony Medina on *Christmas Makes Me Think*:**

<http://www.leeandlow.com/p/medina.mhtml>

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