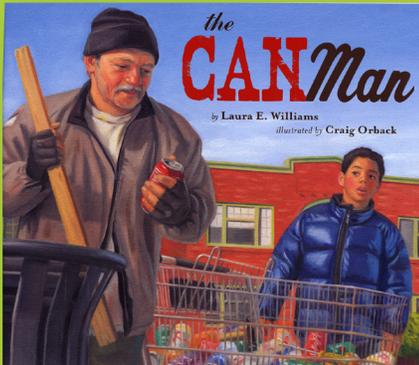


## TEACHER'S GUIDE



## The Can Man

written by *Laura E. Williams*, illustrated by *Craig Orback*

### About the Book

**Genre:** Realistic Fiction

**\*Reading Level:** Grades 2–3

**Interest Level:** Grades K–5

**Guided Reading Level:** P

**Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:** 3.4/0.5

**Lexile™ Measure:** AD630L

\*Reading level based on the  
Spache Readability Formula

**Themes:** Counting Money/  
Everyday Math, Sharing & Giving,  
Identity/Self Esteem/Confidence,  
Neighbors, Multiethnic interest,  
Home, Friendship, Poverty,  
Empathy/Compassion, Gratitude,  
Integrity/Honesty, Respect/  
Citizenship, Childhood Experiences  
and Memories, Conflict resolution,  
Courage, Economics/Finance,  
Optimism/Enthusiasm, Realistic  
Fiction, Responsibility, Self  
Control/Self Regulation

### SYNOPSIS

Tim's birthday is just a week away, and more than anything he wants a skateboard. But money is tight, and Tim knows his family cannot afford to buy him a board.

As Tim ponders how he might earn money for a skateboard, he hears The Can Man down the street collecting empty soft drink cans. The clang of the cans in the homeless man's cart gives Tim an idea. He will collect cans too, and cash them in for the redemption money. By the end of the week, Tim has almost reached his goal—until a couple of chance encounters with The Can Man change everything.

Told with honesty and respect, this timely story shines a perceptive light on current social concerns. Readers will be encouraged to think beyond themselves and celebrate the simple acts of kindness and sharing that make a difference in people's lives.



## BACKGROUND

### Homelessness in the United States

The author was inspired to write *The Can Man* after seeing a man regularly collecting cans, which he stored in an old shopping cart.

*The Can Man* is especially timely today. In 2017, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) estimated that 553,742 people were homeless, which is roughly 17 out of every 10,000 people in America. While the total number of people experiencing homelessness increased from 2016-2017, the total number of homeless people has decreased by 13% since 2010, a positive trend. Many types of people are homeless: individuals constitute the largest homeless population at 67%, and families constitute the remaining 33% (<https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2017-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>). For every person involved, homelessness is devastating as safety, support, and stability are threatened.

The Coalition for the Homeless lists more data about homelessness, particularly in New York City. Read more about how homelessness affected people in New York City, and different ways children and adults can get involved in taking action (<http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/take-action/volunteer/>).

### Discussing Homelessness with Students

The purpose of talking about homelessness with students is to enable them to care for others, build compassion, and strengthen character.

Explain that being homeless means that a person or family does not have a place to live. They might be homeless for a day or two or for many weeks or months. A homeless person or family might live in a shelter with a lot of other people, or in a car, or have no structure surrounding them.

Help students understand that being homeless does not mean that a person is bad or that he or she did something wrong. Homelessness is not an

illness, and it isn't anything someone wants. It is something that happens to some people who are having a very difficult time and is sometimes caused by bad luck paired with larger economic factors. Also point out that homelessness is not necessarily permanent and often people just need some help to get settled again. You might consider using *The Can Man* as an introduction to a volunteerism unit or a community service day.

**NOTE:** Be cognizant of the students in your classroom and aware of students' living circumstances prior to reading *The Can Man*. Would this text be triggering for any students who have been homeless or are currently homeless? School on Wheels, a nonprofit dedicated to working with students who are homeless, has a unit on humanizing homelessness and how it affects all different people that can be used prior to engaging with *The Can Man* ([https://www.schoolonwheels.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/HumanizingLesson0430\\_f.pdf](https://www.schoolonwheels.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/HumanizingLesson0430_f.pdf)). Consider providing a definition as mentioned in the Background Information to give students context to homelessness and a framework for the reading of *The Can Man*.







“Poignant...Orback’s realistic oil paintings on canvas bring the tale’s urban setting into clear focus in warmly lit scenes that illuminate the characters’ feelings—notably Tim’s unease and his beneficiary gratitude—and readily transmit the weighty themes at work.”

—*Publisher’s Weekly*

“A modern story of kindness and its rewards, with warm and modern illustrations.”

—*ForeWord Reviews*

“The spare dialogue rings true, and the full-page oil paintings have a quiet realism in scenes of Tim’s close multiracial family indoors and *The Can Man* alone outside. A humanizing story that reaches beyond easy messages.”

—*Booklist*

3. Why doesn’t Tim think birthday wishes come true? Do you agree with him? Why or why not?
4. How do Tim’s parents feel about him collecting cans? How can you tell?
5. What is Tim like as a character? How would you describe him?
6. How does Mr. Peters act toward Tim when they talk about collecting cans? How would you act?
7. Why does Mr. Peters’ eyes widen when Tim tells him he has seven full bags of cans at home? How do you think Mr. Peters felt when Tim told him that? Why?
8. Why does Tim give his money to Mr. Peters? Do you think Tim made the right decision? Why or why not?
9. How do you think Tim felt after he gave his money to Mr. Peters? How do you think Mr. Peters felt? What evidence from *The Can Man* supports your belief?
10. How does Mr. Peters use the money Tim gives him? How do you know?
11. Where do you think Mr. Peters got the skateboard? What makes you think so?
12. Why do you think Tim begins calling Mr. Peters by name and not *The Can Man*? Which do you think is more sensitive? Why?
13. How does Laura E. Williams show the passage of time in *The Can Man*? Explain thinking with details from the art and the text.
14. How do you think this story would change if it was told from Mr. Peters’ perspective? Why?
15. How would you describe Mr. Peters as a character?
16. In what ways is this story realistic? In what ways is it unrealistic? Why do you think that?
17. What do you notice from the illustrations in the story about the meaning behind *The Can Man*? How do they add to the story?
18. Do you think the ending is satisfying? Why or why not?
19. Why do you think the publisher chose to end *The Can Man* with an image with no words on the page?
20. What do you think Tim learned from his experience? Why? What did you learn?

### Reader’s Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

1. Have students outline the sequence of events in the story. Then ask them to put a star beside their favorite event. Volunteers may then







3. Have students read author Laura E. Williams and Craig Orback's interview about the development of *The Can Man* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/the-can-man/interviews>). Students can write or discuss what they learned from the interview and how it made them think about the text differently. In groups, students can brainstorm additional questions they would like to ask both Laura E. Williams and Craig Orback and explain why.
4. Try out author's craft. The author of *The Can Man* often uses descriptive and sensory language in the story, e.g. whizzed up, clinking like coins, bumped the bags downstairs. Have each student find five (or more) examples of descriptive language from the story that most appeals to him or her. Then challenge students to write their own stories that incorporate this language. Students' stories may be realistic or fantasy.
5. Read other books on kindness and compassion. Some great titles include *Lend a Hand* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/lend-a-hand>), *Destiny's Gift* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/destiny-s-gift>), *Step Right Up: How Doc and Jim Key Taught the World About Kindness* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/step-right-up>), and *Raymond's Perfect Present* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/raymond-s-perfect-present>). Once students have read multiple titles about kindness and compassion, hold a grand discussion to elicit some ideas about what kindness and compassion mean, look like, and how students can show kindness and compassion in their lives.
6. Read *The Can Man* in conjunction with *A Shelter in Our Car* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/a-shelter-in-our-car>). Have students discuss how these books approach and describe homelessness. How did students feel after reading both of the books? What did they learn from each of the books? What resonated with

them the most, and why? How were the books similar and how were they different? Students can write their reactions in writing or conduct small group discussions after reading both texts.

### Social Studies/Geography

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1-3; Craft and Structure, Strands 4-6; Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7-9; Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)  
(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3; Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6; Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9; Range of Writing, Strand 10)  
(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3; Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

1. Volunteer. After reading this story, students may find themselves wanting to help out in their community. With students' caretakers' permission, you might see if students might volunteer in the local soup kitchen, organize a food drive, or do a park or street clean up. A great place for a single student to look for volunteer opportunities is [DoSomething.org](http://DoSomething.org), an organization that creates volunteer opportunities that do not cost anything and do not require a car.
2. Explore HUD. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is responsible for America's housing needs. One of the many things this agency does is to provide resources for those needing housing and funding opportunities to nonprofit organizations and state/local governments to rehouse homeless individuals. Visit the homelessness assistance page at [https://www.hud.gov/program\\_offices/comm\\_planning/homeless](https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/comm_planning/homeless) to learn about what HUD offers.
3. Have students research how different cities across the United States approach homelessness. New York City is one example of a city making major changes in combating homelessness, specifically for students (<https://chalkbeat.org/posts/ny/2018/11/01/new-york-city-will-spend-12-million-on-new-supports-for->



homeless-students/). What are the different ways places all over the country help people who are homeless? How does it differ by city and state?

## Math

(CCSS 8 Grade 2 Measurement & Data: Work with Time and Money: Solve world problems involving dollar bills, quarters, dimes, nickles, and pennies, using \$ and cents symbols appropriately).

1. Explore budgeting. Have students work with prices or fake money. Give students a set budget and a list of items they may need or want to buy during a week. Then ask students which items they would choose to buy within their budget and which they will not be able to afford. Consult different lesson plans for more information and resources about teaching students how to budget efficiently (<https://www.incharge.org/financial-literacy/resources-for-teachers/financial-literacy-for-kids/>).

## Art

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7)  
(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

1. Select the illustration that resonated with students the most. Which illustration in *The Can Man* stood out to you? Why? How did it make you feel? Students can write a response to the art that was most powerful to them from *The Can Man*, or create an illustration on their own that reflects the artistic style in *The Can Man*.

## School-Home Connection

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7)  
(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

1. Go to a Recycling Center. If your town has a recycling center open to the public, students can go with their families to see what gets recycled and how. If the town does not recycle, students can identify what materials are most

easily recycled and petition the town to start a program. Similarly, students can take cans to a redemption center. Students can identify the components they see that are also in *The Can Man*.

2. Volunteer and/or donate. If applicable, students and their families can volunteer at a soup kitchen or another community organization that assists people who are homeless. Consult different directories to find homeless shelters or organizations (<https://www.homelesshelterdirectory.org/>; <https://www.voa.org/homeless-people>). Consider donating used toys, clothes, books, and other materials if possible.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Laura E. Williams** is the author of numerous award-winning picture books and middle grade novels. Born in South Korea and adopted by a family in the United States, Williams has since lived and traveled all over the world. She most recently moved to Kenmore, Washington. Visit her on the Web at [lauraewilliams.com](http://lauraewilliams.com).

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

**Craig Orback** is a fine artist who has illustrated many highly praised books for children, several of which focus on historical subjects, such as *Paul Revere's Ride* and *Gifts from the Enemy*. In addition to illustrating children's book, Orback also creates fine art. He lives in Seattle, Washington. You can find him online at [craigorback.com](http://craigorback.com).

## ABOUT LEE & LOW BOOKS

**LEE & LOW BOOKS** is the largest children's book publisher specializing in diversity and multiculturalism. Our motto, "about everyone, for everyone," is as urgent today as it was when we started in 1991. It is the company's goal to meet the need for stories that children of color can identify with and that all children can enjoy. The right book can foster empathy, dispel stereotypes, prompt discussion about race and ethnicity, and inspire children to imagine not only a world that includes them, but also a world where they are the heroes of their own stories. Discover more at [leeandlow.com](http://leeandlow.com).

## ORDERING INFORMATION

### On the Web:

[www.leeandlow.com/contact/ordering](http://www.leeandlow.com/contact/ordering) (general order information)

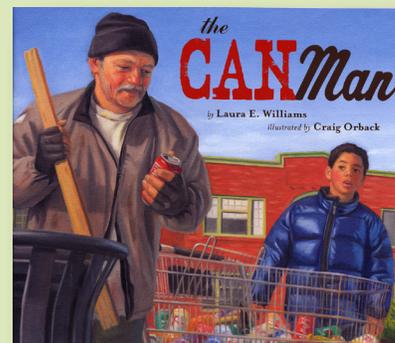
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/the-can-man> (secure online ordering)

**By Phone:** 212-779-4400 ext. 25 | **By Fax:** 212-683-1894

**By Mail:** Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

## Book Information for

*The Can Man*



\$9.95, PAPERBACK

9781620145777

\*Reading Level: Grades 2–3

Interest Level: Grades K–5

Guided Reading Level: R

Accelerated Reader® Level/  
Points: 3.4/0.5

Lexile™ Measure: 630L

**THEMES:** Counting Money/ Everyday Math, Sharing & Giving, Identity/Self Esteem/Confidence, Neighbors, Multiethnic interest, Home, Friendship, Poverty, Empathy/Compassion, Gratitude, Integrity/Honesty, Respect/ Citizenship, Childhood Experiences and Memories, Conflict resolution, Courage, Economics/Finance, Optimism/Enthusiasm, Realistic Fiction, Responsibility, Self Control/Self Regulation

### RESOURCES ON THE WEB:

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/the-can-man>

*All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.*