Stand Tall
by Joan Bauer

Just like his name, Tree is tall—and still growing. At 12-years-old, he’s already six foot three and a half. He doesn’t fit in at school, even on the basketball team, and since his parents’ divorce, he doesn’t feel he fits in at home. With the help of his tough old grandpa and an act of Nature, he learns to stand tall.

THEMES
self-esteem, war, divorce, problem-solving, family, friendship, courage, humor

I. PRE-TEACHING

A. Have the class define and discuss these terms:
- multiple, custodial, invoice, nondenominational, nutrients, dysfunctional, lurched, morphed, diffuse, alienation, cogent, amnesia, vinyl, pediatrician, prosthetic, plaque, instincts, mediocre, apokied, phantom, maneuvering, gargoyles, amnesty, sedimentary, peroxide, abdominal, taunt, finesse, therapist, stalwart, cascaded, octave, billows, woeful, aroma, reminiscences, paratroopers, faltering, levees, iridescent, pummeled, mucus, lumbered, fixated

B. Before beginning the story, discuss with the class the following questions:
1. Do you know anyone who is really tall or in another way “stands out”? How is this person treated?
2. Why is it so hard on kids when parents divorce?
3. Do you have a grandparent or older friend you enjoy being with? What do you do with this person?
4. What do you know about the Vietnam War? Why did so many people protest this war?

II. PRESENTATION

A. Understanding the Story:
1. Begin with Chapters 1 - 7: What is Mrs. Pierce, the school administrator, trying to work out with Tree? What is happening to his grandfather? How did Tree get his nickname? What’s the problem with living in two places? What has it been like for Tree to be so tall? What does he say in his report about the Vietnam War? What does he rig up for Grandpa’s homecoming? Why doesn’t he feel at home with his mom? What had helped Grandpa survive after Vietnam?
2. Advance to Chapters 8 - 20: Why does Tree invite Sophie to eat with him and his buddies? What is Sophie’s motto? What had Grandpa advised Tree to do when kids teased him about his height? What idea does Coach Glummer announce for the team? What convinces the boys to go into the dance? How does Tree feel dancing close to Sophie? What does the principal handle it? What do Tree and Grandpa do for Christmas? What happens at his mother’s? What do the popular girls do to Sophie? How does the principal handle it?
3. Complete the story with Chapters 21 - 31: Why do they take Bradley to the vet? What happens? What does Tree say to the coach? What happens while Tree is helping Grandpa take a shower? What is the evacuation like? How does Tree save Bradley? What does this action lead to? What does Grandpa do to cheer everyone up? What is the condition of their home? Why does Grandpa say the house won’t have to be torn down? How do they convince Grandpa not to march the whole way in the parade? How does Tree’s height help them light the candle of hope?

B. For Discussion:
1. Why do you think the author chose the quote from the Bible to open the story? How does this apply to the events in the story?
2. Trace the references to trees in the story, such as how Tree feels about the old oak. How do trees serve as symbols in the story?
3. What does Tree say about war in his oral report? What does Grandpa say is the secret of fighting a war?
4. In what ways do the three brothers draw apart because of the divorce? What helps them draw closer? How does Tree help make this happen?
5. In what ways does Tree feel divorce and war are similar?
6. In what ways does Tree “stand tall”?

III. EXTENDING THE LESSON

Give students the opportunity to work with partners, groups, the whole class, or alone.

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS:

A. Language Arts:
1. Have students read the opening Bible quote carefully and discuss what it means. They might write an essay about how these two lines apply to their own lives.
2. Have students turn the opening scene between Tree and the school administrator into a humorous skit. Discuss how sometimes rules and regulations can get in the way of communication.
3. Have students who are tall or short talk to the class about how it feels to be different.
4. Have students make up a motto for themselves. They might look in Bartlett's Quotations and find mottoes others have followed. Have them share their mottoes with the class and talk about why they chose them.

5. World War I produced a number of fine poets. Have students read poems by Wilfred Owens, Siegfried Sassoon, and others and discuss what they say about war. Why did this particular war cause this reaction?

B. Art and Music:

1. Have students select background music that is appropriate to some of the scenes. They could use the song “Trees” put to music, or the song “I Talk to the Trees” to introduce scenes when Tree looks at the old oak, use Christmas carols for the seasonal scenes, patriotic music of the Memorial Day parade, flute music for when Sophie appears.

2. Have students make a bulletin board about the story. They might cover the board with black or brown paper with a jagged tear down the middle, cut out a picture of a woman who could be Tree’s mother and a man who could be Tree’s father and place them on either side of the board, show a tall boy like Tree in the middle against a taller oak tree, include pictures of trophies, news stories about famous floods and the Vietnam War, and other items and events mentioned in the story.

C. Social Studies:

1. Have students hold a debate: What are the different causes of war? Have them cite examples from wars we have fought, like the U.S. Civil War, World War I and II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, and the Iraqi War.

2. Tree’s mother believes in making charts and color coordinating them. Have students research ways to organize calendars, to do lists, and other techniques and try applying those that work for them.

3. Have students learn about different custody arrangements for the children of divorced parents. They might interview classmates about this and give a report about what makes custody arrangements difficult.

4. Have students learn more about Eleanor Roosevelt. Who was she? What was she known for? How did she make a mark as more than just the wife of a president? How did she exemplify the saying she’s best known for?

D. Science and Math:

1. Have students learn more about different kinds of trees, especially the oak. How long does it take for an acorn to become a huge oak tree? What is the root system of oaks like? How does it compare to other trees?

2. Have students learn about the loss of limbs, like a leg or an arm. What causes “phantom pain”? Why is it difficult to adjust to a prosthesis?

3. Have students learn more about what causes serious floods. Why do cleanup crews have to be especially careful about bacteria?

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