

2. “Iqbal”

This activity focuses on Iqbal Masih, a heroic Pakistani boy who stood up to child slavery and paid with his life. Students will gain awareness of how discrimination impacts quality of life and gain respect for the inherent dignity of all people.



Materials Needed:

Book “**Iqbal**” by Francesco D’Adamo
Writer’s Notebooks/Journals

Read aloud “**Iqbal**” by Francesco D’Adamo.

“**Iqbal**” is an excellent introduction to the idea of “human rights” and the “rights of the child.”

This moving, fictionalized account of the life of Iqbal Masih, a Pakistani boy who brings hope to child workers in a carpet factory, is told through the voice of Fatima, a young Pakistani girl whose life is changed by Iqbal’s courage.

“You see, for Iqbal I was not invisible. I existed, and he made me free.”

For Fatima and the other unseen children of Hussain Khan’s carpet factory, Iqbal Masih’s arrival is the end of hope and its beginning. It is Iqbal who tells them that their family’s debt will never be cancelled, no matter how many inches of progress they make in their rugs and no matter how neat the knots or perfect the pattern. But it is also Iqbal who is brave enough to talk about the future. “Fatima,” he promises, “next spring you and I are going to go and fly a kite. Remember that, whatever happens.”

This is the story of the real Iqbal: a courageous 13-year-old boy who knew his life was worth more than a rug, that chaining children to looms to work hours without rest was not right and that there was a way to stop the abuse.

Discussion Questions

- Is child labour morally acceptable?
- What types of work are acceptable and unacceptable for children?
- Does this happen in Canada? Why or why not?
- What are some ways the people in Canada borrow money and pay off their debts?



What are the pros and cons of hard work?

At one point, the children, along with Iqbal, realize they are no longer afraid. What do you think caused this change? How did seeing what Iqbal did make others more courageous?

Maria decides to reveal her ability to speak at one point in the story. Why do you think she chose that particular moment?

She then reveals that she is also able to read. How could she have learned that skill if none of the others did? What are the benefits of reading?

Written Reflections

The death of Iqbal is a deeply sad ending for a children's book. However, given that it is based on truth, the ending could not have been changed.

Do you think the story would be as powerful if Iqbal was not murdered at the end?

How would the story and its impact be different had the author chosen to change or omit that portion of Iqbal's story?

No matter how hard the families at the brick factory work, they are never likely to pay off their debt. In Canada, many people put themselves in difficult financial situations by accumulating large credit card debts. If credit cards can be the source of so much trouble and anguish, why do you suppose that so many people use them?

It has been said that being brave does not mean not being afraid. In fact, it means being able to do something even if you are afraid. Discuss your feelings on bravery in the face of danger and risk.

Hussain is able to pay off the police so that they will not shut down his carpet-making factory. Corruption often facilitates the continuation of illegal practices. Discuss your feelings on the importance of laws that try to prevent corruption.

Research Activities

In the novel, the children talk about the appalling conditions in the "Tomb" – the heat, lack of water, difficulty breathing and the scorpions. Search through newspapers and on the Internet to find articles about people who are being treated inhumanely.

Write about the conditions and some reasons for the circumstances.

The Bonded Labor Liberation Front is an organization devoted to eliminating the exploitation of children. Identify organizations that are supportive of children. Determine the mission of each organization.

The child-slaves were given their freedom as a result of Iqbal's efforts with the assistance of the Bonded Labour Liberation Front. Recent actions taken by the United States in the Middle East have produced considerable changes and talk of freedom for many people who live in the region.

Research the events in the Middle East.

Write about the region and the events as an on-the-scene reporter for a local newspaper. Iqbal, Fatima, and Maria undoubtedly worked hard and made a real difference in the lives of children in slavery.

Find someone in the newspaper, in books, or on the Internet who is making a real difference in the world.

Design an award to give to that person based on his/her accomplishments.

Teacher Notes:
