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Students Send Letters to Soldiers

Submitted by Beth Covington
February 8, 2007

A glance inside Ms. Covington's classroom shows students focused on the message they want to write on the special stationary designed just for this purpose. Some describe their holidays and some share all the recent sports scores. Others write about their family members who are also serving our country.

Ms. Covington's eighth-grade history students have adopted military personnel who are serving overseas.

The idea came during Thanksgiving holidays when Covington discovered the website, www.ansoldier.com. The website allows servicepersons to sign up their unit to receive care packages from people who want to support the troops. The contact person for the unit shares the packages with members who receive little to no mail from back home, or spreads the contents among all the troops. The project gives students a chance to practice letter writing skills and experience the joy of helping others while becoming an active part of history in the making.

The first soldier adopted was Daresha Jacobs of Texas, who is currently stationed in Tallil, Iraq. Jacobs is 25-years-old and leaves a 2-year-old daughter at home. The baby's father is also serving in Iraq. Covington sent an initial package to introduce Jacobs to the idea of having her students write to Jacob's unit. "My unit would love to get letters from your class," Jacobs wrote. "It would be our great pleasure to respond back." In a later email, Jacobs wrote, "I can't wait to get those letters in the mail. My friends and I were talking about them today. We are really interested in reading what your students have to say."

After receiving the package of letters and goodies, Jacobs emailed Covington a message to share with the class. "Tell your class that I said hello and we will be sending those letters in the mail sometime today after we get off from work," she wrote. "I really appreciate everything you all have done for us. Please take care and you are forever in my thoughts and prayers."

True to her word, a half dozen envelopes were

Results 1 - 1 of 1:



Result #1
Students Send Letters to Soldiers
02/08/2007

Result Page: 1

waiting for the students' return after Christmas break, holding personal letters to each student who had written to Jacobs' unit.

Another class adopted Sgt. Justin Blaisdell, a 24-year-old Marine based in Beaufort , SC and currently stationed in Al Anbar Province. After the success with Jacobs, Covington included letters from her class in the first package sent to Blaisdell. In his return email, Blaisdell sent a message to the class. "I would like to give you my sincere thanks for showing such great Patriotism," he wrote. "We truly would be unable to do what we do without your support. Furthermore, it is truly inspiring to see such care and interest for our efforts from today's youth."

Blaisdell continued to say he and his troops were glad to be serving during this chapter in the nation's history. He says although he is a Yankee from Boston , Massachusetts , "I work toward a common goal of the United States Military, and that is unity."

Blaisdell sent messages to each student who wrote to him. "That's great that you play the bass guitar in the band. I myself have been playing the guitar for years," he wrote to one student. To another who asked what it was like to be a Marine he replied, "It's not easy all of the time, however, it most certainly has its rewards. I have traveled to six different countries since I enlisted. That's what I enjoy the most."

One student asked if what they did was any fun. "After much thought to answer your question, probably not. When we do get spare time, it's utilized to shower or take a nap. Sounds boring but it's the little things that we don't get a lot of that we miss the most. Nonetheless, I laughed when I read that."

According to his most recent e-mail, Blaisdell will be heading back to Beaufort , SC within a matter of weeks, his deployment in Iraq over, for the time being.

Covington said her students have gotten very attached to their soldiers and are curious about them as people. She feels it has made the more aware of current events. "I have an area in my classroom dedicated to our adopted soldiers that the students like to check out," she said. "Even though some are not in my class right now, they'll pop in to see if I've posted anything new."

Covington screens all letters going out to the soldiers or coming into her students. No student is allowed to use their last name, to protect the student. "This project has gone really well," Covington said. "Not only are our military

overseas receiving a letter of support, but my students are getting to be a part of our country's history. I hope it's an experience they'll never forget."

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All Months All Years

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