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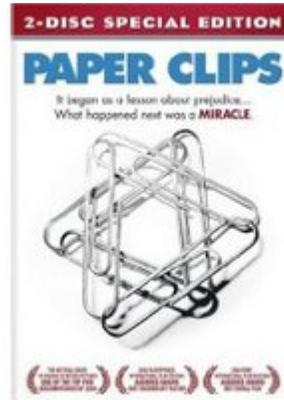
The Paper Clips Project

By Cindy Grigg

Have you ever had a school project that grew...and grew and grew and grew? Students at a middle school in Whitwell, Tennessee, surely did! In 1998, Whitwell's eighth grade students started a new class after school. The students learned about the Holocaust, which took place in Nazi Germany during the time of World War II. When students learned that six million Jewish people were "exterminated" by the Germans, they found that number hard to grasp. They asked if they could make a collection of six million things. They wanted to see for themselves what six million of something looked like. Whitwell's principal agreed IF the students collected something that would give meaning to the project.

Students did research on the Internet. They found that during WWII, people in Norway wore paper clips on their clothes. It was a silent protest against what the Nazis were doing. The Germans forced Jews to wear yellow stars. So the people of Norway began to wear paper clips.

Whitwell students began bringing in paper clips. After a few weeks, they only had about one thousand. They knew they'd have to try harder to get six million. They wrote letters asking well-known people to donate a paper clip. Students wrote letters to sports heroes and film stars. Letters were written to people in politics and business. Soon paper clips came pouring in. Most were sent in by "normal" people. Some, however, were donated by names regularly in the news. Actors Tom Hanks and Henry Winkler, former president Bill Clinton, and director Steven Spielberg, to name a few, sent paper clips. Football players from Tampa Bay and Dallas sent paper clips, too. Most people sent a letter along with the paper clip.



Letters sent with the paper clip donations soon filled nine scrapbooks. The students received a lot of paper clips, but they knew that they needed many, many more. One of the teachers thought about designing a website. Students could tell the story on the Internet and ask more people to donate. It was called the Paper Clips Project.

Two journalists learned of the project. They were Peter and Dagmar Schroeder. They had been born in Germany. They were journalists living in the United States writing about the White House for German newspapers. They wrote about the Whitwell students' project. Their stories were published in newspapers. Then they wrote a book. It's called *Six Million Paper Clips: The Making of a Children's Holocaust Memorial*. Paper clips began arriving at the school from all over the world.

Something was needed to hold all the paper clips. The Schroeders found a German railcar from the WWII era in Europe. These kinds of railcars were used to take the Jewish people to German death camps. The Schroeders bought the railcar and paid for it to be moved to Whitwell. The Paper Clips Project grew into a Children's Holocaust Memorial, which opened on November 9, 2001.

By 2009, the school has received over thirty million paperclips! They have also received more than thirty thousand letters, documents, and artifacts. The students and staff of Whitwell Middle School and the community of Whitwell, Tennessee, created a memorial museum to honor the lives of all the people who were murdered by the Germans. The railcar sits on the school grounds in a small garden, made by the people of the community. The railcar holds eleven million paper clips! Six million are for the Jews who were killed by the Nazis. The other five million represent the number of people of other groups who were also targeted by the Nazis. Gypsies and Catholics are two of these. Another eleven million paper clips are enclosed in a small monument at the school to honor the children of Terezin. This was a Nazi camp for Jewish people in what is now the Czech Republic.

The German railcar was once a symbol of death. It has given new life to the memories of the victims of the German Holocaust. Several books and a documentary film released in 2004 have been made about the Paper Clips Project. The students and townspeople of Whitwell learned what six million looks like. But they learned so much more! They have taught other people something, too, about empathy, diversity, and tolerance.

Name _____



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Questions

- _____ 1. Why did students begin collecting paper clips?
- A. They wanted to see what six million of something looked like.
 - B. They thought paper clips were a great invention.
 - C. They wanted to get in the newspapers.
 - D. They thought it would be a fun thing to do.
- _____ 2. Nazis forced Jews to wear paper clips on their clothes.
- A. false
 - B. true
- _____ 3. The people of which country wore paper clips in support of the Jewish people?
- A. the United States
 - B. Germany
 - C. Norway
 - D. Canada
- _____ 4. What did Whitwell students do with all the letters they received with the paper clips?
- A. They threw them away.
 - B. They stored them in boxes.
 - C. They published them in a newspaper.
 - D. They stored them in scrapbooks.
- _____ 5. Which of these groups were targeted by the Nazis for death?
- A. Jews
 - B. Catholics
 - C. Gypsies
 - D. all of the above

6. When did Whitwell's Children's Holocaust Memorial officially open?

7. Why do you think Peter and Dagmar Schroeder became interested in the project and bought the railcar for the school?

8. Write a definition for the words empathy, diversity, and tolerance.
