

# School Visit Brings Character Education to Life

*One Hen* book, web site, interactive games spur elementary students to action

Africa doesn't seem so far away anymore.

Big words like "microfinance" and "entrepreneurship" are now familiar concepts.

And one act of generosity *can* make a life-changing difference in the world.

Those are among the eye-opening insights that students at Heritage Elementary School, in Highland Village near Dallas, continue to apply in the wake of a power-packed visit by author Katie Smith Milway and Betsy Perdue of Opportunity International, one of the world's largest microfinance organizations

Milway and Perdue introduced more than 700 boys and girls at Heritage to the power of microfinance and entrepreneurship in December through a program that featured an author reading, Internet games and role playing.

The character-education program is based on Milway's popular children's book, *One Hen: How One Small Loan Made a Big Difference*, and the interactive web site [www.OneHen.org](http://www.OneHen.org), an initiative of ARCA Partners, based in Flower Mound, Texas.

The *One Hen* program is fast becoming a valued curriculum complement for schools in U.S. cities and around the globe, from Boston to Dallas and beyond.

"Our students are thinking a lot more globally now, and thinking about others," says Heritage principal BeLinda Nikkel. "The program meshed perfectly with our core value for the month, which was generosity."

Students in kindergarten through fifth grade took part in age-appropriate activities during the school's annual Author Day celebration. Fourth- and fifth-grade students engaged in a group-simulation exercise in which they discovered the limited choices available to them in impoverished situations. They role-played how their lives changed when they obtained a small loan to start a business.

"I thought some of the scenarios might be over their heads," Nikkel says, "but the kids really grasped them and took to heart what it would feel like and how they would respond. Especially in higher socioeconomic areas, where we take more for granted, it's so good for kids to see that one person does make a difference. The *One Hen* program showed them tangible ways to think of others. That's the lesson I'd like to see other kids at other schools pick up: It's not all about me, and one person with the right actions can bring about change."



**THINKING GLOBALLY:** Children—like these from City Year's Roxbury After School program in Boston— glean life-changing insights through *One Hen*.

For students and families at Heritage, the impact of the one-day program continues to gather momentum. Children and their parents have been visiting OneHen.org, learning more about microfinance and reaching out to children in other nations. What's more, Heritage students are taking a big, tangible step: targeting a school fundraiser to support microfinancing efforts and children in Africa.

Nikkel became aware of *One Hen* through former Heritage parents Eric and Katie Hogue; Eric serves as secretary of ARCA Partners. The Hogues helped to connect Milway with the school.

"Understanding how we can serve the poor is something that everybody should know about," Eric says. "Bringing Katie in presented a tremendous opportunity to convey that to the kids. We're hopeful that days like this one will raise up the next generation of gracious givers who will extend their love and resources to the poor."

At Heritage, the seeds planted among students and families show strong signs of sprouting and flourishing.

"We got a lesson in giving, and it keeps on giving," Principal Nikkel says.

### **Purposeful Online Time**

Families spending time together learning, growing and serving via OneHen.org is music to Milway's ears and to the other partners who have established the site as a cutting-edge resource to complement the book. [OneHen.org](http://OneHen.org) is an interactive Website designed to engage and educate children, parents and teachers on the benefits of microfinance and ultimately stimulate a call to action. Through compelling games and activities, the site introduces important financial concepts such as entrepreneurialism to help children understand how they can make a broader impact.

### **One Little Boy, One Small Loan, One Giant Transformation**

Milway's book is the story of a West African boy who receives a small loan to purchase a hen, which ultimately begins his entrepreneurial journey. The book is inspired by the true story of Reverend Kwabena Darko, one of the largest poultry farmers in West Africa and founder of the Ghanaian nonprofit Sinapi Aba, which is part of the microfinance organization Opportunity International.

Since its publication in March 2008, *One Hen* has evolved from inspirational story, to a service-learning tool integrated with onehen.org. Teachers, librarians and after school programs leaders in the US, Canada and UK are using *One Hen*/onehen.org to teach math, social studies, reading, world resources and more through lenses of financial literacy, youth entrepreneurship, youth philanthropy and global citizenship.

They are developing and sharing lessons plans and activities through [www.OneHen.org](http://www.OneHen.org)'s "Teacher & Librarian" tab.

"Microfinance is one of the best ways to help people in developing countries because it doesn't depend on benefits trickling down from official aid programs, but rather on the resourcefulness of individuals," Milway says.

“Microfinance is a particularly apt entry point for children into the world of international development, because it is based on practices that any child who has run a lemonade stand can understand. With the book and [onehen.org](http://onehen.org), we have a means to effectively reach and engage children worldwide. I’m hoping both will inspire kids and spur them to invest their lemonade stand earnings to help others reach their dreams.”

In 2006, Muhammed Yunus and his Grameen Bank were the recipients of a Nobel Peace Prize for their work to promote microfinance. Sapien developed OneHen.org as an online space where children can connect with the concept of microfinancing through fun, interactive games. Children also have an opportunity to make real donations to microfinancing projects through “virtual loans.”

The web site also provides information for donors and includes real-life success stories of individuals who have received loans from organizations such as Opportunity International. Curriculum ideas and other classroom activities for teachers and librarians are provided by publisher Kids Can Press, bringing the teachings in Milway’s book to life.

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