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Supplement: Children's Book

A Choice that Matters
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Page 1. Marianna walked up to the big-huge school doors. She took a deep breath, like her mom told her to do when she was nervous. In (one, two three), out (one two three). Then she pushed open the doors.

2. The hallways smelled like crayons. It reminded her of her younger brother's huge crayon set, the one he always insisted on taking on long car rides. He would draw for hours, making the whole car smell like crayons.

As she walked to her new classroom, she thought about the car ride she had taken just a few days before. It had taken two whole days and it brought her to her new town, in her new state. Her mom said that there were better jobs here. Marianna missed her old home, and her old school. The one that smelled like new carpets, not crayons.

3. 112, 113, 114, 115! Before she opened the door, she quick made sure it was the right room. Her mom had written the number on her hand this morning, so she wouldn't forget. It was right. She walked in.

4. The very first part of the day was a blur. Her teacher, Ms. Jackson, seemed nice, and the other kids were smile-y to her. But it was hard being new. All the other kids knew the routine, they knew what came next. She felt a little lost all morning.

At 10:30, Ms. Jackson glanced at the clock. "Oh my goodness, I almost forgot!" she exclaimed, "the Pledge!"
"Finally!!" thought Marianna, "something I know how to do!"

5. Marianna knew the drill. She stood up, faced the American flag that hung in the front of her classroom, and put her right hand over her heart. "I pledge allegiance, to the flag..." She had been saying the Pledge of Allegiance every day in school for years. She knew every word by heart and didn't even have to think about it any more.

"And to the republic, for which it stands..." Marianna took her eyes off the flag, and looked around the room at her new classmates. That's when she realized that something looked different.

6. The boy she had talked to earlier, José, was sitting down, his hands folded on his desk! So were Malik and Krista! Her old teacher, Ms. Perez, would never let them do that! Ms.

Perez made everyone stand and say the Pledge of Allegiance every day. Ms. Perez said it was disrespectful not to.

Marianna looked at Ms. Jackson, expecting any second for her to tell the other kids to stand up. When she looked closer though, she realized that Ms. Jackson's lips weren't moving. She was standing up, facing the flag, her hand over her heart, but she wasn't SAYING it! When Marianna listened closer, she realized that the girl sitting next to her wasn't saying it either.

Marianna wondered what was wrong with this new school. Everything was different here and she didn't get it.

7. "My sweet, how was school?" her mother exclaimed as Marianna slumped in the door. "I don't know..." Marianna mumbled... "It was weird."
"Weird? What kind of weird?" her mom replied.
"It was just... everything was different from my old school. We do reading in the morning, not the afternoon, we have gym every single day instead of twice a week, and my new teacher doesn't even say the Pledge of Allegiance!"
"Hmm... that is strange. Why don't you ask Ms. Jackson about it tomorrow?"
"I guess so..." Marianna replied.

8. The next day Marianna got to school extra-early, so she could ask Ms. Jackson her Big Question.

Ms. Jackson was grading spelling quizzes when Marianna walked in. "Oh Marianna, what a nice surprise!" she said, standing up from her desk. "How are things this morning? How are you settling in?"

9. "Well... things are ok." Marianna replied. "Everyone is nice... it's just that... Things are different here."
"What kind of different?" asked Ms. Jackson.
Marianna took a deep breath and tried to speak with confidence, but her voice was shaking. She didn't want her new teacher not to like her.
"Well... I don't know... like at my old school everyone said the Pledge of Allegiance together every morning, and here, it's like, everyone was doing different things when we said it. Isn't that disrespectful to the flag? I'm not trying to be mean... that's just what my old teacher said."
"That is a big difference," said Ms. Jackson. "I understand why that would be confusing!"
This made Marianna feel better.

Ms. Jackson continued, "I'll tell you what: today in class, I'll have your classmates explain how we do the Pledge in Room 115."
"Ok!" said Marianna

10. Later that morning, Ms. Jackson did just that.

“Class, as you all know, we have a new student in class this week. In order to be welcoming and help her get used to her new home in Room 115, we need to explain the way we do things here, because they might be different from how she did things at her old school. The first thing I think we should talk about is the way that we choose to do the Pledge of Allegiance in this class. Can anyone help me out?”

Lots of students raised their hands. Ms. Jackson called on Laura, who explained, “At the beginning of the year we did a project where we learned about where the Pledge of Allegiance came from and what it means. We talked about what it means to all of us, and we realized that it was different for all of us. So then we talked some more and some people in our class decided that they didn’t want to say the Pledge anymore, and some people decided that they still wanted to say it, and some people decided that they wanted to stand up and put their hand over their heart but they didn’t want to say it. So now everyone just does whatever they feel best doing during the Pledge.”

11. “That was a great explanation, Laura,” said Ms. Jackson. “Can anyone help Marianna understand why some students choose not to say the pledge and some do?”

José raised his hand. “I don’t stand up and say the pledge because I don’t think that America is keeping its promises that are in the pledge, like liberty and justice for all. We learned about things that America has done to Native Americans, and black people, and I know that my mom and dad still are not always treated right, because they’re Mexican and they don’t speak English. So I don’t want to make promises to America if America isn’t keeping its promises to other people.”

Lily spoke next. “I stand up and say the pledge because my mom is in the army, and for me, pledging to the flag is showing respect to my mom and other people like her that are keeping our country safe.”

12. Then came Julian. “I don’t say the pledge because I’m a Jehova’s Witness and in my religion, you can’t pledge allegiance to anyone but God. But I volunteer with my church at a soup kitchen, and for me that’s how I show that I care about my country.”

Then Damien. “I say the Pledge of Allegiance, but I don’t say the “under God” part because I don’t believe in God and I don’t think that the word God should be in the Pledge of Allegiance.”

13. Next was Heaven. “I stand up when other people say the Pledge, because I want to show respect for the flag, because for me, it represents democracy and freedom, which I think are good things. But I don’t actually say the words to the Pledge because I can’t promise that I’ll ALWAYS support America. Like, if I agree with what it’s doing, I’ll support it, but I feel like “pledging allegiance” is saying you’ll support it no matter what, and I don’t want to support America if it’s doing something I don’t believe in.”

Finally, Gloria spoke. “I used to say the Pledge of Allegiance because I wanted to show that I support America, because I moved her from Colombia and things are easier here for

my family than they used to be in Colombia. But then my mom was sent back to Colombia because she didn't come here in the way you're supposed to. So now I don't say the Pledge anymore, because I don't think it was fair to make her leave, because my family really needs her. But I still might start saying it again if things change, I don't know."

14. Marianna sat there with her eyes wide. She had never heard anyone talk about the Pledge this way before, like something that was a really important choice to make and not just something you had to do every morning. It was strange, but it made a lot of sense to her. The Pledge is a promise to America, and promises are a big deal. You have to think hard about whether you agree with the promise you are making. And just like Gloria, she realized it was ok to make the promise one day and then change her mind the next. Just because you say it once doesn't mean to always have to say it if your opinions change.

15. Marianna went home that day and told her mom about what Ms. Jackson and her classmates had said. Her mom asked, "So, what are you going to do?"

Marianna thought for a minute. "I think that I am going to stand during the Pledge, because I want to show that I care about America and making it the best it can be. But I'm not going to say the words, because pledging allegiance is a really big promise, and I need to learn a lot more before I can make a promise like that."

16. When she told her teacher about her decision the next day in class, Ms. Jackson said, "That's a very thoughtful choice, I'm really proud of you."

Marianna smiled, feeling like she finally understood at least one thing about room 115: It was a place where her choices mattered.

Discussion Questions

What do you do during the Pledge of Allegiance? Do you stand or sit? Do you put your hand over your heart? Do you say the words?

What does the Pledge of Allegiance mean to you? Why do you say it or not say it?

Can you think of reasons why someone else might do something differently than you during the Pledge?

What are some words in the Pledge of Allegiance that are the most important to you?

Is there anything that you think should be changed about the Pledge of Allegiance?

What are some other ways that you can show care for your country? (the US or another country!)