

PRE-K STUDENTS MAIL CARE PACKAGES OVERSEAS TO U.S. TROOPS

Monday, November 1, 2011

Pre-K students from Miss Theresa's class at the Route 70 Goddard School, <http://www.goddardschool.com/Schools/Toms-River-II-NJ/Schools.gsp>, have a new friend called *Flat Matt*, a child-friendly, two-dimensional pen-pal icon, inspired in part by the title-character from the 1964 book "Flat Stanley", written by Jeff Brown.

Since first being published, the *Flat Stanley* book has become a childhood classic, and children can't seem to get enough of the comic masterpiece, told and illustrated in a dry, matter-of-fact tone that balances its fantastic premise. It's a delight for both reading aloud and reading alone, and it is an ideal jumping-off point for early literacy and writing exercises.

In the original story, "Stanley Lambchop" is a perfectly average boy who wakes up one day to suddenly find himself very different. Because something fell on top of him overnight, his parents wake to find him only half-an-inch thick. But, being flat isn't as bad as you might think! In some ways, Stanley is even better than ever. He can now be rolled up, put in an envelope, mailed, or even flown like a kite.

In 1994, a teacher in Canada, Dale Hubert, began the *Flat Stanley* Project. He invited other teachers to take part in the project by hosting flat-visitors and encouraging students to write *Flat Stanley* letters and journals.

In the few years since, children around the world have participated in the *Flat Stanley* project - - to send their own characters far from home and collect photos of wherever their character travels. And while the project is somewhat similar to a pen-pal activity, it is actually much more! While youngsters rarely know how to begin or what to write about, with a flat character it's as if the senders and recipients have a mutual friend, and writing becomes so much easier and so much more creative.

Shortly after the back-to-school season began in September, Miss Theresa was discussing different emotions with her students, and they talked about how soldiers might feel homesick, being overseas and so far away from home. She also asked them what might make them feel better if they themselves were away from home?

Among the responses were ' pictures, games, cookies, hugs, and so forth.' So, with a little help from parents, the class worked together to assemble some care packages for U.S. soldiers - - with games, like dominoes and checkers, lots of cookies, candy, peanuts, gum, cereal, magazines, phone



Army helicopter delivers mail and packages to service members overseas. / Courtesy of U.S. Army

cards, playing cards, greeting cards, pictures, and some other items, like lip balm - - and even packaged them together with rice-krispy treats that they actually mixed together in Miss Theresa's classroom!

In October then, Miss Theresa mailed *Flat Matt* overseas to 'visit' with some U.S. soldiers, along with the care packages assembled by the students and their families. The children requested that the troops receiving these packages take a few pictures with Matt and return the pictures along with *Flat Matt* -- and with a brief description of where Matt traveled on his first-ever journey.

Now, Matt is overseas on his very first trip and his friends at The Goddard School await his safe arrival back home, where he will continue his journeys as he proceeds home with each girl and boy. Hopefully, he'll be back home before the Winter break.

Each student will get a chance to take Matt home, pal around with him or send Matt on to a relative or friend. After this time together, each student (with some help from their Mom or Dad) writes in Matt's journal about what they did with Matt and attach any pictures they take. Then the class will be able to look back at Matt's fabulous journey, and then reminisce at all of *Flat Matt's* amazing adventures!

For more information about *Flat Matt*, this project, or to schedule a tour of The Goddard School, call (732) 363-5530, or visit on the internet at <http://www.goddardschool.com/Schools/Toms-River-II-NJ/Schools.gsp>