

then other kids probably had too many books also," Brant says. He took the idea to his school, Hermosa Drive Elementary, and the principal was all for it. Brant and a few friends put together a presentation for a school assembly to rally support. As a result, the students (about 450 of them) donated 2,700 books that were given to first-year teachers in the Fullerton area.

After that, word started to spread. Scout troops organized book drives. There were even a few Read All Over birthday parties where guests brought used books to donate instead of gifts. Some of the books were given to local children's hospitals; others were sent out of state. So far, children in California, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Washington, Arizona, Utah, the District of Columbia, and Mexico have benefited.

Mary Sitter learned about the program from another teacher, and she e-mailed her story to Brant. Sitter is a first-year teacher who is just starting to build resources for a classroom. But the needs of her students are immediate. Some students struggle with reading and writing; many don't have books at home. About 25 percent of Compton families live below the poverty line.

Brant responded

Do you know a child
who's making
a difference in this world?
We would like to hear about it.
Send your story to Making a
Difference, Creative Kids magazine,
1716 Locust St., Des Moines,
IA 50309.

The Stories Behind the Story

To fully understand Brant Whiting's commitment to the Read All Over program, you need to go back almost four years. At age 8, Brant suffered cardiac and respiratory arrest after a severe asthma attack. He was in a coma for six days, and doctors feared he would face dire complications. Brant surprised them all. "It's a miracle he's even here with us," says his mother, Lisa.

As a result, one of the doctors predicted that Brant would do something special with his life. Brant vowed to make that forecast come true. Two years later, President Bush asked students across America to start service programs dedicated to the memories of September 11, 2001, terror attack victims. Brant felt doubly challenged to do something.

That's when he had the idea for Read All Over. The program honors Deora Bodley, a 20-year-old college student from San Diego who died when Flight 93 crashed in Pennsylvania on 9/11. Deora spent 15 hours a week reading to children as a volunteer. Each donated book receives a bookplate with Deora's photo and these words she had once written: "People ask who, what, when, where, why, how. I ask peace."

Deora's family remains involved in Read All Over. Her sister Murial, who is Brant's age, helped design the bookplate and serves as honorary chairperson.

to Sitter's request by contacting local schools, some with teachers who had received books already. He designed flyers and made speeches to students. "I tell them it doesn't matter how big or small a contribution is," he says. "One book, one smile, one hour—it all makes a difference in someone's life."

Books came pouring in. Among the donations was a full set of encyclopedias. "The next week my class wrote wonderful animal reports, using those encyclopedias for research," Sitter says. "You just don't know the positive effect of this until you're in the classroom. Reading puts the whole world within your reach."

The beauty of Read All Over is anyone can get involved. The Whitings are planning a Web site, www.readallover.org, to help. There you'll find tips for collecting books, plus you'll see lists of groups that

are running book drives and lists of teachers and others who need books.

"It's very humbling to see how a small idea can change so many lives," Lisa says. "All of the sudden this little idea has just blossomed and it's because Brant has had the courage to go out and talk to people and get them motivated."

Despite the success of Read All Over, Brant remains just a regular kid. When asked if reading is his favorite hobby, he says, "Next to golf, baseball, and basketball, yeah." He counts the Goosebumps series by R. L. Stine and *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C. S. Lewis as recent favorites.

That may sound like any sixth-grader, but folks like Mary Sitter see more. Read All Over "is the dream of a child, who took that dream and ran with it," she says. "I expect great things from this young man in the future." ☆