

Reflection 2007 Theme – *I can make a difference...*

Outstanding Interpretation Award – Rachel Carson Middle School, Virginia

Outstanding Interpretation Award – Fairfax County Council PTA, Virginia

Outstanding Interpretation Award – Northern Virginia PTA District

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## Star Light, Star Bright

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Carrie grasped the branch and pulled herself upward. She sat down on her favorite branch. Peace and quiet at last! Carrie would always climb this tree, every evening, after a cramped day in the small house where she lived with her parents and four older siblings, not to mention having to do chores such as cleaning out the barn, collecting eggs, and milking the cow.

*Up here, there are no more annoying parents or siblings. Up here, there's just me and the stars.* Carrie wrapped her arms around herself and shivered in delight, breathing in the cool, crisp autumn air. Soon, the beautiful sunset would disappear, and Carrie could stargaze for a while. She watched the last rays of gold and pink sink behind the far off mountains. Then Carrie turned her face upwards, searching for the tiny points of light that were stars. There was one! Carrie's face broke out into a smile. She was so absorbed in the first star that she almost missed the distant voice that called from beneath her.

"Excuse me?" a tiny voice called out. Carrie's smile disappeared as she looked down. A small girl was standing at the bottom of the tree. She was one of her next door neighbors but still lived half a mile away. The girl was talking again.

"May I come up there too? To see the stars?" she asked shyly. Carrie frowned. This tree was her sanctuary, her place of solitude. This girl seemed to be an intruder of her privacy. Still, Carrie's face softened. The girl must have a reason to come. Maybe she also needed some private time.

"Climb on up," Carrie welcomed. The girl smiled happily and gripped the lowest branches, pulling herself up. When the girl had settled herself on the branch next to Carrie, Carrie asked the girl, "What's your name?"

"I'm Nyra," she replied, "You're Carrie, right?" Carrie nodded.

"Aren't the stars just *beautiful* tonight?" Carrie murmured dreamily, gazing up at the sky. Nyra nodded, at a loss for words. Suddenly, the door to Carrie's house opened.

"Carrie! Get down from there! Make sure the cow is in the barn!" her mother called.

Carrie sighed. "And the Corona Borealis was just coming out." She grumbled something about Maggie, the cow, and started climbing down the branches. Nyra didn't know how to respond.

"Umm – see you soon!" she called after Carrie's back but was too late. Carrie was already heading across a field to drag the cow in. Nyra shifted on her branch to get a better view of the constellation.

Carrie clambered over the thick tree branch, pushing herself over a clump of leaves. The Corona Borealis and Bootes would be shining clearly tonight, so she had made sure Maggie was in the barn and quietly chewing her cud. As Carrie glanced down at the ground, she was startled

to see a small hand waving at her. Nyra was back! This time, she was with a small boy about her age and height.

“Hi!” Nyra called, “This is Danny.” She pointed to the boy. Carrie waved at him.

“Hi, Carrie,” Danny responded to Carrie’s friendly wave. Nyra and Danny began climbing the branches. Inwardly, Carrie worried about more intruders. What if Nyra came back tomorrow with even *more* kids? She counted the number of branches silently. Seventeen... Nineteen...Twenty-one ...Twenty-three...Twenty-five! If Nyra came back with twenty-two more kids...Carrie shook her head to clear her thoughts. *That won’t happen*, she reassured herself. Carrie focused on the brightest star in the Crown, but it seemed faint. Suddenly, she heard a gasp from below. Looking down, Carrie saw Nyra watching the stars wide-eyed.

“There are so many of them!” Nyra exclaimed. She settled down and counted the stars. Carrie smiled at Nyra, and the Northern Crown sparkled brighter. She breathed in the cool autumn air and hugged her knees, watching the twinkling stars wink into sight, one by one.

The next day, Nyra and Danny came again. For an entire week, Nyra and Danny came to the tree together to visit Carrie and the stars. Carrie was relieved that there were only two newcomers. However, the next week, a new little boy arrived. His name was Matt. Danny and Matt soon became best friends, and Nyra became much closer to Carrie. Nyra often confessed that coming to Carrie’s tree was her favorite part of the day.

“Me too,” Carrie had replied, smiling. They both shared a lot in common. The only difference was that Nyra could not read. Carrie was the only kid in her stargazing group who knew how.

One night, Nyra had asked Carrie, “What do you want to be when you grow up? I think I want to be a nurse.” As Carrie pondered this strange question, it struck her that nobody had ever asked her it before. Carrie had never thought about the future, only the present.

“I want to be a teacher,” Carrie finally replied. Nyra smiled back and then, after a few moments, tentatively asked a question.

“Will – will you teach me how to read?”

Carrie sat at the trunk of the tree, cradling two of her old picture books in her lap. Soon Nyra, Danny, and Matt would join her. Carrie’s heart pounded in anticipation. Maggie was standing placidly in the barn, and all of her chores were done. Carrie had brought a flashlight to use after the sun had gone down.

There they were! Nyra was grinning in excitement, and Danny and Matt were talking together, as usual. Nyra raced up to Carrie as the boys climbed the branches. Carrie smiled and moved to make room for Nyra. Nyra would begin learning to read, starting today! Carrie began with the alphabet, pointing out the letters in an alphabet picture book.

“This is ‘A’, this is ‘B’...”

Nyra was a fast learner, and when that night had ended, she had finished the two picture books and was already piecing together words. Carrie felt happy with her new student. The next day, Carrie brought another picture book and a simple chapter book. Nyra began to read sentences, putting them together tentatively, one word at a time. After each sentence, Carrie asked Nyra if she understood the sentences. Nyra began reading faster, and every night would finish three picture books, until Carrie ran out of them. After each book, Nyra would smile triumphantly as Carrie grinned.

After Nyra had finished all of Carrie's picture books, a new girl named Ali arrived. Carrie, seeing Ali's longing face whenever Nyra finished a book, invited Ali to join them. Carrie's reading group expanded as the boys became interested in reading and more and more kids arrived.

Every Saturday, Carrie would let the kids up into the stargazing tree to watch the constellations. Carrie usually spent time with Nyra, watching the stars and talking about Nyra's dreams.

"How do you become a nurse?" Nyra asked Carrie.

"I think you have to go to medical school," Carrie replied, "That's part of a college, where you'll go for school when you're older. After you finish medical school, you can find a job as a nurse somewhere and help people in hospitals." At that, Nyra grinned.

"I can't wait for that day!" Nyra exclaimed, "Will you help me if I need help, Carrie?" Carrie smiled at Nyra's pleading tone.

"Of course I will," Carrie reassured Nyra.

Carrie loved Saturdays. The stars just helped make teaching more soothing and easier. She would use the beginnings of constellation names to help teach the alphabet. She liked being able to read a star book, and then point up at a constellation, announcing, "There it is!" Usually someone would bring a book about stars and read aloud to the people around them. Carrie loved watching the kids happily devour book after book. The stars shined brightly as she pictured the children's delighted faces. There were several frustrating, cloudy nights when she tried to convince a boy named Rob that the letter 'W' *did* exist. However, most nights were clear and filled with stars, when kids gathered around her at the trunk of the tree, eager to learn.

One Saturday night in November, as Carrie watched the stars of Aquila glow, she reflected on what she had done in the last two months. Carrie casually glanced at the kids sitting underneath her and was shocked. The branches were full! Carrie looked up at the stars again, remembering that day when she had dreaded seeing all twenty-five branches full. Now, she was glad that all of these kids were happy. Carrie knew that she had made a difference in their lives, teaching them to read, giving them an education, and believing in their dreams.

*These kids are the stars of the future,* Carrie thought to herself, looking down at them again, *I'm glad I've been able to do all of this for them.* Carrie looked over her shoulder fondly at Nyra, who had started everything with a small, innocent question. "Will you teach me how to read?"

Above the tree, the stars twinkled brightly.