

DO PEOPLE WITH THE SAME SYMPTOMS ALL NEED THE SAME TREATMENT?

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- Person #2 may need a detox and biochemical balancing program
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World lessons

Manchester Middle students fight human rights abuse in Darfur

By Joan Tupponce
 CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Until recently, the Darfur region of Sudan was just a mark on the world map for eighth grader Jordan Jones.

"None of us knew about Darfur until Ms. Tyler told us about it," explained the Manchester Middle School student. "Now we have learned a lot about it."

Tyler, an eighth grade English teacher at Manchester, started combining Standards of Learning (SOL) requirements – reading nonfiction, writing letters and constructing persuasive arguments – with world causes when she began teaching in 2005. Last year, her students made bracelets in class and sold them to raise funds to benefit the fight against AIDS in Africa as part of a "how-to" project. They also wrote letters to members of Congress about the AIDS epidemic, requesting their support for aid to Africa.

"The project helped increase awareness," observed Tyler. "It gave them the chance to look beyond their own boundaries. It got them engaged and took them to a higher level of thinking."

Tyler hopes to repeat those same lessons this year as students learn about the conflict in Darfur. According to the Save Darfur Coalition, the conflict – or genocide as it has been labeled – began in February 2003. Since then, at least 400,000 people have lost their lives. Around 2.5 million people have been displaced, and more than 3.5 million men, women and children are struggling to survive amid violence and starvation.

"After doing research on Sudan this past



Elli Morris/Chesterfield Observer

Benita Mountain and her fellow classmates write letters to Congress in support of aid for Darfur.

summer, I decided to do something different with my class this year," Tyler said. "I talked to people at Save Darfur and found out about a documentary the kids could go see and about a book signing [they could attend]. They went with their families and saw how writing could impact or change the way people think."

Students have written letters to Congress and are sending videos about Darfur to television talk shows such as "Oprah" and "Ellen."

"The kids are writing poems, skits and songs that will be put together as a newscast," Tyler explained. "We are in the process of making the videos now."

Each of Tyler's three classes is making its

own video. Jones has been tapped as one of the producers of the skits.

"I would like for one of the tapes to be shown on television and have a lot of people watch so we could get the message out," Jones explained.

Tyler also hopes to have her students write letters to the United Nations, she explained. "It gets them talking about world events and human rights. It has started to change some of their opinions, and it helps them gain perspective. They can see and think past America."

Jones finds the project exciting as well as educational.

"I've really enjoyed it," he said. "It's not your average class."

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Surviving winter

February is cocoon time. It turned cold just in time for me to curl up with a stack of seed catalogs. I dream of long rows of Queen Anne's lace interspersed with purple spikes of lavender. Some people think Queen Anne's lace is a weed, but it's one of my favorite flowers. And some people should probably keep their opinions to themselves.

I'd like several rows of sunflowers and a few pumpkin vines. And okra plants. Sorry, y'all – not for eating – to dry for arrangements. Oh, and hollyhocks. Those need a white picket fence or the side of a barn to grow against. I'll mention it to my other half. Fences and barns are his territory.

He thinks seeds are better than bulbs – they can be scattered rather than planted. And the rule is if I order, then I plant. There have been a few years when my fall bulbs were planted in February and more than once, not planted at all. Ok, he has been known to help with the bulbs.

We do have a division of labor in the yard. He does everything that requires turning on like mowers. I work with a trowel or a hose. Also, vegetables are his. He cooks so he grows what he wants on the menu – as long as

we don't have big appetites. If I was in charge of vegetables, I would stick to the ones that are pretty or that can be used in dried arrangements.

When I looked at the pond, it was iced over, and little hills of white stuck up all over it. It was 32 degrees outside so I sent my other half down to see if they were tiny icebergs. Apparently a hawk had met his demise, and his downy feathers were stuck in the ice. Icebergs would have made a better story.

Since those little white tufts were so dramatic, I have ordered a catalog for water lilies. I also spotted a great bench and an arbor that I have asked my other half to build. He said, "Sure," but he didn't sound committed. He also mentioned the price of water lilies might limit us to a total of three.

In case I run out of plant catalogs, I brought home a "how to build a bird house" book. Unlike the crafters on TV, I can't be trusted around power tools, so I left it on my other half's chair in case he runs out of things to do.

I also have stacks of paperbacks – the fast-reading kind that doesn't tax my brain. I don't want to have to figure anything out. I just want to escape to a sunny, warm place where the people and the events are exciting – without leaving home.

I count on having a February every year. I appreciate that it is technically the shortest month, even if it seems to last forever. And it gives me time to dream of things for my other half to do.



Loose Ends
 Susan Nienow