

'Reverse' trick-or-treating teaches important lesson

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write the author

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While browsing the New York State United Teachers website, Pamela O'Brien of Kings Park learned about a unique and timely way to teach social justice: "Reverse Trick-or-Treating on Halloween."

Following links on www.NYSUT.org, O'Brien contacted Global Exchange, an international human rights organization dedicated to promoting social, economic and environmental justice around the world, and received a few hundred index cards with samples of fair trade chocolate.

The idea, O'Brien explained, is for Halloween trick-or-treaters to exchange one of the cards with the candy givers on Halloween, so that they, too, will become aware of the rampant child labor abuses involved in the production of chocolate around the world. O'Brien is offering the index cards, complete with attached samples of fair trade chocolate, to all of her eighth-grade English students at Brentwood West Middle School, who have submitted slips permitting them to participate.

"Often children are sold by their parents to the cocoa farmer with the promise that that child receives an education, food and shelter, and they don't," O'Brien said. "It's basically human trafficking."

To further the discussion, O'Brien incorporated into her lesson plans the concept of fair trade versus child labor, a commonplace occurrence on cocoa farms in Latin America and Africa. Her students produced poignant poetry on the subject, which O'Brien said demonstrated a profound sensitivity to the issues.

Launched by Global Exchange three years ago, Reverse Trick-Or-Treating was designed to raise awareness of the pervasive problem of child labor, forced labor and trafficking in the cocoa fields, to empower consumers to press the chocolate industry for more fair cocoa sources policies, and to inform consumers about fair trade companies that are leading the way to industry reform. Since its inception,



Setauket's Mark Jackett and his daughters, Scarlett, 6, as a skeleton, and Lily, 4, as a ghost, are holding the cards that they'll be distributing on Halloween to tell people about fair trade chocolate. Courtesy Mark Jackett ([click for larger version](#))

Reverse Trick-or-Treating has taken off in the U.S., with nearly 20,000 groups of children expected to participate on Halloween this year.

Reverse trick-or-treating seemed the perfect fit for children participating in their time-honored Halloween revelry, said Adrienne Fitch-Frankel, director of Global Exchange's fair trade campaign.

"Kids have a well-developed sense of fairness," Fitch-Frankel said. "I regularly hear stories of U.S. school children who are really outraged to learn that mainstream chocolate companies are making them complicit in the enslavement of their peers."

The website www.globalexchange.org reports that as recently as August, 54 children were rescued from slavery in cocoa fields in the Ivory Coast. "The children were as young as 11 years old, endured hazardous working conditions, labored 12 hours a day, and were not paid for their work," reads the website.

Come Oct. 31, O'Brien will take her school lessons home and plans to accompany her son, Joey, 12, and his friends when they trick-or-treat with their fair trade cards and chocolate.

Also participating in the local effort to combat a global problem is Mark Jackett of Setauket, who will accompany his two children, 6 and 4, on their door-to-door educational campaign. A high school English teacher, Jackett also learned about the child labor abuses through the NYSUT website. As part of his December holiday "Make The World A Better Place" lessons, Jackett plans to introduce his students to the concept of fair trade and what they can do to make an impact on a global level.

"I just think that we as people are put on this planet to help each other out, so this is one of the ways I help out folks in need," he said.

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