

The Family Under the Bridge  
by  
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Living contentedly under a bridge in Paris, Old Armand has long supplied his simple needs by doing odd jobs or begging. When carefree Armand sees children playing in the street, he is happy that he is not responsible for anyone but himself. He wants nothing to do with children because they mean homes and responsibility and regular work. Things he left behind long ago.

His gypsy friend, Mireli, tells him, “You think you don’t like children, but it is only that you are afraid of them. You’re afraid the sly little things will steal your heart if they find out you have one.”

Imagine his indignation when he returns to his “home” under the bridge and finds that three children and their dog have moved in. When he tries to make them leave, the older girl cries, “You can’t take us away. We’re going to stay together because we’re a family, and families have to stick together. That’s what mother says.”

Armand learns that when the family lost its home, they were forced to live on the streets in order to stay together. After meeting Armand the children decide to adopt him as their grandfather. Slowly Armand is changed from Armand the hobo to Armand the family man.

As Christmas approaches, the children tell Father Christmas all the things they want, but most of all they want a home. Will they get their Christmas miracle?

After reading *The Family Under the Bridge*, have fun with these activities:

1. Armand and the Calcet family are homeless for two different reasons. What are they?
2. When the Calcet children meet Armand, they have all their worldly possessions in a shopping cart. List some things that you would like to have if you suddenly found yourself without a home. Remember, they have to fit into a shopping cart!
3. We are introduced to the streets of Paris. Either through library books or the Internet, learn about some of the famous sites of Paris such as the bridges, flying buttresses, Notre Dame, and the Louvre.
4. Here in the states we know about Santa Claus and his traditions. Find out something about the Santa Claus traditions of other cultures.
5. “There’s a fancy Christmas window out here you should see,” said Armand to the children. Do you have some favorite Christmas decorations? Draw a picture of your favorite decorations.

6. “Armand sat in the rectangle marked by Suzy and thought that this woman’s trouble was pride, and that pride and life under the bridge weren’t going to work out well together.” Discuss with your teacher what this means.
7. Armand treats the hungry children to a meal of crepes. Find a recipe for crepes and make some to enjoy.
8. Tinka drew two circles, one inside another. When Suzy asked what it meant, she said, “If you see that sign near a gate, it means that the people who live inside are good and generous.” Then she scratched an upright line and crossed it with two short bars. “But that sign means that beggars will be badly received.” Find out what other gypsy symbols mean.
9. Make up some of your own symbols and leave them around your house. For example, a picture of a slice of cake could mean that a snack is in the refrigerator waiting for you or a picture of an envelope may mean that the mail has come and is on the hall table. A red diamond could mean “Messy room. Enter at your own risk.”
10. Discuss homelessness with your teacher. Collect food or personal items to donate to your local homeless shelter or food bank.