

# Power Picture Books



**Tools for Teaching Peace**

*By Cathleen Haskins*

The picture book is a simple yet profound tool for teaching peace. Today, more than ever before, beautiful picture books are available for children. They are nearly pieces of art—with rich text accompanied by illustrations, paintings, and photographs that speak to the spirit of the child. An increasing number of peace-themed picture books are available to teachers to use in their work for peace in the classroom. From books that serve as introductory resources for the young child to sophisticated books that address specific peace themes, the quality and availability of peace books should not be overlooked as resources for teaching peace.

Picture books are an ideal peace resource, in part because they are readily accessible for all age levels. Books can be borrowed through local library services, an easy and cost-free option. If your local library does not hold the title you are looking for, ask about the library consortium to which your library belongs. (Libraries will also sometimes purchase books on request.) Using online library catalogs, books can be located, reserved, and renewed at your convenience.

A school may find it worthwhile to build a peace library collection, thereby establishing a resource pool that can be shared by all teachers in the building. Five hundred dollars will buy about 30 books. A fund drive or a small grant are options for tight budgets. In some schools, children donate a book to the classroom or school library on their birthdays. Consider creating a peace bibliography and asking families to donate a book from the list as a contribution to the peace book project.

Next, look at what it means to teach for peace and how to organize the learner objectives for teaching peace.

The following categories form the framework for a curriculum for teaching peace: 1) Inner Peace, 2) Peace in a Classroom Community, 3) Universal/Cultural Peace, and 4) Peace in Nature. Given this framework for cultivating the peace-loving spirit of the child, it is possible to look more closely at the picture book themes that will form the basis for or complement the objectives that shape the 4-part framework as defined above. The books discussed here have been included for both powerful text and exceptional art.

### **Books for Cultivating Inner Peace**

We can help children develop inner peace by cultivating awareness of the inner self; appreciation of slowness, stillness and silence; mindfulness; gratitude; and self-reliance. There is a growing collection of children's books on mindfulness and gratitude in particular.

#### ***If You Listen***

*By Charlotte Zolotow,  
Illustrated by Stefano Vitale*

In this story, a young girl asks her mother how she will know if her father, who has been gone a long time, loves her. "If I can't see him, or hear him, or feel his hugs, how will I know he loves me when he is not here?" To

this question her mother replies, "You must listen inside yourself. Just the way you strain to hear the dog barking in the hills or the train rushing by in the night." While this story deals with a child's loneliness and loss, the fact that it acknowledges another way of knowing makes it a perfect book to read when contemplating the concept of inner self. The simple text is accompanied by luminous artwork painted on wood by award-winning illustrator Stefano Vitale.

#### ***I Want to Hear the Quiet***

*By Aline Wolf,  
Illustrated by Joe Servello*

Aline Wolf's collections of small, spiral-bound books are treasures. Included in the Thoughtful Living series is her book, *I Want to Hear the Quiet*. With its straightforward, clear text and clean-lined illustrations by Joe Servello, this short book addresses a major impediment to silent thoughts and reflection—noise! Although simple in format and text, this book tackles an issue that is a great barrier to accessing the inner self. *How can we hear our own thoughts, Wolf asks, if we can't move beyond the noises of everyday living?* This little book powerfully promotes the positive value of taking time for quiet.

#### ***Each Breath a Smile***

*By Sister Susan (Based on teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh),  
Illustrated by Nguyen Thi Hop & Nguyen Dong*

This book about mindfulness—the act of being in the present and paying attention to the here and now—teaches children the value of connecting with their breath to experience inner peace and calm. It begins, "Dear little ones, let us sit very quietly. Listen to the wind. Listen to the birds. Listen to the crickets and the frogs. Listen very quietly to your breathing." Conscious breathing encourages deep, sacred listening and a sense of connection to the

simple joys and wonders of life. The husband-and-wife illustrator team conveys a sense of peaceful tranquility with each of the 20 full-color illustrations.

#### ***The Little Quiet Book***

*By Katherine Ross,  
Illustrated by Jean Hirashima*

This little board book provides simple examples that help children ages 18 months to 3 years understand quiet as something enjoyable.

#### ***Bless Us All***

*Written and illustrated  
by Cynthia Rylant*

This board book by prolific children's author Cynthia Rylant takes young children through the seasons, with expressions of gratitude for life's everyday blessings.

#### ***Biscuit Is Thankful***

*By Alyssa Satin Capulli,  
Illustrated by Pat Schories*

Another board book for toddlers and preschoolers, this volume is perfect for introducing the concept of gratitude.

#### ***Guess How Much I Love You***

*By Sam McBratney,  
Illustrated by Anita Jeram*

This simple story of unconditional love provides the young child with the reassurance that strong parental love offers.

#### ***A Pebble for Your Pocket***

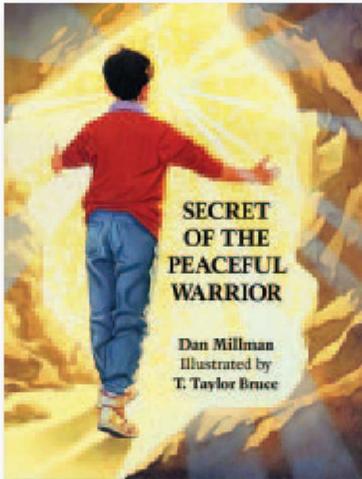
*By Thich Nhat Hanh, Illustrations by  
Nguyen Thi Hop & Nguyen Dong*

Students 6 years and older will appreciate this collection of stories that provides suggestions for transforming anger and unhappiness and offer ways to connect with the joy and wonder of the present moment through mindfulness. The author is an internationally recognized peace activist.

## **Sacred Places**

By Philemon Sturges,  
Illustrated by Giles Laroche

Use this book to explore the idea of sacredness of place. Across cultures and throughout history, special geographical locations have served as expressions of celebration, hope, and gratitude.



## **Secret of the Peaceful Warrior**

By Dan Millman,  
Illustrated by T. Taylor Bruce

When young Danny confronts a bully in his new neighborhood, the guidance of a wise and caring elder shows him the ways of the peaceful warrior. Recommended for children ages 6–12.

## **Books for Nurturing Peace in the Classroom Community**

Engaging children in the construction of a peaceful classroom community gives them opportunities to hone skills that will serve them through adulthood as they participate in work, recreational, or religious communities. We work for peaceful communities, in part, by nurturing compassion, kindness, forgiveness, and conflict resolution.

## **The Rag Coat**

By Lauren Mills  
Minna's family is so poor they can't afford to buy her a winter coat, but her Papa keeps her warm with a burlap sack and her Mama's patchwork quilt.

"People only need people, and nothing else," is the mantra that helps this poor mining family understand life. But when Papa becomes ill and dies, life gets harder for Minna. Thanks to kind and generous neighbor women who contribute scraps and help to make a patchwork coat for Minna, she is able to stay in school through the winter. Her classmate's initial response to her new coat is to tease her and make fun of the coat, but then, learning that the patchwork is made from scrap pieces of their own histories, they begin to listen to Minna and the stories she shares about the coat's many pieces.

## **The Sun in My Belly**

By Sister Susan,  
Illustrated by Sister Rain

In this book, Sister Susan introduces to children the concept of inter-being—the idea that all things are connected to one another. When a fight erupts between two young girls in the park, Jenny experiences unhappiness and discontent. A transformative experience allows her to see the interconnectedness of all things and motivates her to give up her anger, thus experiencing the healing power of forgiveness. Sister Rain's watercolor illustrations are both fluid and bold. In one illustration, Jenny sees herself inside a raindrop.

## **Make Someone Smile: And 40 More Ways to be a Peaceful Person**

By Judy Lalli, Illustrated by  
Douglas L. Mason-Fry

Simple text and corresponding close-up black and white photographs take children through 40 ways to work for peace, such as

*Love each other*  
*Listen*  
*Try to imagine how other people feel*  
*Sing*  
*Be patient*  
*Forgive*

While each idea is briefly stated, they are powerful components to building peaceful relationships. Can the power of love, sacred listening, or forgiveness be overstated? Each idea presented in this book could be the springboard for a longer study.

## **Rabbit in the Moon**

A Jataka Tale, Dharma Publishing  
This book is one in a series of picture books for children based on traditional Jataka tales, celebrating the power of action motivated by kindness, compassion, love, and wisdom. In this story, a rabbit living in the forest draws other animals to him because everything he does comes from a loving heart. His love and kindness change a greedy otter, a sneaky wolf, and a clever monkey into good and helpful members of their community. Shakra, King of Heavenly Beings, watches from above in amazement at their transformation. In disguise, he appears in the woods as a lost, hungry, and distressed old man. All of the animals move quickly to help, except Rabbit, who does not know what he has to offer the weary traveler, until he offers the most unselfish of gifts to the stranger: himself as food for supper. In appreciation for this offering, Shakra places Rabbit in the moon (to be seen on every full moon) as a reminder to others of the power of kindness and generosity. Large illustrations are outlined in thin metallic gold, lending a sense of sacredness to the story.

## **The Peace Rose**

Written and Illustrated  
by Alicia Jewele

An excellent tool for teaching a simple, straightforward conflict resolution process to young children. This picture book from Parent Child Press has a helpful teacher resource section at the end.

### ***What Is Love, Biscuit?***

By Alyssa Satin Capulli,

Illustrated by Pat Schories

For the very young child (1–3 years), this book is a basic introduction to the concept of love.

### ***Sharing: How Kindness Grows***

By Fran Shaw & Miki Sakamoto

This lift-the-flap board book shows how actions such as sharing crayons, cookies, or a ride on a swing can bring happiness.

### ***Ordinary Mary's Extraordinary Deed***

By Emily Pearson,

Illustrated by Fumi Kosaka

The power of kindness and how one person can make a difference is examined in this book.

### ***The Dalai Lama***

Written and Illustrated by Demi

The author presents a picture-book biography of the life of the fourteenth Dalai Lama, one of the world's leading spiritual leaders and lifelong advocate of compassion.

### ***Rose Blanche***

By Roberto Innocenti

For the older, more mature child, this poignant story tells of the compassion of one young German girl who follows a slow-moving tank out of town, only to discover a concentration camp and its inhabitants.

### **Books for Building an Understanding of Universal Peace**

To work for universal peace, we must support children in developing an understanding that they are a part of something larger than themselves. Montessori provided a philosophical vision and a curricular framework to do this: Humanity, as a whole, will reach its potential when all individuals reach their unique potentials. Yes, it is essential to study and celebrate diversity, but let us also remember to



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recognize and emphasize what is common to all human beings. What do we share, regardless of race, religion, age, gender, or geographical location? Books that help children to understand the basic rights of all people, their essential spiritual and physical needs, and their shared values, are of importance in the classroom because they underscore those universal elements that link people everywhere.

### ***I Live in the Universe***

By Aline Wolf,

Illustrated by Joe Servello

*I Live in the Universe* is a perfect book to help children understand that they belong to something larger than themselves, their family, classroom, and community. Elaborate text to convey this concept is not always necessary, as exemplified by Wolf in this book.

### ***All I See***

By Chara M. Curtis,

Illustrated by Cynthia Aldrich

A small boy recognizes that he is a part of all things in the universe. Written in gentle lyric form, this book reads like

poetry. Another book by the same team, *All I See Is Part of Me*, won the 1996 Award of Excellence from *Body Mind Spirit* magazine.

*I used to think that I was small. . . .*

*A little body, that was all.*

*But then one day I asked the sun,  
"Who are you?"*

*He beamed, "We are one."*

### ***The Golden Rule***

By Ilene Cooper,

Illustrated by Gabi Swiatowska

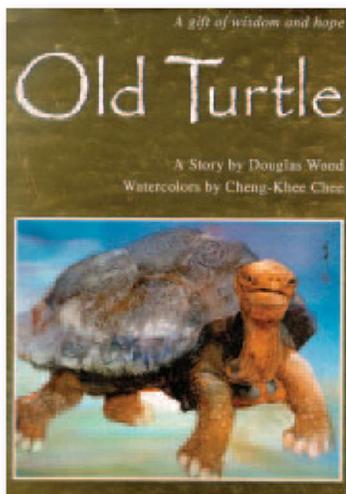
While walking down a city street with his grandfather, a little boy notices words on a billboard: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." The grandfather explains the Golden Rule to his grandson and shares how different religions embrace the same rule. The child sees that Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Native American religions all share this universal value. The evocative illustrations help to impart the universal recognition of a simple rule that is often difficult to follow.

### **Whoever You Are**

By Mem Fox,

Illustrated by Leslie Staub

Acknowledging the differences among people of different cultures, this book cites many things that bind humanity together.



### **Old Turtle**

By Douglas Wood,

Illustrated by Cheng-Khee Chee

Disagreement among all of Earth's creations over what or who God is results in the Old Turtle sharing her wisdom and advocating for unity. Soft watercolors accompany the rich text of this award-winning book.

### **We Share One World**

By Jane E. Hoffelt,

Illustrated by Marty Husted

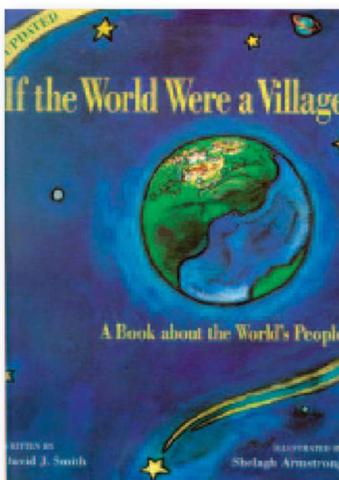
Filled with bright paintings of children from many cultures, this book focuses on what is common among children who initially appear so diverse. I recommend it for the 3–6 classroom.

### **If the World Were a Village**

By David J. Smith,

Illustrated by Shelagh Armstrong

This book views the world as if it were a village of 100 people. For children ages 9–12, this book approaches social justice issues by reducing the world to a global village:



*Of the 100 people in the global village:*

*61 are from Asia*

*14 are from Africa*

*11 are from Europe. . . .*

In this way, Smith employs numbers that the young student can visualize and understand.

### **Cultivating Peace in Nature**

There is a peace that is found in nature that can only be experienced *in* nature. However, picture books can be used as the impetus for thoughtful discussions and activities that may inspire children to be in nature in order to experience the peace it brings. Choose books that inspire or communicate wonder, serenity, and an awareness of the interconnected web of life.

### **Places of Power**

By Michael DeMunn,

Illustrated by Noah Buchanan

Told from a Native American perspective, this picture book offers children a peek into the world of sacred places that harbor special powers. DeMunn calls on the reader to seek out these places of wisdom with an open heart so the power and beauty of each will be revealed. In gratitude, a gift must be given for each sacred place that is discovered. "But how you look or what you offer as a gift doesn't matter as much as what is in your heart. Our

maker sees how you are inside and that's what matters most of all."

The text is simple yet profound, and the art is exquisite. The author ends by reminding us that the greatest place of power is within us.

*Places of power are all over the earth, but inside each of us is the greatest Place of Power of all. It is the greatest power in the universe — it's the power to give love and caring to the Earth and everyone around us. There is no greater power than this, and no greater gift we can give or leave to others.*

### **Giving Thanks**

By Jonathan London,

Illustrated by Gregory Manchess

Another story from the tradition of Native North American Indians, this book tells of a young child whose father gives thanks for all things in nature while walking in the field near their house. He offers gratitude for crickets, deer, wild mushrooms, the sun, the moon, the stars, and being at one with nature. While the child finds this a bit embarrassing, his father offers assurance that this kind of giving back through gratitude becomes very comfortable, like a habit, when done regularly. Manchess's impressionistic oil paintings capture the autumn colors of green, brown, and gold, as well as the changing light throughout the daylong walk.

### **The Way to Start the Day**

By Byrd Baylor,

Illustrated by Peter Parnell

*The way to start the day is this —  
Go outside  
and face the east  
and greet the sun  
with some kind of  
blessing  
or chant  
or song  
that you made yourself*

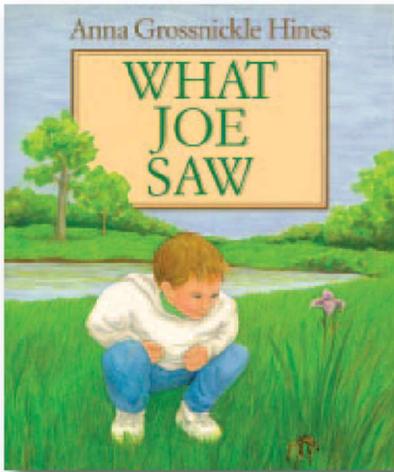
*and keep for  
early morning.*

In this good tool for reflection on the glories of the outdoors in the early morning, Byrd Baylor describes how people throughout history and across many cultures welcome each new day with thanksgiving and celebration. Other books by Baylor and Parnell that are worthy of sharing are *Everybody Needs a Rock* and *The Other Way to Listen*. All of these books call us gently back to the beauty and mystery of the natural world.

### ***Black Elk, A Man with a Vision***

*By Carol Greene*

This is the story of Black Elk's vision in which he saw that all people and nature are connected and must live together in peace.



### ***What Joe Saw***

*By Anna Grossnickle Hines*

Because he slows down and takes time to explore the wonders around him, Little Joe sees what the other children and the adults don't see as they hurry along through the day.

### ***The Earth Is Good: A Chant in Praise of Nature***

*By Michael DeMunn*

This is a simple chant in praise of

nature and life's goodness. Very simple, repetitive text makes this book perfect for children younger than 6.

### ***Play with Me***

*By Marie Hallets*

Originally printed in 1955, this Caldecott Honor Book's simple drawings and text tell about a little girl who learns to be gentle and quiet in the woods.

Finally, it is also worthwhile to consider some of the beautiful new picture books that have come out in the last few years about the lives of celebrated naturalists Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, John James Audubon, and Rachel Carson.

### **Conclusion**

Montessori teachers and leaders around the world are striving to include

lessons of peace and goodness in their work with children. They seek meaningful ideas and activities that can be integrated with integrity into the classroom—authentic teachings that will stir the peace-loving spirit of children and adolescents. Picture books hold great potential to convey to children and adults alike inspiring messages of peace and to raise, thoughtfully, issues about how to live peaceful lives.

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