

## Unifying Generations: Intergenerational and Universal-themed Picturebook Recommendations

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*This article offers picturebook recommendations for early childhood educators to use with young children across contexts (e.g., early childhood classrooms, intergenerational settings) as a starting point to support intergenerational programming.*

**Key words:** *intergenerational; early childhood classrooms; literacy; children's picturebooks; literacy practices*

In this paper, we offer children's picturebook recommendations for educators to use with young children in learning spaces. The focus for this paper arises from our discussion in "Learning Together: Our Reflections on Connecting People and Practices in Intergenerational Meaning-Making Experiences" (McKee & Scheffel, this issue) where we reflect on our experiences as researchers / research assistants in intergenerational settings (McKee & Heydon, 2015; Scheffel, 2015). We ground our reflections in sociocultural perspectives that recognize meaning making as literacy that is dynamic, context specific, and supported through (1) relationships (Barton

& Hamilton, 2000) and (2) the combination of different modes (written, visual, etc.) and materials (Walsh, 2011). Through our reflections, we found that intergenerational experiences created opportunities to connect people of different generations, and that these interpersonal connections supported the sharing of meaning-making practices. Further, we identified three interconnected principles that we view as central to supporting meaning-making practices, whether in intergenerational contexts or beyond (McKee & Scheffel, this issue). These principles are (1) relationships are an essential, integral part of meaning-making practices, (2) all people, regardless of age or ability can be meaning makers, and (3) sharing practices enriches meaning making.

These principles guided the selection of picturebooks that we recommend in this paper. We recognize that the interconnected nature of the principles means that educators could use the same picturebook to support multiple principles. Thus, we frame our recommendations broadly, as catalysts for educators of young children to think in different ways about intergenerational meaning-making opportunities in relation to each principle and its corresponding picturebooks.

Our recommendations:

- *Recognize the value of, but do not require, intergenerational settings:* We understand that not all educators and young children may have the opportunity to work within intergenerational settings. Thus, we selected picturebooks that could be used either in classrooms with young children to discuss intergenerational principles or prepare children for participation in an intergenerational program, or within an intergenerational program with elders and young children.

- *Include both intergenerational-specific and universal-themed picturebooks:* In making our selections, we recognized the abundance of intergenerational picturebooks focused on relationships between grandparents and grandchildren (see Scheffel, 2015) but also those that recognize multifaceted elder roles (caring, wise, useful) that Doiron and Lees (2009) observed with senior volunteers in schools. We also thoughtfully considered the way elder figures were constructed (Scheffel, 2015). While we intentionally include books that represent these elder relationships and elder roles, we also highlight books that are less overt in their intergenerational theme but may spark intergenerational-related meaning-making opportunities through a universal theme for which both elders and children can identify.

In the section that follows, we begin with an overview of each principle followed by three recommendations of children's picturebooks that could be used to support the principle in early years settings and beyond. Each picturebook recommendation includes a quote, a brief synopsis, and a consideration of the way the picturebook speaks to the principle identified. At the end of each principle, we offer additional picturebook recommendations for further exploration. In our discussion, we suggest opportunities for extending meaning making beyond a read aloud. We offer these opportunities as invitations rather than set lesson plans for educators to adapt/expand as fitting of the learners and context.

## Relationships

This first principle recognizes that literacy is “embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 8). Educators are encouraged to create meaning-making opportunities that are relevant to classroom and school practices and reflect the broader social context. Picturebooks, whether intergenerational specific or universal in theme, can demonstrate the power of relationships and learning between generations.

### *Wild Berries by Julie Flett*

When Clarence was little, his grandma carried him on her back through the woods to the clearing to pick wild berries/pikaci-mīnisa.

This picturebook highlights the relationship between Clarence and his grandma (ōkoma) as they go on blueberry-picking adventures. Readers learn that Grandma enjoys “soft blueberries, juicy blueberries” while Clarence prefers “blueberries that go P O P in his mouth.” Other onomatopoeia words are used to describe Clarence's observations of nature and animals. The story embeds Cree words, and a pronunciation guide is provided.

Through this story, readers can observe the growth of an elder-child relationship that is grounded in social and cultural practice. Children may identify with this picturebook for the way it reminds them of shared moments, such as berry picking. Elders may identify with this text for the way it reminds them of cultural/linguistic experiences with their grandchildren or other significant children in their lives.

### *The Hello, Goodbye Window by Norton Juster*

When you look from the outside, Nanna and Poppy's house has lots of windows, but there's only one Hello, Goodbye Window and it's right where you need it.

*The Hello, Goodbye Window* shares the story of a granddaughter's visits to Nanna and Poppy's house. The reader observes daily events, as well as memories shared by the granddaughter (e.g., “Nanna says she even used to give me a bath in the sink when I was little—really!”). The highlight of each visit is the window, which serves both as place to wave hello when she first arrives and to blow kisses when it's time to leave.

Described as “a love song devoted to that special relationship between grandparents and grandchild” (inside flap), this story is filled with shared meaning-making experiences and conversations that arise from a close elder-child bond. The experiences, while unique to this particular elder-child connection, invite others to consider the relationships they have with similar elder figures (e.g., helping in the garden, ways of greeting one another).

*It's Okay to Be Different by Todd Parr*

It's okay to be different. You are special and important just because of being who you are.

*It's Okay to be Different* invites readers to explore several different themes that range from silly to more serious. Parr begins each page with the sentence starter “It's okay to ...” Some examples include “It's okay to need some help,” “It's okay to eat macaroni and cheese in the bathtub,” and “It's okay to have different moms.” To support these messages, the picturebook includes pictures that do not show characters with a particular ethnicity, but instead features characters with bright blue, yellow, and green faces.

This picturebook embraces the diversity of people and recognizes that people have diverse experiences and practices that influence their relationships. Though the text does not specifically include intergenerational relationships, it can create opportunities for all learners to appreciate diversity.

**Additional recommendations:** *Something from Nothing* by Phoebe Gilman; *I Know a Lady* by Charlotte Zolotow; *The Mitten Tree* by Candace Christiansen.

## Capable meaning makers

This principle focuses on pedagogies that recognize *funds of knowledge*, or resources that learners bring with them to learning opportunities (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Rachel Heydon (2013) emphasizes the importance of expanding meaning-making opportunities for elders and children, because at these stages of life, meaning-making opportunities can be restricted. When planning activities that recognize children's capabilities, picturebooks offer the opportunity for “grand conversations” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011) about the strengths we all have, regardless of age, as well as ways to honour approximations of learning (Cambourne, 1988). These conversations can include discussions about aging, which Larkin, Wilson, and Freer (2013) suggest “can influence how children think about growing older and guide their students toward appreciation for the diversity that exists among older adults” (p. 167).

*Now One Foot, Now the Other by Tomie DePaola*

Bob was the one who helped Bobby learn to walk. “Hold on to my hands, Bobby,” his grandfather said. “Now one foot, now the other.”

Bob teaches his grandson Bobby many things, from his first word (Bob) to how to build towers with wooden blocks. They are best friends and often tell stories to one another, in particular the story of how Bob taught Bobby to walk. When Bobby is five, his grandfather has a stroke. Though scared that his grandfather is different, Bobby finds ways to communicate with him, first by talking with him, then building towers for him, and eventually reteaching his grandfather—“Now one foot, now the other.”

This picturebook depicts a teaching/learning relationship between elder and child that values approximations of learning (e.g., building the tower requires multiple attempts). Like *The Hello Goodbye Window*, elders may recall similar moments where they have modelled a skill to children or vice versa. The book's message that everyone needs help at different points in their lives may also resonate with both elders and children.

*Ish by Peter Reynolds*

Ramon felt light and energized. Thinking ish-ly allowed his ideas to flow freely.

*Ish* tells the tale of child Ramon, who loved to create artwork but lost confidence in his abilities when his brother laughed at his attempts. Ramon considers quitting art making because he knows his art is not perfect. The story takes a turn when Ramon realizes that his younger sister collected and treasured his discarded drawings, and at the end of the story he explains that “thinking ish-ly” (accepting that his work was not perfect) renewed his desire to create.

This picturebook shows that a child’s drawings, while not technically perfect, were still meaning-*full*. This message illustrates the importance of accepting approximations as part of learning (Cambourne, 1988) and, like the first principle, identifies the importance of interpersonal relationships in meaning making, specifically affirmation by others. Though the relationships portrayed are not intergenerational, the underlying messages may resonate with both children and elders. For example, children may identify with Ramon in that they may not be able yet to create artifacts that are refined. Elders may identify with not being able to create artifacts in the same way as when they were younger.

*No One But You by Douglas Wood*

No one else in the world can look up at the stars, these stars, right now, with your own eyes, and feel your own special place on this earth.

In *No One But You*, the author invites readers to consider how the best things in the world cannot be taught, shown, or explained, but are instead discovered through our own sensory explorations. For example, “No one but you can feel the rain kiss your skin or the wind ruffle your hair.” Each page is part of a two-page illustration that depicts an up-close image of a child engaged with the natural environment, whether land, sea, or sky. The final illustration focuses on the feeling of love.

This picturebook values children as learners, each with a unique view of the world. Written for an audience greater than children, the book suggests it can “inspire loved ones of any age as they set out to create their special place in the world” (inside flap). Prior to an intergenerational visit, educators can discuss how one’s senses may change as they get older. At the same time, the picturebook fits with the multifaceted elder role (Doiron & Lees, 2009). Together, elders and children may identify with the message of discovery, and that what they see, think, and feel is important.

**Additional recommendations:** *Beautiful Oops!* by Barney Saltzberg; *How to Catch a Star* by Oliver Jeffers; *Not a Stick/Not a Box* by Antoinette Portis; *Verdi* by Janell Cannon.

**Sharing practices**

The third principle focuses on the importance of sharing practices across contexts. It recognizes that meaning making happens within and outside of the classroom space (Moje et al., 2004). One way that educators can build bridges across contexts (home, school, community) is by inviting community members, such as elders, to share from their diverse experiences and practices. Our picturebook recommendations not only provide opportunities for sharing practices but also serve as inviting read-aloud texts for elders to read with young children when visiting their daycare/classroom.

*Grandma and the Pirates by Phoebe Gilman*

It was because of her wonderful noodle pudding that Grandma met the pirates.

In this silly story, a group of pirates comes ashore in search of the delicious smell of Grandma's noodle pudding. They eat the noodle pudding and kidnap Grandma so that she can be their Grandma and continue to cook for them. Melissa, her granddaughter, tries to rescue Grandma but is also captured. Melissa devises several unsuccessful plans for escape before deciding to create a fake treasure map. The map leads the pirates away from the ship, offering Grandma and Melissa the chance to sail away.

This picturebook invites storytelling across a variety of contexts. Together, children and elders can consider imaginary adventures. This picturebook also challenges the idea that elders are frail, which is fitting of the second principle already outlined above.

*Madlenka by Peter Sis*

Madlenka thinks this must be the best day of her life.

*Madlenka* tells the tale of a little girl who walks around her city block to announce to community members that her tooth is loose. As Madlenka meets neighbours from different parts of the world, they greet her in their home language. When she travels the city block, readers view illustrations of images of important landmarks from countries around the world, including France, India, and Italy.

This picturebook creates opportunities for the sharing of personal histories. For example, elders conducting a read aloud of this book might share related stories about their world travels or experiences with their own grandchildren losing teeth like the Madlenka character. Together, elders and children might also try out the greetings from different parts of the world.

*All the World by Liz Garton Scanlon*

Hope and peace and love and trust, all the world is all of us.

Written in rhyming verse, this inviting book speaks to everyday, common experiences shared by people around the world. For example, the world is "wide and deep" as reflected on a family outing to the beach. The world is "a garden bed" where communities grow flowers and food. Each page is filled with shared experiences between generations as they go for walks, eat together, and appreciate what the world has to offer.

This picturebook invites conversation about global aspects of the world that everyone experiences, regardless of their age. The end of each rhyming verse culminates in a two-page spread that offers a starting place to talk about the global concept that is illustrated (e.g., old and new). Elders conducting a read aloud might share stories about beaches they have visited, what they grow in their garden, etc. Young children may also identify with the experiences depicted in the story as they recall related moments with their families.

**Additional recommendations:** *Strega Nona* by Tomie dePaola; *The Peace Book* by Todd Parr; *My Grandpa and the Sea* by Katherine Orr.

**Discussion**

In Table 1, we summarize the picturebooks recommended above, including the type of theme (intergenerational or universal) and the central principle identified, and offer suggestions for ways to extend meaning making

beyond a read aloud of each picturebook. As mentioned earlier, these opportunities are invitations and can be adapted according to learners and context.

*Table 1. Meaning-Making Opportunities Beyond Read Aloud*

Recommended Picturebook	Central Principle	Opportunities for Extending Meaning Making
<p><i>Wild Berries</i> by Julie Flett *Intergenerational Theme</p>	Relationships	<p>Invite learners to design a paper quilt square using key words and images that represent their observations after a nature walk or when remembering a favourite outing. Join each square together to form a collaborative quilt. Further ideas for this picturebook can also be found via the Global Read Aloud (<a href="https://theglobalreadaloud.com/">https://theglobalreadaloud.com/</a>)</p>
<p><i>The Hello, Goodbye Window</i> by Norton Juster *Intergenerational Theme</p>	Relationships	<p>Invite learners to recall a favourite window they like to look through (e.g., in their home, childcare/school). Provide a range of art materials for recreating their favourite windows. Learners might add shutters to create an element of surprise when sharing the windows.</p>
<p><i>It's Okay to Be Different</i> by Todd Parr *Universal Theme</p>	Relationships	<p>Invite learners to create a collaborative storybook in the style of <i>It's Okay to Be Different</i> (e.g., bright colours, black outlines). Learners can work individually or in partners to compose and illustrate a statement beginning with the frame "It's okay to ..."</p>
<p><i>Now One Foot, Now the Other</i> by Tomie DePaola *Intergenerational Theme</p>	Capable Meaning Makers	<p>Invite learners to work collaboratively to build a tower with small blocks or sugar cubes. Like the main characters, the goal might be to build the tallest tower with the materials provided. Invite learners to share about their attempts (e.g., What did they learn from one another?).</p>
<p><i>Ish</i> by Peter Reynolds *Universal Theme</p>	Capable Meaning Makers	<p>Invite learners to play a game where a learner selects a card with an image of a familiar object or place, creates an "ish" statement, and creatively illustrates the object or place (e.g., this is a dog-ish).</p>
<p><i>No One But You</i> by Douglas Wood *Universal Theme</p>	Capable Meaning Makers	<p>Invite learners to select an illustration and discuss what they notice on the page. For example, what do they notice on a lazy afternoon or after a rain shower? Learners might then sketch a favourite place they remember. If fitting, learners could go on a nature walk and use their senses to draw what they see, hear, smell, and feel.</p>

<p><i>Grandma and the Pirates</i> by Phoebe Gilman *Intergenerational Theme</p>	<p>Sharing Practices</p>	<p>Invite learners to design their own pretend treasure map. They might draw the map they think was used in the story to lure the pirates away, or they might create their own treasure map. Learners might also recreate their treasure map in a sand table and ask others to try and find the treasure with their map.</p>
<p><i>Madlenka</i> by Peter Sis *Universal Theme</p>	<p>Sharing Practices</p>	<p>Invite learners to create passports of places they have been or would like to visit. Educators could take pictures of learners for the first page of the passport and then learners could fill the remaining pages of the booklet with images from travel magazines of places they have visited or hope to visit (see Heydon, 2013, for extended lesson plan).</p>
<p><i>All the World</i> by Liz Garton Scanlon *Universal Theme</p>	<p>Sharing Practices</p>	<p>Invite learners to create actions for the story (e.g., how might they act out “wide and deep” using their arms and bodies?). Draw the actions on a chart paper version of the story. When rereading the story, invite learners to do each action and chime in with the educator as the words are read.</p>

Through the above picturebook recommendations, we

- offer a starting point for educators to take steps toward intergenerational programming in their teaching contexts, whether preparing children to meet elders, planning opportunities for children and elders to learn together, or to discuss intergenerational principles in spaces where elders are not present.
- expand the boundaries of what makes a quality picturebook for intergenerational conversations and meaning-making opportunities. We believe that “intergenerational-themed” books (with a grandparent and a grandchild) as well as “universal-themed” books can encourage rich conversations about intergenerational meaning-making opportunities.

The picturebooks generate conversation and can be read multiple times by elders, educators, and parents across different contexts. These conversations and opportunities to extend meaning making can nurture relationships, honour differing capabilities, and support the sharing of practices (McKee & Scheffel, this issue). With this in mind, we return to the opening excerpt from *All the World* by Scanlon (2009) that speaks to time spent together in fellowship—a sense of community that unites generations and supports meaning making.

Nanas, papas, cousins, kin,  
Piano, harp, and violin  
Babies passed from neck to knee  
All the world is you and me.

*All the World*, Liz Garton Scanlon

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