

Welcome to Equality A Picture Books for Big Kids Lesson

A few words from Kari:

It is my great hope that these lessons will engage students in a critical analysis of the values of American democracy. While celebrating the core values of American democracy is important, it is equally important for children to understand that values such as Life, Liberty, Equality and Justice are ideals. Americans and citizens of the world must continually strive to realize these ideals and to extend their benefits to all people everywhere.

The books selected for this series reflect a diverse array of cultures and countries which all recognize, as our Founding Fathers did, that the values we celebrate in America are, in fact, universal values. That Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness are inalienable rights for all of mankind, not just Americans. And so, in that spirit, I have identified ten exceptional children's picture books which will engage students in asking themselves important questions about what it means to be an American and what both our rights and responsibilities are as Americans.

You may wonder at the advisability of sharing picture books with students in upper grade social studies classes. You may fear that inviting teens to join you for "Story Time" could result in a flurry of text messages to this effect: "OMG, Wilson's a FREAK! LOL."

The best part of a century ago, Fred Barnard came up with the sales slogan, "a picture is worth a thousand words." He was right. Artfully made pictures can carry many meanings that otherwise might need pages and pages of words. This is one good reason to share picture books with older students. The language of pictures is easily understood by today's visually literate youth.

In addition to grabbing students' interest, picture books are a great way to introduce children to difficult concepts. Today, more than any time in the past, library and bookstore shelves are filled with beautifully illustrated, mean-

ingful picture books covering an astonishing range of tough topics from war to racism to global warming. The audience for these books is no longer just the preschool set.

Picture books, with their accessible and often poetic words, help teens understand tough issues. They can experience life in the Warsaw Ghetto in *The Cats in Krasinski Square*, by Karen Hesse, witness the effects of war in *The Librarian of Basra*, by Jeanette Winter, or join in a shared family meal in a Kenyan village in *Mama Panya's Pancakes*, by Mary and Rich Chamberlin. Through the shared narrative, students of many different backgrounds can find common ground to discuss global issues.

American classrooms are growing ever more diverse. Teachers need tools to bridge language and cultural barriers. Shared readings, especially of picture books, can be one powerful method for creating community. Just as in nursery school, the shared experience of a "read aloud" creates the social bond essential to learning. Anyone who has parented a teen knows that this awkward age bears some marked similarities to the terrible two's and three's of toddlerhood, the first great age of story-time. Teens can have a tough time talking, so let pictures be worth a thousand words for our big kids! ♦



Kari

During her many years of teaching, Kari has taught almost every grade and most subjects. In 2007 Kari began her latest adventure teaching middle school art, the subject of her Masters work twenty years ago! She lives in Michigan with her husband, two children, and a couple of cats.