

*“Picture Books for Peace and Social Justice”*

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I started hoarding children’s books when I was a child, and I haven’t ever stopped. In fact, “children’s books” seems to me a misnomer: picture books are works of art. The best books are those that appeal to both children and adults, books that open our world to experiences we’ll never have, and books that reflect the realities and complexities of the world around us.

The idea to annotate this collection (of picture books for peace and social justice) came to me after a friend and fellow MSU student (now an alumni) gave me a book he had written, *Fleeing the War*. It turns out that my friend had won an award for his story about boys from Malawi encountering refugees from neighboring Mozambique. The experiences depicted in Steve’s book are ones that I, a white girl from mid-Michigan, couldn’t even have imagined.

Not everyone is lucky enough to know a story-teller like Steve Sharra. But picture books can share his worlds with us. Picture books are powerful teachers. In picture books children encounter other people, sometimes from far-away places or from long ago, and they learn to understand and identify with others. The messages from these stories last a lifetime.

If the books children read reflect the diverse people in the world around them, children can learn to respect not only others like themselves, but also those whose lives are different. In this way, children’s literature can serve both as a mirror reflecting our own lives but also as a window into experiences we will never have.

At its best, children’s literature can help children (and adults) learn both to embrace those things that make us different while simultaneously rejoicing in those things that make us the same.