



And So We Grow...

SOWING SEEDS TO END AGEISM

A Reader's Guide to Using
Storybooks to Cultivate
Positive Age Beliefs in
Younger Children

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Introduction

Welcome to the *And So We Grow...Sowing Seeds to End Ageism, A Reader's Guide to Using Storybooks to Cultivate Positive Age Beliefs in Younger Children*.

According to recent research, negative age beliefs, fueled by stereotypes, can rob individuals of their vitality and fulfillment at any age. In contrast, positive beliefs about aging can offer significant health benefits throughout a person's life.

What is the purpose of this Reader's Guide:

- Learn about age beliefs and ageism
- Recognize age bias and stereotypes
- Discover ground-breaking research on the benefits of positive age beliefs
- Find recommended storybooks and activities to support cultivating positive age beliefs in younger children

Who is this Reader's Guide for:

- Parents of younger children
- Children's librarians
- The community caring for younger children

Why this Reader's Guide matters:

- As more people live longer and healthier lives, it's essential to recognize the implications of growing older
- Empowering older individuals to become Vital and Involved People (VIPs) can foster a vibrant and thriving society
- Providing children with a positive and balanced representation of older characters can help cultivate positive attitudes toward aging and nurture their "inner VIP"
- The *And So We Grow...Sowing Seeds to End Ageism Reader's Guide* provides children with a healthy vision of aging

Understanding Ageism and Age Beliefs



What is Ageism?

According to the World Health Organization's Decade of Healthy Aging 2021–2030:

Ageism refers to stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel), and discrimination (how we act) towards others or oneself based on age.

Ageism affects everyone, starting from as young as four years old when children become aware of their culture's age stereotypes.

From that age onwards, they internalize cultural stereotypes that influence their feelings and behavior towards people of different ages. Internalizing cultural stereotypes can also result in self-directed ageism throughout the lifecycle.

Ageism can be found in various aspects of life, including:

- Media representation (e.g., negative portrayal of aging in the news, film, photography, and advertising)
- Workplace practices (e.g., limiting younger people's opportunities to contribute to decision-making)
- Interpersonal interactions (e.g., patronizing behavior towards older and younger people)
- Self-limiting behaviors (e.g., internalized stereotypes about what a person of a given age can be or do)
- Policies (e.g., healthcare rationing by age)

Understanding Ageism and Age Beliefs



The Impact of Ageism

Ageism can:

- Change how we view others and ourselves
- Erode the connections between generations
- Devalue the ability to benefit from each other's contributions
- Impact health, longevity, and well-being
- Have far-reaching economic consequences

Research shows that ageism is associated with:

- Earlier death (by 7.5 years)
- Poorer physical and mental health
- Slower recovery from disability in older age
- Reduced quality of life
- Increased risky health behaviors (e.g., eating an unhealthy diet, drinking excessively, or smoking)



Age Beliefs

Age beliefs are ideas and assumptions we have about getting older, how we view older people, and how we judge ourselves as we grow older. They can be negative, positive, or neutral and are often as unconscious as any habit we may observe in ourselves and others.

Examples:

- Negative stereotype: "You can't teach an old dog new tricks"
- Positive belief: Thinking of older people as wise with diverse life experiences to share and contributions to make

Understanding Ageism and Age Beliefs



The Power of Positive Age Beliefs

Dr. Becca Levy, a Director of the Social and Behavioral Sciences Division and an associate professor at the Yale School of Public Health, has conducted groundbreaking research on the power of age beliefs. In her book, *Breaking the Age Code: How Your Beliefs About Aging Determine How Long and How Well You Live*, she writes:

"In study after study I conducted, I found that older people with more positive perceptions of aging performed better physically and cognitively than those with more negative perceptions; they were more likely to recover from severe disability, they remembered better, they walked faster and they lived longer."



Self-Reflection: Examining Your Age Beliefs

Negative age beliefs can be subtle. Take a moment to reflect on your age beliefs with simple exercises adapted from Dr. Levy's ABC Method to Bolster Positive Age Beliefs below.

ABC Method to Bolster Positive Age Beliefs

A – Awareness

1. List the first five words or phrases that come to mind when considering an older person. Then, see how many are positive and how many are negative.
2. Name four older people you admire, including personal acquaintances and public figures. What qualities do you admire and hope to strengthen in yourself as you grow older?
3. For a few days, note depictions of older people in television, newspapers, and advertisements. Tally positive and negative portrayals, subtle inferences, and stereotypes. Dr. Levy notes, "In my studies, I found that this kind of active noticing helps develop a keen awareness of not just blatant ageism, but also the more subtle forms of exclusion and marginalization."

Understanding Ageism and Age Beliefs

ABC Method to Bolster Positive Age Beliefs

B – Blame

Investigate what perpetuates negative age beliefs and who benefits from them:

1. Write down four negative age stereotypes that come to mind.
2. For each stereotype you wrote, name a company, corporation, or institution that might benefit from it.

For example, if you wrote down “memory loss,” you might list Luminosity, a company that sells brain training games that often draw on the fear and anxiety associated with the negative age belief that all memory inevitably declines. Luminosity had to settle with the Federal Trade Commission over deceptive advertising claims.

C – Challenge

Take action to change negative age beliefs. Dr. Tracey Gendron, an advocate for ending ageism, said, “We need all the strategies we can get!” The *And So We Grow...Sowing Seeds to End Ageism Reader’s Guide* is one strategy to challenge negative age beliefs and stereotypes by presenting children with realistic, vital, and balanced portrayals of older characters to cultivate positive age beliefs about their own aging experience.

Why Storybooks?

Children learn from the books they encounter in their homes, schools, and libraries. The images and messages conveyed through storybooks shape their beliefs and influence the future selves they will grow into.

As world-renowned gerontologist, Dr. Robert Butler stated in 1999: "If we teach children that growing old is a natural part of life, and raise them to appreciate and value the contributions of older people to their world, ageist stereotypes and fears of growing old will become obsolete."

Book Selection Criteria

The books were selected based on the following criteria:

Older characters defy common stereotypes, such as:

- You can't teach an old dog new tricks
- Older people are fragile and frail
- Older people are selfish and don't contribute to society
- Cognition inevitably declines with age
- Older people lack creativity
- Older people don't benefit from healthy behaviors
- Older people are stuck in the past and don't think or care about the present or the future
- Older people cannot adapt to the natural changes that happen with aging

Stories reflect concepts from the *Lifespan Aging Education Framework*, championed by Mr. Fran Pratt and expanded by Dr. Sandra McGuire:

- Aging is a natural and lifelong process of growing and developing
- Older and younger people share similarities
- Older people are vital involved members of society
- Older and younger people can enjoy each other and learn from each other
- People need to plan for becoming older
- People have control over the Vitally Involved Person (VIP) they can become
- Attitudes about aging influence how people age

Why Storybooks?

Diverse representation of older characters:

- Members of a family or extended family unit
- Members of the community (not family-related)
- Older characters which are elements of nature, both real and anthropomorphized

Cultural diversity:

- Different cultures have different attitudes towards aging and older people. This limited collection includes books that represent various cultures.
- We intentionally did not include books where the older character comes from some intergalactic space/time continuum and has magical powers.

Note: Death, dying, disease, disability, dementia, decline, and dependence are not synonymous with aging; people can experience these at all ages. This Reader's Guide presents a curated selection of books specifically intended to challenge negative stereotypes of older characters.

How to Use *And So We Grow... Sowing Seeds to End Ageism* Reader's Guide

This reader's guide provides suggestions for engaging with the *And So We Grow...Book Collection*. Designed for parents, caregivers, teachers, and librarians, we hope you will adapt these ideas for the children in your care.

Keep in mind that each book features an older character who is a Vital and Involved Person (VIP) and defies a negative stereotype about older people:

1. **Berry Song** (written and illustrated by Michaela Goade, Little, Brown and Company, 2022)—showcases the passing down of culture and traditions from elder to child, providing connection, integrity, and a more profound sense of meaning.
2. **Fauja Singh Keeps Going: The True Story of the Oldest Person to Ever Run a Marathon** (written by Simran Jeet Singh, illustrated by Faljinder Kaur, Kokila Press, 2020)—inspires children to embrace challenges and confidently say “yes” to overcoming obstacles.
3. **Giant Island** (written by Jane Yolen, illustrated by Doug Keith, Flashlight Press, 2022)—nurtures children's sense of adventure and discovery while ensuring they feel loved and supported.
4. **Harry and Walter** (written by Kathy Stinson, illustrated by Qin Leng, Annick Press, 2016)—shows the value of intergenerational friendships.
5. **Henri's Scissors** (written and illustrated by Jeanette Winter, Beach Lane Books, 2013)—showcases how adapting to diminished abilities can help keep creativity alive.
6. **How Old is Mr. Tortoise?** (written by Dev Petty, illustrated by Ruth Chan, Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2022)—celebrates the joy of life and values friendships at any age.
7. **Miss Rumphius** (written and illustrated by Barbara Cooney, Puffin Books, 1982)—focuses on making the world more beautiful at any age.

How to Use *And So We Grow...* *Sowing Seeds to End Ageism* Reader's Guide

8. ***Old Rock (is not boring)*** (written and illustrated by Deb Pilutti, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2020)—honors the stories, knowledge, and experiences older characters have to share.

9. ***Old to Joy*** (written and illustrated by Anita Crawford Clark, Gnome Road Publishing, 2023)—explores the empowering connection between generations through heirlooms.

10. ***On the Trapline*** (written by David A. Robertson, illustrated by Julie Fleet, Tundra, 2021)—captures the bond between a boy and his grandfather as they journey through nature, sharing stories and traditions that strengthen their cultural values and family connection.

11. ***The Branch*** (written by Mireille Messier, illustrated by Pierre Pratt, Kids Can Press, 2016)—cultivates collaborative problem-solving across generations.

12. ***The Keeper of Wild Words*** (written by Brooke Smith, illustrated by Madeline Kloepper, Chronicle Books Smith, 2020)—emphasizes the importance of trusting the preservation of knowledge across generations.

13. ***The Walk*** (written by Winsome Bingham, illustrated by E.B. Lewis, Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2023)—highlights the importance of children actively contributing to their community.

Create an Age-Positive Environment

Transform your reading space to reflect themes from the books:

- Display images and quotes that challenge age-related stereotypes
- Create a cozy reading nook with photos of intergenerational relationships
- Showcase creative works by people of all ages
- Set up a nature-themed area inspired by books like *Giant Island*, *The Keeper of Wild Words*, and *Old Rock (is not boring)*

How to Use *And So We Grow... Sowing Seeds to End Ageism* Reader's Guide

Engage in Meaningful Activities

Create activities based on the book themes:

- Celebrate older characters with a song, dance, or poster inspired by them
- Write a letter to an older character expressing what you'd like to say or ask them
- Develop visual summaries of each book showing the message the child took from the story
- Invite the child to draw themselves as a VIP, a vital and involved older person

Spark Valuable Conversations

Encourage conversations that explore and celebrate the older characters in the story, the themes of aging and relationships between different generations.

- Do the older characters remind you of anyone you know?
- How do characters of different ages interact and learn from each other?
- What is essential to the older character, and what do they value?
- What insights does this story offer about growing older?
- In what ways does the older character contribute to their community and friends?

Community Involvement

Help children connect with the Vital and Involved People (VIPs) in your family and community.

For each book, plan an activity that brings the story's themes to life:

- Share personal stories related to the book's theme
- Demonstrate a skill, craft, or insight inspired by the story
- Share experiences that embody the book's positive aging concepts

All books have been published in the USA. To obtain a book; contact your local librarian, visit your local bookstore, or order online.

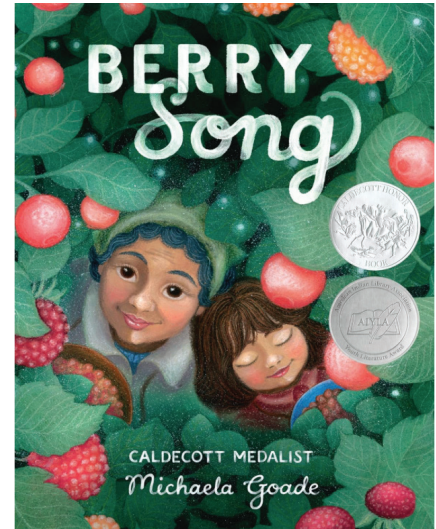
The Books

Berry Song

Written and Illustrated by Michaela Goade,
Little, Brown and Company 2022

Why This Book Was Chosen

Through the relationship between a little girl and her grandmother, members of the Tlingit Nation, *Berry Song* is an eye-opening story that introduces children to ways they can understand and appreciate the natural world.



While foraging in the forest and fishing on the water, the grandmother shows her skills while imparting the Tlingit native philosophy of respecting and honoring their love of the land. The story then expands to show the girl sharing the knowledge and skills she acquired from her grandmother with her younger sister.

Berry Song also shows that passing down knowledge and values across generations can happen gracefully and begins even in the earliest stages of childhood, highlighting the importance of a Vital and Involved Person (VIP) in a child's life.

Discussion Points:

- How would you describe the little girl and her grandmother's relationship with the natural world?
- What does the little girl learn from her experiences in nature with her grandmother?
- How does the story show the importance of passing down knowledge from one generation to another?
- What parallels can you draw between the teachings in the story and your own experiences with nature?
- Are there traditions or knowledge shared in your family between generations?

Celebrate & Create:

1. Write a song or poem about the wind, sun, water, or trees.
2. Draw a picture of the natural world and how you feel the Tlingit may experience it.
3. Create a "nature journal" to draw the plants, animals, and natural elements you observe or collect.

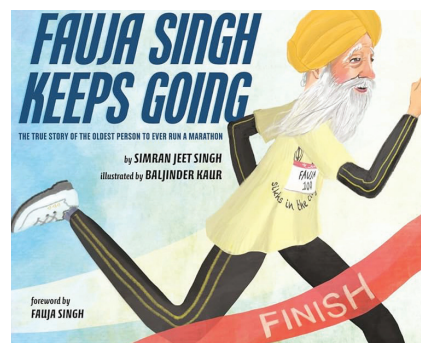
Demonstrate:

Share a brief memory with the children of a time when the beauty of the natural world inspired you.

The Books

Fauja Singh Keeps Going: The True Story of the Oldest Person to Ever Run a Marathon

Written by Simran Jeet Singh, Illustrated by Baljinder Kaur; Kokila Press, 2020



Why This Book Was Chosen

Fauja Singh Keeps Going: The True Story of the Oldest Person to Ever Run a Marathon is an inspiring story about a man who overcame a childhood disability to become a marathon runner in his 80s and 90s.

Despite facing skepticism about his age, Fauja moved to London at 81 and discovered running. He completed marathons at 89, 93, and even 100 years old, becoming the oldest marathon runner in history.

This book was chosen for its powerful embodiment of positive age beliefs. Fauja shares his personal philosophy for the children in the foreword: “Take care of yourself, try your hardest, and always choose yes when you meet a challenge,”—encouraging readers of all ages to embrace determination and resilience.

Through Fauja’s remarkable journey, children learn that age is not a barrier to pursuing new passions or overcoming challenges. This promotes a positive attitude towards aging and shows that anyone can become a Vital and Involved Person (VIP) at any age and stage in life.

Discussion Points:

- What challenges did Fauja overcome as a boy?
- How did he respond when people said he was too weak or that his goals were too difficult?
- What do you tell yourself when faced with a difficult task?
- How old was Fauja when he ran his first marathon? What about his second marathon and the Toronto Waterfront Marathon?
- What did he do to prepare for the marathons?

Celebrate & Create:

1. Make banners or flags to celebrate Fauja Singh’s achievements and spirit.
2. Create a cheer as if you were watching Fauja Singh run a marathon or for children to use when facing challenges.
3. Make greeting cards out of the children’s cheers to encourage and celebrate people overcoming challenges.

Demonstrate:

Share with the children why you admire Fauja Singh and express your confidence that children can also say YES when facing challenges.

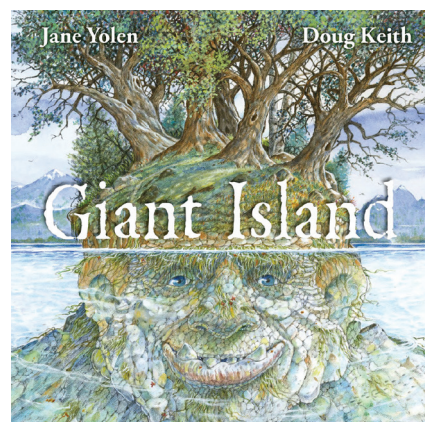
The Books

Giant Island

Written by Jane Yolen, Illustrated by Doug Keith,
Flashlight Press, 2022

Why This Book Was Chosen

Giant Island is a rite-of-passage tale showcasing how older generations' wisdom can support and enrich the journey of childhood self-discovery.



In the story, a grandfather takes his grandchildren to the same island he visited as a child with his grandfather. While preparing the fishing gear, he tells the children they're going fishing but gently encourages the children to explore the island independently. This allows them to experience the excitement of discovering the island's magical, theme-park-like wonders for themselves.

The grandfather is a VIP—a Vital and Involved Person—who exemplifies how older generations can nurture imagination, curiosity, and confidence in younger children by being a gentle reader's guide rather than a direct instructor.

This book was chosen for its portrayal of VIPs and the importance of allowing children to explore and discover independently. Through this lens, the story beautifully illustrates how immersing oneself in nature can heighten creativity and cultivate a sense of awe at any age.

Discussion Points:

- Do you think the children had a good time on Giant Island? Can you describe their experiences?
- What do you think of the Grandpa? And how would you describe him?
- Do you think Grandpa ever expected to catch any fish? Why or why not?
- Do you think the Grandpa was paying attention to the children? Why or why not?
- Do you think the children will ever return to Giant Island?

Celebrate & Create:

1. Celebrate the Grandpa and the Giant of the Island for giving the children a great adventure! How do you thank a Giant, like the Giant that is Giant Island? Does he need a giant Thank You Card?
2. Have the children draw a map of Giant Island or the Giant Island in their imagination.
3. Encourage the children to imagine, write, or draw their adventures on Giant Island.

Demonstrate:

Share a moment with the children about when you experienced confidence and the excitement of adventure.

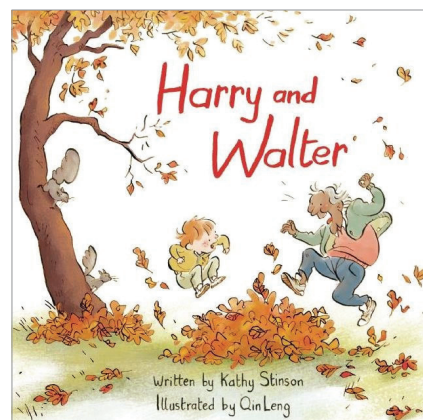
The Books

Harry and Walter

Written by Kathy Stinson, Illustrated by Qin Leng,
Annick Press, 2016

Why This Book Was Chosen

Harry and Walter is a heartwarming tale that defies ageist stereotypes by showing the joy of friendship between generations. The story opens when Harry is four and three-quarters, and Walter is ninety-two.



Despite their age difference, Harry and Walter play, learn, and enjoy each other's company. As a VIP—Vital and Involved Person—Walter defies the stereotypical portrayal of older individuals and shows that older people can be vibrant, engaging, and valuable friends.

Walter shares his wisdom and participates in creative activities and adventures with Harry while acknowledging the challenges that can come with aging. Circumstances momentarily pull them apart, but their reunion—when Harry is six, and Walter is almost ninety-four—demonstrates that true friendship knows no age limits.

Discussion Points:

- How old is Harry? And how old is Walter?
- Do you think it's odd for them to be such good friends? Why or why not?
- Why do you think Harry and Walter have a friendship?
- What makes for a good friendship?
- Can people of different ages be friends? Why or why not?

Celebrate & Create:

1. Invite children to share their stories if they have any older friends.
2. If they don't have any older friends, encourage them to imagine one and write a story, poem, or song about that imagined friendship.

Demonstrate:

Discuss with the children what you admire about Harry & Walter's friendship to inspire children to discover and forge meaningful friendships with VIPs—at any age.

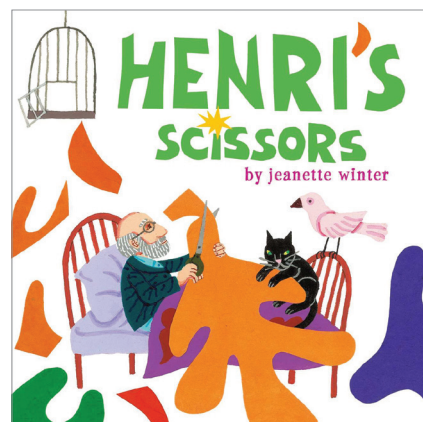
The Books

Henri's Scissors

Written and Illustrated by Jeanette Winter, Published by Beach Lane Books, 2013

Why This Book Was Chosen

Henri's Scissors was chosen for its inspiring depiction of creativity and adaptability later in life. The book follows Henri Matisse's artistic journey, from his childhood passion for art to his decision to leave a law career and become a professional artist.



The story's most profound message emerges during Matisse's later years. When health challenges leave him bedridden, he doesn't abandon his art; instead, he embraces change by adapting his techniques and experimenting with paper cutouts as a new medium. This innovative approach allows him to continue creating and bring joy to himself, his family, and art lovers worldwide.

The book beautifully demonstrates how individuals can remain passionate, productive, and fulfilled by adjusting to new circumstances. Most importantly, it positions Matisse as a VIP—a Vital and Involved Person who creatively embraces the aging process, allowing him to continue to produce art.

Discussion Points:

- What does it mean to "give up"?
- What is the alternative to "giving up"?
- How did Henri Matisse overcome the obstacles in his life?
- What lesson can we learn from Henri Matisse's beautiful cutouts?
- What qualities do you admire in Matisse that allowed him to continue creating art despite his challenging circumstances?

Celebrate & Create:

1. Have children create paper cutouts to celebrate Matisse or another VIP.
2. Combine the individual cutouts to form a mural to honor Henri Matisse's resilience and artistic spirit in later life.
3. Encourage children to write about a time they faced a challenge and how they overcame it.

Demonstrate:

Share a story with the children about how you, or someone you know, adapted their skills and abilities after they had an accident or loss of abilities.

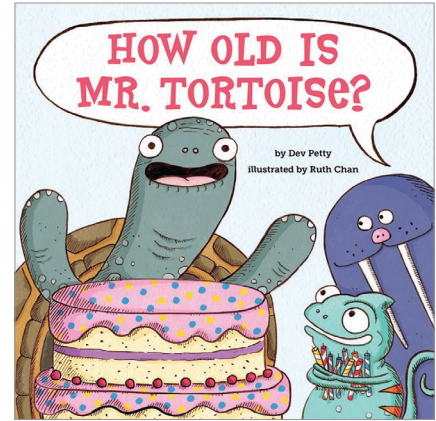
The Books

How Old is Mr. Tortoise?

Written by Dev Petty, Illustrated by Ruth Chan,
Published by Abrams Books, 2022

Why This Book Was Chosen

How Old is Mr. Tortoise? was chosen for its delightful approach to celebrating aging.



The story unfolds on Mr. Tortoise's birthday when his exact age and the necessary number of candles for his cake become a playful mystery. What sets this book apart is Mr. Tortoise's positive attitude about aging. Instead of focusing on his age, he is focused on the joy of celebrating with his friends.

The creative solution of using a candle for each friend highlights the book's core message: what truly matters in life is not the number of years we've lived but the relationships we cultivate and the joy we share.

By depicting Mr. Tortoise as an older VIP—a Vital and Involved Person—brimming with enthusiasm for life and friendship, the book challenges ageist stereotypes and fosters a positive view of aging.

Discussion Points:

- Did you know that tortoises are the longest-living land animals in the world?
 - + Galapagos Tortoises can live over 150 years
 - + Aldabra Giant Tortoises can live up to 225 years
 - + Most non-giant tortoises live between 80-150 years
- How does Mr. Tortoise seem to feel about turning 115 on his birthday?
- What words would you use to describe Mr. Tortoise?
- What seems to be valuable to Mr. Tortoise?
- How does Mr. Tortoise celebrate his birthday?

Celebrate & Create:

1. Celebrate Mr. Tortoise's birthday by drawing a present for him.
2. Write about how you would celebrate if you lived to be 115 years old, just like Mr. Tortoise.
3. Create a birthday card for Mr. Tortoise and write your wishes for him on his birthday.

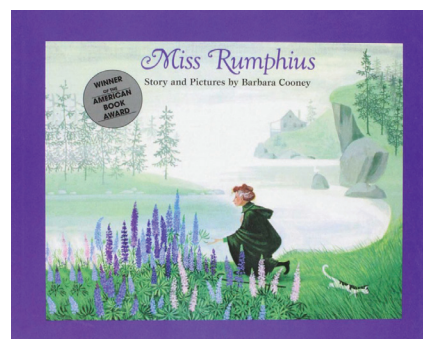
Demonstrate:

Share with the children a memorable birthday celebration you attended and what made it truly special.

The Books

Miss Rumphius

Written and Illustrated by Barbara Cooney, Published by Puffin Books, 1982



Why This Book Was Chosen

Miss Rumphius was chosen for its beautiful portrayal of fulfilling a promise late in life, a promise she made when she was a child. She is a positive representation of how aging can be full of meaning and fulfillment.

The story follows Alice Rumphius from her childhood by the sea to her adventures in faraway places and then her return to live by the sea. Later in her life, as an older woman, she honors a promise she made to her grandfather, who, in his wisdom, urged her to “do something to make the world more beautiful.”

This story is especially valuable because it depicts Miss Rumphius actively fulfilling this mission in her later years, planting lupines throughout her hometown to add beauty to the landscape and the lives of others.

In addition to instilling the importance of making the world a better place, the book challenges ageist stereotypes by showing an older person as a VIP—a Vital and Involved Person—who makes meaningful contributions to her community, honors her grandfather’s wisdom, and inspires the next generation to carry it forward.

Discussion Points:

- What work did the grandfather do?
- What important message does the grandfather give his granddaughter Alice?
- Was Alice happy throughout her life? Why or why not?
- What inspired Miss Rumphius to sow lupine seeds all around?
- How did Miss Rumphius make the world more beautiful?

Celebrate & Create:

1. Celebrate the legacy of Miss Rumphius with drawings of all the lupines she planted.
2. Draw or write about the flowers or trees you would plant to make the world more beautiful.
3. Create a “VIP Spotlight” poster featuring individuals who inspire them to make the world a better place.

Demonstrate:

Discuss with the children how you hope to make the world a better and even more beautiful place.

The Books

Old Rock (is not boring)

Written and Illustrated by Deb Pilutti,
G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2020

Why This Book Was Chosen

Old Rock (is not boring) was chosen for its clever and direct challenge to the stereotype that old things or people are inherently dull. The story revolves around Old Rock, who sits in a meadow surrounded by younger, more mobile creatures. Initially, these creatures pity Old Rock, assuming its stationary existence must be deprived of adventure.

However, Old Rock surprises them and reveals its extraordinary geological journey, sharing tales of being “belched up from a volcano” and witnessing the entire geological history of the planet.

This book connects the past with the present by illustrating that age brings a wealth of experiences and stories. By personifying Old Rock as a VIP—a Vital and Involved Person—the story demonstrates that longevity is filled with history, knowledge, and captivating tales.

Discussion Points:

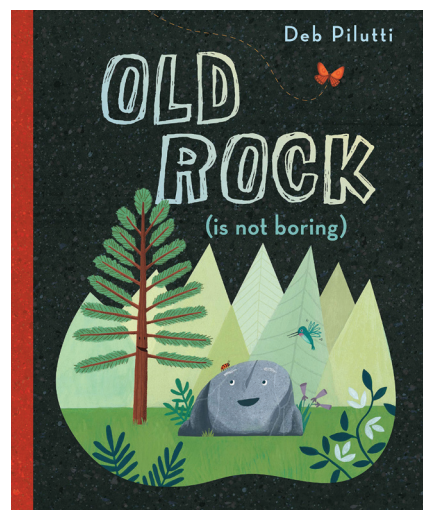
- Why did the creatures in the meadow think Old Rock was boring?
- Did they change their minds? Why or why not?
- What adventures did Old Rock share with the other creatures?
- What else can we learn from Old Rock's journey about the importance of listening to and valuing the experiences of older individuals in our own lives?

Celebrate & Create:

1. Gather a collection of rocks and invite each child to pick one and describe its journey—where it has been, what it has seen, and any adventures it might have had.
2. Have the children paint or decorate their chosen rocks to represent VIPs—Vital and Involved People—drawing inspiration from characters like Old Rock or their imagination.
3. Encourage children to write a poem or song about their rock, focusing on how long it has been on Earth and what exciting events it may have experienced.

Demonstrate:

Discuss with the children about some old items or artifacts and why they are meaningful for you.



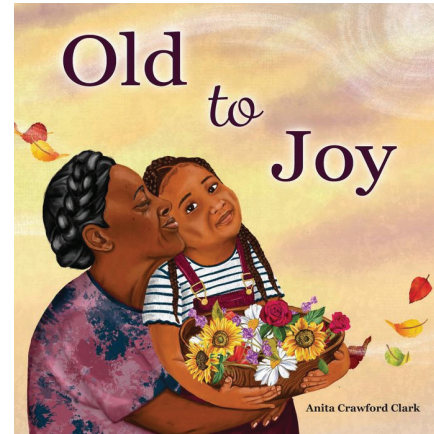
The Books

Old to Joy

Written and Illustrated by Anita Crawford Clark,
Gnome Road Publishing, 2023

Why This Book Was Chosen

Old to Joy was chosen for its gentle and joyful approach to introducing the concept of aging to younger children. The story follows six-year-old Joy as she visits her Grandma's house and becomes aware of the unique qualities of older things.



When Joy realizes that she, too, will grow older one day, her grandmother transforms this potentially intimidating realization into a joyful experience. By sharing her treasured hats, Grandma creates a positive and empowering experience between generations—ultimately gifting Joy a hat that once belonged to her great-grandmother.

This book beautifully illustrates how family heirlooms can help children envision themselves growing older in a positive light. As a VIP—a Vital and Involved Person—Grandmother's nurturing approach allows Joy to see growing older as a rich, meaningful, and natural part of life.

Discussion Points:

- How would you define an heirloom? And why do you think they hold meaning?
- Why do you think the grandmother's hat collection is meaningful to her?
- How does Joy's perspective on older things change during her visit to Grandma's house?
- In what ways do you think Joy's relationship with her grandmother influences her outlook on aging?

Celebrate & Create:

1. Honor a VIP—Vital and Involved Person—in your life by drawing a hat that represents their unique qualities.
2. Is there anything in your family that has been passed down for generations? Can you draw it and share the story you've been told?
3. Draw something you love and cherish. It could be a toy, a clothing item, or anything that holds meaning.

Demonstrate:

Describe your family heirloom to the children by sharing its story and what it means to you.

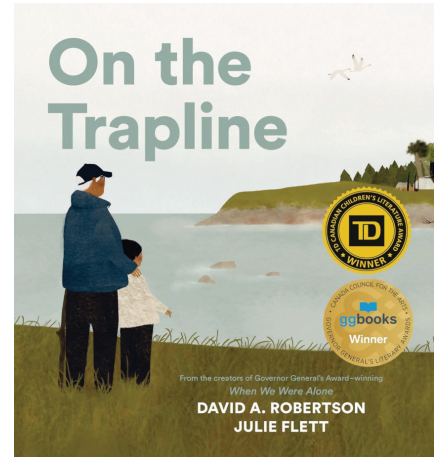
The Books

On the Trapline

Written by David A. Robertson, Illustrated by Julie Flett, Tundra, 2021

Why This Book Was Chosen

On the Trapline was chosen for its authentic portrayal intergenerational connection and cultural transmission through shared experiences. At the back of the book, the author shares, "Being on the trapline with my father was the most significant moment in our relationship—a homecoming for me as a Cree man and truly a journey home for him."



The story follows a young boy and his Moshom (grandfather) as they journey to the trapline where the grandfather spent his childhood. As members of the Norway House Cree Nation, the author and illustrator bring deep cultural authenticity to this narrative of connection between generations.

Throughout the story, the grandfather shares his vivid storylike memories as they walk the shore, explore the woods, and fish together. Their catch becomes part of a community feast, demonstrating how even the smallest shared experiences can strengthen community bonds.

The grandfather serves as a VIP—a Vital and Involved Person—who actively shares stories and vital cultural values like having gratitude for the land, appreciation for family, and the importance of community.

Discussion Points:

- How does the grandfather share his culture and values with his grandson?
- What role do the different languages (English and Cree) play in the story?
- How does this story show the importance of connecting across generations?
- What were some of the boy's favorite parts of the visit?
- How does the boy's understanding of his grandfather's childhood experiences evolve throughout their journey?

Celebrate & Create:

1. Create a bilingual picture dictionary featuring words from the books or your family's heritage language alongside English.
2. Draw pictures showing a special place an older family member shared with you.
3. Design a community feast scene where people of all ages gather to share food, traditions, and stories.

Demonstrate:

Share a story with the children about a place from your childhood with a special meaning, and explain how it has changed with time.

The Books

The Branch

Written by Mireille Messier, Illustrated by Pierre Pratt;
Kids Can Press, 2016

Why This Book Was Chosen

The Branch was chosen for its uplifting portrayal of an older person who helps a child find a creative solution to her problem.

The story revolves around a younger girl's emotional connection to a tree in her yard that was tragically damaged during a storm. As she copes with losing her beloved branch, her compassionate neighbor, Mr. Frank, steps in to lend a helping hand.

As a VIP—Vital and Involved Person—Mr. Frank's character takes the time to listen to the girl's feelings and understand the emotional significance of the fallen branch. Through his empathy and shared wisdom, he encourages her to think creatively about addressing the situation.

This narrative effectively challenges ageist stereotypes that portray older individuals as disconnected or disinterested in younger people's lives. Instead, it paints a powerful picture of a vital older adult helping a child build resilience and discover the power of collaborative and creative problem-solving.

Discussion Points:

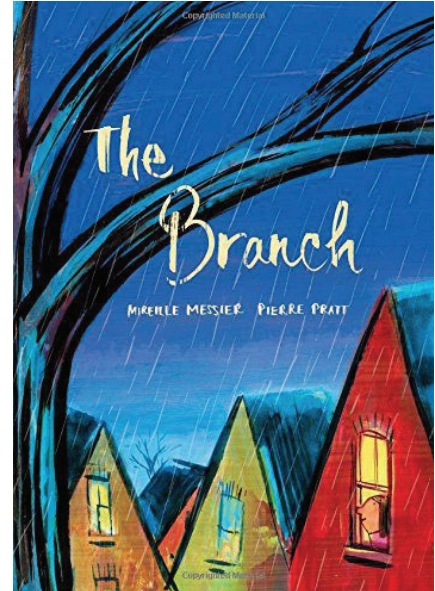
- What does Mr. Frank mean when he says he saw "potential"?
- What words come to mind when you think of Mr. Frank?
- How does Mr. Frank demonstrate the qualities of a VIP—a Vital and Involved Person?
- How does Mr. Frank help his younger neighbor?
- What would you want to talk about with Mr. Frank?

Celebrate & Create:

1. Create a fan club celebrating the superpower of POTENTIAL and Mr. Frank with posters, buttons, or a card.
2. Write a letter to Mr. Frank expressing something you'd love his help with.
3. Create a "Tree of VIPs" wall or poster where each child adds a leaf with VIP—Vital and Involved Person—based on who they know.

Demonstrate:

Acknowledge an older VIP (Vitality Involved Person) in your community by sharing their stories and contributions with the children.



The Books

The Keeper of Wild Words

Written by Brooke Smith, Illustrated by Madeline Kloepper; Chronicle Books Smith, 2020

Why This Book Was Chosen

The Keeper of Wild Words was chosen for its exploration of the power of trust and connection between generations.

Inspired by the removal of nature words from The Oxford Junior Dictionary, the story features Mimi, a passionate writer and nature enthusiast, on a mission to preserve these “wild words.” Mimi challenges her granddaughter Brook to become a “Keeper of Wild Words.” Together, they go on an adventure to experience the natural world through all of their senses.

The story presents Mimi as a VIP—a Vital and Involved Person. By entrusting Brook with preserving language tied to nature, Mimi strengthens their bond and empowers her granddaughter.

The story beautifully demonstrates how older generations can foster continuity and purpose. The book also challenges ageist stereotypes by showing that older adults can be vibrant and wise mentors.

Discussion Points:

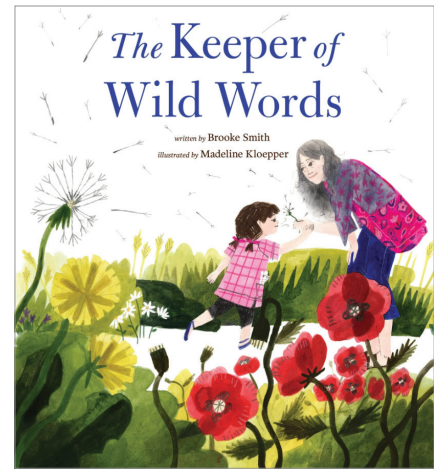
- What was important to Mimi?
- What does Brook learn from her adventures with Mimi about nature and language as she becomes a “Keeper of Wild Words”? What does she begin to understand about herself?
- Do you know other VIPs—Vital and Involved People—like Mimi? If so, how would you describe them?

Celebrate & Create:

1. Celebrate your wild words. Ask children to write words they would want to share with Mimi and Brook about the outdoors where they live.
2. Have the children draw pictures to illustrate their Wild Words.
3. Encourage children to write a short poem using nature words they’ve collected or the pictures they drew.

Demonstrate:

Share with the children some of your favorite words and why they hold a special meaning for you.



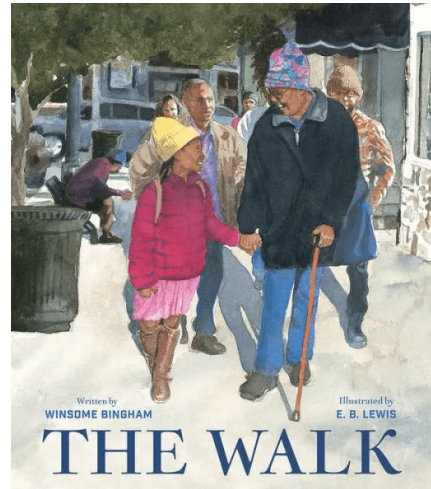
The Books

The Walk

Written by Winsome Bingham, Illustrated by E.B. Lewis, Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2023

Why This Book Was Chosen

The Walk is an uplifting story that shows how the older generation can guide younger generations through history and feel their role as citizens. The grandmother tells her granddaughter that “Leaders are not born; they are made through molding and modeling.”



Equipped with water and sandwiches, the two walk through their community, gathering a diverse group of friends and neighbors of all ages as they take a long walk to the poll site to vote.

This book was chosen for its beautifully paced narrative, which highlights how older generations impart community values and civic responsibility to the young, showcasing the strength found in coming together.

Discussion Points:

- Why was the little girl surprised that she, her granny, and all the others walked to her school?
- When the little girl described the crowd as a “sea of faces swimming upstream like a school of fish,” what do you think she meant by that?
- How does the grandmother’s guidance throughout the walk empower the little girl to understand the importance of civic responsibility and community involvement?
- In what ways does the story illustrate the connection between different generations within the community?
- What does the growing crowd of people joining “the walk” symbolize?

Celebrate & Create:

1. Make a banner to celebrate when community members unite for an important cause.
2. Create “thank you” cards for those who serve your community, like the fire department, police officers, and public library staff.
3. Draw a community map showing important places in your neighborhood.

Demonstrate:

Share a story with the children when you participated in a civic event with your parents or older family members (e.g., a parade or going to the polls to vote).

Words Worth Collecting

While the purpose of the *And So We Grow...Book Collection* is to introduce children to positive age beliefs through engaging characters and stories, anytime a child engages with a storybook is an opportunity to expand their vocabulary, and their ability to learn and express themselves.

Sometimes, matching a word to a picture makes a powerful connection that sparks learning. Other times, just the sound of a word can capture a child's curiosity and fuel their imagination.

Below is a collection of two words from each book. You can use these words to start conversations, play word games, inspire fun projects, and make connections between the books and your daily life.

Berry Song (Goade, 2022)

Ancestors:

The people in your family's history who came before you, such as your grandparents and great-grandparents. While you may not know all of them, they often pass down stories and traditions that can deepen the connection with your heritage. In *Berry Song*, the grandmother introduces the younger girl to the wisdom and traditions of their **ancestors**, especially their love and respect for the land.

Future:

Unfolding of what is to come and how things may change. Your creative ideas, thoughts, and inventions can influence your **future**.

Fauja Singh Keeps Going: The True Story of the Oldest Person to Ever Run a Marathon (Singh, 2020)

Persevere:

To keep trying even when things are challenging. Throughout his life, Fauja Singh shows how he met challenges and **persevered**, demonstrating that it's never too late to learn and achieve your goals.

Marathon:

A long race that takes training, practice, and dedication. Fauja Singh proved that it's possible to run a **marathon** at any age with perseverance.

Words Worth Collecting

Giant Island (Yolen, 2022)

Mystery:

Something that baffles your understanding and leaves you wondering. A **mystery** can motivate you to wonder, explore, and uncover, just as the children discovered the mysteries of Giant Island.

Brimming:

To be full to the top, like a cup of water, ready to spill over. You can also be **brimming** with joy or laughter!

Harry and Walter (Stinson, 2016)

Vroom:

The deep, roaring sound that cars make. In *Harry and Walter*, the two neighbors of different ages become friends as they **vroom** across the grass between their houses, showing that friends of all ages can share adventures.

Dribble:

The experience of biting into something so juicy, like a ripe piece of fruit, that it runs down your chin. Ice cream can **dribble** as it melts, too!

Henri's Scissors (Winter, 2013)

Contented:

A state of being happy with what you have and satisfied with your accomplishments, both big and small. When Henri could no longer paint, he discovered joy in making cutouts and was **contented** with his new art form.

Second life:

Finding a new way forward when something gets in your way. Henri found his **second life** through paper cutouts when he could no longer paint.

Words Worth Collecting

How Old is Mr. Tortoise? (Petty, 2022)

Celebrate:

To honor a special event with joy and enthusiasm. Like Mr. Tortoise, who cares more about **celebrating** with friends than counting his years, we can celebrate in many ways—with parties, dancing, or sharing cake.

Succulent:

Something tender and juicy. The word **succulent** itself sounds as juicy as its meaning!

Miss Rumphius (Cooney, 1982)

Bushel:

A form of measurement equal to 64 pints. Miss Rumphius bought five **bushels** of lupine seeds to make her town more beautiful—that's a lot of seeds!

Delight:

A feeling of great happiness. Miss Rumphius felt **delighted** when she discovered the wind had carried her lupine seeds to create beauty in new places.

Old Rock (is not boring) (Pilutti, 2020)

Exotic:

Something unique or unusually different from what you see every day. Like the hummingbird in the story, who travels to distant lands filled with **exotic** flowers, unlike the ones found in Old Rock's meadow.

Erupt:

To burst out or explode with force and energy. Old Rock emerged from an **erupting** volcano, but you can also **erupt** with laughter when something is funny!

Words Worth Collecting

Old to Joy (Clark, 2023)

Mosey:

To take your time and walk slowly and peacefully. In the story, Joy initially thinks it's a term only older people use, but anyone can take their time and **mosey** along while daydreaming.

Old-fashioned:

Something from the past that isn't commonly used today. Like how we once used candles instead of light switches—**old-fashioned** things can spark curiosity about how something used to be.

On the Trapline (Robertson, 2021)

Moshom (moo-shum):

The Cree word for "grandfather." The story helps us learn words from another language while showing the special relationship between a **moshom** and a grandson.

Kiskisiw (kis-kis-su):

The Cree word meaning "he remembers." Throughout the story, Moshom remembers and shares his childhood experiences at the trapline, showing how memories connect generations. When older people **kiskisiw** and exchange stories, they help us understand and connect to the past.

The Branch (Messier, 2016)

Potential:

Hidden possibilities that can develop into something new. Mr. Frank saw **potential** in the fallen branch to become something special, showing that anything is possible if we look closely.

Elbow grease:

The effort it takes to make or fix something. You'll need to use some **elbow grease** to build or repair something.

Words Worth Collecting

The Keeper of Wild Words (Smith, 2020)

Glistening:

Shining with a sparkling light. In the story, the grandmother and granddaughter see buttercups **glistening** in the sun during their nature walk.

Cherished:

Something lovingly cared for. You can **cherish** many things—a special toy, a pet, a friendship, or memories.

The Walk (Bingham, 2023)

Community:

A group of people living in the same place—your neighbors, shopkeepers, firefighters, librarians, and everyone who makes up your neighborhood. In *The Walk*, the grandmother and granddaughter bring their **community** together.

Vote:

A way to respectfully express your choices and opinions, whether by raising your hand or casting a ballot. **Voting** helps us make decisions together as a community.

Resources to Deepen Your Understanding of Ageism

Age Wave: The New Age of Aging, A Landmark Age Wave Study

https://agewave.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/08-07-23-Age-Wave-The-New-Age-of-Aging-Report_FINAL.pdf

Ashton Applewhite's TED Talk: Let's End Ageism

https://www.ted.com/talks/ashton_applewhite_let_s_end_ageism

Breaking the Age Code: How Your Beliefs About Aging Determine How Long and How Well You Live by Becca Levy, PhD; William Morrow, 2022.

MN Leadership Council on Aging: Reframe Aging Minnesota

<https://www.mnlcoa.org/reframeaging>

National Center to Reframe Aging

<https://www.reframingaging.org/>

Old School: Anti-Ageism Clearing House

<https://oldschool.info/>

University of Michigan's Institute for Healthcare Policy and Innovation: National Poll on Healthy Aging

<https://www.healthyagingpoll.org/reports-more/report/everyday-ageism-and-health>

About the Author

Marsha Weiner

Marsha Weiner is an innovative educator and cultural advocate. Her diverse career spans the performing arts and teaching kindergarten in New York City. She has also developed interactive programs for cultural institutions.

As former Regional Governor of Slow Food USA, Marsha organized monthly public education events about food and culture, reinforcing her commitment to creating enriching programming for informal learning environments.

With a keen eye for engaging audiences of all ages, Marsha brings a wealth of experience bridging generational gaps and fostering lifelong learning.

Acknowledgments

And So We Grow...Sowing Seeds to End Ageism, A Reader's Guide to Using Storybooks to Cultivate Positive Age Beliefs in Younger Children, is the culmination of a remarkable network of people and support I've been fortunate to encounter.

Beginning with my friend and collaborator, the late and dearly celebrated gero-psychiatrist Gene Cohen, MD. His inspiration led me to explore the impact of creativity on aging, and especially how older people are portrayed in children's storybooks.

After moving to Minnesota, I contacted Rajeane Moone after hearing his insightful presentation on Reframing Aging. Rajeane graciously introduced me to Georgia Lane at Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging, who introduced me to Mimi Stender of Duluth Aging Support. Mimi's encouragement, financial support, and talented team of wordsmiths and designers, Brad Bartlett, Leeza Ochsner, and Lisa Pease, were instrumental in bringing this project to life.

I'm thankful to Gary Gardner for sharing materials from his late wife, the beloved gerontologist Helen Kivnik, PhD. I strive to honor Helen's fierce advocacy for older adults, as articulated in her book *Vital Involvement in Old Age*, by coining our use of VIPs (Vital and Involved People).

I also want to acknowledge my fellow travelers, Lindsey McDivitt and Sandra McGuire, PhD, who, for years, have challenged how older people have been represented in children's storybooks and have advocated for more realistic, positive, and balanced stories.

Finally, there's the Foldes family: Paul, Michael, Hannah, Callum, and Zoe. Even though I'm now the shortest among you, your support never makes me feel less valued.

And So We Grow...Sowing Seeds to End Ageism, A Reader's Guide to Using Storybooks to Cultivate Positive Age Beliefs in Younger Children is just the beginning! There are exciting plans ahead, and I appreciate everyone mentioned here and the many friends, colleagues, and even strangers who have contributed to this project in big and small ways.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martha Weiner". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Martha" being more prominent than the last name "Weiner".

We value your feedback

Please share any comments, suggestions, and questions using the contact information below.

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