The Power of Picture Book Reading

…and where is the use of a book," thought Alice, "without pictures or conversation?
—Lewis Carroll

It is not unusual for educators and parents to start putting picture books away once a child has "graduated" to chapter books. It's not unusual for children to do the same thing. But both educators and children have found that using the *Beyond Difference Core Collection* of picture books reopens an incredible world of story and art that provides a powerful means of connecting to key curriculum ideas and meeting multiple curriculum standards.

The power of picture books rests in their ability to convey whole worlds in a direct and meaningful way. Research has confirmed that in order to develop a healthy sense of place in the world, children need to see both their own experience and the experiences of others reflected in the books they see. Educators have reported how powerful it is for children to have access to books that serve as windows and mirrors, and as a nexus for making connections to their personal experience, other books they've read, and their knowledge of the world at large.

Why use picture books in the upper elementary classroom? Some compelling reasons are that picture books:

- can be read and discussed in the same day and can be revisited many times
- can be used to engage children in discussions about similarities, differences, prejudices, inclusion, exclusion, and social justice
- level the playing field for less advanced readers, at the same time encouraging new levels of book experience for more advanced readers
- lend themselves to explorations or conversations that address multiple learning styles
- inspire extended cross-curriculum projects
- provide opportunities for the development of visual and social literacy
- introduce complex vocabulary, concepts and stories

And finally, there's the magic of picture books. The illustrations show new and often exciting places and characters who act and feel just as we do but who look different, have different abilities and live in different

MOTHER GOOSE PROGRAMS 256 HAYWOOD ROAD, CHESTER, VT 05143 USA
800-763-BOOK (2665) T 802.875.2751

parts of our country. Picture books spark innumerable conversations tying the story to children's lives, to the world, to the curriculum.

When children hear the story and see the pictures, they are able to enter into a discussion on many different levels: How is this character just like us? How is he or she different? What do you notice about where the character lives? Have we ever behaved like the character? How did the character change? What actions were necessary for this change to take place? This discussion of culture, of sameness and difference, can be part of both a general unit—such as community or friendship—or part of a specific unit meeting social studies, literacy, science, character education, or mathematics standards.

When using the books with children try to find connections beyond focusing on a character's difference. For example, with *Moses Goes to a Concert*, consider using it as part of a science exploration on sound and vibration. Or use it as part of a unit on music and instruments, rather than focusing on the main character who happens to be deaf.

Martin Luther King, Jr. had a dream. Don't we all have some dreams for making our world a better place? King's dream grew out of hurt, despair and deprivation. Our dreams may grow from an entirely different source. This can lead to a multi-layered conversation with children: *What are your dreams? How are they the same or different from Dr. King's?* Looking carefully at the pictures in *Martin's Big Words* and talking about those same words give children the opportunity to explore history, understand something about a young African-American boy's life and reflect on their own dreams and the words they use to describe those dreams.

Something Beautiful has more to do with the common need to find beauty in our lives than the fact that it takes place in an urban environment. For rural children, it may be eye-opening to learn that they have hopes and ideals in common with a child from the inner city. This same book may validate an urban child's experience in a way that is not usually reflected in picture books.

MOTHER GOOSE PROGRAMS 256 HAYWOOD ROAD, CHESTER, VT 05143 USA
800-763-BOOK (2665) T 802.875.2751