



Canadian Civil Liberties Education Trust (CCLET)

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CCLET List of recommended children's books

This list represents some books we have used successfully with children and youth in order to introduce and explore various issues around rights and freedoms. It is in no way an exhaustive list, but simply offers some starting points.

If you have any additional recommendations for the list, please contact us!

The books are listed alphabetically, by author surname. You can also search ("CTRL+F" for PC, or "⌘+F" for Mac) by subject keywords which are listed at the end of this document.

The Sandwich Swap

By Queen Rania Al Abdullah

2010, Disney/Hyperion

Summary: Lily and Salma are best friends. But they are unsure of each others' favourite sandwiches – Salma eats pita with hummus, and Lily loves peanut butter and jelly. One day, Lily makes a comment about Salma's sandwich – and Salma retorts back. As their story spreads across the school, so does intolerance. Students begin choosing sides in the cafeteria and calling each other "Jelly heads" and "Chickpea brains." When the two girls get caught in the middle of a food fight and called to the principal's office, they decide it's time to make some changes.

Civil liberties application: Discussion of discrimination and freedom of opinion; acceptance of difference.

Subject Keywords: Discrimination; Freedom of Opinion; Freedom of Belief; Difference; Tolerance; Conflict Resolution.

Discussion questions might include:

- Do you have a favourite sandwich? (Do you have an opinion on the sandwiches depicted in the story?)
- What happens when the girls refuse to accept their differences?
- Were either girl's comments about the other's sandwich based on facts? What happened when they actually swapped sandwiches?
- What do Lily and Salma learn from this whole experience? What does the school learn?

The Curious Garden

By Peter Brown

2009, Little, Brown Young Readers

Summary: The story of Liam, a young boy in a severely environmentally degraded city, who quietly works to nurture a garden – and in so doing affects lasting positive change. (Based, loosely, on the Highline project in New York City.)

Civil liberties application: Individual action (by youth) for positive social change.

Subject Keywords: Individual Action; Freedom of Association; Freedom of Peaceful Assembly.

Discussion questions might include:

- How did the city become so degraded?
- What is the result of such bleak living conditions? (Describe the city at the beginning of the story.)
- How is Liam unique? How does he turn things around?
- Why do you think others joined in?
- What “version” of the city would you prefer to live in?
- Do you recognize any of the issues in the book in your own community?
- Can you identify ways in which you can improve your own community?

Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type

(Note: Full lesson plan available at <http://ccla.org/education-2/resources/lessonplans/>)

By Doreen Cronin

2000, Little Simon

Summary: A barnyard tale where the cows and chickens unite to improve their working conditions.

Civil liberties application: An exploration of freedom of expression and association, peaceful protest and basic rights – for animals and humans everywhere.

Subject Keywords: Right to Life, Liberty and Security; Freedom of Expression; Freedom of Association; Freedom of Peaceful Assembly.

Discussion questions might include:

- What is funny about this book?
- What do the animals want from farmer Brown? Do you think we should all have a right to a warm shelter?
- How do the cows and hens use their freedom of expression, freedom of association, and freedom of peaceful assembly to try and achieve their goals?
- Did farmer Brown do what they asked right away? What do you think made farmer brown eventually give in to the demands of the hens and the cows?
- The cows asked for blankets for themselves, but they also asked Farmer Brown to provide blankets for the hens that were also feeling cold at night. Why do you think they did that? Was it helpful to include the hens in their request for blankets? Should we also look out for the rights of other people/animals and not just ourselves? Why or why not? Can you think of a time when you used your Charter rights to stand up for someone else when they were being treated unfairly?
- What were the ducks asking for? Do you think we should all have a right to a diving board? Should the farmer give in to all the demands of the farm animals? Why or why not?

Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse

By Kevin Henkes

1996, Greenwillow

Summary: This book is about a mouse named Lilly who loves everything about school, especially her teacher. But one day, Lilly gets in trouble for disrupting the class and in anger decides to draw a mean picture about her teacher.

Civil liberties application: Exploration of freedom of expression.

Subject Keywords: Freedom of Expression; Defamation; Conflict Resolution.

Discussion questions might include:

- Why does Lilly love her Purple Plastic Purse so much?
- Why does Mr. Slinger keep asking her to put it away during class time?
- How does Lilly feel when she is asked to put her prized possession away?
- What do Lilly's emotions lead her to do? (Have you ever done anything similar?)
- What is the result?
- How is the conflict resolved?

Library Lion

By Michelle Knudsen

Summary: This book is about a librarian named Miss Merriweather who is very strict about following the rules in the library. When a lion comes to the library, people aren't sure what to do. But Miss Merriweather doesn't care because there aren't any rules about lions in the library. But when something terrible happens, the lion quickly comes to the rescue the only way he knows how: by breaking the rules.

Civil liberties application: Discussion of "reasonable rules" (limits to our rights and freedoms) and when, sometimes, rules might need to be broken.

Subject Keywords: Rules; Reasonable Limits.

Discussion questions might include:

- What are the rules in the library?
- Are they reasonable? Do they have a specific purpose?
- Why did the lion break the rules? What happens in the story when the lion breaks a rule? What were the consequences of breaking the rule?
- What could have happened if the lion didn't break the rule? Can rules sometimes have consequences too?
- Can you provide examples of when rules are broken in an emergency? (eg: Fire trucks or police going through a red light)
- How might you change the library rules to make them more fair or more effective?
- Are there rules in your school that you think may have some negative consequences? Can you think of ways to improve those rules and make them more fair?

Mr. Peabody's Apples

By Madonna

Summary: The story of a much-beloved baseball coach becoming the target of gossip and defamation. (Based on an old Ukrainian folk tale.)

Civil liberties application: Freedom of expression; presumption of innocence; discussion of effects of gossip and defamation.

Subject Keywords: Freedom of Expression; Defamation; Conflict Resolution; Presumption of Innocence.

Discussion questions might include:

- Does Mr. Peabody seem like a good person?
- Why does Tommy suspect him of stealing?
- Despite really respecting Mr. Peabody, does Tommy presume that he is innocent or guilty?
- What does Tommy do and what is the result?
- What does Tommy learn from Mr. Peabody, at the story's end? What are the consequences of Tommy's actions?
- If you were Tommy, what could you have done differently to address your suspicion that Mr. Peabody was stealing?
- Why does the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* protect our right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty? Why is this right important?

These Hands

By Margaret Mason

2011, Houghton Mifflin

Summary: A beautiful (and gorgeously illustrated) story of the civil rights movement, as a grandfather and his grandson discuss what their hands have been able/will be able to do.

Civil liberties application: Discussion of prejudice and racism; equality rights. Effect of protest and peaceful assembly/association.

Subject Keywords: Discrimination; Equality; Racism; Freedom of Association; Freedom of Peaceful Assembly.

Discussion questions might include:

- What were some of the things grandfather was able to do when he was young? What was grandfather not permitted to do when he was young? Why?
- What did grandfather and others do to try to stop the discrimination that African Americans faced in the United States?
- What does the book show us SPECIFICALLY about the Civil Rights Movement? (What did people actually do to assert their rights?)
- Have you ("your hands") ever done anything to affect change?

The Paper Bag Princess

By Robert Munsch

Summary: This book is about a Princess named Elizabeth who plans to marry a Prince named Ronald when a dragon suddenly attacks the castle and kidnaps Ronald. Elizabeth finds the dragon, outsmarts him, and rescues Ronald, who is less than pleased to see her in a disheveled and un-princess-like state.

Civil liberties application: Discussion of gender stereotypes and equality rights.

Subject Keywords: Equality Rights; Discrimination

Discussion questions might include:

- How are Elizabeth and Ronald depicted at the beginning of the story?
- When the dragon destroys her castle and all her belongings and kidnaps Ronald, what does Elizabeth do?
- Use adjectives to describe Elizabeth and her actions.
- Is Ronald thankful for Elizabeth's help? What does he say to her? What do we learn about Ronald from his reaction to Elizabeth after she saves him?
- How do Ronald's actions change Elizabeth's future plans with Robert?
- Are you happy for Elizabeth at the end of the story?

The Little Hummingbird

By Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas

2010, Greystone Books

Summary: This book is about a courageous hummingbird who fights her fears and does everything she can to save the forest from a terrible fire.

Civil liberties application: Portrayal of the power of individual action - no matter how small the individual.

Subject Keywords: Individual Action.

Discussion questions might include:

- How do the animals of the forest respond to the forest fire? (What do they say in the story?)
- How does the Hummingbird respond?
- Why do you think the little Hummingbird continued to try to extinguish the massive fire, even though she could only bring water one drop at a time?
- What lesson can you learn from the Hummingbird about taking action towards an important cause?
- What do you think could have been accomplished if all the animals did their small part to try to extinguish the fire?
- If you could continue the story, how would you end it? Do you think the other animals will learn from the Hummingbird's example?
- Have you ever done something like the Hummingbird? (Something courageous/acted to protect yourself or others?)

Viola Desmond Won't Be Budged

By Jody Nyash Warner

2010, Groundwood

Summary: In 1946, Viola Desmond, a successful Nova Scotia businesswoman, goes to a movie. When she is told to give up her seat and move to the balcony, she refuses. She is forcibly removed, jailed and fined. (A Canadian Rosa Parks story.)

Civil liberties application: Historical portrayal of segregation, prejudice and racism. Good lead-up to discussion of equality rights.

Subject Keywords: **Discrimination; Equality; Racism; Individual Action.**

Discussion questions might include:

- Why was Viola Desmond asked to move seats in the movie theatre? Was that fair?
- What was her reaction? Would your reaction be any different?
- What happens due to her resistance?
- What does her resistance lead to, eventually?
- Did Viola do the right thing, despite her treatment?
- Can you think of any rules or laws that exist today that discriminate against certain types of people? If so, list and discuss. What can YOU do to stop discrimination in a peaceful and lawful way?

The Back of the Bus

Aaron Reynolds

2010 Philomel Books

Summary: This book is about racism. A boy and his mother are sitting at the back of the bus because at that time African Americans were forced to be segregated from whites in the United States. When an African American woman decides to make a courageous move to sit in the front of the bus, problems occur.

Civil liberties application: Historical portrayal of segregation, prejudice and racism. Good lead-up to discussion of equality rights.

Subject Keywords: **Discrimination; Equality; Racism; Freedom of Association; Freedom of Peaceful Assembly; Individual Action.**

Discussion questions might include:

- Why do the boy and his mother sit at the back of the bus? Is this fair?
- Why is it surprising that Rosa Parks is sitting up front?
- What happens due to her resistance?
- What does her resistance lead to, eventually?
- Did Rosa do the right thing, despite her treatment?
- Can you think of any rules or laws that exist today that discriminate against certain types of people? If so, list and discuss. What can YOU do to stop discrimination in a peaceful and lawful way?

And Tango Makes Three

By Justin Richardson & Peter Parnell

2005, Simon & Schuster

Summary: Based on a true story from the Central Park Zoo in New York City - two male penguins become parents of a lovely, healthy young chick.

Civil liberties application: Discussion of discrimination/stereotyping and equality rights. (This book has been banned in some jurisdictions – a good censorship talking point with older students.)

Subject Keywords: **Difference; Equality Rights; Freedom of Expression (censorship).**

Discussion questions might include:

- How would you describe Roy and Silo’s feelings for one another?
- Why does the zookeeper decide to give Roy and Silo an egg that another penguin couple can’t incubate?
- What is the result?
- What do you think this story is trying to tell us about families?
- (Discussion on censorship with older students): Some people don’t want this story to be read to children. What do you think? Should this book be banned elementary schools? Why/why not?

The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs

By Jon Scieszka

1989, Viking Penguin

Summary: This book is about a wolf telling his perspective of the story of the three little pigs.

Civil liberties application: Discussion of point of view/perspective in any story or issue; discussion of the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty.

Subject Keywords: **Presumption of innocence; Discrimination; Alternate Point of View.**

Discussion questions might include:

- Why is this story funny?
- What is the Wolf’s side of the story?
- What do the words say? What do the pictures show us?
- Do you believe him and his story?
- Should we always think of everyone’s points of view?
- Do you think he has been treated unfairly in our usual retellings of “The Three Little Pigs”? (Does this violate his right to a presumption of innocence?)
- Why does the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* protect our right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty? Why is this right important?
- Can any of you think of a real situation where you or someone you know was treated unfairly or portrayed to be a “Big Bad Wolf”?

The Lorax

By Dr. Seuss

1971, Random House

Summary: A well-known story that tackles the concept of rampant overuse (for financial gain) of finite resources - and resulting ecological devastation.

Civil liberties application: Discussion of possible need for laws/regulations to protect the most vulnerable (in this case, our environment).

Subject Keywords: Individual Action; Right to Life, Liberty and Security; Rules; Reasonable Limits.

Discussion questions might include:

- Are the Once-ler's actions wrong? Was he just trying to be a good businessman?
- Where/when do things go wrong?
- Who/what are affected?
- Describe the landscape BEFORE the Once-ler arrived; describe it at the story's opening (and ending). What landscape would you like to live in?
- Should there be rules to prevent this kind of thing from happening? If so, what kind of rules might we come up with? Who/what might these rules help? What might be the consequences of such a rule? Are rules like these easy to develop and accept?
- Can you think of a similar story going on in our actual landscape (environment) today?
- Is there hope at the end of the story?

The Sneetches

By Dr. Seuss

1961, Random House

Summary: Dr. Seuss's famous portrayal of the fickleness (and corrosiveness) of prejudice and discrimination.

Civil liberties application: Discussion of discrimination/stereotyping and equality rights.

Subject Keywords: Discrimination; Equality Rights; Conflict Resolution.

Discussion questions might include:

- What is the difference between the Star-Bellied and the Plain-Bellied Sneetches?
- Which Sneetches deserve the better life, more fun, more access to beaches?
- What is the effect of inequality on the Sneetches?
- How does Sylvester McMonkey McBean exploit the discrimination already apparent in the Sneetch society? Does he care about how the Sneetches feel?
- Are you aware of any discrimination – based on appearance – in your own school? What is the result? How might you combat this discrimination?

Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed

By Mo Willems

2009, Hyperion Books

Summary: This book is about a naked mole rat named Wilbur who breaks a rule of the mole rat society: "Never wear clothes." Regardless of what the other mole rats say, Wilbur refuses to be completely naked and wears clothes to express himself.

Civil liberties application: Freedom of expression / equality rights. Good introduction to the idea of "reasonableness" of a rule or tradition.

Subject Keywords: Discrimination; Equality Rights; Freedom of Expression; Difference; Tolerance; Individual Action; Rules; Reasonable Limits.

Discussion questions might include:

- What makes Wilbur different?
- Why don't the other naked mole rats like his behaviour? What is their reasoning based on?
- Why does Wilbur continue his behavior despite the fact that he is upsetting the other mole rats?
- What is the main question Wilbur – and then Grand-Pah– ask? Why is this an important question?
- What other questions does Grand-Pah consider?
- Why is it hard for one small person to go against the whole community? (Introduce concept of minority/majority.)
- Should the mole rats have solved the dilemma simply by taking a vote? What do you think would have happened if they did?
- Should all decision-making be solved by a vote/majority?
- Can you think of another example – in the real world – where minority rights are upheld? (banning peanut products in schools; language rights; freedom of religion etc.)

List of Subject Keywords Used:

Discrimination

Freedom of Opinion

Freedom of Belief

Freedom of Expression

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

Freedom of Association

Difference

Tolerance

Individual Action

Freedom of Association

Right to Life, Liberty and Security

Defamation

Rules

Reasonable Limits

Presumption of Innocence

Equality Rights

Conflict Resolution

Racism

Alternate Point of View