



Birdsong

Julie Flett



A Companion Guide for
Teachers and Parents

Title: *Birdsong*

Author / Illustrator: Julie Flett

Genre: Picture book

Themes: Family—Indigenous, Friendship, Emotions and Feelings, Nature, Seasons

Suitable for: Ages 3–8,
Preschool to Grade 5

Guided Reading Level: L

Lexile Level: TBC

Common Core Standards:

W.2.3,5,7,8

SL.2.1,1b,1c,2,3,4,6

RF.2.3,3d,3f,4,4a,4c

L.2.3,4,4a,4d,5,5a,5b,6

RL.2.1,2,3,4,5,7,10



Summary

When Katherena moves with her mother from her home in a city by the sea to the country, she feels lonely and out of place. When summer arrives, she meets Agnes, the elderly woman next door. The two share a love of arts and crafts. Katherena and her dog start visiting Agnes often. They garden together. They make things together. And they talk—about the seasons and about making things. Katherena loves to draw and shows Agnes her drawings. Katherena is Cree-Métis and tells Agnes about the Cree seasons.

As the seasons pass, Agnes grows weaker and her adult daughter comes to stay with her. By the next spring, Agnes is even weaker. Katherena gathers all her drawings to take to Agnes for a final farewell.

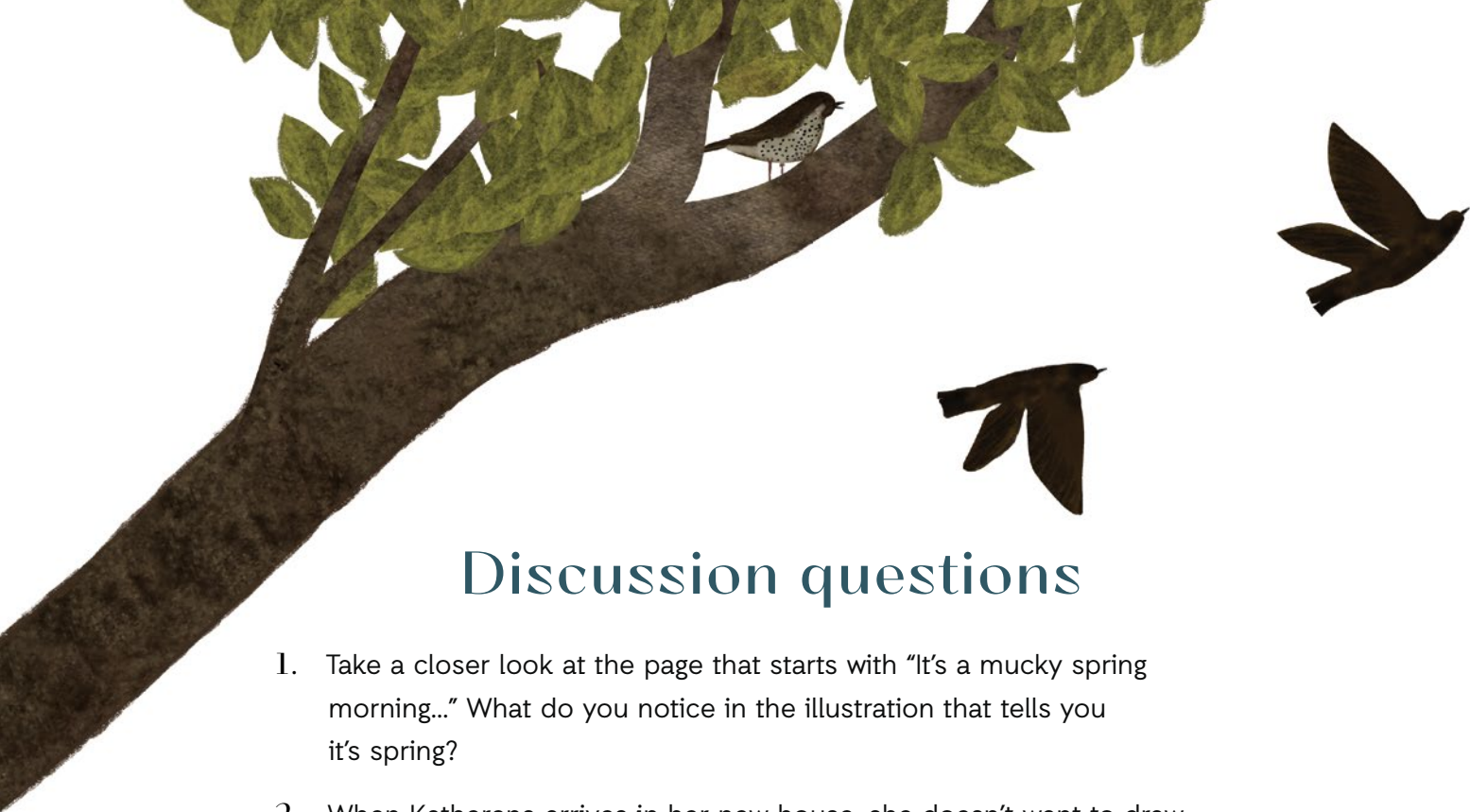
Acclaimed author and artist Julie Flett's textured images of birds, flowers, art, and landscapes bring vibrancy and warmth to this powerful picture book, which highlights the joys of intergenerational friendship and shared passions. She tells this warm story with evocative details and elegant language. A brief glossary and pronunciation guide to Cree-Métis words that appear in the text is provided on the copyright page.

About this guide

These discussion questions and activities are designed to support the goal of helping students explore *Birdsong*, the themes presented in the book, and their own creativity.

* With thanks to Julie Danielson for some descriptive phrases in her review of *Birdsong* in the blog, *Seven Impossible Things Before Breakfast*.





Discussion questions

1. Take a closer look at the page that starts with "It's a mucky spring morning..." What do you notice in the illustration that tells you it's spring?
2. When Katherena arrives in her new house, she doesn't want to draw. Why?
3. After Katherena's first visit with Agnes, she says, "I can't wait to go home and start drawing." What do you think has inspired her to draw again?
4. Take a closer look at the page that starts with "Visit me again soon, Katherena!" What do you notice in the illustration that tells you it's summer?
5. Take a closer look at the page that starts with "Agnes digs in her garden." What do you notice in the illustration that tells you it's fall?
6. Agnes says "she's getting creaky too." What does Agnes mean? What do you think will happen to Agnes?
7. Take a closer look at the page that starts with "It's Ôhô's first snow." What do you notice in the illustration that tells you it's winter?
8. When Agnes gives her some snowdrop bulbs, Katherena says, "My fingers itch in my mittens." What does she mean?
9. What are the different ways Katherena says goodbye to Agnes?
10. When Katherena gets back to her home, she says hello to her mom, her dog, and the home. How do you think she feels about her home now?



Before reading

The following questions and activities build the context and introduce the topic of the book, and establish prior knowledge and interest.

1. Before reading *Birdsong*, look at the cover. Discuss with the class what you think the book will be about.
2. If your copy of *Birdsong* has a dust jacket, take the dust jacket off and look at what's printed on the case. Discuss with the class what you think the pictures are. Then look at the pages inside the cover at the very beginning and end of the book, and the title page. What clues do the illustrations on these pages give you about the story?
3. Have you ever moved to a new home? If you have, share with the class something about that experience.
4. Discuss with the class ways in which you have helped someone else or shown them kindness.
5. Review the glossary on the copyright page, with the three Cree-Métis words. Practice pronouncing the words before reading the book.



During reading

These activities check comprehension, stimulate interest, involve readers in reflection as they read, and encourage consideration of other readers' reactions.

A picture of somewhere new (identifying changes)

1. Have you ever stayed in a place that was new to you? Maybe you moved to a new home, slept over at the home of a friend or family member, stayed overnight on a holiday, or went camping.

Draw two pictures: one of the home you have right now, and one of the place that was new. Label some of the differences between the two places. Remember to think of all your senses. You can include the new sounds or smells of the new place, as well as the differences in the rooms, setting, or spaces.



Friendships

2. Katherena and Agnes become good friends, even though they are very different ages. Think about one of your friends. Share with a partner or the class something about them. How did you meet them? What do you do with your friend?
3. Both Katherena and Agnes like making things. How did this shared interest bring them together?
4. Is there a type of art that you love to do (such as drawing, singing, or dancing), or do you like making or building things? At home, make something (this could be a bird, or a flower, or anything else) using your favorite materials and bring it to class. Tell the class what you liked about making it.



Nature and the seasons



Julie Flett, the author and illustrator, works with paper and a computer to create collage-like images. In the following activity, you will learn some collage-making techniques.

Before starting this activity, think of your favorite season of the year. This collage will be a picture of you in your favorite season.

Materials

- 1 sheet of construction paper or stock paper per student (white or black paper are good colors for contrast)
- old magazines about nature, travel, or the environment, with color photos, such as *National Geographic* (these will be cut up)
- any other papers that could be cut up, such as wrapping paper, wallpaper samples, colored paper for scrapbooking, crêpe paper or tissue; scrap fabric could also be used
- Sharpie markers, black chisel tip and fine tip
- scissors
- glue stick or liquid glue
- colored pencils
- optional: photo of you, or photos from home, of family, pets, etc.



Directions

1. Think about the season you chose and write a list of things you see during that season. Pick the items on your list that you would like to include in your picture. What shapes will you need to cut out for your picture? Leaves or trees? Flowers? Snowmen?
2. Look through the magazines, papers, and fabric (if using) that you've collected. Choose colors and patterns that would fit in your season.
3. Draw the shapes you need on the paper or fabric scraps. Cut them out.
4. Place the construction or stock paper horizontally on your work surface. Glue down your shapes to make your picture. Wait for the glue to dry completely.
5. Remember to include yourself in this picture. If you have a photo, then cut yourself out of the photo and add yourself to the picture. Or, draw yourself into the picture.
6. With a Sharpie or colored pencil, you can draw extra details in your picture. Or, use the Sharpie or pencil to outline some or all of your shapes.



After reading

These activities inspire continued reflection and response to the text, bring conclusion to the experience of reading this particular text, and stimulate further extensions.



Exploring birds



1. Birds appear in many different ways throughout *Birdsong*. This child-directed activity encourages children to explore the idea of birds in their own way.

First, discuss with the class what they know about birds and what interests them about birds. Then allow children to find out more about birds by observing real birds outside, or researching them in books or on the internet.

Then ask children to make their own bird or nest. Provide a variety of materials and mediums for children to use, depending on what's available—clay, paint, newspaper (for papier mâché), feathers, cardboard, etc.

Let the children share with others something about their bird or nest.

Helping hands display

2. When Agnes gets weak, Katherena decides to help her. Discuss with the class different ways you can help someone. In this activity, the class will create a display of “helping hands.”

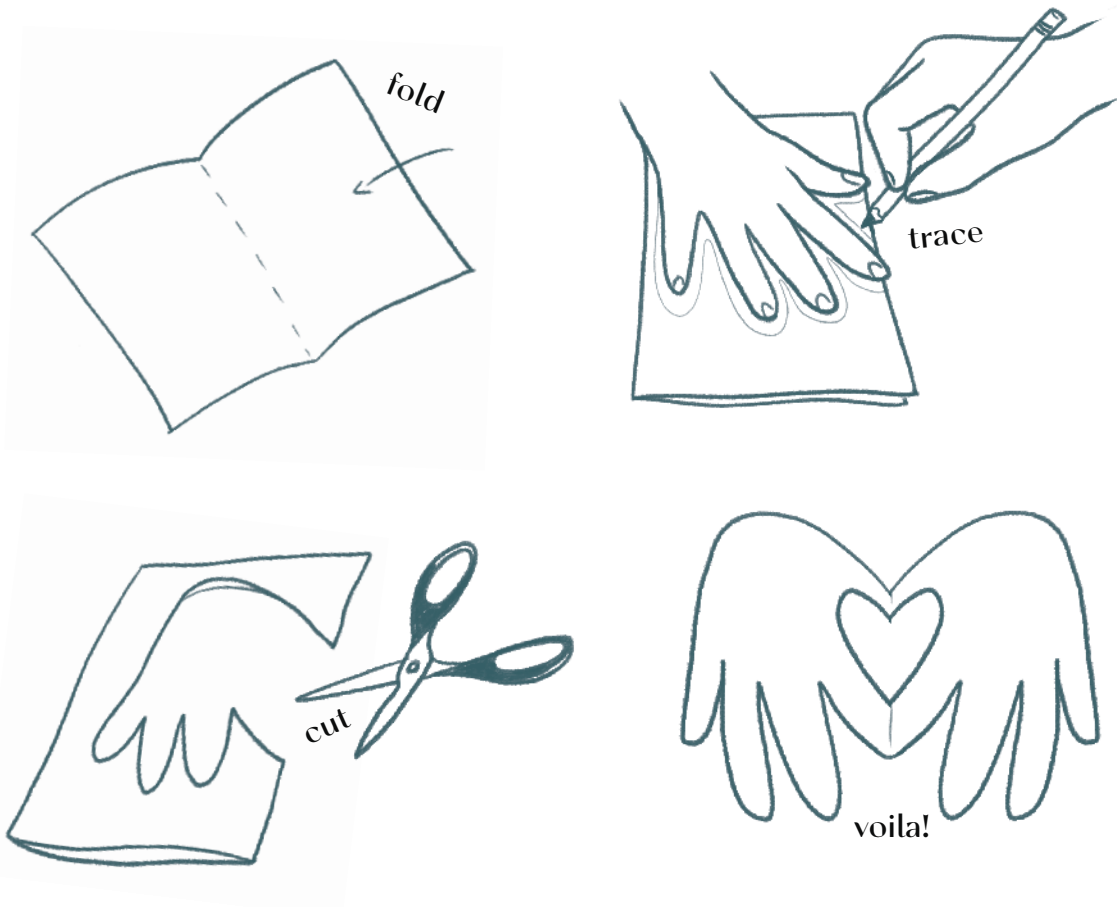
Materials

- colored paper or construction paper
- scissors



Directions

1. Think of two different times when you have helped someone.
2. Then, take a piece of colored paper and fold it in half. Spread the fingers of your non-writing hand and place it on the paper, with your thumb and index finger touching the fold.
3. Trace around your hand.
4. Cut out your hand shape. Remember not to cut along the fold where the tip of your thumb and index finger are. Open out the hands. You should be able to see a heart shape in the space between the two thumbs and index fingers. See diagram for reference.
5. On each hand, either draw a picture of you helping someone else, or write what you did to help.
6. The pairs of hands can be displayed together on a display board.



A Flock of Kindness activity

3. The following activity can be in addition to the Helping Hands display (above), or an alternate activity. In this activity, students will make a picture of a bird out of their own handprint.

Before you begin, discuss with the class how Katherena is kind to Agnes, and how Agnes is kind to Katherena.

Then discuss the concept of random acts of kindness. How do we help each other?

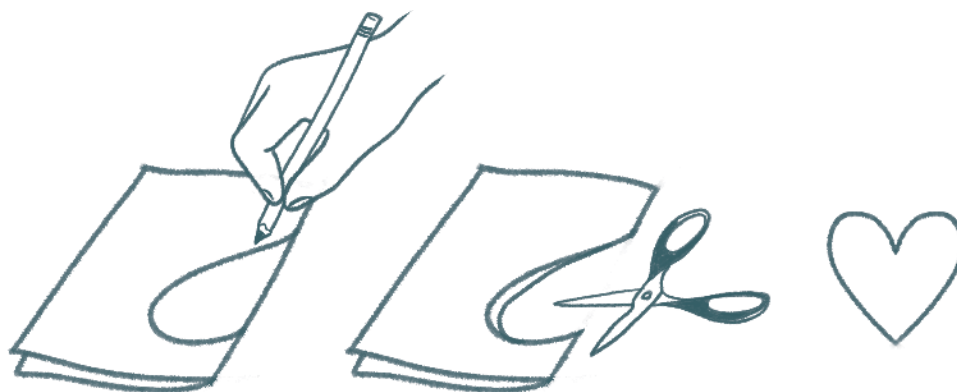
Materials

- poster paint and paintbrushes
- painting smocks and a drop cloth or old newspapers (to catch drips of paint)
- paper (white paper is good for contrast)
- pencils, pencil crayons, or felts
- construction paper (for the flowers)
- optional: googly eyes and glue, and construction paper in different colors

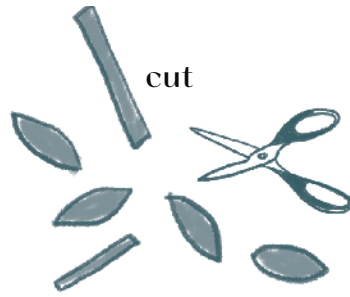


Directions

1. Fold a sheet (or multiple sheets) of construction paper lengthwise. Draw half a heart along the fold. Cut out the hearts. Save for later.



2. Cut leaf and stem shapes out of another color of construction paper. You can use the stencils in the black line masters at the end of this guide.



3. On each heart, write an idea of something you could do to be kind to someone (or something). Option: For a simpler activity, skip steps 1 to 3 and 6, and create handprint birds only.



4. Paint your hand with the poster paint. Press your hand firmly on the paper to make a print.



5. Turn your handprint into a bird by drawing in details. You can also glue on googly eyes, or cut a beak or body out of construction paper to add to your picture. See below examples for ideas.



Glue the heart flowers onto the stem. Glue leaves to the stem.

The finished pieces can be displayed on a display board in a "flock." The heart flowers can be pinned up below the flock to make a field of flowers.

voila!



