

FROM STEM TO SEL: INTEGRATING PICTURE BOOKS INTO EARLY EDUCATION

Danna Smith's curated list of mentor texts for stem, social studies, literacy, and mindfulness.

The "Colors of the Seasons" Little Golden Book Series (Early Science (Seasons))

Includes: The Colors of Winter, The Colors of Spring, The Colors of Summer, The Colors of Fall

- **Educational Tie-in:** Perfect for early science curriculum (Seasons) and sensory observation. These books use color as a lens to explore the changing environment, hibernation, and weather patterns.
- **Activity Idea:** Create a "Seasonal Color Wheel" where students paste textures (leaves, sand, cotton balls) that match the colors described in each book. Make a little golden book with all the colors of the seasons with a printable from Little Golden Books here: <https://dannasmithbooks.com/activity-guides/>

The Welcome Book & The Thank You Book (Social-Emotional Learning (SEL))

- **Educational Tie-in:** These are essential for Social-Emotional Learning (SEL). They focus on manners, hospitality, and building a kind classroom community.
- **Utility:** Use *The Welcome Book* at the start of the school year and *The Thank You Book* during units on gratitude or Thanksgiving.
- **Download and print thank-you cards** at <https://dannasmithbooks.com/activity-guides/> Practice writing and brighten someone's day by giving or mailing them a note

Balloon Trees (STEM/Environment)

- **Educational Tie-in:** This is a unique look at **manufacturing and natural resources**. It explains the process of how sap from a rubber tree becomes a latex balloon.
- **Activity Idea:** A "Source to Store" flowchart project where kids map out how raw materials are turned into everyday objects. Use the four pages of activities in the back of the book or download the 32-page discussion guide for learning beyond the picture book at <https://dannasmithbooks.com/activity-guides/>

The Hawk of the Castle (Social Studies/History)

- **Educational Tie-in:** A brilliant introduction to **Medieval History** and the ancient art of falconry. It introduces technical vocabulary (mews, jesses, lures) in an accessible way.
- **Activity Idea:** Label the parts of a castle or the anatomy of a bird of prey. Kids will have fun testing their falconry knowledge after reading the book with the downloadable Q&A at <https://dannasmithbooks.com/activity-guides/>.

How Do You Haiku? (Literacy & Language Arts)

- **Educational Tie-in:** These serve as a primary mentor text for **Poetry Units**. A leveled lesson: Breaks down the 5-7-5 syllable structure while emphasizing nature imagery. And offers an alternate short form. **Templates are included in the book** for ease.
- **Activity Ideas:** Take students on a "**ginko**" (nature walk) to gather inspiration from the outdoors. Ask them to compose a traditional haiku—either 17 syllables or three short lines—centered on a single observation. Once their poems are polished, have them create "**poem stones**" by painting rocks and inscribing their haiku for the garden. More activity ideas can be found in the book.

One Blue Gnu & Two at the Zoo (Early Math)

- **Educational Tie-in:** These are high-energy **Number and Counting** books. Particularly good for addition and counting pairs.
- **Utility:** Best for Pre-K and Kindergarten math centers.
- **Activity Ideas:** 8 page activity guide available at <https://dannasmithbooks.com/activity-guides/> which includes comprehension questions, Make a Pizza color and counting sheet, tracing numbers, identifying object and more.

Arctic White (Geography/Science)

- **Educational Tie-in:** Explores the **Arctic biome** and the phenomenon of the Aurora Borealis. It teaches children that even in a landscape that seems "white," there is a spectrum of color and life.
- **Activity Idea:** A science experiment on light refraction or a "cool colors" watercolor painting session. A guide is available at <https://dannasmithbooks.com/activity-guides/> which includes how to make your own snow for sensory play, comprehensive Q&A, draw, write, or play a colorful game.

Rooftop Garden (Sustainability/Community)

- **Educational Tie-in:** Focuses on **urban gardening** and how food grows. It's a great fit for "Green Living" or "Plant Life Cycle" units.
- **Activity Idea:** Start a classroom "window garden" with seeds in clear plastic cups to watch the roots grow. Download a Mini Garden Book or learn How to Make Seed Spheres from the Rooftop Garden guide at <https://dannasmithbooks.com/activity-guides/>

Swallow the Leader (Life Science)

- **Educational Tie-in:** This counting book doubles as a lesson on **marine animals**.
- **Utility:** Great for "Under the Sea" themes.
- **Activity Ideas:** The available downloadable guide is filled deep as the ocean with fun things to do. Draw and count your favorite color fish, sing songs, make a paper flag and play Follow the Leader (the leader gets to hold the flag), and count goldfish crackers, then pretend you are a shark and eat them all up! <https://dannasmithbooks.com/activity-guides/>

Ease Your Anxious Mind (Mental Health/SEL)

- **Educational Tie-in:** A vital tool for **coping strategies for Pre-teens, teens, & adults**. It provides language for children to identify feelings of worry and offers grounding techniques.
- **Activity Idea:** Create a "Calm Down Kit" for the classroom based on the suggestions in the book.

Zenguin (Social-Emotional Learning / Mindfulness)

- **Educational Tie-in (Self-Regulation):** This book is a primary resource for **Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)**, specifically focusing on **emotional regulation** and **mindfulness**. It teaches children that while they cannot always control the "noise" or chaos of their external environment, they can control their internal reaction to it. It introduces the concept of a "Zen" mindset—staying centered, calm, and observant.
- **Curriculum Utility:**
 - **The "Zen Zone":** Ideal for introducing a designated quiet space in the classroom. See <https://dannasmithbooks.com/activity-guides/> for downloadable resources on zen zones, coloring pages, and "zen" words printables.
 - **Transition Tool:** Use this book to transition students from high-stimulation activities (like Recess or PE) back into focused work (like Math or Reading).

I'm a Drone (STEM/Modern Life):

- **Educational Tie-in:** This Little Golden Book is a perfect introduction to **community helpers**. It goes beyond toys to show how drones help with search and rescue, agriculture, and photography.
- **Activity Idea:** Pair this with a map-making activity or a "bird's eye view" drawing project.

I Love You A-Z (Early Literacy):

- **Educational Tie-in:** Because it's an alphabet book, it is a staple for **preschool curriculum**.
- **Emotional Tie-in:** Excellent for **Baby Showers** or **Mother's Day** gifts, as it focuses on the unconditional bond between a mother and child.

Board Books & Early Concepts

- **Wake Up, Freight Train!:** Focuses on **Onomatopoeia** and transportation.
- **Bunny's Easter Basket / Springtime Babies:** Ideal for holiday-specific units. *Springtime Babies* is excellent for farm animals and seasonal units and *Bunny's Easter Basket* for use in learning Opposites (Hoppoosites).
- **Peek-a-Boo Haiku (ages 2- 5).** Great for introducing children to poetry and Predictive Reading: The "Peek-a-Boo" element builds **inference skills**, asking children to use poetic clues to guess the hidden animal or object. Download a haiku memory game or haiku worksheet at <https://dannasmithbooks.com/activity-guides/> .

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