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## Book Musings

### May, 2013



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**Book Musings** is an occasional newsletter from staff and friends of QuakerBooks of Friends General Conference. It features books and themes that are of special interest to the author, as well as providing alerts about sales and other opportunities available to readers. If you would like to receive additional newsletters from FGC, [sign up here](#).

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## Helping Children Learn to Cope with Hard Issues

by Beth Collea, guest author

I'm pleased to introduce Beth Collea, Religious Education Coordinator for New England Yearly Meeting and a member of Wellesley Meeting in Massachusetts, who is the guest author for this month's *Book Musings*. For a number of years, Beth has served on a dedicated working group, which has re-imagined FGC's classic Sparklers curriculum to produce *Sparkling Still*, a completely updated version of this First Day school classic. One of the features of the new *Sparkling Still* is that it demonstrates how to create lesson plans for ages 3–8 based on children's story books and how to use the conversations that arise from these stories to build community and help children explore and grow. I asked Beth to share some of her thoughts about children's literature that arise from her work on this project.

--Chel Avery



### Dear Friend,

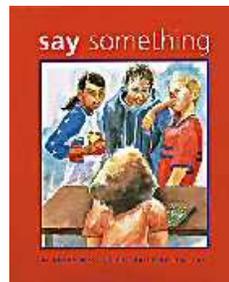
First Day school for our very young Friends is so much more than a weekly dose of Quaker religious education. The gathered circle of children and adults in our classes is a fully living part of our Quaker meeting community. Tender, pastoral care work is often hidden in plain sight within these classes. Even young children hear and see news reports about damaging storms and violent attacks in civilian settings—worse yet, they may have witnessed such events personally. Or perhaps their heartache is more typical, like an impending move, seeing a homeless person, or the death of a grandparent.

The welcoming social and sacred space we create in our classrooms can become the safe harbor in which children choose to unburden themselves. I remember one Sunday morning teaching First Day school when, as we did our check-ins, three of the children and I each had difficult news to report. Two of the children were twins and let the class know that their grandfather had died during the preceding week. One girl's parents had decided to divorce, and that same week her beloved childcare giver had been diagnosed with an advanced cancer, further destabilizing her world. I added into the mix the sorrow I felt at needing to put my father into a nursing home during the past week. Luckily, the lesson I had planned already lent itself to helping us hold and process our grief!

First Day school is an important part of our children's lives, and teachers

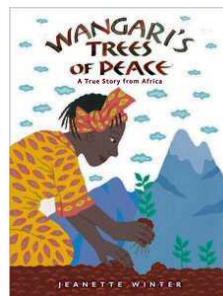
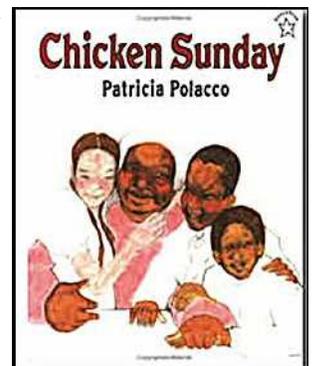
need to be ready to receive and respond to whatever issues or difficulties the children carry in the door with them. I have a strong concern—shared by the other authors of *Sparkling Still*—about the importance of helping First Day school teachers prepare themselves to offer explicit help for coping with hard issues. We selected some books for the curriculum that address such topics as bullying, damaging storms, violence, abuse, and loss, with step-by-step directions for crafting lessons.

After several occasions when unexpected pastoral care concerns arising in class left me surprised and scrambling, I've come to see these moments as gifts to us. Following are some of my favorite books for engaging with such tender issues. I like to establish our class as a place where it is OK to have this kind of conversation. I might string together all four topics addressed in these books under the umbrella of "Speaking Your Truth."



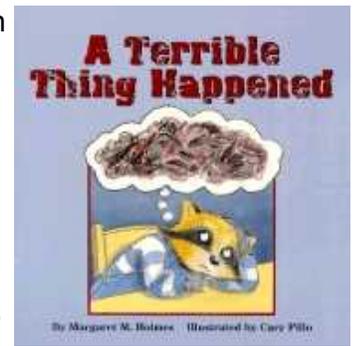
Children receive lots of education about bullying in school but very few chances to practice responding as a bystander—the most powerful person in a bullying dynamic. In [Say Something](#) by Peggy Moss, we see a girl learn firsthand how much it can help if a peer interrupts the intimidation with even a simple greeting, or better yet clear feedback that name calling and threats are not acceptable. *Say Something* is a wonderful jumping off point for role playing.

[Chicken Sunday](#) by Patricia Polacco gives us another lens through which to look at speaking our truth. The children go to the hat shop in their small town to inquire about ways they could earn money to buy a special Easter hat for Miss Eula. Older children rush by and throw eggs at the store. The proprietor is Jewish, and this scenario is familiar to him. The children are wrongfully accused of vandalism and are guided to correct the misunderstanding by Miss Eula. We see the warmth and possibility that spring from a mended relationship. One child's mother helps them make elaborate Pysanky Easter eggs, and the store owner lets them earn money for the Easter hat by selling the eggs in his store.



[Wangari's Trees of Peace: A True Story from Africa](#) by Jeannette Winter moves from the private to the public arena by exploring witness and action in the world. We meet Wangari as she grows up in Kenya and then returns from studies in the United States. She is shocked to see how many trees have been felled to make way for new construction. She begins to plant trees in her backyard and encourages other women to do the same. Men ridicule her and even put her in jail. In the end, her Green Belt movement plants over 30 million trees!

Finally, we could return to the deeply personal with [A Terrible Thing Happened](#) by Margaret M. Holmes. This book takes us into the feelings a child might have after witnessing something very upsetting or traumatic. We are never told what the terrible thing is but learn that troubling memories, sleep difficulties, lack of appetite, and stomach aches can be ways our bodies signal that something is the matter. The story reaches resolution as Sherman, the main character, is able to share his feelings with a trusted adult.



The four stories suggested above work best for ages 5-8, but we list many more helpful titles, including some for younger children, in *Sparkling Still*. I recommend giving parents advance notice of plans to open a conversation about hard topics in class. A word to the ministry and counsel committee or another group charged with pastoral care is wise, as well.

To acknowledge the role of First Day school in pastoral care among our youngest Friends only names what is already true. Teaching First Day school is a ministry and as such requires us to address the very real and often very tender situations in our children's lives.

In faith and joy,  
Beth Collea

## Pre-Order Sparkling Still at a Discount



[Sparkling Still](#) is a guide and support for First Day school teachers, written with the goal of making lesson planning easy for the inexperienced as well as the seasoned teacher. It folds in basic elements of teacher training and streamlines the whole lesson-planning process. Extensive booklists help make curriculum planning fun. A step-by-step Master Lesson Plan, blank lesson templates, and seven sample lessons give teachers a jump start. Units include the Bible and Quakerism, Testimonies, Worship, Sense of Self, and more.

[Pre-order](#) at \$11 from [QuakerBooks of FGC](#). (Print version will be \$12.50; a pdf download will also be offered for \$7.)

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