



*A Circle of Friends*

Written and Illustrated by Giora Carmi

Star Bright Books, 2003, 40 pp

ISBN: 9781932065008

At a time when empathy, caring, and gratitude are much needed, *A Circle of Friends* gives young readers a heartwarming visual narrative that shows how one child's act of kindness made a difference in the world. On the opening page of this story, author-illustrator Giora Carmi introduces the main character, a boy, thoughtfully looking outside his upstairs window. Carmi renders the boy's home, the window, and the nearby tree in pencil line drawings while portraying the boy himself in color. The boy's facial expression could be interpreted as wistful or wondering or even

bored. While the majority of the illustrations in this book are pencil drawings, the visual narrative is enhanced by Carmi's use of color to spotlight new information or the main ideas on each page. From the green money, to the muffin, its seeds, and the sunflower, visual readers will quickly pick up on the story components painted in color. This technique helps the youngest readers navigate the meaning in each new scene and follow the story line to a satisfying conclusion. There is only one printed word in the story, "bakery," so this book can easily be read and shared in any language.

The story begins when the boy's mother gives him money to spend. The boy goes to the bakery on the street level of their apartment building to buy a favorite treat—a sunflower-seed muffin. When he takes a large bite out of it, the boy notices a homeless man sleeping on a nearby park bench, his worldly possessions tied up in a bag. The child tucks the muffin, minus one bite, into the sleeping man's arms and runs home.

When the man awakens, he is amazed by this treasure. Carmi's closeup drawing of the man's wide smile and muffin stuffed cheek captures his delight. While eating the muffin, the man looks up and sees a nest in the tree. He scatters the muffin's sunflower seeds along the bench, and the parent birds swoop down and take seeds back to their nest to feed their fledgling.

The homeless man gives the baby bird yet another seed that he had saved in his pocket. The young bird takes the seed from the man's hand and deposits it in the flowerbox outside the boy's window. With the help of fertile soil and rain, the seed germinates. This circle story ends where it began—with the boy gazing out the window but this time, on a bright yellow sunflower with a sweet look of surprise on his face.

Whether or not this boy realizes the sunflower grew as the result of his gift of a muffin does not matter. The messages of empathy and caring ring true. The grateful homeless man and the boy's gratitude for the flower complete the circle of friendship that was set in motion by a simple recognition of someone else's need.

*A Circle of Friends* can be paired with other picturebook titles involving empathy, caring, and gratitude. Possible titles include: *We Are Grateful: Otsaliheliga* (Traci Sorell and Frané Lessac, 2018); *The Last Stop on Market Street* (Matt de la Peña and Christian Robinson, 2015); *Each Kindness* (Jacqueline Woodson and E. B. Lewis, 2012); *Good People Everywhere* (Lynea Gillen and Kristina Swarner, 2012); and *Ordinary Mary's Extraordinary Deed* (Emily Pearson and Fumi Kosaka, 2002). Also on the theme of empathy and caring, *The Invisible Boy* (Trudy Ludwig and Patrice Barton, 2013) offers the opposite visual experience in which Barton first sketches the main character Brian in faint black and white while rendering all of the other characters in vibrant color.

Other circle story picturebooks with similar themes can extend readers' enjoyment as well as their literacy learning: *I Am a Story* (Dan Yaccarino, 2016), *Miles of Smiles* (Karen Kaufman Orloff, 2016), *Miss Rumphius* (Barbara Cooney, 1985), and *Secrets I Know* (Kallie George and Paola Zakimi, 2017).

Author-illustrator Giora Carmi was born in Israel and immigrated to the United States in 1985. He has earned honorable mentions and awards from the Jerusalem International Book Fair, Simon Rockover Award, American Jewish Press Association, and a Sydney Taylor Book Award for his illustrations in *The Chanukkah Guest* written by Eric A. Kimmel.

Judi Moreillon, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign



WOW Review, Volume XII, Issue 4 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/volume-xii-issue-4/>