



Ten of the Best: Books to Introduce Children to their Human Rights

Article Author:

[Margaret Mallett](#) [1]

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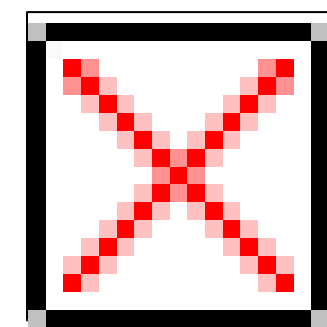
Ten of the Best

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Ten of the Best: books to get children thinking about human rights, a **Magna Carta** inspired list chosen by **Margaret Mallett**

As we prepare to celebrate the 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta, **Margaret Mallett** chooses ten books to start children thinking and talking about their human rights.

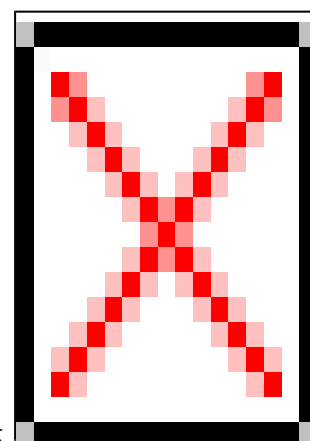
Although children's human rights are a serious issue, books introducing them to children need not be solemn. I have looked out for books which are invitingly illustrated, have a touch of humour and those which offer promising starting points for discussion.



Magnus Carter: A Fable About Justice and Liberty

Julian Warrender & Lyndsey Smith (Ill.), Hare and Heron Press (2015) 978-0-95747-302-7, £6.99 pbk, 5+

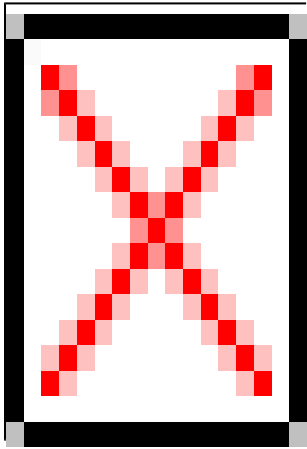
There are a number of good books introducing children to the story of the Magna Carta and the issues it raises. But I think this story about the efforts of a hard working little mole, Magnus Carter, to lead his fellow workers in a rebellion against unjust King Moldewarp is ideal for the very youngest children. It helps them begin to understand what being fair to everyone means, and they will be entertained by the little mole peeping out through a hole in the book cover.



King John and Magna Carta: A Ladybird Adventures from History book

L Du Garde Peach, Ladybird, 978 0-72329-402-3, £5.99 hbk, 7+

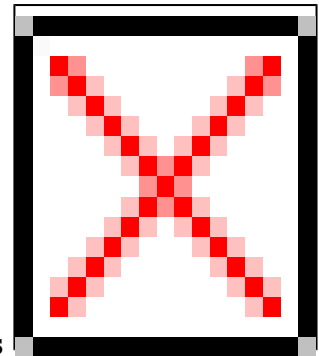
This new edition, brought out to mark 800 years since the Magna Carta was signed, tells the story from King John's point of view through a concise text and dramatic illustrations. The group of citizens, who challenged the absolute power of the monarch and demanded some rights, brought about a turning point in our history. A main point to emphasise is that this event led to our principles of liberty, democracy and the rule of law.



The Magna Carta Chronicle: A Young Person's Guide to 800 Years in the Fight for Freedom

Christopher Lloyd & Patrick Skipworth and Andy Forshaw (ill.), What on Earth Publishers, 978-0-99301-991-3, £8.99 pbk, 9+

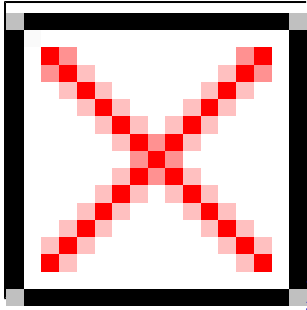
This comprehensive and imaginative book has great visual appeal with a range of illustrations including many that are hand drawn. The scope is wide: after beginning with King John's sealing of the Magna Carta, it charts key points in the fight for important freedoms to the present day. It includes newspaper articles, a wall chart and a timeline and would be a splendid resource for teachers and children to use at the upper end of the primary school and the lower end of the secondary school.



We Are All Born Free: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Pictures

Forewords by David Tennant and John Boyne, Frances Lincoln Children's Books, In Association with Amnesty International, 978-1-84507-650-4, £12.99 hbk, 7+ (All royalties from the sale of this book are donated to Amnesty International)

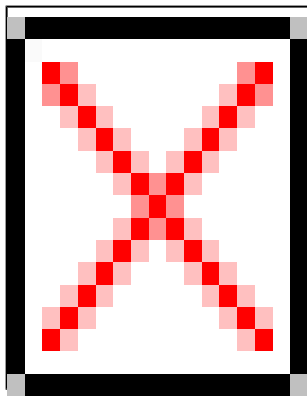
In this large and life affirming book, each of 30 human rights declarations is given a double spread illustration by a different illustrator. Many of the illustrations are by artists who have specialised in artwork for children's books, for example John Burningham, Brita Granström and Satoshi Kitamura. They vary tremendously in style and approach and, while often amusing, each one would be a good focus for children and teacher to talk about important issues. The book reinforces the powerful aim that these rights – including those to do with being protected by the law, believing in what we wish and living in freedom and safety – should belong to everybody, whatever our differences?.



[I Have the Right to Be a Child](#) [3]

Alain Serres & Aurelia Fronty (ill.) & Sarah Ardizzone (translator), Phoenix Yard Books, 2012, 978- 1-90791-211-3, £7.99 pbk, 9+

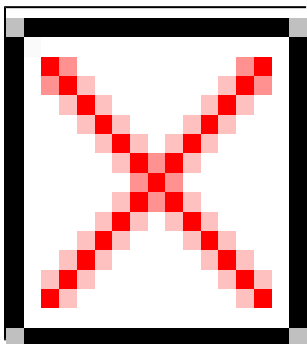
Fifty-four articles were drawn up by the **United Nations** at the **Convention on the Rights of the Child** in 1989 and signed by 193 nations. But many children across the world still lack basic entitlements, for example nourishing food, shelter, education and safety from conflict. This book, endorsed by Amnesty, aims to be constructive and positive and explains what we should aspire to. Its global reach, encompassing children from many parts of the world, is evident in the imaginative illustrations. Any adult reading this with children would have a significant role in clarifying issues and orchestrating discussion.



[Welcome to the Family](#) [4]

Mary Hoffman and Ros Asquith (ill.), Frances Lincoln, 978-1-84780-461-7. £11.99 hbk, 4+

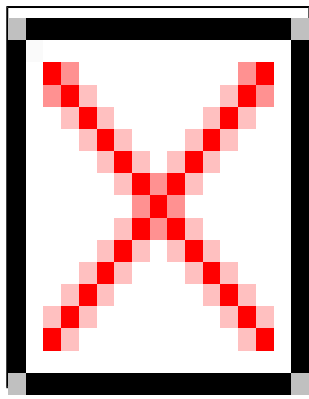
Writers and illustrators of children's books have tended to show us life in a traditional family. This book helps redress the balance by showing nuclear families, families with same sex parents, foster families and 'blended' families. This book helps children feel comfortable with whatever kind of family they belong to. The important thing is that they are happy and well cared for.



[What Are You Playing At?](#)

Marie-Sabine Roger and Anne Sol (ill.), Alanna Books, 978-1-90782-502-6, £12.99 hbk, 7+

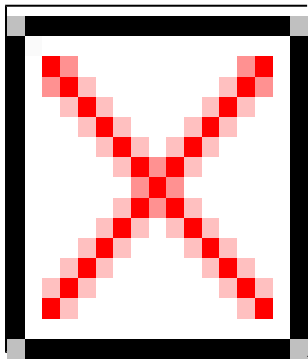
Here is a playful book that makes the point that your gender shouldn't limit what you do. Each double spread has a large print statement, for example 'Boys don't play in kitchens' and 'Girls do not play with cars' and then a large flap opens to show a picture that contradicts the statement: we see a male chef in the kitchen and a female driver in a crash helmet racing a car. This would be a good starting point for projects looking at the mismatch between toys and clothes assumed to be appropriate for each gender (often fed by marketing) and what individual children actually prefer.



Amazing Grace

Mary Hoffman & Caroline Binch (ill.), Frances Lincoln, 978-1-84507-749-5, £5.99 pbk, 6+

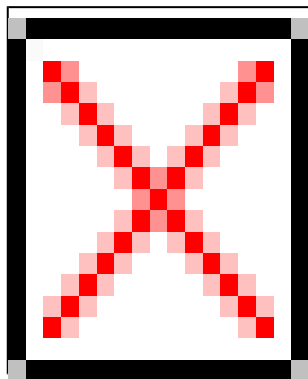
When the other children say Grace cannot be Peter Pan in the school performance because she is a girl and black she determines to prove them wrong. Her mother and grandmother, both good role models, help her challenge gender and racial stereotyping. This book reminds us that a story is sometimes the best way to reflect on important issues.



Made by Raffi

Craig Pomranz & Margaret Chamberlain (ill.), Frances Lincoln, 978-1-84780-596-6, £12.99 hbk, 5+

Raffi is shy and does not like noisy games. He is a kind boy and makes a scarf for his father's birthday. But he is teased about his liking for sewing and knitting. Things improve dramatically when he makes a cloak for the prince in the school pageant. The other children now perceive him in a positive light and everyone wants something 'made by Raffi'. The book has a light touch but it emphasises the right to be different. And it encourages children to put themselves in someone else's shoes and to understand how teasing, which can be a form of bullying, can make someone sad.



Let's Talk About Where Babies Come From

Robie H Harris and Michael Emberley (ill.), Walker Books, 978-1-40635-786-8, £11.99 pbk, 8+

This non judgemental book is a family resource to be shared, and perhaps used in response to children's questions. Children have a right to know about their bodies and about reproduction and this book provides detailed information. Some of the topics covered may not be suitable for children at the younger end of the recommended age range to read on their own. There is a valuable chapter, chapter 19, entitled 'OK Touches' ? 'Not OK Touches' which could be a helpful starting point for discussion about keeping safe.

Margaret Mallett taught in primary schools and in the Education Department of Goldsmiths College. She writes books on all aspects of Primary English and is Emeritus Fellow of **The English Association**.

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