

**Annotated Bibliography for Children’s Literature**  
**Connections to Me to We Themes**  
**Suitable for use in Elementary Classrooms**

1. **Whoever You Are** (empathy)  
By Mem Fox. 1997. Harcourt, Brace & Company. Florida

This beautiful picture book presents the message that children all over the world have similar hearts, emotions and dreams despite differences of geography, race or religion. This could be a great help in opening the discussion of similarities among human beings in their basic needs and wants.

2. **Fly Away Home** (community)  
By Eve Bunting. 1991. Houghton Mifflin Company. New York.

A young boy describes life with his father in an airport—how they live undetected and meet their basic needs. The story presents a child and father’s emotional responses to homelessness. It provides an example of how homeless families try to survive and meet basic needs, as well as a unique sense of community eked out of challenging circumstances.

3. **Sam and the Lucky Money** (compassion, kindness)  
By Karen Chinn. 1995. Lee & Low Books Inc. New York.

Sam wants to spend his Chinese New Year’s money gift. After looking at many expensive or unnecessary items, he chooses to donate the money to a homeless man in need of shoes. Since it is a small amount, Sam tells the man it might not be enough for him to buy shoes but it might pay for some warm socks. *Sam and the Lucky Money* illustrates children’s natural desires to consume, but also, their ability to make a big difference in the world even with small contributions

4. **The Rag Coat** (community, happiness)  
By Lauren Mills. 1991. Little Brown and Co. Singapore

This is the story of a girl in the Appalachian Mountains whose family could not afford to send her to school. When the girl is finally able to attend school, she realizes that she doesn’t have a coat to wear. Women in the community worked together and sewed a coat for the girl with leftover pieces of cloth, but its ragged appearance was mocked by her new classmates. This book provides an opportunity for children to explore multiple points of view, and the tendency for people to misjudge those who live in poverty.

5. **The Lady in the Box** (compassion)  
By Ann McGovern. 1997. Turtle Books. New York.

Two sisters discover a homeless woman living near their home in the winter. Concerned about her ability to survive the cold weather, the girls secretly take items from their home

to give to her. They finally tell their mother about the humanitarian scheme and she joins her daughters in befriending the homeless woman. The book provides insight into the North American experience of poverty. Children are presented as problem-solvers who can take small actions to help eradicate large issues.

6. **It's Okay to be Different** (empathy development)  
By Todd Parr. 2001. Little Brown and Co. Singapore.

This colourful book presents physical differences to young children (aged three to six) in a funny and appealing way. It can be a great way to start a conversation about how people may have visible differences but are similar in other ways. There is also a nice segue to the book *Whoever You Are* by Mem Fox.

7. **Love You Forever** (love, interdependence)  
By Robert Munch. 1986. Firefly Books. Canada/U.S.A.

This is one of the best-selling books in Canadian history. It is a beautiful story of love between parent and child, and how the cycle of love and commitment comes full circle as the child takes on a caretaking role of the parent as they age.

8. **Something Beautiful** (happiness, community)  
By Sharon Dennis Wyeth. 1998. Bantam Double Day. New York

Living in a poor neighbourhood, a young girl is discouraged by the litter, graffiti and homelessness of her community. She visits with people in her neighbourhood to try to understand beauty. Each neighbour tries to show her that beauty is what you already have, rather than something that you lack. She decides to take action and begins to clean graffiti off of her apartment door. This book could be inspirational for children living in conditions of poverty.

9. **A Chair For My Mother** (community, happiness)  
By Vera B. Williams. 1982. Greenwillow Books. New York.

After losing all of their possessions in a fire, a young girl and her mother are helped by friends and relatives to rebuild their lives. Hoping to purchase one new piece of furniture, the pair begins to save money in a jar. When they have enough money, they purchase a chair that they can share. This book demonstrates the resilience of people to overcome a crisis and the power of community to reach out to help others in need.

10. **Edward the "Crazy Man"** (compassion, kindness, happiness)  
By Marie Day. 2002. Annick Press. Toronto.

This is the story of a boy named Charlie who helps an eccentric homeless man. The homeless man saves the boy from being hit by a car, only to disappear moments later. As an adult, Charlie still thinks about the homeless man and tries to find him. He is eventually successful in finding his unsung hero, and offers the man a job. We learn that

the “crazy” homeless man is actually suffering from schizophrenia. This is a gentle story which introduces the idea of societal prejudices toward the homeless, and shows how kindness can change the lives of the needy as well as those who help them.

11. **Mr. Lincoln’s Way** (happiness through helping others)  
By Patricia Polacco. 2001. Philomel Books. New York.

This is the story of a school principal who reaches out to a discouraged bully. He discovers that the boy has an interest in birds and puts him in charge of the school’s avian atrium. While taking care of the birds, the boy learns to appreciate his own self-worth and his relationships with classmates begin to change. This book shows how kindness, self-esteem and a new sense of purpose can turn discouraged students around.

12. **I Can Make a Difference – a Treasury to Inspire Our Children**  
By Marian Wright Edelman. 2005. HarperCollins Publishers. New York.

(gratitude, kindness, helping others)

This is a collection of quotations, poetry and stories from around the world with themes of helping others, perseverance, peace and courage. Different world references are presented with common believe statements to help others, be kind and show gratitude for what we have.

13. **If The World Were A Village** (global community)  
By David J. Smith. 2002. Kids Can Press. Toronto.

This book presents statistics of the world’s six billion people through the microcosm of a village of 100 people. It makes numbers and statistics easier to understand and covers nationalities, languages, age, religion, sanitation, energy, education and access to clean air and water. The author gives a list of suggestions on teaching children about the global village.

14. **The Quilt Makers Gift** (happiness)  
Jeff Brumbeau. 2000. Pfeifer-Hamilton Inc. Minnesota.

This beautifully illustrated book is about a quilt maker who donates her handmade quilts to the poor. She agrees to make a quilt for a greedy king with the condition that he gives away all his possessions. As he starts to give things away, he undergoes a change of heart and discovers a new sense of happiness by helping others.

15. **Series of five books: Do Something in Your Family, Do Something in Your Community, Do Something in Your City, Do Something in Your Country, Do Something in Your World** (community service)  
By Amanda Rondeau. 2004. ABDO Publishing. Minnesota

This series provides ideas on how young children can help others. It gives examples of how people help others in their jobs, and small ways regular people can help.

**16. Circle of Thanks**

**(gratitude, community)**

By Susi Gregg Fowler 1998. Scholastic Press. New York.

This story takes place in the Alaskan tundra where a boy and his mother witness an otter pup fall into deep water. The boy's mother rescues the pup—a conscientious act that starts a cycle of helping by a series of animals. It shows how one act of kindness can have positive affects on many others.

**17. The People Who Hugged the Trees**

**(community, happiness)**

Adapted by Deborah Lee Rose. 1980. Roberts Rinehart, Inc. Colorado

Based on an Indian folktale, this is a story of how trees protect people from the heat and wind in the desert weather. A powerful prince decides all the trees must be cut down to build his new fortress, but a brave girl wraps her arms around a tree and persuades the prince to stopping the clear cutting.

**18. Journey Through Heartsongs.**

**(peace/hope)**

By Mattie J.T. Stepanek. 2001. Hyperion books. New York.

This book is an inspirational collection of the poems of Mattie Stepanek, a young boy who is deeply positive and wise despite his youth and struggle with muscular dystrophy. Stepanek began writing poetry when he was only three years old, and his work has appeared in many American newspapers and magazines, and on television.

**19. The Birdman**

**(kindness)**

By Veronika Martenova Charles.2006. Tundra Books. Toronto and New York.

This is the true story of a man from Calcutta who lost his wife and children in a tragic accident. He was overwhelmed with grief until one day when he sees cages of birds in a market and realizes that nothing will bring his family back, but at least he can help these small creatures. In buying, rehabilitating and freeing the birds, he is able to overcome his grief and live again. He later becomes known as the “birdman of Calcutta.”