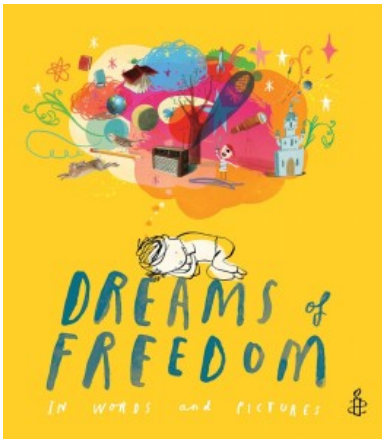


## Dreams of freedom for our youngest citizens

By Susan Ramsay, Early Literacy Specialist

Canada's recent federal election changed the political landscape of our nation overnight and just a few days later Prime Minister Stephen Harper and prime minister-designate Justin Trudeau stood shoulder to shoulder to lay a wreath in remembrance of two soldiers slain last October. The ability to change government in our country was achieved with remarkable peacefulness. In Canada we expect that to be so. And it is. Yet our enviable democratic process exists and persists because of the values and vigilance of Canadians, many of whom have given their lives for it in times of war. Remembrance Day is more than a single day. It is woven into the fabric of our identity.

In her picture book, *In Flanders Fields: The Story of the Poem* by John McCrae, Linda Granfield captures this well-loved poem for children. The pictures and format of the book offer young children time to imagine a past they did not live through, and the opportunity to reflect about the sacrifice of soldiers in the First World War.



But even if children begin to grasp an historical perspective about war, the complexity of why people and nations go to war is challenging to explain. Freedom is not a simple concept. Without respect for others, for example, individual or political freedom can turn into tyranny. Freedom is an abstract idea that has to be examined and questioned before it can be understood, especially among children who developmentally think in concrete ways.

*Dreams of Freedom*, published in 2015 in association with Amnesty International, is a beautiful picture book for children. The book shares quotes from champions of freedom, such as Nelson Mandela, Anne Frank, Malala Yousafzai, Chief Standing Bear, with interpretations of their words expressed by various artists throughout the world. The illustrations on each page are engaging for preschoolers through their use of colour and detail. For children who are a little older, the pictures provoke thought and suggest how freedom can be discussed with children in ways that relate to their lives. The book could be shared by looking only at a two-page spread focused on one depiction of freedom. By letting children choose the picture or idea that captivates them the most, we discover how our children are ready to explore and talk about freedom. Of course the book could also be shared by reading it page by page from beginning to end. The final pages of the book include brief biographies of the authors and illustrators. This will be of interest to older children wanting deeper knowledge about writers, artists, and history.

In the forward of this book Michael Morpurgo, author and former Children's Laureate, writes "Dreams of Freedom is a feast of visual stories, brave words and beautiful pictures, woven together to inspire young readers to stand up for others and to make a difference. It gives me great hope for the freedom of future generations."