



Teaching Diversity with a Color Wheel

By Ann Jackowitz

A children's book tackles prejudice through art.

"Once upon a time there was a color named Red that was full of itself."

So begins *The Best Colors*, by writer and artist Barbara Taff, a new, whimsical book for children of all ages, destined, in my view, to become a popular classic.

The Best Colors succeeds on many levels: it's an art book about color mixing; it's an adventure story that pokes fun at egotism, prejudice, and rivalry; and it's a psychological study that examines and questions innate and acculturated traits, attitudes, and values. For educators, it is a dynamic teaching tool illustrated with zany, genderless characters, each with a color, style, and personality all its own. As they vie to see who is the best, the color-differentiated characters develop relationships with one another and, in the process, learn about diversity and teamwork.

Red, the bold, claims itself as the best. Then along comes Yellow, the enlightened, who clearly disagrees. Blue, the aristocrat, imperially informs the other colors that they are both misguided, since Blue is clearly, well, blue-blooded. A fight ensues. Red and Yellow bump noses, and, to the characters' utter amazement, Orange appears. All three primary colors are in shock: Just where did this stranger come from?

The story continues in this lighthearted and spirited manner as Yellow, Blue, and Red become friends, and out of their friendship, like a miraculous color wheel, in addition to Orange, Green and Purple emerge.

The Best Colors gently and humorously encourages teamwork over individual competition, and can aid teachers in starting conversations with children about differences and how to resolve them. Asked how the book came about, Taff said, "As a child, I experienced religious prejudice, and it's been a lifelong personal mission to do what I can to stand up against social injustice of any kind."

The Best Colors is available on Kindle and in print at amazon.com, barnesandnoble.com, and Ingram, the distributor for independent bookstores. Taff can be contacted on her website, www.thebestcolors.com.

