

## Teaching the Book

Zen is a Japanese word that simply means meditation. “Zen shorts” are short meditations—ideas to puzzle over. Jon J. Muth’s remarkable book provides the opportunity to teach students to apply the valuable lessons from the story to their own lives—and to also see relationships between the illustrations and the story. Activities engage students in retelling the stories, watching webcams and videos about pandas, and writing a note to Stillwater, the Zen panda.

**Theme Focus:** Picture Book

**Comprehension Focus:** Relationship Between Illustrations and Story

**Language Focus:** Feeling Words

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jon J. Muth’s highly acclaimed picture books are beloved around the world and have been translated into more than twelve languages. He was raised in Ohio where he drew and drew and drew, and painted. His mother, an art teacher, took him to museums all over the U.S. He studied stone sculpture in Japan; paintings, prints, and drawings in Austria, Germany, and England; and he was an English major at SUNY New Paltz.

“My work in children’s books really grew out of a desire to explore what I was feeling as a new father,” states Muth. “I was working in comics and that is a natural forum for expressions of angst and questioning one’s place in the universe. When the children came it became important to say other things about the world.” All of Muth’s work has received awards and critical acclaim. *Zen Shorts* was named a Caldecott Honor Book and spent 41 weeks on the *New York Times* Best Seller List. Muth lives in upstate New York with his wife and four children, where he spends time “chasing the clouds from his brushes.”

### BOOK STATS

Grade Level Equivalent: 1–3

Ages: 6–9

Lexile Measure®: 540L

Pages: 40

Genre: Picture Book

Subject/Theme: Kindness, Charity, Understanding Self

Common Core State Standards	Reading	Writing	Listening & Speaking	Language
Grade 1	RL.1.1, RL.1.2, RL.1.3, RL.1.4, RL.1.7	W.1.3	SL.1.1, SL.1.2, SL.1.5	L.1.4, L.1.5
Grade 2	RL.2.1, RL.2.2, RL.2.3, RL.2.4, RL.2.7	W.2.3	SL.2.1, SL.2.2, SL.2.5	L.2.4, L.2.5
Grade 3	RL.3.1, RL.3.2, RL.3.3, RL.3.4, RL.3.7	W.3.3	SL.3.1, SL.3.2, SL.3.5	L.3.4, L.3.5

## OVERVIEW

### Book Summary

One day, a giant panda named Stillwater lands in the backyard of Addy, Michael, and Karl’s house. The panda and children all introduce themselves and become friends.

The next day, Addy goes to visit Stillwater at his house just a few backyards away. Stillwater shares a cake and a story with her. This story is about Stillwater’s Uncle Ry, a poor man who is visited by a robber. Uncle Ry gives the robber his old tattered robe—the only thing he owns. But Uncle Ry is sad—if only he could have given more! The things that he treasures most are generosity and the beauty of the moon.

The next day, Michael goes to see Stillwater and hears the story of “The Farmer’s Luck.” The farmer has bad luck that turns out to be good luck. Then he has good luck that turns out to be bad luck. Michael learns that luck is random and cannot be judged or predicted.

The day after, Karl visits Stillwater. He is carrying a load of anger with him. Karl is angry that Michael always tells him what to do. Through the story of “A Heavy Load,” Karl learns the importance of letting go of anger because it gets in the way of enjoying the moment.

And this is how Addy, Micheal, Karl—and Stillwater—became friends.

This book is not paginated. The first page of the story in the e-book is considered page 1 for page reference purposes.

# Get Ready to Read

## Pre-Reading Activities

**Lessons from Stillwater** Tell students that they will read a book about a giant panda named Stillwater. Stillwater tells stories about people who feel and act in different ways than most of us do. Draw a concept map on a whiteboard or chart paper and write the word “Feelings” in the middle. Then add the word “angry” to the map. Ask students what makes them angry. How do they feel when they are angry? Do they think anger is a good thing or a bad thing? Why? Next, add the word “sharing” to the map. Ask students to describe times when they shared something. How does sharing make them feel? Do they think sharing is a good thing? Why? Ask students to think about their own feelings while reading Stillwater’s stories.

**Preview and Predict** Ask students to read the title of the book and the author and illustrator’s name. Then ask them to study the cover illustration. What is happening in the picture? Who might the bear be?

## Vocabulary

**Feeling Words** Introduce students to these words from the book that describe feelings. Ask them to watch for the vocabulary words as they read. Tell students to use clues in the pictures to help them figure out what the words mean.

Use **Resource #1: Vocabulary Cards** on page 7 and distribute copies to students.

shy	sorry
careful	impatient
selfish	angry

## STORIA ENRICHMENTS

This Storia e-book has the following enrichments to enhance students’ comprehension of the book.

- Picture Starter
- Multiple Choice Text (2)
- Multiple Choice Pictures (2)
- Touch the Page
- Scratch & See
- Jigsaw Puzzle
- Sequencing



## BIG QUESTION

**Critical Thinking** Ask students to think about this question as they read. Write the question on chart paper or the whiteboard.

**What does Stillwater teach you?**



## As You Read

### Reading the Book

**Read-Aloud** Read the book aloud with fluency and expression. Have students follow along in their own books, looking carefully at each illustration as you read a page. Ask students to connect what they hear in the story to what they see in the pictures.

**Shared Reading** Reread the book and ask students to read their copies at the same time. Cue them to read aloud certain words and phrases that you omit from your reading. If students are able, encourage them to read the text aloud along with you.

### Comprehension Focus

**Relationship Between Illustrations and Story** The text and the illustrations in *Zen Shorts* both play an important role in the stories and in young students' ability to comprehend them. Help students understand how to make connections between the characters and events described in words and the characters and events shown in pictures. Project pages 4 and 5 on a whiteboard or screen and model for students how to connect the text with the illustrations.

**Model:** First, I'm going to read the text of the story again. [Read text on pages 4 and 5.] Now I'll take a close look at the pictures. I see a giant black and white panda. That must be Stillwater. And, look, he is holding his red umbrella. Addy must be the girl with blonde hair. Michael is the older boy. The younger boy must be Karl because he looks shy.

Continue to discuss the relationship between the illustrations and the text with students. Use the questions on **Resource #2: Relationship Between Illustrations and Story** to prompt students to make more connections. Also discuss with students the concluding questions that help them apply the stories to their own lives.

## After You Read

### Questions to Discuss

Lead students in a discussion of these focus story elements.

**1. Picture Book** How is this picture book different from a book about real pandas? Do you wish Stillwater could be real? (*Sample answers: The illustrations show a make-believe story. Real pandas don't carry umbrellas and visit children in their backyards.*)

**2. Relationship Between Illustrations and Story** Look at the last page in the book. How has Karl come into the room? How do Karl and Michael feel toward each other? How has Stillwater helped Karl? (*Sample answers: Stillwater lifts Karl into the house. Karl and Michael are friends again. Stillwater helps Karl see that he shouldn't carry his anger anymore.*)

**3. Feeling Words** How do you feel about Stillwater? Use words that describe your feelings for him. (*Sample answers: nice, wise, kind, lovable.*)

## WORDS TO KNOW

### Feeling Words

Have students cut apart their vocabulary cards. Read aloud each sentence below. Ask students to hold up the vocabulary word that fits the meaning of the sentence. Ask students to say the word and tell what it means.

1. Karl felt this way around bears he didn't know. (*shy*)
2. Michael had to act this way when he climbed the high tree. (*careful*)
3. Karl felt this way because Michael told him what to do. (*angry*)
4. Karl told Stillwater he felt this way about bringing so many swim things. (*sorry*)
5. The rich young woman felt this way about getting across the puddles. (*impatient*)
6. The young monk said he thought the woman was rude and \_\_\_\_\_. (*selfish*)

Next, have students mix up their vocabulary cards, choose one, and share a time when they have felt or acted this way.



## Questions to Share

Encourage students to share their responses with a partner or small group.

- 1. Text-to-Self** What did you learn from one of Stillwater's stories?
- 2. Text-to-World** Do you think most people in the world act like Uncle Ry? Do you wish they would?
- 3. Text-to-Text** What do the illustrations that show Stillwater and the children look like? How do the illustrations in the book change when Stillwater is telling a story? Which kind of illustrations do you like better?

## Extension Activities

### Reading/Writing Connection

**Retell a Story** Stillwater tells the children three different stories. Ask students to choose their favorite story to retell. Reread the three stories aloud—"Uncle Ry and the Moon," "The Farmer's Luck," and

"A Heavy Load"—one at a time. Then, ask students to use the illustrations to retell what happens in the stories. Provide any necessary prompting and support by asking questions like, "What happens next?" or by pointing to an illustration. Encourage students to retell their story again to a partner, adding more details.

Don't forget the



## BIG QUESTION

**Critical Thinking** Give each student a turn to answer the big question. Encourage students to give examples from the story or their own lives to support their answers.

**What does Stillwater teach you?**

## Content Area Connections

**Animals Panda Cams and Videos** After reading about Stillwater, the giant panda, students will be curious to see real pandas in action. The San Diego Zoo Kids website provides a fun and informative view of the pandas in the zoo through webcams, photographs, and videos. To share these with students, visit: <http://bit.ly/117e9eo>.

**Art Panda Drawings** Encourage students to draw their own pictures of Stillwater, the panda. Provide various art supplies like a brush and paints, crayons, and markers. Ask students to study the pictures of Stillwater carefully to make sure they color his markings correctly. Discuss what parts of a panda are black—ears, eyes, arms, legs—and what parts are white—head and body. Create a panda gallery with their drawings.

**Math My Japanese Counting Book** Students can practice counting while they learn to make the Japanese symbols for the numbers one through ten. Visit the Scholastic website to find instructions for a Japanese Counting mini-book: <http://bit.ly/TjC05f>.

**Science Still Water/Angry Water** In his Author's Note, Jon J. Muth explains why he named the panda Stillwater. "When you look into a pool of water, if the water is still, you can see the moon reflected. If the water is agitated, the moon is fragmented and scattered." Help students understand the symbolism of Stillwater by putting a mirror at the bottom of a basin of water. Ask them to look at themselves when the water is still . . . and then again when it is agitated. When can they see themselves most clearly?

## BIG ACTIVITY

**Dear Stillwater** Explain to students that they will write a letter to Stillwater. Suggest that they tell the panda a story about themselves, ask Stillwater for advice, or tell him what they like about his stories. Pass out the **Big Activity: Dear Stillwater** for students to complete. Model for students the kind of note you would write to Stillwater. Guide students to spell words phonetically, drawing on knowledge of sound-letter relationships. Provide support when necessary. For students lacking knowledge of sound-letter relationships, have them dictate their note to you.

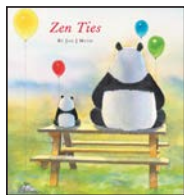
## BIG ACTIVITY: Dear Stillwater

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# READ MORE AND LEARN MORE

Use these books and other resources to expand your students' study of the book or theme.

## Author Connections



### Zen Ties

*Jon J. Muth*

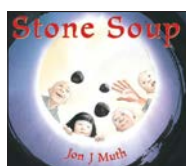
**Ages:** 6–9

**Grades:** 1–3

**Lexile Measure®:** 460L **Pages:** 40

Stillwater, the thoughtful giant panda, is back! This time he's welcoming his haiku-speaking nephew, Koo, for a summertime visit. Soon the pandas are enjoying tea and playtime in the park with Stillwater's human friends. But there's another friend Stillwater would like to visit: Miss Whitaker, a sickly, elderly, and very grouchy neighbor. The children aren't happy. But the wise panda knows how things seem are not always how they are.

**Available as a Stora e-book**



### Stone Soup

*Jon J. Muth*

**Ages:** 5–9

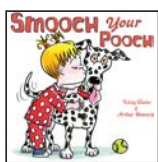
**Grades:** K–3

**Lexile Measure®:** 480L **Pages:** 32

**Guided Reading Level:** M

Three strangers arrive in a war-torn Chinese village and slowly convince the reluctant and distrustful townspeople to come together, create something from nothing, share a feast, and finally discover that the secret to happiness lies in the transforming magic of generosity. This wise and compelling fable reminds readers that happiness comes from kindness and sharing. **Available as a Stora e-book**

## Theme Connections



### Smooch Your Pooch

*Teddy Slater*

**Ages:** 4–8

**Grades:** PreK–2

**Lexile Measure®:** AD500L **Pages:** 32

There are so many wonderful things you can do for the four-legged friend who's so loyal to you. Funny and sweet, this rhyming ode to dogs reminds us to show our love every day—in small ways, in silly ways, in soft and warm and wise ways. The cartoon illustrations, in black line and watercolors, pair perfectly with the text in their movement and energy and are sure to cause many giggles.

**Available as a Stora e-book**



### Duck on a Bike

*David Shannon*

**Ages:** 4–8

**Grades:** PreK–2

**Lexile Measure®:** AD240L **Pages:** 96

**Guided Reading Level:** H

Award-winning author and illustrator David Shannon charms young audiences with this richly illustrated quack-up tale of a duck who creates all kinds of hilarious mishaps. The chicken rides a tricycle, the pigs hop on a bicycle built for two, the goat munches on his bike's basket, and a tiny mouse rides on Duck's handlebars. The text and illustrations will leave young readers laughing.

**Available as a Stora e-book**



### Wings

*Christopher Myers*

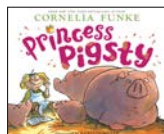
**Ages:** 4–9

**Grades:** K–4

**Lexile Measure®:** AD400L **Pages:** 40

**Guided Reading Level:** O

When Ikarus Jackson comes to school, everyone stares at the giant wings growing from his back. Unfortunately, rather than being celebrated because he can fly, Ikarus is treated like a total outcast. Finally, sick of being rejected, he puts himself in great danger—until some kind words from the one girl who thinks his wings are beautiful help him soar once again. **Available as a Stora e-book**



### Princess Pigsty

*Cornelia Funke*

**Ages:** 4–7

**Grades:** PreK–2

**Lexile Measure®:** AD760 **Pages:** 40

Bored with being a pampered princess, Isabella would rather be climbing trees, picking her nose, and getting dirty. She casts her crown into the fishpond, and when she refuses to retrieve it, her father orders her to work in the pigsty as punishment. Isabella likes the work and won't even put on a dress or comb her hair. Finally, the king tells his daughter she can do as she likes—as long as she returns home, where she is really missed! **Available as a Stora e-book**

To find PDF versions of the Stora teacher guides and links to purchase the related books, visit:

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/ereading-resources/>

**shy**

**careful**

**angry**

**sorry**

**impatient**

**selfish**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **RESOURCE #2:** Relationship Between Illustrations and Story

Consider these questions as you make connections between the illustrations and text.

### **"Uncle Ry and the Moon"**

Page 10

- Point to the robber in the picture. What kind of animal is the robber?
- Point to Uncle Ry in the picture.

Page 11

- What are Uncle Ry and the robber doing in the picture? How does the robber feel?

Page 12

- Where is the robber in the picture? What is he doing?

Page 13

- What is Uncle Ry doing? What is he thinking?

**What did the story teach you about being generous? When have you given someone something that made you feel happy?**



### **"The Farmer's Luck"**

Page 20

- Point to the old farmer in the picture.
- Show where the horse is running away.
- What is happening in the middle picture?
- What character is falling off the horse in the bottom picture?

Page 21

- Point to the military officials who have come to draft young men into the army.
- What happens because the son has broken his leg?
- What is the son doing in the last picture?

### **"A Heavy Load"**

**Reread the story. Then ask students to discuss the characters shown on the four pages and the events that are happening**

**How do you feel when you are angry? When do you start to feel better?**