



Zen Ties

Jon J. Muth

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*Summer fading
new friends' faces
lighten the way home.*

Summer has arrived — and so has Koo, Stillwater the Panda's haiku-speaking young nephew. When Stillwater encourages Koo and their friends Addy, Michael, and Karl to help a grouchy neighbor in need, their efforts are rewarded in unexpected ways.

Jon J. Muth's warm, engaging story and his luminous watercolors are as fresh and magical as a summer breeze. Readers of all ages will be disarmed by this tale of compassion and friendship that reaffirms the importance of our ties to one another.

Zen Ties Details

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Author : Jon J. Muth

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From Reader Review Zen Ties for online ebook

Danielle Mootz says

Super sweet story about friendship and helping each other out.

Sunhi says

Oh, man, oh, man! I've read this book sooooo many times. My son is obsessed with this book. "Read me the daddy and baby panda bear book!" I think I could recite this book from memory and, yet, I still like it.

Though my son, age 2, would insist differently, this is the story of Stillwater the panda, his nephew Koo, his three young friends, and an elderly lady who they all befriend. There is much wordplay that goes on in the book, and even with the title of the book. My husband was reading it out loud to my son when he said, "Oh! Hi, Koo! Haiku!" and I laughed that he had only got that on the second reading. Where as, tonight, after fifteen hundred readings of it, I realized that Koo calls a gift of balloons uplifting, and I laughed again.

There's many a theme in this book that is fun to point out to a child so that they can spot it themselves. For instance, I pointed out in one picture that everyone in it was wearing red ties and now he excitedly points out the fact to me when we read! Additionally, I've tried to get him to point out all the apples in the book to me because I know he can be more observant than I and he's surprised me several times.

I hope that the greater theme of the book, ties within a community strengthen each member of the community, sticks with my son as well. And now, off to buy this book which I got on loan from the library. Because if one little boy in my house doesn't have this to read, I think he might call for my head on a platter.

Reviewed at: <http://sunhibooks.blogspot.com/2011/0...>

Sh3llraiser (grumpybookgrrrl) says

I just read this to my daughter at bedtime and thought it was a great little book. Stillwater is to pandas what Clifford is to big red dogs.

It's got several great messages about being kind to your elderly neighbors, being helpful, overcoming anxiety in school, and there's even haiku!

Kathy says

This is a cute book. I love that they met and befriended an elderly neighbor who seemed grouchy. Great lesson for kids.

Vivek Tejuja says

For those who have still not experienced the Zen Series by Jon J Muth, I guess this is the best time to. Also, might I add, that you are very lucky to have not encountered them yet, because they are wondrous and heartwarming at the same time and you are in for a treat.

The books are not really children's books according to me – their lessons are meant for all and these are things that perhaps we already know of, but do not take the time to ponder or act on. May be that is the biggest problem of our age – just sitting and wondering and doing nothing about things.

Jon J Muth's series starts with Zen Shorts, where Michael, Karl and Addy discover a giant panda in their backyard and then the Panda starts telling them stories – Zen stories. His name is Stillwater (kinda obvious). The book is wonderful.

The watercolour illustrations and the stories go so good together that it feels like you are in a dreamland or something. Zen Shorts was followed by Zen Ties, Ghosts and the latest one was Zen Socks.

The series of these books is something else. I think it rings so true is because it is inspired from life – it is what we go through and live every single day, may be that's why I was able to connect with them the way I did. The writing is simple and more characters get added as you move along the books – there are so many lessons in these books but they do not sound preachy even once. It is all about living and finding it out for yourself. These 4 books, Zen Shorts, Zen Ties, Zen Ghosts and Zen Socks will leave with with a big smile on your face and maybe even some wisdom.

Manybooks says

The one term that comes to my mind when I read Jon J. Muth's Zen Ties that it is "deceptively simple." On the surface, it is simply a sweet story of friendship, one that even the youngest children will easily enjoy and understand. But beneath the seeming simplicity of the narrative, there are not only delightful haikus and plays on words, there also exist sparkling flashes of wisdom and philosophy. For example, when Miss Whitaker talks about the roots of words, one can see that these roots are not only important for words and plants, as she mentions, but also that real friendships require strong roots as well, and that these roots must be nurtured and studied in order for them to flourish. Zen Ties is therefore a book I would recommend for both adults and children, a wonderful collection of sweetness and wisdom, where both joy and sadness, delight and seriousness are presented in small, enjoyable and easily digested portions (sweet, satisfying and enlightening all at once).

I have to admit that I was not and am not all that keen on some of the accompanying illustrations. I think that for the most part, they do work well enough with the presented text, and I do love the way Jon J, Muth depicts/paints landscapes and buildings. Personally though, I find the illustrations of the pandas, especially some of the larger depictions of Stillwater, a bit overbearing, even potentially frightening (I think if I had had Zen Ties read to me when I was a child, I might have found Stillwater a bit creepy at first, at least until I

realised what a truly wonderful character he really is). I know that most people really, really love these illustrations, and I honestly believe that this is a personal preference, but gigantic Stillwater (and the large, completely opaque, black eyes of both Stillwater and Koo) did require some getting used to for me.

Randie D. Camp, M.S. says

I read this book about a year ago because it was extremely popular and I wanted to see what all the fuss was about. I liked it but I didn't see what was so special about it.

I re-read this book today with the purpose of assessing how well Muth presented the friendships between the characters. I really enjoyed the bond between Stillwater and Koo, although they are family, they still possess a special friendship and bond. Stillwater is very wise and serves as a mentor to his young nephew. Stillwater also serves as a mentor to the neighborhood children. He encourages them to be helpful and kind to Miss Whitaker even though she has a "rough" exterior. This compassionate message is one that all readers can benefit from. Miss Whitaker reciprocates the children's kindness by helping Michael prepare for his spelling bee and warming up to the children—she even encourages them to play in her yard when before she shoed them away. Muth's multiple storylines and peaceful watercolor illustrations help to show that our actions and friendships come full circle.

I also appreciated Muth's usage of haikus and wordplay. Additionally, the storyline of the reusing the paper cups is one that children can connect to because "going green" is a reoccurring message in our society.

Jenny says

Love the illustrations and the clever plays on words in this book. It also has a great but subtle message that we are indeed all tied together and that as we get to know others, we can learn to like them...even those who seem grumpy or weird or different from us.

Julie says

Zen Ties is a whimsical book packed with hidden messages to the reader. Upon my first read of the text, the story seemed overly simplistic and unoriginal. Reading the "Author's Note" greatly enhanced my second reading of the story. I gained a new appreciation for the word play and symbols throughout the book.

The illustrations are warm and playful. The second time I read the story, I noticed the red neckties throughout the story and their significance. This is a book that could be read over and over again as the reader uncovers new meanings.

The author crafted a text that could be enjoyed by children and adults alike. While many children might not pick up on the nuances of the wordplay or zen undertones, adults can enjoy decoding the many meanings in the story. At the same time, children can appreciate the message of kindness and friendship, as well as the colorful illustrations.

I might use this book to challenge my high performing students in their observational and critical thinking skills. I appreciate that this text is complex enough to engage and challenge a multi-level classroom.

Sarah Sammis says

Zen Ties by Jon J. Muth is the sequel to *Zen Shorts*. Stillwater helps Michael prepare for his spelling bee while teaching the neighborhood children the importance of perspective.

The book opens with a visit from Stillwater's nephew, Koo, who speaks only in haiku. Stillwater has offered to help a neighbor who is feeling poorly. He invites the children along to help. Although they go, they are reluctant, believing the neighbor is too grumpy to want them visiting. It turns out she is a retired English teacher. She ends up being both a new friend and the perfect person to help Michael.

Zen Ties like *Zen Shorts* is a very quiet book. It's also as many of the reviews have noted, "deceptively simple." On the surface the story's just about preparing for a spelling bee, meeting a nephew and helping out a neighbor. But each of these scenes are lessons that can be expanded through conversation in the classroom.

Kathryn says

This is one of those stories that made me feel GOOD inside! Even beyond warm-fuzzies, it seems to speak to something deep and true. A very sweet story about friendship and being kind and thoughtful about others—even if they are a little prickly at first! The story of the children and the old lady's developing friendship is sweet and something that many children can relate to as grandparents are sometimes a bit "cranky" due to aches and pains, but truly do love the influence of children in their lives.

The Zen aspect comes in the soft nature drawings and from nephew panda Koo's speaking in haiku ("Hi, Koo!") Don't miss the thoughtful author's note at the end.

Highly recommended!

Abigail says

Stillwater the panda returns in this sequel to Muth's *Zen Shorts*, this time teaching Addy, Michael and Karl an important lesson about kindness to the elderly and looking under the surface of things... Also features a visit from Stillwater's adorable haiku-quoting nephew, Koo (Hi, Koo!).

Although I enjoyed this story, and found Muth's watercolor illustrations just as luminous and lovely as those which graced the first book, I wouldn't say this was quite as compelling as *Zen Shorts*. Perhaps my penchant for folktales bumped that one from three to four stars? Whatever the case may be, this is still a wonderful picture book.

Dolly says

This is a wonderful tale, full of good moral lessons, humor and zen philosophy. I love that Zen's nephew, Koo, spoke only in Haiku and that Stillwater had an opportunity to say, "Hi, Koo!" So corny, yet so perfect. Our girls really have enjoyed these stories and so have I. We've read this book a couple of times.

This story was selected as one of the books for the February 2012 - Friendship reads at the Picture-Book Club in the Children's Books Group here at Goodreads.

Laura says

This follow-up to Zen Shorts has more beautiful, charming watercolor illustrations and Zen wisdom to impart. The story about the children helping their elderly neighbor is simple and sweet, if a little predictable. However, Stillwater (the talking Giant Panda) and his visiting cousin Koo (who speaks only in haiku) add more depth and interest. Since this is a longer story, and the simple language belies some more complex concepts about friendship and compassion, I would suggest this book for elementary school and up.

CIP: "When Stillwater the panda encourages Koo, Addy, Michael, and Karl to help a grouchy neighbor, their efforts are rewarded in unexpected ways."

Favorably reviewed in Kirkus ("irresistible storytelling, both visual and textual") and SLJ, which called it a "rich and wonderful offering."

Lisa Vegan says

The paintings are beautiful. It's a lovely story, that includes haiku poetry and wordplay, about friendship. Great message about looking below the surface for what others have to offer and for giving others second chances. Story with bears and children and an old lady, and balloons.
