

ABOUT THE CREATORS

International speaker and award-winning author **Monique Gray Smith** is a mixed-heritage woman of Cree, Lakota and Scottish ancestry. She wrote *When We Are Kind* to prompt a dialogue among young people, their care providers and educators about kindness and the importance of the connections children make with their friends, classmates and families. Monique's picture book *My Heart Fills With Happiness* won the Christie Harris Illustrated Children's Literature Prize and was selected as the TD Grade One Giveaway Book for all grade one students in Canada in 2019. She lives in Victoria, British Columbia, with her family.

Nicole Neidhardt is Diné (Navajo) of the Kiiyaa'áanii Clan and is from Santa Fe, New Mexico. She has a BFA from the University of Victoria and is working on her MFA at OCAD University in Toronto. Nicole's Diné identity is the heart of her practice, which encompasses installation, illustration and large-scale murals. She currently lives in Toronto.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does kindness mean to you?
2. What are some ways that you show kindness (to your friends/family/neighbors)?
3. How do you feel when you are kind to someone else?
4. What are some ways that other people show kindness to you?
5. How does it make you feel when someone is kind to you?
6. Why do you think it's important to be kind to one another?





“Kindness has been and always will be a salve for society. There are those who, for whatever reason, find it easier to be kind to themselves and others, and those who have a difficult time with kindness. I think we are all born with kindness in our hearts and minds and that is either fostered or deterred by the adults in our lives. Kindness is an important value to nurture with children, young people, and us as adults. Being kind isn’t only about our actions, but also our words. Kind words can be like medicine for a bad day, life’s disappointments or a hurting heart. I encourage you to be kind to the land, the water and all living things—including yourself.”

—Monique Gray Smith



Q&A WITH NICOLE NIEDHARDT

1. What does kindness mean to you?

Kindness to me is a form of care—caring for oneself, your family, your community, the land, the animals. It’s a way of showing respect and love. Kindness doesn’t live in oppressive ideas or behaviors. True kindness respects difference, is selfless, giving and loving.

2. Was there a specific message in this book that resonated with you when you first read it?

The most impactful pages for me were the ones speaking about showing kindness to the earth. For example, the page “I am kind when I only take from the earth what I need.” I think instilling this idea in young readers and with their families is so important. It’s acknowledging that we all still need to have a relationship with the plants and animals around us. We need to restore humanity’s balance with Mother Nature, because it has become really out of balance. We can’t rely on an endless cycle of extraction from the earth; the earth simply can’t take it anymore. That’s why this book is so beautiful, it illustrates all these different ways of showing kindness that we may not have thought about before. Kindness truly is caring for the earth by only taking that which sustains us and our families.

3. What does it mean to you to have a version of your book in a dual-language edition in Diné and English?

I am over the moon about the Diné/English translation! Revitalizing Indigenous languages is so critical and being able to offer literature in Indigenous languages is such a powerful tool in the learning process! I am early on my language learning journey, so this book is an amazing tool for me to practice as well.



Q&A WITH NICOLE NIEDHARDT continued...

4. What was your inspiration while illustrating this book?

My intention when illustrating this book was to ensure I showed the widest range of diversity in character, skin colour, ability, and gender. I think the lived reality of Indigenous people today is so diverse and rich and brimming with complexity. I had to creatively find ways to illustrate these families that don't conform to Western ideas of family structure. For example, I felt it was important to have lesbian moms and a transgender dad (as indicated by the subtle transgender flag on his shirt). Kindness acknowledges this diversity of experience and lived reality, and shows care and love always.

6. What do you hope people will take away from reading *When We Are Kind*?

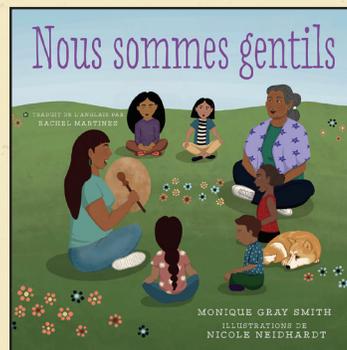
I hope children will love the colourful illustrations and think about kindness in new ways. That they will see themselves or their friends or their family reflected on each page. Positive portrayals of Indigenous families and children is so important, as there is a long history of stereotypes that have created a lot of prejudice, racism and misunderstandings about our communities. I also hope people will be able reflect on all the ways we can show kindness in this world. Monique Gray Smith's writing is profound in its simplicity and I think taking a moment to really meditate on what kindness is to you, to your family, to your community, and to the land and water is a good exercise. We need more kindness in our world right now, to the environment and to Black and Indigenous folks and to People of Colour. There's a lot of pain in our communities and kindness can be a really healing salve.

7. Can you tell us a bit about your illustration process?

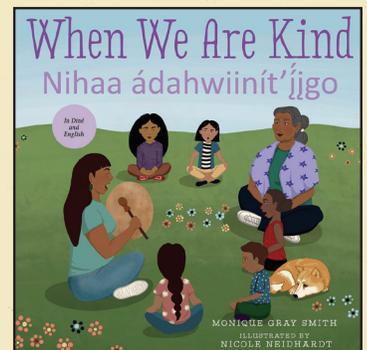
I used my iPad Pro and the app Procreate to create these illustrations. I started with multiple rough sketches for each page, then created line drawings that became the foundation for the final colored version. I worked on all the illustrations simultaneously, as it was more fun to jump between illustrations while I was creating them. It was a fairly lengthy process for each design, because of the amount of detail I put into each page. I love when people can see new details and patterns every time they look at a work of art and this was something I wanted to achieve with this book. I will admit that learning to draw children was difficult for me, as their proportions are so different from adults, which I'm more used to drawing. However, I loved the process and the challenge. Imagining and then illustrating the world of a child was quite fun.

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