Living successfully and productively with others is a lifelong challenge. Learning to carry out this responsibility begins very early in life. It does not occur in a vacuum; it is a part of a child’s ongoing history with others. Young infants have been found to respond to other infants in a variety of experimental settings (Radke-Yarrow, Zahn-Waxler, & Chapman, 1983). Between the ages of three and six, children typically make significant advances in contributing to the welfare of others, controlling their aggressive impulses, and developing interpersonal skills. These advances enable children to be more effective in their attempts to cooperate with others, in their strides toward meaningful problem-solving, and in their purposeful relationships with others (Schickendanz, 1994). Children’s ability to interact successfully with others can be built through the use of carefully chosen stories and books.

Children’s actions are also influenced by their level of cognitive development. As they grow older, children’s ability to understand the problems and feelings of others is enhanced. Such heightened understanding allows them to behave more easily and effectively in socially appropriate and reciprocal ways. One of the most effective techniques for supporting this understanding is through the use of books which explore cooperation, problem solving, and caring relationships within the contexts of everyday life.

**Learning to Cooperate.**

For many years, socializing and learning to cooperate with others was viewed as a one-way process. Young children were “taught” to behave and cooperate by their parents and other significant adults in their lives (Santrock, 1994). Today the process of early socialization is viewed by many as a multifaceted and bidirectional process in which young children exert influence as well as act upon the influence of others (Cohn & Tronick, 1988). Thus they learn to cooperate by receiving and partaking in cooperative actions and activities and by discussing these behaviors with others. Successful cooperation evolves as young children begin to understand both the responsibility and the power they have in shaping and controlling the daily interactions of themselves and those around them.

Following are some books which can provoke thinking and spark discussion with children about the nature and importance of meaningful cooperation.


  The cat and the crow lived under the banyan tree. All day long they told stories. The cat was thin and quick, and she told stories that were elegant and entertaining. The crow was fat and handsome, and he told stories that were fast and furious.

  With the cat, readers ascend the secret stairs into the clouds and out
the other side to catch a shooting star
to the highest mountain on the moon.
Through a magical telescope, the cat
and the crow peer downward to the
beginning of the story and the old
banyan tree. A blink of the eye finds
them transported back home, only to
begin the crow’s fantastic tale. At sup-
personic speed, they fly through pas-
sages and ghost tunnels, past the snake
gang, and finally back home again for
tea with some fascinating guests.
Lively’s book presents different sto-
ries by two different characters who
share their fantasies, fears, and fables
in the splendid spirit of cooperation
and friendship.


When Nicki asks his grandmother
to knit mittens that are white as the
snow, she worries they will be
shattered and lost in the blanket of the
winter woodland. But so like a grand-
mother, she knits the mittens from
soft, white wool. And so like a child,
Nicki drops a single mitten in the
snow and sets out for his day’s explor-
ing without realizing the mitten is
missing. Slowly the mitten becomes
home to a variety of woodland crea-
tures, who shift and shake and snuggle
and share the space inside the mitten.

A hilariously explosive ending causes
smiles for all who read the story, as
Nicki finally returns home with the
mitten. Warm and inviting illustra-
tions fill Jan Brett’s text with visual
surprises which remain faithful to the
Ukrainian tradition from which the
story originates.


Hungry and alone, a young man
walks through a village. He approach-
es a little old lady to ask for some-
thing to eat. She does not want to give
him food, but her curiosity allows her
to share a simple round gray stone.
And that is the beginning of stone
soup. Into the pot go additional ingre-
dients gained with gentle persuasion:
sweet yellow onions; long, thin car-
rots, juicy beef bones, a bit of pepper,
a handful of salt, and finally butter
and barley. The soup becomes a meal
fit for a king, and so they dined to-
gether. There are many lessons about
sharing and cooperating to be learned
from this classic story. Children love
reading about and creating their own
stone soup (but don’t forget to remove
the stone before serving!).


Marcia Brown's 1947 Caldecott
Honor Book version of *Stone Soup*
provides a historical perspective on
how illustrations and text change over
time. In this early version, three sol-
diers march into a small French vil-
lage, hungry and tired and weary from
war. The peasants busy themselves
and pretend not to notice the newcom-
ers; they worry that the soldiers will
eat all the food. Cleverly, the soldiers
first ask only for three round, smooth
stones—and a carrot or two, a bit of
cabbage, and so on. As the soup’s
contents expand and the delicious
smells fill the village, a sense of ex-
citement builds. The story ends in cel-
bration, and the soldiers end up in the
finest beds in the village. Young read-
ers learn that sharing and working to-
gether can be a productive and joyous
undertaking, even when the sharing
must be gently nudged along the way.

**Learning Problem Solving and Conflict Resolution Skills.**

To solve a problem effectively,
young children must first be able to