What Can a Small Bird Be?

Written and Illustrated by the Character Education Teen Residency Project Participants

With writer Susie Wilde and artist Marguerite Jay Gignoux

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
North Carolina Museum of Art
There once was a curious bird who wondered, 
*What can a small bird be?*

He flapped his wings and caught a soft breeze through a forest until he came to the edge of a riverbank to see what he could learn.

On the riverbank stood an ancient tortoise wearing an enormous golden straw hat. The tortoise, hunched in his shell, poked his head out to take timid looks at the river. “For years I’ve wanted to get to the other side.”

“Why don’t you use that beautiful hat of yours as a raft?” Bird asked.

“I’m too slow, and the currents are too fast. What if I tip over or fall out?”
“Then you can swim.” Bird untied Tortoise’s hat and held it in the water. Ever so carefully Tortoise placed one short, stubby leg inside, but when he lifted the other, a cackling of crows startled him.

“You foolish old tortoise!” cawed one.
“You can’t swim,” sneered another. The third just laughed.

Tortoise’s voice trembled. “I c-c-can’t do it.”

Bird pointed. “There are sweet wildflowers and a welcoming sun over there. Don’t let those bullies stop you.”

“I won’t,” said Tortoise. “Not this time.” Without hesitation he climbed into the hat and pushed off.
When Tortoise looked at the bank, he realized it was getting closer. He cut across the currents until he felt sand between his claws.

Bird greeted Tortoise as he came ashore.
"You were so brave! I knew you could do it!"
"I sure showed those crows, didn’t I?"
Tortoise chuckled.
"And you showed yourself, too."
Bird winked and placed the hat back on Tortoise’s shell.

As Tortoise neared the opposite bank, a terrible whirlpool snatched the hat from beneath him. Tortoise flailed his legs and surfaced with a mouth full of water.

"Swim, Tortoise! You can do it!"

Bird called as he rushed to rescue Tortoise’s hat.
What do you get when you bring twenty-four talented teenagers and their teachers from all over North Carolina, drop them off in an art museum for three days, and challenge them to create a book that will teach character education to young children? The answer is *What Can a Small Bird Be?*, a delightful story about a little yellow bird whose adventures lead him to distant lands, where he lends a helping hand to a wonderful cast of animal friends.

Thanks to funding from the North Carolina General Assembly to support character education in K–12 public schools, the ELA section of the Department of Public Instruction and the North Carolina Museum of Art had the immense privilege of hosting these creative young people and their dedicated teachers. Under the inspired leadership of artist Peg Gignoux and writer Susie Wilde, we watched the students transform their ideas into images and words that tell the story of what it means to be a good person.

On behalf of our two institutions, we want to thank the school systems that allowed their students and faculty to participate in the Character Education Teen Residency. They represented your schools and communities—and indeed, our state—with the traits they worked so hard to present: courage, kindness, respect, good judgment, integrity, responsibility, self-discipline, and perseverance.

English Language Arts Section  
North Carolina Department of Public Instruction  

Education Department  
North Carolina Museum of Art
What Can a Small Bird Be? © 2011 by North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

Written and Illustrated by the Character Education Teen Residency Project Participants
with writer Susie Wilde and textile artist Marguerite Jay Gignoux

Book design and production by Julia Gignoux, Freedom Hill Design and Book Production
Photography by Christopher Ciccone, courtesy of the North Carolina Museum of Art

This publication and the information contained within must not be used for personal or financial gain. North Carolina LEA school officials and teachers, parents, and students may duplicate in whole or in part this publication for instructional and educational purposes only. Others may not duplicate this publication without prior written permission from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Division of Curriculum and Instruction/English Language Arts section.

Character Education Teen Residency Writers, Artists, and Educators

TEAM COURAGE - New Hanover High School
Teacher: Sara Scott
Student Artist: Brent Koehler
Student Writer: Lily Sala

TEAM GOOD JUDGMENT - Louisburg High School
Teacher: Dana Church
Student Artist: Andrew Duke
Student Writer: Mia Storey

TEAM INTEGRITY – E.E. Smith High School
Teacher: Jason Edwards
Student Artist: Ivana Woodard
Student Writer: Tyree Parker

TEAM KINDNESS – North Stokes High School
Teacher: Kimberly Anderson
Student Artist: Lydia Richardson
Student Writer: Laresa Roberts

TEAM RESPECT – New Technology High School @ Garinger
Teacher: Carolyn Crutcher
Student Artist: Moe Win
Student Writer: Ivan Gaddy

TEAM RESPONSIBILITY – Caldwell Career Center
Teacher: Tonia Olson
Student Artist: Jefferson Canaveral
Student Writer: Hayley Townsend

TEAM DISCIPLINE – Freedom High School
Teacher: Donny Palmgren
Student Artist: David Fleming
Student Writer: Michael Tyson

TEAM PERSEVERANCE – Swain County High School
Teacher: Dora May
Student Artist: Stevie Loftis
Student Writer: Jonah Winchester