

# • Meet the Author •

## Karen Katz

Interview conducted by Toni Buzzeo, career media specialist and author (visit [www.tonibuzzeo.com](http://www.tonibuzzeo.com)).



Photo from [karenkatz.com](http://karenkatz.com)

Karen Katz has always been making something: quilts, costumes, prints, sculpture, painting, collage, and book illustrations. While attending the Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia and Rome, Italy, she became interested in folk art, Indian miniatures, Shaker art, and Mexican art. After graduating, she went on to the Yale Graduate School of Art and Architecture where she fell in love with Chagall, Matisse, and Grandma Moses. Her love of folk art and children's art has influenced all of her children's books. Before making children's books full time, she created costumes for a magician (Doug Henning), taught college, and illustrated and designed for more than fifty publishers.

After she and her husband adopted their daughter from Guatemala, she began to devote herself full time to her love of creating children's books. She is the author and illustrator of more than 45 children's titles

and has won numerous awards. Her books have sold over seven million copies, and her multicultural picture books can be found in many schools and libraries. Ms. Katz has lives in upstate NY and Manhattan.

### How did you first learn about the International Day of Peace? From there, how did you come to write a book about it?

**KK:** I didn't really learn about the International Day of Peace until I was partway into creating the actual book. After the events of 9/11, I decided that I wanted to do a book about peace. I knew right away that I wanted the book to be very simple and to celebrate children around the world and how they would say the word "peace." When I create a book I do a lot of research and that is how I discovered the International Day of Peace.

### What did you hope to accomplish with your appealing book?

**KK:** When I created *Can You Say Peace?*, my intention was to share with children the awareness that there are many different kinds of people around the world and all of them want peace. This book has few words, but through its elaborate illustrations, readers can see how children around the world live and what their

clothing, houses, and environment are like. To me, that was enough to show and share the differences and beauty of other children. I used the word "peace" in different languages to also share with kids how great it is that children speak in different ways around the world. It's fun for the child reading the book to say the words.

### One of the most wonderful things about your book is that it is meant for very young children, and it is both a book about peace and a book about countries of the world. How did you decide which countries you would feature?

**KK:** When I created the book I tried to cover as many different countries and nationalities as was possible on 14 spreads. I made lists of countries trying to take one country from every continent. It was impossible to represent every culture and every nationality and every country, so I tried to do it with broad strokes. There were a lot of back-and-forth e-mails between my editor and me as we worked on what we thought would be the best selection of cultures and countries around the world. We also wanted the word "peace" to be fun to say and to be different as possible

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on each page. So we couldn't have two countries that both had Spanish as their national language.

### As the illustrator of *Can You Say Peace?* as well as its author, how did you decide which images you would use for each of the countries you selected?

**KK:** Now that's an interesting question. My editor and I had many conversations about how to show the cultures and countries we had chosen. We didn't want to be stereotypical; for instance, when I painted the art for Japan, instead of painting Tokyo, which would be the first thing everyone would think of, I painted a rural scene in Japan. When I did the art for Bolivia, instead of painting something high up in the mountains, I painted a city scene. Many of the paintings do depict the children in scenes that you would automatically think of, so another thing I tried to do was not necessarily paint the children in their typical cultural clothing, but to paint them in the kinds of clothes that they would be wearing in this day and age.

### Did you travel to do any of your illustration research? Tell us about the research process for your images.

**KK:** I have been very fortunate in my life to have traveled to some really interesting countries, so I have a frame of reference for some of the paintings I've done. I certainly haven't been to every country that I depicted in my book!

The research for this book was extremely time consuming, although it was fun. I had to have a reference for every single thing I painted, from the houses, to the animals, to the clothing that the children were wearing, to the foliage and architecture. For instance: what does a koala bear look like, what do the palm trees in India look like, and what do the yellow mountains in China look like? Everything in the book had to be accurate. I researched a lot of things on the Internet. I bought other artists' children's books to look at. I basically found my research material wherever I could. I also have a large collection of handmade art papers because my art is collaged and painted, so I tried to match the patterns and textures to the various countries.

### How can readers learn more about you and your books?

**KK:** You can go to my website, [www.karenkatz.com](http://www.karenkatz.com), or any of my publishers' websites where they will have information about my books and me.

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*Toni Buzzeo, MA, MLIS, is an author as well as a career library media specialist. She is the author of eleven picture books, most recently No T. Rex in the Library! (McElderry, 2010) and many professional books and articles. Visit [www.tonibuzzeo.com](http://www.tonibuzzeo.com) or e-mail Toni at [tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com](mailto:tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com).*

