

The First Great Journey

Nina Koevoets

A Teacher's guide



In short

The First Great Journey is a beautifully illustrated book for children aged 7–9. Follow four young bird siblings—Tweet, Chirp, Rookoo, and Kiki—on their first big migration. Along the way, they face disagreements, get separated, and must find their way back to each other... learning important lessons about listening, taking responsibility, and working together.

Inspired by real-life practices like (peer) mediation and restorative justice, this story gently introduces children to peaceful conflict resolution through adventure and metaphors.

✓ Perfect for:

- Parents who want meaningful bedtime stories
- Teachers exploring social-emotional learning (SEL)
- Peace educators and school mediators
- Classrooms working with themes like cooperation, empathy & resilience



On the next pages you will find the introduction of the book *The First Great Journey*, reflection questions, background information, a fragment of the story and an explanation of the mediation process. Teachers can follow the steps and put it into practice. In addition there's a teacher's review and some reflections on children's rights. As a bonus there are two coloring pages and a map with a flying route of the birds.

Dealing with conflict is a daily life skill that we all need to practice. Therefore, this e-book is made available freely, to stimulate teachers to use *The First Great Journey* in schools, and inspire problem-solving in classrooms.



This is an adventurous and educational story with everyday lessons for children, parents and teachers.



Introduction

The little birds Tweet, Chirp, Rookoo, and Kiki are quadruplets. In spring they learn to fly and in autumn they make their first Great Journey to a warmer part of the world. The two brothers and two sisters are very different from each other, but they will have to learn to cope with their differences as they make this long journey together with their whole family.

Tweet wants to be the best and the fastest, and he is not very good at working together. Chirp, on the other hand, is not so fast and feels insecure. Kiki tries to support and help others, but sometimes this means she's forgetting herself. Rookoo helps everyone to understand each other.

What happens along the way? The two brothers get in a fight and two siblings get lost. How will they reconcile and find each other again? Read the story to find out!



How to Work with the Story in Class

The story of the four birds is meant to help opening up a conversation with children about how to navigate conflicts. And in the classroom this can be taken a step further by continuing to work with it.



- **Preparation:** Before engaging in a conversation the teacher can carefully read about the conflict styles in the background information on the next pages.



- **Guided discussion:** Teachers can use the reflection questions, that are in the book and this e-book. (See page 8-9.)



- **Drawing:** the children can make coloured drawings of the birds, from p.16 and 17, as they process the story and relate it to the conflicts they've experienced in the class. They can draw the duck/rabbit from the book, here on p. 11. A fragment of the book is included here to illustrate the part of the book about taking different perspectives. These drawings can contribute to understanding this principle and they can serve as a reminder by hanging them in the class.



- **Value Poster:** After the discussion, you could co-create a poster with the values important to the people in the class. This can be a good reminder to create a more peaceful atmosphere on a daily basis.



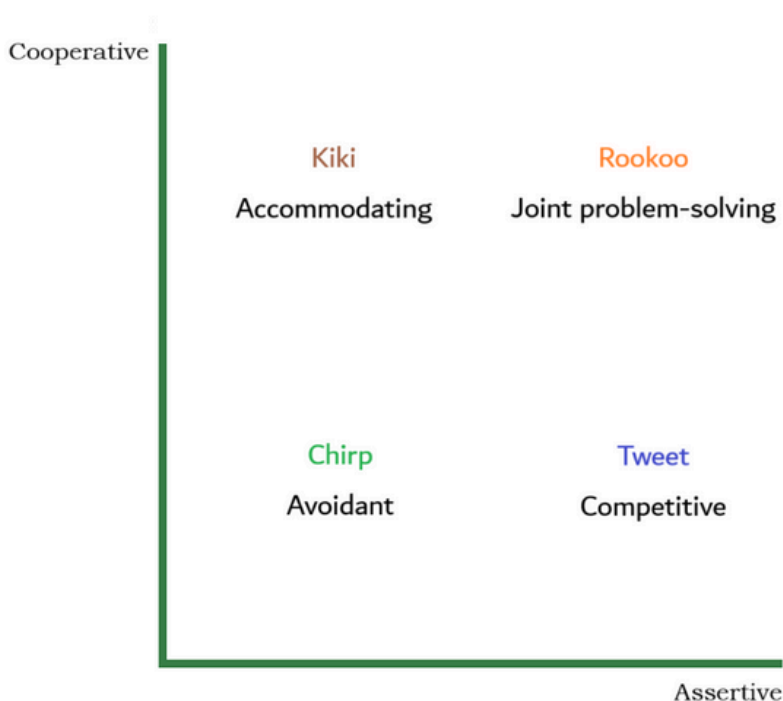
- **Conflict Check-in & Mediation:** Finally, you can agree to set-up a regular Conflict Check-in, every week, two weeks or month, depending on the needs of your class. Check-in if there were any conflicts and identify who was involved. Set a time aside to talk with the children. The teacher can join as a support or a mediator. The mediation process is further explained in this e-book on page 12-14.

Story Background and Conflict Styles

Nina Koevoets, the author, provides training on dealing with conflict and working toward peace. Nina also calls this “conflict navigation,” because not all conflicts can always be resolved, but you can learn how to navigate them better, and without violence. She works with adults, but she also finds it important that children learn how to deal with conflict at an early age. That is why she wrote this children's book. Birds are very good at navigating and cooperating, as this story shows.

The story is inspired by peer mediation, which is conducted in several schools. A number of students act as mediators, after being trained how to resolve conflicts between other students. The mediator does not provide solutions, but rather facilitates listening, so that the conflicting parties can understand each other and find their own solutions. Restorative Justice is another method that is used in schools, in which the school or community works together to find constructive solutions to conflicts. Restorative Justice is derived from the way Maoris in New Zealand resolve conflicts, where the focus is primarily on repairing the damage done and the disrupted relationship. The two methods overlap in their approach, and mostly differ in how many people are involved.

In this story, the four birds' personality types were created from four conflict styles. A conflict style is a behavior a person exhibits when a conflict occurs. Below they are explained in a chart, indicating the level of cooperativeness and assertiveness of each style.



Knowing the styles makes it easier to make more conscious choices. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each style? What do you recognize in yourself and in others? How might children and adults more often work together to solve problems and conflict?

The graph isn't meant for ages 7-9 like the story, but if you're working with older children, then it's probably useful to explain it to them. For the younger children, the teachers can simplify the main message: problem-solving requires both standing up for one's own needs (assertiveness) and listening to others (cooperation). This simple formula alone may change the way they engage in conflict. And if desired, one can further dig into each bird's responses to understand what the disadvantages and advantages are of each.

Reflection Questions

Below are six reflection questions that teachers, parents, and children can use to check their understanding of the story and engage each other in conversation about this story.

1. In this book, two brothers get into a conflict. They are also classmates of each other. What does Tweet find annoying about Chirp?
2. Sometimes, unintentionally, the four birds don't pay much attention to each other. What happens when they are first allowed to fly?
3. Since they are going on a big trip together, it is important that they work well together. Unfortunately Tweet gives Chirp a hard push, hurting his wing. What happens next?
4. How long does it take before Tweet and Kiki are found again? And how much of a delay will they have incurred?
5. When they are back together, the brothers do not talk to each other at first. Who brings them back together and what does that person do to resolve the quarrel?
6. When Chirp comes up with a solution to the conflict himself to which Tweet agrees, this may keep them from arguing again. Why is that, you think?

Answers to the reflection questions:

1. Tweet is annoyed that Chirp doesn't fly as fast.
2. When the birds are allowed to fly alone for the first time, Tweet flies ahead by himself to a mountain, while the others go to a lake. Afterwards, Tweet meets his little brother and sisters, but they do not notice until late that Chirp did not go with them.
3. After Tweet gives Chirp a hard push, Tweet flies away. His sister Kiki flies after him. But in doing so, she also loses the rest of the group.
4. It takes six days before Tweet and Kiki are found. While the swarm was supposed to take one day of rest, they now have to take two extra days and then need to fly three more days.
5. Rookoo first listens to everyone's side of the story. Then she brings them together and also asks Ms. Mira for help. Tweet, Chirp, and Kiki solve it themselves. Chirp also comes up with a solution to prevent them from having another fight.
6. If those who have the conflict come up with a solution, they are much more likely to implement that solution than if someone else suggests the solution. Therefore, it is not for the mediator to provide solutions. And in this way Chirp also practices being assertive.

A fragment

Quarrels must be resolved

Chirp and Tweet don't say anything to each other at all. They cannot go on like this, Rookoo thinks.

“Chirp, you must go and talk to Tweet. Tell him you are doing your best.”

“I don't dare to talk to Tweet! I think he's still angry at me,” Chirp peeps.

Rookoo finds Tweet. He's in the top of a tree.

“Tweet, I'm happy you're back. But you have to talk to Chirp.”

“No,” answers Tweet, “I don't want to talk to him.”

Rookoo flies to Kiki.

“Chirp and Tweet are not talking to each other at all. Can you talk to them?”

“I don't think so. I've already flown after Tweet, but he doesn't listen to me.”

Rookoo sighs. What should she do now?

She mulls for a moment, but then she knows: she goes to Ms. Mira.

“Do you remember what I told you during our classes?” her teacher asks.

Rookoo looks at her. They have had quite a lot of classes.

“Because we are birds, we are able to see things from many different angles. We can try to see the different ways that other birds see something.”

Rookoo does not understand yet what this has to do with the quarrel her brothers had.

“Look,” Ms. Mira says, showing Rookoo a paper, “what animal do you see?”

“A rabbit!”

“And now?” Ms. Mira asks and turns the paper around.

“Now I see a duck!” Rookoo says, surprised.

“We can look at the same thing from different points of view. When you listen to someone and hear their story, you understand how that person looks at something. So by listening we can understand each other,” Mira clarifies.

“But my brothers don't want to listen to each other,” says Rookoo.

“Maybe you could listen to them first? Then you can ask them to talk to each other and stay with them.”

“That's a good idea,” says Rookoo happily.

“And if you need my help, you know where to find me,” Ms. Mira says.

As Rookoo flies away, she remembers the words of Oohoo the owl: “Your brothers must learn to work together.” Now Rookoo understands that they can only do this if they first listen to each other.



The Mediation Process

A mediator is a facilitator that uses listening and communication skills to help others resolve conflict and disagreements before they escalate. A mediator can ask clarifying questions, but does not make or propose solutions. A mediator does not take sides, so doesn't blame, judge etc.

In the story Rookoo does most of the mediation. She first talks to everyone individually. This may not always be needed. Sometimes the children can meet straight away and the mediator only facilitates the process of listening.

The mediation process has the following steps:

The children:

- Each in turn tell their story to the mediator, focusing on issues, not on who did what, while the other concentrates on listening without interrupting.
- Parties change roles:
- each repeats the other's story to their satisfaction to demonstrate they understand the other's position (not that they necessarily agree with it).

The mediator:

- Summarizes the facts and feelings of both sides for verification and agreement on the issues, and acknowledges the difficulty in dealing with its emotional baggage, if appropriate.
- Asks both parties if any solutions have come to mind, or begins a brain-storming session without judgment. All suggestions are noted and acknowledged.
- Leads a discussion of the solutions, checking off only the solution(s) that both parties can agree to.

The children:

- determine implications of solutions in selecting the best possible outcome.
- Select the best solution.

The mediator:

- Verifies the verbal agreement with all parties, ensuring that no-one is reluctant or afraid to speak out or dissent.
- Optional: Writes a memo of understanding in parties' own words.



When expressing themselves, you can ask the children to talk about their feelings and what's important to them (their needs) and refrain from judgments. (These are often called “I-messages”, but you don't need to use the jargon).

The repeating or “reflecting back” process helps to ensure both people really listen to each other, even if they don't agree with the other one. After the summary, give the one that spoke the opportunity to correct or add something, if they want.

In the story, Chirp proposes that Tweet flies behind him. It's important the children come up with their own solutions, and the teacher does not interfere, unless asked. In that way the children do not only practice creative problem-solving, but the solution is also more likely to be sustainable.

Depending on the conflict, you may also want to check-in after some weeks that the agreed solutions are really put into practice and that they are satisfactory. If not,

then open up a new brain-storming sessions for different solutions.

In professional settings, mediators always work in pairs. One person takes on the lead and the other supports and only interferes when needed. Staying neutral is not always easy, so a co-mediator can be helpful to make sure the mediator doesn't do something “out of role.”



Nonviolent Communication

In addition to mediation, you may also want to learn more about *Nonviolent Communication*. (Because this method is explained in many different places, I won't get into detail in this e-book.) I have found this to be a very useful tool. It gives insight into one's own and other's people's motives to behave in different ways, creates mutual understanding and often also helps to find solutions.

When working with a group of children I broke down the story into three elements: observations, feelings, needs. Which are the first three steps of Nonviolent Communication (NVC). I then asked them to also identify feelings and needs in a conflict they experienced at school, with the help of a set of cards, and they were amazingly good at it! The last step of NVC is requests, which is the problem-solving process. Once you know the needs, it's easier to think of creative strategies that fulfill the needs of everyone involved.

A Teacher's Review

The example on the previous page comes from a visit that I made to Northern Italy in May 2025, where I was invited to five schools, two primary and three secondary schools. One of the teachers shared:

“Nina's book is very useful for addressing the topic of non-violent conflict management in an educational context. It has been used at the Comprehensive Primary School of Demonte, Cuneo. The students appreciated the story, the discussions in the classroom, and the author's presence during Europe Week. It was also important to discuss the topic in both Italian and English in class, in order to address it in a cross-curricular manner. Also other schools read the book and continue to work with it in the current school year, (with new classes) as they saw the book helped the children step by step to resolve their conflicts more peacefully.”

- Cristina Broseghini, primary school teacher Demonte



Two of the three primary school classes in Demonte, listening to the explanation of their task.

Peace Education & Children's Rights

This book could be a starting point to consider the concept of Peace Education, offering children knowledge about peace and skills for peace. This includes navigating conflicts nonviolently, something that is just as much of a necessary for daily life as literacy and mathematics.

The Convention of the Rights of the Child, written in 1989, is the first document that defines the rights of children. Children's Rights includes the basic needs for physical protection, food, health care, their right to association with both parents, as well as universal state-paid education. Children have rights for special protection during childhood, like freedom from discrimination, and economic and sexual exploitation. But they also have rights that empower them, like the right to express his views in matters concerning the child. Parents do not have absolute power over their children., but are subject to criminal laws against abandonment, abuse, and neglect of children.

The UNHRO (United Nations Human Rights Office) has consulted children about Children's Rights. In it they include the topic of safe schools. Schools should work to be free of violence, bullying or fear. Stop corporal punishment or any kind of harmful discipline and make sure children feel respected valued and hears.

Including the children's rights framework could be a helpful way of contextualizing the importance of nonviolent conflict navigation and help children be aware of healthy conditions in the school and at home.

About the Author



Nina Koevoets obtained a master's degree in Conflict Resolution and Governance in Amsterdam in 2007, after which she participated in a training program at the Metta Center for Nonviolence in the US. She worked and traveled for five months in India and spent more than a year in Israel-Palestine. She earned a second master's degree in Global Studies

in Sweden, with the intention of doing a PhD afterwards, but decided instead to work with non-formal education.

In 2015, she gave her first training in the Netherlands, and since then she has organized several in different European countries, with funding from the European Commission. She is co-author of *Engaging Nonviolence Activating Nonviolent Change in our Lives and Our World* which contains fifteen workshop sessions and is published by the organization Peace Bene (USA). In addition she developed two cooperative games for a more peaceful and more sustainable world.

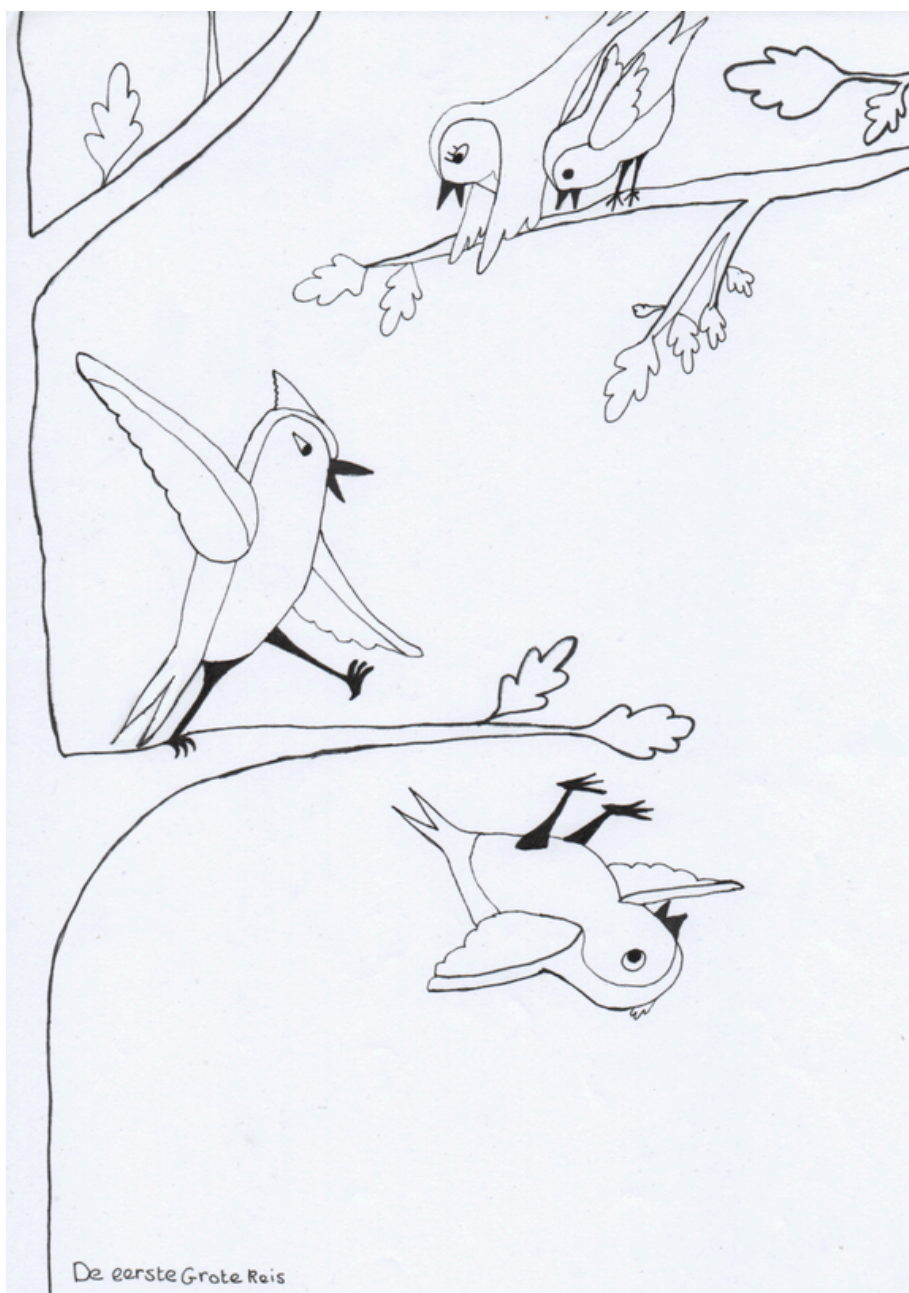
In 2018, she received a peace medal for her work from the Coalition Peace Missions Without Arms (Netherlands) and in 2022 she received a Lifetime Achievement Award for peace education from The Visioneers International Network (Canada). She was born in the Netherlands and lives in Greece.

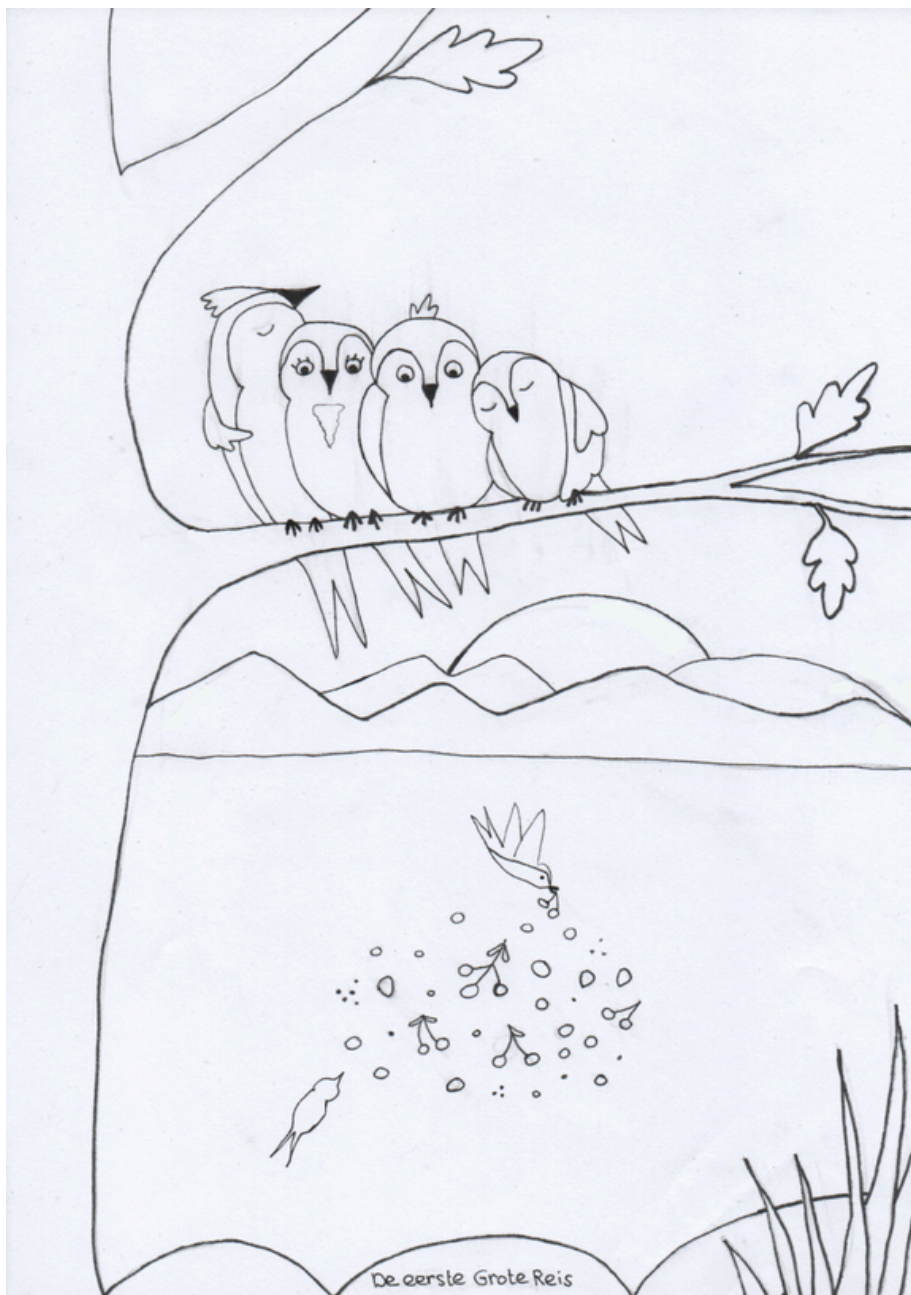
If you would like to learn more about her work, please visit: www.peace-power.org.



Bonus

Two coloring pages





Possible route of swallows from The Netherlands to Ghana. Feel free to make your own maps, according to where you live.

