

2021 Reader's Guide

Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings: *Poems* by Joy Harjo



**CONFLICT RESOLUTION
MONTH IN COLORADO**
Listen. Talk. Work it Out.

Conflict Resolution Month in Colorado annually recommends a community read to encourage conversations around understanding and resolving conflict. In this year's selection, U.S. Poet Laureate Joy Harjo draws upon her life experience as a member of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and the violence against Indigenous Peoples in *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings: Poems*. Readers may recognize universal conflict-inducing experiences like love and loss. Readers may also be learning for the first time the magnitude of historical conflict still seeking resolution. Resist the urge to look away, taking words of encouragement from the poet herself, "Let's not shame our eyes for seeing. Instead thank them for their bravery." (p. 39)

Land Acknowledgement Statement

A quote by Phillip Deer, Muscogee Leader (1929-1985) acknowledging "the Indian People" begins the collection of poetry. Acknowledgements demonstrate respect and knowledge of history. Think about the land where you live, work, and play. Native nations in Colorado include the Apache, Comanche, Shoshone, and Ute. The Southern Ute Indian Tribe and Ute Mountain Ute Tribe have their current headquarters in Colorado. If you have lived elsewhere in the United States, what tribal nations would you include in drafting your land acknowledgement statement?

Kitchen Table University

We learn lessons about conflict early on from those nearest us, our families. The poet uses imagery of the kitchen table university. "Everything you need to know is here." (p. 64) Think about a lesson you learned from your family's kitchen table. Did the lesson learned help or hinder how you resolve conflict?

Rhythm of Life

Music is the blood, the singing of trees, and words of praise. The poet shares, "We keep the heartbeat of the earth in our stomp dance feet." (p. 81) In some cases, music is a lover, like a hornplayer begetting life with song and Death dances the two-step. (p. 44) The natural rhythm of life's light and shadows are woven throughout the collection until an unnatural aberration: "The birds were however silent. They could not comprehend the violence of humans." (p. 110) Has there been a time in your life the music stopped? If your life had a soundtrack, what songs would be included?

Children and Our Future

In "Once the World was Perfect" the poet shares that we all played a part in destroying the world but a blanket becomes the "spark of kindness" that created a light for children generations to come. (p. 14) The blanket takes on more symbolism in "Beautiful Baby, Beautiful Child" and in "For a Girl Becoming." (p. 29, 127) The child traveling from "the rainbow house" is not only wrapped in a blanket but in blessings and community wisdom. (p. 127) What blessing or advice would you wrap (blanket) a child in your community?

Restorative Justice

In the titled poem "Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings" the poet states, "You must speak the language of justice." (p. 77) Is justice possible if the principles of conflict resolution are not applied equally? The poet returns to Indigenous teachings and beliefs to restore community instead of extolling the Western concept of restorative justice. Crocuses breaking through the earth, honoring the seasons and connection with Mother Earth restores and heals. What does restorative justice mean to you?

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