

Letters to My Grandchildren

David Suzuki; Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2015.

Well-known as a Canadian science broadcaster and planet activist, David Suzuki is in his 80th year. His [legacy letters](#) to his grandchildren are made public to reach a wide intergenerational audience.

Interwoven with memories of five generations (backward to grandparents, forward to grandchildren), Suzuki articulates his values and lessons learned across his lifetime. He urges older adults to use his book to stimulate reflection on their own experiences, choices, priorities and motivations for passing on to younger family members.

Several features of the style for the book are useful for grandparents considering such a collection of essays. First, he presents an intriguing design for family tree to represent his two families, one with his first wife and then his second younger family with his second wife. Second, although most of the letters are to all five grandchildren, he speaks directly to specific grandchildren from time to time.

Whatever you do, do it to the best of your ability and make sure it aligns with your deepest values.

I am so pleased that each of you is learning from your parents, who always throw themselves into whatever they are doing.

Ryo, my latest grandson, welcome to the world. I can only imagine what state the world will be in and what kinds of issues you will face when you are older, but I hope you will be as engaged as your parents and cousins have been. It's so important for us all to try to make this a better place for all people.

One overriding theme is pride in his multicultural family. All of his grandparents immigrated to Vancouver from Japan, while his parents were both in Canada. He regrets that his parents felt it untimely to teach him and his sisters Japanese. Some of the grandchildren have a Chilean parent, and some have a Haida parent. These parents are passing along their languages. At the time of the first separatist government in Quebec, Suzuki made a Canadian commitment to speaking French, taking his young family to Chicoutimi for six months of French language immersion.

Suzuki and his extended family were greatly affected by the forced relocation of Japanese Canadians during World War II. He describes his family's experiences, explaining that his parents tried to protect the youngsters from the gravity of the hostile situation. His maternal grandparents returned to Japan after the war rather than accept resettlement to the East. His paternal grandparents moved to a farm in Ontario, where

they held the family together through Sunday dinners and sharing the basics. Suzuki tells of memorable acts of generosity by specific 'white' Canadians during this time.

Each of you is a quarter Japanese, so I hope your Asian heritage is of interest.

I owe a lot to my father for bringing me up with a strong sense that I must speak out and act on my beliefs.

I hope that all of you will speak out against racism and other forms of bigotry whenever you encounter it.

Suzuki writes about not letting fame get to your head:

I know some of your friends think your bompá is famous just because I'm on TV, but that kind of fame is fleeting. It's also incredibly superficial, based on one aspect of the person that people choose to focus on.

Suzuki writes of how early experiences in the forest (place of consolation during his internment in the camp) gave him a love for nature which led to his career as a geneticist, passion to communicate the intricacies of nature, and his environmental activism.

We need nature in order to be healthy, but we also need to be in nature to observe changes like those in climate.

I know how each of you has valued nature as you grow up, from dinosaurs to rocks and frogs and creeks. That's why you will all be warriors for things that matter.

So here we are, my dears. My generation and the boomers who followed have partied as if there is no tomorrow. We didn't see that we were leaving you a world of depleted diversity and opportunity and heavy with impending ecological crises.

In final words, grandpa/bompá asks his grandchildren to be thoughtful in how they use nature's bounty in everyday life, in acting generously, and in celebrating what matters most.