Once upon a time, there was a king who ruled over a kingdom where everyone was happy, even though all the neighbouring kingdoms lived in a constant state of war.
The king summoned his advisor. ‘Why is it that only our country is at peace?’ asked the king. ‘Because the people are contented,’ replied the minister. ‘But why are the people contented?’ insisted the king. ‘Because everyone enjoys what they do.’
It’s dangerous to live surrounded by war,’ thought the king, still worried. ‘One day they might grow tired of fighting amongst themselves and end up attacking us. How can we teach our neighbours the importance of peace?’
While the king was sitting one day contemplating a lake, a boatman passed by, and the king asked him: "Do you have any idea how we might teach our neighbours about the importance of peace? Since they all speak different languages, I don't know how they could possibly understand." The boatman was right. However, after the king had spent a whole afternoon looking at the lake, he had an idea.
The following day, he called together the entire population of his kingdom. ‘The person who creates the best picture about peace will receive ten gold coins,’ he said. And his excited subjects set to work.
By the end of the year, they had all submitted a picture about peace, because they all hoped to win the coveted prize.
Each of them had worked with the material they knew best:

- the embroiderer
- the baker
- the soldier
- the hippie
- the monk
- the mystic
- the best student at school
- the worst student at school
The king was inundated with pictures, and it was difficult to decide which one best represented peace. Finally, after a great deal of work, the king summoned his subjects to announce the result.
Thank you for all your efforts,’ said the king. ‘Everything you produced was really excellent because it was done with love. However, in order to award the prize, I had to choose one picture. This is the picture that took second place. It contains the strength of the mountains, the energy of the sun, the security of home, the comfort of food, the peace of the lake, the shade of the forest, the joy of the birds, and the innocence of the child. It’s a lovely painting, and I would definitely have given it the prize were it not for another picture, which, I believe, most truly represents peace.’
The people were horrified when they saw the king's choice.
This is the painting the king chose.
'I think our king has gone mad,' said a woman.
'He can't seriously think that an ugly thing like that represents peace!' said the baker.
'Perhaps we should find someone who understands about art,' suggested the king's astrologer.
‘You may well think that I either know nothing about art or understand nothing about peace,’ said the king. ‘And when I first saw this painting, I too was horrified. The whole of nature appears to be in a rage, but if you look at that tree lashed by the winds, you will see, as I did, that there is a branch, and on that branch there is a nest and in that nest there is a small bird, smiling because its mother is bringing it some food. And for me, that is the true meaning of peace. When your heart is full of joy, when you are capable of having a family and fighting for it, it doesn’t matter what is going on around you, because with peace you have overcome all difficulties.’
The painting travelled to many other kingdoms, and gradually they understood the king's message, and peace filled all their hearts.
THE END