

# A Celebration of the Earth



## Teaching Ideas

**This annotated bibliography focuses on twenty-two picturebooks and four articles that feature environmental awareness and promote a healthy relationship with nature.**

**Aston, Dianna and Long, Sylvia. A Seed is Sleepy. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2007.**

This beautifully illustrated information book is by the team that created An Egg is Quiet. Ink and watercolour illustrations grace every page as the text quietly puts forth information about seeds and the plants they produce. The endpapers gently introduce the reader to the concept by following the dandelion fluff to the second set of endpapers, covered with a variety of labeled seeds. The text is printed in brown calligraphy, conveying an organic and natural mood to the poetic style of the writing. The book finishes with a flourish, as the sleepy seeds now “awake!” and blossom into flowers, which are illustrated and labeled on the closing endpapers. An attractive text for elementary school science lessons, an excellent library resource, or even a pretty gift for a green-thumbed friend.

**Baker, Jeannie. Home. China: Harper Collins, 2004.**

The concept of this wordless picturebook is so simple, yet so effective. The basic premise of the plot is the observation from a window of the positive and “green” changes that a neighborhood undergoes because of the efforts of the neighbors to improve their street. The point of view focuses on a girl from birth to adulthood,

and the artwork in this book is collage (a variety of materials), which was photographed in colour. From the endpapers depicting a pregnant mother moving in, to the final scene where the window has become a French-doored deck, inviting the reader out onto a lush, jungle-esque street, Home is a work of art. As Baker notes, at the end of the book, “people are discovering the need to nurture and to be nurtured by the unique character of the places they live.” A beautiful, engaging text to be discussed and shared with children and adults alike.

**Base, Graeme. Uno’s Garden. New York: Abrams Books, 2006.**

Opening with a poem and concluding with a page spread that unfolds to reveal the balance between industry and nature, Base’s book invites the reader to discover the mystery of animals and plants that are disappearing. Illustrated in a rounder, more cartoonish style than Base’s usual epic pages, this picturebook is still packed with

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details and riddles to delight young readers. A great book to read alone or in a small group, this book will be very popular in the library but frustrating to use for story time in the classroom, as attention to detail must be paid. Not only will children love to search for and count the missing species (the text and illustrations work hand-in hand to make Uno’s Garden a story, puzzle and numbers book), they will also learn how humans affect our environment, as well as what we can do to help save it. Despite its whimsical style, this book embodies an important message about endangered species and the destructive nature of humankind.

*Kat Thomson*

Kat Thomson originally created this resource for her program at UBC about teaching with illustrated materials.

**Bunting, Eve and Wisniewski, David. Ducky. New York: Clarion Books, 1997.**

Ducky is an engaging and inventive glimpse into the far-reaching affects of freight lost during shipping at sea, as narration begins in the endpapers, depicting a crate loading onto a ship, and the ship headed into ominous clouds and lightning. Readers follow the protagonist; a bathtub toy that is part of a crate washed overboard during a storm. Told in first person point of view and illustrated in bright, textured layers of cut-paper (Color-Aid and Canson papers with textured plexiglass and Form-X film which is then photographed), the plot is both charming and an education about ocean habitats. Ducky would provide a great example for art teachers planning to work with cut-paper technique, as well as science classes that are exploring ocean life, tides and pollution.

**Carle, Eric. "Slowly, Slowly, Slowly", Said the Sloth. New York: Penguin Putnam Books, 2002.**

Illustrated in Carle's iconic tissue-paper collage style, a sloth that inhabits the exotic Amazon rainforest explains to the other animals why slow and peaceful can be beneficial (and sends the message that it's OK to be different). At first glance this picturebook may seem simplistic, and very young children will appreciate the expressive colour and bright details, but "Slowly..." is also an information book. The final endpapers depict the animals of the Amazon and label them for identification, and Jane Goodall discusses the plight of the rainforest and other endangered habitats, calling for conservation in

an introductory forward to Carle's book. A great read for Earth Day or an excellent introduction to a unit on environmentalism in intermediate classrooms when tied with YouTube clips of Goodall's speeches.

**Chin, Jason. Redwoods. New York: Roaring Brook Press, 2009.**

In Chin's first book that he has written/illustrated, a young boy explores the wonders of the majestic redwood forest and learns that

*An informative book for the primary classroom and a great addition to units on habitats and geography.*

nature can be an inspiration to us all. A mix of fantasy (the protagonist is actually learning about the trees from a book he finds on the subway) and non-fiction information (the reader discovers redwood facts alongside the main character), Redwoods features a text-within-a-text trick – the book carried throughout the illustrations by the boy is actually Redwoods. An informative book for the primary classroom and a great addition to units on habitats and geography. Painted in muted watercolour that captures the light, shadow and mist of the Californian redwood forest, Chin finishes the story with a final page of pure information, explaining the fragility of the ecosystem and redwood habitat because of logging.

**Cooney, Barbara. Miss Rumphius. Toronto: Puffin Books, 1982.**

Winner of the American Book Award, Cooney's contemporary classic was painted in acrylics with "accents of Prismacolor pencils on gesso-coated percale fabric mounted on illustration board,

then camera separated and printed in four colours" (Cooney, 1982). This technique allows for the fabric background to seep through the paint, creating images with texture and depth. An inspiring book for stronger primary or intermediate readers, the story is narrated by the title character's great niece, who holds her Great-Aunt Rumphius in high esteem. From childhood Alice Rumphius was expected to do three things; travel the world, live by

the sea, and do something to make the world more beautiful. In her twilight years, she completes all three tasks, and improves her local environment by planting lupines in her community. The tale ends in a pretty two-page spread of the great-nephews and nieces gathering lupines and wondering what else can be done to beautify the world, encouraging the reader to ponder what *they* might do as well.

**Fleischman, Paul and Hawkes, Kevin. Westlandia. Toronto: Scholastic Incorporated, 1999.**

Cartoonish and inventive illustrations lead us through this tale about Wesley, a social outcast who learns in school about staple food crops, and decides to start his own civilization of "the new and unknown." The endpapers display the symbols and "eighty-letter alphabet" of Westlandia, inviting the reader into the innovative world of Wesley and his discoveries. Fun for use in English classrooms to study character and setting development and the concept of the outsider, and especially interesting in social

studies classes, looking at agriculture, environment, civilizations and development of numeracy, culture, language, crop production/usage, and significant figures in history (along with the fact that their ideas and inventions often labeled them as outcasts). Hawkes' illustrations take up the whole page, often expanding into two-page spreads, and depict how Wesley's world changes and unfolds as his crop begets his civilization, and in turn earns him the respect of his parents and some new friends.

**Hall, Zoe and Halpern, Shari.** **The Apple Pie Tree.** New York: **The Blue Sky Press, 1996.**

Using one of her mother's homemade apple pies as inspiration for the artwork, Halpern entices readers into the tale with her mouthwatering, multi-media collage illustrations. This book tells the story of an apple tree and all the ecology it supports (birds, bees, butterflies, squirrels and even deer) from season to season. Aimed at beginning readers with its simple text and vocabulary, this book also provides a lot of information about the environment in which an apple tree resides, and the final page explains the process of pollination (and also gives a recipe for apple pie!).

**Hughes, Monica and Garay, Luis.** **A Handful of Seeds.** Toronto: **Lester Publishing Limited, 1993.**

This inspiring story is accompanied by paintings of Luis Garay, an artist from Nicaragua. Hughes, well known for her young adult science fiction, tackles the subject of child poverty with sensitivity and hope. Concepcion's grandmother has died, and when they are evicted from her farm,

all Concepcion has to remember her by are a handful of corn, bean and chili seeds. Using the knowledge gained from her industrious grandmother, the young protagonist plants a garden on the edge of the dump, and teaches other children how to survive by living off the land. Garay's oil paintings, which have been displayed in galleries in Central America and Canada, give life to the children and the dismal setting of the *barrio*, but sometimes the characters' facial expressions do not match the actions in the text (for example, police chase the children, yet both the officers and the kids look happy). All in all, a tale of hope that would fit well with intermediate social studies curriculum in indigenous cultures and agriculture.

**Jeffers, Oliver.** **The Great Paper Caper.** London: **Harper Collins, 2008.**

Jeffers, the author/illustrator of *The Incredible Book Eating Boy*, uses playful, modern illustrations to depict the story of trees that go missing, and the inhabitants of the forest who investigate the reason behind their absence. Printed on responsibly harvested paper, the endpapers lead us in with instructions on "advanced paper planery" and introduce the cast of quirky characters. As it turns out, the bear had been using the trees to make practice paper airplanes for the upcoming competition, and he learns his lesson about demolishing the environment for his own gain. Intermediate-level readers will love the interaction between Jeffers' text and pencil crayon illustrations, as well as the surprise ending that promotes teamwork and recycling.

**Kogawa, Joy and Ohi, Ruth.** **Naomi's Tree.** Markham, Ontario: **Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2008.**

Both Kogawa and Ohi are well known in the Canadian literary industry, and their collaboration on this picturebook is based on Kogawa's World War II novel, *Naomi's Road*. Young immigrants from Japan settle in Canada, bringing with them a reminder of their homeland, a cherry seed that blossoms into a beautiful tree. The tree becomes a part of their home, even part of their family, and when they are forced to leave it behind because of war, it waits patiently until the return of the now-elderly children, in a heart-wrenching conclusion. In contrast to the concept of war unsettling the family, the illustrations are peaceful; Ohi utilizes cool, serene watercolour and coloured pencil, each image contained by a frame. An excellent book for initiating discussion on Japanese internment camps, evacuation, relocation and the human connection with nature, *Naomi's Tree* would work well in an upper-primary or intermediate level classroom.

**Leedy, Loreen.** **The Great Trash Bash.** New York: **Holiday House Inc., 1991.**

The light, carefree tone of this book is complemented by cartoonlike illustrations, despite the fact that the subject matter is of a serious nature. The animal inhabitants of Beaston realize their town has too much trash, and during a town meeting, decide to do something about it. Not only do they manage to get rid of the trash, the animals begin to think sustainably and plan to change their living habits for a brighter future. An excellent book for elementary school classrooms to encourage impres-

sionable students in reducing their carbon footprint, becoming aware of consumer culture and recycling. Leedy's watercolour illustrations use humour and charm to get the message across, while supporting young readers in building literacy with a mixture of captioned text and dialogue bubbles.

**Leger, Diane and Gait, Darlene. Who's In Maxine's Tree? Victoria: Orca Book Publishers, 2006.**

This insightful story, aimed at more competent primary readers, would make a great read aloud at library or classroom story time. It begins with endpapers depicting a raccoon peeking out at the reader, and in Leger's acknowledgements she thanks a professional climber who provided her with information, the Forestry Society, and the Wet'suwet'en chief. Gait, a BC artist, realistically portrays Canadian landscape and wildlife in vivid acrylic paint illustrations that were scanned (in Victoria) to picture-book size. The plot focuses on Maxine, as she hikes with her family to check on her favorite Sitka spruce tree (the book is the sequel to Maxine's Tree, which features the same characters). Luckily for Maxine and the spruce, the marbled murrelet, a threatened seabird species, has nested there, and both Maxine and the reader learn about this rare bird and its old-growth tree habitat, endangered because of logging.

**MacLachlan, Patricia and Wimmer, Mike. All the Places to Love. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1994.**

The first thing any reader will notice about this picturebook is the stunning artistry by Wimmer. Rich, detailed oil paintings

take on a life of their own and are as genuine as photographs in their depth, colour and realism. The story is narrated by a boy named Eli, who has been taught since birth to appreciate land – all the places to love. Each person in Eli's family demonstrates to him what they treasure about the natural world that surrounds their farm, and this will elicit a connection in any reader, young or old. A beautiful example for older students of portrait and landscape art, or the paintings could be used for writing exercises as an inspiration for creative or descriptive writing. The heartwarming, memory-evoking story ends with a stunning two-page spread in full-bleed that depicts Eli and his younger sister overlooking the farm; "All the places to love are here, I'll tell her, no matter where you may live."

**Pak, Soyung and Truong, Marcelino. A Place to Grow. New York: Arthur A. Levine Books, 2002.**

Written by Pak, a Korean immigrant, and illustrated by Truong, a Vietnamese immigrant, this book fittingly describes the parallels between what a seed, in order to flourish, needs in nature and what the narrator needed in life, hence his decision to emigrate. The endpapers make an appropriate beginning, showing sepia-toned photographs of the author and illustrator's families and maps of their journeys (to the USA and England). The artwork is sharp, yet the backgrounds are soft and textured, created using gouache paint and China ink. An introduction to the concept of immigration, the human need for nature in our lives, and the idea of cultural identity from an international perspective are all dis-

cussion topics that could be raised when working with this book in the primary classroom.

**Rosenberry, Vera. Who is in the Garden? New York: Holiday House Inc., 2001.**

In this simple concept book for emerging readers, Rosenberry uses a light wash of watercolour to give her reader a tour through the garden and its inhabitants. This picturebook would make an excellent introduction to wildlife and their habits, as well as the notion of camouflage, as each bird, animal or insect must be discovered in the illustrations, using the text as a guide.

**Seuss, Dr. (Giesel, Theodor Seuss). The Lorax. New York: Random House, 1971.**

This classic tale of the greedy Once-ler, who cares only of money, is a caution to us all about taking the environment for granted, "UNLESS someone like you/cares a whole awful lot/nothing is going to get better/It's not" (Seuss, 1971). The reader is encouraged to speak for those who can't, the endangered animals, the trees, the water, the air, the Earth. An excellent read for Earth Day, a staple in any library collection, school or public, and often used in secondary school science classrooms, The Lorax is an iconic picturebook for a reason. The book, illustrated in Seuss' favored medium of watercolour and ink on bristol, is commonly recognized as an extended metaphor concerning industrialized society, using the Once-ler to represent industry and the Lorax to personify the environment.

(Note: a 3-D, CGI film based on The Lorax is in the works for release in 2012)



**Silverstein, Shel. The Giving Tree. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1964.**

Inspired by cartoonists as a child, Silverstein created the now famous picturebook The Giving Tree in simple black and white line drawings of pen and ink. This book is an excellent resource when discussing humankind's use of nature and the issue of environmental responsibility and sustainability. "The Giving Tree is one of those rare creations that seem to defy categorization, appealing equally to the reverent and the irreverent, the sophisticated and the simple" (Silverstein, *Publishers Weekly* interview). The plot tells of a tree and the manner in which a man uses it. When he is a boy, he plays in the tree's branches and enjoys its apple. Later, he uses its apples to sell for money, and then the tree's branches to build a house for his family. Years pass; the man is now old and alone. The tree lets him take its trunk to carve a boat from, and the man rows away. Finally he returns for the last time to sit and rest on the stump of the tree - all that's left of it.

**Stewart, H.E. A Child's Enchanted Garden. Victoria: Tudor House Press, 2001.**

This is a well-designed book, although its target audience is unclear; older readers may find it a bit dry and stodgy, while younger readers will struggle with vocabulary such as "eiderdown," "shrubbery" and "expectancy." Beginning with a winter scene, the slightly dark in value illustrations steer the reader towards the return of the robins, signaling spring has begun. The narrative follows the robins and their chicks as they navigate the pitfalls of living as wild animals do, and spring turns to summer (yet the illustrations still stay somewhat dark). Of course, spring becomes autumn, then winter, and the book closes with informative nature notes at the back, detailing robins. The illustrations are printed in a process called "intaglio", using hand-printed copper plates, and a combination of drypoint, aquatint, soft ground, flat bite and spit bite, with coloured inks applied to specific areas of each plate, then wiped. Printing multiple plates resulted in layered images that appear richer, and the images are enhanced with watercolour pencils or oil pastels (Stewart, 2001).

**Stewart, Sarah and Small, David. The Gardener. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1997.**

Set during the Depression, this picturebook follows the journey of Lydia Grace, who must leave her home "until things get better" and live with her uncle (who never smiles) in the city. The reader tracks Lydia Grace, armed with planting seeds, through her narrative of letters, first to her uncle as she prepares to leave, and then to her parents as she attempts to stay positive in the face of the unknown. The illustrations of the countryside left behind are bursting

with life and pastoral pastel colour, providing an evident juxtaposition to the dark, cold, charcoal-drawn city. However, Lydia Grace has a plan to brighten things up in her neighborhood using her love for gardening and knowledge of flowers. Recognized as a Caldecott Honor book, The Gardener is an asset to any library, but may be best left to individual reading. Since it is written as correspondence, the format doesn't translate well to read alouds.

**Ward, Helen and Craste, Marc. Varmints. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Candlewick Press, 2008.**

This is a sweet, yet heart-breaking book about change coming to those who live in harmony with nature, about assimilation of culture and environmental damage. "The others" come, and build, making the gentle sounds of nature fade away until there is so much noise (industry), that no one can think... "so they stop thinking." Broken into parts separated by numbered plastic sheets, Part Two shows us the protagonist in his own sanctuary, nurturing a plant, which he leaves outside a mysterious doorway. In doing so, he transforms the dark, industrial towers of the city into plant pods, where Part Three lets us see the protagonist and like-minded others cultivating a contained environment in a biosphere amongst the towers. Craste, an animation director in London, uses computer illustrations to create the adorable and brave creatures that navigate through what can only be described as epic images. Bees buzz through the pages, pods stem from concrete in almost 3-D surrealism, and layers of shadow and light make up the rainy cityscape of ominous concrete, bricks and

metal. This book has an excellent message for use in elementary and secondary science classrooms (effects of pollution), as well as English and social studies lessons on environment and social change. 🌱

## ARTICLES:

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