

Storybook Curriculum Guide for Elementary Environmental Educators

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The spread of industrialism and the ever-dwindling resources on our planet leave environmentalists frantically searching for an answer to a vitally important question- How do we teach people to care for our planet? The key to changing the downward environmental spiral currently facing our world lies in the hands of children. Having not yet developed hard-to-break habits, children can be instilled with environmentally-friendly behaviors.

Although changing the way we treat the planet is a very serious task and should be treated as such, putting the task in the hands of children requires that environmental educators tailor the lessons to be easily understood by not-yet-educated minds. Although most would agree that the best way to learn is through direct experience, this is not always possible. Therefore, an alternative and practical way to convey messages to children, and even to adults in certain cases, is through stories. “A good story readily encourages a depth of cognitive processing that makes it more likely the information presented will be used when making future decisions about the issue or behavior in question” (Some Fundamentals of Engaging Stories 173). Stories allow people to learn valuable information and lessons in a way that is fun and interesting.

This list of children’s books was made in the hopes of exposing young students to a variety of stories. There are so many different aspects of environmental consciousness, so it is essential that readers understand its many angles. To make it easier to attain this well-rounded understanding, the list has been divided into four categories: Doomsday tales, The Human-Nature Connection, Informational Stories, and The Power of One.

To maximize this list’s effectiveness, at least a few stories should be read from each category because each section depends on one another for full understanding. For example, books from The Power of One category teach children that they can make a difference, but students will not know how to make go about this unless they read tales from the Informational section. After reading a few stories from each category, children will hopefully understand not only the importance of preserving our planet, but also how to care for it.

Doomsday Tales

Cherry, Lynne. *The Great Kapok Tree: A Tale of the Amazon Rain Forest*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990. Print.

In this moving plot, animals and children of the rain forest discuss what will happen to them and the world if mankind chops down their beloved Kapok Tree and the rainforest in general. For example, the snake and frog would have nowhere to live, the jaguar would not find food, humans would perish from lack of oxygen, and much more. Cherry connects the destruction of one tree with the survival of all animals and humans.

Peet, Bill. *The Wump World*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1970. Print.

In *The Wump World*, aliens called 'Pollutians,' who travel to the Wump planet. Previously a grass and green landscape, the Pollutians industrialize the entire planet, forcing the innocent Wumps to move into dark, scary underground caves. The fable gives a chillingly real depiction of how humans are destroying our planet.

Seuss. *The Lorax*. New York: Random House, 1971. Print.

In this cartoon metaphor of how industrialism has destroyed our planet, the Once-ler, who symbolizes big corporations, chops down a single Truffula Tree to make a Thneed. However, the Once-ler could not stop after cutting down one tree, and soon enough, he has slashed down the entire forest and polluted the air and water around him, forcing all the animals to leave. Using colorful illustrations and rhymes, *The Lorax* delivers a very serious message to children about can happen if we continue to industrialize.

Van Allsburg, Chris. *Just a Dream*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990. Print.

About a young litterbug named Walter, this story outlines what the future looks like if humans continue to abuse the planet and its resources. Chris van Allsburg's dramatic approach to how we treat the environment will catch young readers' attention and will cause them to re-examine their own behaviors just as Walter does.

Human-Nature Connection

Ehlert, Lois. *Pie in the Sky*. Orlando: Harcourt, 2004. Print.

Pie in the Sky demonstrates how we can make delicious food, such as pie, using ingredients from the earth! In this story, a father tells his child that the tree in the backyard of their new home is a pie tree. Never having heard of a pie tree, the child feels apprehensive, and as the seasons change and no pies grow on the tree, the child's skepticism increases. Finally, the father explains to his child that they will pick cherries, just as the birds do, and make a pie from them.

Harrison, Jim. *The Boy Who Ran to the Woods*. New York: Atlantic Monthly, 2000. Print.

About a wild youngster named Jimmy, *The Boy Who Ran to the Woods* demonstrates how time in the Northern Michigan wilderness can heal a trauma

from a serious accident that blinds him in one eye. In Jimmy's case, free time to run and explore the forest near the Great Lakes allows him to gain control of his rebelliousness and instills in him a lifelong love of the outdoors. Jimmy's story will encourage children to spend more time in nature.

Lapointe, Claude. *Out of Sight! Out of Mind!* Mankato, MN: Creative Editions, Harcourt, Brace, 1995. Print.

Composed almost entirely of illustrations, *Out of Sight! Out of Mind!* reminds readers to pay attention to the outside world. Under the impression that "Nothing ever happens outside," the children spend all day playing video games and miss all the interesting events taking place outside. Finally, they look out the window and notice the excitement happening outdoors, such as animals playing and running around.

Romanova, Natalia. *Once There Was a Tree*. New York: Dial, 1985. Print.

When a tree is hacked down, insects, animals, and men all claim the remaining bottom of the tree as their home, which causes the narrator to ask, "Who does the stump belong to?" By the end of the story, the answer is clear: trees do not belong to any single species on Earth, including man. Instead, nature must be shared and enjoyed by everyone.

Schimmel, Schim. *Dear Children of the Earth: A Letter from Home*. Minocqua, WI: NorthWord, 1994. Print.

In this inspirational letter to her children, Mother Earth shares, from her own point of view, the importance of caring for the earth. The personification of the Earth transforms the way students understand the world. By considering the planet to be just another person with thoughts and feelings rather than as something too huge to be affected by our actions, students will understand that the earth is not simply here for our exploitation and our individual behavior does have consequences.

Udry, Janice May. *A Tree is Nice*. New York: Harper & Bros., 1956. Print.

Simple yet delightful, *A Tree is Nice* opens up readers' eyes to the many uses of trees, from creating shade to providing branches for swings or climbing to protecting houses from strong winds. Outlining the many benefits of trees affirms their value and the need for them to be cared for and protected.

Informational Stories

Cole, Joanna. *The Magic Schoolbus On the Ocean Floor: A Book about Color*. New York: Scholastic, 1992. Print.

In this classic *Magic School Bus* adventure, Ms. Frizzle takes her students on a wild field trip down to the ocean floor. There, she teaches her students about the wonders of the ocean while giving them the opportunity to also explore the sea for themselves! Ms. Frizzle's out-of-box teaching style allows her class the chance to learn and have fun at the same time, while she reveals why the ocean is something to love and cherish.

Huntington, Harriet E. *Let's Go Outdoors*. New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1939. Print.
Let's Go Outdoors explains to young readers the different species one might find outside. Huntington explains in a straightforward yet engaging way how to identify animals globally and how each one behaves.

Hurst, Bridget. *Charlie and Lola: We Are Extremely Very Good Recyclers*. New York, NY: Dial For Young Readers, 2009. Print.
Little sister Lola, who has a bad habit of hoarding, fears for her own future when she visits her friend's older brother's room, who is also a hoarder, and sees that it is packed to the brim with old stuff. With help and advice from her older brother, Charlie, Lola kicks her hoarding addiction, becomes a model recycler, and even leads her class to winning a recycling contest. The brother-sister duo do a fantastic job of explaining to readers how to recycle.

Johanson, Sarah Margaret. *Caillou: Every Drop Counts*. Québec: Chouette, 2012. Print.
In his day care class, Caillou learns about not wasting water in his day care class. Caillou gains appropriate water conservation skills through a process of trial and error. Readers can follow along with Caillou to discover the best ways to save water.

Kroll, Steven. *Stuff!: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle*. Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Children, 2009. Print.
The notorious town pack-rat, Pinch, hesitantly decides to participate in a tag sale and sell all of his old stuff. By the end of the sale, he realizes all the joy that his things have brought to others, and decides to have his family sell their junk as well! Pinch's friend Heddy Hedgehog convinces Pinch to use the money from the tag sale to buy trees and make their town "pretty as well as clean." Pinch and his friends show that selling or giving away items that one no longer uses can help the community and feels very gratifying.

Smith, David J. *If America Were a Village: A Book about the People of the United States*. Toronto, Ont.: Kids Can, 2009. Print.
If America Were a Village explains the importance of using less and sustaining resources in a direct and educational way. In order to make this information easy-to-understand, Smith shrinks down the population of America to just one hundred people. Yet, this book does give statistics about the population and resources. For example, "If all the energy sources- coal, petroleum, natural gas, nuclear, renewable, electricity- were added up, America would use 21 percent of the world's total."

The Power of One

Cole, Henry. *On Meadowview Street*. New York: Greenwillow, 2007. Print.

New girl on the block, Caroline, demonstrates how one person can make a huge difference. What started out as saving a single flower from her dad's lawn mower soon turned into the creation of a beautiful garden filled with trees, a small pond, bird house, plants of many kinds, and a variety of animals. Caroline's neighborhood oasis influenced all of her neighbors on the block to design gardens of their own.

Wallace, Nancy Elizabeth. *Recycle Every Day!* New York: Marshall Cavendish, 2003. Print.

When Minna's school holds a contest for posters to be displayed in a recycling-themed calendar, Minna's parents teach her ways to recycle so that she can gather ideas for her poster. Each day of the week, Minna's mom and dad introduce her to a new habit, beginning with bringing old clothes to a community clothing bank and ending with saving leftover dinner food and storing it in plastic containers instead of plastic wrap. Minna and her family present an array of simple methods to recycle.

Weeks, Sarah. *Follow the Moon*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1995. Print.

This adorable and heart-warming tale tells the story of a boy who helps a baby turtle find his way to the ocean by encouraging him to "follow the moon." The turtle, lost and confused, needs the guidance of the young boy, who seems to know just how to be of assistance. The friendship between the boy and the baby turtle reveals the theme of the story: that we need each other to survive.

Wellington, Monica. *Gabby & Grandma Go Green*. New York: Dutton Children's, 2011. Print.

In this adventurous tale, budding environmentalist Gabby and her grandma spend the day doing a variety of fun, earth-friendly activities, from sewing reusable cloth bags for their groceries to buying local fruits and vegetables from the farmer's market to having a picnic in the park. Gabby and her grandma present a multitude of entertaining endeavors that are beneficial to sustaining our planet and demonstrate that saving the environment can be enjoyable.