

# Reviews of the 2011 Award Winners

## Multicultural & International Books:

**Red Umbrella**, a novel by Christina Diaz Gonzalez. *Knopf*, www.randomhouse.com/kids. ISBN 978-0-375-86190-1. Middle & upper grades.

*Red Umbrella* is based on the real-life experiences of the author's parents during the early 1960s. It describes the thoughts and actions of a strong-willed teenager, Lucia, and her younger brother Frankie during their escape from Castro's political regime.

The revolution in Cuba doesn't appear dangerous to fourteen year-old Lucia Alvarez until soldiers come to Puerto Mijares and flip her world upside-down. Lucia used to roam freely around town, but now with soldiers on the streets, Lucia's parents order her to stay at home and away from her best friend, Ivette.

At first, Lucia is frustrated with her lack of independence and inability to take part in revolutionary groups like many of her friends; however, after a tragic accident Lucia begins to see the threats of the revolution—a movement that forces her family to keep secrets to stay alive. Unfortunately, while caught up in the romantic daydream of her first dance, Lucia spills her family's secret. After a startling visit from the soldiers, Lucia fears that her mistake might be the reason for her father's sudden arrest and her parents' heart-wrenching decision to send their children to the United States.

Before long, Lucia and Frankie are whisked away from their beloved homeland of Cuba and sent to Miami, Florida, and then to a foster home in Nebraska. While the Midwest seems disappointing at first, Frankie and Lucia learn to love their new surroundings. Their kind hosts teach them English, assist them with their school work, and even help them save money for phone calls to Cuba. Soon, Lucia is making friends and embracing the American lifestyle. However, after months of no contact with Cuba and an upsetting letter from Ivette, Lucia begins to worry about her parents' survival. Fortunately, with the help of her American host family, Lucia and Frankie are reunited with their parents. Lucia comes to realize that the location of a home is not nearly as important as the loving people inside of it.

—Kendra Ribeiro, student intern, University of Oregon

**Birmingham Sunday** by Larry Dane Brimner. Calkins Creek, boydsmillspress.com. ISBN 978-1-59078-613-0. Historical book. Grades 4-11.

Did you know that Birmingham was infamously known as Bombingham during the civil rights era? This book is focused on the Birmingham Church bombing that killed four little girls in 1963 and the events preceding and following it. The author sets the stage eloquently as he describes the racist acts of the white supremacists during the 1950s and 1960s. During this time, tensions were high—African Americans fought for their rights while white segregationists were determined to silence their efforts with brutality and aggression. The more successful the civil rights demonstrations became, the more violently white segregations retaliated. The climax of these actions occurred when white segregationists bombed the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church which took the lives of four African American girls who were preparing for their Sunday service. Two black boys were also shot dead later that day. Brimner includes both photographs and personal quotes to help us understand the brutalities which finally led the government leaders to act and pass the 1964 Civil Rights legislation.

—Nicole Dionisopulos, student intern, University of Oregon

**Global Issues Series.** *Rosen Publishing*, www.rosenpublishing.com. Middle and upper grades.

The *Global Issues* series is an introduction to six serious social concerns that plague our world today. These include: Terrorism, Human Trafficking, HIV & AIDS, Refugees, Globalization and Fundamentalism. Each book focuses on one specific issue and is composed of chapters that detail the topic with its description, history, impact, possible solutions, and what could happen in the future.

Each individual book is written by a different author, but all have a similar format and style. The authors are aware of the fact that they are presenting these serious problems to a younger audience. Yet, they do not seem to shy away from presenting the truth. The authors have simplified the content somewhat to allow children to understand the gravity and implications of the issues. I recommend this series for a mature readership of middle and high school students who are eager to learn of the actual problems that we face in our modern society.

—Nicole Dionisopulos, student intern, U. of Oregon

**Yafi's Family:** *An Ethiopian Boy's Journey of Love, Loss, and Adoption* by Linda Pettitt, illustr. Jan S. Gilchrist. *Amharic Kids*, www.amharickids.com. ISBN 978-0-979-7481-4-1. Picture book for elementary grades.

Linda Pettitt was inspired to write *Yafi's Family* as a gift for her own adopted son who had expressed a longing to know more about his birth-country of Ethiopia and his biological mother. It is a fictional story of a six-year old Ethiopian boy named Yafi and the American family who adopts him.

With tenderness and insight, we see how Yafi's new family helps keep his memories of his previous life in Ethiopia vivid in his young mind. Through beautiful watercolor illustrations and the dialogues, we learn of Yafi's separation from his birth mother, his grandmother's struggle to provide for him, and the American family he meets. *Yafi's Family* is about his journey to America, but more importantly, it is also about the love for their children that both birth families and adoptive parents have in common.

I recommend this book for all families, especially with adoptive children, as it is sure to help strengthen family bonds in the long run while instilling a sense of belonging.

—Nancy Glubka, parent

**Moon Watchers:** *Shirin's Ramadan Miracle* by Reza Jalali, illustr. Anne Sibley O'Brien. *Tilbury House*, www.tilbury-house.com. ISBN 978-0-88448-321-2. Grades 3-6.

*Moon Watchers* is a sweet, pleasant, picture book with a childlike feel that gives it a warm essence. Reza Jalali and Ann Sibley O'Brien have created a remarkable work that is not only entertaining, but thought provoking as well.

The book follows nine year old Shirin, as she experiences the fasting month of Ramadan, which she wants to be a part of. She watches the moon sliver grow each day, and prays with her family to Allah. This book is not just a description of Ramadan though. It is a story that contains vital lessons as Shirin takes part in the fasting and realizes that Ramadan is not just about not eating, but also about doing good deeds. She ends up doing favors for her brother Ali, who is having a hard time fasting. In the end, she is repaid for her generosity, and learns that good deeds often circle back around again.

This wonderfully written and beautifully illustrated book is sure to bring a smile to readers' face. It is a sweet, uplifting story that teaches that doing good deeds, if taken to heart, can help the whole world and everyone in it.

—Julian Mullins, grade 9, Oregon

**A Hare in the Elephant's Trunk** a novel by Jan L. Coates. *Red Deer Press*, www.fitzhenry.ca/reddeer.aspx. ISBN 978-0-88995-451-9. Middle & upper grades.

This incredible story is based on the real life of Jacob Akech Deng, a Sudanese boy who marched for seven years across the continent of Africa.

Jacob's story unfolds when soldiers attack his Sudanese village. During the raid, Jacob is torn from his mother and sisters, and is forced to join the thousands of boys seeking refuge in Ethiopia. Jacob, his best friend and his half-brother trek endlessly in constant search of food and water and anything that might aid their survival in the harsh desert heat. During their journey the boys struggle to fight homesickness, predators, infection and dehydration. Yet, Jacob quickly finds that being optimistic in difficult times can ease the pain in his hungry belly and aching heart.

After months of walking across sub-Saharan Africa, Jacob and his friends come to the river that separates their war-driven countries. The wildly rushing water is filled with dangerous currents and hungry crocodiles, but through teamwork and perseverance Jacob and his friends manage to swim across to Ethiopia, where they encounter the Pinyudo Refugee camp. It is here where the boys attend school for the first time. However, the boys are continuously being told that joining the SPLA (Sudan People's Liberation Army) is the only way to save Sudan, which leaves the young boys struggling to find a reason to attend school. However, when Jacob witnesses a soldier attack his beloved teacher, he becomes suspicious of the soldiers' motives and their rough lifestyle.

Eventually, the boys are forced out of the refugee camp in Ethiopia and they begin their long walk to Kenya, in search of their long-lost families. On his journey, Jacob recognizes that peace is not carved through war, but through education, and he begins a new quest to find teachers to educate all the children of Africa.

—Kendra Ribeiro, student intern, University of Oregon

**Bamboo People**, a novel by Mitali Perkins. *Charlesbridge*, www.bamboopeople.org. ISBN 978-1-58089-328-2. Middle & upper grades.

Bamboo is an interesting plant. Flexible yet strong, it can be made into houses and bowls. In a similar manner, the characters in *Bamboo People* are also varied and unique, and they symbolize the ever changing and growing nature of life.

Chiko is a smart, book-loving, Burmese boy whose father, a doctor, is in prison for resisting the government. Chiko's endeavors will take him far from his comfort zone of books and into the midst of army recruitment and battle. Tu Reh is a Karenni boy who wants to fight for the freedom of his people after witnessing Burmese soldiers burn down his house and bamboo fields. The boys' separate journeys end up intertwining, and the conflict between the two boys from different cultures creates an intense drama.

How could there be understanding without struggle? How could there be peace without war? As the drama increases between Tu Reh and Chiko, the two boys must find a way to adjust to the fact that they're stuck together or run the risk of imminent death. It is this very struggle that makes *Bamboo People* such a globally significant book, for the parallel lies between the characters' tension and the tension between countries that exists in our society today. *Bamboo People* depicts a startlingly relevant story, and if its principles were applied to modern society, important change could occur, leading to a more peaceful, knowledgeable world.

—Julian Mullins, grade 9, Oregon

**Eight Days: A Story of Haiti** by Edwidge Danticat, illustr. Alix Delinois. *Orchard Books*, www.scholastic.com. ISBN 978-0-545-27849-2. Picture book for ages 5-9.

Haiti is known today for being a place in ruins—families coping with the hardships after the disastrous earthquake of January 2010. In this picture book the author shows a very different Haiti than what the media has portrayed.

The book follows a boy named “Junior” as he relives what he was thinking during the eight days that he was trapped beneath his crumbled house following the earthquake. Although Junior is in the midst of a disaster, the story doesn't have any pictures of death

and destruction. Instead, the vibrant pastel and acrylic drawings show the beautiful images of life before the earthquake. It depicts Junior playing marbles, singing a gorgeous melody, splashing in the warm rain, and eating a sweet mango.

*Eight Days* is a story of hope that shows us how inspiring Haiti can be. It tells of a boy who survived an earthquake by imagining the happy times of his life, and the fun and excitement of his world. This message is relevant to every single person on this planet, because we all experience hardships, but the way we deal with those hardships is what shapes us and who we are. It's what helps us to grow and mature in a healthy manner.

—Julian Mullins, grade 9, Oregon

**Mali Under The Night Sky: A Lao Story of Home** by Youme Landowne. *Cinco Puntos Press*, www.cincopuntos.com. ISBN 978-1-933693-68-2. Picture book. Ages 5-9.

In this beautiful book, Youme tells the true story of Lao-American artist Malichansouk Kouanchao, who walked with her family as a five year old from Laos to Thailand to escape the American bombing.

The culture, language and alphabet of Laos are woven into Mali's recollections of life at home in Laos. These memories inspired hope for Mali and her family when they were jailed for having no home after they became refugees.

Exquisite watercolors and colorful borders on each page are an integral part of this story. Some of the paintings have a breathtakingly spiritual quality to them.

*Mali Under the Night Sky* is a useful teaching tool for elementary school teachers. It expands children's worldviews and offers understanding of how the needs and feelings of all people are alike, although their customs and languages may be different. For people of all ages who have had experiences of war or may have been uprooted from their homes, this story provides acknowledgement, recognition and affirmation in a way that may begin to heal their wounds.

—Yvonne Young, retired teacher, storyteller

We invite entries for the **2012 Skipping Stones Honor Awards** (send by 1 February 2012). Visit [SkippingStones.org](http://SkippingStones.org) to download an entry form.

**Ruth and the Green Book** by Calvin Alexander Ramsey, illustr. Floyd Cooper. *Carolrhoda*, www.lernerbooks.com. ISBN 978-0-7613-5255-6. Ages 6-10.

Ruth and her parents are traveling by car from Chicago to Alabama to visit her grandma. Ruth has never made a journey like this. As she travels in her father's 1952 Buick, she learns about "Jim Crow" laws, what "white only" means, and to look for Esso gas stations.

From the history page in the back we learn that in the 1940s, Esso gas stations were the first stations to sell gas to African Americans and allow them to use their public restrooms. Ruth's father had never heard of the "Negro Motorist Green Book," but he quickly bought his first copy from the Esso service attendant. The "Green Book" was created in 1936 by Victor Green, an African American. The book helped black travelers move across the United States safely. Few white people understood how difficult, humiliating, even dangerous it was for African Americans to travel across the United States. Even in the 1970s after "white only" signs were illegal for public accommodations black people could still run into serious difficulties.

**Ruth and the Green Book** is a lovely picture book which shows these difficulties in a way young children can understand some of the effects of racism on a family. The pictures are all soft, fuzzy pastels and the mood of each person in the story can be read very well. The illustrations on every page enhance the words in the story.

—Paulette Ansari, grandmother, educator and storyteller.

**The Other Half of My Heart**, a novel by Sundee T. Frazier. *Delacorte Press*, www.randomhouse.com/kids. Middle & upper grades. ISBN 978-0-385-73440-0.

This is an extraordinary story of twin sisters born to a white father and a black mother. One twin, Minni (short for Minerva) has white skin, red straight hair, and blue eyes, while her twin Keira, brown skin, black curly hair and brown eyes. The girls are now eleven-years-old living in a small town on the Oregon coast and they are and have always been best friends. Minni complains the most about sticking out at school and not fitting in with her tall skinny body and big feet. That is, she complains until she is pressured into participating in the Miss Black Pearl Preteen competition in North Carolina by her African American grandmother and Keira. In North Carolina every stranger who lays eyes on Minni treats her as if she is white. Minni being painfully shy does not speak up

for herself or her sister. Even their grandmother favors Minerva's white features over Keira's dark skin and afro hair. The gap between Minerva and Keira widens until Keira is not speaking to her sister. The question is, will Minni find the courage she needs and the right words to set everyone straight before the situation gets any worse. This is an intriguing novel, which holds your attention until the very last word.

—Paulette Ansari, grandmother, educator and storyteller.

**Africans Thought Of It: Amazing Innovations** by Bathseba Opini and Richard B. Lee. *Annick Press*, www.annickpress.com. ISBN: 978-1-55451-277-5. Elem. grades.

In Zimbabwe, there are historic ruins of magnificent stone structures such as the University of Timbuktu. The walls are 39 feet high and 20 feet thick. This ancient university has six floors where students studied many subjects. And we can never forget the pyramids of Egypt, the greatest architectural achievements of humankind.

This book talks about the skills and creativity of the African people in hunting, agriculture, medicine, arts and crafts, communications, music, sports and ends with how Africa is today. Each page is a beautiful collage of strong colors. The text includes a two page index, a timeline of African history and a list of books for further reading on the subject.

—Paulette Ansari, grandmother, educator and storyteller.

**Gandhi: His Life, His Struggles, His Words** by Elisabeth de Lambilly, illustr. Severine Cordier. *Enchanted Lion Books*, www.enchantedlionbooks.com. ISBN 978-1-59270-094-3. Biography. Grades 4-10.

He was born, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in October 1869. He married Kasturba when they were both thirteen-years-old in 1882, and in 1906, Gandhi became the first political activist to use non-violence in politics. He called it *satyagraha*—*satya* meaning 'truth' and *agraha* meaning 'force or firmness'. He fasted seventeen different times, to the point of death, to bring about change. This book is beautifully put together having three distinct sections. The first part is done in deep colors, comic strip format. This section tells about his life as a young man. It gives examples of the discrimination he and the people of India suffered under British rule. The second section begins with a chronology page of Gandhi's life then discusses each act of civil disobedience. There are lots of pictures—some are colorful drawings

and others black & white photographs of him and others. The third section has pages dedicated to his quotes. The quotes are written in large letters and in different colors against a different background color. His quote on Love reads, “Belief in non-violence is based on the assumption that human nature in its essence is one and therefore unfailingly responds to the advances of love...”

—Paulette Ansari, grandmother, educator and storyteller.

**Cesar Chavez:** *A Photographic Essay* by Ilan Stavans. *Cinco Puntos Press*, www.cincopuntos.com. ISBN 978-1-933693-22-4. Biography. Middle and upper grades.

This book is primarily a tribute by the author to Cesar Chavez: a bigger than life activist who fought for the rights of the migrant population in the United States. It is also an attempt to enlarge the reader’s understanding of the Civil Rights movement. While acknowledging the very crucial work that was done to realize the dreams of millions of African Americans, the books does justice to the struggles of other disenfranchised people—minorities who, through back-breaking hard work, tried to better their lives and the lives of their children.

Through careful archival research the author was able to gather a great collection of photographs of Cesar Chavez and his work. These photographs derive much of their strength, beyond the subject that they illustrate, through their stark and unglamorous depiction of a world of struggle. They are black and white, grainy and sometimes a little blurry depending on their origins but they are always powerful and clear in what they describe. Some of these pictures illustrate simple moments in the life of Cesar Chavez as a child or among his coworkers. Others illustrate moments of important acknowledgment, if not outright support, that Chavez received in the company of the powerful political and religious figure of his time. Some photos show the countless personal struggles that Chavez had to endure to give a voice to his struggling companions or close collaborators that helped him along the way.

This book will also spark the interest of a would-be photographer/journalist in documenting local struggles such as environmental issues and help them clearly see that pictures can be worth a thousand words.

This book also includes a list of resources and a chronology of Cesar Chavez’s life.

—Alain Rebeyrol, architect and parent.

**The Lunch Thief** by Anne C. Bromley, illustr. Robert Casilla. *Tilbury House*, www.tilburyhouse.com. ISBN 978-0-88448-311-3. Picture book. Elementary grades.

The *Lunch Thief* deals with the challenges hunger creates for children. In the story, Kevin’s family is unable to afford to pack him a lunch for school. Kevin is starving, and resorts to stealing other students’ lunches. But when Kevin is caught stealing his classmate Rafael’s lunch, he is not met with anger but rather sympathy. The character Rafael shows a deep sense of understanding and compassion, which is rare to find in other children his age. While at first Rafael admits to being deeply frustrated that his classmate stole his lunch, he decides to not express his emotions through his fists. Instead he exhibits a sense of sympathy and understanding and gains a friend in the process. This humbling picture book is an introduction for younger readers to the challenges others encounter. Through Rafael’s unselfish actions, readers can learn the importance of helping others, even when it is most inconvenient.

—Nicole Dionisopoulos, student, University of Oregon

**Sabores de América** by Ana María Pavez y Constanza Recart, illustr. Isabel Hojas. *Editorial Amanuta*, www.amanuta.com. ISBN 978-956-8209-51-3. Spanish. Grades 3-8.

Did you know that until the 15th century, chili peppers (chile or Ají), corn (maiz), potatoes, tomatoes, chocolate, papaya and a dozen other commonly used foods were exclusively grown only in the Americas? When I ate potatoes as a teenager in Central India, I never thought of this!

We can learn many cultural insights as well as kitchen secrets about many of these native foods and fruits. For example, when Columbus first encountered the hot “chilies” in the food he ate, he mistakenly thought it was the flavor of “the black pepper of the American Indians.” Before Columbus, the Europeans had never tasted the spicy hot chilies.

This outstanding book, published in Chile, begins with an opening spread on a dozen varieties of chilies. With its 32 richly illustrated pages, it invites Spanish-speaking students to rediscover the 17 featured indigenous plants like peanuts (maní or cacahuete), avocado (aguacate) sweet potato (batata) as well as the cultural richness that these American fruits and vegetables offer. The book deserves to be translated to English so many more of our “English only” readers can appreciate its cultural content.

—Arun Narayan Toké, editor.

**Thunder Over Kandahar**, a novel by Sharon E. McKay, photos by Rafal Gerszak. *Annick Press*, www.annickpress.com. ISBN 978-1-55451-266-9. Upper grades.

Yasmine and her parents have returned to Afghanistan so that her father can teach at a university and be useful to the country. But because he is well-educated, has lived in a foreign land and is open and interfaith-minded, he is considered an “outsider” or a “spy” by many Afghan villagers.

In the city of Herat where they have come to live, Yasmine’s mom is attacked by a Taliban group as the mother-daughter team walked and sang a children’s song in a city park. After her mother’s partial recovery from this bloody attack, the family moves away to a smaller town called Bazar y Panjyawati, to live in Yasmine’s grandfather’s house. That’s where she meets Tamanna, about the same age as her own.

The family hires Tamanna as Yasmine’s companion and soon the two girls become best friends. Thus begins their life of friendship in a war-torn country. Read about their adventure-filled journey through the desert on foot, the risks they take and sacrifices they make for each other.

This is a novel that’s hard to put down. It is a story of friendship that I’m sure you will enjoy reading and learning from. Appropriate for ages 12-17.

—Arun N. Toké, editor

**Saltypie**: *A Choctaw Journey from Darkness into Light* by Tim Tingle, illustr. Karen Clarkson. *Cinco Puntos*, cincopuntos.com. ISBN 978-1-933693-67-5. Ages 6-10.

*Saltypie* is a wonderful model for Native American picture books. It has what any book about Native Americans should have: authenticity. Both author Tim Tingle and illustrator Karen Clarkson are modern Choctaw people, who bring their personal life experiences to this work. The essay and photographs at the end of the story are invaluable for breaking stereotypes about Native Americans.

*Saltypie* is a poignant, true story about Tim Tingle’s grandmother. Her quiet strength and courage imbued her large family with values that enabled them to persevere through any challenges life brought. These values are intrinsically woven into this lovely story, which quietly speaks to the importance of family and respect for individuals’ needs.

I highly recommend *Saltypie*: as a teaching tool, a classroom read-aloud story, and as a superb addition to any library.

—Yvonne Young, retired teacher, storyteller.

**Fatty Legs** by Christy Jordan-Fenton & Margaret Pokiak-Fenton, illustr. Liz Holmes. *Annick Press*, www.annickpress.com. ISBN 978-1-55451-246-1. Grades 4-8.

Margaret Pokiak-Fenton was named Oleman by her Inuvialuit aboriginal family on Banks Island, north of the Arctic Circle. She begged to attend the Catholic boarding school in Aklavik, because more than anything she wanted to learn to read. Her father refused many times but when she persisted he finally allowed her to go.

In *Fatty Legs*, Christy Jordan-Fenton recreates the childhood of Margaret, her mother-in-law. The memories are simultaneously spellbinding and appalling. Oleman soon understood why her father did not want her to go. Her braids were cut off, she and the other girls were made to work, and they were given barely enough to eat. Oleman’s strong will caused one nun, she called the Raven, to dislike her and single her out for extra work and punishment. When the girls were given new stockings, Oleman was given red, oversized ones, unlike the tight, black ones for all the others, which, of course, caused the other girls to tease her, calling her “fatty legs.” But Oleman’s spirit prevailed. She tricked the nun, and eventually returned home to her family.

Woven into the story is information about the culture and lifestyle of the Inuvialuit people. Photographs of Oleman, her family and the boarding school enable the reader to understand her culture more clearly.

This outstanding book speaks strongly for the spirit of Native peoples who suffered and survived terrible hardships. Anyone interested in social justice will find this book fascinating and informative. It would be a wonderful addition to any elementary or middle school library.

—Yvonne Young, retired teacher, storyteller.

Each year, **Skipping Stones** recognizes exceptional multicultural and nature books and teaching resources with our annual **Skipping Stones Honor Awards**. You can download previous years’ list of winners from our website: [www.SkippingStones.org](http://www.SkippingStones.org).

## Nature and Ecology Books:

**The Good Garden:** *How One Family Went from Hunger to Having Enough* by Katie Smith Milway, illustr. Sylvie Daigneault. *Kids Can Press*, www.kidscanpress.com. ISBN 978-1-55453-488-3. Ages 7-12.

*The Good Garden* by Katie Smith Milway is a generously illustrated picture book about some of the common hardships and possibilities facing small farmers in Latin America. The story is based on the work of a real teacher from Honduras who helped thousands of rural families in his country. The teacher, Don Elias Sanchez, shared new agricultural techniques with farming villages, which helped them to overcome the threat of bad harvests and hunger and to become more independent as well.

The story begins when hard times come to Maria Luz's village. Her family is suffering because their soil has lost its fertility and they are threatened with losing their farm as well. In this time of crisis, a new school teacher comes to town and begins to introduce good (natural) farming techniques. The teacher presents this new knowledge gently, through the process of starting a school garden. The curious children and their parents come to observe the teacher's new ways of tending the vegetable garden and learn. Then later, they try out these techniques on their own land with positive results. Maria's family overcomes their hardships as their harvest improves and their plans for the future look brighter.

Although the narrative of *The Good Garden* is in English, a few key words in Spanish are sprinkled through out the story to give it more cultural depth and rhythm. Words like campesino, maestro and Coyote are introduced to readers and gently and artfully repeated throughout the story. The large format of the artwork, by Sylvie Daigneault, is well suited to the tale. The full page illustrations in warm colors with breezy images reflect both the indigenous heritage and rugged, mountainous countryside of Honduras.

—Kara Steffensen has worked and lived in C. America.

**Skipping Stones** welcomes your submissions and subscriptions. Visit **SkippingStones.org** for subscriptions and submission guidelines.

**S is for Save The Planet:** *A How-to-Be Green Alphabet* by Brad Herzog, illustr. Linda Holt Ayriss. *Sleeping Bear Press*, www.sleepingbearpress.com. ISBN 978-1-58536-428-2. Picture book for elementary grades.

*S is for Save the Planet* is an outstanding book for children of all ages. Each page, beautifully illustrated by Linda Holt Ayriss, presents a letter with a text appropriate for reading to primary children. The side panel presents more information, in greater depth, suitable for older students. Numerous concepts related to environmental issues and suggestions for actions that can be taken are introduced in these side panels.

The illustrations portray the concepts in the book very well. They also demonstrate inclusiveness—of different races and people of all ages involved in environmental projects. The paintings of various resources using habits and endangered species motivate and empower students to want to work to protect the earth.

The Web Resources section in the book lists more than thirty websites for teachers on related topics. There is also a list of websites just for kids. A Teacher's Guide, complete with 27 pages of possible worksheets for students, is available at www.sleepingbearpress.com.

An excellent resource for your library!

—Yvonne Young, retired teacher, storyteller.

**Over in Australia:** *Amazing Animals Down Under* by Marianne Berkes, illustr. Jill Dubin. *Dawn*, www.dawnpub.com. ISBN 978-1-58469-136-5. Picture book.

This book about animals living in Australia is amazing in several ways. It is all written in poetry, which is set to music at the end of the book. It is cumulative, to promote language development and reinforce remembering. It is illustrated with colorful collages using a variety of textures and patterns. And, most important of all, it is educational.

Twenty different Australian animals are introduced, ten in mother/baby pairs, and the other ten hidden in the illustrated habitats. Further information about each animal is also provided.

In the author's tips at the end, Ms. Berkes suggests a number of related learning activities and lists additional resources, including websites. Jill Dubin, the illustrator, explains her process and encourages children to try making their own collages.

*Over in Australia* is delightful fun. I look forward to an opportunity to share it with a group of young children.

—Yvonne Young, retired teacher, storyteller.

**Not your Typical Book about the Environment** by Elin Kelsey, illustr. Clayton Hammer. *OwlKids*, [www.owl-kids.com](http://www.owl-kids.com). ISBN 978-1-897349-84-7. Middle grades.

Have you ever wondered how penguins are connected to your bicycle? Or how bees are connected to your burger? If you're wondering now what those connections might be, then I suggest you pick up this helpful, upbeat book for kids, *Not Your Typical Book about the Environment*. Elin Kelsey is a dynamic writer who speaks to youth in a positive way about many of the global environmental challenges we face. The expressive cartoon illustrations by Clayton Hammer also help lighten up the bad news and clarify the complex issues for children and parents alike.

Kelsey emphasizes the power we have to make a difference in the world based on the choices we make as consumers and citizens. Also, she points out some pretty unusual choices to help the planet, some that I had never heard of before such as bicycles made out of bamboo. The author also focuses on helping us make the connections between complex problems and the simple things we do in our daily lives that can make a difference. The book introduces empowering possibilities that make readers want to learn more about these efforts and how to participate in them. Some examples of the interesting topics she introduces are biomimicry, natural capital and happiness research.

So check this book out, and you'll learn more about being part of the solution. As Kelsey says, "You are not nature's bogeyman. You are nature. You're connected to this great wide world in ways beyond your wildest imagination."

—Kara Steffensen, parent

**On Parade: The Hidden World of Animals in Entertainment** by Rob Laidlaw. *Fitzhenry & Whiteside*, [www.fitzhenry.ca](http://www.fitzhenry.ca). ISBN 978-1-55455-143-9. Grades 4-10.

*On Parade* is a behind the scenes story of animals in the entertainment business. Among them are stories about circus animals, zoos, reptile shows, marine parks, rodeo events and wildlife parks.

The book is meant to enlighten the reader about the true life of animals in captivity, including animals used in dog races, bull fighting, horse races and dog fights. It reveals animal exploitation and suffering, and graphically exposes the abuse commonly committed by

animal trainers, as well as private owners of animals. As disturbing as the accounts of abuse are, the book offers ways that the public can help bring about a change for better, and improve the lives of animals in captivity. The author encourages the reader to make a difference in the world through education and by helping sanctuaries, rescue centers and foundations dedicated to ending the suffering of animals. The book will compel you to look at animals in a new light.

—Nancy Glubka, office administrator and parent

**Bugs and Bugsicles: Insects in the Winter** by Amy S. Hansen, illustr. Robert C. Kray. *Boyd's Mills*, [www.boyds-millspress.com](http://www.boyds-millspress.com). ISBN 978-1-59078-269-9. Ages 7-9.

This beautifully illustrated book invites us to gaze at some of our smallest neighbors: the insects. In particular, we learn about the processes through which each species will survive the challenging forces of winter and will come back to grace the natural world in the spring.

In the opening section of the book, the author and illustrator present us with a general view of our scurrying friends as they frantically prepare themselves for winter. After just a few pages, we understand that some creatures will survive through their off-spring while others will dramatically vary their way of life either by travelling great distances to warmer locations or by altering their physical attributes.

In the subsequent mini scenes, we learn about the specific survival techniques of each of the insects that were introduced at the beginning of the book. While being accurate in their depiction of the insects and their environments, the illustrations creatively support the text by effects of light and dark. Without using entomological terminology, the book delivers scientific facts about the insects' natural world.

After reading some inspiring personal notes on the reasons behind the author's passion for insects, the reader is presented with some interesting hands-on experiments on the physical property of freezing water to help readers better understand the technique used by insects to survive the cold season.

*Bugs and Bugsicles* speaks to the interests of budding entomologists who experience the forces of winter and ponder the mystery behind the apparent absence of insects from their daily lives.

—Alain Rebeyrol, architect and parent.



**Vuela, Vuela Mariposa/Fly, Fly Butterfly** by Diego H. Pedreros Velásquez, illustr. Evelio Casas and Leoncio Amaya. *Falcon Books*, www.forlymonarch.com. ISBN 978-0-615-37228-0. Bilingual Spanish/English picture book.

Diego and his daughter often visit a nearby monarch sanctuary where thousands of butterflies winter each year. In **Fly, Fly Butterfly/Vuela, Vuela Mariposa** the author shares their joint discoveries of the fascinating and ever-changing world of monarch butterflies.

The story begins to unfold when on a winter's day his daughter spots a butterfly that cannot fly because it has been injured during a storm. **Fly, Fly Butterfly/Vuela, Vuela Mariposa** uses a mix of photography, drawings and words. Each page offers bilingual text and colorful illustrations or paintings showing the life cycle of monarch butterflies and their migration patterns. Often it is not the original, but rather the second or third generation butterflies that reach the destination after their annual 2,000 plus mile migration.

This book expresses beautifully the wonders of nature, the curiosity and quest for knowledge and the kindness of a child's heart. It also shows the profound bond of love that a nurturing father has for his daughter and his desire to make best use of each opportunity to learn with his daughter. Together they discover by sharing, inquiring and caring for nature.

A great addition to any library!

—A.N.T.

## Teaching Resources:

**Economics of Happiness**, a DVD directed by Helena Norberg-Hodge. *International Society for Ecology and Culture*, www.isec.org.uk. Documentary. Grades 5-12.

'Globalization' is often thought of as something that brings people together through faster communication, easier travel, and so on, but there's far more to it than that. By greatly increasing the distance between producers and consumers it has expanded the power of big business and big banks to a dangerous level, while worsening many other problems we face: fundamentalism and ethnic conflict; climate change and species extinction; energy shortages and nuclear pollution; poverty and unemployment. For most people in the mod-

ern world, life is becoming increasingly stressful. We have less time for friends and family, and we face more pressures at work. As **The Economics of Happiness** points out, governments and big businesses continue to promote globalization despite these and other clear problems. The film also highlights the fact that people everywhere are resisting these destructive trends by supporting economic localization. These grass-root movements are calling for a stronger regulation of trade and finance, while working to re-build more human scale, ecological economies in which as many of our needs as possible are met at a local or bioregional level.

This documentary includes voices from every continent and footage from many different cultures. We hear from economists, ecologists, authors and activists—ranging from Samdhong Rinpoche (the Prime Minister of the Tibetan government in exile), to Vandana Shiva, David Korten, Bill McKibben, Richard Heinberg, and many others. They tell us that climate change coupled with dwindling oil supplies give us little choice: we must localize our economies.

**The Economics of Happiness** shows examples of practical solutions that have already been implemented, including urban gardens in Detroit, cultural preservation efforts in Peru, and the rediscovery of local knowledge in Japan. It also discusses key policy changes that would enable local businesses to survive and prosper. If we can break free of our current fixation on global trade and growth, we can begin not only to heal the earth, but to regain our own sense of self-worth and well-being. This documentary restores our faith in humanity and points the way to a better world. Thinking globally and acting locally has been a great motto for social activists during the last forty years; as this film emphasizes, 'going local' is a powerful strategy to repair our fractured world—our ecosystems, our societies and our own lives.

The film is more than an hour long, so teachers and educators wanting to use it as a teaching resource in their classroom might divide it in perhaps two, if not three, segments to be shown on different days, with discussion times built in after each segment for maximum benefit.

—Arun Narayan Toké, editor.

**Skipping Stones** also recognizes ten youth, ages 7-17, with our annual **Youth Honor Awards**. Visit [www.SkippingStones.org](http://www.SkippingStones.org) for details.

**Straightlaced:** *How Gender Got Us All Tied Up*, a DVD by Debra Chasnoff, dir. *Groundspark*, www.groundspark.org. Grades 7-12.

*Straightlaced* begins by showing how teens want desperately to fit in with their peers and that teenagers' clothing especially defines who they are and whether they fit in within a specific group. In this DVD, a number of youth explore the differences between male and female—activities, tastes, strength, weight and intellect—as they see them. For example, for girls to fit in they can't appear too smart or wear baggy clothes. Gradually the gay/straight theme appears, including how desperate teens are not to be perceived as gay. It also covers the verbal cruelty present in calling someone “gay, fag, faggo” when the point is to disparage them in some way, even if they are not gay.

Finally, a number of teens express that they believe there is a spectrum of “normality” within the area of sexual orientation. Some of them “come out” as gay, lesbian or transgender. The tragedy of teen suicide due to their own or others' feelings regarding their sexual orientation or being perceived as gay is discussed. Teens who do not fit the norm are subjected to name-calling, bullying, exclusion, rejection and sometimes physical violence. The youths interviewed in this film share what a difficult path life is for them. Some of the teens do survive with their identity intact and a sense of their personal self worth.

Sadly, this film also shows how some teens go to any lengths to “fit in” which includes name-calling and demonizing those students who do not fit the norm.

This excellent documentary will encourage anyone who is interested in social justice for LGBT students to work toward changing the school environment to that of respect and affirmation for all students.

—Ann Brown and Anita Stelling

**Bullied:** *A Student, a School and a Case that Made History*, a DVD by Bill Brummel & Geoffrey Sharp. *SPLC/Teaching Tolerance*, www.tolerance.org. Grades 6-10.

The Southern Poverty Law Center has produced a film about a young man in a small town in the Midwest. Jamie Nabozny was identified as gay from his middle school days and suffered verbal and physical abuse because of bullying throughout his middle and high school years. He attempted suicide and finally ran away from home to avoid going to the school where he was

being bullied. School officials excused the bullies' behavior as “boys will be boys” and, “What do you expect if you are openly gay?”

In 1995, at the age of 19, with the help of a youth counselor, Jamie filed a lawsuit against the school district and administrators of the school for failing to protect him. After first being dismissed by a lower court, the circuit court found that discrimination against him was illegal. The jury returned with a “Guilty” verdict against the school officials, and the school district settled the case for \$900,000.

This was the first legal challenge to anti-gay violence in public schools and sent a message to schools that if they failed to protect students, they would be held accountable.

*Bullied* is done very professionally. It sympathizes with the victims of bullying, and it empowers them. It is appropriate for viewing in middle and upper grade classrooms. It would also be a very good training film for school districts. It is endorsed by several organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League, GLSEN, PFLAG, and a few national teacher's groups.

—Ann Brown and Anita Stelling

**Do Something!** *A Handbook for Young Activists* by Nancy Lublin. Workman Publishing, www.dosomething.org. ISBN 978-0-7611-5747-2. Grades 5-9.

*Do Something!* is a complete tool kit packed with project ideas, facts, worksheets, action plans and checklists.

Young people are naturally idealistic and they want to do something to make a difference in the world, to make it better. This book has everything you will need to start working on your passion to change things for better.

The first part of the resource book helps readers find the cause they believe in and want to work on. Then it helps the readers put together a plan of action. There are 32 action plans to choose from and 41 projects to consider. Of course, you can design your own project or action plan, using the tools provided in this great work book.

This attractive, spiral bound book even gives tips on how to reflect on what you did, how the project went and how to improve it the next time around. Youth groups would find the book especially valuable in organizing their activities. Go for it!

—Arun Narayan Toké, editor.