



February 2021

Recommendations for Multi-Cultural Environmental Education Books for Youth

Below are Metro Education Staff recommended books on environmental education that showcase stories of diverse culture and backgrounds and empowers youth to take action in their communities to protect the environment, individually and collectively.

Elementary- Kindergarten- 3rd grade

- ***Ada's Violin (4-8 y.o.) by Susan Hood & illustrated by Sally Wern Comport***
The extraordinary true tale of the Recycled Orchestra of Paraguay, an orchestra made up of children playing instruments built from recycled trash.
Also available in Spanish- El Violín de Ada
- ***The Boy Who Grew a Forest: The True Story of Jadav Payeng (5-8 y.o) by Sophia Gholz & illustrated by Kayla Harren***
Tells the inspiring true story of Payeng--and reminds us all of the difference a single person with a big idea can make. As a boy, Jadav Payeng was distressed by the destruction deforestation and erosion was causing on his island home in India's Brahmaputra River. So he began planting trees. What began as a small thicket of bamboo, grew over the years into 1,300 acre forest filled with native plants and animals.
- ***The Great Kapok Tree (4-7 y.o.) by Lynne Cherry***
Story about a man who exhausts himself trying to chop down a giant kapok tree. While he sleeps, the forest's residents, including a child from the Yanomamo tribe, whisper in his ear about the importance of trees and how "all living things depend on one another" . . . and it works.
Also available in Spanish- El Gran Capoquero
- ***Greta and the Giants (4-7 y.o.) by Zoë Tucker & illustrated by Zoe Persico***
The re-telling of the story of Nobel Peace Prize nominee Greta Thunberg, who led a global movement to raise awareness about the world's climate crisis. Using allegory, the story is about a little girl who lives in a forest threatened by Giants. The Giants chopped down trees to make houses, then they chopped down more trees and made even bigger homes. The houses grew into towns and the towns grew into cities, until now there is

hardly any forest left. Greta knows she has to help the animals who live in the forest, but how?

- ***In the Garden with Mr. Carver (4-8 y.o.) by Susan Grigsby & illustrated by Nicole Tadgell***

Story about a young girl living in rural Alabama in the early 1900s, a time when people were struggling to grow food in soil that had been depleted by years of cotton production. One day, Dr. George Washington Carver shows up to help the grown-ups with their farms and the children with their school garden and teaches them how to restore the soil and respect the balance of nature.

- ***One Plastic Bag (5-9 y.o.) by Miranda Paul & illustrated by Elizabeth Zunon***

The inspiring true story of Isatou Ceesay, an African woman who began a movement to recycle the plastic bags that were polluting her community. This story shows how one person's actions really can make a difference in our world.

- ***Sofia Valdez, Future Prez (5-7y.o.) by Andrea Beaty & illustrated by David Roberts***

Every morning, Abuelo walks Sofia to school . . . until one day, when Abuelo hurts his ankle at a local landfill and he can no longer do so. Sofia (aka Sofi) misses her Abuelo and wonders what she can do about the dangerous Mount Trashmore. Then she gets an idea—the town can turn the slimy mess into a park! She brainstorms and plans and finally works up the courage to go to City Hall—only to be told by a clerk that she can't build a park because she's just a kid! Sofia is down but not out, and she sets out to prove what one kid can do.

Also available in Spanish: Sofia Valdez, Presidenta Tal Vez

- ***Wangari's Tree of Peace: a True story from Africa (4-7y.o.) by Jeanette Winter***

True story of Wangari Maathai, environmentalist and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. As a young girl growing up in Kenya, Wangari was surrounded by trees. But years later when she returns home, she is shocked to see whole forests being cut down, and she knows that soon all the trees will be destroyed. So Wangari decides to do something—and starts by planting nine seedlings in her own backyard. And as they grow, so do her plans . . .

Also available in Spanish: Wangari y los Árboles de la Paz

- ***The Water Princess (5-8 y.o.) by Georgie Badiel and Susan Verde***

Inspired by the childhood of African-born model Georgie Badiel. The story is about Princess Gie Gie's challenge to find clean drinking water in her small African village. And try as she might, Gie Gie cannot bring the water closer and she cannot make it run clearer. Every morning, she makes the long journey to the well and Instead of a crown,

she wears a heavy pot on her head to collect the water. After the voyage home, after boiling the water to drink and clean with, Gie Gie thinks of the trip that tomorrow will bring. And dreams of a day when her village will have cool, crystal-clear water of its own.

- ***We are Grateful (3-7 y.o.) by Traci Sorrell & illustrated by Frane Lessac***
Written by a citizen of the Cherokee nation -- follows celebrations and experiences through the seasons of a year underscoring the traditions and ways of Cherokee life
- ***We are Water Protectors (3-6 y.o.) by Carole Lindstrom & illustrated by Michaela Goade***
Inspired by the many Indigenous-led movements across North America, the book issues an urgent rallying cry to safeguard the Earth's water from harm and corruption.
- ***Yara's Tawari Tree (3-8 y.o.) by Yossi Lapid & illustrated by Joann Pasek***
Story is about Yara who lives with her Mama in the lush Amazon jungle. She wants to rescue her beloved but increasingly besieged rainforest home. When Yara falls gravely ill, the forest returns the love and saves Yara's life. Great story that shows children how all living things on our beautiful planet depend on one another.

Elementary 4th-5th-grade

- ***The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind (10-12 y.o.) by William Kamkwamba***
When a terrible drought struck William Kamkwamba's tiny village in Malawi, his family lost all of the season's crops, leaving them with nothing to eat and nothing to sell. William began to explore science books in his village library, looking for a solution. There, he came up with the idea that would change his family's life forever: he could build a windmill. Made out of scrap metal and old bicycle parts, William's windmill brought electricity to his home and helped his family pump the water they needed to farm the land. Retold for a younger audience, this exciting memoir shows how, even in a desperate situation, one boy's brilliant idea can light up the world.
- ***Island of the Blue Dolphins (8-12 y.o.) by Scott O'Dell***
Story of a 12-year old girl who lives alone on a Pacific island after she leaps from a rescue ship. Isolated on the island for eighteen years, Karana forages for food, builds weapons to fight predators, clothes herself in a cormorant feathered skirt, and finds strength and peace in her seclusion. Great story about perseverance and resourcefulness.

- ***Plastic: Past, Present, and Future (8-12 y.o.) by Eun-Ju Kim***

Journey through the life cycle of plastic – how plastics are produced and recycled, the many uses of plastics throughout the last century, how our plastic use and pollution has spiralled out of control, and what we can do about it.

- ***Trash Revolution: Breaking the Waste Cycle (8-12 y.o.) by Erica Fyvie***

All the “stuff” that surrounds us has a life cycle: materials are harvested, the stuff is made and distributed, it's consumed and then it gets trashed or recycled. Using the typical contents of a child's school backpack (defined as water, food, clothing, paper, plastic, metals, electronics), this book explores those stages in detail, including lots of ways to reduce, reuse or recycle waste along the way. Children will gain new insight into the routine decisions they make about their own consuming and trashing or recycling practices. For example: How long does it take for a cotton T-shirt to decompose in a landfill? Can a bike helmet be made from recyclable materials? Which is better for the Earth, wrapping a sandwich in aluminum foil or plastic? By learning to use critical thinking skills to make informed choices, children will feel empowered by the important, constructive role they can play in the future health of the planet.

- ***You are Mighty (10-12 y.o.) by Caroline Paul***

A kids' guide to activism. Book is a good match for those with a fierce sense of justice, a good sense of humor, and a big heart. The guide features change-maker tips, tons of DIY activities, and stories about the kids who have paved the way before, from famous activists like Malala Yousafzai and Claudette Colvin to the everyday young people whose habit changes triggered huge ripple effects.

- ***Young Water Protectors (9-12 y.o.) by Aslan Tudor, Kelly Tudor and Jason Eaglespeaker***

Read about 8 year old Aslan and his inspiring experiences in the Oceti Sakowin Camp at Standing Rock. North Dakota, helping to stop the building of a pipeline. Learn about what exactly happened there, and why. Be inspired by Aslan's story of the daily life of Standing Rock's young water protectors. Mni Wiconi ... Water is Life.

Secondary 6th-8th grade

- ***Bugs in Danger: Our Vanishing Bees, Butterflies, and Beetles (12-14 y.o) by Mark Kurlandsky***

Honeybees, monarch butterflies, and ladybugs are among the most visible North American insects; but as pollinators, they are also responsible for the future of many angiosperms (flowering plants) important to humans, including apples, almonds, and

cotton. Along with a number of other insect species, they're increasingly under threat. The text explains the damage done to insects through human activity, largely habitat loss and overuse of pesticides. A concluding chapter outlines specific actions readers can take to help stop the damage, such as planting gardens to attract pollinators.

- ***Hatchet (12-14 y.o.) by Gary Paulsen***

Thirteen-year-old Brian Robeson is traveling by single-engine plane to visit his father for the first time since the divorce. When the plane crashes, killing the pilot, the sole survivor is Brian. He is alone in the Canadian wilderness with nothing but his clothing, a tattered windbreaker, and the hatchet his mother had given him as a present. At first consumed by despair and self-pity, Brian slowly learns survival skills—how to make a shelter for himself, how to hunt and fish and forage for food, how to make a fire—and even finds the courage to start over from scratch when a tornado ravages his campsite. When Brian is finally rescued after fifty-four days in the wild, he emerges from his ordeal with new patience and maturity, and a greater understanding of himself and his parents.

- ***Heroes of the Environment: True Stories of People Who are Helping to Protect our Planet (9-14 y.o.) by Harriet Rohmer***

This inspiring book presents the true stories of 12 people from across North America who have done great things for the environment. Heroes include a teenage girl who figured out how to remove an industrial pollutant from the Ohio River, a Mexican superstar wrestler who works to protect turtles and whales, and a teenage boy from Rhode Island who helped his community and his state develop effective e-waste recycling programs. Plenty of photographs and illustrations bring each compelling story vividly to life.

- ***No One is Too Small to Make a Difference (12 y.o. and up) by Greta Thunberg***

In August 2018 a fifteen-year-old Swedish girl, Greta Thunberg, decided not to go to school one day in order to protest the climate crisis. Her actions sparked a global movement, inspiring millions of students to go on strike for our planet, forcing governments to listen, and earning her a Nobel Peace Prize nomination. *No One Is Too Small to Make A Difference* brings you Greta in her own words, for the first time. Collecting her speeches that have made history across the globe, from the United Nations to Capitol Hill and mass street protests, her book is a rallying cry for why we must all wake up and fight to protect the living planet, no matter how powerless we feel. Our future depends upon it.

- ***One Earth: People of Color Protecting Our Planet (12-17 y.o.) by Anuradha Rao***

One Earth profiles Black, Indigenous and People of Color who live and work as environmental defenders. Through their individual stories, the book shows that the intersection of environment and ethnicity is an asset to achieving environmental goals. The twenty short biographies introduce readers to diverse activists from all around the world, who are of many ages and ethnicities. From saving ancient trees on the West Coast of Canada, to protecting the Irrawaddy dolphins of India, to uncovering racial

inequalities in the food system in the United States, these environmental heroes are celebrated by author and biologist Anuradha Rao, who outlines how they went from being kids who cared about the environment to community leaders in their field. *One Earth* is full of environmental role models waiting to be found.

- ***World Without Fish (12-18 y.o.) by Mark Kurlansky***

Written by a master storyteller, *World Without Fish* connects all the dots—biology, economics, evolution, politics, climate, history, culture, food, and nutrition—in a way that kids can really understand. It describes how the fish we most commonly eat, including tuna, salmon, cod, swordfish—even anchovies— could disappear within fifty years, and the domino effect it would have: the oceans teeming with jellyfish and turning pinkish orange from algal blooms, the seabirds disappearing, then reptiles, then mammals. It describes the back-and-forth dynamic of fishermen, who are the original environmentalists, and scientists, who not that long ago considered fish an endless resource. It explains why fish farming is not the answer—and why sustainable fishing is, and how to help return the oceans to their natural ecological balance. Interwoven with the book is a twelve-page graphic novel. Each beautifully illustrated chapter opener links to the next to form a larger fictional story that perfectly complements the text.

Secondary 9th-12th grade

- ***Gyre: The Plastic Ocean by Julie Decker***

A flip-flop discarded in Thailand finds its way to Hawaii, and a bottle cast off from Japan's tsunami is soon Alaska's beach litter. With stunning visual impact and an astonishing array of ocean trash, internationally recognized artists create works of art from debris collected from beaches around the world. Much of the oceans' trash is swirling in one of five gyres, which are large systems of rotating ocean currents. Plastic packaging in a throwaway culture finds its way into our ocean biosphere and onto beaches, propelled by the gyres, and now, in this compelling book and related exhibition, into the hands of artists. This book, which explores the relationship between humans and the ocean in a contemporary culture of consumption, offers an international perspective on a pressing environmental problem.

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- ***We Rise: The Earth Guardians Guide to Building a Movement that Restores the Planet by Xiuhtezcatl Martinez***
Xiuhtezcatl Martinez is a 16-year-old climate activist, hip-hop artist, and powerful new voice on the frontlines of a global youth-led movement. He and his group the Earth Guardians believe that today's youth will play an important role in shaping our future. They know that the choices made right now will have a lasting impact on the world of tomorrow, and people—young and old—are asking themselves what they can do to ensure a positive, just, and sustainable future. *We Rise* tells these stories and addresses the solutions. If you are interested in creating real and tangible change, *We Rise* will give you the inspiration and information you need to do your part in making the world a better place and leave you asking, *What kind of legacy do I want to leave?*
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