



WOW REVIEW

READING ACROSS CULTURES
VOLUME XVII, ISSUE 4

Summer 2025
Action for Climate Change

Worlds
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Education

**WOW Review: Volume XVII, Issue4
Summer 2025
Action for Climate Change**

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Introduction and Editors' Note

Mariajo Ilustrajo's brilliant picturebook *Flooded* summarizes the focus of this issue on collective action to address environmental issues. As government spending for environmental programs is slashed, these titles underscore the possibilities for taking action to support environmental health. The books demonstrate that people of all ages can brainstorm solutions and tackle issues like endangered habitats and species, deforestation, consumerism resulting in disposable goods that end up in landfills or in waterways, and reliance on fuels that exacerbate climate change. Each title has a call to action that can inspire readers to research problems and brainstorm ways to address local and global issues. These titles inspire and give hope that, by working together, we can have an impact on our pressing environmental problems.

The issue opens with *The City Sings Green & Other Poems About Welcoming Wildlife*, a poetic exploration of what it means to welcome wildlife into urban spaces. The impact of climate change is also explored in stunning prose and images in *Polar Bear* and *Honeybee: The Busy Life of Apis Mellifera*, two species that are endangered because of loss of habitat.

Deforestation is explored in two titles. In *Pencil*, a wordless book, the cyclical journey of a writing tool starts in a beautiful forest of trees that is clear cut to make colored pencils which a young artist purchases. Inspired by the remaining tree stumps, she draws the forest, recreating the lush and diverse trees that invite wildlife. As a final nod to nature, the girl plants the pencil which begins to grow into a sapling. The work of Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt Movement in Kenya is profiled in *Planting Peace*. Wangari Maathai galvanized women from across different ethnic groups to work together and plant millions of trees to reforest and rebuild ecosystems in their country, which in turn enabled them to feed their families. The initial tree planting ceremony called Save the Land Harambee (which means Let's All Pull Together) morphed into the Green Belt Movement that spread across Kenya, Africa, and the world.

A final group of titles profiles activism that addresses other environmental issues impacted by consumerism and waste. British climate activist Mikaela Loach discusses a range of issues brought on by consumerism in her book *Climate is Just the Start*, intertwining facts with stories that make the climate issue real but also encourage the reader to take action. In *Kids vs Plastics*, a balanced perspective is offered as the author and illustrator identify many objects made from plastic that have become crucial in 21st century life, pairing that information with plastic waste and profiles of children and youth who have taken action to recycle, clean up, or offer alternatives to consumer waste. In *Composting for Community*, a young boy learns more about food and plant waste and the composting process that turns waste into food for the soil. Composting also solves the problem of the methane gas produced from decaying plant material in a landfill. Finally, in a unique story, one man's efforts to rescue and display reusable or unusual items is portrayed in *Gifts from the Garbage Truck: A True Story About the Things We (Don't) Throw Away*. Nelson Molina, a sanitation worker in New York City, salvaged over 45,000 items from his garbage truck and shared them in his Treasures in the Trash Museum.

We invite you to read and think with these titles and consider submitting a review for future issues. Please refer to calls below and the submission guidelines (<https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/reviewcall/>).

Volume 18, Issue 2 (Winter 2025 – submission deadline December 1, 2025) – Themed issue profiling titles that involve curiosity, inventiveness and imagination as a tool for problem-solving.

Volume 18, Issue 3 (Spring 2026 – submission deadline March 1, 2026) – Open theme. The editors welcome reviews of global or multicultural children's or young adult books published within the last three years that highlight intercultural understanding and global perspectives.

Welcome to Melissa Wilson as the new co-editor!

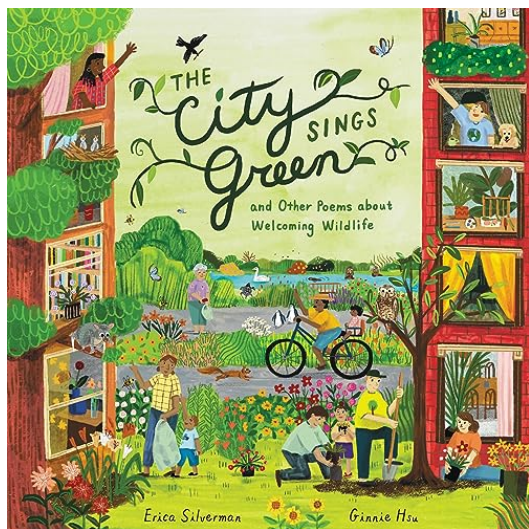
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Melissa Wilson, co-editor

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The City Sings Green & Other Poems about Welcoming Wildlife

Written by Erica Silverman

Illustrated by Ginnie Hsu

Clarion Books, 2024, 40 pp

ISBN: 978-0358434566

This multigenre nonfiction picturebook, which blends poetry with informational text, portrays the environmental impact of human activity and highlights ways to rewild cities with examples from across the globe. The book opens with this powerful and evocative poem.

The City Sings Green:

*Green me, sings the city.
Dig my dirt and seed me.
Plant my streets, my yards, my lots
with native shrubs and trees. (p. 4)*

*Clean me, sings the city.
Take out the trash.
Remove the fumes.
Purge all poisons from my soil. (p. 5)*

This poem gives voice to the city, creating a strong emotional appeal and setting the tone for environmental awareness and action. As the city continues its song over the next two pages, richly detailed illustrations depict scenes of interdependence between humans and nature. The city's voice urges, "Rewild me, sings the city, and I will rewild you" (p. 7), echoing the message of restoring ecological balance and reconnecting people with the natural world. This theme is further supported by informational text that highlights global efforts to prevent extinction and revitalize urban ecosystems.

Subsequent pages explore the transformation and revitalization of animal and plant habitats – shaped over time by human actions—through poems paired with brief informational text. In one poem about the Bronx River in New York City, readers learn of its degradation. Once a thriving habitat for beaver families, the Bronx River had become severely polluted. This problem was exacerbated by European colonists who hunted beavers nearly to extinction for their pelts. A grassroots cleanup effort initiated by local residents in the 1980s eventually restored the river's ecosystem. In 2007, a beaver returned for the first time in nearly three hundred years.

In Busselton, Australia, a poem gives voice to possums reacting to a rope bridge constructed above a busy road:

*“But wait! What’s this? How mysterious!
A bridge? For us? We’re curious.
It stretches above the road below.” (p. 22)*

The possums are excited to realize they can now “leap and scurry everywhere” from the canopy above instead of trying to cross the road. The personification of possums encourages readers to view the world from the animals’ perspective, fostering empathy and connection. The accompanying informational text explains how highway construction and tree removal have endangered possums in Australian cities. Innovative interventions by scientists prompt deeper reflection on habitat preservation and sustainable urban planning.

The final location featured in this book is Versova Beach in Mumbai, India. A poem from the perspective of Afroz Shah, an environmental activist and lawyer, reflects his childhood memories of the clean beach and days of swimming and diving—now littered with plastic bottles, rags, and bags. Paired with an illustration of the beach covered in trash, the poem poignantly captures the emotional loss caused by pollution. Shah began cleaning the beach with a small group of volunteers, a movement that grew over time and led to the full restoration of the shoreline. Remarkably, sea turtles, once absent, returned to nest on the beach. The United Nations recognized Shah’s efforts as “the world’s biggest beach cleanup.”

The backmatter is rich with resources, offering website links and recommended books for young readers, families, and educators to further explore animal habitats and urban rewilding initiatives featured in this book. It also provides practical actions children can take in their daily lives, individually or as a community, such as observing local wildlife or placing decals on windows to prevent bird collisions.

Suggested children’s books to read with this title include *The Curious Garden* (Peter Brown, 2009), *Crossings: Extraordinary Structures for Extraordinary Animals* (Katy Duffield & Mike Orodán, 2020), *Wildlife Crossings of Hope* (Teddi Lynn Chichester & Jamie Green, 2025), and *Nature’s Best Hope: How You Can Save the World in Your Own Yard* (Sarah Thomson & Douglas Tallamy, 2023). These texts pair beautifully with *The City Sings Green* to explore urban wildlife and environmental stewardship, encouraging children to think critically and act responsibly toward the environment.

Erica Silverman resides in California and has a deep love for both urban life and wildlife. Her works include *Jack (Not Jackie)* (2018), illustrated by Holly Hatam, which follows a big sister learning to embrace her younger sibling’s gender identity, and *Wake Up, City!* (2016), illustrated by Laure Fournier, the story of a young girl and her father’s morning walk to school as the city slowly wakes up around them. More about her work can be found on her website (<https://ericasilverman.com/>).

Ginnie Hsu, the illustrator, lives in upstate New York. Her childhood in Taiwan, and her upbringing with her grandparents, strongly influence her artistic identity. Her recent works include *The Chinese New Year Helper* (Ying Chang Compestine, 2024) and *The World That Feeds Us: Discover How Our Food is*

Produced in a Sustainable Way (Nancy Castaldo, 2023). She also illustrated *Lady Bird Johnson, That's Who!: The Story of a Cleaner and Greener America* (Tracy Nelson Maurer, 2021). Hsu's illustrations frequently center on the relationship between nature and human life. Her portfolio is available on her website (<https://helloginniesu.com/>).

Junko Sakoi, Tucson Unified School District

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Climate is Just the Start

Written by Mikaela Loach

Bright Matter Books, 2025, 192 pp

ISBN: 978-0593897324

Climate is Just the Start introduces the implications of climate change on our daily lives and inspires readers to take action to address the climate crisis. The author, Mikaela Loach, shares her personal stories about how she went from being a medical student to a climate justice activist.

The introduction of the book reads like a letter from the author to her readers, letting them know what she wants to say about climate change. The content is divided into three parts. Part 1 starts with “the story of the disappearing beaches,” which is introduced as visible evidence of climate change. The stories shared in this section help

readers understand how people’s actions in one part of the world influence people’s lives in other parts of the world. In Part 2, climate denial is introduced. The readers will learn how some businesses, such as ExxonMobil, use climate denial to benefit themselves, even though they know burning fossil fuels could bring severe negative impacts on the Earth. Part 3 provides examples of how young people have stood up for climate change in the past. At the end of the book, the author asks readers, “What are you going to do? And, how are you going to make what moves you move the world around you?”

The text includes illustrations that visually summarize the written content, helping readers revisit what they read about. In the back matter, a glossary and resources for further action are included. The glossary provides the vocabulary for readers to learn about climate change.

Climate change and climate justice are critical topics for children and teens to grapple with and *Climate is Just the Start* introduces these issues through concrete examples from the past or and the present. The author helps readers see how our lives are all connected even though we live in different parts of the globe. Learning about the climate crisis can give readers uneasy feelings, but the author gives a hopeful message and encourages readers to take action to keep the earth sustainable. After reading this book, readers may recognize climate change as a global issue and be aware of how they generate and use energy. The author asks readers what they will do individually to tackle climate change and reminds them of the importance of creating a community and taking action together to make a change.

Climate is Just the Start can be paired with the graphic novel *Global: One Fragile World. An Epic Fight for Survival* (Eoin Colfer, Andrew Donkin & Giovanni Rigano, 2023). *Global* introduces climate change through compelling fictional stories about two children, one in far north Canada and the other in a village along the Indian Ocean. *Global* puts readers on the edge of their seats with realistic visual descriptions of life-threatening dangers that these children face. Readers will learn how two children’s living environments are interconnected and how climate change brought dangers to their lives.

The author, Mikaela Loach, is a leading British-Jamaican climate justice activist. *Forbes*, *BBC Women's Hour*, and *The Guardian* named her one of the most influential women in the UK climate movement. She has organized many grassroots climate movements, including Stop Cambo, Fossil Free Book, Resist Glencore, and the UL Black Eco Feminist Collective. She has also published *It's Not That Radical: Climate Action to Transform Our World* (2023). You can visit Mikaela's website (<https://mikaelaloach.com/>) to learn more about her and what she is fighting for.

Jongsun Wee, Pacific University

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Composting for Community

Written by Michael Martinez

Illustrated by Hannah Abbo

Gloo Books, 2023, 40 pp (unpaged)

ISBN: 978-1737240488

Mateo and his classmates are presenting the various professions their family members engage in such as running a taco truck, making TV shows, or painting city murals. Mateo's father is a city composter, and when Mateo's presentation does not capture his classmates' interest, he tries to understand more about his father's profession. Starting with his Abuelo's and Tio's history of turning discarded items into things of beauty, Mateo learns more about the similar process of turning food scraps into rich soil. His father explains the various stages of composting and the

science behind turning food waste into food for the soil. As his father shows him the compost bins in the community garden, Mateo also notices the community that is built as people work together in the garden. As he begins to understand, his enthusiasm grows. Mateo asks his father if he can start composting at his school, so family members and friends pitch in to build bins that his classmates begin to fill with food waste from the cafeteria. Mateo's changed understanding is summarized by his father's statement: "You saw something beautiful where others saw nothing" (p. 33).

The book is based on Michael Martinez's work as the founder, Executive Director, and composter for LA Compost (<https://www.lacompost.org/>), a nonprofit organization that is a community network of over fifty community composting locations in the city of Los Angeles. The narrative is a compelling combination of Mateo's growing understanding of repurposing, a high value held by his extended family, and the science behind turning plant waste into rich food for the soil. The end of the book includes practical suggestions on reducing waste and growing community through composting. The story is told in a way that makes composting a compelling necessity in city plans that address climate change.

Hannah Abbo's primitive style of art helps convey Mateo's enthusiasm for composting. The vivid and joyful colors of the page spreads are full of details that make reading the book a sensory experience. Dark somber tones portray the waste in a landfill, decomposing and creating dangerous methane gas. In contrast, three spreads depict the trio of composting bins and stages by incorporating insets that describe the science of decomposition, digestion, and curing of the compost. Complete with images of heat vapors, macro and microorganisms, and thermometers to track the stages, composting becomes a process that helps the planet, replenishes soil, and returns food to the soil for the next cycle of life.

The foundation of the story is the value of collecting waste to create beauty, whether that is turning a discarded table into a beautiful centerpiece in a living room, building a clubhouse from project leftovers, or making salsa from vegetable scraps. Several titles pair well because of similar philosophies. Using fabric scraps to create new items of clothing or art is presented in titles like the

classic *Something from Nothing* (Phoebe Gilman, 1993), *The Clever Tailor* (Srividhya Venkat & Nayantara Surendranath, 2019), *Malaika's Costume* (Nadia Holn & Irene Luxbacher, 2016), *Patchwork Prince* (Baptiste Paul & Kitt Thomas, 2023), and *Stitchin' and Pullin': A Gee's Bend Quilt* (Patricia McKissack & Cozbi Cabrera, 2008). Recycling is at the heart of turning waste into something new and useful, though recyclers often are not involved in the creation of something new. Several titles that show participants the whole process of collecting and recreating are *Flipflop: How a Boat Made from Flip-Flops Is Helping to Save the Ocean* (Linda Lodding, Dipesh Pabari, & Michael Mwangi, 2023), *Scrap Metal Swan: A River Clean-Up Story* (Joanne Linden & Estrellita Caracol, 2022), and *Ada's Violin: The Story of the Recycled Orchestra of Paraguay* (Susan Hood & Sally Comport, 2016).

Michael Martinez first learned about composting in his grandfather's garden where he noticed that plants thrived in environments that were teeming with life. As a fifth-grade teacher, he started an after-school garden club to help his students create connections around food, soil, and community. LA Compost (his nonprofit) began as an effort to collect food scraps from juice bars, coffee shops and taco shops, composting the waste in friends' and family members' backyards. However, it soon morphed into multiple community composting locations spread across Los Angeles County. A wealth of print and video information about composting can be found on the LA Compost website and blog (<https://www.lacompost.org/resources>) where readers can hear Michael Martinez and his team explain aspects of composting in English or Spanish.

Hannah Abbo is a self-taught illustrator from the UK, but currently lives and works in Lisbon, Portugal. She used to be an illustration agent at Advocate Art, so in order to avoid a conflict of interest, created illustrations under the pseudonym Jean Claude. When she is not drawing, she loves making ceramics in a local studio, visiting the botanical gardens, rollerblading, and baking bread. Her concern for nature is evident in titles she has illustrated: *How Not to Kill Your Plant* (Magda Gargulakova & Lenka Chytilova, 2023), and *Little Tree and the Wood Wide Web* (Lucy Brownbridge, 2023).

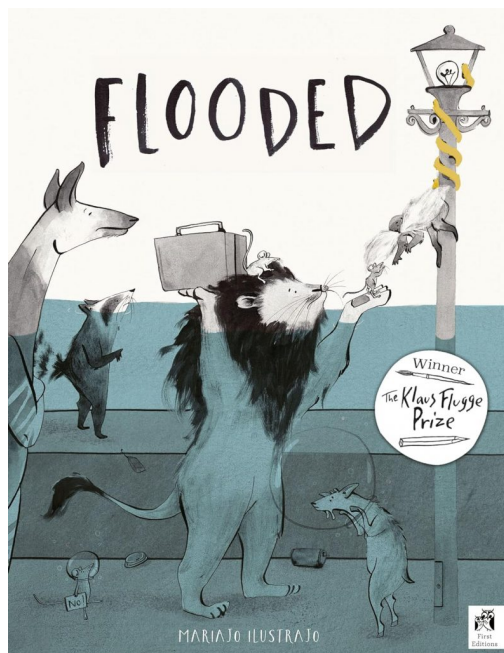
Susan Corapi, Trinity International University

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Flooded

Written and illustrated by Mariajo Ilustrajo
Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 2022, 34 pp (unpaged)
ISBN: 978-0711276765

A town populated by wild and domestic animals is experiencing problems with water. The emperor tamarin is the first to notice the pervasive damp conditions on the streets. After putting on his rubber boots, he tries to draw the animals' attention to the accumulating water, but everyone is enjoying the chance to wear wellies. Everyday life carries on with adult animals talking about the water at work, while young animals enjoy playing in the water accumulating in their classrooms. But as the water keeps rising, surprising events occur. In a classy restaurant, dinners are interrupted as a rowing crew of mice practices between tables. Tall animals visiting an art museum comment on the wet paintings and voice their assumption that the rising water will eventually go away. Short

animals can only walk around with diving bells, snorkels and scuba gear. Soon only the tall animals can continue to function normally, and they begin to wonder where the water is coming from. A protest is organized, complete with signage, demanding a solution. Finally, the animals listen to the tamarin who has been trying to get their attention for a long time. He has a solution, but it is going to take the whole community working together to solve the problem. Large and small, strong and not-so-strong, they all line up, tug on the drain plug, and soon the water drains away. All is now well—but the experience has changed the community. There are new problems (litter from the flood, small animals stuck on top of poles with no way to get down), but the animals now recognize the only way to fix a problem is working together.

The illustrations are simple but full of humor as the animals take on characteristics of humans and contemporary society (e.g. eating in an upscale restaurant, sitting in a classroom, visiting a museum complete with paintings of mice in the medieval wedding portrait by Jan van Eyck, and gazelles portraying *The Kiss* by Gustav Klimt). The narrative text is minimal with speech bubbles displaying the emotions, thoughts, and conversations of the animals. The black-and-white pen and ink illustrations have only two touches of color, the blue water and the golden tail of the tamarin. The blue increasingly fills the pages as the water rises, and the golden tail makes the communication efforts of the tamarin pop off the spreads, highlighting his questions and pleas for help.

This book functions as both a commentary on our society and a call to communities for collective action. The illustrations mimic daily commutes in cities with animals focused on getting to work, paying more attention to their cellphones, headphones, and specialty drinks, than to the voice of the tamarin who frantically tries to get their attention. At work they discuss the moisture issue, blaming it on a hippo leaving the tap on or the politicians. It is only when coping strategies become more difficult for everyone that the tamarin could finally get everyone's attention and share his plan for collective action.

Books that pair well with *Flooded* are ones that emphasize collective action. In *Amara and the Bats* (Emma Reynolds, 2021), *Ganesha Goes Green* (Lakshmi Thamizhmani & Debasmita Dasgupta, 2023), and *Join the No-Plastic Challenge* (Scott Ritchie, 2019), young children galvanize their peers and adults around them to build habitats for bats, use non-polluting clay for statues, and have a no-plastic birthday party. Indigenous titles like *Stand as Tall as the Trees* (Patricia Gualinga, Laura Resau, & Vanessa Jaramillo, 2023) and *Autumn Peltier, Water Warrior* (Carole Lindstrom & Bridget George, 2023) demonstrate the time it takes to build a collective movement and create change. Finally, in *Listen to the Earth* (Carme Lemniscates, 2022), it is clear that in order to move Earth Overshoot Day (the date each year that human demand exceeds what the earth can produce and absorb) it will take everyone making efforts in many ways to find the balance that protects our planet.

Mariajo Ilustrajo is an illustrator from Spain currently living in the UK where she earned a master's degree in children's book illustration from Anglia Ruskin University. She is enthusiastic about creating art and has worked in a wide variety of art-related jobs including illustrating websites, painting murals, and designing wedding invitations and other greeting cards. She also served as an artist in residence in India, printing with metal and wood in traditional lithography and xylography. In an interview on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G3Z7UZENB48>), Mariajo explains her artistic process in creating *Flooded*. In an interview (<https://www.klausfluggeprize.co.uk/2023/flooded-mariajo-illustrajo/>) with a member jury of the Klaus Flugge Prize (which was awarded to *Flooded*), Mariajo explains her process in more detail. More information about Mariajo can be found on her website (<https://www.mariajoilustrajo.com/>).

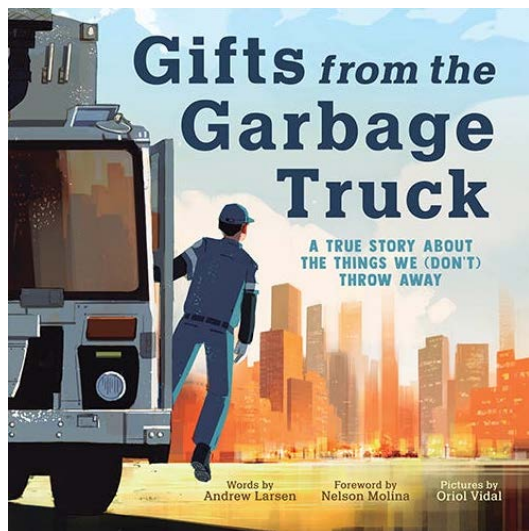
Susan Corapi, Trinity International University

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The Legend of Tiger and Tail-Flower

Written and illustrated by Lee Gee Eun

Translated by Aerin Park

Levine Querido, 2024, 72 pp (unpaged)

ISBN: 978-1646144594

Nelson lives in East Harlem, New York City, where as a child, he learned to look for the value in everything. His mother showed him the importance of finding new uses for things that people throw away. For example, she taught him how to upcycle scraps of wood into bird feeders. When Nelson's father, a merchant marine, sent Nelson letters from faraway places, he collected the stamps and experimented with different ways to display his collection to tell the stories of

his father's travels. He found tossed toys, which he brought home to fix and give as Christmas gifts for his siblings. Later, Nelson became a New York City sanitation worker, and found treasures in the bags of garbage he hauled. Some of these treasures were perfect already, and some he brought home to repair. There were so many that he brought them to his sanitation garage where they were displayed in ways that told their stories. Over his career, Nelson's collection grew until it became a museum.

This text is based on Nelson Molina's career of finding worth in everything, and the story of his museum acts as a counternarrative to our overuse of disposable goods. Treasures in the Trash is a curated collection of over 45,000 objects that he rescued from the landfill. The story is a testament to Nelson's commitment to the environment, his neighborhood, and his artistic vision. It serves as an example of an "ordinary" person changing the world. Author Andrew Larsen's prose is sparse and serves as a call to action for environmentalism without being didactic. This book includes a beautiful foreword written by Nelson, who talks about his joy when something in his museum triggers memories in a visitor. It also includes photographs of him and his garbage truck that add to the power of the text.

Oriol Vidal's illustrations burst with color and light and show a multiethnic neighborhood that is warm and abounding with the vigor of the everyday. He mixes highly graphic illustrations of Nelson, that encapsulate his strength of character, with almost French impressionistic scenes of El Barrio, that highlight its delicacy and beauty. This contrast helps to show both the work and the art that is integral to Nelson's life.

Readers can find out more about Nelson and his collection at the Sanitation Foundation website (<https://www.sanitationfoundation.org/>). The website includes articles about Nelson and his work along with video interviews (<https://www.sanitationfoundation.org/m11-treasures-in-the-trash>).

Gifts from the Garbage Truck could be a part of a text set on repurposing objects on a grand scale. The set could also include titles such as *Zero Waste: How One Community is Leading a World Recycling Revolution* (Alan Drummond, 2023), *Flipflop: How a Boat Made from Flip-Flops is Helping to Save the Ocean* (Linda Lodding, Dipesh Pabari, & Michael Mwangi 2023), and *Ada's Violin: The Story of the Recycled Orchestra of Paraguay* (Susan Hood & Sally Comport, 2016).

Andrew Larsen is an award-winning Canadian children's author. Some of his titles are *Goodnight, Hockey Fans* (Jacqui Lee, 2017), *The Man Who Loved Libraries: The Story of Andrew Carnegie* (Katty Maurey, 2017), and *Jungle Cat* (Udayana Lugo, 2023). He credits his prolific writing output to summers spent with his grandparents in a cottage with no TV. More information can be found on his website (<https://www.andrewlarsen.ca/>).

The illustrator, Oriol Vidal, studied fine art at the University of Barcelona and now lives in Madrid, Spain. Along with his work in children's illustrations, he also works with character design, concept art, and storyboards. More information can be found on his website (<https://www.oriolvidal.es/>).

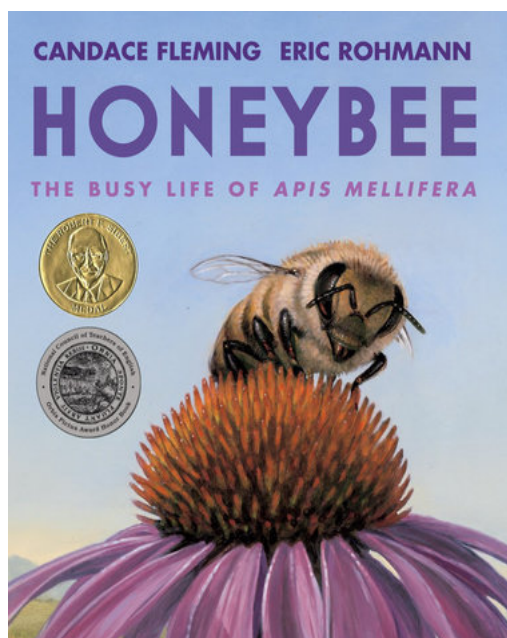
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Honeybee: The Busy Life of Apis Mellifera

Written by Candace Fleming

Illustrated by Eric Rohmann

Neal Porter Books, 2020, 40 pp (unpaged)

ISBN: 978-0823442850

Candace Fleming's fact-filled narrative combines with Eric Rohmann's detailed illustrations to create an outstanding and fascinating account of the life of a honeybee. The writing and illustrations provide many details about honeybees that will interest readers from first grade through middle school. This text is an example of how a seemingly simple picturebook can be packed with information that provides knowledge and appreciation for an insect that is vital to our lives. As Fleming writes in the back matter, "Most people sitting down to dinner don't realize the important role honeybees played in preparing that meal."

The text and illustrations start before the title page with two pages showing the emergence of a brand-new honeybee into the nest. Then each stage of that worker bee's life is carefully described and illustrated. Readers learn that honeybees have a scientific name, *Apis mellifera*. This narrative is a story of one bee's life and she is referred to as *Apis* for short.

Apis performs many jobs. First, she must tend to the hive's nursery. Next, she moves on to tend to the larvae, then on to queen tending, comb building, food handling, guarding the hive, and finally on the twenty-fifth day of her life, "she leaps from the nest and ... Flies!" Four sections of a fold-out page show the bee zooming out into a flower filled, colorful landscape. Readers discover how *Apis* searches for sweet nectar and pollinates the flowers. Then she returns to the hive where she dances to give directions to the other bees about where she found the sweet nectar.

Apis continues to gather nectar for ten days until, on the thirty-fifth day of her life, "*Apis* stills." Readers learn that "She has visited thirty thousand flowers. She has collected enough nectar to make one-twelfth of a teaspoon of honey. Her work is done." However, that is not the end of the book. The last two pages echo the first two pages, showing a brand-new honeybee emerging from her solitary cell to begin a new life cycle.

Fleming explains how we can help bees recover and survive with actions and ideas for children to implement. For example, she advises readers to write to their Congresspeople and Senators to urge them to support funding for honeybee research and to spend money on habitat enhancements. Also, she offers a way that readers can support bees by seeking out local beekeepers and buying their honey.

The last pages of the book contain a section titled, "Bit More Buzz," which offers more facts about honeybees and online resources. The author also includes a list of other books about bees. These titles could be combined with this picturebook to create a text set. *Honeybee* has won several awards,

among them the Robert Sibert Award for the most distinguished informational book in 2021 and an NCTE Orbis Pictus Honor book. The Sibert Award Committee noted that *Honeybee* is “scientifically accurate and emotionally satisfying.”

Books that would pair well with *Honeybee* include books about this insect. *Bees: A Honeyed History* (Piotr Socha, 2021) includes both scientific and cultural information, describing the role bees played in earlier historical times. *The King of Bees* (Lester Laminack & Jim LaMarche, 2018) is a fictional story about the importance of bees and beekeeping. Other informational books by Fleming and Rohmann like *Polar Bear* (2022) and *Giant Squid* (2016) are excellent choices for children to discover more about the style and creative process of this author and illustrator. Fleming and Rohmann have collaborated on other books (*Bulldozer's Big Day*, 2015; *Oh, No!*, 2012). Each of them has also produced a number of outstanding picture and informational books independently.

Candace Fleming is an award-winning author, known for her biographical informational books. Fleming won the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award for *The Family Romanov: Rebellion, and the Fall of Imperial Russia* (2024) and *The Lincolns: A Scrapbook Look at Abraham and Mary* (2008). More information can be found on her website (<https://candacefleming.com/>).

Eric Rohmann has been awarded both a Caldecott Award for *My Friend Rabbit* (2002) and a Caldecott Honor for *Times Flies* (1994). More information can be found on his website (<https://www.ericrohmann.com/>).

Marilyn Carpenter, Eastern Washington University

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The Last Straw: Kids vs. Plastics

Written by Susan Hood

Illustrated by Christiane Engel

HarperCollins, 2021, 48 pp

ISBN: 978-0062981394

From the introduction to the “News You Can Use” at the end of the back matter, *The Last Straw: Kids vs. Plastics* is a child-centered book. After the introduction, written by a young person who has had an international impact on preserving the environment, author Susan Hood offers seventeen rhyming poems. She presents informational pullouts and quotes from young climate activists or researchers on each double-page spread. Christiane Engel’s charming child-friendly illustrations complete the hopeful message that everyone—no matter how old they are or where they live—can make a difference.

When he was nine years old, Milo Cress, who wrote the intro, realized that using a straw with every drink he ordered was a waste of resources and terrible for the planet. He learned that a kid could be a voice for change when he founded BeStrawFree.org, which is now hosted on EcoCycle (<https://ecocycle.org/eco-living/refuse-and-reduce/be-straw-free/>). Milo worked to minimize the use of plastic straws, bags, and bottles. He encouraged adults to follow his lead and other children to find projects about which they are passionate in order to change the world for the better.

Susan Hood’s seventeen rhyming poems include “Fantastic Plastic,” “The Great Pacific Garbage Patch,” “For the Love of Frogs,” and “Stand Up, Speak Up.” The rhyme schemes vary but the end-of-the-line rhymes can draw listening readers into the poem when they provide the rhyming word. Hood’s poems use known forms such as a cumulative poem in “Plastic for Dinner,” (like “This Is the House that Jack Built”) as well as the limerick in “Mr. Trash Wheel.”

The informational paragraph that accompanies each poem provides facts that may surprise, shock, or delight readers. For example, there actually is a “Mr. Trash Wheel.” Installed in 2014, it gobbles up trash floating down a river before it gets to the Baltimore harbor. “Ode to the Jellyfish” tells how researchers discovered that jellyfish mucus can capture microplastics to reduce the amount in the ocean. The quotes from researchers and young climate activists offer inspiration and motivation to become knowledgeable and involved. The back matter includes an author’s note, timeline, source and poetry notes, and more.

In a straightforward manner, Christiane Engel’s acrylic, watercolor, and Adobe Photoshop artwork accurately illustrates the information found on each page. Her spot illustrations, which are included in the back matter, make that section of the book an attractive destination to further readers’ interest. This design results in an overall child-friendly presentation.

Although this book is catalogued and shelved with nonfiction, it has been criticized for not having sufficient “information” to be considered nonfiction. I disagree with that assessment. Books like this

one pique young readers' curiosity and can motivate them to learn more. In addition, today's children will likely use digital resources rather than informational books alone to satisfy their further information needs.

The Last Straw: Kids vs. Plastics can be paired with any number of books in this issue of *WOW Review*. Another possible pairing is *Black Beach: A Community, Oil Spill, and the Origin of Earth Day* (2023). This fiction picturebook could help children connect further with their own agency in responding to environmental issues. Written by Shaunna and John Stith and illustrated by Maribel Lechuga, *Black Beach* tells the story of the 1969 Union Oil spill off the coast of Santa Barbara, California. The protagonist in the story is Sam, a primary school-aged child, who is, at first, horrified by the destruction of her favorite place—the beach at Santa Barbara. When her parents and community become actively involved in saving the oil-coated seabirds, Sam is inspired to take action. Sam and her friends bottle up the oil from the beach and mail it to politicians, who finally realize the breadth of the environmental destruction. As a result of their activism, Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin proposed a national teach-in on environmental issues, which led to the first annual celebration of Earth Day on April 22, 1970. *Black Beach* ends with children in Sam's school participating in an Earth Day assembly, during which they recycle and learn about many other ways to preserve the environment. Along with 20 million other people who participated in that first Earth Day, Sam and her classmates joined an international movement to celebrate and protect the planet. Books like *The Last Straw* and *Black Beach* can help children understand they can make a difference.

Author Susan Hood writes early readers, picturebooks, and middle grade novels. Her books have earned numerous awards, including a 2022 NCTE Notable Poetry book award for *The Last Straw*. Hood lives in coastal Connecticut. Visit her online (<https://www.susanhoodbooks.com/>).

Christiane Engel (<https://chengel.myportfolio.com/about>) is both a children's illustrator and author. She states her goal is to inspire readers to be curious and compassionate about the world. Engel lives in Kent, England.

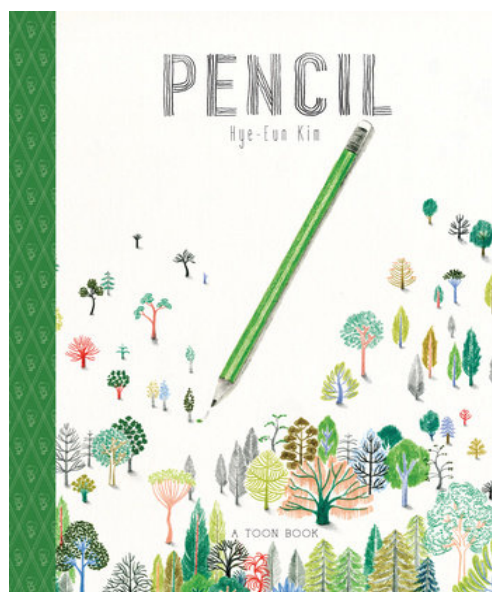
Judi Moreillon, Tucson, Arizona

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Pencil

Written and illustrated by Hye-Eun Kim

A Toon Book, 2021, 44 pp (unpaged)

ISBN: 978-1662665530

Thin curls of pencil shavings quietly fall to the ground and a sprout emerges. The sprout grows into a tree, and one by one, more trees join to form a dense forest. Each tree grows in its own unique way, and the forest fills with birds and animals. One day, the peaceful forest trembles and birds fly away in fear as trees are cut down. The fallen trees are transported to a factory, where they are turned into colorful pencils amid rising smoke. These pencils are delivered to an art store, where a young girl buys one. She begins to draw a tree on a stump left behind by the felled forest. The tree she draws grows, branching

outward. As it gets taller, the girl climbs onto a chair and then a ladder to keep drawing. She continues to draw the tree, and in the process of rebuilding the forest, birds and animals return. Together, humans and nature recreate a lush forest. At the edge of the forest, the girl plants the pencil into the ground. She disappears but from that very spot, a new sprout begins to grow.

This book gently yet powerfully explores the relationship between humans and nature, addressing the urgent issues of destruction and restoration while highlighting the essential qualities of ecosystems—diversity and coexistence. As a wordless picturebook, it uses visual techniques effectively to bring these themes to life. The contrast between natural and human activity is effectively portrayed through the use of a simple line. Nature is depicted as expansive, filling entire pages without borders, while human actions are rendered on a thin line that traverses across pages. This juxtaposition intuitively conveys human intervention in contrast to the natural world.

The book excels in portraying the diversity and vitality of an ecosystem. Starting from a single tree, the forest gradually expands into a flourishing habitat of trees in various colors, sizes, and forms, emphasizing ecological diversity and the harmonious coexistence of many species. The forest, drawn without borders across full spreads, symbolizes the infinite boundaries of the ecosystem.

This peaceful ecosystem collapses due to human intervention. Trees are felled, and factories emit smoke in the service of industrial production for human convenience. While these depictions highlight environmental destruction and the consequences of industrialization, the author/illustrator goes beyond critique to imagine hopes for recovery. At the edge of the forest, the girl plants the pencil into the ground. She is no longer present. From the spot where the pencil stands, a new sprout grows. The distinction between human and nature, artificial and natural, begins to dissolve, and they become part of one another. The pencil is no longer a tool for human consumption alone; it is transformed into a medium of life. The girl's absence leaves a lingering emotional resonance.

Pencil can be beautifully paired with *onia's Rain Forest* (Juana Martinez-Neal, 2021), which portrays a young Asháninka girl's deep bond with the Peruvian Amazon, highlighting Indigenous reverence for nature and a powerful message of self-determination as she takes agency in protecting her homeland. *My Life at the Bottom: The Story of a Lonesome Axolotl* (Linda Bondestam, 2022) would also be an excellent choice for a partner text. This book invites readers to reflect on climate change and environmental responsibility through the eyes of an adorable axolotl struggling to survive amid an environmental crisis.

The author, Hye-Eun Kim, lives in Korea. She majored in fine arts in college and worked as a designer and illustrator before becoming a picturebook author, pursuing her true passion. *Pencil* is her debut picture book. She shares that she is curious about stories that are neither vague nor grand, and she loves the moment they are reimagined as images. Each day, she quietly searches for things too shy to speak aloud. This book began with her imaginative thought that the pencil, so easily within reach on her drawing table, might once have been a tall, solitary tree standing firm in a vast forest. No informational text appears on the book cover. The backside of the cover features a full image of a forest, which can be appreciated as a beautiful work of art. This book was selected for the 2022 Bologna Ragazzi Award Amazing Bookshelf.

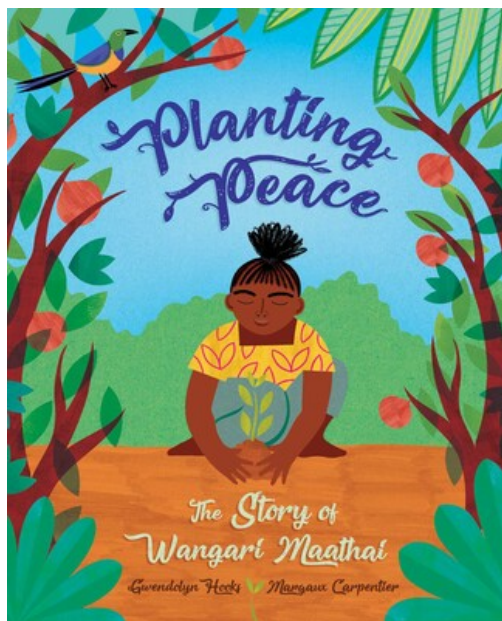
HeeYoung Kim, West Texas A&M

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Planting Peace: The Story of Wangari Maathai

Written by Gwendolyn Hooks

Illustrated by Margaux Carpentier

Crocodile Books USA, 2021, 64 pp

ISBN: 978-1623718855

Planting Peace is a powerful biography of Wangari Maathai, the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize. She was also the founder of the Green Belt Movement in Kenya, which focused on planting trees, environmental conservation, and women's rights. Her movement led to the planting of over 30 million trees. This nonfiction picturebook shows how one woman can make a big difference.

The narrative follows Maathai's life from her coffee-farming childhood in rural Kenya where she was fascinated by nature,

to her later years as a scientist and activist. Hooks tells about the societal barriers Maathai faced along the way. The text highlights how deforestation affected Kenya's ecosystem where rivers dried up, wildlife disappeared, and women walked miles to find firewood. In response, Maathai encouraged women to plant trees to heal the land and to restore their communities.

Carpentier's illustrations use vibrant color palettes and bold shapes to depict Kenya's landscapes. Her images often fill the page with layered textures and repeating motifs, such as tree seedlings and outstretched hands. These design choices suggest unity and movement. The women are portrayed in traditional clothing and engaged in communal planting, reinforcing the idea of cultural and environmental restoration working hand in hand.

The book is a celebration of Maathai's life but misses some parts of the greater narrative that makes this woman's story rich and nuanced. The book portrays groups of Kenyan women working together, but the narrative centers almost exclusively on Maathai. Her collaborators are unnamed, and their voices are not heard. The book also omits details about the personal and political risks Maathai faced, including government opposition and imprisonment. Without these, readers may walk away with a story of triumph, but not a full understanding of the challenges.

Planting Peace acts as both a mirror for readers who identify with environmental activism and African heritage and as a window for those unfamiliar with Wangari Maathai's legacy. Through Hooks's storytelling and Carpentier's symbolic illustrations, young readers are invited to observe and to imagine themselves as changemakers.

Planting Peace could be paired with *Wangari's Trees of Peace: A True Story from Africa* (Jeanette Winter, 2008), another text about Maathai's important work. Other books about Maathai include *Mama Miti* (Donna Napoli & Kadir Nelson, 2010), *Seeds of Change* (Jen C. Johnson & Sonia Lynn Sadler, 2010), *Planting the Trees of Kenya: The Story of Wangari Maathai* (Claire Nivola, 2008), and

Wangari Maathai: The Woman Who Planted Millions of Trees (Franck Prévot & Aurélia Fronty, 2017). Titles that introduce younger readers to other climate warriors include *As the Seas Rise: Nicole Hernandez Hammer and the Fight for Climate Justice* (Angela Quezada Padron, 2024) and *The Girl Who Heard the Music: How One Pianist and 5,000 Bottles and Cans Brought New Hope to an Island* (Marni Fogelson, Mahani Teave, & Marta Alvarez-Miguéns, 2023).

Gwendolyn Hooks is an African American writer who focuses on stories that encourage children to explore the world. Before becoming a full time author, she taught middle school math. Hooks is the author of the NAACP Image Award winning picturebook biography, *Tiny Stitches-The Life of Medical Pioneer Vivien Thomas* (2016). You can find out more about the author and her books on her website (<https://aalbc.com/authors/Gwendolyn+Hooks>).

Illustrator Margaux Carpentier (<https://www.margauxcarpentier.com/>) grew up in France but is now based in London. She is known for her folkloric style, blending modern design with traditional patterns. Her art emphasizes unity, color, and natural patterns, all of which enrich Maathai's story with visual metaphor.

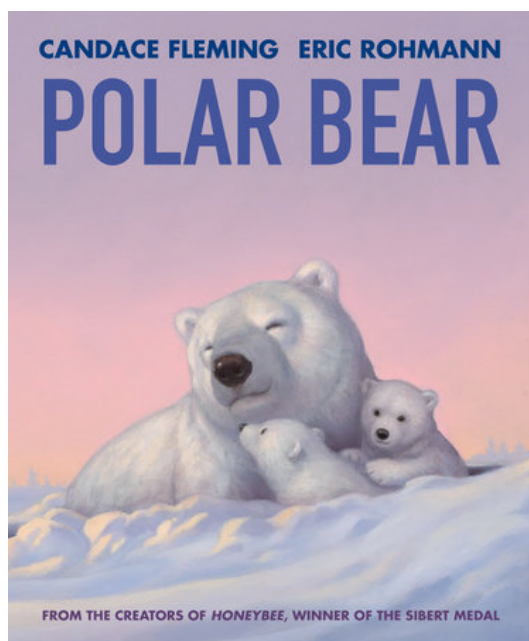
Casey Holland, Texas Woman's University

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Polar Bear

Written by Candace Fleming

Illustrated by Eric Rohmann

Neal Porter Books, 2022, 40 pp (unpaged)

ISBN: 978-0823449163

This story of a mother and her two cubs starts in April in the Arctic. The reader's attention is caught with a description of the mother polar bear "crawling from her icy den, seeing her world for the first time in five months...For all that time, she has been in the den she dug beneath the snow. Not eating. Never leaving. Surviving on her stored fat." There she gives birth to two cubs that she nurses, keeping them safe and warm for four months. As the babies grow bigger, the mother grows thinner.

Now she is ready to go home to the ice where she will hunt and regain weight. But before she can take the cubs on this journey, the mother must get her cubs used to the outdoors and the cold. Once the cubs are ready, their journey begins to their new ice home. While grown bears can walk fifty miles a day, the babies' tiny legs tire quickly. The mother has to stop and nurse them, giving them time to nap before they are ready to walk again.

The cubs with this careful guidance and protection of their mother, travel forty miles to reach their new home in the Hudson Bay. There the mother hunts seals and regains her weight. Then a disaster occurs: the ice that the family is on breaks off, and they are carried far out to open water. While adult bears can swim sixty miles nonstop, young cubs cannot swim that long, but they have no choice. The mother must take the cubs into the Arctic water to swim back to land. It is an arduous, rugged journey of many hours and they barely make it. A dramatic fold-out of four pages opens up to show their lengthy journey to safety.

The lack of stretches of solid ice make it hard for the mother to survive in the summer. When there is no sea ice the bears cannot catch seals, their main source of nutrition. During the summer the mother again "lives mostly on her fat store. The babies live mostly on her milk...They are waiting for the return of the ice." Their wait continues, but it is taking too long. The mother's hunger grows and the layer of fat needed to sustain her cubs is disappearing. She desperately needs to eat. Finally, in December the ice returns and with that the opportunity to hunt seals again. The cubs will stay with their mother through this second frigid winter and the next spring and summer seasons. However, when the cubs' third winter comes, each member of the family travels on, alone.

There is an aspect in this account that is somewhat unusual for a nonfiction book. It is the portrayal of unwavering support, care and sacrifice given by the mother to her cubs. In every

threatening incident in their journey back and forth to the ice, she puts her own wellbeing last and the cubs' first, a powerful reminder of what being a mother means. This part of the book may promote a lively discussion of how mothers care for their offspring.

Eric Rohmann's luminous oil illustrations enhance the narrative of the icy snow and changing hues of the light blue skies in the long Arctic summer days. The white snow is an effective backdrop for the lively cubs and their wise, caring mother. Some of the pictures are close ups that allow us to see the curiosity on the bears' faces and the actions of their bodies. Other pictures stretch out to show the incredible space of ice and water. Rohmann uses tones of blue and white effectively to showcase the bears and their surroundings. Scenes, like when wolves attack the family, are set off by a bright, blue background. Other vistas show the Northern Lights and the dark nights of winter.

The back matter is particularly effective in giving more information about the bears. A diagram of an adult bear describes how the physical adaptations of the bears enable them to survive the bitter Arctic cold. The informative section, "It's All About the Ice," discusses how global warming is impacting the lives of the bears. As the Arctic ocean warms, the sea ice in Hudson Bay melts, effectively cutting short the time the bears have to hunt and build up stores of body fat.

Fleming explains that the warming is due to human-caused climate change and describes how global warming is impacting the Arctic. Then she offers hope with a list of actions to save the sea ice and help polar bears survive. The actions are simple but they can make a difference, offering hope to young people. The back matter also includes "A Few Cool Facts" about polar bears. There are two lists of online resources about polar bears and a bibliography of books that will encourage readers to learn more. There is more information included in the back matter with "Polar Bears Online," and a selected bibliography of other books about polar bears and their environment. Using this information, children may be inspired to take action and be involved in projects to make a difference for the bears.

Books that pair well with *Polar Bear* are the two nonfiction titles that are collaborations between Candace Fleming and Eric Rohman, *Honeybee: The Busy Life of Apis Mellifera* (2020) and *Giant Squid* (2015). Another title, *Emperor of the Ice: How a Changing Environment Affects a Penguin Colony* (Nicola Davies & Catherine Rayner, 2023), pairs well because it describes the impact of melting ice on the breeding grounds for the penguins.

Candace Fleming has written over fifty books for children. She has won the Orbis Pictus Award, the Sibert Award, the Los Angeles Times Book Prize and is the two-time winner of the Boston Globe/Horn Book Award. Readers can find out more about her on her website (<https://candacefleming.com/>).

Eric Rohman won the Caldecott Medal for illustrations in *My Friend Rabbit* (2002) and a Caldecott Honor for *Time Flies* (1994). He works in two distinct styles, oil paintings and cartoon-like relief prints. More information about his illustrations and process can be found on his website (<https://www.ericrohmann.com/>).

Marilyn Carpenter, Eastern Washington University

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