

Earth Day Books for Children

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“Let go! It’s mine!” Four year-old Sam snatches the ball from his sister’s grasp. Cleo, only two, knows what to do. Stomach-first, she throws herself on the floor, beats her small fists on the ground and erupts with a blood-thirsty cry. Sam and Cleo’s parents, in another room when the dispute broke out, wonder how to intervene. Who had the ball first? Who owns it? Who needs it most? Should the children take turns, or should the ball be taken away?

Derek Evans, former Deputy Secretary General of Amnesty International, believes that compromise is not the ideal strategy to resolve conflict. His negotiating experiences demonstrate that the best results are achieved, not when opponents feel they must give up something, but rather when they are able to create a new vision or opportunity together.... when Sam and Cleo choose to play ball together.

But creating a new vision is not always easy. In 1990, two million Canadians joined 200 million people in 141 nations to celebrate the first International Earth Day. Twenty years later, the issues of municipal waste and renewable sources of energy are still hotly debated within communities, and clear direction about climate change and worldwide loss of species is elusive to politicians on the world stage. But Canadians have not lost their vision. Now on April 22nd more that 6 million Canadians join 1 billion people in over 170 countries to address environmental issues.

While effective environmental policies are disputed and hammered out in the adult world; respectful environmental choices can be birthed in the world of a child. Nurturing children’s love of nature is easy. They are already in the spring mud, digging their way to earthworm heaven. We simply need to find a plastic shovel too and, as we dig, talk about the creatures and rocks and plants we find together. We need to model composting and recycling. We need to affirm children’s sense of wonder about nature.

Books with an environmental theme have been written for children from birth onwards. Schim Schimmel has written exquisitely illustrated board and picture books for children from birth to twelve years of age. “Children of the Earth Remember” and “Family of the Earth” are both in toddler-friendly board books. “Dear Children of the Earth” is perfect for reading and talking about with preschoolers and school-age children.

Shrinking die cut holes in “The Water Hole” by Graeme Base show how important clean water is to jungle animals. This book is published in picture, board and colouring book formats.

Mercer Mayer fans will be happy to discover that Little Critter has recently joined the environmental movement too in “Little Critter: It’s Earth Day!”

“Earth Day: An Alphabet Book” by Gary Kowalski shows the incredible diversity of earth’s plants, animals and insects.

Creating a better world for our children can involve our children. Exploring, talking and reading about nature can help children create the vision that will show them how to play with that big ball we call home – Earth.