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5 Children's Environmental Books

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5 Children's Environmental Books

Lucas, Eileen. *Acid Rain*. Chicago: Children's Press, 1991. 128 pp. ISBN: 0-516-05503-8. Printed on Evergreen Gloss 50% recycled preconsumer waste with binder of 100% recycled material.

Acid rain is a general term referring to acids and other pollutants in rain, snow, clouds, fog, and aerosols. Called acidic deposition or acidic precipitation in technical settings, acid rain motivated a substantial research effort in the United States, Canada, and other industrial countries worldwide. Such research has sought the causes and effects of acidic deposition and options for mitigating its effects, and aims to provide information that will help policy makers evaluate alternative strategies to reduce the threat of acid rain.

Since the study of acid rain involves the life, physical, social, and political sciences, the subject is a convenient one for integrating learning in the classroom. Lucas's first chapters discuss sources of air pollutants that contribute to the acidification of precipitation and provide several experiments related to the measurement of pH and the concepts of acid and base chemistry and buffering capacity. The phenomenon of long-range transport of air pollutants is adequately discussed. The effects of acid rain to soils, crops, forests, animals, and materials is discussed in rather general terms, while the last two chapters briefly cover options for reducing air emissions and the levels of action that can be taken to reduce the threat of acid rain.

While *Acid Rain* makes an honest effort to present this topic in a non-biased, neutral fashion, the underlying rhetoric fringes on the activist side of the issue. Words describing "dead" or "dying" lakes occur frequently. While the consequences of acidified ecosystems have been well documented over the past twenty years, catastrophic ecological damage attributed solely to acid rain has been perhaps exaggerated by the media. However, Lucas' *Acid Rain* provides one of the better treatments of the topic.

Acid Rain is designed for the advanced upper middle school to the high school student and is amply illustrated with color photographs, line drawings, charts, and graphs. A series of field, laboratory, and classroom activities and exercises are included as sidebars to the text. The book is rounded out with a list of pertinent nongovernmental organizations, a brief glossary, and a rather good index. *Acid Rain* would serve school and public libraries best; nature centers, natural history museums, and science centers providing science classes in an informal setting would also find this a useful resource.

Russell, F. William. ed. *Animal Families of the Wild*. New York: Crown Publishers (Random House), 1990. 82 pp. US \$12.95 trade ISBN: 0-517-57358-X; library binding, ISBN: 0-51757359-8.

William Russell has selected excerpts from five well-known wildlife/nature authors, including James Michener (Centennial) and Farley Mowat (Never Cry Wolf) to be read aloud to younger children or to be read alone by older children. Each story is accompanied by an introduction to its theme and side bars to

pronounce and define words that may be new to the reader. This book is part of the Classics to Read Aloud to Your Children and has been richly illustrated by the wildlife and children's book artist John Butler, whose full-color plates and half-page color and black and white illustrations add a striking beauty to the accompanying texts.

From my childhood in the southern foothills of New York's Adirondack Mountains, I have vivid recollections of my father reading stories from a Mark Trail nature book--a book that I wish had been kept. From those early stories of flying geese, grazing deer, and jumping fish the secrets of the wonderful and exciting world of wild animals and nature was unfolded. Perhaps those early readings led me to pursue an education in the biological sciences, culminating in graduate degrees in ecology and library science. A lot can be said for the nurturing of children's interests in their natural surroundings.

Russell's book should be as enticing to the listeners and readers of today as Mark Trail was to me. The stories reveal the complexity of nature through the lives of penguins, wolf pups, eagles, beavers, and caribou. This is a book designed to stimulate curiosity, compassion, and understanding. Parents, grandparents, teachers, and children of all ages will find these stories enlightening, as well as informative.

Roberts, Allene. *The Curiosity Club Kid's Nature Activity Book*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1992. 184 pp. US\$12.95 paper ISBN: 0-471-55589-4; US\$19.89 library edition ISBN: 0-471-55590-8.

Sheehan, Kathryn and Mary Waidner. *Earth Child: Games Stories, Activities, Experiments & Ideas About Living Lightly on Planet Earth*. Tulsa, OK: Council Oak Books, 1991. 327 pp. US\$16.95 paper ISBN: 0-933031-39-4; cloth ISBN: 0-933031-42-4.

Rachel Carson (in *A Sense of Wonder*) offered the observation that, "If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder . . . he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in." Parents, siblings, teachers, and other "instructors" can encourage children to learn about nature and the environment in fun and exciting ways. Both of these books describe ways to make learning about the environment enjoyable and rewarding experience for both the student and the teacher.

Roberts' *Kids' Nature Activity Book* is filled with numerous facts, explanations, ideas, and observations about nature and the environment, woven into a series of puzzles, games, and a wide variety of projects designed to sharpen the child's senses and skills in reasoning and appreciation. These activities are arranged into seven subject areas: trees, green plants, soil, animals, birds, insects and spiders, and weather. Each chapter contains simple amusing drawings, challenging questions, and lots of room for creative and imaginative work and enjoyment. The activities are geared to expose children to an appreciation of nature and their environment through experiential, hands-on activities such as growing plants from mud on their sneakers, collecting feathers and flower seeds, helping to build a bird's nest, and predicting tomorrow's weather. The text is written in a friendly and encouraging style and is suited for children in the age range from 6 to 12. The book should be welcome to the school teacher, summer camp or activities program, or parent seeking to expand a child's appreciation for the outdoors.

Sheehan's and Waidner's book *Earth Child* is more of an instructional strategy for educators in both the formal and non-formal settings. *Earth Child* tends to treat its subject from an academic perspective. It

provides detailed explanations for the science and technology being described. The chapters are arranged in a topical sequence providing activities for exploring the spatial and temporal aspects of the environment. The use of plants, animals, ecological concepts (such as habitats and geochemical cycles), and environmental issues (like biodiversity, endangered species, and activism) are presented for instruction from the upper middle through junior high school levels. Each chapter comes with extensive lists of both children's books and resources for teachers and parents, stories around which lessons can be planned, and activities and games that encourage an awareness and appreciation of the earth and its resources.

DeSandolo, Nancy Ann. *Treats and Tales from Vail*. Vail, Colorado: Independently published (P.O. Box 206, Vail, CO) . 1992. 26 pp. US\$8.50 paper No ISBN assigned.

While noted for its resort-skiing atmosphere, Vail in the Colorado Rockies harbors other seasonal delights, one of which, flyfishing for wild trout, this reviewer has undertaken on several occasions. It is this near-idyllic setting in the midst of majestic mountains that we find Jeffrey and Jimmy and Jesse ("The Mess") learning the gentle and not-so-gentle art of surviving childhood--a basic ecological principle. This trio of youngsters also learn the responsibilities of being older and younger siblings and their roles of caretakers are ever expanding.

This book is the first children's book written by DeSandolo, a learning disabilities teacher, and illustrated with simple imaginative drawings by Nancy Ann Miller, a well-known Vail artist. *Treats and Tales from Vail* would be appropriate for the parent to read to a child or for placement in the children's section of a school or public library. The charming story should appeal to children age two to six. Concepts of caring and responsibility unfold as Jeffrey, Jimmy, and Jesse must learn to accept change in their lives. A second volume of the young trio's exploits in the Rocky Mountains is scheduled for the Spring of 1993.