Book Buddy, April 2023

Our Big Wonderful World

Clover knows about problems that arise when we turn our backs on “Our Big Wonderful World.” While we’ve made some efforts in bettering our planet since Earth Day was established more than 50 years ago, there is still much more that we can do.

To commemorate Earth Day, on April 22, Clover has chosen Book Buddy Picks that focus on our natural world, stories certain to increase our awareness and inspire us to take action, in big and small ways. Together we can make a difference.

You can count on the Earth. This marvelous place that we call home continually changes and offers us so much—trees springing to life with blossoms, running streams with fresh water, stars that sparkle and rainbows that dazzle. The Earth gives and we’re encouraged to give back, the theme of “Little Land,” a visually appealing book with inspiring words and watercolor illustrations by Diana Sudyka.

The Earth hasn’t always been like it is today. Millions of years ago, it was ruled by thundering dinosaurs and threatened by volcanic eruptions, until the Ice Age when “… life seemed to have left for good.” Painstakingly and ploddingly “Life began anew … the land (providing) for all … that lived upon it.”

Mother Earth sustains us by offering rich soil, rivers, and food for humans and animals, just a few of her many gifts. But forces work against her, destruction by fires, earthquakes, tornadoes and manmade environmental issues, yet our planet survives, picking itself up, and dusting itself off, time and time again.

Earth Day offers us the opportunity to commit to change, each in our own way. “Little Land” is a call to action, urging individuals to “… look closely and listen …” to heed our planet’s need for a helping hand, on whatever plot of “Little Land” we inhabit.

Imagine seeing the Missouri River burst into flames. It’s unimaginable, but fires on the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland, Ohio, actually happened, what a sight to see! With a light, entertaining, yet informative voice, author Barry Wittenstein tells the story of “The Day the River Caught Fire: How the Cuyahoga River Exploded and Ignited the Earth Day Movement.”

For years there were no laws preventing waste from being dumped in our nation’s rivers, a problem that worsened with the Industrial Revolution. Rivers in cities like Cleveland became hostile cesspools. No one cared about “… the environment or what their slop, slush, gunk and rubbish did to” once clear waters.

The Cuyahoga River became coated with a “... thick gooey layer or sludge, oil, and sewage.” When a passing train threw sparks into the combustible soup, a huge “KABOOM!” lit the sky and firemen rushed to the scene. Then life went on as usual, “HO HUM.”

In the 1960s, a movement began, driven by the passion of young people, and the foresight of Carl Stokes, Mayor of Cleveland, who said “… the days of ho-humming were over.” A combined commitment by many led to the Clear Air Act, Clean Water Act and Earth Day.

This important, interesting book is enhanced with action-packed, dramatic Illustrations by Jessie Hartland.

The main character in “Haven Jacobs Saves the Planet” a must-read by Barbara Dee, has eco-anxiety—concern about the environment keeping her up at night. Haven’s in middle school and her obsessiveness surrounding issues, like global warming, consume her thoughts. When Haven’s family goes fishing, she objects that they’re killing fish, and when her teacher shows a video about the icebergs melting in Antarctica, Haven can’t get the penguins’ possible plight off her mind.

Haven’s embarrassed about her feelings and gets exasperated that her parents and friends don’t understand her. Haven’s parents have things on their minds too, Haven’s dad just started a job at Gemba, a new factory in town, and her brother is in a whole different world, tussles between them continuous.

Things come to a head when Haven gets involved with a class project to analyze water in the local Belmont River, where her brother told her frogs and other wildlife is abundant. But the class discovers this is no longer the case, a truly shocking discovery that takes hold of Haven’s psyche. Haven is certain that something is amiss but what can she do, with her father employed at the very plant she suspects might be polluting the water.

Haven is a formidable, driven force in this relatable story that not only focuses on the issue of global warming, but on the slippery slope of maintaining adolescent friendships. Just when you think you have this page-turner figured out, Dee slips in a surprise you don’t see coming.

*Copyright 2023, Community Literacy Foundation. Reprinted with permission only.*