



this i dream... for Environment

Poem by Jane Yolen, Essay by Deborah Hopkinson

“I tell everyone the same thing that I told my children and their children as they grew up: Leave the world a better place than you found it. If everyone would do that...” - Jane Yolen

I wrote a poem once that says it better than I can in prose:

Oh World, I Wish

Oh World, I wish you were my mother,
For I would spread my fingers out
Against your earth face
And smell again the good brown smell.
I would feel your body warm by mine,
More than sun and fire and coals.
I would taste your silky streams
And the cold clean waters
Running over twenty-one stones.
I would lift my face to your sky.

Oh World, I wish you were my father,
For I would burrow into your marshes
And twine your green fingers in mine.
I would feel my face against yours,
Woody and barkish and rough.
And I would touch the slippery stones
As soft as tears and as shiny.
Your gray boulders, like muscles,
Would bunch up against my back.
I would lift my face to your sky.

Oh World, I wish you were my brothers,
I wish you were my sisters,
For we would play in the long grass
And the wind would swing it like hair:
Swee-swash, swee-swash.
We would make combs of acacia and thorn
And plait feathers in our braids.
I would share my bowl with you
And you would share yours with me.
I would lift my face to your sky.

Oh World, I wish we were a family
Of flesh and earth and stone.
Oh World, I wish we were a family
Of blood and sand and bone.



Jane Yolen

Jane Yolen (www.janeyolen.com) has 300 books out and apologizes to the trees. She's a passionate recycler, in both her life and her stories.

Lisa Desimini

Lisa Desimini (www.lisadesimini.com) has written and/or illustrated over thirty books for kids. It is her passion, along with yoga and cooking and visiting schools to share her books with kids.



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"I dream of a world where polar bears, elephants, tigers, and frogs thrive, where environmental issues are afforded the highest national priority, where children have free access to the knowledge necessary to create such a future..."

-Deborah Hopkinson

In 2009, Americans will celebrate the bicentennial of the birth of an extraordinary historical figure: America's 16th president, Abraham Lincoln, born on February 12, 1809.

Less attention, in this country at least, will be given to the celebration of the bicentennial of another major figure born on the same day: Charles Darwin.

I've researched and written books for children about both Darwin and Lincoln. While I'm not sure how many kids will actually read my book, *Abe Lincoln Crosses a Creek*, I can certainly say I don't worry about it being excluded from a library, school, or bookstore simply because it is about Lincoln.

But the same cannot be said of my previous book on Darwin. After *Who Was Charles Darwin?* was released several years ago, I heard that book clubs would probably be reluctant to acquire it, so as not to offend any of their schools. I'd become so excited researching Darwin that it was hard to believe that a biography of one of the greatest scientists who ever lived would be considered controversial. Yet I shouldn't have been surprised. I knew from previous experience that evolution is on the list of excluded subjects for educational tests.

I can't help but come back to Darwin when I try to express what I dream for the environment: a world where the amazing diversity of life he encountered in his journey on the *Beagle* still exists. Yet it does not seem enough to say that I dream of a world where polar bears, elephants, tigers, and frogs thrive, a world where global warming is reduced, where environmental issues are afforded the highest national priority.

For it is more complex. I dream of a society where children have free and unfettered access to the knowledge and understanding necessary to envision and create such a future for the environment.

I dream of an America where children are encouraged to hone critical thinking skills and acquire literacy. And by literacy I mean not just the ability to read, but scientific, media, and historical literacy as well.

Scientific literacy enables us to make sense of the complex environmental decisions facing us at all levels – personal, local, national and international. Young people will need this capacity to make sound, informed decisions on issues such as land use planning, transportation, conservation, carbon emissions policies, and the development of new sources of energy.

In March 2007 David Ewing Duncan wrote that “recent findings by Michigan State University’s Jon D. Miller suggest that 72 percent of Americans can’t read a newspaper article about science and understand it.” The good news, he reported, is that this is a vast improvement from a 1988 study showing that 90 percent of Americans were scientifically illiterate.¹

But given the acceleration of environmental issues we face, is this progress enough? If we will not allow discussion or study of evolution by natural selection in our schools, how will our children acquire the basic knowledge of science they need?

Science journalist Elizabeth Kolbert, attests that global warming is not just a scientific issue but a moral one. She calls preserving a world for our children, “the moral issue of our times.”

When Abraham Lincoln was president, slavery was the moral issue of the times. As the bicentennial of Lincoln approaches, my dream is that we are able to celebrate both Darwin and Lincoln. For even today, two hundred years later, these great and wise men can inspire and challenge us to look at our beliefs and our actions -- at the world around us -- in new ways.

Darwin famously concluded the *Origin of Species*, which will be 150 years old in 2009, this way: “there is grandeur in this view of life,

with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, while this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.”

My dream is that we will work together to ensure that these most beautiful, most wonderful endless forms will never be destroyed.

¹ Blog hosted by MIT’s *Technology Review*



Deborah Hopkinson

Deborah Hopkinson (www.deborahhopkinson.com) is the author of many books for young readers including *Apples to Oregon*, *Sweet Clara* and the *Freedom Quilt*, and *Who Was Charles Darwin?* In honor of the Lincoln/Darwin bicentennial she will publish the forthcoming *Abe Lincoln Crosses a Creek* and *The Humblebee Hunter*. She lives in Oregon.

Lisa Desimini

Lisa Desimini (www.lisadesimini.com) has written and/or illustrated over thirty books for kids. It is her passion, along with yoga and cooking and visiting schools to share her books with kids.

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Illustration by Lisa Desimini

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