

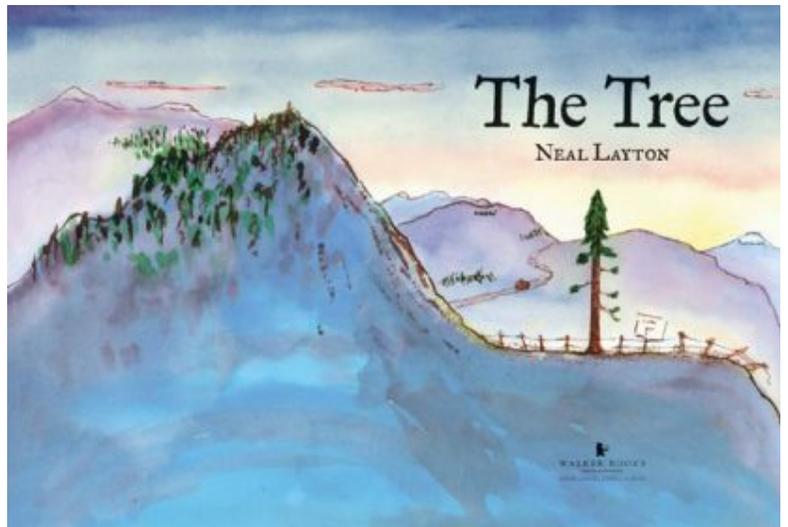
Book Reviews

May 11, 2018

The Tree

by Neal Layton, Walker Books, 2016

This positive and affirming picture book gives hope that we humans can live in harmony with nature. The book's five sentences tell the story of a couple who purchase land to build their dream home only to find a tree blocking their way. As they start to chop the tree down, they are "surprised" to find wildlife living in its nests, hollows and burrows. The young couple, expecting a family of their own, respond with empathy to the plight of the homeless wildlife. They go back to the drawing board and modify their plans for a new eco-friendly house that protects both tree and its wildlife.



This loving and endearing message calls on us to search for compromises when nature impinges on our human needs. Politicians desperately need to read this book because at the moment they are failing miserably to protect trees and forests from industrial logging and land clearing. Their anti-environment laws are wreaking havoc on wildlife which is utterly dependent on trees for shelter, food, and nesting. The book also shares another important message; when we show empathy for wildlife the quality of our lives improves.

The Pobblebonk Earth Detective Club, Going Wild

by Sue Baker, Balboa Press, 2016

This humorous and fun teaching book is laden with facts, general knowledge and information about Australia and its unique wildlife including frogs, quolls, crocodiles, as well as problem pests such as cane toads, foxes and rats.

The book revolves around the adventures of the Mathieson children – Ozzie, Fee, Pete and their dog The Phantom – who come to live with their geography-enthusiast grandmother on a farm next to one of the last remaining forest patches on the North Coast. Exposed to a world of nature, they are transformed from Earth Ignoramuses to Earth Detectives. They take on environmental cases as the Pobblebonk Earth Detective Club, and with the help of their adoring and knowledgeable grandmother, solve environmental conundrums.

This is an excellent resource that merges the genres of information, adventure and detective story, with toppings of imaginative quizzes, design tasks, problem-solving activities and useful resources. An excellent resource for geography and science units of work on Australia's environment.

The Hidden Life of Trees

What They Feel, How they Communicate, Discoveries from a Secret World

by Peter Wohlleben, Black Inc, 2015

This enthralling tale of the hidden lives of trees and forests is both beautiful and enchanting and will change the way you see trees and forests forever.

This deeply interesting book is about the slow life of forest ecosystems that includes the beeches, oaks, birches, spruces, aspen, pines, maples, ashes, firs of Central Europe, as they grow from seed to ancient forest. It describes how different trees have different strategies for survival. Some species live in social groups where individual trees work as a community to care for each other in times of need. Through their sophisticated fungal networks they are able to warn each other of impending dangers and feed each other when sick or in distress.

This book is so important at a time of deforestation, biodiversity extinction and climate crisis as well as a time of wilfully ecologically ignorant politicians. Protecting forests is one of the most effective solutions to deal with climate change, as forests are excellent for carbon sequestration.

This book inspires one to take time out and sit quietly in a forest to listen to the “conversations” of trees.

All three books are all available from Federation Library.

Janine Kitson is a Federation Life Member

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

The Tree

English K-6

Stage 1, Thinking Imaginatively and Creatively

A student: *thinks imaginatively and creatively about familiar topics, ideas and texts when responding and composing texts* EN1-10C

Small group/pair discussion:

- What else can the couple do to improve the environment?
- How might this tree feel standing alone by itself, when it was once part of a vast forest might? Is it lonely?
- The tree is a home to a family of birds in their nest, squirrels in their dray and rabbits in their burrow. What wildlife lives in an Australian tree?

Suggestions for learning activities:

- Write the conversation that the husband and wife say to each other as they look with sadness into each other’s eyes knowing that their original plan to build their dream house will bring destruction.
- Write a conversation between the tree and the couple at the beginning, middle and end of the story
- Write your own story ‘The Tree’ but with an Australian tree.

The Pobblebonk Earth Detective Club, Going Wild

Science and Technology K-6:

Stage 4

Problem Solving

A student: *selects and uses appropriate strategies, understanding and skills to produce creative and plausible solutions to identified problems.* SC4-8WS

Small group/pair discussion:

- Why are frogs, quolls and crocodiles important?
- What scats and tracks have you seen?
- Why do people often jump to the wrong conclusion about environmental problems?

Suggestions for learning activities:

There are abundant activities in the book for the student to use such as the ‘Design Task’ that asks you to ‘Assess the ‘friendliness’ of your home and school gardens to having frogs, insects and birds . . . [page 58] or

'The Breakfast Quizzes: The World This is your Planet [see page 21-22] and Australia Part 2 [see page 29]. Select your own learning activities to complete.

The Hidden Life of Trees

Science: Stage 5

Living World

A student: *explains how biological understanding has advanced through scientific discoveries, technological developments and the needs of society.* SC5-15LW

Small group/pair discussion:

- What new scientific insights does author Peter Wohlleben reveal about European trees?
- How are the forests of Europe different to Australian forests?
- Why are forests important for climate, wildlife and well-being?

Suggestions for learning activities:

- Act out a conversation between trees in a forest.
- Interview a tree and write down its responses.
- Plan a tree planting ceremony, using ideas from this book.