

Guide to Using Environmental Fiction and Nonfiction in the Classroom

Environmental issues feel more immediate and expansive than ever. Whether it's the global movements organized by youth activists like Greta Thunberg or the more localized efforts taking place in communities around the country, kids are at the forefront of the demand for change. They're exploring their surroundings with an eye for connection and sustainability; they're learning to recognize growing problems and working to identify possible solutions.

This guide will help encourage and activate young people looking to learn more about the world around them or to better understand the conversations around climate change. They can reflect and interact with one another about topics that are meaningful and immediate while developing creative ideas, engaging critical thinking, and strengthening STEM skills. These discussion questions and activities can be adapted across age levels, and recommended reading categories include nonfiction and fiction selections from board books through YA.

Discussion Questions

1. Why should we care about the environment? Using books featured below or news articles, name some of the ways we rely on nature and how our choices are affecting it. Does anything you've learned change how you currently engage and think about your surroundings?
2. In Jeanette Winter's picture book *Our House Is on Fire*, the author describes Greta Thunberg's school strike and its growing momentum. "Children started striking everywhere. If grown-ups won't act to save the planet, children will." Why is Greta frustrated with adults? How does she feel about the planet's future? What roles do you feel children can play in helping to save and preserve the world around us? How else have you seen kids speak out and act against these issues?
3. *How to Change Everything* has a section called "Students on Strike" as well. Author Naomi Klein writes, "organizers of the first school strike estimate that there were almost 2,100 youth climate strikes in 125 countries that day. More than a million and a half young people showed up." She describes strikers in Cape Town, South Africa; the Pacific Island nation of Vanuatu; and Delhi, India, who are all seeing changes in their environments due to the climate crisis. What have you seen or heard about natural disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes, droughts, or floods and conditions such as air pollution occurring in other countries? How might those events affect the people living there? How can rising temperatures cause or worsen these situations? How can students striking from all over the world send a powerful message? How can their efforts inspire action and hope for the future?
4. What do you love most about your community or state? Think about parks, gardens, hiking grounds, lakes, oceans, and other natural landscapes, or places that allow you to interact with plants and animals such as nature preserves, museums, or zoos. As a class, discuss some of these locations that you'd like to recommend for people visiting your area. Did classmates suggest any places that you'd never heard of before? Why might it be important for people to be able to access the outdoors and spend time in nature?
5. What is a favorite novel, picture book, or nonfiction book you've read that involves elements of the natural world or environmental concerns? Share your own eye-opening fact with your classmates.

Activities

1. Take a walk in your neighborhood or in your favorite park. What wildlife and plants do you notice? How does the time in nature make you feel? Write an essay, poem, or short story about appreciating these surroundings.
EXTENSION ACTIVITY: Write about how these surroundings are in danger, and what the consequences might be if we don't act.
2. As a class or in a small group, discuss what you know about animals and their habitats, and what kinds of food and climates they need to survive. Consider reading picture books such as *Fur Feather Fin—All of Us Are Kin*, *The Honeybee*, *The Beak Book*, *Crossings*, *What Do They Do with All That Poo?*, and *Amara and the Bats*. Brainstorm a list of three to five animals you'd like to learn more about; then, independently or

in small groups, choose one animal to focus on. Use some of the book suggestions below, the internet, or resources in your school library to collect information. Share your most interesting findings with your class.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY: Gather information about animal habitats as they relate to the climate crisis: How are they changing? Which animals are particularly endangered? Create a list of ways you could help protect them, or draw a picture of the environment they currently have alongside the one they need to survive to hang throughout your school or classroom as a way to help spread awareness.

3. A garden can be a place of solace, a sustainable way to grow and consume your own food, and a meeting place that brings people together. Imagine you could start your own community garden. Where would it be located? How much space would it take up, and how many people could have their own plots? What kinds of food would you plant? Draw a map of your garden. For inspiration, consider reading picture books such as *Harlem Grown*; *Thank You, Garden*; *In a Garden*; and *Hundred Feet Tall*.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY: How could you give back to your community and the environment? Read about topics like composting, food donation, food accessibility, reuse and recycle, and single-use packaging and think about how you can incorporate these processes or types of awareness into your daily life.

4. Interview a classmate, friend, or family member. What do they most value or enjoy in being around nature? What changes have they noticed in the environment? What do they consider to be the most important issues we're facing? What do they plan to do about it?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY: Once your classmate, friend, or family member has answered all your questions, open it up into a conversation where you can both share your feelings and ideas. Then use their interview answers and your discussion to come up with two to four topics you'd like to use to get people talking about the climate; brainstorm one new person you can chat with once a week for the next month.

5. Look at the colorful protest signs on the endpages of *Our House Is on Fire*, or think about others you've seen in the news or in your community. Then create your own sign using your own message about what topics or actions are most important to you.

6. Choose an environmental topic that concerns you, such as an endangered species or a disappearing landscape. Imagine you're writing a fictional short story or novel that incorporates this situation and setting. Who would be telling this story? Who would some of the other characters be? What would be the major conflict and the climax? Once you've brainstormed these details, write one pivotal scene for a novel or a short story. For inspiration, consider reading books like Stuart Gibbs's *FunJungle* series, Fabien Cousteau and James O. Fraioli's *Fabien Cousteau Expeditions* series, *Arrow* by Samantha M. Clark, *The Islanders* by Mary Alice Monroe, and *Dry* by Neal Shusterman and Jarrod Shusterman. Why do you think authors and illustrators insert real environmental concerns into fictional stories? What happens when you give a larger concept like climate change a specific face and name?

7. Start an environmental club in your school, or join one and help to increase membership if it already exists. What messages would you like to convey? What topics will you discuss? What kind of projects will you take on? How often will you meet? How will you draw in members?

8. Investigate organizations in your community, and make a list of any that are environment-related. Are you surprised by the number available? Are there any issues or topics you think are missing? Are there any that you'd consider joining or recommending to a friend or family member?

Encourage Environmentally Conscious Kids and Budding Activists!



Denotes reading group guide/ curriculum guide available on SimonandSchuster.net.



This Little Environmentalist
By Joan Holub
Illustrated by Daniel Roode
BB: 9781534475588
Grades P–K | Ages 3–5



Harlem Grown
By Tony Hillery
Illustrated by Jessie Hartland
HC: 9781534402317
Grades P–3 | Ages 4–8
Lexile® AD540L | Fountas & Pinnell™ L



Our House Is on Fire
Written and illustrated by Jeanette Winter
HC: 9781534467781
Grades P–3 | Ages 3–8
Lexile® 680L | Fountas & Pinnell™ M



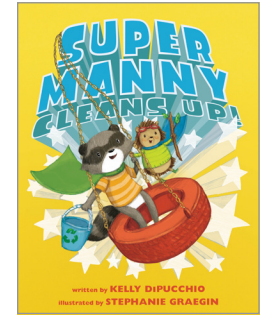
Thank You, Garden
By Liz Garton Scanlon
Illustrated by Simone Shin
HC: 9781481403504
Grades P–2 | Ages 3–7
Lexile® AD240L



Green on Green
By Dianne White
Illustrated by Felicita Sala
HC: 9781481462785
Grades P–3 | Ages 4–8
Lexile® 350L



In a Garden
By Tim McCanna
Illustrated by Aimee Sicuro
HC: 9781534417977
Grades P–3 | Ages 4–8
Lexile® AD770L



Super Manny Cleans Up!
By Kelly DiPucchio
Illustrated by Stephanie Graegin
HC: 9781481459624
Grades P–3 | Ages 4–8
Lexile® 730L



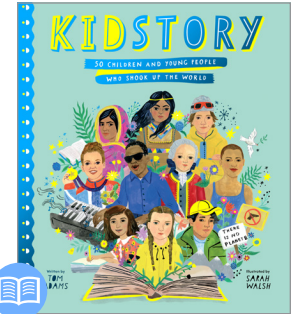
Kids Who Are Changing the World
Ready to Read Level 3
By Sheila Sweeney Higginson
Illustrated by Alyssa Petersen
HC: 9781534432154 | PB: 9781534432147
Grades 1–3 | Ages 6–8
Lexile® 870L | Fountas & Pinnell™ P



Kids Who Are Saving the Planet
Ready to Read Level 3
By Laurie Calkhoven
Illustrated by Monique Dong
HC: 9781534456471 | PB: 9781534456464
Grades 1–3 | Ages 6–8
Lexile® 940L | Fountas & Pinnell™ Q



Best Buds Forever
Book 7 of Craftily Ever After
By Martha Maker
Illustrated by Xindi Yan
HC: 9781534463554 | PB: 9781534463547
Grades K–4 | Ages 5–9



Kidstory
By Tom Adams
Illustrated by Sarah Walsh
HC: 9781534485150
Grades 3 & Up | Ages 8 & Up



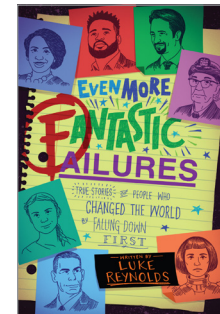
Greta's Story
By Valentina Camerini
Illustrated by Veronica Carratello
Translated by Moreno Giovannoni
HC: 9781534468771 | PB: 9781534468788
Grades 3–7 | Ages 8–12
Lexile® 980L | Fountas & Pinnell™ W



How to Change Everything
By Naomi Klein
Adapted by Rebecca Stefoff
HC: 9781534474529
Grades 5 & Up | Ages 10 & Up



Together We March
By Leah Henderson
Illustrated by Tyler Feder
HC: 9781534442702
Grades 2 & Up | Ages 7 & Up

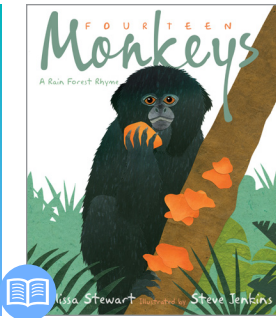


Even More Fantastic Failures
By Luke Reynolds
HC: 9781582707334
Grades 3–7 | Ages 8–12
Lexile® 1130L

Nonfiction Illuminating the *Natural World* around Us!



Denotes reading group guide/
curriculum guide available on
SimonandSchuster.net.



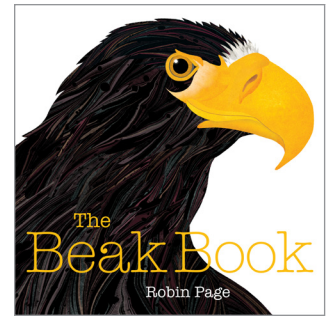
Fourteen Monkeys

By Melissa Stewart
Illustrated by Steve Jenkins
HC: 9781534460393
Grades P-3 | Ages 3-8



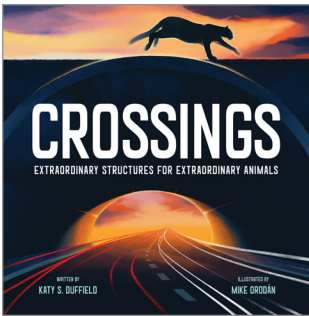
Rock by Rock

By Jennifer Bradbury
Illustrated by Sam Boughton
HC: 9781481481823
Grades P-3 | Ages 4-8



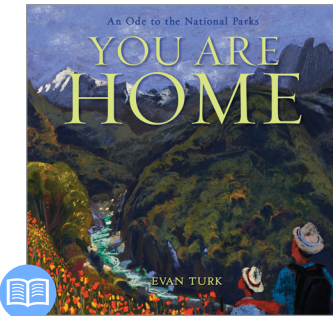
The Beak Book

Written and illustrated by Robin Page
HC: 9781534460416
Grades P-3 | Ages 3-8



Crossings

By Katy S. Duffield
Illustrated by Mike Orodán
HC: 9781534465794
Grades P-3 | Ages 4-8
Lexile® AD1080L



You Are Home

Written and illustrated by Evan Turk
HC: 9781534432826
Grades P-3 | Ages 4-8



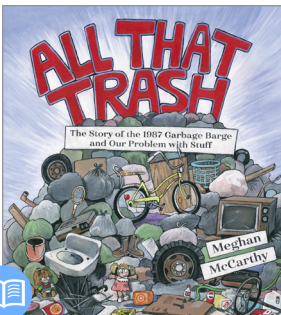
Heartbeat

Written and illustrated by Evan Turk
HC: 9781481435208
Grades P-3 | Ages 4-8
Lexile® AD280L



The Honeybee

By Kirsten Hall
Illustrated by Isabelle Arsenault
HC: 9781481469975
Grades P-3 | Ages 4-8
Lexile® AD480L



All That Trash

Written and illustrated by Meghan McCarthy
HC: 9781481477529
Grades P-3 | Ages 4-8
Lexile® 800L



What Do They Do with All That Poo?

By Jane Kurtz
Illustrated by Allison Black
HC: 9781481479868
Grades P-3 | Ages 3-8
Lexile® AD910L



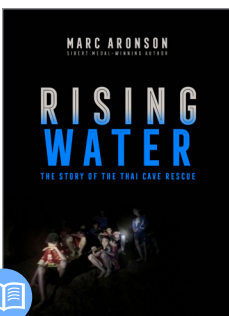
Fur, Feather, Fin—All of Us Are Kin

By Diane Lang
Illustrated by Stephanie Laberis
HC: 9781481447096
Grades P-3 | Ages 3-8
Lexile® AD590L



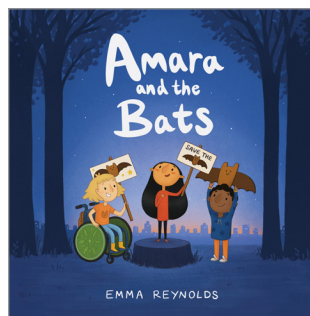
The Impossible First An Explorer's Race Across Antarctica (Young Readers Edition)

By Colin O'Brady
HC: 9781534461987
Grades 5 & Up | Ages 10 & Up
Lexile® 1130L



Rising Water

By Marc Aronson
HC: 9781534444133 | PB: 9781534444140
Grades 5-9 | Ages 10-14
Lexile® 1090L | Fountas & Pinnell™ Z



Amara and the Bats

Written & illustrated by Emma Reynolds
HC: 9781534469013
Grades P-3 | Ages 4-8

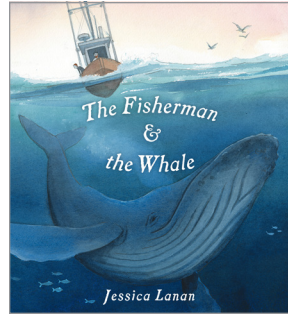


This Pretty Planet

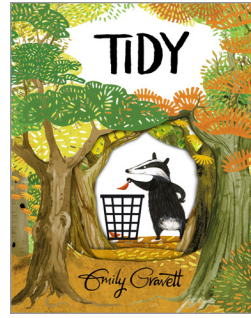
By Tom Chapin and John Forster
Illustrated by Lee White
HC: 9781534445321
Grades P-3 | Ages 4-8
Lexile® AD360L



Hundred Feet Tall
By Benjamin Scheuer
Illustrated by Jemima Williams
HC: 9781534432192
Grades P-3 | Ages 4-8
Lexile® AD510L



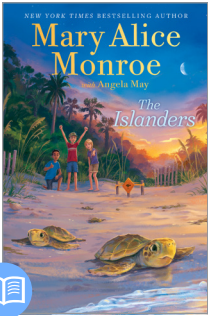
The Fisherman & the Whale
Written and illustrated by Jessica Lanan
HC: 9781534415744
Grades P-3 | Ages 4-8



Tidy
Written and illustrated by Emily Gravett
HC: 9781481480192
Grades P-3 | Ages 4-8
Lexile® AD590L



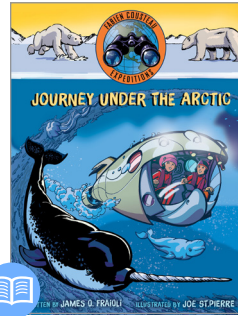
Saltwater Secrets
By Cindy Callaghan
HC: 9781534417441 | PB: 9781534417434
Grades 4-8 | Ages 9-13
Lexile® 640L



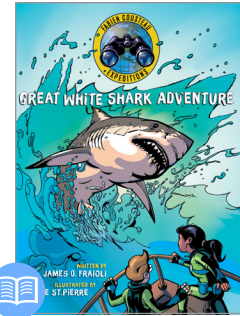
The Islanders
By Mary Alice Monroe
With Angela May
HC: 9781534427273
Grades 3-7 | Ages 8-12



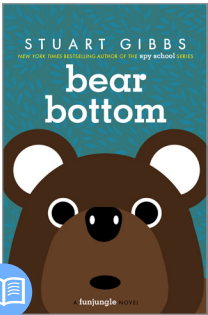
Arrow
By Samantha M. Clark
HC: 9781534465978
Grades 3-7 | Ages 8-12



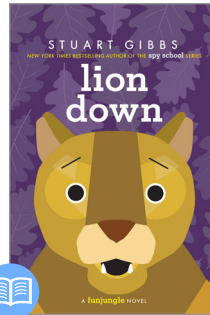
Journey under the Arctic
By Fabien Cousteau and James O. Fraioli
Illustrated by Joe St. Pierre
POB: 9781534420908 | HC: 9781534420915
Grades 3-7 | Ages 8-12
Lexile® GN800L



Great White Shark Adventure
By Fabien Cousteau and James O. Fraioli
Illustrated by Joe St. Pierre
POB: 9781534420878 | HC: 9781534420885
Grades 3-7 | Ages 8-12
Lexile® GN890L | Fountas & Pinnell™ V



Bear Bottom
Book 7 of FunJungle
By Stuart Gibbs
HC: 9781534479463
Grades 3-7 | Ages 8-12



Lion Down
Book 5 of FunJungle
By Stuart Gibbs
HC: 9781534424739 | PB: 9781534424746
Grades 3-7 | Ages 8-12
Lexile® 850L | Fountas & Pinnell™ W



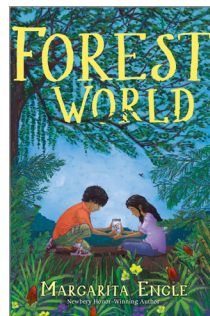
Big Game
Book 3 of FunJungle
By Stuart Gibbs
HC: 9781481423335 | PB: 9781481423342
Grades 3-7 | Ages 8-12
Lexile® 740L | Fountas & Pinnell™ V



Poached
Book 2 of FunJungle
By Stuart Gibbs
HC: 9781442467774 | PB: 9781442467781
Grades 3-7 | Ages 8-12
Lexile® 750L | Fountas & Pinnell™ V



The Mutant Mushroom Takeover
By Summer Rachel Short
HC: 9781534468658
Grades 4-7 | Ages 9-12
Lexile® 670L



Forest World
By Margarita Engle
HC: 9781481490573 | PB: 9781481490580
Grades 5 & Up | Ages 10 & Up
Lexile® 1240L



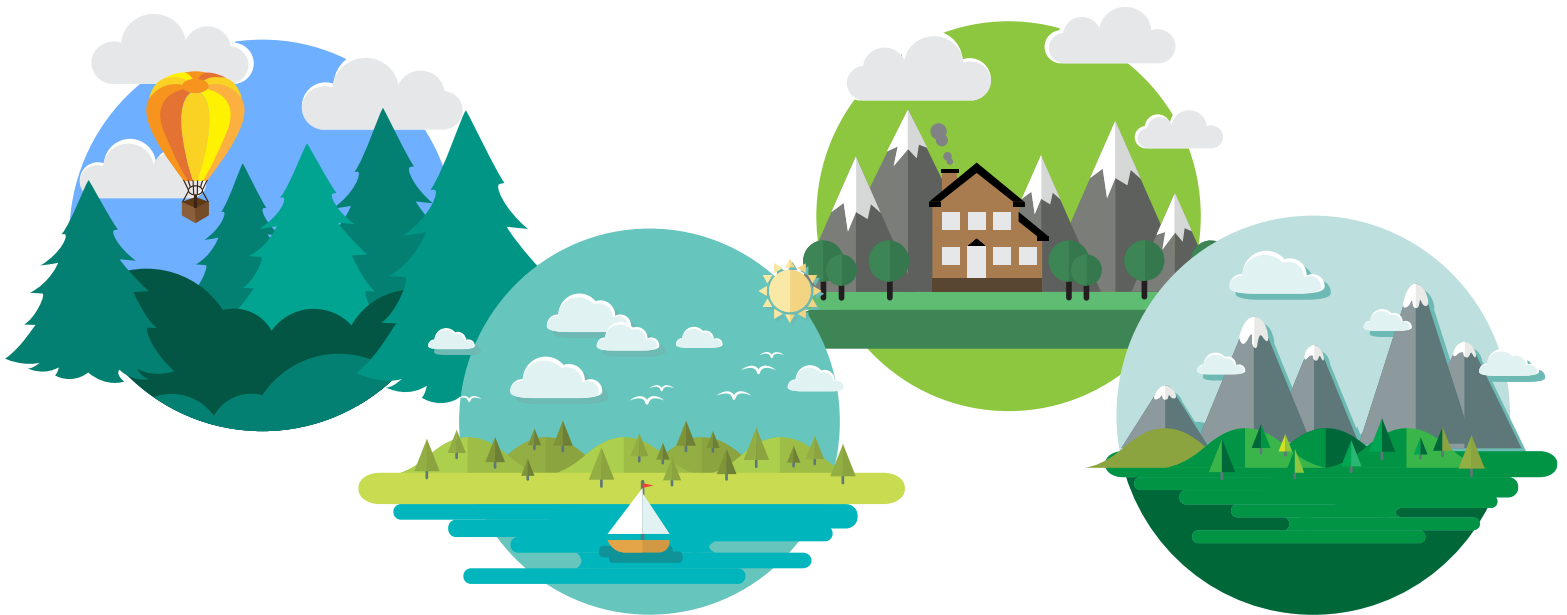
Dry
By Neal Shusterman and Jarrod Shusterman
HC: 9781481481960 | PB: 9781481481977
Grades 7 & Up | Ages 12 & Up
Lexile® 790L | Fountas & Pinnell™ Z+

#KidLit4Climate

Authors & Illustrators for the Environment!

SHARING RESOURCES FOR KIDS TO PARTICIPATE

Emma Reynolds, illustrator of *Rescuing Mrs. Birdley* and author/illustrator of the upcoming *Amara and the Bats*, started the **#KidLit4Climate** campaign, bringing together thousands of children's illustrators and authors from more than fifty countries in solidarity with the youth climate strikes. For more information, visit EmmaReynoldsIllustration.com/KidLit4Climate.



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“The cormorant dives and snags a fish with its hooked beak. Then the bird comes to the surface and flips its prey into its mouth. The shoebill stork’s large, heavy beak is perfect for crushing lungfish, catfish, and the occasional lizard or baby crocodile.”

Excerpted from *The Beak Book*, written and illustrated by Robin Page (Grades P–3; Ages 3–8)

“‘My government has failed to take steps to regulate and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which are causing extreme climate conditions,’ Ridhima [Pandey] told a newspaper [after filing a petition against the government of India]. ‘This will impact both me and future generations.’ Ridhima began to worry about climate change in 2013 when she was five years old. Uttarakhand, the northern Indian state where Ridhima lives, is in the foothills of the Himalayan Mountains. In June 2013, flash floods and landslides in her state killed hundreds of people and left thousands homeless...Ridhima learned that the flooding was caused by some of the most powerful monsoons in modern history. A monsoon is a period of wind and rain in the Indian Ocean that sweeps over countries in southern Asia. Scientists believe that climate change has led to bigger and more dangerous monsoons.”

Excerpted from *Kids Who Are Saving the Planet* by Laurie Calkhoven, illustrated by Monique Dong (Grades 1–3; Ages 6–8)

“Over, under, across, through. Around the world, construction crews build overpasses, underpasses, bridges, and tunnels—ways for people to get from one place to another. But what about the animals that live in these places? What happens when construction spreads over, under, across, through their habitats? Around the world, in search of solutions, animal lovers come together...Construction crews work again. But these structures aren’t for traveling people. They’re for traveling animals...The Trans-Canada Highway is home to more than forty wildlife overpasses and underpasses. And the crossings don’t just benefit elk. Bears, wolves, cougars, bighorn sheep, and other animals use the crossings too.”

Excerpted from *Crossings* by Katy S. Duffield, illustrated by Mike Orodán (Grades P–3; Ages 3–8)



“A reef-killing event called a mass bleaching had the Great Barrier Reef in its grip. Bleachings happen at times of high water temperature. The living corals turn ghostly and bone-white. They can return to normal if temperatures quickly go back down to lower levels. In the spring of 2016, though, temperatures had stayed high for several months. A quarter of the reef had died and turned into a brown goo of decay...The water of the Pacific Ocean didn’t have to warm very much to cause this massive die-off at the Great Barrier Reef. Ocean temperatures went up just 1.8 degrees Fahrenheit, or 1 degree Celsius, past the levels at which these corals can live...Food and income for a billion or so people around the world come from the fish that depend on coral reefs. When reefs die, the loss reaches far.”

Excerpted from *How to Change Everything* by Naomi Klein, adapted by Rebecca Stefoff (Grades 5 up; Ages 10 up)



“In 2018, the temperature [in Sweden] reached record highs, the highest ever recorded in 262 years. While warm temperatures can be nice for people who aren’t familiar with global warming, thirty-three fires are a real problem that everybody understands. Wildfires can be catastrophic. And that summer there were lots of wildfires in Scandinavia. Fires were burning everywhere, even in the remote north. In the region called Lapland, something occurred that had never happened before: more than sixty fires devastated entire forests. This was partly due to the high temperatures, the dry climate, and the fact that it hadn’t rained in almost two months...They were unprepared for the fires. Volunteers, helicopters, and even the army were called in, but the blazes seemed unstoppable...The temperature rose to 30°C (86°F), an unbelievable temperature for freezing Lapland, which spends most of the year under a blanket of snow. Everyone talked about what was going on. Newspapers with dramatic headlines arrived in the shops, but no one did anything practical. No one except Greta.”

Excerpted from *Greta’s Story* by Valentina Camerini, illustrated by Veronica Carratello, translated by Moreno Giovannoni (Grades 3–7; Ages 8–12)