

Reading Matters

Our House Is on Fire: Celebrating Children's Books About Global Issues

The girl of the hour—in fact, the person of the year, according to Time magazine—is Greta Thunberg, the teenage Swedish activist who speaks truth to power regarding climate change. This is arguably THE issue that affects all children, all adults, all animals, and all life on this earth. Several new children's books share the urgency of Greta's message, while others illustrate the universality of children's issues around the world.



My favorite of the Greta books for children is **Our House Is on Fire**, by Jeanette Winter, who has given us children's biographies of such diverse folks as Diego Rivera, the Williams sisters, Malala Yousafzai and Johann

Sebastian Bach. Winter's simple painted images, reminiscent of folk art, allow the message to spark from the page, and Greta's words to echo in the reader's mind: "I don't want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic." Winter presents the struggle that Thunberg (who has Asperger's syndrome) has had and how she has used her gifts of focus and communication for the good of the earth. Another Greta book is allegorical: **Greta and the Giants** features authority figures that are literal giants—and a happy ending.

Our House Is on Fire: Greta Thunberg's Call to Save the Planet by Jeanette Winter (Beach Lane Books, 2019) Ages 6 – 10.

Greta and the Giants: Inspired by Greta Thunberg's Stand to Save the World by Zoe Tucker, illustrated by Zoe Persico (Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 2019) Ages 5 – 8.



Some kids just want the facts, and they can get engrossed for hours by pages packed with miniscule illustrations and data. **Everything & Everywhere** is that kind of book, a colorful exploration and observation of 15 places in the world as seen through the eyes of the illustrator, Marc Martin, a watercolor artist who clearly loves the details—the monuments, the traffic, the buildings, and of course the food—that make traveling the globe interesting and so much fun.

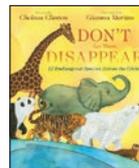
Everything & Everywhere: A Fact-filled Adventure for Curious Globe-Trotters by Marc Martin (Chronicle Books, 2018) Ages 5 – 10.



We've Got the Whole World in Our Hands by Rafael Lopez is a variation on the traditional spiritual with a similar name. The alternative words to the song in this volume show each of us taking responsibility not only for each other, but for the wind and the clouds, the oceans and the seas, the rivers and the mountains,

with everything tied together in a long strand of rainbow-colored yarn encircling the earth. This is Greta's message set to a bouncy beat. **We've Got the Whole World in Our Hands** by Rafael Lopez (Orchard Books, 2018) Ages 2 – 8.

Jean Dugan, a long-time friend of *Exchange*, has been connecting kids with books for over 40 years. She helped establish a library program in the elementary schools of Gloucester, Massachusetts, and later brought her love of children's literature to the public library there. This is one more opportunity for her to share the best new books with children and those who care about them.



Chelsea Clinton has chosen to advocate for 12 very familiar but vulnerable animals in **Don't Let Them Disappear: 12 Endangered Species Across the Globe**. Clinton's words, along with beautiful illustrations by Gianna Marino, speak to the characteristics and plight of the blue whale, polar bear, giant panda and others, telling us where they live, what's caused

them to be categorized as endangered, and what even the youngest among us can do about it.

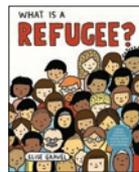
Don't Let Them Disappear: 12 Endangered Species Across the Globe by Chelsea Clinton, illustrated by Gianna Marino (Philomel Books, 2019) Ages 5 – 10.



Many of us in the U.S. have been told that our parents walked five miles to school every day, in snow, uphill both ways! None of the kids in **Adventures to School** go that route, but they get to school in unique and sometimes far more dangerous ways,

and it's interesting to see how different they are: five on a motorcycle in Cameroon, riding a cable car in Bolivia, climbing over a mountain by ladder in China. In Kenya, some children have to avoid rampaging elephants, in Ukraine they wait until the shelling has stopped. All of them know that their studies will shape their future and that the first step out of poverty, hazardous as it may be, is education.

Adventures to School: Real-Life Journeys of Students from Around the World by Baptiste Paul and Miranda Paul, illustrated by Isabel Munoz (Little Bee Books, 2018) Ages 6 – 10.



I can't think of a better explanation of what it might be like to leave family, home and country to find security elsewhere than Elise Gravel's **What is a Refugee?** Her colorful, Todd-Parr-like illustrations of refugees of all ages and types don't shy away from the danger, sorrows and the very real hardships of refugee life, they are portrayed in a way that very

young children can understand. There are interviews with children who speak of fleeing their homes for a new place, and biographical sketches of several refugees who became famous.

What is a Refugee? by Elise Gravel (Schwartz & Wade Books, 2019) Ages 4 – 8.