

Picturebook Dialogues About Environmental and Social (In)justice

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Abstract

Climate curriculums and reading practices are urgently needed both in school and higher education. The mobility project Green Dialogues is focused on enhancing the quality of teacher education by strengthening student teachers' and staff's ecocritical thinking and collaboration competency. As part of the project the students developed experience-based teaching plans for primary education on how to connect literature activities with reflections on and dialogues about environmental and social (in)justice. This article presents five of these teaching plan infographics and explains their educational context.

Keywords

Ecocritical dialogue, children's literature, infographics, UN Agenda 2030, teacher education

A student mobility project focusing on ecocritical thinking and collaboration

The five infographics were created by student teachers involved in the mobility project *Green Dialogues*, a collaboration between Western Norway University of Applied Sciences (HVL, Bergen, Norway), the University of Padova (UNIPD, Padova, Italy), and

the Universitat Internacional de Catalunya (UIC, Barcelona, Spain). Green Dialogues is a four-year mobility project (2022–2025) aimed at enhancing the quality of teacher education by strengthening student teachers' and staff's ecocritical thinking and collaboration competency through dialogue and intercultural exchange. The students and staff involved in the project participate in five-year MA programmes in teacher education with an orientation in language and literature. To enhance the quality of education, the project builds on dialogic teaching (Bakhtin, 1986; Alexander, 2020). It seeks to develop and apply theoretical and ecodidactic perspectives on environmental children's literature, primarily addressing children aged 6 to 12.

Ecocritical thinking and collaboration through dialogue

Climate literacy implies knowledge about the drivers of climate emergencies and about transformative responses needed "to stand up for everyone's biospheric inheritance" (Oziewicz, 2023, p. 34). Taking human greed and environmental insensibility as one cause of the climate emergency, in the Green Dialogues Project students selected picturebooks that address both greed and insensibility and welcomed young readers to collaborate and engage critically with the books to gain knowledge and understanding required to develop "ecocentric ways of thinking" (Oziewicz, p. 35). The Green Dialogues project considers collaboration and the development of dialogic skills as key actions to establish viable and democratic long-term solutions to the climate crisis. Following Goga et al. (2023), ecocritical dialogues "combine theoretical concepts from ecocriticism and dialogic teaching" (p. 3) to encourage teaching practices that open participants to "critical, relational, and collaborative encounters and entanglements with multiple environments, materials, and matter" (p. 9). This conception of ecocritical dialogues is based, among other things, on previous experiences with ecocritical dialogues and picturebooks (Goga & Pujol-Valls, 2020; Campagnaro & Goga, 2022). To enable educators to systematically consider the key principles of ecocritical dialogues and to develop their repertoire of techniques, Goga et al. (2023, p. 8-9) propose a framework for setting up ecocritical dialogues. This framework, which guides the five teaching plans presented here, calls for attention to the location, participants, approach, and subject matter of the ecocritical dialogue.

The educational context of the infographics

The infographics by Debora Carolo, Giulia Nai, Ilaria Sardella, and Giulia Silvestrini were created within the educational context of a 15 ECTs (about 8 US credits) course on "Sustainable literacy and environmental children's literature." The course combines advanced knowledge about literacy and children's literature with current themes in sustainable development and lifelong learning needed to meet the goals of the UN's Agenda 2030. The literary corpus consisted mainly of contemporary children's literature with an emphasis on environmental connectedness, climate change, and social and environmental (in)justice. Dialogic teaching and the didactic tools related to ecocritical dialogues were applied, tested, and further developed throughout the course. The course included an assignment in which students created an infographic based on their classroom experience with children aged 9–10. The infographic applies ecocritical and educational approaches to a selected corpus of picturebooks that thematize environmental connectedness and social and environmental (in)justice.

The educational context of Rebecca Agostini's infographic was a 16 ECTs course on "Environmental children's literature and teaching English as a foreign language." The course included extensive reading, storytelling, and literary circles as TEFL methodologies, complemented with ecocritical, literary theory, social science, and pedagogical components for education in democratic citizenship. One of the competencies developed in this course was how to combine storytelling, picturebooks, and dialogue—grounded in ecocritical and social approaches—when teaching English as a foreign language. One assignment consisted in designing a teaching proposal that involves storytelling with a picturebook. The selected book had to lend itself to developing pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading activities that foster dialoguing and critical thinking on sustainability and social (in)justice.

The format of the infographics

Students were asked to create infographic posters or booklets to help primary school teachers design lesson plans related to children's literature, environmental issues, and child-oriented learning activities that stimulate affective, critical, and collaborative ways of thinking. The infographics were designed as a step-by-step guide on how to carry out activities and to provide teachers with educational justifications for each step. In line with

the Green Dialogues project parameters, these justifications link up with key ideas in dialogic teaching, environmental literacy, performative and aesthetical picturebook mediation.

A few final notes: except for *Forêt des frères* by Yukiko Noritake, all picturebooks are available in English. Noritake's book is available in the original French, as well as in Italian, Spanish, and Catalan translations. All five lesson plans are designed to be carried out within the frame of one to four lessons/class periods, approximately 45–60 minutes each. They are designed for groups of 15 to 30 primary school students, preferably with two teachers in the classroom.

The five infographics

The first two infographics (figures 1 and 2) address one of UN's most disputed Sustainable Development Goals—SDG 8, decent work and economic growth—by displaying how economic growth and humanity's greed for natural resources have caused today's climate crisis. Both infographics suggest ecocritical reading activities to enable primary school students' transformative responses to the picturebook by imagining alternatives.

Title	How to Talk About the Exploitation of Nature with Children
Unit Time	2-3 hours
Grade Level(s)	Students age 9-10 years
Core Text	The Giving Tree (1964) by Shel Silverstein
Supporting Texts	United Nations SDG <u>8</u> and <u>15</u>
Climate Literacy Terms	Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Greed
Objectives	At the end of the lesson students will have shared and discussed their thoughts on humanity's greed and its consequences. They will have had the opportunity to express their own suggestions on how humans can respond or take action in more generous and sustainable ways.
Materials and Resources	Figure 1, paper, coloured pencils (leporello)

Figure 1 (below). Infographic by Giulia Nai on Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree*





How to talk about the exploitation of nature with children

By Giulia Nai (Università Degli Studi di Padova)

The Giving Tree (1964) is a children's picturebook by Shel Silverstein.

The story is about the relationship between a boy and a tree:

The boy asks and pretends, and nature gives.

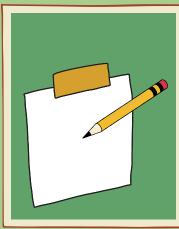
Children (9-10 years) can focus on **environmental ethics**, **nature-human** connections and **actions-consequences**.

They have an important role in building a better future for our planet, and talking about this topic at school is a good beginning.

The suggested activities take 2-3 hours.







1. Brainstorming on the cover

The teacher asks the children what they see and what they think the book is about. They can write down their ideas on a post-it note and stick it near an image of the cover; at the end, the teacher reads all the notes.

Children can find out a lot of information about the story just by looking at the cover. They are active participants and not only passive listeners of the story.

2. Book reading

The teacher reads aloud the story and shows the pictures to the children.

The text is short and with pictures it is easy to understand.

The repetitions in the book are engaging and they push the reader to turn the page and find out what happens next.





3. Discussion about the message of the story

Together the class discusses: "How did the boy treat the tree? How did the tree treat the boy? Do you think that humans take good care of nature? Why?"

Conversation about the characters and their actions is necessary in order to reflect on the message of this story. Keep in mind that it is important to listen to what children think without judgment.

4. Brainstorming about emotions

Children can share emotions and feelings: "How does the boy feel? How does the tree feel?

And how do you, as a reader, feel about this story?"



It's important to try to identify with each character and imagine why this character did a certain thing instead of another. Talking about feelings and emotions is challenging but necessary to develop empathy. We may have different opinions, but it is important to accept them, so this is why the dialogic part is so relevant.



5. Leporello: The Giving Tree VS The Giving Human

Everyone creates a Leporello, a small double-sided book with two stories: One story is about the book they read with the title "The Giving Tree", and the students are encouraged to draw the main scenes on the pages.

In the second story, children have the possibility to tell an alternative story with the title "The Giving Human". Students can reflect on these guiding questions: "What can we do for nature? What can we give?" and they can draw some ideas on the other pages.

At the end, children show their Leporello and share what they have done. Children have to think of some solutions in order to improve the world and prevent exploitation. It is necessary to think differently to find alternatives and solutions to problems.

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Silverstein, S., (1964). *The Giving Tree*. London: Harper&Row.

Bruno, R.T., (2020). Educare al pensiero ecologico: letture, scritture e passeggiate per un mondo sostenibile. Milano: Topipittori.

Campagnaro, M., & Goga, N., (2021). Green Dialogues and Digital Collaboration on Nonfiction Children's Literature. Journal of Literary Education, (4), 96-114.

United Nations, (2015). Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Title	Forêt des frères by Yukiko Noritake
Unit Time	2-3 hours
Grade Level(s)	students age 9-10 years
Core Text	Forêt des frères (2020) by Yukiko Noritake
Supporting Texts	United Nations SDG <u>8</u> and <u>15</u>
Climate Literacy Terms	Anthropocene, Coastal erosion, Human expansionism, Individual action, Wilderness, Capitalocene, Greed
Objectives	At the end of the lesson students will have shared and discussed their thoughts on sustainable ways of living. They will have had the opportunity to imagine human or other earthlings' responses and perspectives on the various choices and changes of life represented in the picturebook.
Materials and Resources	Figure 2, pen and paper

Figure 2 (below). Infographic by Giulia Silvestrini on Yukiko Noritake's Forêt des Frères.



FORÊT DES FRÈRES



by Yukiko Noritake

The book presents the parallel stories of two brothers, who each inherit half of the same forest. They both decide to settle down there, but from the beginning, they take two different roads...

The literary activity is designed for **9-10 year old** students and it is connected to the 15th SDG *Life on Land*. The entire activity takes **two/three hours** to complete.



READING

Following a discussion about the cover, the teacher reads and shows everyone the picturebook.

Teaching tips: the teacher should read using expressive techniques to keep the students' interest and attention high. Each page has only a few words, so the book can be explored as a wordless picturebook.

DIALOGUE

The teacher asks questions or replies to answers strictly regarding the storyline, without going into the reflective part.

Teaching tips: the teacher can also let the students create questions and share them with the class. In this way, the students will be more interested and will improve their dialogical skills.





INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

Each student should write which story they prefer and why. Then, the teacher collects the replies, reads them to the class and starts to discuss them, respecting everyone's opinions.

Teaching tips: the teacher should ensure that everyone works on their own, because the students can sometimes be too influenced by one another, risking that they always share the same ideas and forget to reflect on their own.

GALLERY WALK

The students, divided into small groups, should write answers to specific questions, focusing more on the details of the story, and should read what other groups have already said.

Teaching tips: the teacher should organise the gallery walk with the doublespreads and, at the end, discuss the replies with the class. This activity helps the students to improve their communication skills and their imaginative dimension.





WRITING

Each small group has to write the story from the point of view of one character (be it one of the brothers, another human, or an animal or plant).

Teaching tips: the teacher can make this activity more challenging, making the students choose a character from the story that they don't like. In this way, they can improve their narrative skills, walking in the shoes of someone else.

LIFE ON LAND

The teacher asks each student to choose one picture from the story that, in their opinion, can represent the *Life on Land* Goal.

Teaching tips: the teacher should let everyone go through the pages individually and reflect. This activity helps the students to connect the picture book with the 15th SDG.



Noritake, Y. (2020). *Forêt des frères*. Arles: Actes Sud Jeunesse.

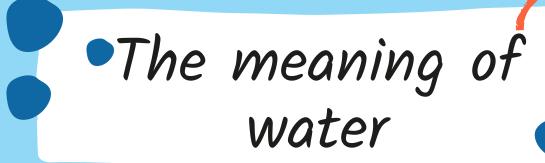
Campagnaro, M. (2013). Educare lo sguardo: Riflessioni pedagogiche sugli albi illustrati. Encyclopaideia: *Rivista di fenomenologia pedagogia formazione*, 17(35), 89-108.

The third infographic (figure 3) revolves around the sustainability of natural resources used by humans. It engages with SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation) and SDG 14 (life below water) through its focus on the discovery, availability, and sustainable use of water. The picturebook and the activities developed for classroom use help encourage children to read the story ecocritically and to develop deeper awareness about water as a resource at risk.

Title	The Meaning of Water
Unit Time	4-5 hours
Grade Level(s)	students age 7-8 years
Core Text	On a magical do-nothing day (2016) by Beatrice Alemagna
Supporting Texts	United Nations SDG <u>6</u> and <u>14</u>
Climate Literacy Terms	Ecological civilisation, Nearby nature, <u>Planetarianism</u> , Wilderness
Objectives	At the end of the lesson students will have learnt, thought, written and painted about the meaning of water, both in class and outdoors. They will have considered the meaning of water and the use that humans should and should not make of it.
Materials and Resources	Figure 3, paper, pens, watercolours, sticky notes

Figure 3 (below). Infographic by Debora Carolo on Beatrice Alemagna's On a magical do-nothing day.





The project

This project includes all the following activities, based on the reading out loud of the picturebook *On a magical do-nothing day* by Beatrice Alemagna.

SDGs: 6:Clean water and sanitation, 14:Life below water

Time: 4-5 hours Age: 7-8 years old

1. Intro to SDGs and WATER

The teacher and the pupils should watch a video together about SDGs and then go through the



2. Reading of the book

After a short introduction of some key-words relevant to the story, the teacher reads aloud the picturebook On a magical do-nothing day by Beatrice Alemagna. The teacher should stop and show the picturebook to the children every

second page.



During a break or a walk outside, the children should be encouraged to look for things with water and keep them in mind for later.



4. Watercolor time

When the children come back from the outdoor exploration, the teacher asks them to do some watercolor painting, underlining why they are using water for it.

The teacher asks them to paint what they have seen or experienced with water.

5. Gallery walk

The teacher hangs up the watercolor paintings of the children in their classroom and asks them to walk through, watch, and think. They should focus on what the meaning of water is to them and write a few keywords on a post-it.



6. Writing

Thinking about all the work done about water, the children should be encouraged to write:

- to water
- for water
- about water

It can be a letter, a poem, or whatever they feel to be appropriate.

Bibliography

- Alemagna, B. (2017). On a magical do-nothing day (Un Grand Jour de Rien). Thames & Hudson Ltd, London (Original work published 2016).
- Capetti, A. (2018). A scuola con gli albi. Insegnare con la bellezza delle parole e delle immagini.
- Goga, N., & Pujol-Valls, M. (2020). Ecocritical engagement with picturebook through literature conversations about Beatrice Alemagne's On a Magical Do-Nothing Day. Sustainability (Switzerland), 12(18), 7653.







In climate literacy education it is important "to foster an appreciation of the interconnectedness of social and environmental justice, encouraging more contemplative behaviour toward each other, other species, and the environment" (Young, 2018, p. 6, our italics). Whereas the first three infographics are more related to the environmental component of the interconnectedness mentioned by Young, the fourth and fifth infographics focus on the social side of the spectrum. Addressing the SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), these infographics intend to develop children's ecocritical thinking through reflection about the many people who need to migrate, the reasons for migrations, the risks migrants encounter, and their feelings.

Title	A silent book about courage, loss and hope
Unit Time	1 hour
Grade Level(s)	students age 8-9 years
Core Text	Migrants (2020) by Issa Watanabe
Supporting Texts	United Nations SDG <u>10</u>
Climate Literacy Terms	Collective Action, Social Justice, Migrants
Objectives	At the end of the lesson students will have been able to reflect about the social and environmental inequalities experienced by migrants. Through drawing, speaking, or writing, students learn about the potential of wordless picturebooks to expose and overcome linguistic inequalities.
Materials and Resources	Figure 3, paper, pens, watercolours, sticky notes

Figure 4 (below). Infographic by Ilaria Sardella on Issa Watanabe's Migrants.

Children age 8-9. A one-hour lesson

MIGRANIS

By Issa Watanabe

silent book about courage, loss and hope

By Ilaria Sardella (Università degli Studi di Padova)



READ

This is a Silent Book so it's important to know how to read it.

There are many ways, but I suggest stopping on every page and asking the children what they see and what they think about it.

Starting from the cover.



Teacher tips

This book can be used to talk about the 10th goal of SDG (Reduce Inequalities). You can talk about inequalities during the reading, but also about this kind of book, which everyone can understand (Silent Book). In this case the teacher has to be a scaffolding for her students, in order to create an interactive and inclusive activity.

Teacher tips

In a Silent Book every child can see different things according to their interpretations. Seeing their stories can be really interesting, but it's not an evaluation of the children. You have to consider this reading as an aesthetic work. Let the children work on their interpretations and meaningmaking.



RECONSTRUCTION

After the reading, you can propose to the children that they reconstruct the story with copies of some of the characters from the book.

In this way you can see what they have understood and what impressed them the most.



WRITE

You should subsequently ask the children to write down the story.

In this way everyone can express their opinion and their meaning of the story.

They can also look at the book or at their story and write it down



Teacher tips

In able to offer the children different possibilities, you should propose different options with

different forms of expression (drawing, speaking, writing).

In this way you can meet all the children's needs and offer them possibilities to express themselves.

Teacher tips

This is another way to give the children a chance to express themselves. In this way they can be involved and be active participants in their

own learning. Important: there's not a right

way and a wrong way.



INVENT -



To go deeper into their learning you can ask the children to invent a personal new story about migration.

They have to draw it without using words. If they need it, they can use the previous works to get inspiration.



BUILD A BOOK

For the last step you can build a book with the stories of all the children in the class. You can choose the title together and write down all the authors' names.

You can then read it together with all the children, each one explaining his or her work.



Teacher tips

During all these activities it is really important to have a meaningful dialogue with the children. In this way they can share and build their ideas together.

For this activity it is fundamental that everyone has a chance to share their story with the whole class and be active participants in the lesson.

Bibliography:

Watanabe, I., Migrants, 2020, Wellington, Gecko Press

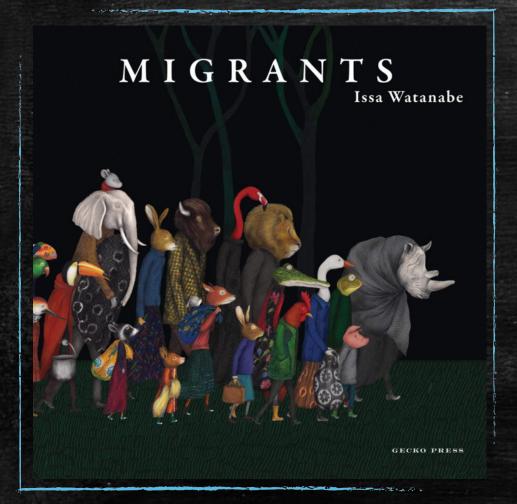
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Schwarz, B. B., Baker, M. J., Dialogue, Argumentation and Education. History, theory and practice, 2017, New York, Cambridge University Press

Rosenblatt, L. M. (1982). The Literary Transaction: Evocation and response. Theory into Practice 21(4), 268-277

Title	Literature Conversation for a Selected Book
Unit Time	1 hour
Grade Level(s)	students age 9-10 years
Core Text	Migrants (2020) by Issa Watanabe
Supporting Texts	United Nations SDG <u>10</u>
Climate Literacy Terms	Collective Action, Social justice, Migrants
Objectives	At the end of the lesson students will have increased their awareness of migration, environmental and social injustices. Thanks to reading the book and discussing it with the classmates, they will be able to question the knowledge and opinion regarding migrants that they had before the session.
Materials and Resources	Figure 5, paper, pens, watercolours, sticky notes

Figure 5 (below). Infographic by Rebecca Agostini on Issa Watanabe's *Migrants*.



Organization of the project

CLASS:

4th primary school (9-10 years)

TIME:

1 class (45 minutes)

OBJECTIVES:

- Dialogue and discuss important and current issues with an eco-critical approach
- Raise children's awareness of migration through children's literature

Choice of the picturebook

- It tells the migration path of a group of animals, with difficulties and obstacles
 - → the ending is open but suggests a positive outcome with a little bit of hope
- A heterogeneous group of animals as protagonists keeps the story in balance between fantasy and reality
 - → children can identify with the characters
- A silent book has a lot of potential
 - → its universality makes it very useful for including all pupils and breaking down language or other barriers
- Children's literature can help to educate about environmental and social sustainability
 - → an effective tool to develop greater
 awareness of social issues such as migration

Pre-reading activities (7 min)

- Initial brainstoring based on questions (presented again at the end to see how children's ideas have changed)
 - Who do you think migrants are?
 - Why do they flee from their own country? What leads them to emigrate?
 - How do you think they feel? What emotions and feelings do they experience?
 - Do you think that migrants are people who want to travel and enjoy changing countries? Or do you think that migrants are poor people who are running away from difficult situations and have to face terrible journeys?

During-reading activities (30 min)

First moment

- silence while the teacher slowly flips through the pages of the book
- musical background of the stormy sea is played, in order to allow children to have a 360-degree experience, combining the sense of listening with that of sight

2. Second reading

- children are able to speak by raising their hands, discussing, asking questions and making contributions,
 highlighting what they observe and asking for clarifications
- the teacher guides the discussion with stimulating questions:
 - What do you notice here?
 - What has changed from this page to this page?
 - What is the plot of the story?
 - What happened in this scene?
 - What is the global message?

During-reading activities (30 min)

A focus on the different symbols

sea

an enemy-friend, as the only escape route undertaken with hope, which however irremediably brings danger and death with it

boundaries

barriers, frontiers, walls and obstacles to overcome; geographical, physical and imaginary ones built by people who exclude

The dress worn by death and the trees varies according to the situation:

colors

- when the animals are traveling, the plants are without leaves and flowers are colored in black and white \rightarrow feeling of despondency
- at the end, the plants return full of colorful leaves and flowers \rightarrow a feeling of hope and trust towards a new life

death

spiritual and physical, represented as in the book *The Duck, Death and the Tulip* by Wolf Erlbruch

suitcase

past memories, place of origin

ibis

link between life and death, connection between past and present

Post-reading activities (7 min)

- Final brainstorming based on questions (to compare with the initial ones)
 - Who do you think migrants are?
 - Why do they flee from their own country? What leads them to emigrate?
 - How do you think they feel? What emotions and feelings do they experience?
 - Do you think that migrants are people who want to travel and enjoy changing countries? Or do you think that migrants are poor people who are running away from difficult situations and have to face terrible journeys?

Theoretical framework

Picture-book selected for storytelling

"[It] needs to meet a range of criteria, such as its suitability and interest in terms of content, linguistic, conceptual and cultural accessibility and appropriacy, aesthetic appeal and its educational affordances for a particular group of children" (Ellis, G., & Mourão, S. (2021) Demystifying the read-aloud: Gail Ellis and Sandie Mourão discuss the role of reading picturebooks in early English language learning. Teaching Young Learners)

Structure of the activities

Subdivision of the work and organization of the times, project in 3 parts, albeit connected: Pre-reading activities, During-reading activities and Post-reading activities.

(Graves, F. M., & Fitzgerald, J. Chapter 5. Scaffolding Reading Experiences for Multilingual Classrooms)

→ Pre-reading activities

Methods that activate the knowledge background, that introduce the topic, that motivate the students for the subsequent activities and that direct attention to the main theme through stimulating questions.

\rightarrow During-reading activities

Methods such as silent reading and guided reading, two opposing techniques but useful for different purposes and for carefully studying the book.

→ Post-reading activities

Methods such as discussion, dialogue and questioning to broaden children's knowledge and make them think about what they have just read.

Continuing the dialogue

We hope to have clarified the framework of the five infographics and aroused your curiosity either as a primary school teacher, a student teacher, or a teacher educator. To continue the process of self-examination and project improvement, we warmly welcome your comments and feedback. We can be reached at Nina.Goga@hvl.no.

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