



ECO-CONSCIOUS KID LIT

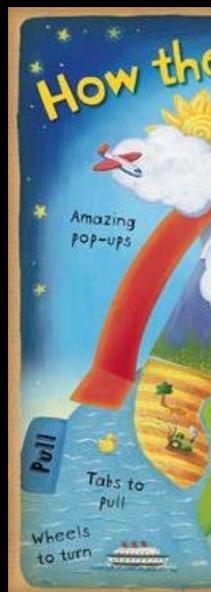
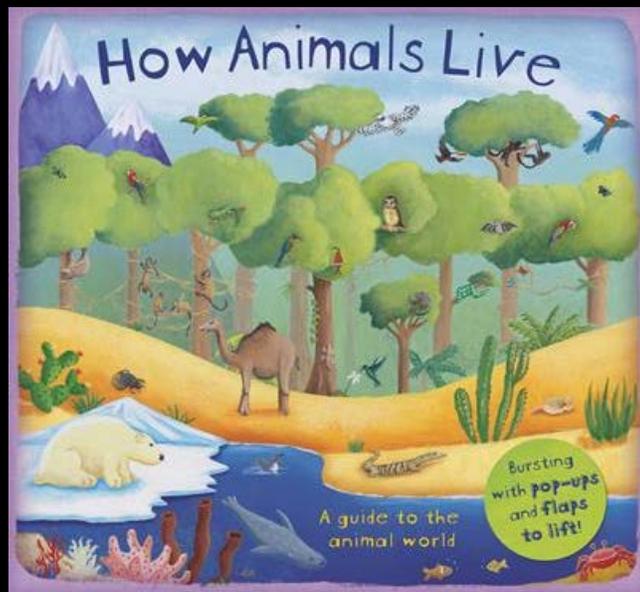
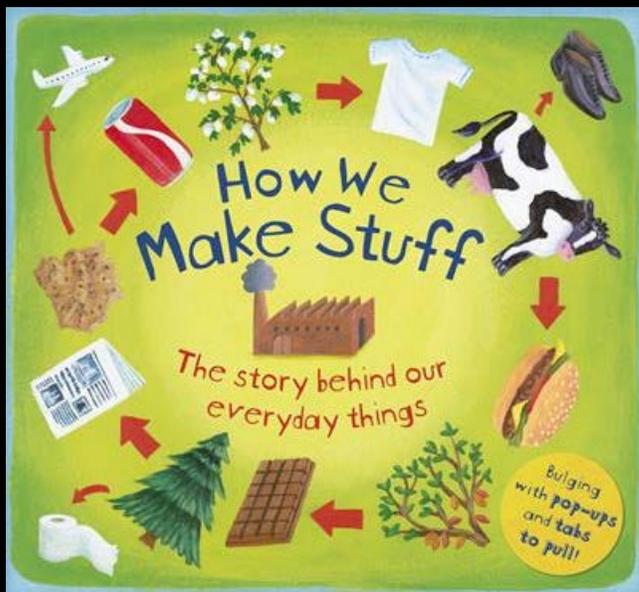
Christiane Dorion's Pop-Up Books Make Environmental Science Easy-Peasy

BY MELISSA PANDIKA

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WHY YOU SHOULD CARE

Because Christiane Dorion's pop-up books get kids thinking about hefty environmental topics.

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“If you answer children’s questions and inspire them, you don’t need to tell them ... what action they need to take.”

The trick? She never mentions them. “You can teach anything to children if you pitch it at the right level and use the right words,” said the U.K.-based author.

Dorion distills hefty environmental concepts into bite-sized, kid-friendly explanations. Along the way, whimsical pop-up spreads — complete with pull-tabs, flaps and booklets — engage even the shortest attention spans. Her books, written for 7- to 12-year-olds, tackle a variety of environmental and earth science topics, like [how the weather works](#) and how we make and discard everyday products from T-shirts to cheeseburgers.



Author Christiane Dorion

“The idea of habitats as living systems clicks with kids right away.”

And the rich content keeps Dorion from sounding preachy. “If you answer children’s questions and inspire them, you don’t need to tell them ... what action they need to take,” she said.

Dorion’s latest book, [How Animals Live](#) — shortlisted for the prestigious [Royal Society 2014 Young People’s Book Prize](#), looks at how animals have adapted to life all over the planet. Each pop-up spread opens with a question: “What’s in a grassland apart from grass? What makes the rainforest so popular?” Unlike many kids’ books about animals that describe species individually, Dorion portrays habitats as interdependent systems. For example, the rainforest spread shows how bacteria make soil from animal droppings, which also help disperse seeds.

Kids “get” that habitats are living systems right away, Dorion said. Whenever she asks students which animals live in cities during workshops about her book, they respond, “Us!”

“They see the links,” she said. “They’re so logical.”



A pop-up spread from *How Animals Live*

Raised outside Quebec, Dorion grew frustrated when she couldn't find engaging classroom books while coordinating the World Wildlife Federation's primary education program. She mentioned to a fellow mother at her son's school that she was thinking of writing a pop-up book on the water cycle. Turns out that mother was the chief executive of Templar Publishing, which published Dorion's first book, *How the World Works*, in 2011 — followed by three more.

“ Her own books boldly tackle natural selection, plate tectonics and other complex scientific concepts. ”

Dorion's ideas often come from children at literary festivals who tell her what book she should write next. She collaborates with an illustrator, Beverly Young, who specifies a word limit — sometimes as few as 40 words for one topic — which helps Dorion keep her explanations simple and focus on the most interesting tidbits from her research.

But Dorion refuses to oversimplify concepts. She recalled as a child struggling to

understand how clouds could be made of water vapor, since many of her schoolbooks compared them to cotton wool. In her own books, she boldly tackles natural selection, plate tectonics and other complex scientific concepts.

Scheduled to hit bookshelves in October, Dorion's fifth book, *How the World Began*, opens with the Big Bang and fast-forwards to the evolution of life and human civilization, all the way to the present day.

The author swells with optimism for the next generation. She hopes to inspire children to "do something to protect the world," she said.

Maybe it's time to add kids' books to the climate change agenda.

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What do you think?



MEET THE AUTHOR [MELISSA PANDIKA](#)

Melissa Pandika is a lab rat-turned-journalist with eye to all things science, medicine and more. Like? Distance running, snails, late-night Korean BBQ + R&B slow jams.

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