

Facts, Not Fear

**Teaching Children about the Environment
(Canadian Edition)**

MICHAEL SANERA AND JANE S. SHAW

Adapted for Canadian readers by

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Foreword by

PATRICK MOORE



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PATRICK MOORE

The environmental movement has given a whole new meaning to the idea of teaching our children about the birds and the bees. Not only has the subject matter expanded to include everything under the sun, we are now faced with the challenge of helping our children separate fact from fiction in a highly charged political debate.

As a father and an environmentalist, I am often discouraged by the amount of misinformation conveyed to our young people through the school system and the media. I am particularly dismayed by the degree of pessimism for the future that is generated by predictions of an environmental apocalypse. It's as if the lessons of Chicken Little and not crying wolf have been completely forgotten.

How can we help our children reach informed and balanced opinions on the multitude of issues and ideas that are collectively called "environmentalism"? This book is a good starting point as it calls into question many of the assumptions that have seeped into popular culture through constant repetition. From endangered species to forests to climate change there is often a feeling that all the trends are negative and that nothing can be done about them. Both these attitudes are entirely incorrect.

The environmental movement came by its association with fear for the future honestly. In the late 1960s when the movement was born, the threat of toxic waste and pollution loomed large. In her

landmark book *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson predicted that pesticide use would eliminate songbirds from the land. She was partially correct in that DDT was responsible for major population declines in birds of prey such as hawks and eagles. But DDT was successfully banned and the populations of birds of prey have recovered. Songbird populations have actually remained quite stable; despite considerable changes to their habitats and the continued use of pesticides in agriculture. In short, we fixed the specific problem and the world did not come to an end.

There are a number of important lessons and ideas that should be given to the generation now growing up in order to help them see the world in a more positive light. First, they should be told of the many success stories; that commercial whaling has been virtually ended, toxic waste cleaned up, air quality improved, forest practices reformed, and endangered species protected. This should be balanced against an awareness of ongoing concerns over poverty and the loss of tropical forests. Environmentalism should be at least as much about celebrating life and our ability to maintain it as it is about fear of future loss and change.

Second, we must teach our children to think critically and to learn more than we ever knew about science, geography, and the use of language. They should be able to tell fact from opinion, to question assertions of truth, and to spot inconsistencies in logic and argument. And, whether it is viewed as a struggle between left and right, yin and yang, or green and brown, they will benefit from a desire to seek a balanced view that takes all factors into account.

Third, we should give young people the ability to see the connections between the environment, the economy, and our communities. "Learning for sustainability" means both recognizing the real needs of six billion fellow humans, while at the same time understanding that those needs affect the environment, sometimes negatively. The emphasis should be on practical solutions to the problems rather than

on looking for someone to blame. Field trips should include visits to rural work-sites and communities as well as parks and wilderness.

Fourth—and this is a good lesson for life in general—our children must learn how to set priorities. The environmental movement tends to portray every issue as if it were a dire threat to the survival of the planet. It is often difficult to determine what the real risks are from a particular activity. This requires an understanding of “risk management” and often involves judgments and sometimes best guesses about which issues are most important. Making informed judgments and not being afraid to change opinions in the face of new evidence are key to maintaining a sense of priority.

There can be no doubt that the future will hold many challenges for the new generation. They need the tools to meet those challenges. *Facts, Not Fear* can help parents provide these tools and give their children a positive attitude towards the environment. Both parents and children can benefit by working together towards a better understanding of this wonderful world and all its natural beauty.