

A B C ... Naturally!

Mamata Pandya



A Centre for Environment Education Publication
for South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme



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About the project

This book is one of a series of four books for children on environment-related themes. The series was commissioned by South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP). The books have been developed and produced for SACEP by Centre for Environment Education, India.

Centre for Environment Education (CEE) is a national institute of excellence for Environmental Education supported by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India and affiliated to the Nehru Foundation for Development. The main objective of CEE is to create environmental awareness among children, youth, decision makers, and the general community. CEE develops innovative programmes and materials and field tests them for their validity and effectiveness. The aim is to provide models that could be easily replicated to suit local conditions.

CEE is also the Subject Matter Area Focal Point for Environmental Education as designated by the Government of India and approved by the Governing Council of SACEP.

South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) is an Intergovernmental Organization of 9 South Asian Countries namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. It was the culmination of two years of deep deliberations by the concerned countries on the feasibility of regional co-operation on environmental oriented development activities. It became a legal entity in 1982. SACEP is also the only specialized institution in South Asian Region concerning the formulation and implementation of Environmental Projects and Programme Activities.

The alphabet we learned at school
We rattled it off, went by the rule.

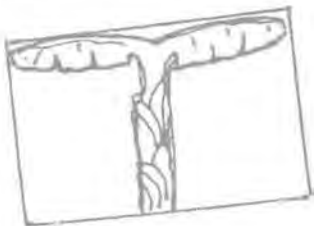
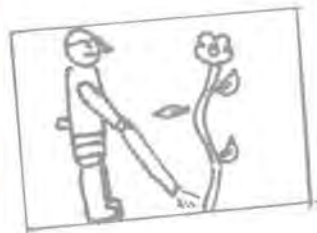
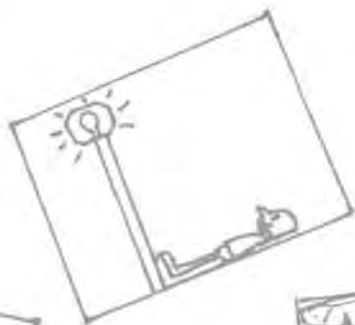
A for apple, B for bed
From ABC to XYZ.

We learnt it by heart, ran right through.

What we said we hadn't a clue.

Here are the letters we already know
But now about things we learn as we grow.

An alphabet about what's around us all
Of what we must care for, whether big or small.



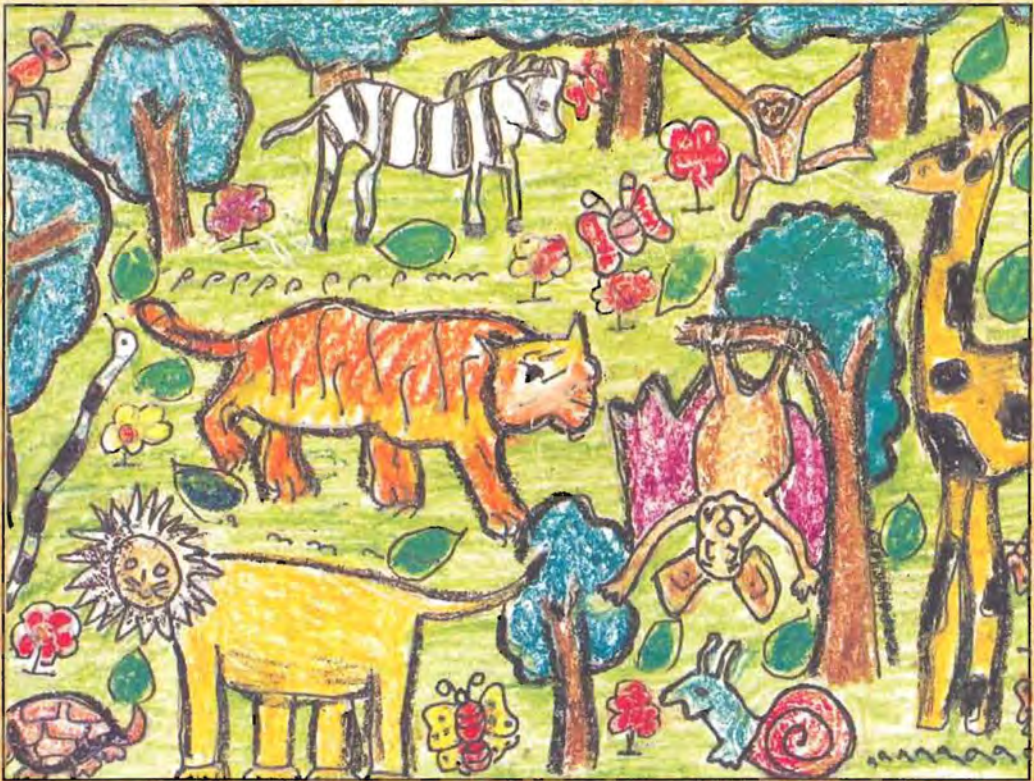
A

A is the **atmosphere**, a vital resource
Of life-giving gases it is the source.

A is the **air**, the breath of life
For every being that is alive.

The **air** that we today pollute and poison
Till even breathing becomes a difficult condition.

A is for **animals**, all colours, sizes, and shapes
From **ants** to zebras, zorillas to **apes**.



B

B is what we call our **biosphere**
The layer that holds all the life that is here.

B is teeming with **biodiversity**
That's another word for life's variety.

B is also the **birds** of all feathers
Butterflies, bugs, bats, and a billion others.



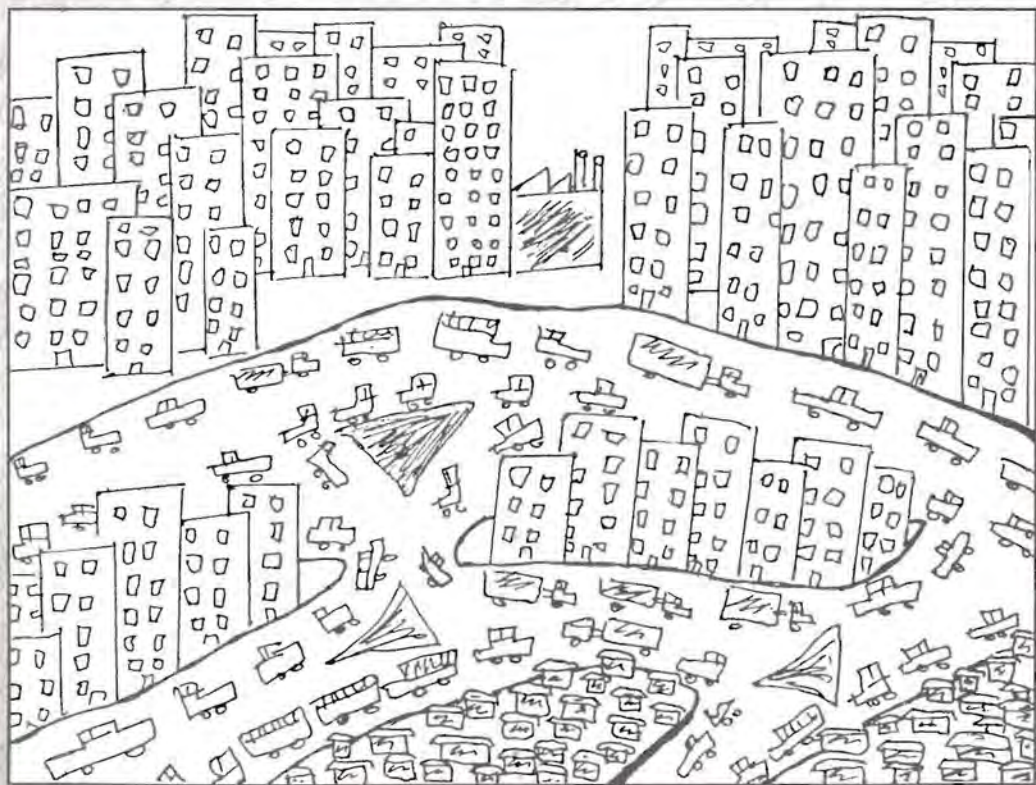
C

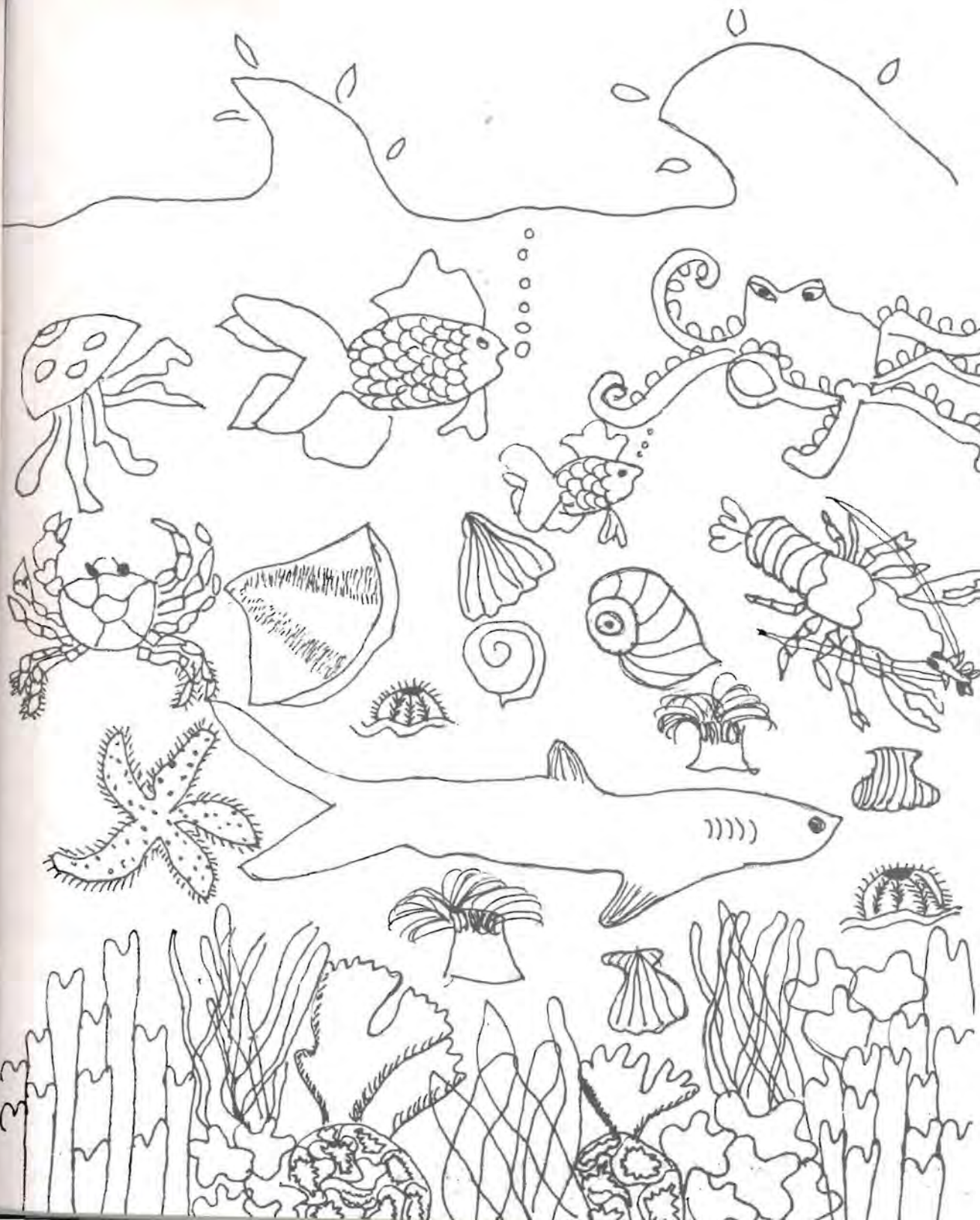
C is the **coral** reefs that protect our **coasts**
It's the **coal** deep below, also **clouds** that float.

C is the **cities** built since times gone by
They rise, they fall, they multiply.

Today they are larger than ever before
More buildings, more people, more problems in store.

C cautions us not to just **consume**, but **conserve** and **care**
For the sake of our **children** whose future we share.





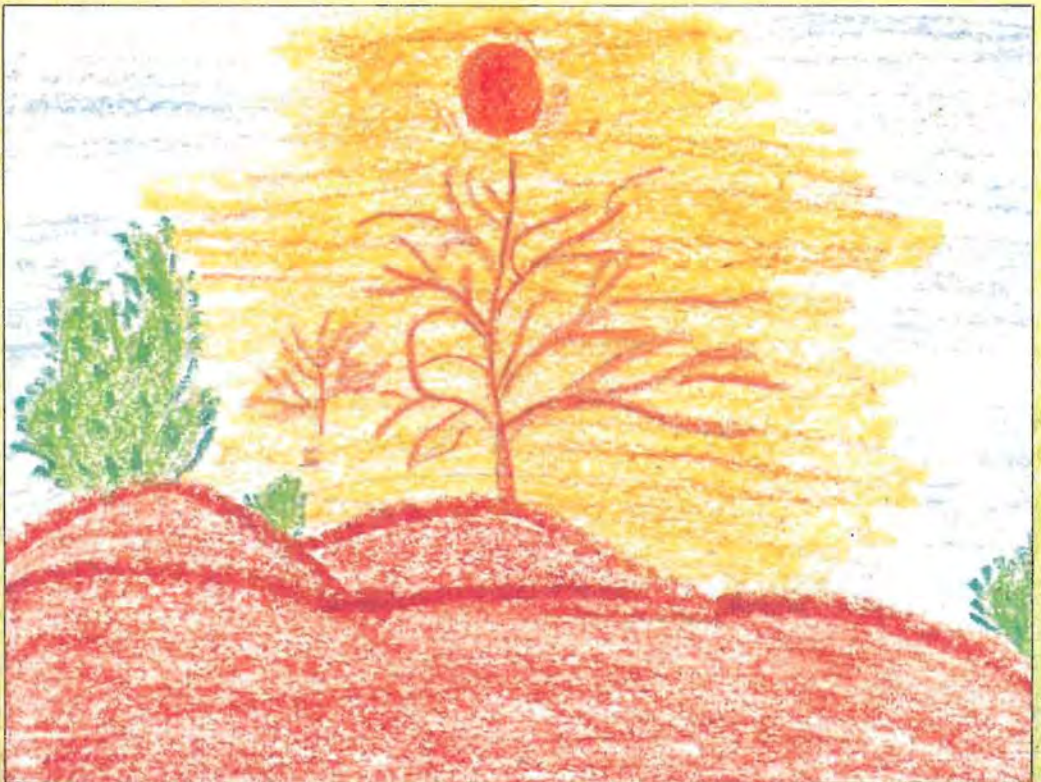
D

D is a letter of great **diversity**
It begins great **dinosaurs** that once roamed free.

D is **deserts** wonderful to explore
Spreading today to where they weren't before.

As we cut grass and trees, clearing the way
Inviting grim **droughts** that come to stay.

D is the **danger** that threatens **diversity**
As we **dig, dive, destroy, demolish, deforest.**



E

E is for our home the **Earth**
And all that surrounds us right from birth
Made by nature or made by men
That's what we call **environment**.

E gives **energy** that every living thing does need
To live, grow, change, to move and to feed.

Endangered, extinct are two worrying **Es**
That's what's happening to many species.

Ecology is the **E** we study to see
How all things are related, **not** one is free.



F

F is the **forests** teeming with life
Fields of **food** — **flowers, fruits, rice.**

Fauna — that's animals, and **flora** — that's plants
All fantastic—floating, flying, feathered or furred.

Floods can make **F** a natural disaster
But one that we increase by cutting trees faster.

For **fuelwood** and **factories** we cut down the **forests**
Never once thinking about the dens and the nests.





G

G is the grass that grows green and golden
For the cereals we eat, to **grass** we're beholden.

It's **grass** that holds the soil that's so precious
And protects the earth like a mantle ferocious.

G is the **ground**, and the water below
That we use up carelessly till supplies run low.

That's **groundwater** which we pollute and spoil,
Till one day soon it'll be more precious than oil.



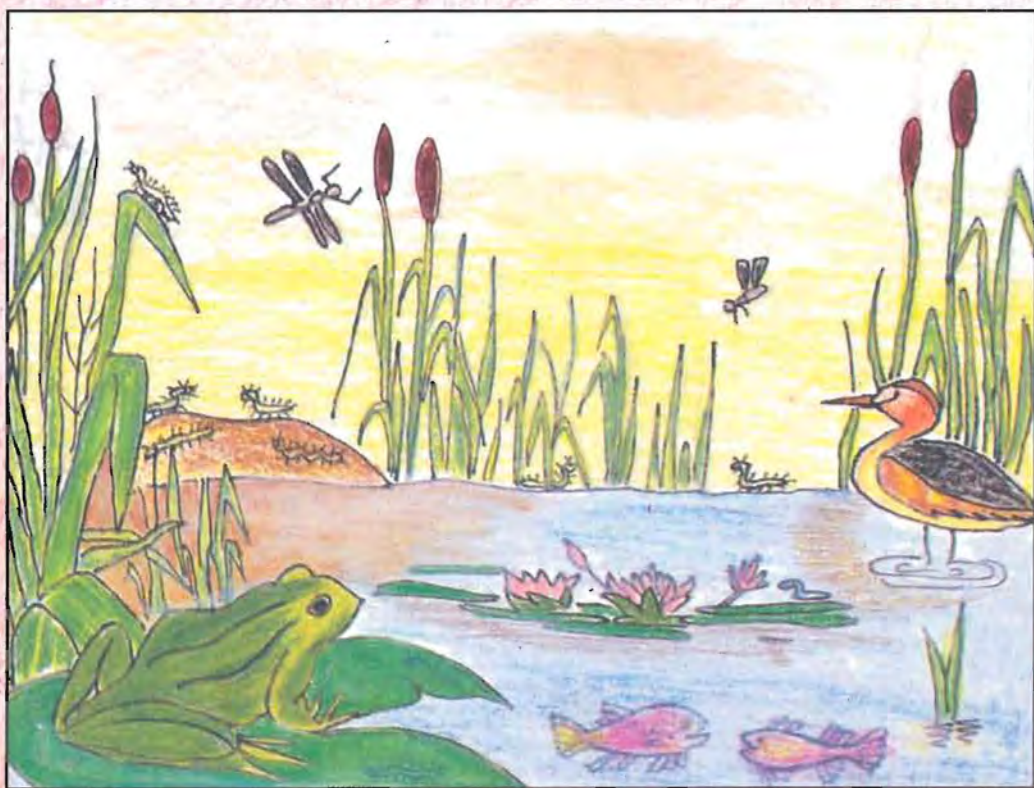
H

H is our **habitat** or **home**
Whatever our address, the earth alone.

Not just a place for **humans** to reside
But for every single plant and animal besides.

We often destroy **habitats** to make our own **houses**
But what about those who do not have choices?

Where will a **hare** live outside its **home** ground
Can a **humpback whale** become land bound?

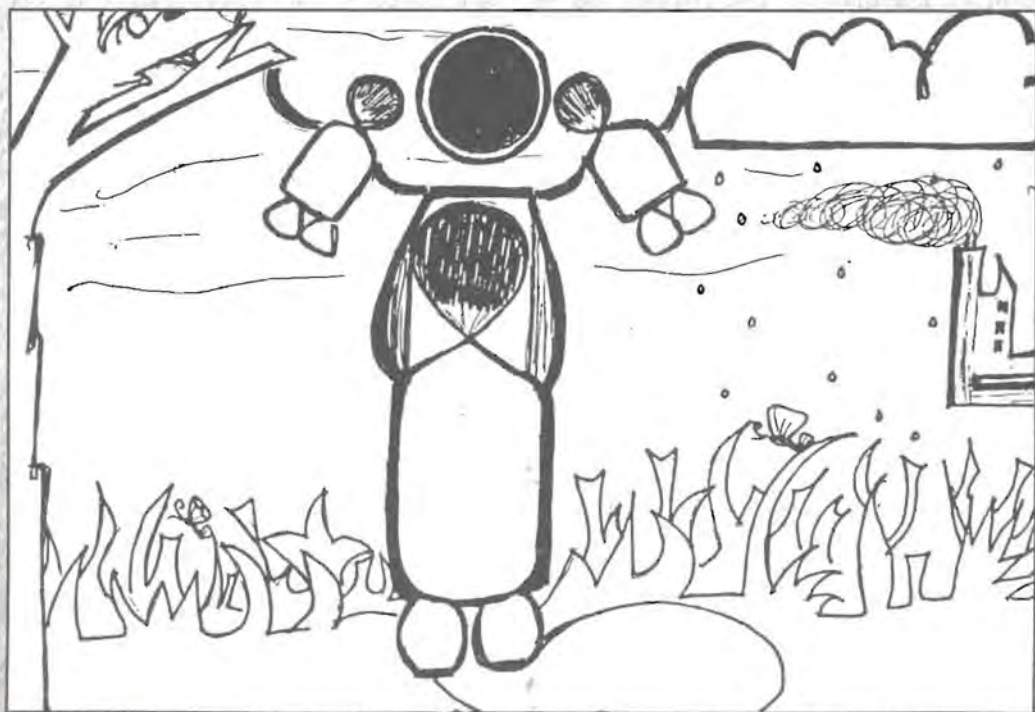




I is for me, myself, mine ...
Words we think of first every time.
Have you ever thought that **I** alone
Will not survive just on its own?

We all need each other, it's what makes sense
That's what we call **interdependence**
Not just humans, every creature alive
Needs all others and all elements to thrive.

The links are uncountable, and not always seen
Just a few little breaks, then dismal the scene.



J

J is the **jungles** where trees grow
Strong, thick, tall, leafy and close.

Where creepers and climbers thrive side by side
And where hunters and hunted stalk and hide.

Green **jewels** that sparkle with the secrets of life
Treasure-houses of riches for which you can't put a price.

J is the jeopardy our **jungles** face
Destroyed day by day, for timber and space.



K

K is the **kaliedoscope** of life on earth
The ever changing patterns, magical beyond words.

It's the **kingdom** of Nature, from lions that roar
Like kings of the jungle, to the **kites** that soar.





L

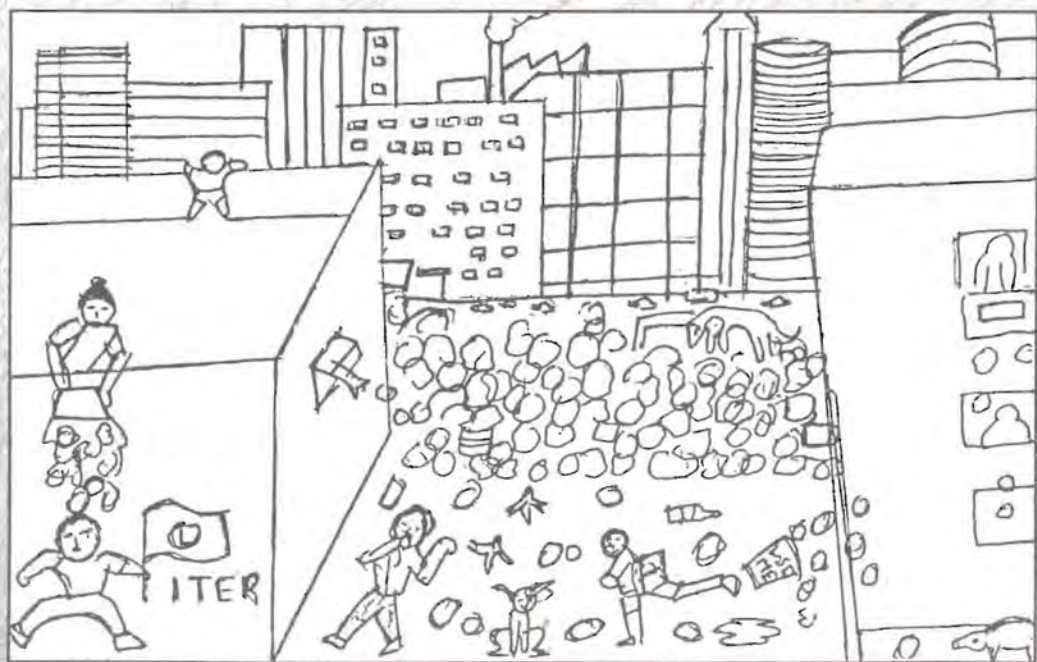
L lights up our day and night
With sunshine, moonbeams and stars so bright.

It's all the **leaves** that make a lacy canopy
On every size and shape of tree.

The **leaves** that dry and fall and flutter,
To cover the soil with protective **litter**.

But the **litter** of **leaves** that is useful so,
Is not that **litter** we so carelessly throw.

L is all the **life** on this planet
Found nowhere else, we are privileged to have it.





M

M goes a long way, up and down,
From the **moon** in the sky, to **minerals** in the ground.

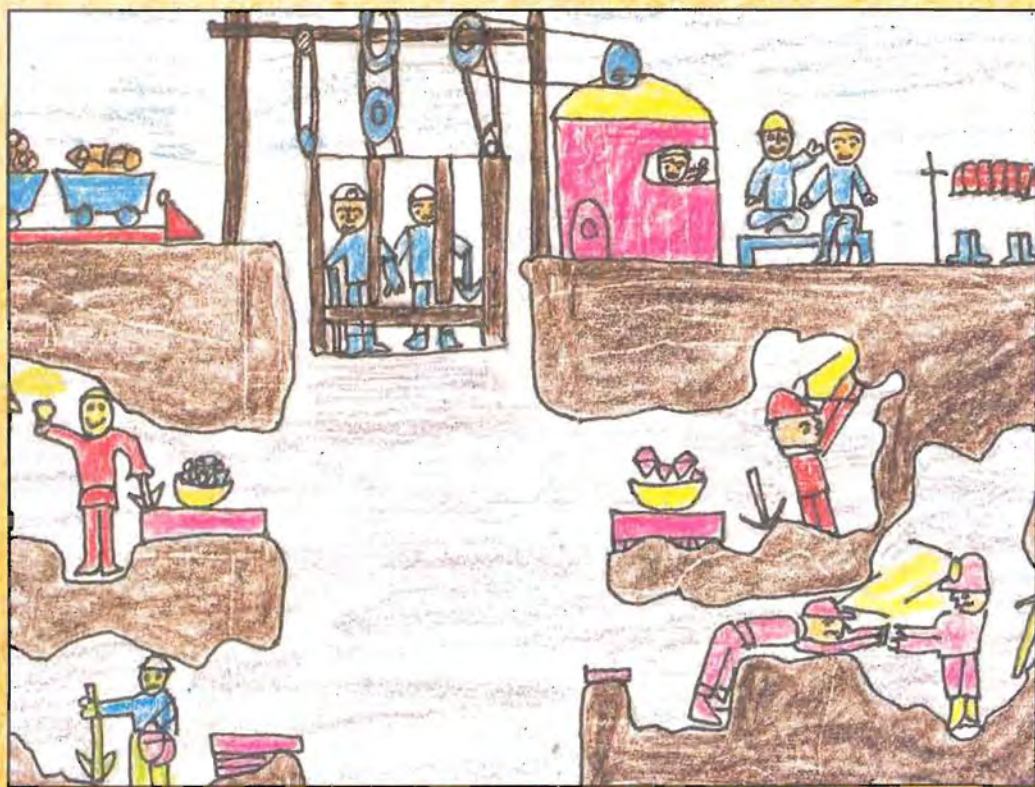
It climbs up high **mountains**, dives deep **marine** waters.

Runs free in **meadows**, enjoy the **marsh mud**.

It embraces all **mammals**, **mouse** to **manatees**

And **man** in built houses, to **monkeys** in trees.

M fills the world with mysteries and marvels,
Microscopic to mammoth, all ours to unravel.





N

N is **natural**, what humans can't create
And **nature** in who's lap we all live and breathe.

N meets life's needs with **natural** resources
These are precious, there are no other sources.

It's also the **numbers** of people increasing each day,
And **numbers** of resources being eaten away.

N is the nineteen-nineties, a decade for concern and care
The time to plan how we will nurture and share.



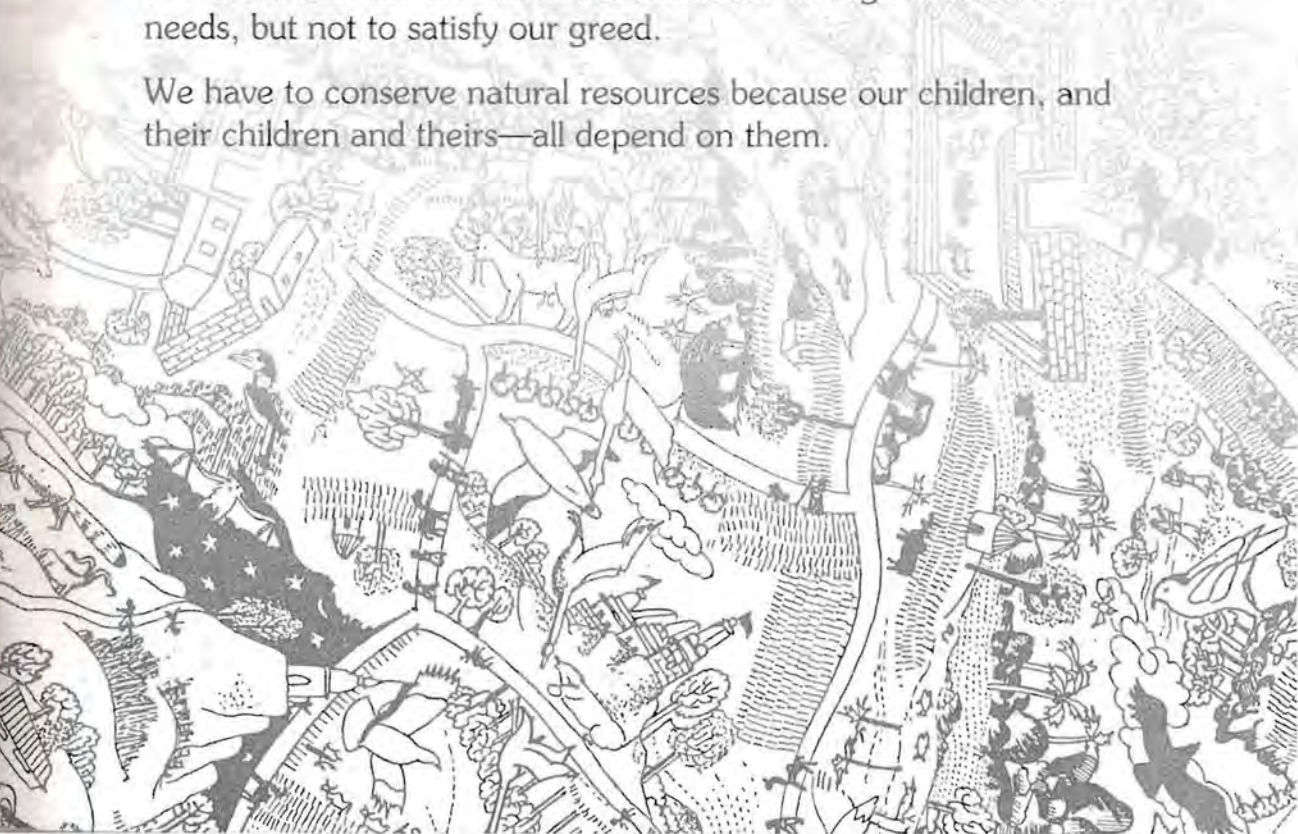
Our Planet Earth

Our earth is a very special planet. It gives everything living things need for life: air to breathe, water to drink, soil that sustains vegetation. These, and all the other materials that make life possible, not just for humans but for all life forms, are called natural resources. These resources have taken billions of years to form.

Humans are threatening natural resources by overusing or polluting them. Factory chimneys and vehicles give out dirty fumes into the very air we breathe. We draw water from under the ground without a thought for how the store of water will be recharged. We destroy the soil's cover of vegetation leaving it bare and eroded. And on and on goes the story of human's abuse of nature and natural resources.

We have to remember that the Earth's resources are precious. They are not unlimited. The earth has resources enough to meet our needs, but not to satisfy our greed.

We have to conserve natural resources because our children, and their children and theirs—all depend on them.





The Earth is
our Mother.
Whatever befalls
the Earth, befalls the
children of the Earth.
This we know,
the Earth does not
belong to us,
we belong to the
Earth...

Chief Seattle, 1855
(Chief of an American Indian Tribe)

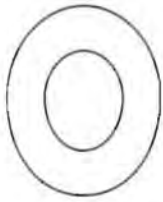
Resources... Forever?

Some resources come from plants and animals which grow and reproduce. These can slowly be replaced if we use such resources wisely and plan ahead for the future. These are called renewable resources. Crops, animals, trees and other things which can be replaced are renewable resources.

There are some resources which cannot be replaced. A limited amount of these is found on the earth. When it is gone, there will be no more. The resources are non-renewable. We can't grow or make new copper or other precious metals. When the last oil well runs dry, there will be no more oil for heat, for cars or for use in all the plastic products which are now part of our lives. Minerals, fossil fuels, water and air are all non-renewable.

For years we have taken our Earth for granted. We have used its resources as if they would never end. We can no longer afford to do that. We must care for our Earth and protect and conserve our resources. Our Earth is important to each one of us, and each one of us is important to our Earth.



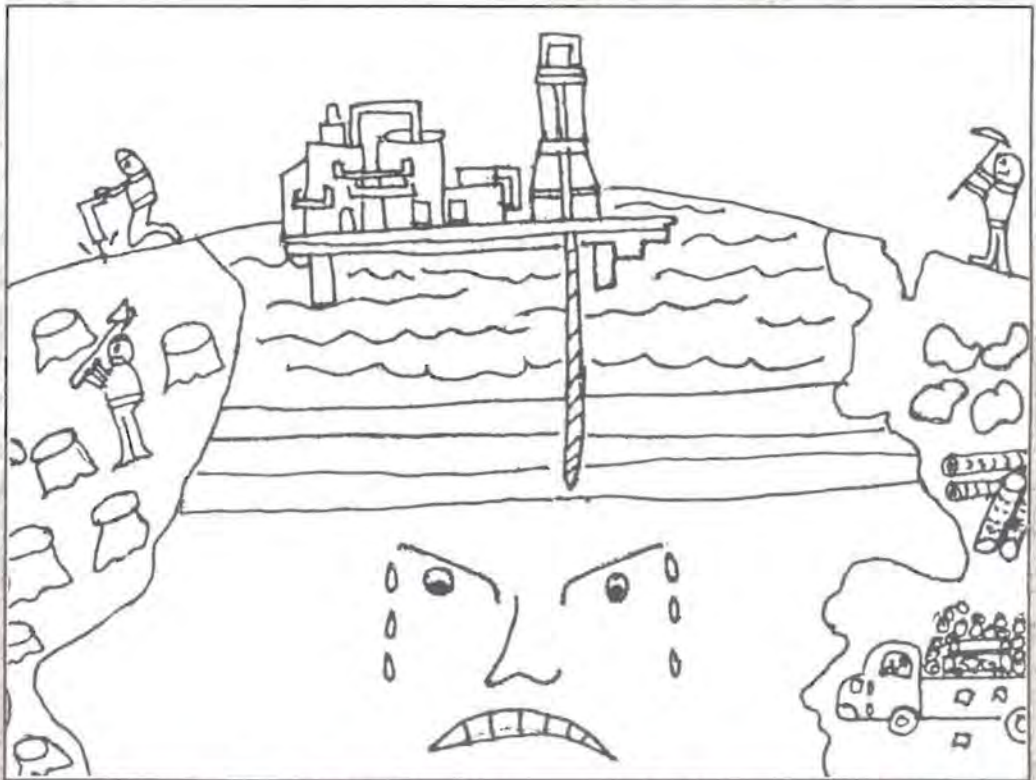


O is for **oikos**, our earth, our home.
Also the shield that protects us, that's called **ozone**.

It's the **oil** deep down in the bowels of the earth,
That makes things go, lights home and hearth.

O is the **oceans**, fathomless and vast
Hiding clues to life, present and past.

O begins 'over' a word that destroys
When its in **overuse**, **over consume** and **overexploit**.



P

P is teeming with **populations**

The weight of sheer numbers leading to poor conditions?

When we start to count **people** in millions and billions

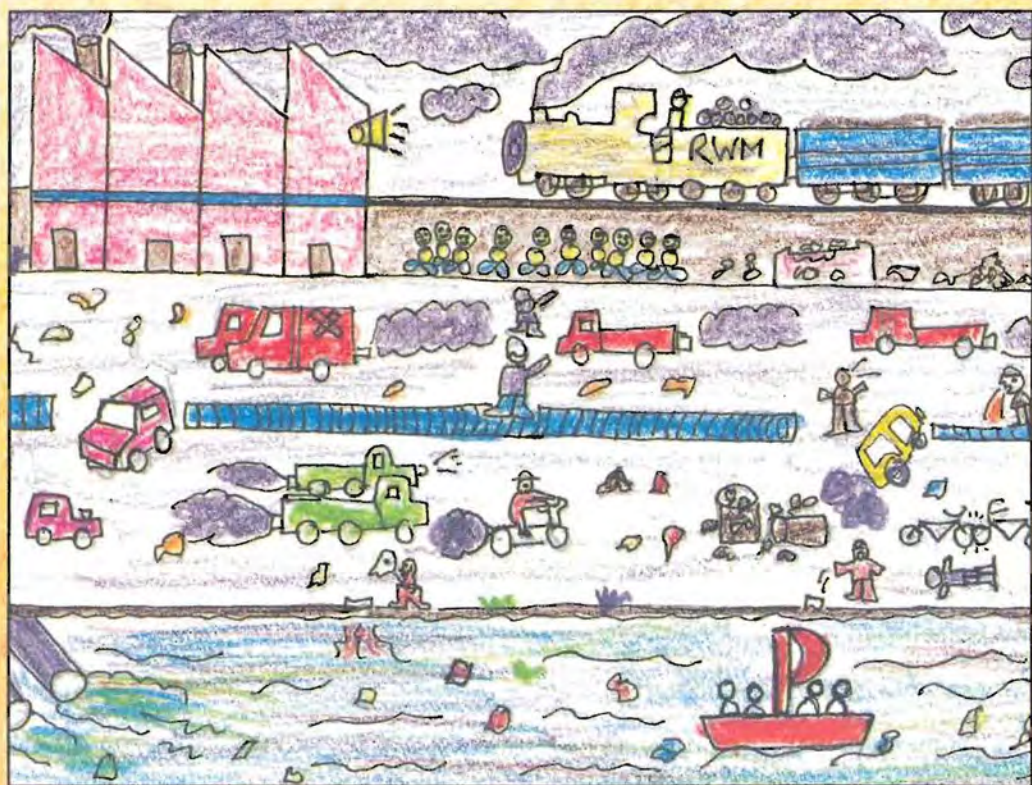
Could it be that today, we are the villains?

Then there's the famous **P** of **pollution**

Before it begins, or after, when's the time for solution?

It's the **power** of **people** that a difference can make

To help **protect** the environment, before it's too late.



Q

Q is the **question** whose answer we search
As we quarrel and quibble about saving the earth.

A quandary that each of us does sometimes face
Does **quantity** or **quality** qualify to win the race?

It's the **query** whose secret lies in our hands,
The peoples together of all lands.

A **quest** upon which we must embark
Towards lifestyles that are sounder right from the start.

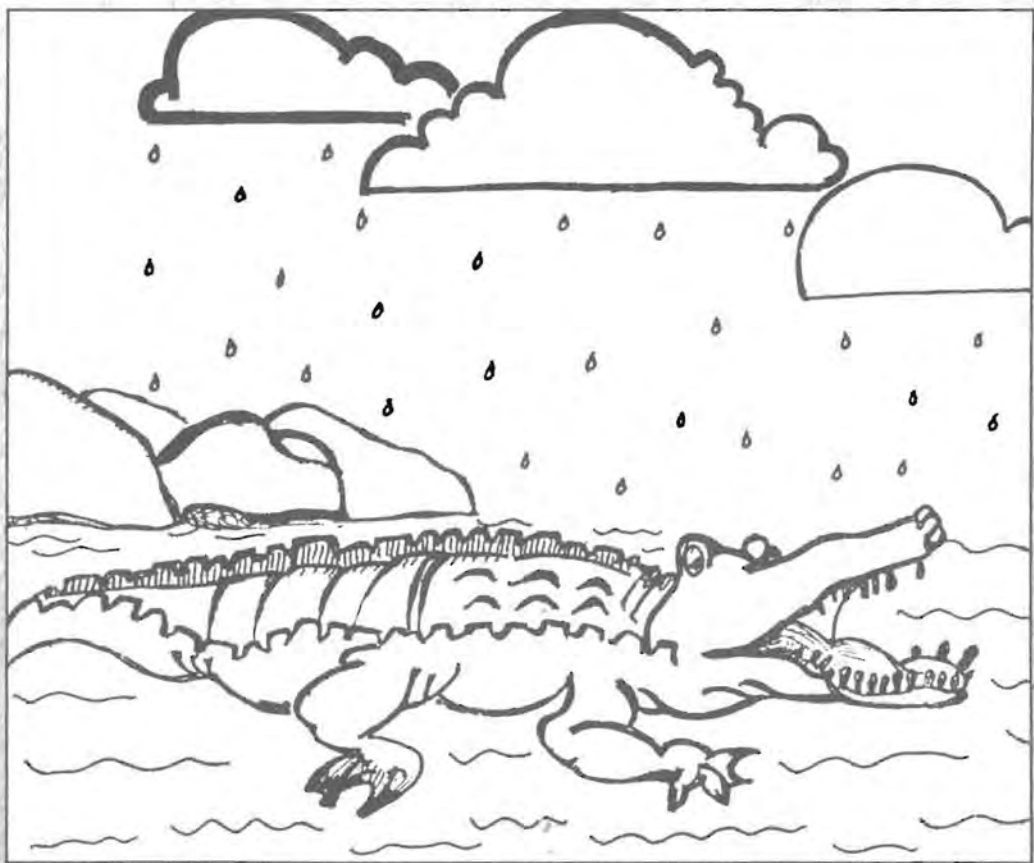


R

R is **rivers** and **rocks**, **rainbows** and **rain**
Reptiles and **roots**, **rainforests** where trees reign.

R is the **realm** of natural **resources**
Some **resources** are **renewable**, some are not
Whichever they are, it's all that we've got.

So right from this moment, let's everyone plan
Remember to **recycle**, **reuse**, **reduce** where we can.





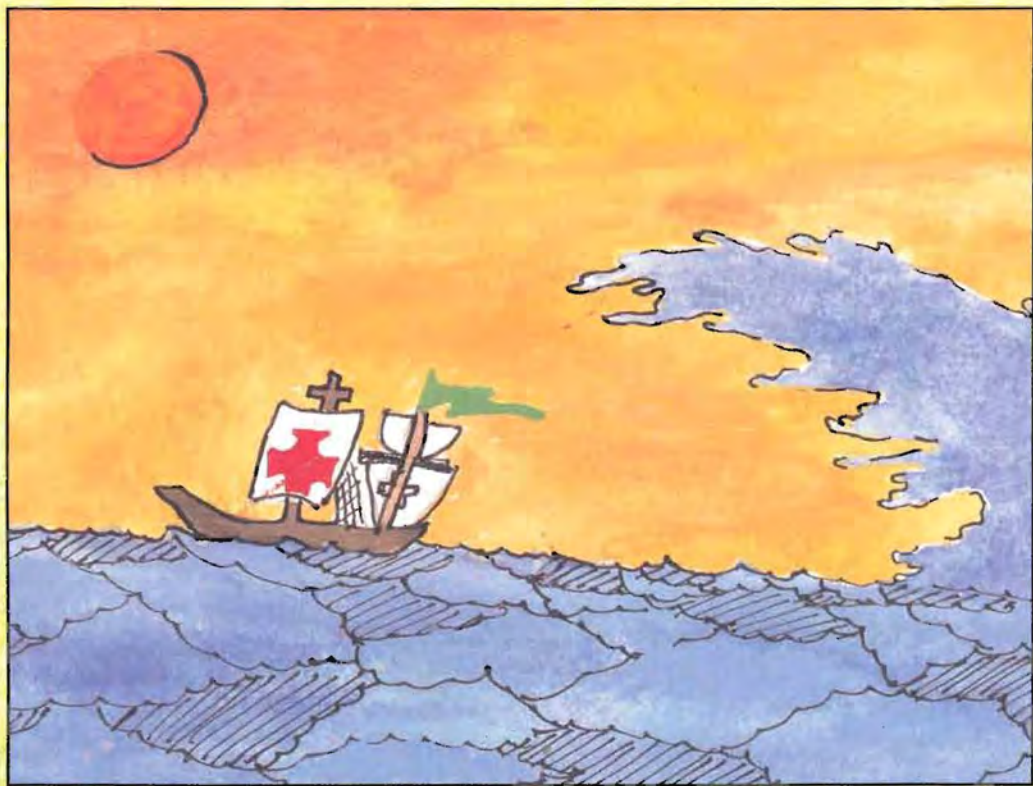
S

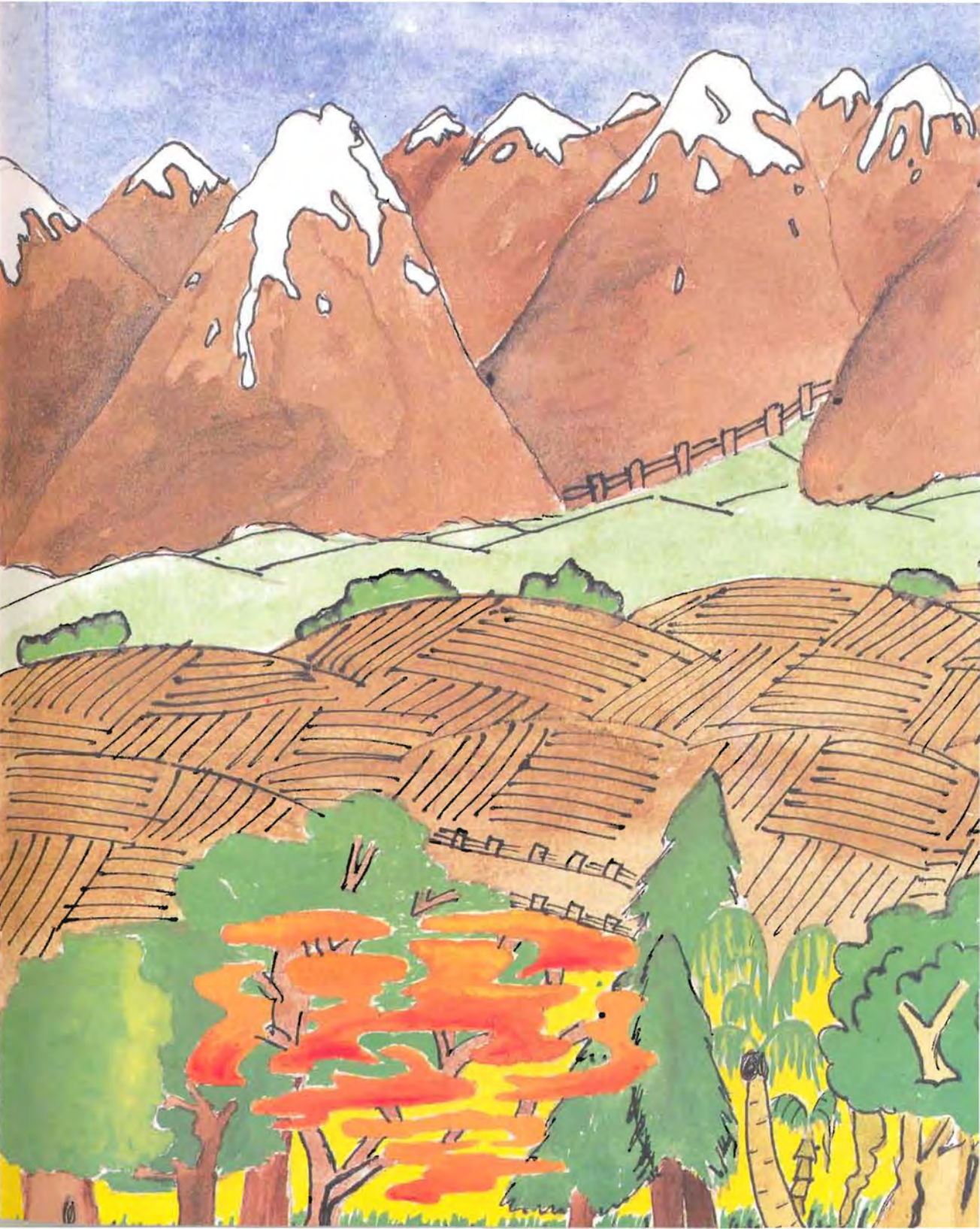
S is the **sun**, source of all life
The giver of energy, the giver of light.

S is the **soil** more precious than gold
Lost as it flows away, flies away--that gold we must hold.

S sails the **seas** and soars into **space**
Snows from the **sky**, swims and slides with grace.

With the splendour of changing **seasons** and landscapes
S swarms with **species**, all sizes and shapes.





T

T teems with priceless **treasures**
Of the world around that give us such pleasure.

From **tigers** to **termites**, **turtles** to **trees**
In **tundras** and **tropics**, on land and in seas.

T is also the threat of **toxic** waste
All the poison we throw away in our haste.

T tells us the time has come
To make sure that the right things are done.



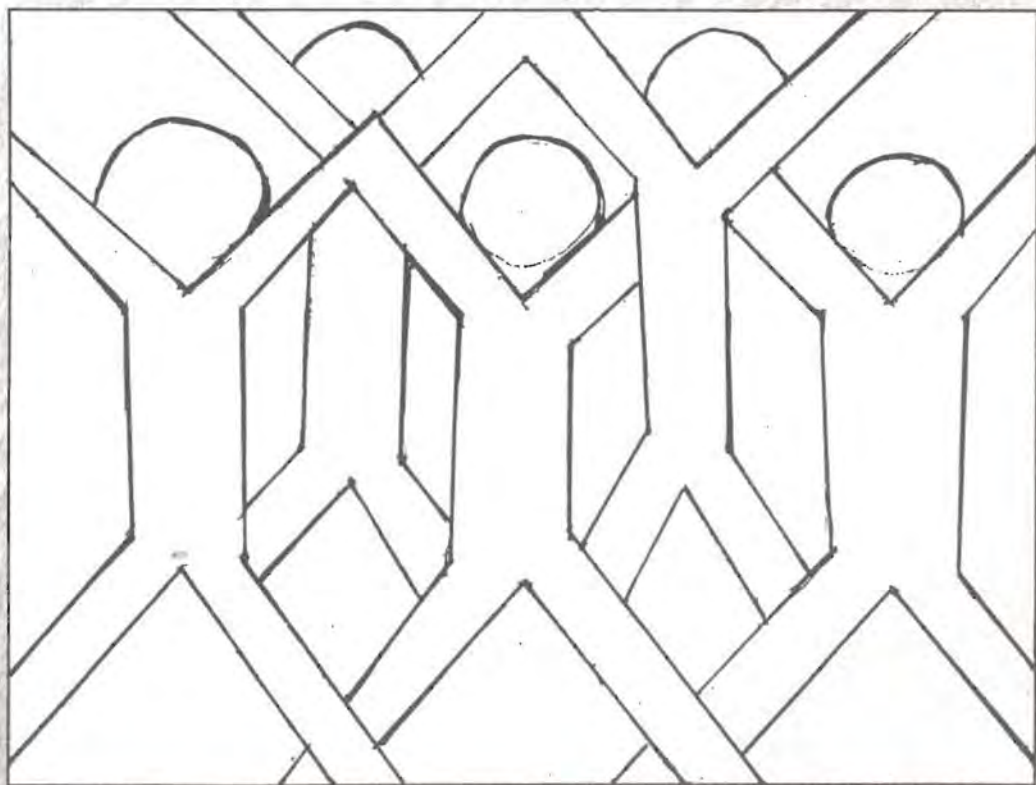
U

U is a reminder to all of **us**
Who enjoy all these resources without a fuss.

But when it comes to worry about their fate
We just throw up our hands and ululate.

Sometimes it's because we're truly unaware
That it does make a difference if we take a little care.

If we all joined hands, there's possibilities unbound
To leave the world a place that's better than we found.



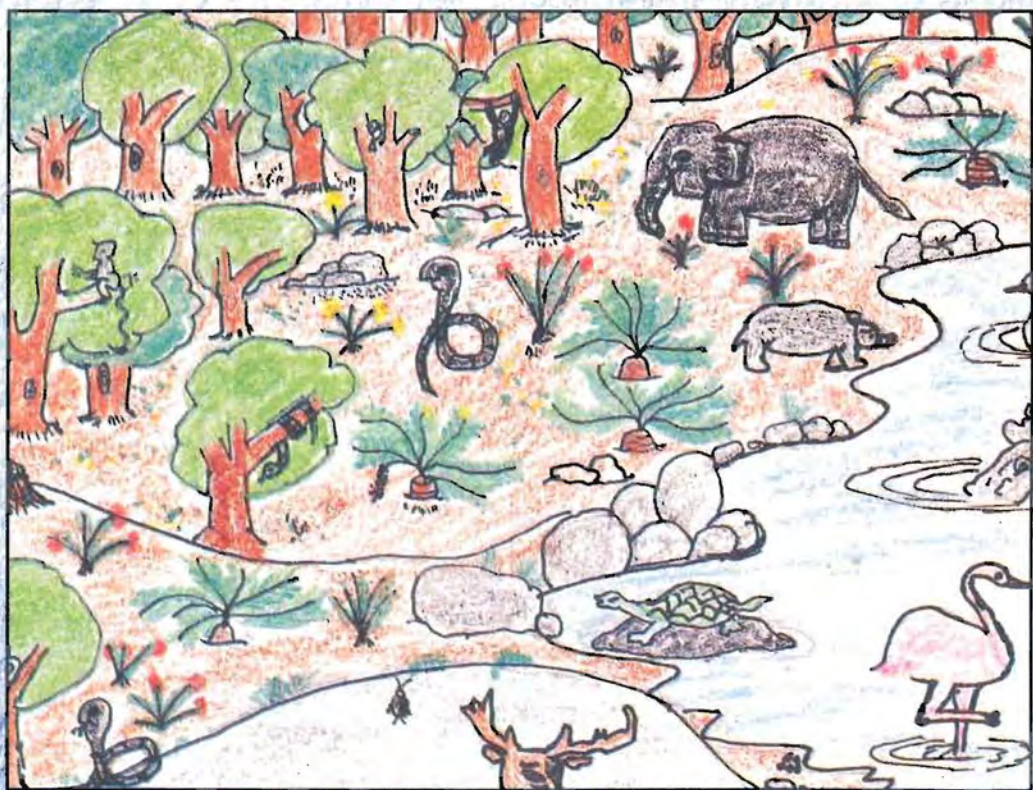
V

V is the value of our natural resources
That we can't count in money, or lock up in vaults.

It crosses **valleys**, **volcanoes**, the **vastness** of **veldts**
Visits **vipers** on **vines**, **vegetables** in fields.

V is the veritable **variety** of life
That gives us the basics, even adds the spice.

V is **vulnerable**, that's our Planet Earth
That needs our **vigil**, a **vision** and **voices** that must be heard.





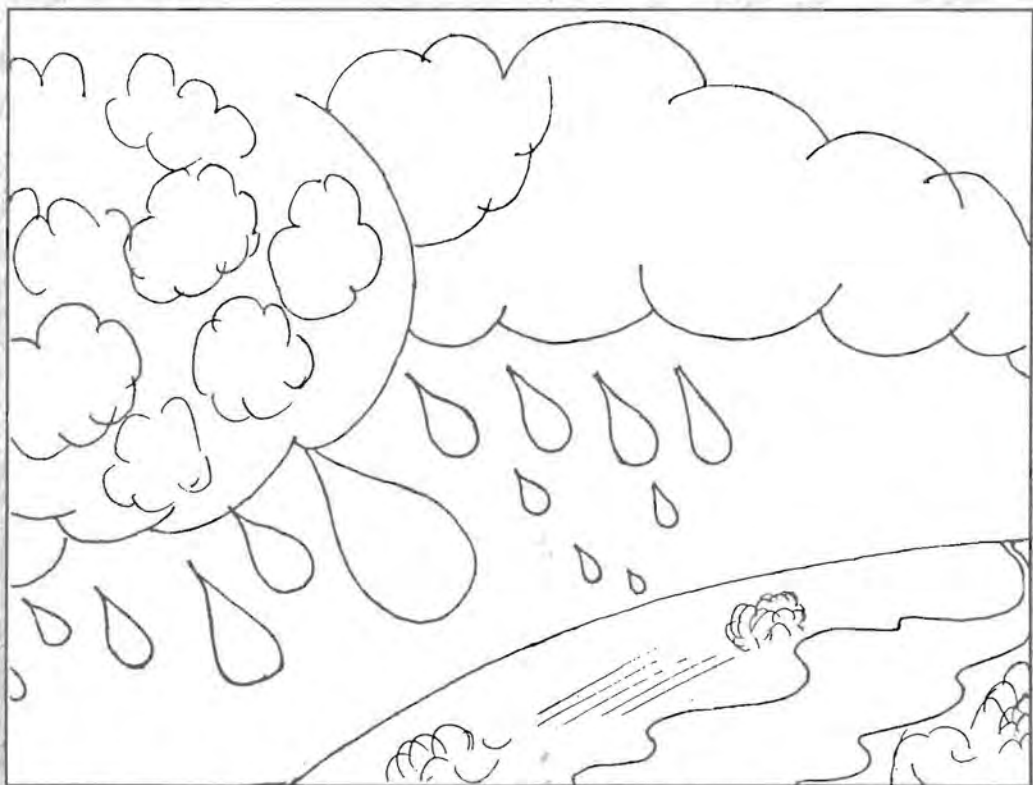
W

W is for **water**, the source of life,
And the **wealth** of plant and animal life.

Wetlands that are a wonderful home
To swimmers, divers, fliers and hidiers under stone.

W urges that we wake up to the wonder
Of life's wonderful **web** that goes beyond all borders.

W also warns us there's no time to wait
Nor to **waste**, or leave the future to fate.





X

X is quite an 'xacting letter

One that 'xclaims that things can be better.

An 'xcellent reminder to make every effort
To protect, preserve, conserve, and heal the hurt.



Y

Y once again comes back to **you**
Me, them and us, him and her too.

When all these get closer, they all come together

And let's not forget the power of **youth**
You can make a difference, and that's the truth.

So this very year, yell it out loud
Yes, we can do it, without a doubt!



Z

Z ends the alphabet
Even our zig zag one.

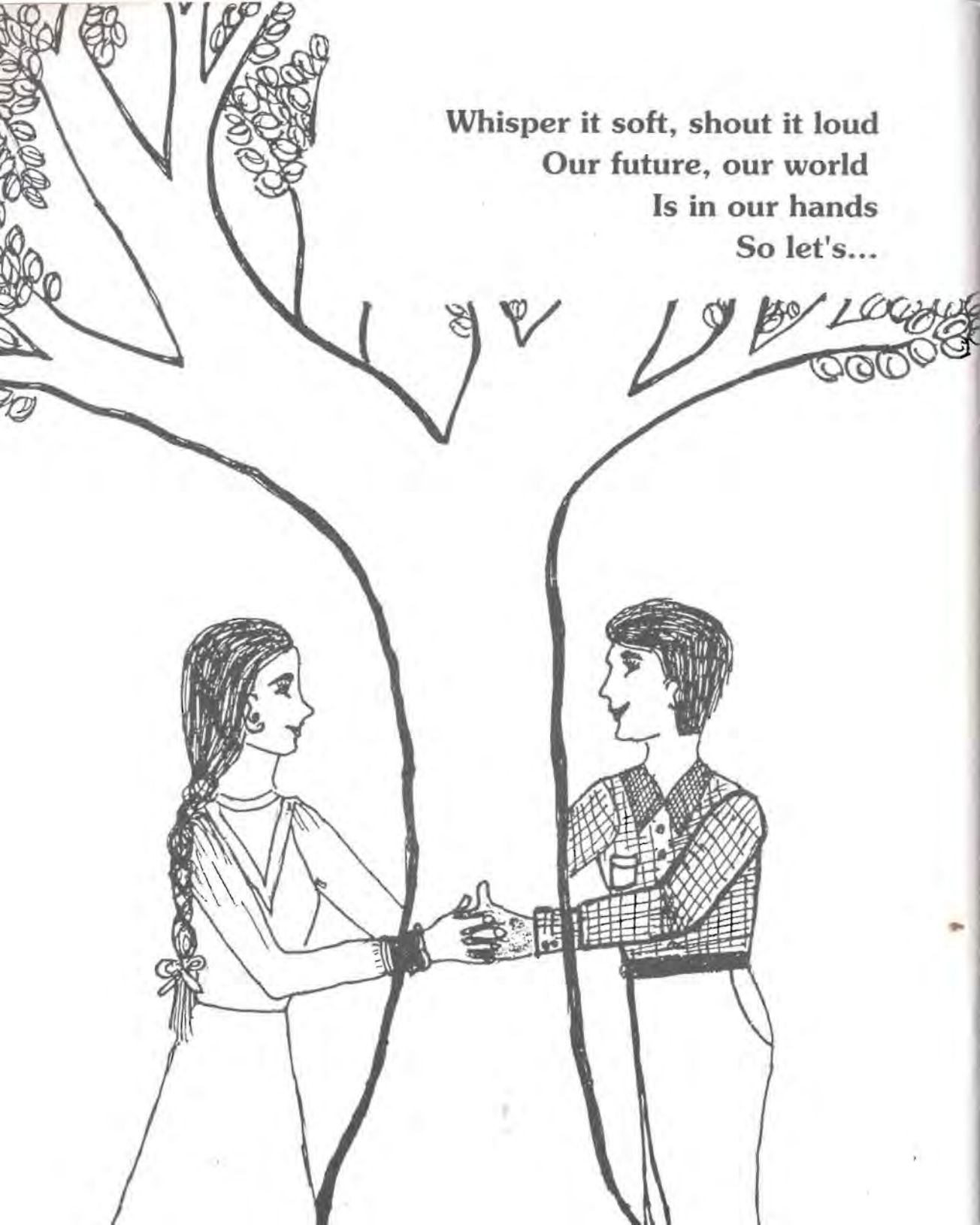
It's always the tail, but it's full of fun.

Its sums up the zeal that the letters proclaim
For a better environment, not one that's a shame.

Z is quite zippy, the last but not the least
Let's zoomi with it, a better future to greet.



Whisper it soft, shout it loud
Our future, our world
Is in our hands
So let's...





Act, activate
Begin
Conserve



Demand
Educate
Fight
Go out, Get going
Hasten



Inspire
Join
Know
Lead



Mobilize
Nurture
Overcome
Participate
Question



Recycle, Reduce
Show the way
Teach



Understand
Vitalize
Wonder



X-claim
Yet while there's time
Zoom into a brighter future!

How this book was made

We would like to share the story of how this book came about. After the verses were written, we showed them to a number of adult artists and asked them to draw pictures for the text. They read the poems, and thought and thought of how these could be shown in drawings and paintings. But they were baffled. What funny verses, they said. Imagine talking about the moon and mines, mammoths and man, all in just 10 lines. How could one picture include all that, and more?

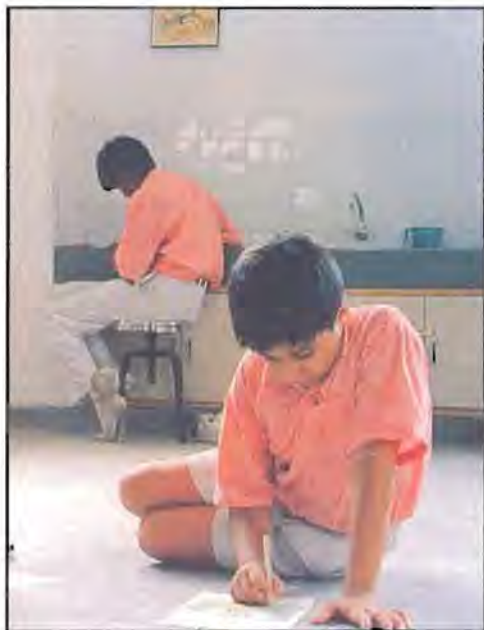
And then we thought, 'Adults will be adults. Always wanting everything orderly and separated neatly, worrying about how they can show grass exactly how it looks, and how many stripes a tiger has. Why involve adults at all? Let's get children to draw what they've read. After all, the book is for them, not for adults.

So we went to a school and met lots of children. We gave them the verses, told them to read these and think about what was in them, and then draw what they imagined the verses talked about.

From then, it was a wonderful experience. Drawings started pouring in for all the letters of the alphabet. It was exciting and already becoming so difficult to choose. But choices had to be made. We just would not be able to accommodate all the lovely drawings and paintings, even if the alphabet had had 52 or a 104 letters! We selected some of the artists, had another round of discussing and exchanging of ideas, and off they went with their assigned letters, to round two.



There was yet another round of choosing and finishing touches being put, and small last minute rushes and changes. Finally, all put together, the verses came to life. Each one was illustrated according to the artist's idea of what the lines meant. The 'artists' ranged in age from 8 years to 16 years. All worked fantastically—alone, in pairs, in groups; sharing everything from paints and crayons, to ideas and arguments, laughs and a lot of fun!



You can see the result for yourself. Most creditably none of the artists wanted to be individually given credit for their work. So here they are, not in order of appearance, but in alphabetical order. Some have contributed more than one illustration. See if you can match styles! And try guessing who painted or drew which picture.

The artists who illustrated this book for you:

Jui S. Achar, Amuda Arul, Abhishek Chakraborty, Punarnaba Chakrabarti, Amit Contractor, Robin Daniel, Akshay Kalia, Manasa K, Revathi M, Era J. Macwan, Ishita J. Macwan, Priya Makrandi, Prateeksha Nagar, Deepak Ravi, Twisha R. Patel, Shraddha P. Patel, Shrestha D. Patel, Mikira P. Patel, Shivani J. Patel, Mineshkumar R. Patel, Shanti Panicker, Shruti Singh, Vinayak Shenoy, Mahashweta T. Shah, Koyel Sikdar, Payel Sikdar, Kaushal B. Vyas.

What you can do with this book

Now that you have read *ABC... Naturally!* how do you feel? Inspired to pick up your pens and paints and paper? To write a poem, to draw a picture to communicate your concern for the environment?

Well here are some suggestions to get started. To begin with, you can add colour to this very book. You will have noticed that many of the pages are not in colour but have outline drawings in black and white. These are for you to fill with colour. So pull out your crayons and paints and add your name to the list of the children who have illustrated this book!

So the artist in you has leaped out! Would you believe that there's a poet too, hiding somewhere there, between all that math and history and chemistry and geography and biology?

Haven't you often seen something beautiful in nature and wished to capture the beauty for ever? Or seen something that was spoiling the environment, and wanted to protest? But it's not always easy to express what you feel... especially in verse.

True, not all of us are born poets. But with a little practice and a lot of feeling, you'll be surprised at how you can nudge awake that 'poet' in yourself. To start with, try coining a Cinquain.

Cinquain is the French word for a poem of five lines in which the first line has one word, line two has two words, line three has three, and line four has four words. The fifth line is just one word—like the first.

To write a Cinquain, just follow these steps and see what emerges. Ready?

Think of any object in nature that you especially like or relate to or identify with—flowers, rain, butterflies, clouds... Close your eyes for a few seconds. Picture your chosen object. Better still, take yourself with a pen and paper, to where you can actually see, hear and experience your natural surroundings.

- Now begin by writing the name of the object you have chosen. This should be a single word, and a noun. For example: *Butterfly*
- In the next line, write two words describing the qualities of your chosen object. These should be adjectives, e.g. *Delicate, graceful*.
- In the third line write three words of action describing something that the object does. These will be verbs. *Flutters, finds, sips*.

- In the fourth line write four words describing how you feel about the object. (You can drop the rigid grammar and mix nouns, verbs, adjectives!). *Seems weak but isn't.*
- In the fifth and last line write one word that conveys the sense of the first word. (Back to grammar—this could be a synonym). *Beauty.*



Butterfly
Delicate, graceful
Flutters, finds, sips
Seems weak but isn't
Beauty

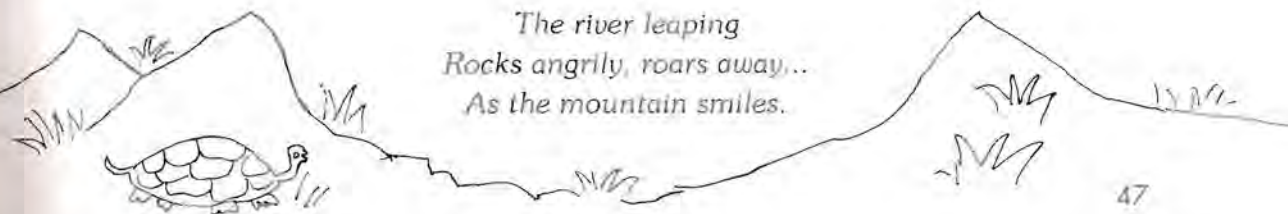


Read the five lines as a poem. Hear how it flows? See the verbal picture it creates? It is poetry, and it's your very own. Create Cinquains about any aspect of nature that strikes you, appeals to you, excites you... You will soon have your own book of nature poetry.

An Oriental Touch: Want to go eastwards? Try writing a Haiku. Haiku is three-line Japanese poetry dedicated to nature. These are usually poems which are composed as responses to or impressions of the world around us. Words used are very few, but in such a manner that reading them evokes an instant verbal picture. An image flashes past, creating an experience that the Japanese often describe as a "haiku moment".

Seasons form an important theme of Haiku. And also minute observations of small elements in nature—a blade of grass, a dewdrop on a flower petal, the flash of a dragonfly... But beyond or behind all these images is a strong consciousness of the close interrelatedness of all things, living and non-living, that make up the universe.

Here are some examples of the kind of pictures a few words have the power to evoke. Even though they are translated from the original Japanese, they are effective and moving.





*Little bird flitting
Twittering, trying to fly...
My, aren't you busy.*



*An old silent pond
Into the pond a frog jumps
Splash! Silence again.*

Close your eyes and tell a friend to recite these. What images flash through your mind as you hear the words? Can you transform these into graphic visuals—a sketch, a painting, a collage? Better still, why don't you and your friends all try to represent the same verse in different ways, through drawing, painting, acting, miming, or even by a tune on a musical instrument? And then, if you are ready, why not try your hand at some Haiku yourself?

The rules are simple enough:
There are three lines in every poem.
There are five syllables in the first line.
Seven in the second, and again five in the third line.
The lines do not have to rhyme.

To inspire you to begin, here are some Haiku verses by seventh standard students, written after spending a quiet half-hour in a forest.



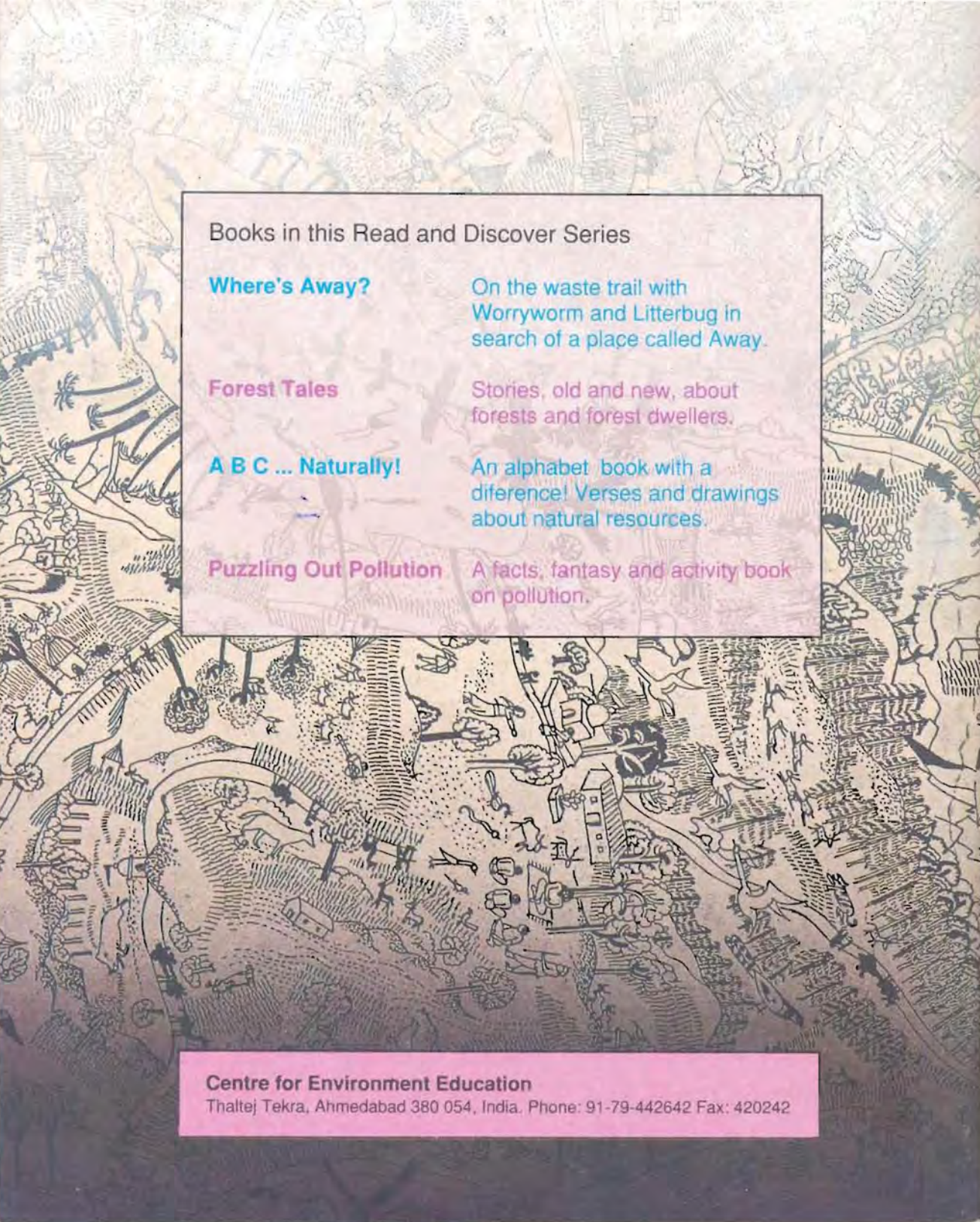
*Nature is funny
Nature is mysterious
Nature is freedom.*



*Sounds of animals
Are quieted by people
Who come to observe them.*

*I would like to know
How the forest would be if
Man had not yet come.*





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