

# Building a Database and Website for Eco-fiction Resources

*Mary Woodbury, curator at [Dragonfly.eco](#): Exploring World Eco-fiction*

## Abstract

This essay offers an overview of [Dragonfly.eco](#)—a collaborative project for exploring eco-fiction—and its evolution over the period of the last ten years. Following a tour of the content—reviews, author interviews, music, games, films, and a database of more than 1,000 books—the article reflects on how children's fiction and climate literacy fits into [Dragonfly](#) and provides a site road map for finding teacher's resources.

## Keywords

Eco-fiction, climate change, climate literacy

[Dragonfly.eco](#) is a volunteer project that curates meaningful stories about the natural world and humanity's connection with it. The site explores the breathtaking literary scope of eco-fiction: a diverse field of stories which includes environmental and nature themes in Black and Indigenous fiction, literary fiction, science fiction, fantasy, solarpunk, and more. Diversity and inclusion are central to eco-fiction, and the goal of this article is to introduce the site to climate literacy educators. While [Dragonfly](#) is a resource for all readers, it also features reviews and other materials for K-12 teachers.

Since I began the site more than ten years ago, it has been important to me to offer content freely, promote authors with no charge, and share news about narratives dealing with climate change, biodiversity, conservation, extinction, pollution, the state of our waters, diaspora, colonialism, and more. Such narratives raise awareness of climate and ecological concerns while also offering inspiration and courage to face these challenges. Dragonfly is evolving and has grown considerably since I first launched it in 2013. With a database of more than 1,000 books, more than 150 author interviews, and over 100 excerpts of works, the site has remained highly collaborative in nature. Together, we are able to do more to protect our planet's ecosystems and share climate literacy lessons through stories. Such education starts with young children, which is why Dragonfly includes recourses helpful to parents and teachers alike.

## How to use Dragonfly

Dragonfly offers plenty of content for people of all ages curious about eco-fiction and its cultural work. Readers can search for books in two ways: the **Search For** widget on the top-right menu or the [Book database](#). Readers can also use pull-down menus in the top menu bar to find more information. Because so much data has accumulated throughout the years, readers can find a [Tour Guide](#) in the About section, which acts as a road map to the major sections at the website:

- [Book database](#): Every book post added to the site is auto-added to the database via advanced fields, such as book title, author name, publication date, type of book, category, and genre. Categories include audience types, such as all, YA, teen, and children's stories. The database has filterable headings, but readers can only sort by one heading at a time. Click **Show entries** at the top of the database and select **All** to view all entries at once. With over 1,000 book posts so far, the database is a work in progress. It isn't exhaustive, but aims to include as many pieces of eco-fiction that time allows.
- Book posts: Most of the 1,000+ books auto-added to the database are generated from plug-ins to show a short description, book cover, and ordering information. Occasionally, authors provide the information directly. For many years, Dragonfly used Goodreads to generate book information. Currently we use a plugin by Booknet.ca's BiblioShare, which pulls data from LibraryThing, WorldCat, and

BookFinder. Readers can search through the database to select a book title, author, publication date, type of book, audience, or genre to find what you are looking for.

- Book and film reviews: Dragonfly publishes book reviews written by contributing authors. To read a few book and film reviews, [click here](#).
- Author interviews and spotlights: Dragonfly features many authors, all with free promotion. The Dragonfly Library is no longer accepting submissions but has over 100 [book excerpts](#) shared by authors. The [World Eco-fiction Series: Climate Change and Beyond](#) features notable novels and anthologies from authors writing in various genres and styles on topics such as science, climate change, ecological studies, animals, water, and much more. Featuring authors from around the world, this spotlight series is designed to be inclusive, allowing audiences to virtually visit different places, ideas, and learn about other cultures. Many spotlights come from children's book authors. The [Indie Corner](#) spotlights new authors who either self-publish or publish with small literary presses.
- [Links and Resources](#): For readers wanting to branch out away from the site, this link provides a list of publishers, journals, projects, and bloggers with similar themes.
- [Film and Video](#): Since early 2015, Dragonfly has added a [song of the week](#) to a YouTube environmental playlist. Since 2014, we have maintained a list of [films](#) related to climate awareness and ecology.
- [Games](#): A new list of eco-games joins Dragonfly!
- [Turning the Tide](#): A list of resources for children, teen, and YA audiences.

## Resources for Teachers

### What Is Eco-fiction?

Our definition of eco-fiction builds on the criteria proposed by Jim Dwyer in [Where the Wild Books Are: A Field Guide to Ecofiction](#) (2010). According to Dwyer, ecofiction includes narratives in which:

- The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history.
- The human history is not understood to be the only legitimate interest.
- Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation.
- Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text. (Buell qtd. in Dwyer, 2010, p. viii)

Today's eco-fiction is a sprawling category that spans over twenty distinct genres (see [this short guide](#)), each of which brings its own tools for using fiction to raise climate and ecological concerns.

Dragonfly.eco offers teachers a background into eco-fiction across a range of formats, from books and films, to songs, games, and other media. In all eco-fiction works, the ecological elements are deeply integral to the story, even if used as symbols or metaphor. Some writers refer to these strategies of foregrounding nature in stories as the project of *rewilding* the novel, framing eco-fiction as, to use Dwyer's term "wild books."

### Turning the Tide

From the beginning, Dragonfly.eco included stories for younger audiences. About midway into the life of the site, I began the [Turning the Tide](#) section. It was inspired by a conversation with author Edan Lepucki about her short story "There's No Place Like Home." In the story, youth are represented as a *stuck generation*, because the environmental climate and catastrophe made it impossible for them to grow and live the full lifespan of a human life. They remain children until they die. In the story, youth are also called the *youngest generation*. Lepucki's haunting idea has its equivalent in the real world too. Youth activists like Vanessa Nakate, Greta Thunberg, Xiuhtezcatl Martinez, Bana Alabed, Emma Gonzales, David Hogg, Mari Copeney, Payla Jangid, and hundreds of thousands more are today's "youngest generation" of leaders who mobilize others to stand up for social and climate justice.

While Dragonfly is not an exhaustive resource on children and teen fiction, it is a stepping-off point for teachers wanting to find more information. While a lot more work needs to be done, [Turning the Tide](#) links to:

- [Resources and links](#): The main section includes links to articles and resources about climate literacy and climate lit for kids.
- [Children's bookshelf](#): a list of children's book posts at Dragonfly. The website's focus is on adult fiction, but about 70 books are currently featured for children up through middle-grade.
- [YA/teen bookshelf](#): a list of teen and YA fiction at the site. 165 books currently fall into the YA/teen category.
- [Book reviews for younger readers](#): thanks to Kimberly Christensen, who reviews most of the younger reader books, Dragonfly currently houses about 30 reviews for fiction aimed toward younger audiences.
- [Games](#): a growing list of eco-games, whether video or tabletop, with highlights for children-appropriate games, including age guidelines.
- [Films](#): a list of movies, television shows, and documentaries relating to environment and nature. Highlights indicate children's shows and age levels recommended by movie rating or [Common Sense Media](#).
- [Spotlights](#) (interviews and features): includes reviews of, or interviews with, the following authors, arranged chronologically, most recent to earliest:
  - Arlene Mark, *The Year Without a Summer*
  - Jewell Parker Rhodes, *Paradise on Fire*
  - Todd Mitchell, *The Last Panther*
  - Cynthia Zhang, *After the Dragons*
  - Sonia Meyers, *We Have Something to Say!*
  - Jennifer Harrington, *The Spirit Bear*
  - Bijal Vachharajani, *A Cloud Called Bhura*
  - Emma Reynolds, *Amara and the Bats*
  - Ryan Mizzen, *Hedgey-A and the Honey Bees*
  - Clete Barrett Smith and Dave Matthews, *If We Were Giants*
  - Sita Bramachari, *Where the River Runs Gold*
  - D.G. Diver, *Juniper Sawfeather* collection
  - Ned Tillman, *The Big Melt*
  - James Bradley, *The Buried Ark*
  - Jennifer Dance, *White Feather* collection
  - Edan Lepucki, "There's No Place Like Home"
  - Marissa Slaven, *Code Blue*

- John KixMiller and team, *Protectors of the Wood* series
- Jo Marshall, *Leaf* series
- Gary Robson, *Who Pooped in the Park* series
- Austin Aslan, *The Islands at the End of the World*
- Sarah Holding, *SeaBean* trilogy

Looking ahead, I am inspired to add more climate literacy materials at Dragonfly by increasing the content at Turning the Tide. The opportunity to partner with the Center for Climate Literacy is a thrill as well because I am getting older and I understand my privilege in growing up in a world where scientific reality and literacy were a given. Looking back, I realize that reading books, walking through forests to learn the names of trees by their leaf types, and always learning more about the world's environmental complexity made me the person I am today. Today's children need climate literacy education more than any other generation before them. I am inspired that this work is accelerating everywhere, including at the University of Minnesota's Center for Climate Literacy, and I look forward to extending some of my time toward building children's climate literacy.

## References

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