



# Mother Earth

*Poems to celebrate the  
wonder of nature*

LIBBY HATHORN

ILLUSTRATED BY  
CHRISTINA BOOTH

**TEACHERS RESOURCES**

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## Teachers Resources by Robyn Sheahan-Bright

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# INTRODUCTION

*Nature's all around ...*

*Let's dream of what we can become, Mother Earth, I am your son. Food and shelter, climate, water, Mother Earth, I am your daughter.*

This is a thoughtful and beautifully illustrated collection of nature poems to celebrate the wonder of our precious world, from beloved children's author Libby Hathorn and award-winning illustrator Christina Booth.

It is also a lament for some of the damage done to the environment and a clarion call to children to recognise that, and to prevent such degradation in future. The poem 'Mother Earth', which ends the collection, makes this dual theme very clear.

*Mother Earth* encourages children to connect with nature and with each other in meaningful ways.

## THEMES & CURRICULUM TOPICS

Several themes are covered in this book which might be related to the Australian Curriculum, including:

### HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES (HASS)

Several themes and topics are relevant to the following Curriculum Area:  
<<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/humanities-and-social-sciences/hass/>>

### OBSERVATION OF NATURE

**Discussion Point:** This book celebrates the beauty and the intriguing features of nature. It encourages children to observe nature, to reflect on the uniqueness of flora and fauna and to express their feelings about nature in poetic form. Invite students to discuss what aspects of nature they appreciate.

**Activity:** Take classes outside the classroom and invite students to look closely at the natural world around them. Discuss what they observe.

**Discussion Point:** 'Nature-Deficit Disorder' is a term given to the fact that children today are often quite removed from their environment. The amount of time spent watching television or looking at phones and tablets also distracts them from time spent outdoors. This has the effect of making them ignorant of both flora and fauna, and ultimately uncaring about their environment, which has potentially devastating

future effects on our global environment. It can also affect their health, and lead to anti-social behaviour. Invite students to discuss how much time they spend in nature. What elements of nature do they enjoy? What distracts them from really appreciating nature?

**Discussion Point:** The four natural elements considered by western culture to be essential to life are earth, air, fire and water. The ancient Greeks believed that these four elements made up everything; the theory was suggested around 450 BC, and it was later added to by Aristotle. The elements are explored or referred to in several poems, and the title of this book is *Mother Earth*. What symbolism is attached to these four elements? What happens, though, when these elements become unbalanced?

**Activity:** Pour some water from a hose or a jug onto a firm surface and watch it tracking its way, breaking up and forming tributaries and finally pooling. Reading a poem about water would be an excellent activity to engage in after this. Then you might also list five water-saving tips and illustrate them. And then, you might write your own water poem.

## ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

**Discussion Point:** Several poems reflect on the need for environmental protection, for example, 'Iceberg's Secret: Antarctica' (p 11), 'Planet Earth Needs You For ...' (p 12), 'Bushfire Baby' (p 18), 'Tree Planting Rap' (p 20), 'Say Rubbish to Rubbish!' (p 24), and 'Beach Blues' (p 9) ends with: 'and sixty-six thousand people have taken all the shells'. Invite students to reflect on issues such as pollution, land degradation, and climate change. Then invite them to write a poem about one of these topics.

**Discussion Point:** Current natural disasters are often attributed to climate change which is a hotly contested topic. Greta Thunberg, the teenage environmental activist, has become a key figure in this debate. Research this topic and discuss. [See **Bibliography**.]

## CONNECTIONS AND COMMUNICATION

**Discussion Point:** The book contains poems 'Only Connect' (p 2) and 'We're All So Connected' (p 22) which reflect on connecting with each other and with nature. 'Twitter and Tweet' (p 28) is a subtle commentary on the false communications we often have via social media, instead of via in-person communication. The message is that communication entails real feelings and empathy and understanding.

**Discussion Point:** 'Valley Under the Rock' (p 26) reminds students that First Nations Peoples were here well before Europeans and that they have a deep connection to Country. As a mark of respect for this understanding and knowledge some Australian place names have had their Indigenous languages names restored

to them – Fraser Island is now known by its Batjala name: K’gari, and Ayers Rock has long been known by its Pitjantjatjara name: Uluru. Encourage students to recognise Indigenous words for towns and suburbs and landmarks and to discover their meanings. Research and discuss.

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE & LITERACY

This is relevant to the following Curriculum Area:

<<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/english/>>

The text of this book might be studied in relation to the following aspects:

**Activity:** Various forms of poetry are included in this book and might be discussed as models for student writing. Students might be asked to identify both the devices used and the themes explored in each poem. [See **Worksheet 1** containing a template for this exercise, which could be further added to and developed.]

**Activity:** Give students writing prompts to encourage nature writing. For example:

a) Ask them to write a poem in which each line begins: ‘I went for a walk in the bush and ...’ The poem will evolve into a list of a range of things we might see, hear, feel, touch or smell in the bush.

b) Begin another poem with the words: ‘After the flood, I...’ This might contain useful ideas for recovering from a flood and helping one’s neighbours.

**Activity:** Study different forms of poetry. Use the poems in this book as examples of different poetic forms and techniques, and encourage students to experiment with that form or technique, eg ‘Storm Came’ (rhyme), ‘Tree Planting Rap’ (rap). Then write a poem about nature in acrostic, or haiku or cinquain, or another form. [See **Bibliography** for relevant websites.]

**Activity:** Several words used in these poems are less common than others. Test your students’ understanding of these words and their usage. [See **Worksheet 2**.]

**Activity:** Test your students’ comprehension and interpretation of the meaning of these poems by asking them questions about the written and visual text.

**Activity:** Write a poem based on the model of ‘Oh Moon of My Delight’ (reproduced below). But first observe the moon every night for a week, or at least for one night. Here’s the poem, by the 11th-century Persian poet Omar Khayyam, about the moon looking for the writer of the verse, who is no longer in the ‘Garden’ of Earth:

*Ah, Moon of my Delight who know’st no wane,  
The Moon of Heav’n is rising once again:  
How oft hereafter rising shall she look  
Through this same Garden after me – in vain!*

Model your poem on this poem, or write a four-line poem about how the moon looks and how it makes you feel.

**Activity:** Poems by Heart – Take one of the poems, eg ‘Tree Australia Tree’ and see if you can commit it to memory and perform it. You might prefer a shorter poem like ‘Bush Picnic’ or ‘Platypus You!’ Do this singly and then in pairs and then as a group. Talk about the differences you hear in each person’s recitation.

## VISUAL LITERACY

This is relevant to the following Curriculum Area:

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/the-arts/visual-arts/>

The visual text of a book combines with the written text using the various parts of the book’s design and illustrations, as explored below:

**Activity:** The **cover** of a book is an important part of its message. This cover depicts two children on a green hillside, one in a wheelchair, holding umbrellas and pointing upwards to an image of the Planet Earth swathed in clouds. Flowers, insects, and a bird complete the picture. What did this combination of images suggest to you? Design your own cover for this book.

**Discussion Point:** The **endpapers** depict scenes in nature but also carry four Haiku poems. The **title page** features insects and flowers. The **format** of the book is square. How does the **design and format** of the book influence your reading of it?

**Activity:** The **medium or style** employed is digital artwork. There is an innocence to the somewhat retro style in which these images are portrayed. The children seem almost timeless and the colour palette is in bold primary colours reminiscent of early readers. Colour or collage a sketch based on one of these images. [See **Worksheet 3.**] [See also **Illustrator’s Notes** below.]

**Activity:** Invite students to draw, paint, or collage an image to accompany a poem they have written above. Create a classroom mural using all the images.

## CREATIVE ARTS

There are many creative activities suggested by this text:

1. Invite students to create a **Nature Observation Journal** in which they can record interesting facts about nature and draw images as well. [This is a tradition which dates back centuries as keen walkers often kept a diary of their findings.] When they are exploring nature or simply taking a walk, encourage students to take notes for ideas which might develop into a poem. Simple two-word descriptive observations might spark a poem. [See

**Bibliography** for ideas.]

**2. Create a garden in the school grounds** and introduce students to the ecosystem which might develop in such a nurtured microcosm of nature. Research and discuss ways in which you could create a wildlife-friendly garden. Then find a corner at school where you might be able to do it! What should you plant in it and why?

**3. Invite students to create a diorama** of a particular landscape that each student is familiar with or has enjoyed exploring.

**4. Create a poster** to advertise this book.

**5. Create a Book Trailer** to promote this book. [See **Bibliography**]

## LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

**Activity:** Research the topics above online.

## FURTHER TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH

- Research the work of Libby Hathorn. Compare this to her other books.
- Research the work of Christina Booth. Compare this to her other books.
- Students might research this book in comparison to reading other picture books and poetry collections such as those listed in the **Bibliography**.
- Investigate any other topic not covered in these notes which you consider is suggested by this text.

## CONCLUSION

These lyrical poems are written by a masterful poet and illustrated in a winsome and lusciously suggestive style. They pay homage to the wonders of nature and encourage children to really look at the environment in which they live, to care for it, to protect it, and to cherish it.

## AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

Poetry has always fed my imagination and served endlessly and astonishingly to inspire me. It's probably no surprise many poems from my childhood have remained with me through my lifetime. Or that I've written poems all my life to mark my 'going' and that many, many of my texts for children's picture books are written entirely in verse.

A Chinese sage and poet, Li Po, described writing poetry as trying to 'trap heaven and earth in the cage of form' and I believe poets are always trying to 'trap' their life and their feelings, their sense of wonder and sometimes dismay. For myself, poems can appear as if from the air and I snatch a line down, 'trap' some words on a page – be it in a notebook I carry, on my iphone or my computers – fearing it might evaporate otherwise.

Covid lockdowns provided much more uninterrupted time for me as a writer, to sit and dream to observe my small world closely, especially the garden and nearby beaches and boardwalks. A flurry of nature poems found me and the idea of a collection began to take shape as ***Mother Earth*** made her presence known especially with the signature poem 'We are all so connected' ... I reached back then for favourite nature poems I'd written earlier like 'Valley under the Rock' and 'Rainforest Song' and 'Tree Australia Tree' to make the collection complete.

I see this collection as a cry from the heart... to accept and value poetry as a significant part of our lives – a distillation of the best language has to offer; as a kind of super-power in enhancing our emotional intelligence – spiritual and intellectual.

As a writer and poet over the decades of change I've experienced, I realise that poetry stands as a constant, to express in so many diverse ways just what it is to be human. So on offer with ***Mother Earth*** is poetry to capture heart and mind; with Christina Booth's marvellous artwork 'lighting up' each page we've presented poetry and art to delight, to defy, to deepen meanings and to help us deliberate about ourselves and our world.

And as a reciter of poetry I commend the practice and the opportunity for kids to commit some of it to memory too – as they say – to learn some poetry 'by heart'.  
*Libby Hathorn, 2023.*

## ILLUSTRATOR'S NOTES

As a visual storyteller, I am influenced greatly by my environment and the world around me. I work with many different mediums depending on the style and feel of the book I am illustrating and use traditional illustration methods on paper as well as using those techniques digitally. The illustrations for ***Mother Earth*** have been created digitally.

My process begins by immersing myself in images that are mentioned in the text, doing research to find the right place, species or environment. I collect images, colours and textures as a sensory scrapbook and create digital mood boards to help me find the starting point to creating the right illustrations for the book. I also collect a large amount of reference images, especially when working with specific things mentioned in the text.

I then play with drawing and sketching, finding interesting ways to view an image, practising and learning about what I'm drawing. I consider space, texture, and light, and where text will sit within the image and how I can add my own visual narrative to the story. I consider the pagination and how the reader will travel through the book visually, connecting images and text to make the journey through the pages exciting, interesting, and visually tactile.

Once the rough images are discussed and approved, I then create the final illustrations. I use art software designed for artists, allowing for a more natural, intuitive approach to my work.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Libby Hathorn** is an award-winning author and poet of more than eighty books for children, young adults, and adult readers. Her recent picture book *No! Never!*, written with her daughter Lisa Hathorn-Jarman, won the CBCA Children's Picture Book of the Year Award, Younger Readers, 2021. Translated into several languages and adapted for both stage and screen, her work has won honours in Australia, the United States, Great Britain and Holland. She is the recipient of the ABIA Pixie O'Harris Award, 2022, and the Lady Cutler Award, 2020, for distinguished services to Australian children's literature. In 2014 she won The Alice Award, a national award given to 'a woman who has made a distinguished and long term contribution to Australian literature'. In 2017 she won the Asher Award, a peace prize, for *A Soldier, a Dog and a Boy*.

Libby is a keen educator who has lectured part-time at Sydney University and is devoted to being an ambassador for poetry anywhere and everywhere. She has been a National Ambassador for Reading and often acts as a judge for various literary prizes, including the NSW Premier's Literary Awards.

See: [www.libbyhathorn.com](http://www.libbyhathorn.com)

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

**Christina Booth** is the award-winning international author and illustrator of over 20 books for children. A CBCA Honour Book Award winner for her picture book *Kip*, Christina has also won numerous Notable Book Awards, and the Environment Award for Children's Literature for her books *Welcome Home*, and *One Careless Night*. Trained as a teacher and artist, Christina has always loved nature, books, art and reading. She works from her studio on the small island of lutruwita (Tasmania).

See: <https://www.christinabooth.com/>

# WORKSHEET 1. POEM ANALYSIS

Poem/ page	Device	Theme
'Only Connect' 2		
'A Thought ...' 4		
'Under a Tree' 5		
'Lying on My Back All Alone on the Grass Staring Upwards' 5	Playing with format (poem is printed upside down)	
'The Wonder Thing' 6	Riddle poem: What is it?	
'Out the Back' 8		
'Beach Blues' 9		
'Iceberg's Secret: Antarctica' 11	Alliteration 'glistening giant'; 'bruising blue'.	Melting icecaps.
'Five Bush Senses' 12	Playing with format (poem is printed upside down)	
'Five City Senses' 13		
'Planet Earth Needs You For ...' 12		
'Tree Australia Tree' 14	First and second person	
'Bush Picnic' 16	Rhyme	

'Platypus You!' 17		
'Bushfire Baby' 18		Koalas at risk from bushfires.
'Rainforest Song' 19		
'Tree Planting Rap' 20	Rap poem	Plant trees and look after the environment.
'Nature's For Real' 21	Contains the repeated line 'nature's all around'	
'We're All So Connected ...' 22		
' "Say Rubbish to Rubbish!" ' 24	The illustration 'becomes' the poem	Don't litter and look after the environment.
'Cane Toad Chorus' 25		
'Valley Under the Rock' 26		First Nations knowledge of Country.
'Garden Australia' 28		
'Twitter and Tweet' 28		Social media commentary.
'Storm Came' 29	Rhyme	
'Mother Earth' 30	Repetition/rhythm	

'Earth', 'Cloud', 'Food Chain', 'Web in Rain', appear on front and back endpapers	Haiku	
'Blue Planet Ours' appears on reverse back endpaper		

# WORKSHEET 2. WORDS AND MEANINGS

Write a synonym or explain the meaning of these words which appear in these poems, in which the context should assist students in understanding.

Earthiness (p 2)	
Coruscant (p 11)	
Sumptuous (p 14)	
Curious (p 17)	
Unique (p 18)	
Edible (p 23)	
Toxic (p 25)	
Descent (p 26)	
Myriad (p 28)	
Hobnobbing (p 29)	
Bountiful (p 30)	
Ecosystems (p 30)	

Then write sentences using some of these words:

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# WORKSHEET 3. COLLAGE THIS IMAGE

This image by Christina Booth might be enlarged on a photocopier to A3 to allow for more space to work on.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES

**Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright AM** operates justified text writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. In 2011 she was the recipient of the CBCA (Qld Branch) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Queensland, in 2012 the CBCA Nan Chauncy Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Australia, and in 2014, the QWC's Johnno Award. In 2021 she was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia.