

Children and Nature in a Picture Book “Our Big Home”:

An earth poem–ecocriticism

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Abstract—All the living creatures and nature cannot be separated, especially humans as one of the living creatures. Humans depend on the environment as the source of their lives. The purposes of this research are: (i) to reveal the medium of what binds the children and nature, (ii) to portray the bonds between children and nature. This research is focused on the way to raise the awareness of fundamental nature issues using a picture book. The ecocriticism is applied in this research. The qualitative research methodology is employed in this research based on the interpretative philosophy. Techniques of data analysis are collecting data, note taking and ecocriticism analyzing. The source of data is a picture book entitled *Our Big Home: An Earth Poem* by Linda Glaser as the author and Elisa Kleven as the illustrator. This book was published in 2000. *Our Big Home: An Earth Poem* depicts the bond between children and nature in its poems and illustrations. The result showed that the researcher found out the bonds between children and nature and what bind them. The relationships are keeper and provider, caretaker and home, lifesaver and life-giver. The binds are Earth, Parent, Other Children, Children’s Stuff.

Keywords—*ecocriticism; children; children’s literature; nature*

I. INTRODUCTION

Earth, if we heard the word of ‘Earth’ people is still debating about the Round Earth and the Flat Earth. Whether the Earth is round or flat, it does not matter, but the problem is how to protect the Earth from destruction. The destruction here is kind of the things that can make Earth suffers. It does not scream when it is destructed but people who live in there that will cry or feel the negative benefits.

Nowadays, Earth is in a critical condition, which means Earth in a state that people keep destroying the Earth toward the way such as illegal logging, littering, expanding the settlement, etc. Some experts, such as Hayes have been conducting researches to save the Earth from the destruction [1]. The studies that they conducted are various; some of them are using their knowledge of making the Earth survive from the current development and using the methods to prevent the human from destroying the Earth.

Children are the most prominent figure to teach about environmental issue. The awareness of this issue is needed to

teach to them from the early days. One of the studies could help to raise awareness about environmental issues are by using children literature. Picture book is a good choice for children to learn about environmental problems. They could learn and develop their ideas by reading the book. They could bonding finely and develop their sense of awareness by using the picture book as medium [2].

The bond between the children and nature are significantly important for this research. By looking at their bond, there will significant medium in order for this bond to happen. The medium is the picture book. What is the picture book then? The picture book itself has a story, the first one made to read aloud. The first picture book considered in the history of literature is *Orbis Pictus* [3]. There are many variations of picture book, the pictorial poem is one of its variations. Picture book is a book, typically for children, in which the illustrations are more important (or even important than) the words in telling the story [2].

II. CHILDREN LITERATURE

Children literature is a term use to refer to literary work that created from the reader age under 18. Since a long time ago, the children were entertained by several form of stories such as fairy tale, folk tale, fables and so on. All of this is parts of children literature. However, the development of it nowadays creates many kind of new genres.

A. Picture Book

As one of the books for children, the definition given to picture book is a typical book created for children with illustrations and words in it. Usually, the existence of drawings is way more important than the words. On the inside of picture book, the illustrations are put on every page or in the every facing page.

Even though at the beginning of it is creation, the aim of the picture book is for children as the primary readers, and nowadays there are picture books created for upper elementary school and middle school. Also, it is a definition is more expanded than before.

B. *Nature in Picture Book*

The definition of nature is referring to the entire natural, physical and material world. It also refers to the phenomenal in physic world. The term of nature itself could also points to the plants, animals, weather, energy or geological processes. It also linked to “natural environment” or in the other words “wilderness”, which is also mean untouchable location by the hands of human or still persist despite intervention by human [4].

In this article, it will use the component of ecosystems to conduct the study. The elements that will be used are water, sun, soil, living organism such as animals and plants, atmospheres such as weather and climate. In *Our Big Home: An Earth Poem*, the components of ecosystems include the water, sun, weather (rain), climate (daytime and nighttime), and animals.

C. *Our Big Home: An Earth Poem*

Linda Glaser is quite famous as an author as one of poet and author for children book. Along with Lisa Kleven as her illustrator, she created a beautiful picture book entitled, *Our Big Poem: An Earth Poem*. This picture book talks about the connections of children, plants, animals, and nature.

In this book, the author and the illustrator presented a much broader vision of the home as the planet Earth. In the case of the poem, Glaser was successful enough to lead the children toward the crucial role they have for caring about their environment. Glaser is also known for her achievement as an award-winner author of several non-fiction books. Those are written about conservation, nature, and animals, and they are dedicated for children.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. *Research Design*

Since the research requires data from the book, the method that used during the process of the research is the descriptive qualitative method. This method was chosen because the data used for the analysis are in the form of words and sentences from the book. Important keywords, events, and settings from the book were crucial in conducting this research. The research first read the book to understand what the content of the story is. Later on, this research will write down the question of what happened in the book. The analysis showed the result of the read and how it connected.

B. *Instruments of Data Collection*

The analyzed data in this research should be obtained by applying the instrument, which is called note taking. Note taking is a system for recording information, which includes the last name of author, page, and related information. In this research the researcher note down the information and essential points from the book.

C. *Procedures of Data Collection*

The procedures of collecting data are:

- Classify the text that important thing such natural environment and its bond with the children.
- Analyze the poem and its illustration, which helps children gain consciousness of natural environment.
- Conclude the result of analyzing based on the data analysis.

D. *Technique of Data Analysis*

To analyze the data, the researcher read the book first. After reading the book, the collected data, which is the bonds between the children and nature analyzed using ecocriticism according to Glotfelty's theory. Later on, the researcher reanalyzed the data to get the results of how to build children's consciousness toward the natural environment by reading this book.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. *The Bonds Between Children and Nature in the Book*

Applying ecocriticism in the *Our Big Home: An Earth Poem* picture book is aimed to seek the bond between the children and their nature. In the text, poems and illustrations are described as a unity. The relationship between children and nature can be depicted in the poems and the pictures in the book. The author described the environment as the shared-blessings for all living creatures, but the illustrations strengthen the relationship between children and nature. *Our Big Home: An Earth Poem* consists of 10 poems and their drawings. The poems and the pictures depict the bond and the activity between living creatures and nature, especially children. The bonds, of course, have a connector.

1) *Earth*: Earth is a place where the living creatures and the natural environments coexisting. From the ecocriticism's view, Earth is the most important thing, which makes it, existed. The Earth in their whole life binds children and nature. The children should give more attention to the Earth, the place they live. On Earth, there are so many natural environments, or we can say that as 'a gift.' When the children were born, they will be facing with all natural environments. For example, oxygen or we can call it 'air,' when the children were born, the first thing they will do is breathing. They will breathe the oxygen. The oxygen itself is a gas that living creatures need for life. If the children were born in the other planets, they would not be alive since there will not be any oxygen in there. But, nowadays, we know that Earth is having some issues that we must concern.

In Earth, there is also water for drinking and fish to live, and soil for planting the plants to eat and for ground animals to live. Without those natural environments, children cannot grow up to become an adult a birth a child anymore. So it is necessary for the children, and of course, their parents keep or take care of the natural environments on Earth.

In the book, the author clearly describes how the Earth binds the children and their nature. She emphasizes the word 'here on Earth' in every stanza of her poem to make a clear view of how Earth binds the children and nature. In the stanza

1, the poem is telling about the widest natural environment, water. Without water, all the living creatures, especially humans and more specifically their children cannot be alive. Stanza 1, line 1 says that ‘We share the water’ which means, not only humans or children who need water, but animals and plants also need it. And of course, sharing the water needs a special concern of it to prevent the water from the pollution. In stanza 1, there is also a word ‘our big blue home’ which emphasizes the unpolluted water, because we know that polluted water is not blue anymore.

In the book, we can see the illustrations, which are showing to the reader the bright and clean seawater, the sparkling of the sky, the greenery of the forest. Those illustrations increase the awareness of the children who read the book so that they will keep the nature.

2) *Parents:* As the first person children get in touch, a parent is the first connector for them and nature. When the mother is giving birth, the early nature she bound with the children is air. After that, she is breastfeeding the children. Milk is the first food, which is provided by them naturally.

As the children grow up, the parent keeps binding them with nature. They will bring their children to feel the warmth of the sun, the fresh of the seawater, to see the beauty of the sky, the dark of the night, the smell of the rain, and the wind blows. The parent will teach their children to nurture the plants they planting. And as the time passing, the children will grow to become an adult and later will do the same for their children in the future.

In stanza 1, line 5; stanza 2, line 6; stanza 3, line 4 the words “you and me” described as the parent and their children. In stanza 1, the first line described that all living creatures share the water. Therefore the line 5, is described the parent and the children from the word “you and me” which mean the parent and the children share water, and this also implies parent bind their children with the nature, ‘you’ as the children, and ‘me’ as the author’s point of view as an adult or parent.

In stanza 2, the poem described the rain they share. In line 6 “It brings fresh water to you and me.” mean parent and children sharing the rain, ‘you’ as the children and ‘me’ as the author’s point of view as an adult or parent. It also means human and others (animals and plants) sharing the rain, ‘you’ as the others and ‘me’ as the author’s point of view as a human. Meanwhile ‘freshwater’ means the rainwater is unpolluted or good for the children health.

A parent also becomes the children first teacher who increases their awareness of nature. To prevent the fundamental issues, the parent can read the book for their children while they show the illustrations of the book. They also should tell their children about how good nature is if it does not pollute. And according to the figures in the book, there were none of the natural issues shown because the author and the illustrators want to show to the reader how good the nature without the pollution or other issues is.

3) *Other children:* The researcher analyzes Our Big Home: An Earth Poem using ecocriticism to see how the other children bind the children with nature. In the book, we can see

the illustrations, which are shown to us about the children play along with other children in their natural fields. They are holding hand appreciate the warmth of the sun, and the fresh of the air.

In stanza 6, line 5 “It brings fresh air. It blows kids’ hair” is described as the connection between children and nature. ‘Fresh air’ means the wind or air is safe for the children. The children will not play at the outside if they do not feel good with the wind. The word ‘kids’ hair’ means the children are playing with the other children outside. Sometimes, if the weather is good, their friend will ask them to play out. And it accidentally makes the other children as the connector between children and nature.

The ‘fresh air’ also means the air or the wind is unpolluted. If we see what happened on Earth nowadays, the atmosphere contains dust and some pollution from the factory or vehicle emission. This is not good for children, animals, and plants.

4) *Children’s Stuff:* Children’s stuff is one of the bonds between children and nature. Children’s playthings such as games and toys bind them with nature. Hide and seek, propellers, kites, and build a castle from the soil or sand are the favorite playthings of the children.

In the book, we can see the illustration of the children who use the wind to play. Wind as the natural things on Earth is beneficial for children to play. Four children use the wind to play, both of them flight their kites, one of them spin her propeller and one of them sail their boat.

After applying ecocriticism, the researcher found out the binds of the bond between children and nature, which are Earth, parent, other children, and children’s plaything. The four of them bind children and nature in the children whole life. Children will not be separated from the four binds above.

Comparing the reality and the book, researcher found that in the book, children in the book are playing outside because the air is fresh. If we look at the reality, there are not many children who are playing in the outside nowadays; they are busy playing with their mobile phone since the air or the weather is not good anymore. In stanza 6, the word ‘fresh air’ supported the comparison, not only fresh, the air or the wind also spread the new seeds which can grow on the fertile soil later.

B. The Bond of Children and the Nature

1) Keeper and Provider

The stanza 1 mentions about water and some living creatures such as humans, animals, and plants. Water is the most abundant natural resource. Water as a source of life is indeed essential for humans, especially children.

*We share the water.
We splash and slosh and swim in water.
And, of course, we all drink water.
Whales, dolphins, manatees,
Penguins, palm trees, you and me.
We all share the water, here on Earth,
our big blue home.*

This part of the poem clearly described the bond between water and ‘we’ (humans, especially children). Glaser described the line 1 as that all the living creature share the water. Line 2 support line 1. Line 3 is the emphasis on the bond between children and water. She emphasized the line 3 using the word ‘of course’ to show the reader that all the living creature, especially children drink the water. Drinking water is a daily needed for children. So, children need to keep the water clean before drinking it. Children, of course, cannot drink the water if the water is unclean and they also cannot play in the polluted water. The illustration also showed to the reader how blissful the children play on the clean water.

The stanza 4, Glaser described the soil where the seeds grow. The planted seeds will provide the plants, trees, vegetables, and fruits, but of course, they are needed the human, especially children nurture to prevent them withered.

*And there’s dirt all around,
our earth, our ground.
Soil where seeds wait
and where trees are born,
where earthworms live and rabbits dig.
Earth that holds life,
dirt that feels good under my feet.
We all share the soil, here on Earth,
our big life-holding home.*

Line 1-4 of this stanza emphasized the growth of the seeds and trees. The illustration showed to the reader a child who eats a fruit. The fruits are coming from the trees as the return because humans kept them.

The stanza 5 and its illustration depict the bond between children and nature. The Earth’s air that children breathe every day is the gift from nature.

*And there’s air everywhere,
far, far away, and right next door.
We all breathe Earth’s air. Ahhh....
Doesn’t it feel good to breather?
People, lizards, ladybugs,
oak trees, sweet peas, even weeds.
We all share the air, here on Earth,
our big fresh-air home.*

In line 4, Glaser emphasized the bond between children and nature. It has the deep meaning of the thankful feeling. The illustration showed us the clean air, unpolluted air.

Comparing the literary meaning in the poem and the reality, the researcher found that in the poem, the author emphasizes the unpolluted nature. In stanza 1, last line, the word ‘our big blue home’ emphasize the unpolluted water and the illustration also support it. Nowadays the plastic bottle polluted the ocean, and the water is not blue anymore. The researcher is willing to raise the awareness of the children and to the reader of this research and the picture book later, so the children and the reader will keep taking care of the ocean or water. If the bond of the children as keeper fulfilled, the reality will be the same

as in the book is. As the result of analysis above, the bond between children and nature is the keeper and the provider.

2) *Caretaker and home*: The repetition ‘our home’ on every last line in every stanza emphasized that children as the caretaker of the home (Earth) should be cared for and kept their home clean, safe and cozy.

our big blue home (stanza 1, last line)
our green, growing home (stanza 2, last line)
our big sun-warmed home (stanza 3, last line)
our big life-holding home (stanza 4, last line)
our big fresh-air home (stanza 5, last line)
our big whirling home (stanza 6, last line)
our big home under the sky (stanza 7, line 9-10)
our home under the big blanket of night (stanza 8, line 9-11)
our big moonlit home (stanza 9, last line)
our big life-giving home (stanza 10, last line)

Comparing the reality and the poem, the researcher, found that our truth is not as good as the author describes in her poem. Earth as a home nowadays is not taken care of by the humans’ hands as the caretaker. This research is hoped that children who read the book later will become the excellent caretaker of their home (Earth).

The illustrations also showed thus children feel at ease in their home. They look joyful playing in their natural home called Earth. The children also treat animals and plants as their family, and they took care of plants and animals well.

3) *Lifesaver and life-giver*

There is a particular relation between nature and children in this book. Nature as the gift of the God in this world can be called as the life-giver for the living creatures. Water, air, sun, wind, and soil are the greatest gift that humans and other creatures got. Without them, we cannot live. Nature as the life-giver mentioned in stanza 10, last line in this book. Glaser wrote that ‘our big life-giving home’ meaning that the Earth nature gives us all life.

In every poem’s stanzas, there is repetition “We all share.....” which means ‘We’ or children are sharing that gift to the other living creatures such as animals and plants. Sharing the natural gift means they care with other living creatures’ life which means they can be called as the lifesaver.

We all share the water, here on Earth, (stanza 1, line 6)
We all share the rain, here on Earth, (stanza 2, line 7)
We all share the sun, here on Earth, (stanza 3, line 7)
We all share the soil, here on Earth, (stanza 4, line 8)
We all share the air, here on Earth, (stanza 5, line 7)
shaping our night. We all share the moon, (stanza 9, line 4)
We all share life, every one of us, (stanza 10, line 7)

In stanza 10, the title of a lifesaver for the children depicts from the poem in line 4. It sounds ‘I feel alive. We all have that aliveness.’ which means the children care about all the living

things. The illustration also supported the idea of children as the lifesaver, and they are befriended with the animal.

The bonds between children and nature are various. Nature as the source for supporting children life, cannot treat itself to survive in this Earth with full of natural environmental issues. They need children's hand to nurture them and to use them very well. Ecocriticism helps the researcher to find out the bonds between children and nature, both in the poems and the illustrations. After binding the literature and physical environment or nature (ecocriticism), researcher revealed the bonds between children and nature.

V. CONCLUSION

Four factors bind the nature and children. The earth as the home of children and nature binds them right after the children were born. As what nature definition is, at the moment when the children were born, they are already binding with nature by their parent, because nature often refers to as 'birth.' The bond

between children and nature is using the personality growth from the perspective of the humanistic approach according to Roger. As a keeper, children will not fulfill their duty as must be to protect the nature if they do not have a good personality and nature as a provider will not provide any resource if it is not nurtured by humans

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