

# Ecoliteracy Book Clubs: Learning for Classrooms and Communities

## Recommended Reading for Ecoliteracy

### Children (ages 5-9)

**The Sea, the Storm and the Mangrove Tangle**  
By Lynne Cherry

**She's Wearing a Dead Bird on Her Head!**  
By Kathryn Lasky

**Something Beautiful**  
By Sharon Dennis Wyeth

**An Island Scrapbook: Dawn to Dusk on a Barrier Island.**  
By Virginia Wright-Frierson



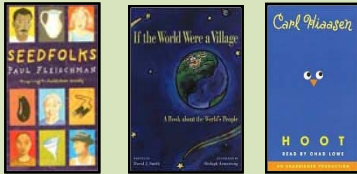
### Young adult (ages 10+)

**Seedfolk**  
By Paul Fleischman

**Hoot**  
By Carl Hiaassen

**Jackie's Wild Seattle**  
By Will Hobbs

**If the World Were a Village: A Book about the World's People**  
By David J. Smith



### Adult Non-fiction

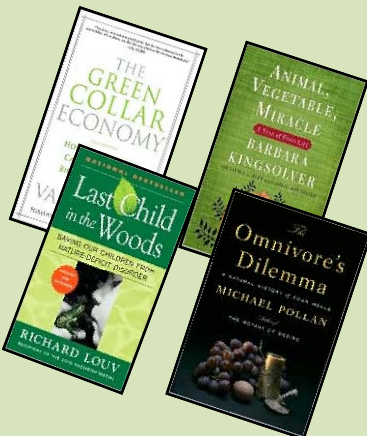
**Big Coal**  
By Jeff Goodell

**Green Collar Economy**  
By Van Jones

**Animal, Vegetable, Miracle**  
By Barbara Kingsolver

**Last Child in the Woods**  
By Richard Louv

**The Omnivore's Dilemma**  
By Michael Pollan



## The Need for Ecoliteracy

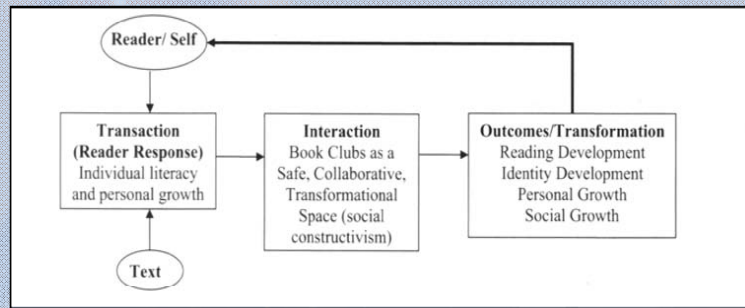
Ecological literacy, or ecoliteracy, involves understanding the ecosystems of our planet and the ways in which humans can more efficiently and sustainably live within those systems. Increasingly, the decisions and choices that individuals, communities and policy makers are facing often involve highly complex scientific, economic, and social factors. Unfortunately, the level of discourse and literacy among citizens (seemingly at all levels of society) is characterized by misinformation and a lack of critical questioning and reflective skepticism.

We are facing this reality at a time when book reading among all youth and adults is declining. Some research shows that reading ability declines as children age (Scharber, 2009). Declining literacy among youth has been attributed to "alienation and disempowerment due to traditional curricula, pedagogical practices and culturally irrelevant texts" (Polleck, 2010, p. 51).

## How Book Clubs May Help

Book clubs can be used to help address issues of literacy in general, ecoliteracy and the development of critical thinkers. Literature can be used to develop and enhance literacy and social and emotional growth (Polleck, 2010). The dialog and social constructivism of book groups enhances the transformative potential of reading. Figure 1 provides an explanation of how book club participation has transformative potential. Book clubs are places in which we can re-imagine the social world (Twomey, 2007), a place to challenge the dominant thinking of society. Engaging with texts that enable readers to explore the intersections of the environment, culture, and social and economic justice can help to develop the thinkers and actors our society needs, both now and in the future.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Book Clubs (Polleck, 2010)



Book clubs should be responsive to the needs and preferences of their participants. Online book clubs can help bridge the old (reading a book) with the new (digital interaction). Since young people spend six minutes a day reading for pleasure and 50 minutes engaged with video games or on a computer (Scharber, 2009), the use of technology should be incorporated in the promotion of ecoliteracy.

## Tips and Resources for Practice

Key points for successful book clubs (from Polleck, 2010 and Brevig, 2006)

- Participant ownership – the clubs should be participant-centered and led. Participants choose the materials and organize themselves into self-selected groups.
- Use instructional materials or texts that match participants' diverse cultural backgrounds
- Use methods that are collaborative (shared facilitation responsibility, decision-making)

The Role of the Teacher

- Acts as a meta facilitator (a roving observer who encourages students to actively facilitate, and offers strategies to consider)
- Creates space for authentic conversation

Book clubs can read the same book, or just works in the same genre, or thematic area. Feel free to mix media – books, films, plays (not necessarily different versions of the same work, but separate works that complement each other).

Explore the use of video chatting and blogs to bring people into conversation who cannot be in the same physical location at the same time.

Resources

<http://www.readinggroupchoices.com/readinggroups/leaders.cfm>  
<http://www.spaghettbodyclub.org/>

## References and Further Reading

- Brevig, L. (2006). Engaging in retrospective reflection. *The Reading Teacher*, 59(6). 522-530.
- Hoffert, B. (2006). The book club exploded. *Library Journal*, July. 34-37.
- Polleck, J.N. (2010). Creating transformational Spaces: High school book clubs with inner-city adolescent females. *The High School Journal*, 93(2). 50-68.
- Scharber, C. (2009). Online book clubs: Bridges between old and new literacies practices. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 52(5). 433-437.
- Twomey, S. (2007). Reading "woman": Book club pedagogies and the literary imagination. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 50(5). 398-407.