

Received:

doi:

UDC:

Revised:

Accepted:

"ECOLOGICAL HUMANISM AND BUILDING ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS THROUGH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE"

Ivana Karova Koceva

Student, Faculty of Philology, Goce Delčev University, Stip,
R. N. Macedonia,
ivana.22219@student.ugd.edu.mk

Abstract. Children's literature is essential for every young reader. It fosters the development of many important skills and abilities, especially when it comes to educational literature that positively influences children's emotional and mental growth.

"Rasho Saves Planet Earth" is a children's book by author Mimoza Ristova, which tells the story of Rasho, a bear who advocates for social responsibility in protecting Planet Earth.

Through an engaging and entertaining story, the book teaches children about the importance of ecological awareness and the responsibility we all share in safeguarding our planet.

Key words: bear, planet, children, awareness, ecology.

1. Introduction

Macedonian children's literature is rich and diverse. It consists of children's books with didactic stories, fairy tales, and even fantastic worlds and science fiction with their unique characteristics, whose roots can be traced back to the realm of wonder, from which the magical qualities of the main characters have emerged. (Denkova, 2022: 23)

Children's literature is a special literary field that encompasses its own educational and artistic features. This literature is intended for a specific group of children and young people, which does not mean that it is not often welcomed by older readers as well. Children's literature is aimed at the youngest reader and listener, specifically for children starting from the age of two, beginning with picture books, and up to the age of fifteen, concluding with mandatory school readings and, of course, the free literature that young people choose to read on their own. However, this age limit of fifteen is not static, so we could say that children's literature includes a group of young people over the age of fifteen. Books, as an indispensable part of childhood and child development, play a significant role in the educational process. Books appropriate for children not only abound in knowledge and skills but also nurture children's emotional intelligence and creativity, which is why books should be accessible and available to every child.

When it comes to animals as characters in literary works, they have always been a fertile ground for writers throughout all times and stages of development, especially for children's authors. They can be used for many reasons, including raising environmental awareness and as a means of conveying moral messages. Such is the case with the didactic story in the book for young readers "*Rasho Saves Planet Earth*," a book that encourages human morality for greater self-awareness and protection of nature.

2. Ecological Humanism and Building Ecological Awareness through Children's Literature

The Earth is our home and our responsibility. Therefore, from a young age, it is essential to direct this significant need for its preservation towards the youngest readers through various educational readings. To protect the Earth from climate change, pollution, and other challenges we encounter, it is necessary to follow some simple and basic principles. Children's readings are always more appealing, instructive, and interesting to read when they include elements of wonder, fantastic elements, and so on. When it comes to fantastic stories, they have mostly begun to explore the hidden and unknown world of animals, birds, and insects. (Denkova, 2021: 27) When a book combines all these elements, it becomes a source of knowledge, fascination, and an interesting world for children to explore.

According to Vladimir Yakovlevich Propp, the fairy tale is a folk story in which the plot intertwines the real and the unreal, while the term "function" is defined as the character's action determined by its significance for the course of the plot. (Mladenovski, 2012: 36) For young readers, the most interesting and appealing aspect is when the main characters in the fairy tale, such as in this one, acquire human traits. They speak, sing, laugh, and perform tasks that, in reality, are only suitable for humans. Giving human traits to animals in books is an artistic method known as anthropomorphism, which brings animals to life by attributing emotions and behavior similar to those of humans. (Burke & Copenhaver, 2004: 210) This allows animals to have typical relationships with other animals and humans in the book, creating a dynamic world, as this method helps young readers identify with the characters and understand their motives and actions.

Since anthropomorphism expanded into children's literature, it began to be used for educational purposes. In this case, the child can learn a lesson from the story that will teach them important life lessons and how to relate to their environment.

An example of this is the bear Rasho in "*Rasho Saves Planet Earth*" by author Mimoza Ristova, a fantastic children's book in which, deep in the Green Forest at the school for brown bears, Rasho is the smartest bear and the best student of Professor Medo Ednokamchev. Through the portrayal of animals (bears) as lively characters, children can learn to assess what is good or bad, which actions are valuable, and which ones deserve condemnation.

Animals of all kinds are a fertile ground for storytellers. They can be used for many reasons, including raising environmental awareness and conveying moral messages, as seen in Aesop's Fables or stories about "tricksters," which are often some of the earliest stories children hear.

Therefore, stories based on familiar scenarios create a high level of interpretation. Moreover, if texts connect new and prior knowledge for children, it creates a process of drawing conclusions. (Baratz & Hazeria, 2012: 34)

This book covers themes such as recycling, conserving and producing energy, using sustainable energy sources, and protecting animals and nature, etc. The part of the book where the bears, having awoken from their deep winter sleep, recount their dreams from the long winter is particularly engaging. Through Rasho's dream, the educational part begins, addressing the dangers threatening Planet Earth. Here, Rasho explains the dangers of ozone holes:

"Our beautiful planet is wrapped in the blue sky that protects it from the cold of space. A thin layer of this blue sky, about the thickness of an oak leaf, contains ozone and is therefore called the ozone layer. Ozone is similar to the oxygen we breathe, provided by Earth's plants. However, ozone is actually composed of one and a half times as much oxygen. Despite being essentially oxygen, ozone is not good to breathe. Fortunately, it is not found on the surface of the Earth where we live," Rasho explained. (Ristova, 2018: 28)

Ozone holes represent a serious ecological and health risk because when the layer is damaged, ozone holes form, allowing more UV radiation to reach Earth. This can have severe consequences for human health, wildlife, and the environment. Although international measures have been taken over the years to prevent this danger, ozone holes remain a serious threat.

Through this book, young readers are given the opportunity to understand one of the most important ecological lessons: protecting Planet Earth, as our planet faces many challenges that climate change and threats to biodiversity. To protect Planet Earth, each of us must contribute in our own way. One way is to reduce the use of fossil fuels and replace them with renewable energy sources, such as solar or wind energy. Given that electricity generation from fossil fuels is a major source of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, preserving biodiversity is intrinsically linked to how we supply our energy. (W. Brook & J. A. Bradshaw, 2015: 703)

Protecting and improving the environment at both local and global levels has become a contemporary priority. The world is changing under the influence of scientific and technological development, and as part of the consequences or exposure to these changes, continuous development of the educational system aimed at preserving Earth is necessary.

Climate change is a global problem related to significant changes in Earth's temperatures and weather conditions. This process has been particularly noticeable in recent decades and is caused by human activities that increase the levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. This issue is addressed in the book increase the risks of, specifically in a letter from a polar bear to the professor:

"At the North Pole, we see the effects of global warming caused by the greenhouse effect with our own eyes. The eternal ice is melting rapidly. It is said that the consequences for us, polar bears, will be dire. Research has shown that Earth's temperature is rising year by year. It is predicted that the increase in temperature will lead to a sudden melting of the polar ice caps in a few years, which for us means disaster, extinction. We will have no place to stand, and in the end, we will all drown. Our species will be wiped out as if it had never existed. For the foreseeable future, no one will remember us, polar bears, whiter than the polar world. The thought of this, dear professor, makes my whole fur stand on end, as if lightning had struck me." (Ristova, 2018: 41)

The term "Anthropocene," derived from the words "human" and "new," refers to a proposed geological epoch that began between 1950 and 1954. The concept of the Anthropocene was introduced at a scientific conference over 20 years ago, in response to the accelerated environmental degradation caused by factors such as the burning of fossil fuels, the detonation of nuclear weapons, and the use of fertilizers.

The book also covers other disasters caused by humans as major destroyers of nature. Among these, nuclear bombs are among the most terrifying. Such explosions kill both people and animals, destroy all life, and the consequences are very severe.

Pollution from factory smokestacks, which constantly emit smoke and contaminate the air, is also significant, and this pollution extends to water: "This smoke contains gases that, if they come into contact with atmospheric water, create acid more acidic than rotten apples. This acid will be absorbed into the clouds and will fall as acid rain. This rain is very harmful to forests." (Ristova, 2018: 50)

The biological and chemical signals left by humans—invisible and intangible in our daily lives—may leave a mark more profound than the physical structures of the world's megacities. Thus, the dissolution of increased atmospheric CO₂ into the oceans is increasing their acidity. A significant drop in oceanic pH has already occurred, and further decreases are almost certain. The biological response is complex but will stress many calcifying organisms

such as corals or marine plankton that form the base of many food chains. Ocean acidification alone may substantially change marine ecosystems over the next century, contribute to global biodiversity decline, and thus produce a distinctive event in the future fossil record. (M. Williams, J. Zalasiewicz, A. Haywood & M. Ellis, 2011: 837)

Water pollution is recognized by the bears in this children's book as one of the major problems. As described, fishing is easier in a murky river, but if the river is polluted, the fish will be poisoned as well.

The role of humans in polluting the planet is significant, as is their contribution to global warming. Due to their large needs, such as heating or cooling spaces, heating or cooling food, driving cars, and so on, humans use natural resources like coal and oil uncontrollably. To obtain the energy needed for their excessive demands, they burn these resources. This burning releases large amounts of carbon dioxide, a direct cause of warming. Nevertheless, the bears in this book will eventually say that they believe in saving Planet Earth and that complete destruction will not occur:

"After all, aren't humans smarter than bears? They will soon realize and will have to change something in their behavior." (Ristova, 2018: 47)

Besides all the educational elements in this book, it also addresses the need for good human behavior towards the community, environment, animals, and everything else. Building a good relationship with bears as wild animals can be challenging but also an incredible experience. It is crucial to study their behavior and develop an appropriate relationship for easier interaction.

Moreover, when in nature, it is important to coexist with it to reduce the fear that might be caused in wild animals. Thus, the book concludes by emphasizing the need for changes in human behavior towards the animal and plant worlds, as humans are the main contributors to the destruction of nature:

"You need to change, people. You need to correctly understand your role on Earth. You need to learn to live more modestly and with less. To understand that happiness is not in luxury and wealth, but in modesty, kindness, sharing with others, and coexisting with nature. Every disconnect from nature brings misfortune. The material chain, the circle of nature, must be respected to avoid self-destruction." – Professor Ednokamchev continued in bear language while the bearologist simultaneously translated to human language. (Ristova, 2018: 96)

Although young readers may not know if the events in this story really happened, they believe in its norms and lessons, which, despite the magical elements in the book, are genuinely realistic.

Conclusion

The work "Rasho Saves Planet Earth" by author Mimosa Ristova brings a new freshness to the world of children with its educational pages. Through its inevitable educational value, the author has managed to present these topics in a fun and accessible way for every child, teaching them about recycling, protecting the planet and nature, energy production, etc. Such authors are always well-informed about animals and nature to convey interesting details and information to children through their books, especially when the characters are wild animals as in this work and carry an ecological message to the whole world.

Ecological humanism and the development of ecological awareness is an approach that merges the principles of humanism and ecology, with the aim of creating harmony between humans and nature. This concept is based on the idea that humans, as rational and moral beings, have a responsibility not only to themselves and to other people but also to all living beings and natural systems that support life on Earth. Ecological humanism promotes a sustainable lifestyle that respects and protects the ecosystem, emphasizing the need for an ethical approach in our relationships with nature.

Ecological books for children help readers develop ecological awareness and take concrete steps towards environmental protection by changing personal habits. This reading material teaches children about the importance of ecological awareness and the responsibility we all need to have for protecting our planet. This responsibility is instilled from a young age, thanks to school benches, good teachers, and, of course, quality reading materials.

References

- Baratz, L., & Hazeira, H. (2012). Children's Literature as an Important Tool for Education of Sustainability and the Environment. *International Electronic Journal of Environmental Education*, 2(1).
<https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/89002>
- Brook, B. W., & Bradshaw, C. J. (2015). Key role for nuclear energy in global biodiversity conservation. *Conservation Biology*, 29(3), 702-712.
- Burke, C. L., & Copenhaver, J. G. (2004). Animals as people in children's literature. *Language Arts*, 81(3), 205-213.
<https://cdn.ncte.org/nctefiles/store/samplefiles/journals/la/la0813animals.pdf>
- Mark, W., Jan, Z., Alan, H., Mike, E. (2011). The Anthropocene: a new epoch of geological time, 837. <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/epdf/10.1098/rsta.2010.0339>
- Денкова, Ј. (2022). Научната фантастика во македонската книжевност за деца и млади, Македоница литера, Скопје.
- Денкова, Ј. (2021). Фантастиката во македонската книжевност за деца и млади, Муза, Скопје.
- Младеноски, Р. (2012). Наратологија, Универзитет „Гоце Делчев“, Штип.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301748759_Naratologija
- Ристова, М. (2018). Рашо ја спасува планетата Земја, Просветно дело, Скопје.