

tection priority over economic growth. The effects of genetic engineering and of computers on the environment remain to be experienced. The effects of global warming, should this process continue, cannot be predicted with any certainty. A further loss of biodiversity seems inevitable.

There have been a very few successes: elimination of lead from gasoline; the cleanup of air and water in Pittsburgh and London; the development of model public transportation and waste recycling in the new city of Curitiba in Brazil.

This book has added to my knowledge and corrected some of my prejudices. In his epilogue, McNeill tells us, "It is impossible to know whether

mankind has entered a genuine ecological crisis. ... By the time we do know, it will be far too late to do much about it." He hopes for new and cleaner energy regimes and for formal education of girls in poor countries, since "female education is the strongest determinant of fertility." History and ecology "need to integrate with one another." Yes. Read this book and you will better understand the history of the world's environment.

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You Are the Earth, From Dinosaur Breath to Pizza from Dirt

By David Suzuki and Kathy Vanderlinden. 1999.
Greystone Books, Douglas & McIntyre, Vancouver. 128 pp., illus. \$24.95.

I like books for young people. They're quick to read. They present clear ideas. They convey just the right amount of information to grasp basic concepts. And they make you want to learn more.

You Are the Earth is no exception. It's a dynamic book, featuring lots of great photographs, illustrations, annotated diagrams, cartoons, activities, glossary and quiz, complementing clear text that makes every possible connection — some I would never have thought of — between *Homo sapiens* and the natural world.

The chapter on air, for example, talks about argon gas. It tells us that the 30 zillion or so argon atoms we exhale with every breath travel through our neighbourhood within minutes, and that within a year they spread around the planet, with about 15 of them returning to our own noses. We also learn that argon atoms never die or change, meaning, as the book points out, that "thousands of years ago, an Egyptian slave building the pyramids breathed some of the same argon atoms that later Joan of Arc, Napoleon, and his horse breathed. And some of those were argon atoms exhaled by dinosaurs that lived 70 million years ago." It's a mind-boggling and playful notion.

Yet the book isn't all fun and games. It also points out the negative impacts humans have on the envi-

ronment. The chapter on energy tells us that plants and animals in the wild use and pass on energy in a continuous cycle, but that humans use energy in a linear manner that leads to waste. The chapter on soil addresses topsoil loss, factory farming, and the use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers. The chapter titled "Depending on Our Relatives" illustrates biodiversity (including the bacteria we host on our own bodies) and emphasizes how human activities are killing off species up to 10 000 times faster than ever before in the history of the planet.

But the book isn't all doom and gloom either. The last chapter provides encouragement. It tells stories of young people who are making a positive contribution to the environment. It gives a list of things kids can do to help the natural world.

And it provides hope: "Our survival depends on remembering who we are. We are the Earth — part of the air, water, soil, and energy of the world; beings with love in our hearts, life in our souls, and a kingdom of kin at our doorstep. It is up to us to protect those things so that they will be around for many generations to come."

If, as a result of reading the book, readers end up believing these things and taking action, it will have fulfilled its purpose.

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