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## Introducing and Raising Awareness of Climate Change in Kids Minds

A science at heart, I was always learning more about the nature and specifically about the man-made issues that are harming natural habitats and threatening life as we know it on the planet. When it comes to taking climate action for the UN Sustainable Development Goal 13, I believe that taking the initiative to educate youth about environmental sustainability holds an equal importance as taking action yourself. It is crucial to raise awareness in kids about climate change starting from an early age.

Eager to sound the alarm about climate change and global warming, I wrote, at age 15, and published a children's book called *Still Waiting* in the hope that once kids understand what's happening and how urgently change is needed to stop it, they'll be willing to take the necessary steps to protect the planet's future. I am a stronger believer in the idea that people need to feel the problems first, and according to studies (Heisey & Kucan, 2010; Shatzer, 2008), stories in picture book have power to help us feel.

My interest in the environment started when I was a little girl. My interest in animals actually originated from reading books, watching my favorite TV show *Wild Kratts*, and taking care of my three guinea pigs. Then when I got older, I became more aware of issues with the environment and climate change threatening the lives of animals, and I started to grow an interest in that as well.

*Still Waiting* is a fictional story featuring an endearing and adorable animal family of a young polar bear cub named Ollie who is raised by his mother at the North Pole. Through this book, I explained how the actions of humans have disrupted this innocent polar bear family's natural habitat in a simple way that children can understand. At the conclusion of *Still Waiting*, I added some extra tips for readers and educators, hoping that children will be moved enough by Ollie's story that will want to know what they can do to make a difference.

*Still Waiting* has been extremely well-received. The New Jersey Council for Social Studies has recommended this book and over five school districts in New Jersey have already incorporated my book into their curriculum, impacting more than 1500 children. Although I have developed my talents and interests in writing and science through the Scholastics Art And Writing Contest,

New York Academy of Sciences, and the Curious Science Writers, I didn't expect that what I share can be this much helpful to the community. I am amazed that so many schools are interested in my book, and I am grateful that so many kids will be able to read my work and also have a chance to be influenced by it.

For the purpose of reaching a larger audience, I made the early decision to write my book in two languages: English and Spanish. Spanish was chosen in particular due to the overwhelming number of kids from hispanic families that were unable to attend online school during the peaks of quarantine. Because of this, kids who are of Spanish origins were able to read and learn from my book. In addition to this, the Long Branch School District in Monmouth County of New Jersey has incorporated my book into their school curriculum and would buy this book for each of their classrooms. I have personally visited their school and met some teachers and students. Seeing the elementary kids in person being so curious and invested in my book really moved me.

During times of quarantine, meeting in person held risk factors, so I had met with kids online through libraries or school classrooms. I did a book talk with them, which included discussions and activities. Through this process, I learned the curious and questioning nature of kids, and their eagerness to learn more about climate change. I also learned the significance of my role in this: me as only one person could greatly impact and motivate a kid into taking climate action. Because of this, my goal is to continue using my book as a means to educate children on environmental sustainability and to write more books, envisioning *Still Waiting* as my first in a series of books about global warming and climate change, with each book focusing on a different species.

Heisey, N., & Kucan, L. (2010). Introducing science concepts to primary students through readalouds: Interactions and multiple texts make the difference. *Reading Teacher, 63*(8), 666-676.

Shaatzter, J. (2008). Picture book power: Connecting children's literature and mathematics. *Reading Teacher, 61*(8), 649-653.