

Pourquoi Tales

Why do dogs bark? Why is it dark at night? How did the elephant get its trunk? Folktales that answer these kinds of questions are called pourquoi tales. Pourquoi [poor-kwa] is the French word for "why," but these entertaining tales are found all over the world.

Pourquoi tales

- explain how something in nature came to be
- can be about animal traits, nature, or people's customs
- feature animals or natural forces that have personalities and can speak
- often take place in the distant past
- sound as if they are being told aloud.

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WHY THE SUN AND THE MOON LIVE IN THE SKY

by Julius Lester

IN THE TIME OF THE BEGINNING of beginnings, everything and everyone lived on earth. If you had been living in those times, you could've sat on your porch in the evening and watched the Sun, the Moon and the Stars taking a stroll and chatting with all the neighbors.

The Sun had many friends, but his best friend in all the universe was Water. Every day Sun visited Water and they talked about this and that and enjoyed each other's company, which is what friends do.

There was one thing wrong with their friendship, however. Water never came to visit Sun at his house. That hurt Sun's feelings.

He could've held onto his hurt feelings and gotten angry. But that's not the way to treat your feelings when they're hurt. You feel better if you talk to the one who hurt them. Maybe Water didn't know that he had hurt Sun's feelings.

"Why don't you ever visit me?" Sun asked Water.

"I would love to visit you," Water replied, "but your house might not be big enough for me and all of my relatives. I wouldn't want to force you out of your house. If you want me to visit, you must build a very, very, very, very, very large house. I need a lot of room."

Sun went home and told his wife, the Moon, that they had to build a very, very, very, very, very large house. His friend, Water, was coming to visit.

They set to work immediately. He sawed. She nailed. He hammered. She measured, and they built a very, very, very, very, very large house indeed.

The house was so large that it took a whole day to walk from the front door to the back door. The house was so wide that when you stood on one side, you couldn't see the other side.

Sun went and told Water that he could come visit now.

The next morning Water flowed up the road. "Is it safe to come in?" he asked when he got to the house.

"Please enter," said Sun and Moon, opening the door to the house they had built.

Water began flowing in. With him came the fish and all the other water creatures.



Soon the water was knee-deep. "Is it still safe for me to come in?"

"Of course," Sun and Moon said.

More water flowed in. Soon it was halfway to the ceiling. "Do you want more of me to come in?"

"Of course," said Sun and Moon, rising to the ceiling so they wouldn't get wet and have their lights put out.

More water and more water and more water flowed in. Sun and Moon had to go sit on the roof.

"Do you want more of me to come in?" asked Water.

Sun and Moon said yes, not knowing what they were saying.

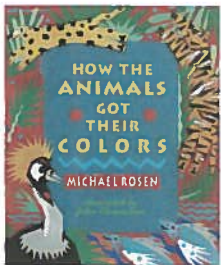
More and more Water poured in. With him came more and more fish and whales and sharks and seaweed and crabs and lobsters. Water covered the roof of the house and got higher and higher.

The higher Water rose, the higher in the sky Sun and Moon had to go to stay dry.

Finally Sun and Moon were so high in the sky they weren't sure how to get down. But they liked being so high up and looking down on the world.

And that's where they've been ever since.





Tiger

by Michael Rosen

A meeting is taking place on Great Mountain.

Tiger says Tiger's the best, the strongest, the fastest on earth. Thunder says Thunder's the best, the loudest, the fiercest on earth. Echo says Echo's the best, the toughest, the cleverest on earth. Dragon says Dragon's the best, the mightiest, the hottest on earth.

"Yes, yes, yes," says Tiger. "I know all about you. But the thing that makes me the best is I'm not afraid of anything."

Tiger, Thunder, Echo, and Dragon cannot decide who is the greatest.

"Let us have a contest," says Tiger. "In this contest we will see which of us is the most terrifying. Whoever can make the other three cry, 'Stop, no more!' is the winner."

They all agree, and Tiger laughs.

"Now I'll show them."



Tiger paws the ground, opens his jaws, shows every tooth in his head, and roars. Thunder vanishes into thin air and sits among the clouds. Echo rolls down Great Mountain, across Blue River, up Little Mountain and is gone. Dragon coils and twists her long body and tail and squirms her way up into the sky, out of reach of Tiger's claws.

No one cries, "Stop, no more!" Tiger is left pawing the ground and roaring to himself until no roar is left. Thunder, Echo, and Dragon come back.

"Tiger loses," they say.

"I know, I know, I know," says Tiger.

Now Thunder comes forward, looks around at the clouds, and flies off to the deepest, darkest one in sight. From that cloud come the most horrendous drumming and deafening rolls.


Tiger can't bear it and shouts, "Stop, no more!"

But Echo listens to Thunder's rolls, waits for them at the top of Little Mountain, and rolls them back at Thunder. And Dragon just coils and twists her long body and tail and squirms her way up into the sky, up above Thunder's clouds where it is all quiet.



Thunder, Echo, and Dragon come back.
"Thunder loses," they say.
"I'm better than Tiger," says Thunder.
"I know, I know, I know," says Tiger.
Now Echo comes forward and waits.
"Well, aren't you going to start?" says Tiger.
"Going to start?" says Echo.
"Well, don't hang about," says Tiger.
"Don't hang about," says Echo.
"It's not me that's hanging about, you fool," says Tiger.
"You fool," says Echo.
"Who are you calling a fool?" asks Tiger angrily.
"Who are you calling a fool?" asks Echo angrily.
"You," says Tiger.
"You," says Echo.
"Just get on with it," roars Tiger.
"Get on with it," roars Echo.
"It's not my turn," says Tiger.
"It's not my turn," says Echo.
"It is," shouts Tiger.
"It is," shouts Echo.
"You're driving me mad," says Tiger.
"You're driving me mad," says Echo.
"Stop, stop, no more!" cries Tiger.
"Stop, stop, no more!" cries Echo.
"I agree," says Thunder.
"I agree," says Echo.
"Stop, no more!" says Thunder.





Echo looks around for Dragon, but Dragon has coiled and twisted up her long body and tail and squirmed away up into the sky, where not even an echo can reach. Sometime later, Dragon comes back.

"Echo loses," they say.

"Echo was better than Thunder," says Dragon.

"Better than Thunder," says Echo.

"That's true," says Thunder.

"Echo was better than Tiger," says Dragon.

"Better than Tiger," says Echo.

"I know, I know, I know," says Tiger.

Now it's Dragon's turn. Dragon coils and twists her long body and tail and pours fire out of her mouth. Thunder flees to a cloud, but Dragon follows and breathes fire on the cloud and dries it up until there is nowhere for Thunder to sit.

"Stop, no more!" shouts Thunder.

Dragon chases Echo down Great Mountain, across Blue River, and up Little Mountain until they meet going down the other side.

"Do you want to give up?" asks Dragon.

"Give up," says Echo.

"Stop, no more?" asks Dragon.

"Stop, no more," says Echo.

"And now for Tiger," says Dragon. But Tiger is hiding in the forest on the side of the Great Mountain. So Dragon coils and twists up her long body and tail and lets fly a huge jet of flame, setting that forest on fire. But Tiger is ready, and he runs from the fire that races through the trees. And Tiger could have escaped, but for the wind in the treetops that flies even faster. Just as Tiger is leaving the forest, the fire crackles overhead. Flaming branches of a tree fall on Tiger, just as he thinks he is free.

"Stop, no more!" shouts Tiger.

"I've won," says Dragon.

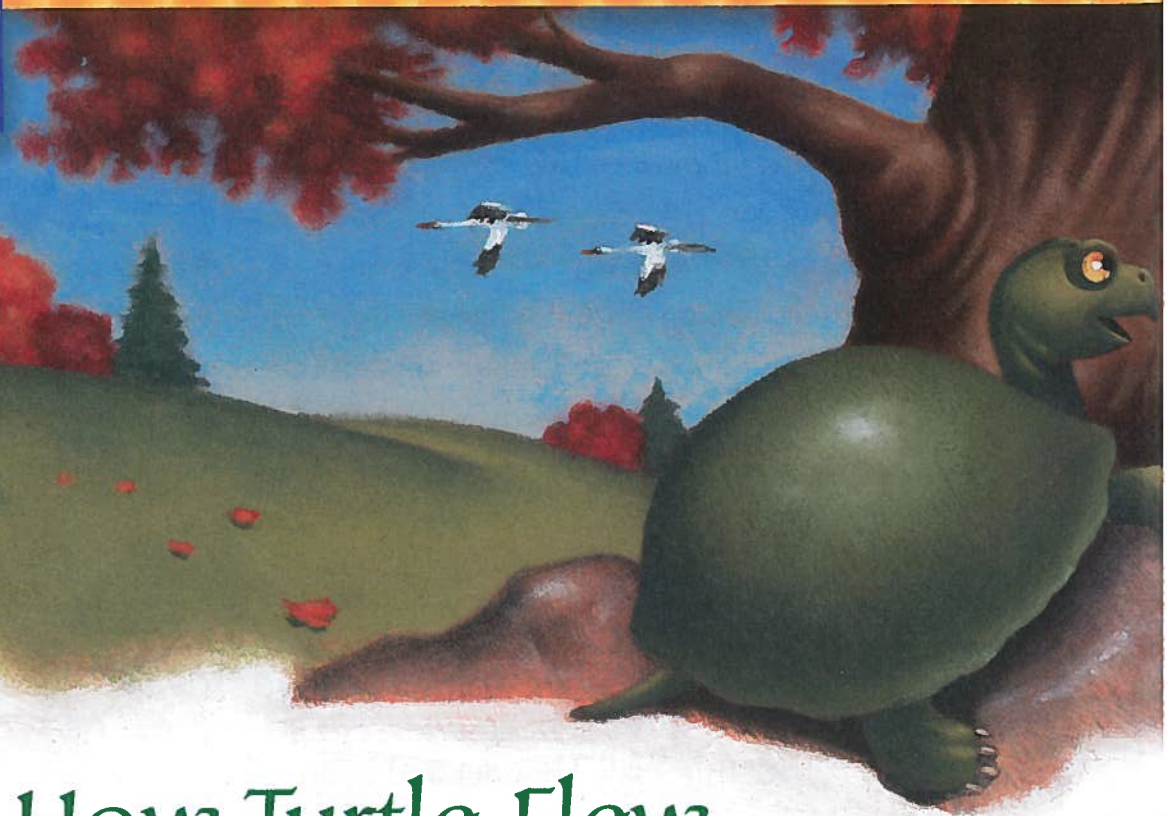
"That's true," say Thunder and Echo.

"Never mind that," says Tiger, "look at my coat, the branches have burned my fur."

"Yes," says Dragon. "You're all *stripy*."

"I know, I know, I know," says Tiger.





How Turtle Flew South for the Winter

by Joseph Bruchac

IT WAS THE TIME OF YEAR when the leaves start to fall from the aspens.

Turtle was walking around when he saw many birds gathering together in the trees. They were making a lot of noise and Turtle was curious. "Hey," Turtle said. "What is happening?"

"Don't you know?" the birds said. "We're getting ready to fly to the south for the winter."

"Why are you going to do that?" Turtle asked.

"Don't you know anything?" the birds said. "Soon it's going to be very cold here and the snow will fall. There



won't be much food to eat. Down south it will be warm. Summer lives there all of the time and there's plenty of food."

As soon as they mentioned the food, Turtle became even more interested. "Can I come with you?" he said.

"You have to fly to go south," said the birds. "You are a turtle and you can't fly."

But Turtle would not give up. "Isn't there some way you could take me along?" He begged and pleaded. Finally the birds agreed just to get him to stop asking.

"Look here," the birds said, "can you hold onto a stick hard with your mouth?"

"That's no problem at all," Turtle said. "Once I grab onto something no one can make me let go until I am ready."

"Good," said the birds. "Then you hold on hard to this stick. These two birds here will each grab one end of it in their claws. That way they can carry you along. But remember, you have to keep your mouth shut!"

"That's easy," said Turtle. "Now let's go south where Summer keeps all that food." Turtle grabbed onto the middle of the stick and



two big birds came and grabbed each end. They flapped their wings hard and lifted Turtle off the ground. Soon they were high in the sky and headed toward the south.

Turtle had never been so high off the ground before, but he liked it. He could look down and see how small everything looked. But before they had gone too far, he began to wonder where they were. He wondered what the lake was down below him and what those hills were. He wondered how far they had come and how far they would have to go to get to the south where Summer lived. He wanted to ask the two birds who were carrying him, but he couldn't talk with his mouth closed.

Turtle rolled his eyes. But the two birds just kept on flying. Then Turtle tried waving his legs at them, but they acted as if they didn't even notice. Now Turtle was getting upset. If they were going to take him south, then the least they could do was tell him where they were now! "Mmmph," Turtle said, trying to get their attention. It didn't work. Finally Turtle lost his temper.

"Why don't you listen to . . ." but that was all he said, for as soon as he opened his mouth to speak, he had to let go of the stick and he started to fall. Down and down he fell, a long, long way. He was so frightened that he pulled his legs and his head in to protect himself! When he hit the ground he hit so hard that his shell cracked. He was lucky that he hadn't been killed, but he ached all over. He ached so much that he crawled into a nearby pond, swam down to the bottom and dug into the mud to get as far away from the sky as he possibly could. Then he fell asleep and he slept all through the winter and didn't wake up until the spring.

So it is that today only the birds fly south to the land where Summer lives while turtles, who all have cracked shells now, sleep through the winter.





Write Your Own Pourquoi Tale

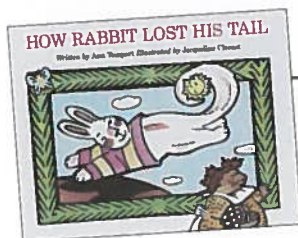
Become a storyteller. Think of something in nature that would be fun to explain in a creative way. It could be an animal, a geographical feature, or a force of nature. Decide how your “character” came to be the way it is. Write your story so that it sounds as if you were telling it aloud.

Tips

- Give your “character” an interesting personality.
- Use dialogue as well as action to show the personalities of all the characters.
- You might include a lesson in your tale: the character gets what it deserves in the end.
- Read your tale aloud to see if it has the effect you want.



More Pourquoi Tales



How Rabbit Lost His Tail

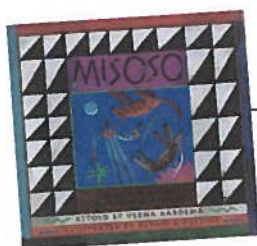
by Ann Tompert (Houghton)

This Seneca tale explains why Rabbit no longer has a long, beautiful tail.

Days of the Blackbird

by Tomie dePaola (Putnam)

Find out why the last three days of January are called the Days of the Blackbird in northern Italy.



Misoso: Once Upon a Time Tales from Africa

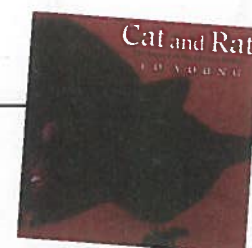
by Verna Aardema (Knopf)

These twelve stories explain animal traits, such as Elephant's tusks and Antelope's cough.

Cat and Rat: The Legend of the Chinese Zodiac

by Ed Young (Holt)

This legend explains why there is no Year of the Cat on the Chinese calendar.



Theme 6



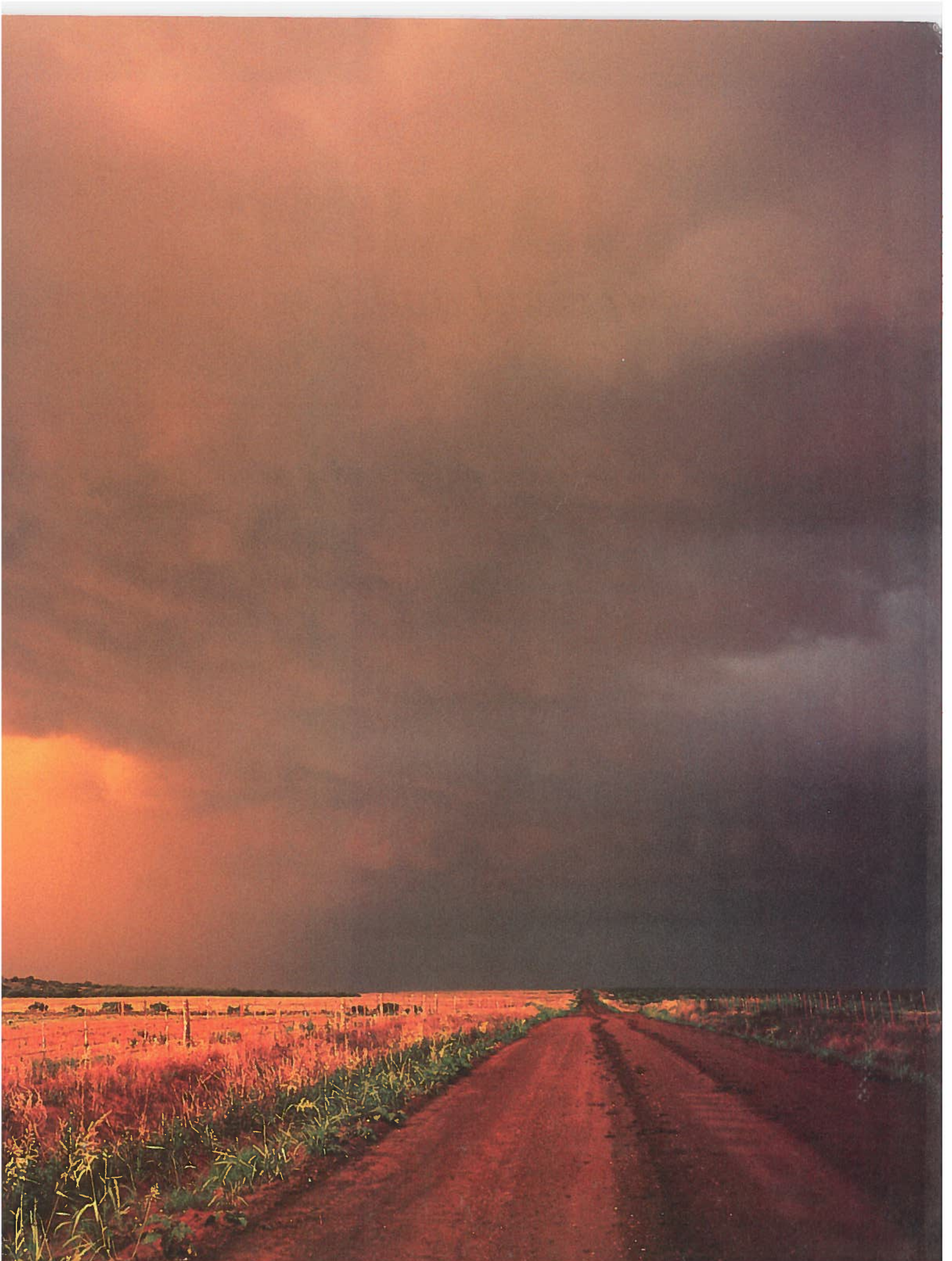
Nature:

Friend and Foe

Nature is a gentle rain
and winds that howl and blow,
a thunderstorm, a hurricane,
a silent field of snow.

from "Nature Is" by Jack Prelutsky

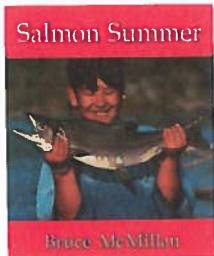




Nature:

Friend and Foe

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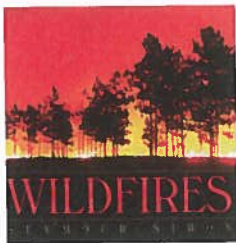
written and photographed by Bruce McMillan

Social Studies Link: Seal Island Kids 650



Student Writing Model A Research Report 654

The Rain Forest, by Brian K.

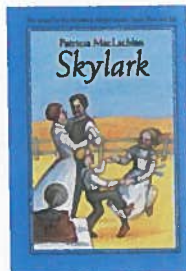


Get Set: Wildfires and the Cycles of Nature 658

Wildfires 661

by Seymour Simon

Career Link: Flame Busters 684



Get Set: Life on the Prairie 686

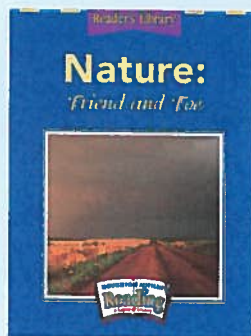
Skylark 689

*from the book by Patricia MacLachlan,
illustrated by David Soman*

Language Link: Rain Sayings 706



Taking Tests Writing an Opinion Essay 708



Reader's Library

- Peter's Harvest
- Landslides
- Whiteout

Theme Paperbacks

Snowshoe Thompson

by Nancy Smiler Levinson,
illustrated by Joan Sandin



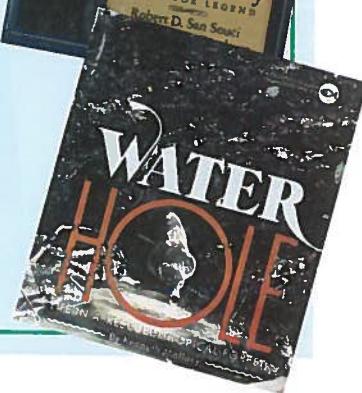
Kate Shelley: Bound for Legend

by Robert D. San Souci,
illustrated by Max Ginsburg



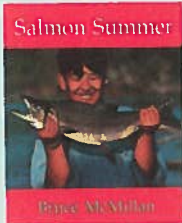
Water Hole: Life in a Rescued Tropical Forest

by Kenneth Mallory



Book Links

If you like . . .



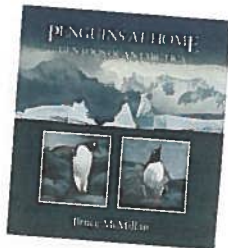
Salmon Summer
by Bruce McMillan

Then try . . .

**Penguins at Home:
Gentoos of Antarctica**

by Bruce McMillan (Houghton)

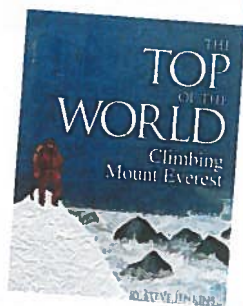
Visit the cold, barren landscape that is home to the Southern Gentoos penguins.



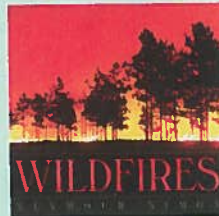
**The Top of the World:
Climbing Mount Everest**

by Steve Jenkins (Houghton)

This book lets you climb the world's highest peak without leaving your chair.



If you like . . .



Wildfires
by Seymour Simon

Then try . . .

Storms

by Seymour Simon (Morrow)

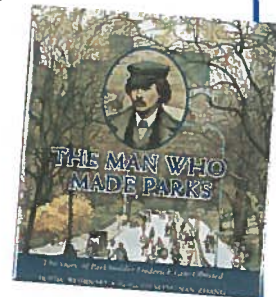
The author explains how thunderstorms, hurricanes, and tornadoes are formed.



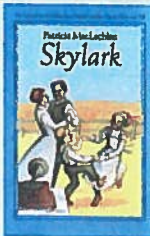
**The Man Who
Made Parks**

by Frieda Wishinsky (Tundra)

Landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted turned a muddy wasteland into New York City's famous Central Park.



If you like . . .



Skylark

by Patricia MacLachlan

Then try . . .

Sarah, Plain and Tall

by Patricia MacLachlan (Harper)

With eagerness and some nervousness, Anna and Caleb await the arrival of their new stepmother.



. . . If You Lived at the Time of the Great San Francisco Earthquake

by Ellen Levine (Scholastic)

Learn what it was like to be in San Francisco during the 1906 earthquake.



Technology



At Education Place

Post your reviews of these books or see what others had to say.

Education Place[®]

www.eduplace.com/kids

. . .

At school

Read at school and take a quiz.



. . .

At home

Read at home and log on to



www.bookadventure.org

