

## REVIEW

# A Review of “A Forest Child Adventure: Conquering Carbon Chaos”

## Review Reference

Allen, M.J. (2022). *A Forest Child Adventure: Conquering Carbon Chaos*.

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Every child has the right to thrive and live as part of a healthy planet. However, as human-driven climate change, extreme weather events and disaster impacts continue to escalate (Ripple et al., 2024), and fossil fuel extraction, use and emissions keep increasing (Guterres, 2024), the well-being of our planet and children’s futures decline. Climate change does not discriminate against any age group, and according to Watts et al. (2019) “children are the worst affected by climate change” (p. 1836). From this perspective, climate change can be seen as an issue of intergenerational justice, as children will carry the legacy of the impacts experienced today throughout their lives.

A heavy reliance on fossil fuels (Armaroli & Balzani, 2011) and limited development of climate change curricula characterised the twentieth century. During this period, our fossil-fuelled neoliberal society, politics and economies were supported by a capitalist marketplace through the ideology of perpetual economic growth, global migration, trade, travel and consumer consumption (Wilson et al., 2017). The petrocultures narrative limited climate change education discourse by dismissing and downplaying climate science, the socio-ecological impacts of fossil fuel extraction and the urgency of transitioning to renewable energy sources (Dahl et al., 2023). Fossil fuel hegemony has continued into the twenty-first century, hindering society’s ability to decarbonise the planet and transition to net zero by 2050 (Wright et al., 2022). In Australia, this has been accentuated by political indecision and constant lowering of climate action-oriented goals.

Contemporary climate change education must challenge and resist the neoliberal commodification of education (Gardner-McTaggart, 2025) to equip young Australians with the tools, knowledge and skills to transition to and flourish in a decarbonised society (Eaton & Day, 2020). Climate change education should be regarded as a fundamental right (Gibbons, 2014) and an essential part of the school curriculum, integrated through multidisciplinary frameworks (Rousell & Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, 2022) and holistic, regenerative pedagogical approaches that include the perspectives of First Nations and Indigenous Peoples (Wooltorton et al., 2025). Incorporating students’ voices, perspectives, experiences and imaginings (Gameau, 2025; Rousell & Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, 2022) into curricula would position students at the centre of the climate emergency, empowering them with agency. Through this approach, students learn about climate truths and can critically engage with societal aspects of climate change, including social



**Figure 1.** The front cover of Murray Allen's book entitled *A Forest Child Adventure: Conquering Carbon Chaos*. Permission Murray Allen.

and environmental justice and ethics (Ben Zvi Assaraf et al., 2025). Education in the Anthropocene needs to support and equip young people and their teachers to develop emotional resilience, enabling them to cope with the emotional ramifications of climate adversity, which can impact their mental health and well-being (Fox & Thomas, 2023; Jukes et al., 2024; Rushton et al., 2023). Hope-based pedagogies should also be embedded in climate change education to help children and youth navigate eco-anxiety and galvanise their commitment to social and environmental stewardship (Finnegan & d'Abreu, 2024).

Murray Allen's (2023) book (see Figure 1), *A Forest Child Adventure: Conquering Carbon Chaos*, is a timely resource designed as an educational tool that offers readers many opportunities to explore topics related to climate change, sustainability, well-being and active hope.

Allen has created a poetic and visually striking narrative picture book that combines environmental education with storytelling, offering readers, especially upper primary to high school students, an invitation to embark on a compelling exploration of the interconnected systems in our modern world. Allen's detailed hand-drawn sketches and layered prose draw readers into a forest where a child begins a quest to find the source of pollution, only to uncover the vast machinery of an industrialised civilisation.

The story begins with a whimsical tone, as smoke forms a cloud above the forest, prompting the forest child to investigate. What unfolds is not just a physical journey but a philosophical and emotional exploration of the global economy, consumerism and the consequences of modern lifestyles involving our societies' addiction and affiliation with carbon extraction. Allen's narrative is deeply rooted in systems thinking (Iacovidou et al., 2021), tracing the paths of production, consumption and waste to reveal how everyday choices contribute to environmental degradation.

One of the book's strengths is its ability to explain complex ideas like ecological footprints, embodied energy and carrying capacities in a way that younger audiences can understand. Another strength is the illustrations. While they might seem simple at first, they are full of symbolism and detail, encouraging the reader or viewer to look closer and find connections on different pages.

Allen's writing style develops in complexity, making the book suitable for a wide age range that can be adapted and scaffolded for various educational settings. This book can be read all at once or broken into smaller themes that emerge at different points of the forest child's journey. The book may present some challenges for neurodiverse learners because of its descriptive language and abstract storytelling. Teachers and parents might need to facilitate discussions to explore the layers of meaning fully.

Allen's background in environmental systems analysis is evident throughout the book. He integrated research-based solutions, including permaculture principles and community-led, low-carbon lifestyle adaptation, into the narrative. These solutions are not presented as abstract concepts; however, they are woven into the emotional journey of the forest child, emphasising the importance of both active hope (Macy & Johnstone, 2012) and collective action (Rap & Bodas, 2024).

The themes of courage and active hope are central to Allen's story. The forest child displays courage and bravery as it ventures beyond the safety and familiarity of the forest into the unknown and overwhelming landscapes shaped by consumption, extraction, waste, power and greed. The forest child's journey reflects not only the courage to face global challenges but also the emotional resilience and moral strength needed to seek truth, act with integrity and imagine and advocate for hopeful solutions in the face of systemic complexity (Wiseman, 2021). The forest child embodies the practice of active hope (Macy & Johnstone, 2012), as they do not wait for change; they are active participants in the change process, engaging in nature, community and inner reflection. These messages of courage and active hope are especially poignant for young people facing climate adversity, as it encourages them to imagine different possibilities and take meaningful steps towards them.

This book has been a passion project for Allen. Although it has been self-published and is available online from the A Forest Child Adventure website ([www.aforestchildadventure.com](http://www.aforestchildadventure.com)), the project has taken nearly two decades and continues to develop. According to Allen, the idea for the book came about in 2007 when he composed a tune on his shakuhachi flute that expressed his concerns and inner struggles for the planet. His next step was to add illustrations, which he first drafted in 2010 and finalised in 2013. He then wrote a theme for each page, written in uppercase text at the bottom of each page. The following phase involved writing the main text, which he completed in 2019. Allen did not stop the project after the book was published in 2024; he continued with a period of review and refinement. He is now designing and producing a series of short animated videos, using addition animation, to boost engagement with various educational aspects of his book, which can be included in lesson plans.

The book is presented in a compact A5 format, making it easy to carry, handle and use both in indoor and outdoor learning environments. The book does not have page numbers, which encourages a more fluid exploratory reading experience. Once you pick up this book, you want to explore beyond the front cover. To me, this book resembles a combination of *The Lorax* (Seuss, 1971), with its poetic narrative, journal-based adventure and hope-based environmental sentiment, and *Where's Wally* (Handford, 1987), with its engaging visual exploration and recurring symbols, in which observation and curiosity are rewarded. As an outdoor environmental educator, I have incorporated the book into my climate change education toolbox, and I invite you to do the same.

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