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## Kid Lit Authors Unite for Earth Day

By [Rocco Staino](#) on April 8, 2013 [Leave a Comment](#)

Literacy,

censorship, and

children's rights

are issues

generally

associated with

children's book authors—but the environment has not been forgotten. A grassroots coalition of 70 writers and illustrators of kids' literature, [Authors for Earth Day](#) (A4ED), is committed to raising funds and eco-awareness. During the entire month of April, A4ED members pledge to donate at least 30% of their school speakers' fees to a non-profit conservation organization voted on by students.



A4ED is the brainchild of Brooke Bessen, author of *Zachary Z. Packrat and his Amazing Collections* (Arizona Highways, 2008). It began on [Earth Day](#) in 2008 during a school visit, when she asked students to choose the conservation organization to which she would donate her speaker's fee. She discovered that this was a way to give students a voice in philanthropic giving and wanted to expand the concept. In 2009, she began to enlist the support of fellow authors and illustrators at a Los Angeles meeting of the [Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators](#).

Since then, the number of authors and illustrators has grown from five in 2010, its first organized year, to the current [group of 70](#) who have signed on the program. The program has received support from such noted authors as Jerry Spinelli, Linda Sue Park, and Dan Gutman. Bessen was inspired to contact Gutman after learning of his book, *Recycle this Book: 100 Top Children's Book Authors Tell You How to Go Green* (Random House, 2009). He has since become an avid spokesperson for the program.

"I got involved in this movement after reading a lot about climate change and thinking—what's the biggest problem facing the world today," Gutman tells *School Library Journal*. "I think it's crucially important that we move away from burning fossil fuels and toward alternative sources of energy. If the politicians don't have the courage to make this happen, maybe the kids of the world do."

This April, Gutman will be visiting [Haledon School](#) in Haledon, NJ, a first-time participant in the program. Catherine Eng, library media specialist at the school, says it is "a great way to have students become more aware of Earth Day and how we should take care of the earth." Students at Haledon will be deciding among five conservation organizations that include [Earth Day Network](#); [Environmental & Energy Study Center](#); [Natural Resources Defense Council](#); [Student Conservation Association](#); [Union of Concerned Scientist](#), she explains to *SLJ*.



It's not only nature and science authors and illustrators that participate in A4ED, Bessen tells *SLJ*. "We work across all genres of children's literature," she says. "We write different kinds of books but we share a common interest in the environment—and we all believe in mentoring our young readers."

Since its inception, A4ED has raised over \$15,000 for local and international conservation groups such as [Clearwater Environmental Organization](#), an organization in New York's

Hudson Valley that was founded by musician Pete Seeger to clean up the Hudson River; [Greenpeace](#); the [World Wildlife Fund](#); and the [Australia Koala Foundation](#).

Prior to a school event, the visiting author/illustrators—using a [nominee template](#)—send a list of five possible organizations to students for them to vote on which group will receive the proceeds from his or her visit. As a group project, students research each of the five nominated organizations in preparation for the vote, and the vote is taken during the school author/illustrator visit.

"For the same price as a regular author visit, an A4ED visit packs a lot more pow," says Bessen. "We hope librarians will see this as a great educational opportunity for their students. Behind every A4ED visit is a generous author who wants to give something back to their community." Bessen has spent thousands of hours coordinating the project but she feels "the rewards are equally tremendous. What more could an author ask for than to be able to positively impact the lives of so many reader?"

Some of the schools participating this year are [Yellow Springs Elementary School](#) in Frederick, MD, hosting [Edie Hemingway](#); [Vienna Woods State School](#) in Queensland, Australia, hosting [Michelle Worthington](#); and [Saint Hilary School](#) in Tiburon, CA, hosting [Andrea Alban](#).

Now in its forty-fourth year, [Earth Day](#), considered to be the birth of the environmental movement, is celebrated annually on April 22.

Adds Bessen, "Giving a child a voice is no small thing. So I am ever grateful to the pioneers who built our coalition and all my colleagues who continue to help it grow."

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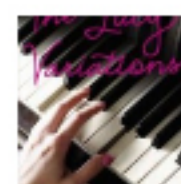


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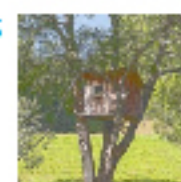


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