

Did God really make each little flower that opens and each little bird that sings?

written by the children I taught in Nottingham tended to be about people rather than animals, and cars rather than tractors.

Then, in the late 70s something wonderful happened. Environmental education was introduced to our curriculum and every class experienced a half-termly coach trip to the countryside to visit farms, stately homes, woodlands and coastal habitats. The children were confronted with wide horizons and open skies; they breathed deep the sweet country air and saw wild creatures running, flying and swimming free; they began to understand where food came from and by what means it was grown, prepared and delivered to their plate or lunchbox.

Then, after singing *All things bright and beautiful* one day in a school assembly, the children in my class began to ask if the words of the song were true. They wondered whether God 'invented' trees and purple-headed mountains. Did God really make each little flower that opens and each little bird that sings? Did He make their glowing colours and their tiny wings? Did God create, and does He still care for, every living thing? And does he care for every person, no matter who they are or what they do? As you can imagine, we had some lovely discussions! I was able to tell them about Jesus and the promises in the Bible on these and other life-affirming topics.

Even the penultimate verse of *All things bright and beautiful* – often omitted from hymn books these days – had meaning for my pupils: 'The tall trees in the greenwood, The meadows where we play, The rushes by the water, To gather every day.' My class might not have gathered rushes by the water every day, but they had played in meadows and had seen, stroked and attempted to climb some very tall trees!

Isla Reid

Dear Editor

After reading 'The secret' by Monica Dart and 'Getting out and about' by Barbara Todd in the Autumn 2008 edition of *ACT Now* I felt prompted to share my reflections on the importance of helping young people to appreciate the environment.

I began my teaching career in the 1960s at a village primary school on the Lincolnshire fens. Many of the children I taught had parents who were farm labourers; some were from farm-owning families; and others had parents whose livelihood was largely dependent on agriculture. It is no exaggeration to say that every girl and boy understood the seasonal patterns in nature. Our school harvest festival service was the highlight of each year.

In stark contrast, when I moved to an inner-city primary school serving a council housing estate in Nottingham in the 1970s, I found that the children had little appreciation of the seasons and were ignorant about where their food came from. Children had to be told that milk came from cows, eggs came from hens and potatoes grew underground. Invariably harvest festivals were a celebration of Commonwealth ties and international trade as we used coloured wool to map labels from tinned pears, tinned pineapples and tinned peaches to a map of the world so old that it still showed a third of the world coloured British Empire pink.

One of the things that struck me when I moved from a rural school to one in an urban setting was the fact that in the former the children's writing was full of nature. The stories and poems they wrote were invariably about wild birds and farm animals. Children knew what a spider's web looked like when it was covered in dew or frost; they knew that one night of heavy rain could destroy a crop and leave a family penniless for the coming year; they saw beauty in the furrows of a freshly ploughed field or a neatly laid hedge. Tractors featured in many of their tales as well, as I recall. Unsurprisingly, stories and poems

Subject: Christmas night

ACT Now issue: Autumn 2008

Item responded to: Monica Dart's play

Dear Editor

I am writing to say that I used Monica Dart's fine 'Christmas night' play (*ACT Now*, Autumn 2008) in school and received very positive feedback from staff, children and parents alike. The children enjoyed making masks and costumes, and then dressing up as animals. The adults enjoyed hearing the Nativity story afresh. I appreciated the fact that almost every child in my class had lines to learn because the play included so many speaking parts. Thank you Monica!

Terri Walker