

## Unit 5

# The Diversity of Words and Pictures

*I suspect that the child plucks its first flower  
With an insight into its beauty and significance  
Which the subsequent botanist never retains.  
-Henry David Thoreau*

As we look to present information about biological diversity to students, we must also ensure that our instructional methods and materials are diverse. It is important that, in addition to the facts, we provide children with opportunities to discover what is beautiful and enchanting about the natural world. Librarians have told us for years that a good book can transport the reader to other worlds. This is particularly true of nature books for children. Many of these books are well-loved because they contain memorable characters (who can forget the Lorax ?) but an equal number are treasured for their beautiful illustrations. Both the words and images in these books can be used to bring the study of natural diversity into a personal context for students. Stories, books, and pictures can introduce basic concepts while legitimizing a child's emotional response to nature. As the Orion Society states in the introduction to their on-line publication, *Bringing the World Alive: A Bibliography of Nature Stories for Children*, available from <http://www.orionsociety.org> :



Stories legitimize emotional responses to nature. They can capture the exhilaration of an encounter with a hawk, or the sadness of losing a backyard tree to disease, or the love that grows between a child and his or her own special place. By nurturing in our children these affections for nature, we can be confident that they will seek the hard facts about ecology and environmental problems in due time. But for those who can still hear the wind whisper and the ocean speak in a language many adults have long since forgotten, it is crucial that we share nature in ways that they can understand and embrace.

The lessons in this unit feature activities designed around several well-known children's books as well as activities to encourage reading science materials for comprehension. For an in-depth study of nature literacy visit the Orion Society's web site at <http://www.orionsociety.org>, which includes their free on-line bibliography of over 170 titles (referenced above), or contact Orion Society, 195 Main Street, Great Barrington, MA 01230