



A Q&A INTERVIEW WITH SHERYL WEBSTER, AUTHOR OF ONE LITTLE BIRD

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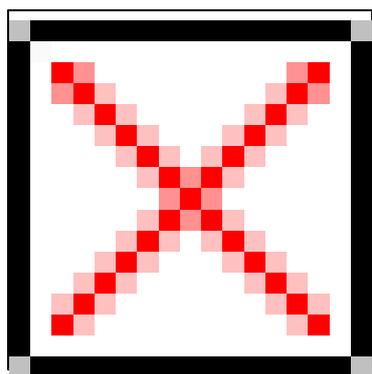
[Sheryl Webster](#) [1]

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Byline:

The author answers our questions about **One Little Bird**.

In [One Little Bird](#) [3] by Sheryl Webster, illustrated by Helen Shoesmith, a little robin changes the world for everyone, proving that no matter how small and powerless you are or feel, you can make a difference by taking a stand. Sheryl Webster answers our questions about the book.



Were you environmentally conscious as a child? Or engaged in any kind of activism? Do you think children today are more environmentally aware than previously?

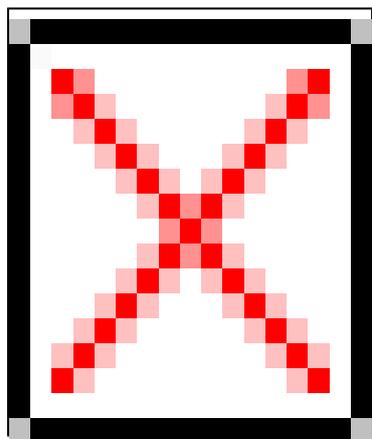
I wouldn't necessarily say I was environmentally conscious as a child, in that I didn't really think about threats to our natural world, such as animal extinction, plastic pollution, deforestation etc. I don't think many children from my era were aware of such issues to be honest. What I would say is that I was certainly very exposed to nature and the outdoors as a child. I can remember blackberry picking at the back of the garden, climbing trees, making perfume from blossom and rose petals, getting incredibly mucky, and seemingly being outdoors for the whole of the summer from morning until night!

Children today are definitely more aware of environmental issues, for example through television, books and social media. Greta Thunberg has certainly played her part in creating awareness amongst young people, in her fight against climate change.

For much younger children however, I think the awareness has to be introduced more subtly and gently, and by maintaining an element of fun. When supermarket, **Iceland**, collaborated with **Greenpeace** for their 'No Palm Oil?' campaign, we saw a great example of this. Its advertisement and book, **There's A Rang-Tan in My Bedroom**, was pitched perfectly at young children, making them aware of the importance of looking after our world and the plight of orangutans, in a simple child friendly way. I think techniques like this, which also include simple ideas about how we

can make a difference, are vital in nurturing an awareness and greater interest in our environment, and hopefully a love and appreciation of our wonderful natural world.

For me, one positive thing to have come out of our current situation over the past year, is that a lot of people, including children, are connecting, or re-connecting, with nature. In turn, this has led to a greater awareness and understanding of threats to our natural environment.



*When and how did you get the idea for **One Little Bird**?*

I got the idea for [One Little Bird](#) [3] a few years ago while my youngest daughter, Katy, and I were watching the birds in our garden. We love nature and are always taking part in things that bring a little bit of wildness into our lives, such as **The Wildlife Trust's 30DaysWild** nature challenge, and the **RSPB's** annual **Big Garden Birdwatch** weekend.

I take real pleasure in seeing Katy's enthusiasm for nature; and wanted to create a story with an environmental theme that may encourage other young children to be more aware of their natural surroundings too. Hopefully also inspiring an interest in our natural world and in caring for the environment.

I thought habitat loss may be a good starting point as even very, young children have an understanding that birds, and other animals, make their homes in trees. I initially thought of Rosa Parks and how she inspired others through standing up for what she believed in. Right away I thought of a robin as the main character.

Robins are characteristically known to be adaptable, instinctive, a little bit cheeky, but also fiercely defensive of their territory. So Rosa the robin losing her home and taking a stand seemed the perfect starting point for the story, which could then escalate into her inspiring the rest of the animal kingdom in taking a stand against habitat loss.

There are important messages of course in the story but delivered very gently. How important was that to you, and how did you work to make sure that the book inspires without lecturing or indeed, scaring young children?

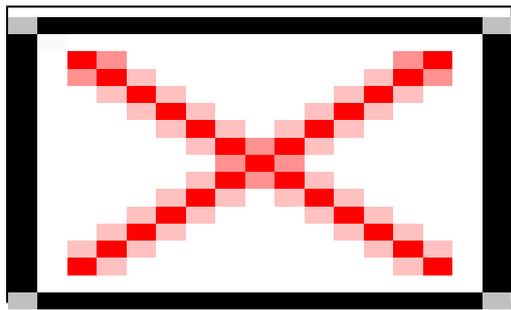
It was really important, and Rosa had to be a character that was both likeable and inspirational in order to do this effectively. I started by choosing a lead character who was physically a small member of the Animal Kingdom, but one who was taking a stand against a huge threat. Hopefully, from this, young children will feel that we can all make a difference. I also did my best to ensure that Rosa's actions and words were consistently strong and full of optimism and hope.

I was aware that something so devastating as habitat loss also had to be presented in a way that children would invest in, whilst also being entertained by. The best way to do that was through light moments and humour. Weaving in comic events, such as when the animals moved into the human houses, hopefully provides a good balance between the upset and loss we see when the animals lose their homes, and the hilarity of finding lions in your laundry baskets!

The story needs these comic moments, despite the obviously serious and important underlying message.

What is your favourite spread in the book and why?

Oooo, that's a difficult question, as I have so many favourites. I love the spreads in which the animals are in the bathtubs, laundry baskets and loos ? BUT? I think my absolute favourite has to be the final spread in which Rosa is snuggled safely back in a tree, and the man who initially cut her home down can be spotted in the background putting up homes and food for the birds and squirrels in his garden. It's such a positive and happy spread that just leaves you feeling good and shows the changes we can make if we act together!



Is there a book you remember from your own reading that inspired you, or one you recommend as a book to move children?

Definitely [The Lorax](#) [4] by Dr Seuss. I think it was so ahead of its time in warning about the danger posed to the earth and its natural beauty. It has such fun, colourful illustrations and creative words/rhymes that roll off the tongue. It really is a perfect introduction to environmental issues and its message that 'what is threatened must be protected,' (in this case, the trees) applies to so many other environmental concerns. It's a book that really leaves you feeling that if you care enough about something, then you'll do whatever you can to protect it:

'Unless someone like you, cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better, it's not.'

Sheryl Webster lives in Liverpool with her husband and four children. She worked as a primary school teacher for many years before taking time out to focus on her family and allow herself more time to spend writing. Her biggest passion has always been to help children develop their skills and a love of reading.

[One Little Bird](#) [3] by Sheryl Webster, illustrated by Helen Shoesmith, Oxford, £6.99.

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