This article is being written on a solar-powered computer, after a breakfast of eggs from chooks fed on home-grown avocados and now scratching up the lavender bushes. All concepts and words in this article have been sustainably recycled from my other articles and books ...

I write about sustainability because I live it – not perfectly (tomorrow I’ll eat mangoes flown from Queensland), but our household still has a negative carbon footprint – the trees we grow soak up more CO₂ than we use in a year, even with flying to conferences.

Writers put their values in their books. Enid Blyton’s heroes battled dastardly foreign spies and Nazis; her concept of the ‘good life’ was hard-boiled eggs and tomato picnics with a bottle of ginger beer in the basket. The foundation of my life is living kindly on the planet.

Only one of my books was written solely to explain not just that concept, but how it might be achieved – and to convince kids that doing so might not just save the world – or the parts that we humans need – but also be fun: The Tomorrow Book, (created with illustrator Sue de Gennaro).

This picture book for kids 5–12 is about ‘tomorrow’, when the King and Queen retire leaving the little Prince in charge. The kids of the kingdom come to the prince with the problems of the world, from pollution to how to share the planet with wildlife. They, and most importantly, the palace library, come up with solutions to our planet’s most urgent problems.

It’s fun. But it’s not fantasy. Every ‘solution’ in the book – and in the teacher’s notes that accompany it on the HarperCollins web sites – exists. In some cases, like the photovoltaic cloth to power small appliances or roof material to power a house, you can already buy it. Other examples of sustainable solutions, like the zeppelins to travel in, instead of aeroplanes, exist as prototype. (Imagine travelling to Europe floating on a helium balloon with giant batteries charged by both wind and sun and temperature differentials. No more cramped cattle class, but libraries or even a swimming pool as you zoom along.)

Zeppelins, like the hard plastics made from garbage, are not yet commercially available, for a range of commercial, social and political reasons that I won’t go into here, but that older kids might like to discuss.

Kids are often depressed about their future. Ask a class of kids what they think the world will be like in twenty years or what they’ll be doing then. You may be surprised by how gloomy their answers are. To my surprise the level of depression varies enormously from school to school. In some schools only two or three kids in a class may feel apprehensive about the future. In others, nearly all of them are.

This may of course depend on their family background, but I suspect the school philosophy – showing kids that problems can be solved, whether they are personal or ecological – has an enormous impact on kids’ confidence and happiness.

Sue Denarro’s joyous illustrations, made from rubbish recycled solely from her kitchen, show what a future that kids can help create in The Tomorrow Book.
I hoped *The Tomorrow Book* would both expand children’s horizons and encourage them to dream about even greater inventions and ways to create a better future.

Its themes include:

- What the future might be like
- Change and how it affects us
- Recycling
- Transport
- Power sources
- Pollution
- Conservation – animals and the environment
- Sustainability
- Awareness, hope and action

The teachers’ notes encourage discussions like:

- What do you think the world will be like in twenty years’ time? What would you like it to be like? What sort of future would YOU like? What inventions are needed to make it happen? Brainstorm the sorts of things you can do to improve the future of our world, its people, animals, environment and the preservation and responsible use of our resources.
- What is a ‘food forest’? Design a food forest for your home or school or park or footpath.
- Where does the power come from for your home or school? Does it cause pollution?
- Choose a food you had for lunch. How was it grown? How far had it travelled?
- How did the little Prince go about finding answers to the children’s concerns about the lack of water for their vegetable gardens, their baths and swimming pools?
- Topics for individual or paired research projects might include: solar and other alternative power sources, water recycling, pollution, home-based food production, rubbish recycling etc.
- Count the number of inventions in this book, then check *New Scientist* magazine to find out if they are already available. How many inventions can you find? Who can find the most? Who can find the most AND explain how they work?
- Do a survey amongst the class or teachers and then create a column graph to represent the answers to the following questions: How many people have a vegetable garden? Fruit trees, a water tank, solar heating, electricity produced by solar panels or wind turbines, chooks, a compost bin, shop at farmers’ markets, a half-flush toilet, a composting toilet, an electric car, a wildlife friendly garden, grey water recycling, plant trees? And any other suggestions from children.
- Identify and list Australian native animals that are classified as endangered or vulnerable. Does farming take away their land? Do new housing developments encroach on their territory? How many of those animals once lived in the local area?
- Find out about ‘wild life’ friendly farms and ways that we can grow food but still have room for wildlife.
- How do wild animals and birds in your area find water? Can you help them?
- Discuss the illustrator’s work and the collage materials she used to create the images in the book. Some of the items used include old envelopes (gardens), pages from an atlas and diary (suitcases and the roof), a steel wool packet (the window frame on the front cover), the top of a shoebox (red bikes) and junk mail catalogues (green leaves). Using found materials, ask the children to create a collage of a scene from the story or their own interpretation of a sustainable future.

**Nanberry: Black Brother White**

My values show in my other books, too. *Nanberry: Black Brother White* is the true story of the eight-year-old Cadigal orphan, adopted by Surgeon White of the early Sydney Cove colony, who would grow up to be a respected sailor in the Merchant Navy and a leader of his people. But it also contrasts the two cultures and their impact on the land.

The Cadigal society of 1788 did not inhabit the Garden of Eden. But it was an ecologically sustainable population that never rose above the area’s ability to support it. Human impact was minimised by moving according to the season. Even gatherings of groups and clans happened at different places each year, to let the land recover.

The Sydney Cove of Nanberry’s first eight years was a place of clean gushing streams, cabbage tree palms and tree ferns, of eucalyptus and angophora forests, a land where every few steps you’d find food and medicine, where there were no major diseases, the inhabitants were strong and healthy, with good teeth and strong bones. There was a time for the
settling of disputes, and a time to go west to feast on
eels, a time when the bees wore fluffy yellow pollen
on their legs, when you knew that in another season
of moons the nectar would flow sweet and pale
green when you poked a stick into the honey trees’
(p. 13).

Ten years later the Tank Stream was so filthy
that the smell sickened those nearby. The colony
smelt of sewage, rubbish and unwashed bodies.
These bodies, in the most part, were stunted by
years of starvation, smog, alcohol and foetal alcohol
syndrome. Few had enough teeth even to eat
tough meat. Food was almost uniformly both bad
and unhealthy – salt meat, flour that was soured
by weevils, high infant and maternal mortality –
childbirth was the major cause of female mortality,
from childbirth fever brought on by filthy hands as
surgeons came from the dying or diseased to the
birthing chamber.

A convict, a settler or even the administrators
worked long hard days, that still resulted in a far
lower standard of living than the Cadigal had
enjoyed. But the new settlers had muskets and a
sense of entitlement and ownership – and they
prevailed.

The book prompts far-reaching discussion about
how we see and use the land.

Students might:

• Compare Sydney Cove in the book before and
  after white settlement. What are the good and
  bad points of each culture’s approach to land use?
  How can Sydney Cove support so many more
  people now? What are the costs and advantages of
  that?
• Students might study their own area, and
  compare how the land was used and what it
  might have been like three hundred years ago,
  with what it’s like now. What are the good and
  bad points about the changes?
• Younger students could make dioramas or draw
  pictures of the land 300 years ago and the land
  now to compare the two.
• Students could also research local Aboriginal land
  use and cultivation practices and how they kept
  all water sources clean.
• The most important discussion point might be
to discuss the opposing views that land and its
resources are there to be used and to make as
much money as possible versus the concept that
we need to develop sustainable ways of living
so that the earth is a good place for humans and
other species to live for many generations to come.
Are there any aspects of the Indigenous concepts
of land care and sustainability that we should
adopt today?

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**A Waltz For Matilda**

*A Waltz for Matilda* is an entirely different book. But
it also contrasts the land use of ‘Auntie Love’ with
that of squatter Mr. Drinkwater, and the ecological
consequences. Early in the book, Matilda’s father
promises her, ‘you learn this land right and it’ll give
you everything you need, and riches too’ (p. 91).

The management of land and natural resources
is another aspect of Indigenous belief which is
revealed, for example, in Auntie Love insisting that
Matilda keep the waterhole clean (pp. 163–4) and her
later realisation that fire (pp. 223–4) is coming, just
from observing the natural signs. She also predicts
for Matilda when drought will break (p. 367) and
Drinkwater admits that she told him too that the
drought would break, years before (p. 405).

The book ends with Matilda – now the owner of
the Drinkwater properties as well as her father’s
Moura – looking at the paddocks bare of trees and
yam daisies, a land of sheep and grass, of growing
rabbit and erosion problems. She promises to let the
land rest, to restore life or, at the very least, make it
sustainable (although it being 1915 she does not use
that term).

**The Camel Who Crossed Australia**

This book carries this theme further, showing how
the explorers of the Burke and Wills expedition died
due to starvation and basic neglect, spurning the help
of the indigenous people who were living off the
land that they were starving in. For them the water holes were a land of plenty and comfort; for the Europeans who refused to adapt and died from their stubbornness and aggressive ignorance it was a hell of heat, filth and flies – the latter two a product of an expedition that had camped too long in one place with no thought of the consequences of their waste.

**Pharoah: the Boy Who Conquered the Nile**

To a child reading this book it may be simply an adventure romance, set in an Egypt that was ancient even when the pyramids were built. For me it is a story of human adaptation to the dramatic global warming and drying that was occurring around them, when the great grasslands of the world turned into desert and humans learned to irrigate, taking water from rivers to grow crops when it didn’t rain; to develop new technologies like sails to make trading easier, but most of all, that enchanting time when humans began to write their knowledge down, transmitting ideas and technologies to other generations and cultures far away.

The above books are all fiction – and fiction may be one of the most persuasive tools to teach new concepts, to make them fascinating and fun. But I have also written about these themes in the *Dinkum Histories* (Scholastic).

**The Dinkum Histories series**

This is the eight-volume history of Australia that begins with shipwrecked sailors and 60,000 years of habitation and finishes with *Booms, Busts and Bushfire*, in 2010. Each book, and the series of books, shows not just how the land has shaped our nation, but how we too have shaped the land. At its core is the theme of LOOKING at the land – knowing it, and recognising its history, if we are to make the responsible decisions necessary to protect us from the floods, bushfires and other ecological challenges that lie ahead of us.

This is not the place to argue degrees of climate change, nor whether humans are responsible for it. No matter what answer you give to these questions, we still have the archeological and oral history traditions of Australia that are more than sufficient to tell us that we live in a land of ‘drought and flooding rains’.

The climate ALWAYS changes in Australia – often dramatically – suddenly or over a very long time. Looking at our history will help us accept this on an emotional as well as a scientific level. It will also give us – and the adults of tomorrow – confidence as well as the tools necessary to face the future.

But there is one more insight implicit in my books, one that I hope I bring to the children who read them.

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**Teachers’ notes are available on the publishers’ websites for all Jackie’s books, with detailed suggestions of possible classroom activities for all ages.**