

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Ecosystem Series: *Who Needs a Swamp?*, *Who Needs a Jungle?*, and *Who Needs an Iceberg?*

By Karen Patkau. 2012. Tundra Books, 75 Sherbourne Street, Toronto, Ontario M5A 2P9. 32 pages. 19.99 USD. Hardcover.

This delightful series of children's books, written and illustrated by dimensional artist Karen Patkau, are focussed on the ecology and conservation of three ecosystems. Each book introduces an ecosystem and its species, illustrates ecological concepts, provides a distribution map, an illustrated guide to some of the species contained within the book, and a comprehensive glossary. The illustrations are colourful and playful and sidebar illustrations are cleverly used to magnify a section of the main page illustration or reinforce an ecological concept. Inside the jacket sleeve of each book, the reader will discover a hidden poster.

The books are formulaic, beginning with an introduction to the ecosystem featured in the book and its inhabitants, followed by ecological concepts including the food chain and life cycle. Ecological services provided by each ecosystem are presented (such as flood protection and water filtration by swamps, climate control and oxygen production by jungles, and reflection of the sun's energy by the arctic ice) and discussed with reference to human impacts on the featured ecosystem. A global scale map of the ecosystem illustrates its distribution and rarity. The shortfalls of the

books are few: in *Who Needs a Swamp*, the author neglected to clarify that a swamp is an ecosystem, and the title of *Who Needs an Iceberg* is somewhat of a misnomer, as only one page is dedicated to an iceberg. *Who Needs the Arctic* may have been a more appropriate title. A nice addition to these books would have been a profile of the author, who is evidently passionate about nature and its conservation.

The evocative question of who needs these ecosystems is presented at the end of each book. The text presents the ecosystems in a manner that is relevant to the lives of children and thus the answer is self-evident before the end of each book. The ecological concepts are sufficiently complex that the books are most appropriate for 9 – 13 year olds. Younger children will enjoy the illustrations, however, and the concepts can be reinforced with the guidance of an adult. The conservation message in each book is strong without being overly preachy. This series would make a wonderful addition to the library of any young naturalist. My daughters, age thirteen and eight, gave this series two thumbs up.

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