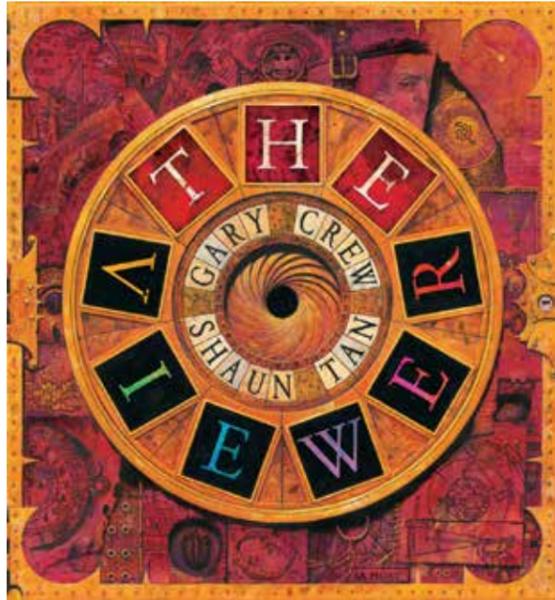


The Viewer ...

Zafroon Bibi & Maria Ferrante

'The Viewer'- written by Gary Crew and beautifully illustrated by Shaun Tan - was used by Year 6 teachers to initiate discussions about climate change.



For those not familiar with the novel, Shaun Tan's images depict scenes of natural destruction that have not only occurred in the past, but are also happening today. When further investigations were made by the children, they realised that the scenes could also be depicting the future.

Within the book the images appear as if on a disc, when the protagonist looks through a 'viewer'. Not only was the protagonist, Tristan, shocked by what he saw, but our pupils responded similarly and were mesmerised as they flicked through the book.

A buzz was created throughout the Year 6 pupils (150 of them, as we are five form entry). The classrooms filled with their questions. Many wanted to share knowledge they had gained through books, or information they had acquired from television programmes, as well as independent research that they had carried out.

Every child had something to say in the discussion.



Children were keen to talk about the images. For example, one image depicts a famine where a single child is crouched, looking helpless. This resonated with our children and they talked about previous disaster appeals; for example, the school's Water Aid appeal.

Pupils recalled images of natural disasters, such as the deforestation of the Amazon, earthquakes and other scenes of chaos. The 'viewer' also provides images of factories and smoke, showing emissions of toxic gases – a link to their earlier work on climate change.

The children quickly realised all the scenes of destruction were created by humans. This led some of them to ask, **'What could we do to make things better?'**



In order to encourage our children to become critical thinkers and to think 'outside of the box', we decided to focus on one aspect of climate change - **the negative impact plastic has on our environment**. Pupils watched a series of short videos. One of which explains journeys taken by three plastic bottles:

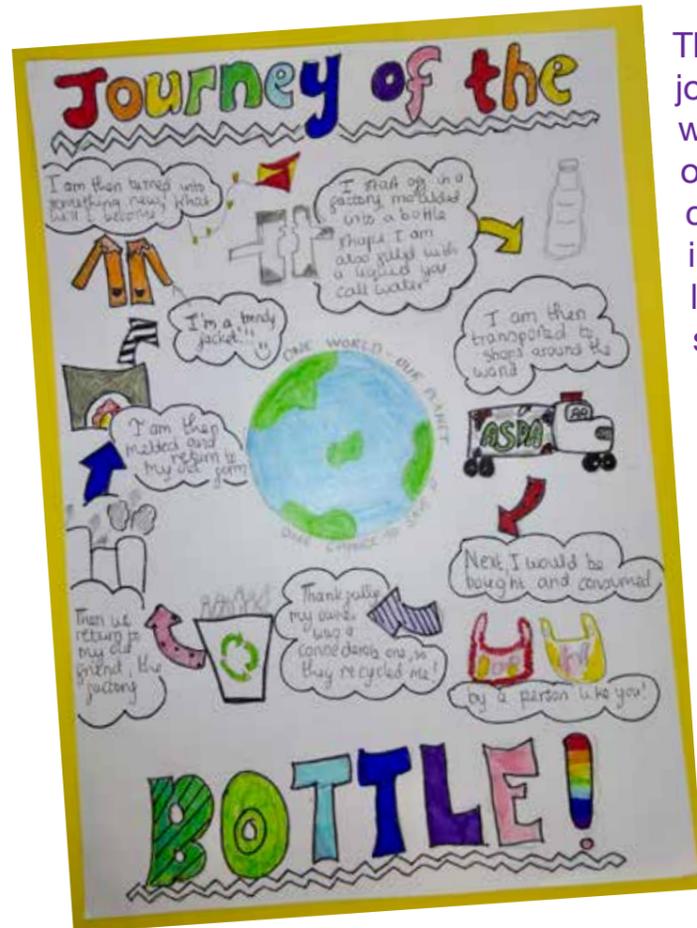
Bottle 1 ends in a landfill site;

Bottle 2 starts off in the river and ends up in the ocean - amongst the 'Great Garbage Patch';

Bottle 3 ends up in a recycling plant where it is turned into something new.



* A collection of marine debris in the North Pacific Ocean. See useful National Geographic article on [Great Pacific Garbage Patch](#)



The children had to explore one of these journeys further. In doing this the children wrote a monologue from the perspective of one of the bottles. This created many challenges for the pupils as they had to include some of the facts that they had learned from the video, using language such as 'degradation', 'micro plastics', 'decompose', 'the Great Garbage Patch', 'leachate' * and 'toxic soup'.

Another challenge was for children to give 'a voice' to their chosen bottle. They had to empathise with the bottle, which is a challenge in itself, as giving feelings to an inanimate object is a difficult skill. However, we were amazed by children's work and their ability to combine facts with feelings and embed the two. Some pupils asked rhetorical questions; for example, one wrote:

'Dear reader, who is actually to blame for the climate change crisis? Me or you?'

'You have the option to make the right choice but choose to do the wrong thing'.

All of the monologues were written with true passion and had a clear message: humans are responsible for the changes they make and need to ensure that they do the right thing.

Our children were genuinely shocked by the effects of climate change and its effects on the humans and on the planet. They realised that climate change was everybody's business, that we all need to work together.



Pupils also created art work related to 'The Viewer', but with a climate change stance. The eye within the 'disc' looked into the future and the consequences if no changes are made; the other side of the disc showed what will happen if we do make a change. We all realised that it is never too late to make a positive change.

The unit of work has helped children to start thinking about their global impact, take responsibility for their own actions and what they can do to bring about change locally.

