I thank the USC School of the Environment and the Sustainable Universities Initiative for giving me the opportunity and initiative to begin thinking seriously about my work in the field of children’s literature in relationship to environmental issues. The process has been valuable though I have produced no documents, such as a syllabus, as end products. Instead, what I discovered was that the month I devoted to the project could be only the start of a longer, larger undertaking.

My children’s literature students of 2001-2002 benefited from the project in two ways. First, Dr. Michelle Martin of Clemson University, a specialist in environmental children’s literature, gave a guest lecture in one of my classes. She shared numerous resources (such as bibliographies) and valuable information and insight. Second, they benefited from my heightened alertness to environmental concerns. Part of what this sensitivity gave me was the realization that many of the books that are already on my syllabus are relevant to environmental concerns.

Dr. Seuss’s *The Lorax* is the most obvious title. It deals quite directly with the problems of rampant consumerism with little regard for decimation of the natural environment and resources, in this case, trees. It is a book that causes quite an uproar in various regions of the country, particularly in the pacific northwest where countless workers are employed in the logging industry. Another obvious book (that I plan to teach in my young adult literature course) is Jean Craighead George’s *Who Really Killed Cock Robin?: An Ecological Mystery*. My courses are largely centered around the idea of the politics of the
publishing industry and the social and cultural context of children’s books. These kinds of texts and the discussions they spur fit in perfectly. So what I’ve learned is that along with concerns such as race, gender, and class, I must introduce “environment” as a parallel concern at the very beginning of each semester. This way, students won’t wait for a discrete unit on environmental issues and children’s literature. Instead, they will pay attention to ways in which a huge variety of books contribute to our consideration of this issue. They, and I, will look at environmentalism and children’s books as a kind of institutional concern rather than a book by book concern.

After this kind of context for the course is constructed, students will read Douglas Ward’s *Old Turtle* and think not only about respect for people of all religious persuasions, but of respect for the earth that these people share. Students will read Karen Hesse’s *Out of the Dust* and think of the Dustbowl not only as an historical era/event, but about the complicated dance between human beings and natural occurrences/disasters. Students will read Paul Fleishman’s *Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices* and consider not only the beauty of the poetry but the small creatures like grasshoppers and booklice about which Fleishman writes. Students will read Mildred Taylor’s *Song of the Trees* and *The Land* and raise questions not only about segregation and class, but of love for the land and environmental racism.

While working on this project, I was reminded that there is no need to reinvent the wheel. There are numerous print and internet materials that include teachers’ guides, booklists, and activity plans. These include Patti Sinclair’s *E for Environment: An Annotated Bibliography of Children’s Books with Environmental Themes* (Bowker, 1992), Nancy Lee Cecil’s *Developing Environmental Awareness Through Children’s Literature: A Guide for Teachers and Librarians, K-8* (McFarland, 1996) and Carol Butzow’s

In short, I spent most of my time on this project engaged in identifying resources and materials to share with my students. More importantly, I now have a more inclusive conception of and more sophisticated understanding about “environmentalism” that will infuse my decisions about reading lists and my discussions of various texts with future students. I now know how much I still need to educate myself.

Finally, I have begun conceptualizing my own children’s book that deals with the problem of litter and refuse and how much time any given waste material takes to disintegrate. When I have a presentable draft, I will forward it to the SUI offices.

There is a wealth of children’s literature, ranging from fiction to nonfiction to poetry, picture book to young adult novel, that is relevant to environmental concerns of all types. And though I did not produce a new syllabus, the time I was able to devote to researching this issue –due to the SUI’s generosity— will alter, in a very meaningful way, the context of my children’s literature courses.