

Vanishing Teachers' Notes

Title: *Vanishing*
Author: Mike Lucas
Illustrator: Jennifer Harrison
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Audience: 4-8

Synopsis:

Vanishing is a picture book set in a future that could exist if the human race continues to expand and threaten this world. It looks back at all the marvels that once existed upon planet Earth, from endangered and threatened species to common animals and pets. Gradually these animals disappear until finally the reader reaches a point where all living creatures, including humans, have ceased to exist. There is, however, an optimistic ending, with nature beginning to take back the empty spaces.

Style:

The book's narrator is speaking from a possible future. Mike Lucas purposely avoids the mention of specific animals, instead opting to use highly descriptive language to conjure images of the great diversity of creatures that once existed on a now empty planet. The corresponding lifelike pencil illustrations capture that diversity along with its natural beauty, whilst also depicting the tragic evolution of real animals into manmade imitations. There is an unspoken paradox within the telling – if humans have ceased to exist, then who is writing the book?

The first sentence of the book, along with the corresponding elephant illustrations, sets the time as somewhere in the future. We are told that the land is now empty and that the beasts who once dwelled upon it were '*could barely be believed.*' We also get the first glimpse of potential technological impact with the 'clockwork' elephant. From land animals to flying animals, from dry plains to wetlands, we turn the page to find '*winged creatures that rested and nested beside lakes.*' One of the most high profile endangered animals, the snow leopard, makes an appearance outside of its environment and this continues onto page three with a touch of humour.

The use of alliteration is prevalent throughout the book, particularly evident when describing the turtle. The book continues through a wide range of creatures, with no mention of how or why they disappeared until we come to the Arctic pages. The '*birds that cannot fly*' (penguins) and '*mammals that could never walk upon the land*' (whales) are no more and we find that the '*white titans of the ice could only watch as their home fell into the sea.*' This brings us to the present, and we begin to see that the process which has already begun has continued to deplete the Earth of all living things.

'The trees were felled, the land was farmed, the fields were fenced' brings the story home to Australia and the next page shockingly tells us that even our common pets have disappeared. And the animals that *'hid deep in the forests'* eventually vanish, with the intimation that, despite the knowledge gained by humans, there was also a lot that had been lost by their superior evolution.

On the following page, we see animals trawling through the mess left by humans as the *'changing world crept closer and closer to their vanishing footsteps.'* We then see human children at a museum with a backdrop of extinct animals, learning *about* the past, but not *from* it – two small words that makes such a difference.

We turn the page to see the present – a world devoid of natural life, with only a paper crane to indicate that anything of beauty has ever existed. But the book ends on a note of hope with the wilderness and the creatures beginning to encroach back onto farmed land.

The contrasting difference between front and back endpages clearly represents the severe threat to our planet if we do not change.

Author Motivation:

Extinction is a natural process, but it is reported that it is presently happening at 1,000 times the natural rate. The unfortunate regularity of news relating to threatened, endangered and extinct species helped Mike to envision a bleak future where all creatures, including humans, ceased to exist. And the people who will be most affected by the mistakes made now and in our past are the present day children who are the target audience of this book. This was the motivation behind writing it.

Author Background:

Mike Lucas is the author of several collections of humorous poetry for children and has had work published in anthologies and literary magazines. His last book, *Olivia's Voice*, was a Notable in the 2018 CBCA Awards. Originally from the UK, he now lives in Adelaide, where he works as an engineer and runs an independent book store with his wife, Becky. He has a passion for encouraging children to use imagination and creativity to produce original stories and poetry.

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Illustrator Background:

Jennifer Harrison lives in Adelaide with her son Nathaniel. Since leaving university she has worked as a graphic designer, commercial artist and art director. Her illustrations have been commissioned for book covers, magazines and packaging for overseas and local markets and

she has exhibited in Adelaide galleries. She also illustrated *Olivia's Voice*.

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Suggestions for classroom discussion and application:

- Without showing students the pictures, ask them what animal they think is being described. There can be a few answers and they do not have to match the animal depicted.
- Who is writing this book? When is it being written? Why is the land now empty? What has happened to the creatures?
- Ask the students to choose an animal from one of the pages and then guess how many of this species exist in the wild. Compare that to the actual number found on the internet and research how that number has changed over a period of time.
- Ask the students to come up with reasons why some animals have become threatened, endangered or extinct? What is the difference between the three classifications?
- Discuss food chains and how the disappearance of one species can affect many others.
- Discuss an animal that has become extinct. How do the children feel about that animal disappearing forever? What other animals could be affected by its disappearance? Why?
- Make a list of things that can be done to help slow down the rate of extinction. Is there anything the children could do to help?
- Choose some simple items in the room and look into how they are made and transported to the classroom. Does the manufacture of this item affect any animals? How? Could something else be used that is more environmentally friendly?
- Name the native Australian animals in the woodland scene. How have these and other Australian animals been affected over the past 200 years? What are the causes? What animals have disappeared in Australia?
- Make a paper crane. Decorate it.

Teachers' Learning Resources on Endangered Animals

[World Wildlife Fund \(WWF\)](#)

[Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership \(AITSL\)](#)

[Department of the Environment and Energy](#)

[For Teachers for Students](#)

[Scootle](#)