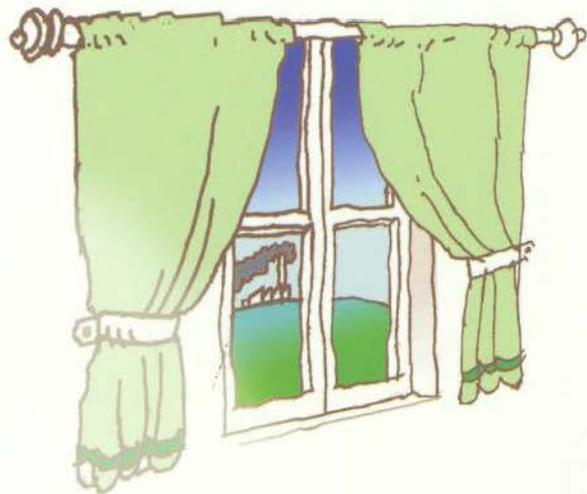


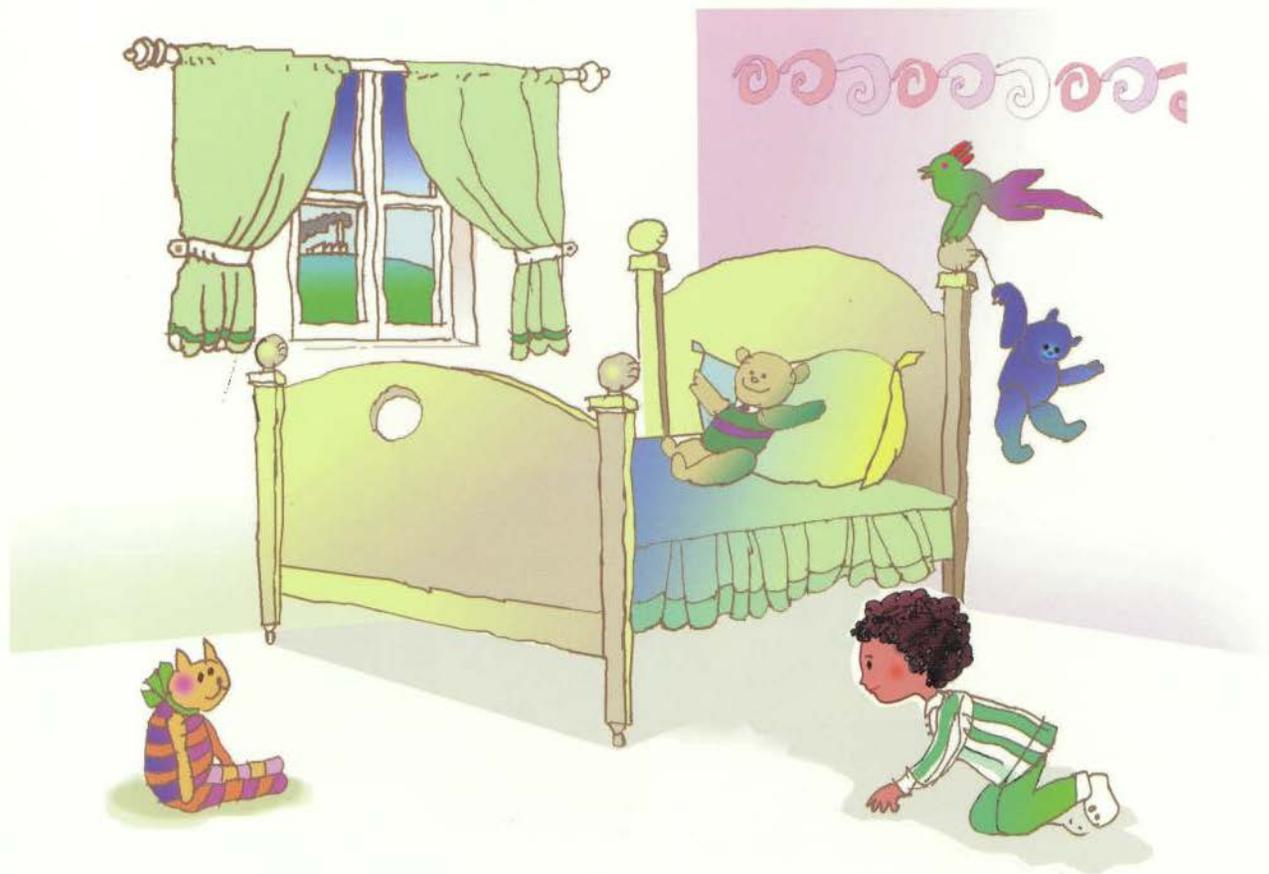
Sharon Finds the Environment



A Read-along Story from the
National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences
National Institutes of Health



One morning Sharon woke up early. She wanted to find the environment. Her teacher, Miss Clark, had told her that people need to keep the environment clean. But to keep it clean, Sharon had to find it first. Since it was Saturday, she had plenty of time to look.



When she got out of bed, she decided to look under her bed. It was dusty under there. But where was the environment?



Sharon went to the window and opened it. She looked out at the trees in her neighbor's yard. Sharon smelled something a little funny in the air like smoke. Maybe it was from the old factory in town. It didn't smell good. Sharon went into the hall. Ugh – the smell of her dad's cigarettes. But if she was going to find the environment, she'd better hurry up.



Sharon washed her hands and face and combed her hair. She brushed her teeth and watched the water rush from the faucet and swirl down the drain. Where did it all come from? Where did it go?

She went to the kitchen. Her mom was washing strawberries. Weren't they clean enough to eat?



After breakfast, she went outside to look. She hadn't walked far when she met Herman, a squirrel. He asked Sharon what she was doing. "I'm looking for the environment. Have you seen it out here?" Herman looked amused: "I haven't looked. But I guess if you haven't found it inside your house, maybe you'll find it out here." He winked at Sharon, but she couldn't think why.



Sharon asked, "Where do you usually look for the environment?" Herman said, "Oh, I don't." Sharon said, "Well then how do you ever find it? And if you don't find it, how do you keep it clean?" Herman said, "I don't look because I don't need to. The environment seems to be everywhere we go." Sharon looked to the right and the left. She looked up. She looked down. She looked right at her feet. "Where?" she said. "Where is it now?"



Herman said "You're working too hard. You've got to sit down." Sharon sat. As if she might scare the environment away, she whispered, "Where is it now?" Herman said, "Take a deep breath." Sharon did so, and said softly, "There, now tell me where the environment is." Herman replied, "The air you just breathed is part of it."



Sharon sat up straight. "Do you mean I've been breathing the environment all my life?" Herman flicked his bushy tail. "Oh, yes. And did you drink any water? That's more of it. Did you have, maybe, cereal and milk and fruit for breakfast?" Sharon began to see. "My mom washed the strawberries!" Sharon said. "And what about dad's cigarettes and the dust under my bed?" Herman said, "You've got it! The environment is everywhere you look."



Herman poked at acorns under a nearby tree and bit into one. "These acorns are part of it. I must say, they taste pretty good. The environment can help make us strong and healthy. But sometimes it can make us sick. The environment is the air, the water, the soil, and our food. It's everything around us."



Sharon thought and thought. "I'll bet the sun isn't part of the environment!" But Herman said, "Oh, yes it is. A little sun gives you a vitamin you need, Vitamin D. But you can get too much sun. You can get a sunburn. You can even get badly sick from too much sun. That's why we squirrels build nice deep, shady nests. And though you don't have anything as nice as a nest, at least you have a house."



Standing up and turning around and around, Sharon said, "So, the environment is everywhere. In the sky and in the ground. In the water and under the bed." "And we can all help by remembering that," Herman said, "and by being careful about what we throw out and where we put trash, and what we pour down the drain."



Sharon said, "Also, by washing our hands before we eat." Herman said, "That would be good. And by using things over and over and recycling newspapers and paper bags—you could help your mom do that. And by taking really yucky things like oil and old cans of cleaner and paint to a special collection place. That's so they won't make the environment dirty, leak into the water, and make us sick, squirrels and people both."



Sharon said, "Gosh, that's an awfully big job to clean the whole environment." "That's why it takes nearly everyone, everywhere, all the time," Herman said. "I'd better get busy then," Sharon said. Herman made a chattering sound to say goodbye and scrambled up his tree.



Sharon walked along feeling the breeze on her face. The environment was huge. It was the whole sky, the oceans, the mountains, and all of the towns—all around the world. Keeping it clean seemed like such a big job. Sharon thought it might take all morning...or all day...or even all week.

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English listening and speaking activity

Over the next two days read the following story to the class and discuss the events that took place.

Sharon cleans up

Part 1

Sharon had the day off from school. It was a day when teachers met and planned and did paperwork. Children got to stay home. Sharon was so happy she danced about to the music from her portable radio - her boombox. Sometimes she hoisted it to her shoulder so she heard the music really loud.

Her mother wouldn't let her play it loud indoors. So, naturally, when Sharon got outside, she turned the radio's volume up.

Sharon wanted to find her friend Herman the Squirrel, who had helped her discover "the environment" all around her. It was just about everything, everywhere. Before long, Sharon spotted Herman high in his own home tree, looking over the edge of his nest to see where the noise was coming from. His fur was still ruffled from sleeping. He looked a little upset. "You woke me up," he complained.

Sharon ignored the complaint. "Sleepy-head!" she shouted up the tree. "You said you would help me clean the environment. And we'd better get busy. My teacher, Miss Clark, says if we don't clean it up soon, it may make us sick."

Herman peered over the top of his nest and yawned. "Oh, all right. But we'll need some help. Go get Rufus the Rabbit. He's fast and lively, and he probably has nothing better to do than eat carrots over in the Smiths' garden. I'll be down in a few minutes."

Sharon soon found Rufus the Rabbit pulling on a huge carrot. It popped out of the ground, and Rufus chomped off the tender tip, threw the rest aside, and went on to the next. Rufus was enjoying himself so much he didn't even look up. Sharon had to put her shoe between him and the next carrot to get his attention.

Once she did, and he heard her out, he was more than willing to help.

"We have to keep the earth clean and watered so carrots and lettuce will grow," Rufus said in his rapid-fire voice, as he bounded around Sharon's shoe to pull up two more tall carrots and nip off their tips. "Yep. Naturally. Let's do it!"

Wiggling his nose, he added quickly, "It might be a big job! We'd better get Bertrand the Bear. He's big and strong. He can get a lot done."

Where is he?" Sharon asked.

"There, in that cloud," Rufus said, angling his two tall ears in that direction.

"Bertrand!" Sharon shouted. "Are you on fire?"

Bertrand the Bear stuck his big nose out of the cloud and showed the great, dopey grin that he often wore on his friendly face. He spoke in a deep rumble:

"I am smoking a cigar. It's the 'in' thing, I've heard. All the Big Guys in Hollywood puff them, you know. That's what my cigar magazine says. And I'm a Big Guy myself. Here, Sharon, you can wear the cigar band for a ring!"

His big paw came out of the cloud of smoke and he placed the little foil band on Sharon's finger. "Lovely!" he roared, admiring her new ring and coughing.

Sharon coughed too, but she loved the ring. When Sharon told Bertrand the Bear about cleaning up the environment, he was ready to join the effort.

"We'd better get Mabel the Moose in on this," Bertrand said. "She's almost as strong as I am. She can carry you on her back, and she knows her way around the woods."

Part 2

Dancing along, Sharon found Mabel the Moose browsing at the edge of the forest. Mabel was big and awkward. When she heard about the project to clean up the environment, she got so excited she jumped up, pawed the ground and backed up, accidentally snapping three young maple saplings and crushing some Indian pipe plants.

"Well, this is just wonderful, my dear," she said in her high pitched warble. She sounded like a flute being played. "When can we start?"

"And it's bad for *you*, too, Bertrand," Mabel the Moose said. "Put it out. Put it out. Put it out." She stomped her four feet.

The cloud of smoke slowly cleared, and soon everyone could see Bertrand the Bear crushing out his cigar on the ground, looking a little ashamed.

"I didn't like it that much, but I thought I looked like a big shot," he said. "I thought it was 'in.'"

"Maybe, but the environment *you* are 'in' just got a little bit cleaner," Herman said, swishing his tail the way squirrels do, to fan away what was left of the smoke

"While we're onto bad habits," Bertrand the Bear said in his deep basso, "one of them is waste. Rufus, how many carrots did you pull out of the Smiths' garden without finishing one? Couldn't you leave the rest in the ground for tomorrow, or even for Mr. and Mrs. Smith? If you eat all the carrots, they may decide it isn't worth growing a garden - or they might fence it in."

"No!" Rufus cried. "Disaster. Couldn't have that. Tips are nicest, but I could eat the whole carrot, I guess, if it meant there'd be more for me in the future.

"Oh, dear," Mabel said. "It's true. I'm so awkward. And I've heard that some plants are becoming rare. And they are not only pretty and interesting, but doctors are finding that some can be made into medicines to cure animals and people, too. I'll try to do better."

Mabel's big eyes teared up, this time with embarrassment rather than cigar smoke.

"Don't feel too bad," Sharon said, reaching up to pat Mabel's tall shoulder. "Herman taught me the environment is everything around us, but I've seen him toss shells and stuff from his nest without caring where they fall. And he keeps digging up tulip bulbs - even when he already has enough acorns and other food for winter."

"And what about you, Sharon?" Herman shouted over her blaring boombox music. All the animals joined in: "Haven't you heard of noise pollution? You'll make us all deaf with that loud radio! You make our ears ring! We can't hear the wind sigh or the birds sing. Or even thunder from a storm."

Sharon was startled by their complaints, but she turned down the boombox

"Oh, my, we're all at fault," she said, looking at the ground.

Herman's tail drooped, but then it rose again and shook. He said to them all, "Yes, yes, yes, we're part of the environment too! It's not just the things around us, it's also us!"

"No!" Bertrand said. "Now that we're really thinking about it and helping each other do the right things, we can be part of the solution! No more cigars. Fewer wasted carrots. No more stepping on trees and plants, if we can help it. Less trash! And less noise! Starting today."

Rufus collected the left over parts of the Smiths' carrots to eat later. And Herman looked sheepish, for a squirrel, as he kicked his shells under a bush where they wouldn't be seen and could slowly become part of the earth again.

Sharon smiled at her four good friends. "It seems to me, we make the environment what it is," she said. "We're happier and healthier when we clean it up. Just think ... it all begins with ... us!"