

What a Wonderful World: Indiana Author April Pulley Sayre Leads Children to Explore the World in their Backyards... and Beyond

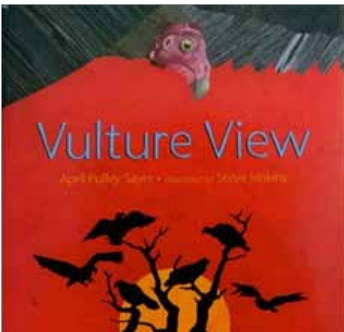
By Catherine Trinkle

Combining her talent for writing with a passion for science, Indiana author April Pulley Sayre creates children's nonfiction picture books that have a long-lasting impact. The books are written in hopes that they will either nurture a child's love of nature or spark an interest in science and the environment.

April has visited 27 countries with her husband, Jeff, an ecologist and native plant specialist. Panama is a favorite country for the Sayres, and it is a setting for her newest book, *Meet the Howlers!* and *Army Ant Parade*.

April's mother taught her about the birds and plants in their backyard in South Carolina. As a teenager, April worked in a raptor rehabilitation center where she cared for hawks and owls. Summers in the Appalachian mountains of North Carolina hunting crystals and picking wildflowers furthered her interest in the natural world while the great southern storytellers and musicians led to April's lifelong love of Appalachian culture and music. She holds a bachelor's degree in biology from Duke University and a master's degree in fine arts (Creative Writing) from Vermont College.

For the past 15 years, April and Jeff have made northern Indiana their home, in the region known as "Michiana," due to the close connection between the Indiana and Michigan border regions. The ecology of this area consists of forests, wetlands, tallgrass prairies, and dunes and is, as April describes it, "a major flyway for migratory birds."



Northern Indiana is where April says she has

learned so much about the natural world. She has shared much of this knowledge in her books, many of which cover obscure topics that have piqued the interest of readers all over the

Author Studies Meet the 21st Century Standards

4.1.1 Read, view, and listen for pleasure and personal growth.

4.1.2 Read widely and fluently to make connections with self, the world, and previous reading.

4.1.5 Connect ideas to own interests and previous knowledge and experience.

4.2.4 Show an appreciation for literature by electing to read for pleasure and expressing an interest in various literary genres.

world. Her most popular book in France is *If You Should Hear a Honey Guide*. In the U.S., April says, probably *Vulture View* and *Trout, Trout, Trout: a Fish Chant* would vie for most popular title, followed closely by *Stars Beneath Your Bed: the Surprising Story of Dust*. Worldwide, her most popular book is *One Is a Snail, Ten Is a Crab*. It's no surprise that this counting book speaks to children of different languages.

Trout, Trout, Trout, and her other chanting books *Ant, Ant, Ant* and *Bird, Bird, Bird* help students work on their oral reading fluency



First grade student Sophia was eager to meet April Sayre, whose books she knew well after a six-week author study during her weekly library visits.

skills. April visits between more than 30 schools per year, and students and staff will love her presentation and will connect with her books long after the event. Nonfiction, as most librarians know, is harder to sell than fiction, but no less important

as many students choose to read nonfiction more than their teachers do. The fiction book in April's repertoire is *Hush, Little Puppy*, a simple, gentle rhyming book perfect for parents to read aloud to toddlers and preschoolers after a long day spent playing.

Many people may not find vultures interesting creatures, but they will after reading *Vulture View*, winner of a 2008 Theodore Geisel Honor Award. There is a definite rhythm to this book which will have children chanting along as you read "up, up!" and "down, down." In *Get to Know Vultures*, we learn that these "graceful soaring birds" ride atop warm, rising air which helps lift them up to then soar into the sky where they use their sight and smell to find dead animals to eat. Many students know that vultures eat dead animals, but most youngsters haven't yet learned this interesting tidbit. Prior to reading, teachers may ask students what makes vultures unique? What makes them stand out in the animal kingdom? Caldecott honor winner Steve Jenkins's cut-paper collages on vivid, solid-color backgrounds both teach and inspire.

Many of April's books use onomatopoeia to help make the habitats and the animals that live in them come alive to students. *Crocodile Listens* is an excellent book to introduce students to the onomatopoeia which will be found

throughout an April Sayre Author Study and to teach students about Nile River animals and animals that lay eggs. For students in grades 4-6, *Secrets of Sound: Studying the Calls and Songs of Whales, Elephants, and Birds* is a deeply interesting book which describes these creatures and the scientists who study their sounds. We know that many students prefer nonfiction to fiction. Books like *Secrets of Sound* have a smaller but devoted audience. The photographs taken all over the world, mini-biographies of scientists, and narrative descriptions of sound, are fascinating.

One of April's newest books, *Honk, Honk, Goose: Canadian Geese Start a Family* is full of onomatopoeia that invite listeners to read along. These geese that seem to love living on school property had once disappeared from parts of the northern U.S. and Canada. A breeding program ensured that these geese would stay around the area. In fact, these geese did not migrate as their wild ancestors had but have made low grassy areas near small ponds their homes.

Sayre has several books in print that teach students about specific regions of the world. The Our Amazing Continents series includes *Good Morning, Africa!*, *G'Day, Australia!*, *Greetings!, Asia!*, *South America, Surprise!* and *Hello, Europe!* Each double page spread has both large and small photographs depicting the landscape and animals of the region along with simple-sentences presented in large and colorful text which could be read aloud by the teacher. As an introduction to these regions of the world, these books are excellent.

A 2010 release *Turtle, Turtle, Watch Out!* teaches the reader about sea turtles. This book is appealing as a read aloud, independent reading, and an excellent resource for the young researcher.

To learn more about this Indiana author, visit her website: <http://www.aprilsayre.com>. She can be reached at apsayre@mac.com.

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Works Cited

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"The Bumblebee Queen." *Tumblebooks - eBooks for eKids!*. N.p., n.d. Web. 1 June 2010. http://www.tumblebooks.com/library/asp/home_tumblebooks.asp Subscription required.

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Some Books by April Pulley Sayre

Note: *If You Should Hear a Honey Guide* and *Crocodile Listens* are both out of print but used copies are available as of this publication through online booksellers.

Ant, Ant, Ant! An Insect Chant. Chanhassen, MN: Northword Books For Young Readers, 2005.

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G'Day Australia! (Our Amazing Continents). Brookfield, CT: Millbrook Press, 2003.

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Meet the Howlers!. New ed. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge Publishing, 2010.

One Is a Snail, Ten is a Crab: A Counting by Feet Book. Cambridge: Candlewick, 2006. Written with Jeff Sayre.

Secrets of Sound: Studying the Calls and Songs of Whales, Elephants, and Birds (Scientists in the Field Series). Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

Stars Beneath Your Bed: The Surprising Story of Dust (Ala Notable Children's Books. Younger Readers (Awards)). New York: HarperCollins, 2005.

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Turtle, Turtle Watch Out. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge Publishing, 2010.

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