

The earth has a fever

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thanks to Graham Keen
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Dear colleagues,

This story was intended to be read in class out loud, used as an educational support for lessons related to the environment.

This format is less attractive on the screen but seems to be more practical for use in class. On one side there are drawings to show the children or put on the board and on the other side the text for you (one drawing = one page of reading).

Give your own intonation, add some details, make it live so that it encourages your pupils to love and respect our nature.

Your comments, drawings or questions are most welcome – please send them to Professor Sneeze, Breakneck or Reckless. They will send you a response.

Professor Sneeze (Breakneck or Reckless)
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Dear parents,

Good habits are learnt at home from a very early age and that includes habits about our environment.

Read this story to your children and work out together some measures you can take together to save the planet.

Do write to us too!



At the village school in Rabbitville everyone was very excited.

They were getting ready for the school fete the next day. Mrs Pretty, the teacher, was listening to Cheeky, the rabbit, who was reciting his poem to welcome everybody.

At the back of the class, Scamp, his friend, was practicing her dance steps. At the same time Pim and Pom were in the corridor singing the song they had just learnt.

When the clock struck 4 o' clock everything was ready.

Mrs Pretty announced:

- No homework for Monday because it's the school fete!
- That's great said the rabbits.

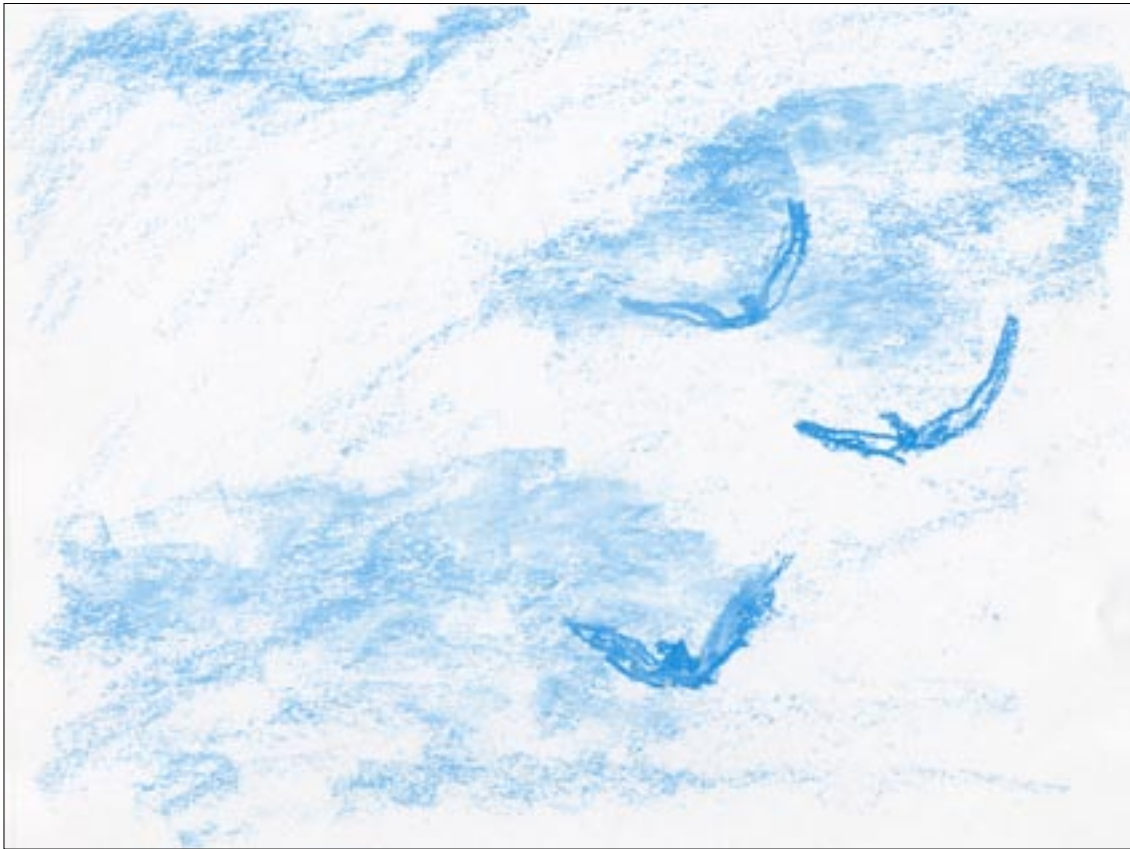
And all of them went back home, so happy.



- Tomorrow we are going to have fun,
thought Pim the rabbit as he went up to his
bedroom

Like all the rabbits in the village he found it
hard getting off to sleep and he was awake very
early the next morning.

He was feeling really happy as he pulled back
the curtains and opened the window.

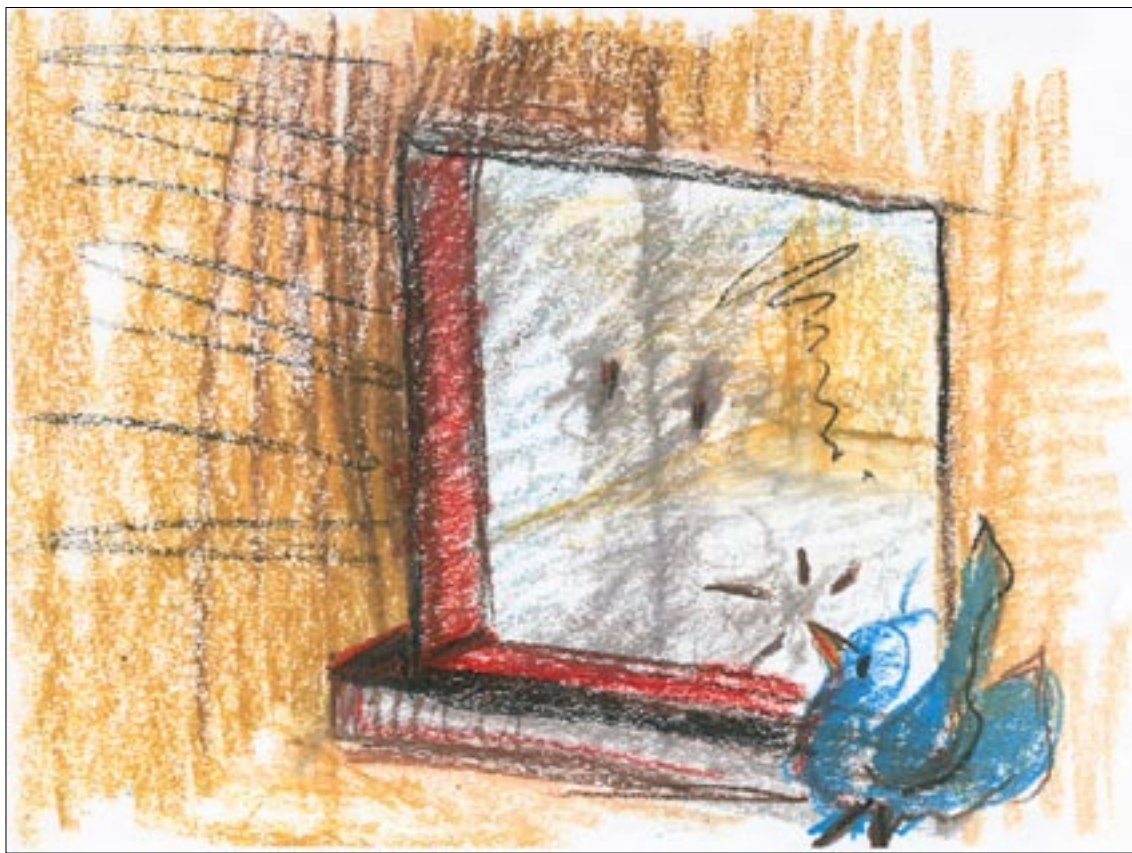


Suddenly he was surprised by the noisy chirping of the birds. He saw his friend, Chives, the seagull.

- What's happening, Chives? Why such a din so early in the morning? Is it because it's the school fete today, said Pim.

- No, Pim, answered Chives. There's something funny down on the beach near the school. Come with me, I'll show you.

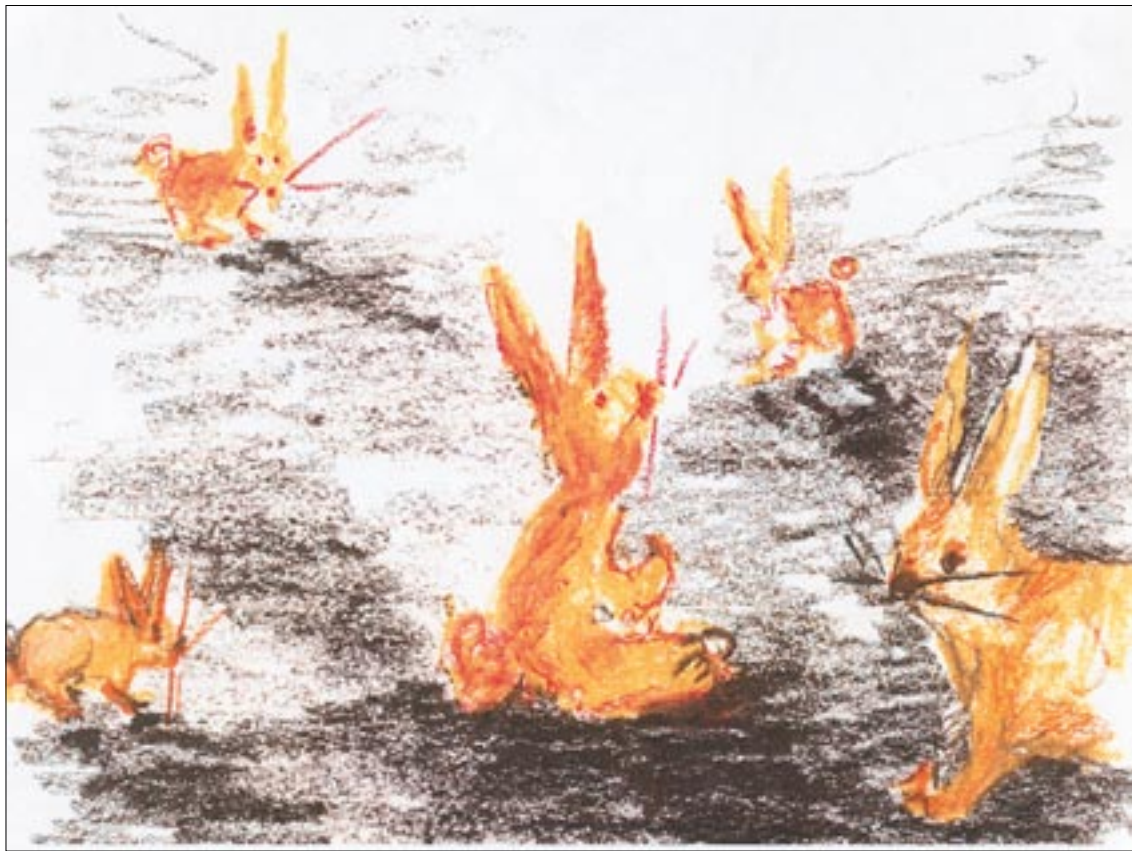
- No, go and tell my friends, then we'll meet at the school.



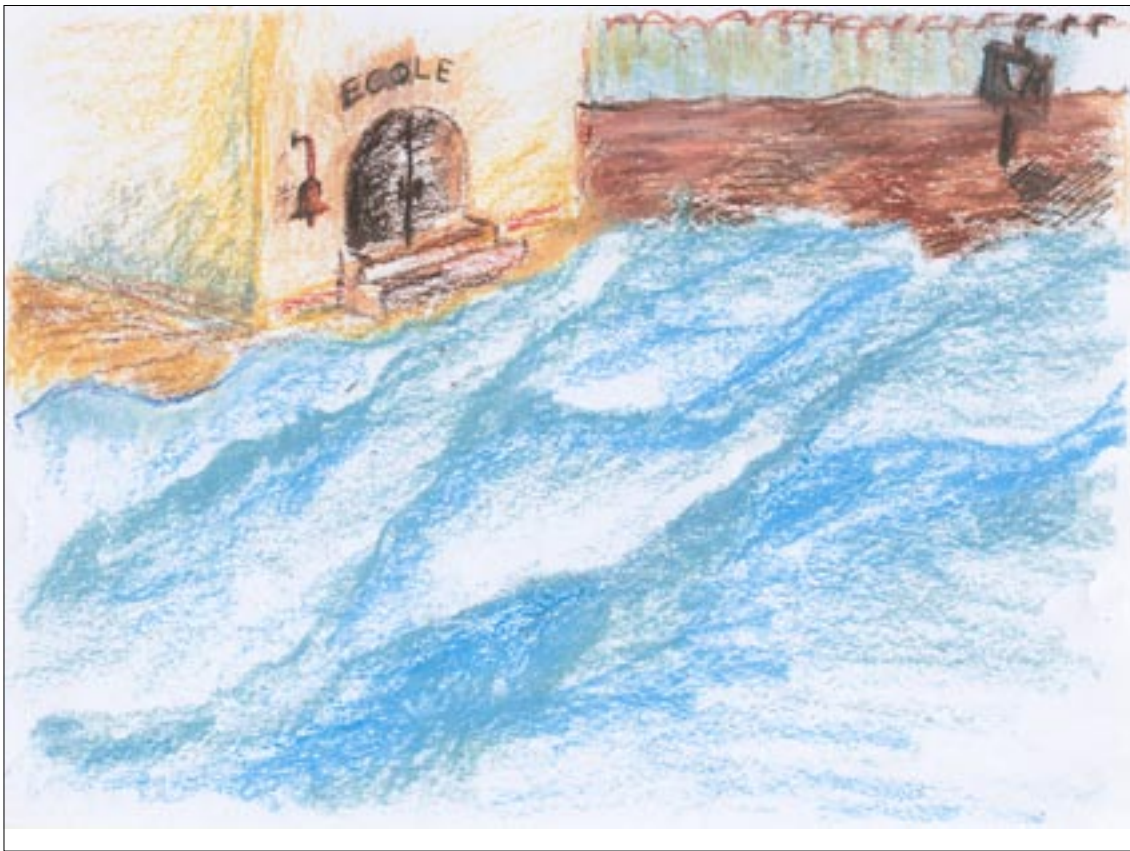
Chives, the seagull, went and tapped with his beak on all the bedroom windows of the little rabbits and everybody got moving.



Pim was so intrigued that he got dressed too quickly. He put his trousers on back to front and put on two socks with different colours;



He ran out. On the way he met his friends,
Scamp and Cheeky. A little further on they were
joined by Pom and the group arrived at the end
of the beach near the school.



- Oh, what's going on? said Scamp.
- We can't get into the school any more, said Cheeky.
- Can you swim? said Pom.

Everyone said what he thought about these strange goings-on. The tide had come in and the water covered the lovely beach, which they used as a playground. Little waves were gently lapping at the school door.

- It's not normal, said Pim. Let's wake our parents and Mrs Pretty, the teacher, maybe they will know what it is!



The news spread through the village in a flash. Everyone assembled in front of the school but nobody had ever seen that before.

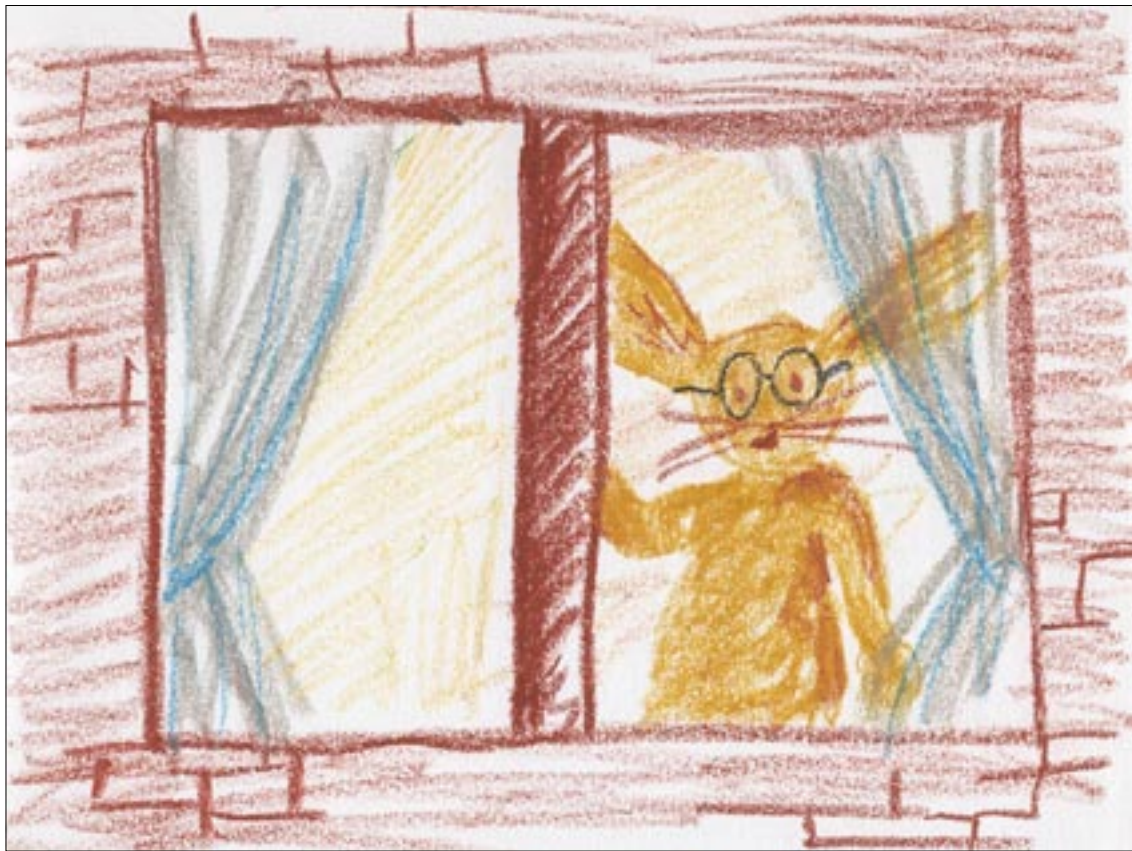
- Why don't we ask Professor Sneeze, suggested Mrs Pretty.



Everybody knew Professor Sneeze was very clever. He lived outside the village in a house full of books and containers for his experiments. He looked rather funny with his square hat and his little round glasses.



It was decided that Pim and Pom would go and see him.



As soon as the two young rabbits had explained the strange goings-on at the school, Professor Sneeze retired to his library to study his books ...but he didn't come out again.

Time went by, so slowly ... Pim and Pom started getting impatient.

- It must be serious, said Pim.

Just as he said that, Professor Sneeze appeared at the window. He seemed very earnest and his eyes had that worried look.

- Nothing, I found nothing, he said. I need more information. Chives, the seagull, must fly out to sea and bring me back some clues.



Pim and Pom rushed back to the village, where everyone was waiting for them.

Chives, the seagull, willingly accepted the task that Professor Sneeze had asked her to carry out.

- You can count on me, my friends, I will fly as far as I can. I will keep my eyes open wide and listen carefully. I'm going to leave right away, said Chives.

In the village nobody was thinking about the fete any more. Everyone was looking at the sea incredulously.



Chives had only just left when she met a fishing boat. She landed on the deck but the fishermen shooed her away because they thought she wanted to steal some of their fish.

- Listen, I only wanted some information, said Chives looking at the tasty fish. Alas, nobody answered.

She didn't take a single fish, even though she was longing to have one, and she sat patiently on the edge of the boat. She had to make a success of her mission.

Finally one of the older fishermen spoke to her:

- What do you want to know, my little seagull? We are working and don't have time to chat.

- Have you noticed anything strange out at sea since yesterday? Chives asked.

- Are you joking, answered the fisherman, the sea hasn't changed but there are less fish than when I was young.

- Oh! Nothing changed! Are you sure? Chives asked again. That's a pity!

She was disappointed and flew off, leaving those inhospitable fishermen behind to get on with their work.



Chives flew for a long time, looking carefully at the surface of the water. But she didn't see anything unusual.

Suddenly she saw some dolphins jumping happily. She called out to them :

- Hello, my friends! Have you noticed anything strange in the last few days? she asked

- No, little seagull, answered one of the dolphins. Come and try the water, it 's almost warm! Come and play with us!

- Another time, answered Chives, because today I've got a special mission...

Chives flew off disappointed and tired.

Out to sea she saw an island and decided to stop there for a rest.



Chives settled down pensively on the beach.

- What a beautiful view! she thought as she admired the red sunset reflecting on the blue water.

Suddenly she noticed two wasps buzzing around, talking to each other as they flew back to their nest:

- Buzz! You know, I've just got back from a lovely green country where no wasps have been before, one of them proudly said.

- Buzz! Buzz! What? The green country called Greenland? You went as far as that? But it's very cold there, the other one said.

- Buzz! No, not this year. And what's more over there the people don't know us. They don't try and squash us because they don't know that we sometimes sting.

Chives sat up when she heard this.

- That's funny, she thought. I must go and quickly tell Professor Sneeze.



Chives flew all night long. She didn't stop at the village and was quite out of breath when she got to the Professor's house.

She told him everything she had seen and heard.

Professor Sneeze thought for a minute stroking his moustache.

- We must send someone to the North Pole, he said all of a sudden. I need some samples of the ice. I could analyse them in my laboratory to try and understand how the wasp was able to go to Greenland, which is normally so cold. It's certainly the same thing that's happening in front of our school.

- But it's dangerous, said Chives. Nobody would want to go there!

- That's not true, said Professor Sneeze. In the forest there are two rabbits who love exploring those regions and are always ready to go. Let's get in touch with them!



Breakneck and Reckless, the two explorers agreed to help Professor Sneeze.

Everyone in the village was getting excited as their departure approached.

Two big sledges were loaded with cakes and other food prepared by the mothers, the special containers belonging to Professor Sneeze and all the equipment required to survive in such icy regions: a special tent, sleeping bags, warm clothing, a stove, skis, sails, a radio, and so on... and even a pistol to scare off inquisitive polar bears!



A plane took off in the direction of the ice cap and dropped Breakneck and Reckless and all their equipment off at a place where the ice was thick enough for the plane to land. It was still quite a long way from the North Pole.

Too bad! Breakneck and Reckless would have to cover the rest of the way on foot, pulling their sledges behind them.

Suddenly the wind whipped up.

- Great! Let's put our skis on and get the sails out, said Breakneck. They will pull us along and we will progress faster.
- Look, Reckless! There's a strange reflection on the horizon.
- Let's go and see!



- It's water, said Breakneck in astonishment. It looks like a small lake.
- The ice cap has melted, answered Reckless.
- But it's not summer yet. Let's stop and put our tent up so we can collect some samples for Professor Sneeze.
- Down to work!

It was icy cold because the weak sun was about to set and the wind was still blowing. In spite of that both Breakneck and Reckless took off one of their two pairs of gloves. That way it was easier to put the tent up but their paws might get frozen.

No matter, they couldn't let the inhabitants of Rabbitville down since they had put all their hope in this polar expedition.



The explorers spent a nice night in their warm sleeping bags and the next morning they breakfasted on the tasty cakes prepared by the mothers and tea made from melted snow.

A mother bear and her two cubs were attracted by the appetizing smells and came close to the tent. Reckless didn't want to share his breakfast and was a bit frightened by the size of the visitors, so he grabbed the pistol and got ready to fire into the air to frighten them off.

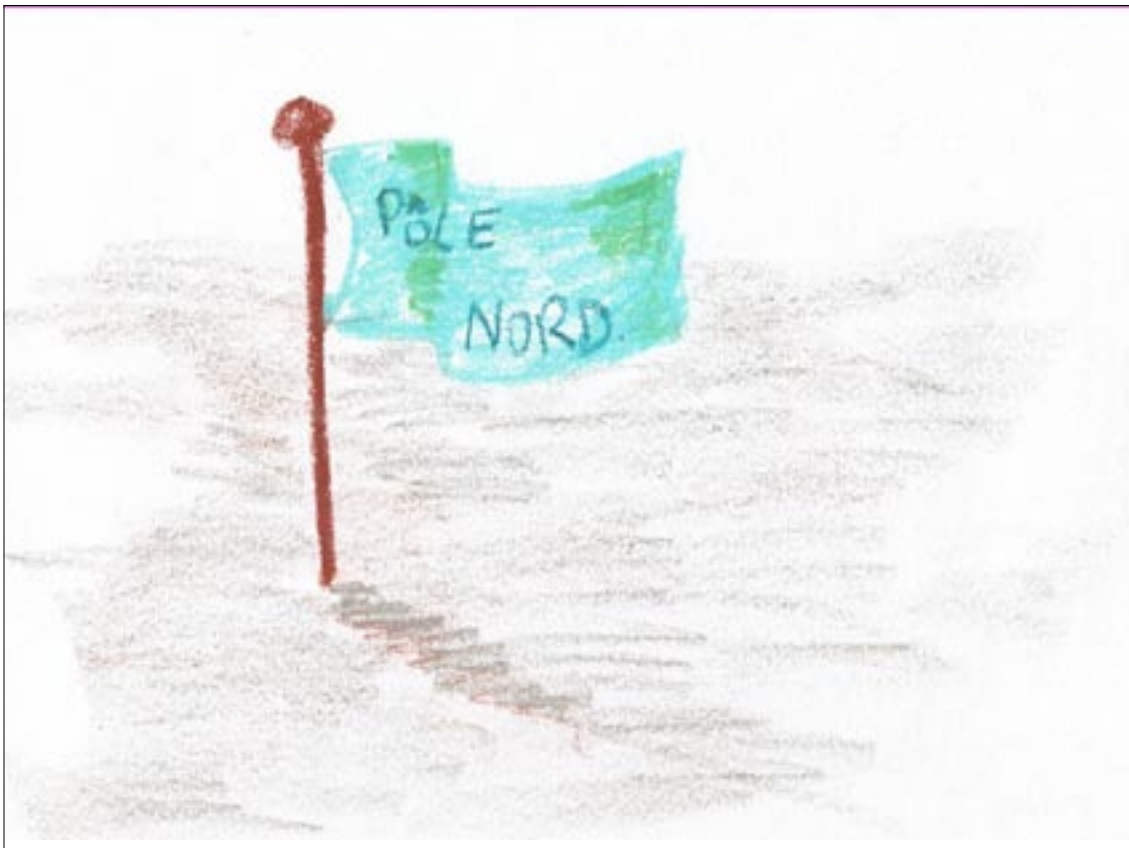
Fortunately a seal popped his nose out of the water, which caught the attention of the three greedy bears. In fact seal meat is something bears really love.



The journey to the North Pole seemed never-ending. Breakneck and Reckless prepared themselves for a long walk. As they set off they were caught out by a blizzard, which is a very strong wind that drives the snow.

Furthermore the ice pack started to creak and move and blocks of ice started crashing into each other. Breakneck and Restless were frightened ... but nothing was going to stop them!

More and more often they came across holes in the ice, which were full of water. That worried them a lot.



After a huge effort the finally reached the North Pole.

- We must turn back quickly, said Reckless. It's urgent to tell Professor Sneeze that the ice is melting.

- No, replied Breakneck. We only have a few samples of the ice pack. That's not enough for Professor Sneeze.

Furthermore the wasps talked about a country called Greenland. That's not so far from here. Let's go there!



Circling above them was a magnificent seagull, called Pear, listening to their conversation.

- Who are you? What are you looking for in the middle of nowhere? she asked inquisitively. Aren't you afraid walking on that moving ice pack or coming across polar bears or foxes?

Breakneck and Reckless were so happy to meet someone that they invited her to share a snack with them.

They explained to her the strange things going on at Rabbitville and their mission.

- I would like to help you, said Pear, the seagull. From up in the sky I will seek out the easiest route for you to Greenland, one where you won't come across « hummocks », those mounds of ice that you would have to climb over to move on.



So the three of them continued the expedition together. As they progressed Pear asked lots of questions about Chives, the seagull.

- We are cousins, said Pear, but Chives doesn't like the cold. She never comes up here to the North Pole and I find it's too warm at Rabbitville ...we never see each other, it's rather sad.

Breakneck and Reckless put their trust in Pear who was giving them directions from up in the sky. With their skis and sails they were as fast as she was.

They almost forgot the terrifying noise of the heaving ice pack and they took in the full beauty of that white and cold expanse.

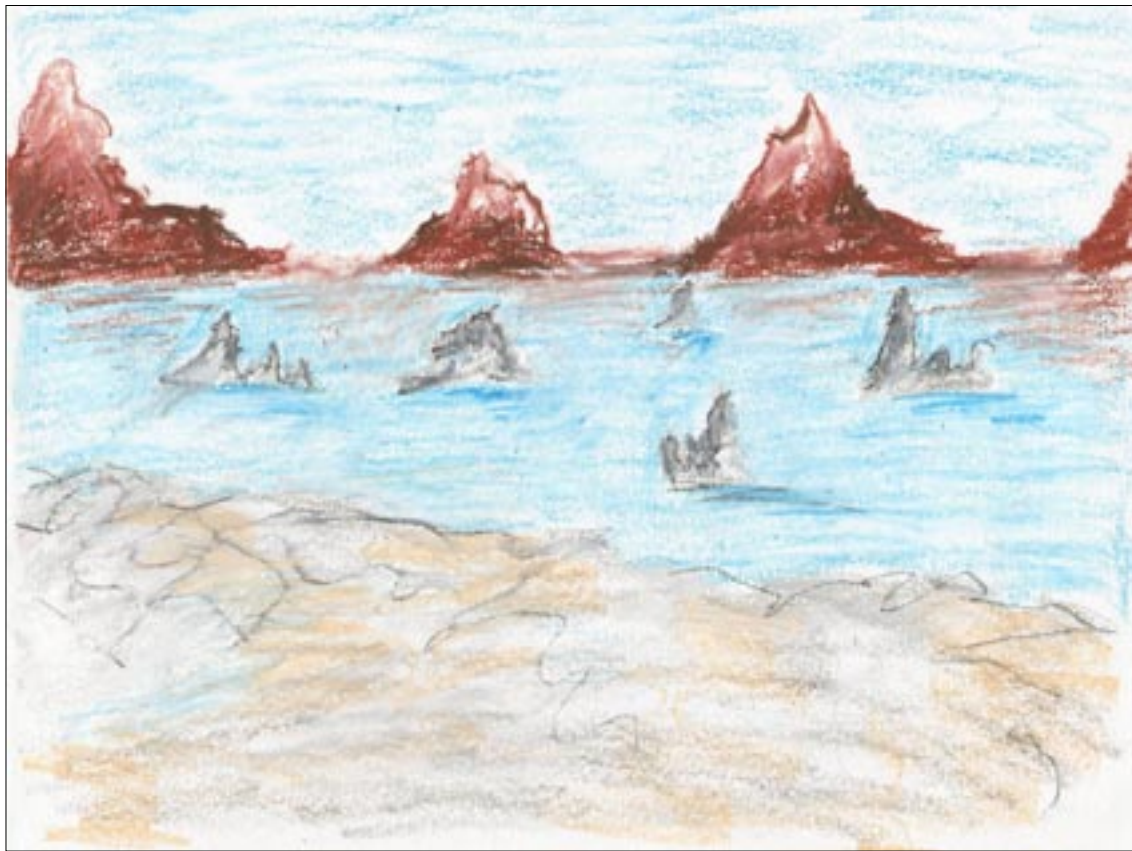


Suddenly Pear cried out from up in the sky:

- Hurray! We're nearly there. I can see more and more icebergs. Those great blocks of ice that have broken off from a glacier and fallen into the sea are prisoners in the ice pack. That means we are nearly at the coast.

- Hey! The wind is getting too strong! I can't hold on to my sail! My paws hurt! complained Breakneck as tiredness set in.

Breakneck and Reckless stopped to recover their strength and have a drink of hot tea but Pear was in great form and surged ahead to check the way.



When she came back she announced:

- The « nunataks » aren't very far away.
- The what? asked Reckless in surprise.
- The « nunataks », repeated Pear smiling.

That's the rocky mountains along the coast.

- Right, let's set off for the « nunataks », said Breakneck.

Once more they let the wind fill their sails and they reached Greenland without too much trouble.

As soon as they got there Pear left them because she preferred the solitude of the wide open spaces.



Breakneck and Reckless continued their expedition on their own.

They wanted to get to the ice cap, the huge glacier covering Greenland to collect some samples for Professor Sneeze but to reach it Breakneck and Reckless had to climb a slope of ice, which was like a slippery side. They were wondering how they were going to manage that when they overheard a strange conversation carried by the wind.

- ... just one ice carrot, said a loud voice.

These words whetted the appetites of Breakneck and Reckless who set off in the direction of the voices.



They soon came across a group of hares with white fur.

Reckless was a bit greedy and asked them where they could find ice carrots because he had never eaten them.

- Hi! Hi! Hi!

- Ho! Ho!

- Isn't he funny exclaimed the hares.

Breakneck and Reckless didn't understand.

One of the older hares took pity on them and explained that an ice carrot was not a dessert. When one makes a hole in the ice cap one removes a long piece of ice. That's called an ice carrot.



Breakneck was a bit cross but remembered Professor Sneeze and said:

- We need an ice carrot,
where can we find some?
- Here, said the white hares.

Yesterday we went on the ice cap and brought one back. If you want it we would be willing to exchange it for real carrots, because we have never eaten any, they laughed.

So Breakneck and Reckless exchanged a bag of real carrots for an ice carrot and were impatient to set off back to Rabbitville.

On the way they agreed never to tell the others that they had thought an ice carrot was a tasty dessert and that the hares had laughed at them.



As soon as Professor Sneeze received the ice carrot he shut himself in his laboratory and put it in his freezer so that the ice didn't melt.

Then he got his equipment ready.

With great care he cut a piece of ice.

Unfortunately it was warm in the room. The ice melted and Professor Sneeze only had water left to examine.

The same thing every time.

He conducted many different tests but the water didn't reveal any secrets. He started again with another piece of ice, then another but it was the same thing every time.

Professor Sneeze was worried that he couldn't find anything. He started thinking, walking round and round in circles.



Then he had an idea:

- I really must analyse the ice before it melts!
he said.

So Professor Sneeze turned off the heating.
Gradually the temperature in his laboratory
went down but that wasn't enough. So he
invented a machine to make the room cold.

All the inhabitants of the village were waiting
outside. But nobody dared disturb him.



Professor Sneeze started getting cold; his moustache became brittle and his hairs froze.

He was so busy with his work he didn't even stop to put his coat on. He took the ice out of the freezer. It didn't melt.

He carefully cut the ice in slices as if it were a salami.

His fingers were so cold but he managed to put a slice under his microscope.

- What a surprise! he cried on seeing lots of little air bubbles captured in the ice.

He studied the air bubbles for a long time and finally understood what was going on.



Professor Sneeze came out and explained to the inhabitants:

- Now I understand! The earth is sick: it's got a fever. The temperature makes the ice at the poles melt. So there is more water in the sea. The water was looking for somewhere to go so it came up to our school door.



- Is the earth seriously ill? asked Cheeky who suddenly became worried.

- Yes I think so replied Professor Sneeze.

- Aren't there any medicines or remedies to cure it? wondered Pim.

- I'm going to try and find one, said Professor Sneeze, who was concerned.

And he went back into his laboratory.



A short while later Professor Sneeze invited all the children into his library.

Cheeky was amazed to see so many books. Scamp was captivated by the large boards with complicated calculations.

Pim and Pom, who were usually so restless, didn't dare to move. Chives, the seagull settled down on the window sill.

- The earth has a fever, said Professor Sneeze, because it's fighting against dangerous bacteria: pollution.

- What's pollution? asked Cheeky.

- It's everything that is bad for nature like for example, exhaust gasses from cars, smoke from factories and household heating, etc... Professor Sneeze explained.

- So it's our fault that the earth has a fever, said Pim.

- That's right! And the only remedy is to stop polluting, Professor Sneeze continued.

The rabbits were bowled over and left Professor Sneeze.



On their way they had a lively discussion.
Everyone wanted to do something to cure the earth.

- Scamp said, I will turn the light off every time I leave the room.
- Cheeky said, I will walk to school in future rather than going by car.
- Pom said, I'm going to take showers rather than using so much hot water in the bath.
- Pim said, I will organise the dustbins so that we can get as much as possible recycled.
- And Chives, the seagull said, I promise to tell everyone that the earth is sick so that people everywhere make more effort.



The rabbits went home, happy about the decisions they had taken. Everyone had forgotten the school fete. The earth had a fever but it was going to get well again.

Dedicated to

ALAIN HUBERT

who made us dream in the face of imposing landscapes and opened our eyes to the fragility of our planet, encouraging us to tell young children about the attitudes that are necessary to maintain our environment.

OUR FORMER AND FUTURE PUPILS

who, thanks to their spontaneity and liveliness and also their boisterousness, make us constantly seek new ways of keeping them interested.

Our warmest thanks to

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JOËLLE VAN DEN BERG

for having opened the doors of his association, « Réseau Idée, Information et Diffusion en Education à l'Environnement » (Network of Ideas, Information and Distribution of Education about the Environment)