

✖ Maybe not. But perhaps eight-year-olds can.

Last Wednesday morning, I showed up for my weekly library volunteering at my daughter's first grade class. School cutbacks meant that the librarian wasn't there, so the teacher, another parent and I had to make do. The display was about Earth Day, since I had to find a book to read to the kids — fast — my eye settled upon what looked to be a pretty interesting story: Molly Bang's [*Common Ground: The Water, Earth, and Air We Share*](#).

If you have a school-aged child, you probably know of Bang because she wrote [*When Sophie Gets Angry — Really, Really Angry*](#), a book about how a little girl gets, well, angry, and how she learns how to handle it by herself. The kids knew that book well, so when I told them it was the same author, they seemed content.

Turns out that *Common Ground* is a book that tells the story of Garrett Hardin's classic article on the Tragedy of the Commons. Straight up. There's a village, and the villagers have sheep, and they chew up all the grass, and so we have to take care of the earth. Strictly speaking, that's not totally straight up, because theoretically one solution to the commons problem is privatization, and another one is government regulation. (And another one is informal controls and social norms, but you get the point.). Then Bang uses other examples of commons problems, like polluting the water and emissions into the air. It's all fine "In the short run," the book says. But not in the long run.

The kids liked the book, but I wouldn't say that it all turned them into tree-huggers. It usually takes me a couple of times with my first-year law students for them to get the idea, and the law students aren't bouncing out of their seats looking for Pokemon books. (They can stay there and surf the web.). Looking at the descriptions of the book on Amazon, I can see why: it's really geared more for 8-12 year-olds, and a room full of antsy first-graders just won't focus on the message with much understanding. (*Sophie*, by contrast, is supposed to be for 2-7 year-olds). But if you have a third-grader and up, or even a first-grader one-on-one, they might be able to get it. And if they do get it, they'll be way ahead of the House Republican Conference.