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Lafayette environmentalist pens book for kids about Earth Hour

By Kara Navolio



Nanette Heffernan dons a suit made from a weeks' worth of plastic bags. Photo provided

When Nanette Heffernan, a 25-year resident of Lafayette, was driving across the Golden Gate Bridge on the last Saturday evening of March 2015 all the lights went out. The eerie darkness made her believe there had been a power outage, but later she learned that it was part of a global event called Earth Hour. She did not know it then, but the environmental activist would soon take this experience as inspiration for a children's picture book called "Earth Hour: A lights-Out Event for Our Planet" (Charlesbridge, 2020).

Earth Hour, sponsored by the World Wildlife Fund, occurs each year on the last Saturday in March at 8:30 p.m. local time across the planet. Lights are turned off for one hour as a pledge for what each individual plans to do for the environment in the next year. Monuments across the globe also go dark from the Eiffel Tower to the Great Wall of China, and from the Sydney Opera House to the International Space Station.

Writing about Earth Hour was a natural fit for Heffernan, who has spent over 20 years working with kids and with environmental causes. She has worked with Sustainable Lafayette, Sustainable Contra Costa and the Lafayette School District's Green Team. She also leads an active, outdoors-loving Girl Scout troop, which participates in community service related to the environment. While a parent volunteer at Springhill Elementary School, Heffernan was a parking lot traffic guide at drop-off time. She would wear fun hats as a way to keep the atmosphere relaxed. One day she noticed all the trash in the school's dumpster, mostly plastic from kids' lunches. She decided to make a hat from one week's worth of plastic bags. However, one week's worth of plastic bags was too much for just a hat; it evolved into a complete suit! With the principal's support, Heffernan led a waste-free lunch initiative, and the school reduced its plastic trash by 50%. Heffernan used the trash suit to lead the Earth Day Festival parade. She now brings it along on author visits when discussing her book.

"Earth Hour: A Lights-Out Event for Our Planet" was celebrated with a Launch Party at Bel & Bunna's Books on Jan. 26. Supporters were also offered the opportunity to buy a book for a Bay Area Title 1 school, another of Heffernan's passions. The Dailey Method also hosted events (called Barre and Bubbles) and donated studio space to help raise donations to Heffernan's Title 1 book drive. Each of the 150 books donated so far also comes with a free virtual author visit for the school via Zoom. Her author visits at schools are often accompanied by hands-on, interactive activities to help kids understand the impact we all have on the environment. "Children are empowered to learn what a difference it makes when you carpool or take a bus versus everyone driving individually in cars," Heffernan said.

Signed copies of the book are available at Bel & Bunna's Books and Orinda Books. Heffernan can also be seen in her trash suit, reading her book and leading a solar lantern making craft at Flashlight Books in Walnut Creek on March 18 and Mrs. Dalloway's in Berkeley on March 21. Visit her website nanetteheffernan.com for more future events or to learn about school visits or donating a book to Title 1 schools.

"I hope that children learn that even their activities, as one person, all add up and make a difference," added Heffernan.

Don't forget to turn off the lights at 8:30 p.m. on March 28 and make your pledge to help the environment.

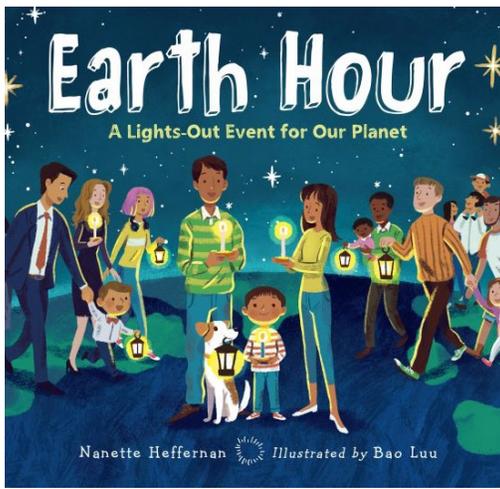


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