

Eco-Linguistics and Popular Culture: A Critical Perspective on
Disney Animated Movies

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Abstract

Movies are known for their vivid imagery and inculcating ideologies through their scenic depiction. Various language and visual patterns are incorporated in movies to disseminate desired ideologies in minds of the masses. Minds of young children can easily be manipulated by watching movies and they start to deal with situations according to their shaped ideologies. The present study aims to analyse the role of constructing ideologies through ecological relationships between humans and nature while raising awareness about environmental degradation and its protection. The study was narrowed down to two movies named as; Finding Nemo and WALL-E that are analysed with respect to an eco-linguistic lens. The methodology was qualitative and Stibbe’s (2015) Model of Eco-linguistic Discourse Analysis was used. The dialogues of mentioned movies were analysed linguistically and the result of these findings showed that movies play a significant role in constructing ideologies while these movies focused on eco-friendly ideologies. Movies that consist of themes related to nature conservation and protection should be added in curriculum.

Key Terms: Eco-linguistic Discourse Analysis, Ideologies, Children, Animated Movies

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INTRODUCTION

Media plays highly significant role in shaping the minds of young children. There is a dire need to maintain and sustain justice at every level whether it is social, political or environmental. Life solely depends on the environment surrounding a person. Similarly environment is not only limited to living things but also non-living entities. Ecology basically deals with how living and non-living things live together and linguistics on the other hand, deals with how people interact with each other. Ecology and linguistics both combine to form ecolinguistics and through eco linguistics, the relationship between the environment and language is studied. A child grows up by forming a relationship with his environment, his emotional and cognitive development takes place as he interacts with his environment. A child is a product of his environment and society and s/he will perform such actions which he has learnt from his surroundings whether they are good or bad. Environment and language are interconnected, one is incomplete without other and vice versa. Apart from environment, digital media also has a great influence on children's cognition, the content they are watching directly integrates in them and enables them to behave in a certain way. Language acts as a powerful tool to convey messages and to build mindsets and through language it is seen that how people interact with each other and what impact does our words and actions exercise on our surroundings. There is a constant relationship between children and animated movies or cartoons and they spend a lot of time watching movies which in/directly influences them. Whenever a child sees something on TV, he starts mimicking it despite its significance, for instance if s/he watches a good character, s/he starts imitating him and gets praised by his parents and other people but there is still a chance that s/he might get influenced by a bad character and when the child mimics something evil s/he gets beaten up and this is how media is shaping young children's minds. Apart from that children movies are full of messages, they contain symbolism, morals and lessons, positive role models, entertainment as well as education and through watching these movies children develop social skills which help them to interact and communicate with their surrounding environments.

Animated movies in early ages revolved around magical themes but as now the themes have totally changed, they show moral lessons and provide information on very important subjects which are necessary for the upbringing of the children as well as helpful in sustaining the environment. Many animated movies cover the very theme of nature like; *the jungle book*, *Zootopia*, *the lion king*, *finding nemo* and many others. Many animated movies are now covering important social and climate issues like; *inside out*, *big hero*, *cars 2* and *captain planet*. Watching movies contribute a lot in shaping minds and provides the children to see everything critically. Society is shaped by the repeated narratives and stories we live by. If a narrative is being repeated for centuries and it is not helping in sustaining the environment it should be changed but it is very difficult to change it as people have accepted and given it a shape of ideology. Hence, say for instance; people see nature from the lens of resources or poetry and they think that they can use nature in the way they want whether they conserve or exploit it. The concerning part is the natural resources which should be conserved are now being exploited just because people think that they are natural and will never run out but sadly, a greater extent of natural resources have been depleted due to human intervention. It is time for children to learn about their environment and how they are going to help in sustaining it. The objective of this study is to examine how animated movies like *finding nemo* and *WALL-E* provide a message about human behaviour and their interaction with the environment and with themselves too.

Finding Nemo showcases the relationship between humans and animals and how human intervention is causing nuance in their surroundings and on the other hand, *WALL-E* imparts a lesson that humans should take care of the planet earth and not destroy it through excessive consumerism and waste.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature has shown that children are more inclined towards cartoons and animated movies and it is high time that these mediums should be used in shaping young minds, positively. Out of many interesting things the most enjoyed one is watching animated movies (Meng et al., 2020) and it is of no surprise because children spend most of their time watching tv and animated content like cartoons and movies catch their interest. Movies undoubtedly play a vital role in conveying messages that contains lots of information and useful knowledge, animated movies are in fact made with a purpose and that focus is to build up ideologies since a very early age. A young mind can be moulded in any way. Animated content is made in such a way that it helps children to develop social skills, critical as well as logical thinking skills and most important of all positive attitudes that may help them to become a person of great values in future and they will do a lot for their environment as well.

Gamson et al. (1992) opined that nothing in this modernized world is ideology free even the content made for children entertainment. On the surface, it may seem neutral but in reality, even a small bit of that content contains an ideological message that directly or indirectly shapes the mind of the viewer in whatever direction they want. Huesmann et al., (2003) exposes that watching aggressive content for a long period of time can make a child behave in that particular way for the rest of his life. When a child is exposed to a content that revolves around the themes of violence, aggression, and fighting there is no doubt that he would not adopt those attitudes, he will adopt those attitudes and apply them practically as well, same goes for positive themes, if a child is exposed to positive themes like compassion, kindness, empathy and sympathy s/he would act in the same way throughout his/her life, the outcomes of the content children watch on tv are solely based on the messages that are conveyed through them. Matthes and Naderer (2019) revealed that a great number of unhealthy foods and drinks are shown in children movies which can deteriorate the food eating habits of children. Movies like *Alvin and the chipmunks* show the love of chipmunks towards eating junk food while Alvin, Simon and Theodore are often seen eating oversized amount of food and lastly the chipmunks are shown to have sweet tooth due to overeating of sugary foods (Brown et al., 2017), these unhealthy eating habits are ultimately adopted by the children watching these movies and most of them end up having childhood obesity. So, from the above research it is proved that children learn everything from the content they are watching and they try to imitate them in their real life. The content can be of any type it may contain violence, compassion kindness, unhealthy eating habits, magical, fantasy or reality based some things are adopted by the children and they try to apply them in their real lives.

Just like eating habits messages about physical attractiveness are also delivered through animated movies. Characters that had fair skin tone and were slim were considered more attractive as compared to the dark skinned and healthy ones (Klein and Shiffman, 2006). Very less animated content was made on dark skinned tone female protagonists because it did not attract the audience, according to them if the female protagonist is not fair or thin, she cannot be a princess or queen same is the case with male characters if they are less muscular, dark skinned and overweight they are not fit for the

role of the protagonist. Similarly, this beauty standard is applied in real life by the children as well they start give less importance to people with dark skin as compared to people with white skin.

Moreover, many animated movies relay informational messages which help children develop positive attitudes and sense of duty (Anderson and Pempek, 2005). As it is seen from previous researches that children try to imitate and apply everything, they see on TV whether it is helpful or consequential. If a child watches violence or aggressive content, s/he is more likely to use violence for getting things done. If a child watches kind and compassionate content, s/he is more likely to help people and try to make society worth living. De Leeuw and van der Laan (2018) also discussed that watching animated content specifically *Disney* movies enabled children to become kinder and more compassionate and integrated helping behaviour in them. Stibbe (2015) suggested that readers and viewers should be able to detect the message being conveyed to them and what impact does that message has on the viewer and his relationship with his surrounding environment. He advised people to disclose the cognitive structures present in the stories we live by because these structures act as foundation in constructing a person's behaviour and how he interacts with the society.

In the words of Lessa Fawcett (2019), anthropomorphism is significant in understanding the nature of the world. Fawcett opines that for a life (human) to understand another life (non-human), anthropomorphism plays a very pivotal role. When emotions and animals are presented as humans, they tend to create a significant relation with the children and they enable the children to create a stronger bond with the environment. This study aims to discuss the messages conveyed through animated movies like finding *nemo* and *WALL-E* in order to create an understanding between children and their environment and how people are destroying the nature around them. Movies like these can provoke children to start taking care of their planet.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF THE KEY TERMS

DISCOURSE AND IDEOLOGY

Discourse and ideology go side by side. Discourses are always fully loaded with ideologies and are pivotal in shaping minds of masses. Ideology is set of beliefs, shared and practiced by an individual or group of individuals. A person's ideology changes from time to time due to socio- cultural, economic changes and formal literacy practices. Ideologies are constructed through various means such as, coercive and discursive means where discursive means involve schools, religion, media, textbooks and literary practices on the other hand, coercive means consists of police, army and courts. Coercive mediums have short time effect whereas, discursive means have long time effects and these practices go a long way in constructing ideologies. Language is full of ideology; it may implicitly or explicitly disseminate an ideology through the text. The underlying message can be understood once the text has been decoded. Language shapes human minds in both negative and positive ways.

LANGUAGE AND POWER

Language plays an important role in sustaining power relations in society. Through language ideologies are built and disseminated. Power exists at various modalities and language of powerful is powerful language. Language is full of ideology; it may implicitly or explicitly disseminate an ideology through the text. The underlying message can be understood once the text has been decoded. Language shapes the mind in both negative and positive ways. Language of the powerful is the powerful language. Language is not just

a tool for communication but it is also used as an instrument to practice, sustain and negotiate power in society. Language plays a vital role in constructing ideologies, shaping social structures and form identities. Language always conveys an underlying meaning through the speakers' choice of words, tone, and silence. Silence is considered as the most powerful weapon in discourse. Saussure (1857-1913) asserts that through language political power can be exercised easily.

GREEN DISCOURSES

Fairclough (1992) asserts that discourse practice is a way to connect how people use language (like speaking, writing, and reading) with the larger social world around them. This includes things like culture, politics, economy, and institutions. Studying discourse practice means looking at how language can influence society and bring about change. It helps us understand how language is used in different settings like schools, media, or government and how it can shape people's beliefs, values, and actions. So, according to Fairclough, language is not just a way to communicate, but it also plays a big role in how society works and changes (Fairclough, 1992: 66). Van Dijk (1995) looks at power by focusing on how it affects people's minds. He believes that when powerful people use language or other tools to control others, their main goal is to influence how others think and what they believe in a way that benefits those in power. So, according to Van Dijk, both language (discourse) and how people interact in society are connected to how people think. This includes their knowledge, beliefs, ideologies, and attitudes. In other words, power works by shaping the way people understand the world (van Dijk, 2009: 64).

In eco-linguistics, green discourses signify the relationship between environment and humans and how this relation can be studied through language. These discourses discuss environmental problems, nature; its sustainability and exploitation and to raise awareness on how to protect the environment and the natural sources. Green discourses in the present study mentions different communication strategies (i.e., linguistic analysis) to foster environmental alertness among children.

The present study is important as it explores the green discourses presented in animated movies for children. This paper will discuss two movies named as, *Finding Nemo* (1993) and *WALL-E* (2008) from an eco- linguistic point of view and analyses how language plays a major role in integrating ideologies in young minds about protecting the environment and also provides a direction to policy makers and other people to adopt effective strategies to inculcate their desired ideologies more efficiently.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To investigate how popular culture, through *Disney* animations, frames the human-nature relationship and its implications for environmental education.
2. To analyse the portrayal of marine ecosystems and human impact in *Finding Nemo* using (Eco- linguistic Discourse Analysis (EDA).
3. To critically examine how *Wall-E* constructs discourses of environmental degradation and consumerism.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. How does the language in *Finding Nemo* and *WALL-E* contribute in building ecological connections and raise awareness in children towards environmental protection?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology applied in this study is qualitative in nature as it explores underlying meanings which are incorporated in the dialogues. The study aims to explore the underlying ecological messages imparted through the dialogues in two animated movies,



Finding Nemo and *WALL-E*. For this purpose, Stibbe’s EDA model (2015) will be used. The methodology will focus on dissecting green discourses and ecological messages present in the dialogues used in the aforementioned movies and it will analyse their influence on young children’s minds and their ecological morals.

STIBBE’S (2015) MODEL OF ECO LINGUISTIC DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Stibbe’s EDA model to study green discourses that include various categorical structures, has been discussed under:

	Story	Kind	Linguistic Representation
1.	Ideology	What point of view does a group of people have about the world.	How different people have different views about a certain thing and how they represent it through language.
2.	Framing	Using a source frame to construct a recipient frame	Trigger terms that bring a specific frame or area of life in mind
3.	Metaphor	A type of structure that brings recipient frame in mind which is different from already imagined source frame	Keywords that bring specific source frame in mind
4.	Evaluation	Assessment about something that whether it is admirable or terrible.	Appraisal structures; linguistic structures that portray things in a positive or negative sense.
5.	Identity	Evaluation of a person that how he is perceived after reading a certain text	Forms of language that categorize specific attributes of people.
6.	Conviction	It shows if something is right, wrong or doubtful.	Patterns that discuss whether a description is true, false or doubtful.
7.	Erasure	A form of narration that highlights a specific area as less important.	Language structures that highlight something as inferior and places it at the foreground.
8.	Salience	A form of narration that highlights a specific area as essential.	Language structures that highlight something as superior and places it at the front.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF *FINDING NEMO*

Finding Nemo is a movie about a father fish (Marlin) finding his son who had been taken away by the divers. Marlin goes on a journey through the ocean to find his son Nemo who is captured by divers and had been taken to a dentist’s clinic in Sydney. The movie revolves around the struggle Marlin has to face even inside his own community living in the vast ocean, surpassing them and reaching Sydney with the help of fellow fishes specifically, Dory. While Nemo also gives his all and with the help of his friends in fish tank, he is able to get out of the tank and joins his father in the ocean once again. This movie is a critique on human intervention in aquatic eco system and disrupting it. It also showcases how life

of other living beings is used merely as an entertainment for humans. The movie explores themes of trust, love and resilience in marine ecosystem.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF WALL-E

WALL-E is an innovative animated movie which revolves around a small trash picking robot which is left on planet Earth, which is abandoned by humans after polluting it till the level of destruction. He develops human like emotions after living on earth for about a hundred years. His life takes a turn when a sleek robot named Eve visits Earth in search of life. He discovers a new world in space with Eve where the humans are living in spaceships and enjoying life with artificial bots after destroying the Earth. *WALL-E* revolves around the themes of environmental destruction caused by human beings, consumerism and hope for ecological repair. The environment could only repair with love, kindness, care and responsibility.

ANALYSIS OF FINDING NEMO

Fairclough (2003) asserts that discourses play a significant role in mirroring the social realities around us and helps in framing ideologies in human minds. Mostly, people believe what they see without questioning and exploring them. Same is the case with children they believe what they see and they try to imitate the actions performing around them. Young children spend most of their leisure time in watching different cartoons and movies and deep down they start to imitate the things they watch on Tv consciously or unconsciously. So, it is very important to see what type of content children are consuming and what underlying ideological messages they are receiving. For this purpose, two animated children movies were selected and some of their dialogues that are related to the relation between human and nature.

FINDING NEMO

Marlin: Don't you dare! If you put fin on that boat... Are you listening?...

(Nemo touches the boat)

(A diver appears behind nemo)

(Nemo turns around and sees the diver behind him and screams)

(Nemo is taken by the diver)

The language used by Marlin shows fear and uneasiness in his tone while he is stopping his son from going near the boat. For humans a boat might seem an object of facility but for marine life it is considered as something dangerous because humans use boat for two main purposes; one for travelling through the sea and second to catch fish and in this specific scenario a boat is seen as something threatening as it is used to take a son away from his father. Human intervention in aquatic ecosystem is shown in the above dialogues and it also shows how humans have become a threat towards other living beings. The ellipses can also be seen in the dialogues which indicate that Marlin is so frightened to see Nemo near the boat that he could not speak words and ran towards him. The dialogues carry an underlying message that fish belong to the ocean and ocean is there home but still they are unsafe in their own home due to human intervention. Through the dialogues it is portrayed that due to human intervention the father fish is separated from his son.

Marlin: He was my son! He was taken by these divers.

CHUM: Humans! Think they own everything.

Strating from the use of personal pronoun "He", here indicates the individuality of Nemo after he gets separated from his father. Stibbe (2015) affirms that use of pronoun carries plethora of meaning and this indicates that languages are highly ideological. Then the use of possessive pronoun "my son" show the relationship between a father and his lost son.

The tone used here was full of anger and complaint towards the divers specifically and humans. The underlying message in this dialogue is demonstrating the family bond which was broken due to human intervention. In the next line, a very disappointing tone is used by the character CHUM while addressing Humans, this line basically shows how non-human living beings are tired of being treated as merely an object of entertainment for the humans. **“Think they own everything”** show how humans consider themselves dominant and want to rule over everything. Chum’s dialogue highlights the underlying ideology from an anthropocentric point of view, that humans consider themselves as centre and possess the authority to control everything around them. Then a dialogue which reflects to a historical perspective is highlighted which goes, “Probably America”, here America is used because it considers itself dominant (just like humans) and most progressive of all but deep down everyone is well known about its problematic behaviour. Americans symbolize dominancy, industrialization and consumerism and all these three factors contribute the most in creating environmental problems. The message conveyed through these dialogues reveals that humans are causing serious problems not only on the surface level but on the deeper level as well and if preventive measures are not taken quickly, the earth might get destroyed by them.

Gill: Fish aren’t meant to be in a box, kid.

The above dialogue underscores the idea of animal captivity. Animals belong to nature where they can live freely and this dialogue explains this notion very well. Nature cannot be controlled or confined to an aquarium it is free and should not be intervened. The metaphor of box is used as a powerful symbol which indicates confinement and control exercised by humans over nature specifically animals. The message imparted through this dialogue is that the upcoming generations should treat nature as it is; free and do not try to capture it because its beauty lies in freedom.

Gill: All the drains lead to the ocean.

This dialogue is very significant as it critiques that even if humans have made their artificial world where they consider themselves separate from nature, still they are linked to the nature. This dialogue also conveys a message that humans are polluting nature. All the human waste is dumped into the aquatic ecosystem destroying the life there. There are many other ways to dump the waste but still humans choose to destroy the nature because in their point of view nature is in their captivity and they can do whatever they want with it. Little do they know that if these resources are destroyed, human life will also be destroyed.

The movie criticizes humans and their harmful activities towards the nature. Humans are portrayed as destructive forces that destroy everything which comes in their way in order to achieve their goals. Many ecosystems are being damaged by human intervention and this movie specifically covers aquatic ecosystem. Firstly, humans are shown as captivators as they captured Nemo, took him to Sydney and confined him in a tank. Secondly, they are seen polluting the natural ecosystems by their man-made infrastructures. All the wastes are being dumped into the ocean, contaminating it and ultimately destroying marine life. As the specific audience of this movie were children, the theme of anthropomorphism is significant in it. Through the characters, their dialogues and particular scenes the movie creates a relation of sympathy between children and animal life. When children are exposed to movies like these, they form a relationship with the animals as they feel the same as they feel around humans and it evokes a sense of relatability between animals and themselves. The main goal of producing these movies is to raise awareness in children to protect their environment.

ANALYSIS OF WALL-E

Scene I:

WALL-E travels alone
Traverses miles of desolate waste.
Passes haunting structures buried within the trash

The opening lines introduce *WALL-E*, a robot who has spent more than hundred years on earth alone. *WALL-E* travels through earth which is covered in waste left behind by the humans. All the buildings, roads even houses have converted into heaps of garbage. Through this scene, it is depicted how humans have destroyed the earth by overconsumption and neglect. This scene tells a silent story about high level of consumerism without any check that led to the destruction of earth. The underlying message portrayed through this scene is that if natural resources are used without proper check and balance the life on earth would become unsustainable.

Headline: TOO MUCH TRASH!! Earth covered
Billboard announcer
Ad#1 Too much garbage in your face?
Ad#2 There's plenty of space out in space.
BNL star liners leaving each day.
We'll clean up the mess while you're away.

Theses lines are sufficient to indicate how planet Earth had been exploited by the humans, everywhere you see there is pollution, garbage and heaps of waste. It seems like humans never lived on earth on once. These lines also prove that excess of everything is bad similarly, as humans get free excess to natural resources, they use it excessively without knowing the destructive consequences. It is evident from the lines above that after destroying the earth completely humans were left in an airship into the space. Hence, it becomes more prominent that if people are covered in garbage they can still leave for outer space. Their lives can become normal once they get into the airship as the ship is operated by Artificial Intelligence bots (AI bots) and humans don't have to lift a finger to perform any action even, they travel on artificial machines. These lines imply an important message that if something like this happens on earth it will become impossible to find a place to live in.

Now that Earth has been restored to a life sustaining status, we can begin operation recolonize.

It is ironical that Earth which was considered as the only planet which had life on it changed into a planet where only heaps of waste was present. It was all due to overconsumption of resources and no check and balance between consuming and conserving. Earth and its resources were used till an extent that it was no longer possible to recover life on Earth, if people had not escaped in the airship they would have died in the very instance. Humans are always known for capturing things which provide them benefits as in the end of the line the words used to relocate on earth are operation recolonize, colonize is much more different from relocate because colonization according to history means to use and exploit a land for personal gains. Through this dialogue it is very obvious that once life is restored on Earth it may repeat the history of destruction again if resources are used without proper check and balance, this message is imparted through the dialogue mentioned above.

Operation cleanup has failed.

Rather than try and fix this problem, it'll be just easier to remain in space.

These lines explicitly may show that the operation carried out on earth in order to clean the mess created by humans has failed but implicitly it deeply favours a certain organization named *Buy N Large* which acts as conglomerate and plays a significant yet destructive role in increasing consumerism by showing excessive ads which ultimately leads people to buy their products and this excessive consumerism leads to increased pollution and waste production. When a robot sent to earth returns with a proof that life is again sustainable on Earth the company orders auto bot to destroy the evidence (plant) and orders the captain to stay on the airship rather than go back to earth and fix the problem created by human themselves. This statement evokes a sense of hopelessness in captain and the viewers as well.

On the Axion you will survive

I don't want to survive I want to live

The captain of the airship when he discovered how beautiful the earth was, he became persistent on going back to earth. He was told by the auto bot and the directive of *Buy N Large Company* to stay where he is now but his love for his planet made him more determined to go back to earth as he named earth as his home. These lines portray that the planet which was designated to have life on it, will always remain in the hearts of its habitants even if they are far away from it. It is obvious that in the starting of the movie, earth is shown as a heap of garbage which was due to pollution spread by humans but as the movie ends it can be seen that people had learned their lesson and many plants were seen growing on earth which showed that life on earth which became unsustainable due to consumerism is now again growing and that too by the help of people.

WALL-E stands for *Waste Allocator Load Lifter Earth-Class* and *Eve* stands for *Extraterrestrial Vegetation Evaluator*. Both of the robots have significant names and they indicate their duties on Earth as well. One performs the duty of cleaning the earth while the other has arrived there to find life on earth which was once destroyed by humans. The theme of anthropomorphism is also significant in the movie as both the robots *WALL-E* and *Eve* demonstrate human like qualities, they communicate with each other, show emotions like joy, laughing, curiosity, love and anger. These emotions help viewers specifically young children to get immensely engaged in the movie and through showing these emotions an underlying ideology to protect environment at all costs is also inculcated in young minds. these movies play a significant role in shaping young minds towards a certain direction. Fairclough (2003) concurs that use of different practices including visual and linguistic practices are used to inculcate hidden meanings and messages in a thorough and convincing manner.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Through this research it has been found out that after watching movies like *WALL-E* and *Nemo* children began to recognize environmental issues and how they can be solved. The anthropologist concept shown in *Finding Nemo* made children realize that humans should not destroy other ecosystems as well as the life inhabited there. While, through *WALL-E* children seemed more protective towards protecting the environment. Watching Earth changing into a heap of trash they started performing eco-friendly practices like picking up litter, reducing plastic use and they were often seen engaged in discussion on Why Earth needs protection and how we can protect earth.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, as the main aim of this study was to analyse the role of language in shaping ecological connections and evoke a sense of duty in children towards protecting their environment. The methodology used in the research was qualitative and Stibbe's 2015 model of Ecolinguistics Analysis was applied on certain dialogues taken from both movies; *Finding Nemo* and *WALL-E*. This study was limited to eco-linguistic analysis and only two movies were selected where as, in future it can be analysed from other perspectives as well. If analysis is done on more than two movies it will give diverse feedback which will be helpful in research. Keeping in mind the concerning ecological problems, eco-friendly movies should be a part of study curriculum as they will raise environmental awareness in children and they will consider it as their duty to protect the environment for a sustainable future.

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