

Feature Book Review

Plant Biology for Young Children

Review of: *My Life as a Plant*, by Alan M. Jones and Jane Ellis; 2012; 40 pp.; American Society of Plant Biologists (Rockville, MD); ISBN-13: 978-0-9430-8802-0

Reviewed by Jeffrey Scott Coker, Department of Biology, and Mary Gorman, Undergraduate in Elementary Education, Elon University, Elon, NC 27244

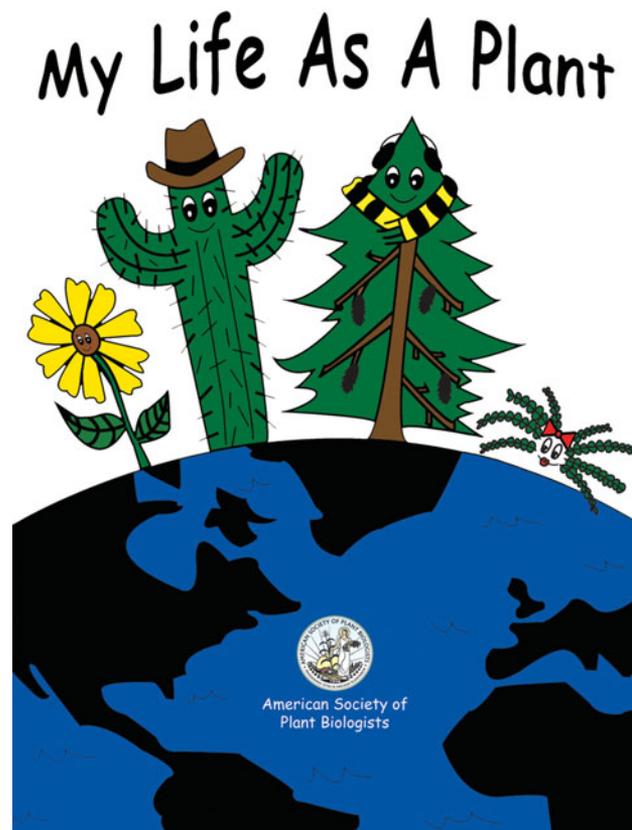
My Life as a Plant is an activity book targeted toward young children from pre-K through second grade, created with support from the American Society of Plant Biologists (ASPB). As stated on the back cover, its purpose is “to include even the youngest learners in the society’s vision to help all people see the importance, relevance, and beauty of plants in our daily lives.”

While enjoyable, the book is also rich with age-appropriate information on plant biology topics such as anatomy, physiology, ecology, and evolution. The pithiness of the content was guided by the ASPB’s “12 Principles of Plant Biology,” which the ASPB promotes for the teaching of plant biology at K–12 levels (see http://my.aspb.org/?page=EF_Principles). Each page has an icon that corresponds to one of the 12 principles of plant biology listed at the end of the book.

My Life as a Plant succeeds in introducing children to plant biology in a fun, inquiry-based, and appropriately challenging way. It engages children through coloring, connect-the-dots challenges, simple experiments, recipes, puzzles, matching games, and other activities that tell the story of Sally Sunflower. Kids get to know Sally through comparisons with themselves, a clever and effective learning device that repeats throughout the book. For example, on one page, Sally says to a child, “I need food to grow just like YOU,” and then on the adjoining page, she says, “But I use energy from the sun to make food with air (CO_2) and water (H_2O).” A sim-

ple, clever diagram illustrates the process. On another page, Sally notes, “You bring your bug spray to the park. I can repel bugs without spray.” On yet another page, Sally shows her family photo album as a means of showing plant evolution and compares it with the child’s family album, the pictures of which are drawn by the reader.

Other sections of the book encourage children to do simple activities and experiments. For example, instructions are given for observing food coloring as it makes its way through



DOI: 10.1187/cbe.14-06-0093

Address correspondence to: Jeffrey Scott Coker (jcoker@elon.edu).
Disclaimer: Jeffrey Scott Coker has served on the Education Committee of the American Society of Plant Biologists and led another ASPB-funded project, “Inquiry-based Activities for the 12 Principles of Plant Biology,” geared toward middle-school students.

© 2014 J. S. Coker and M. Gorman. CBE—Life Sciences Education
© 2014 The American Society for Cell Biology. This article is distributed by The American Society for Cell Biology under license from the author(s). It is available to the public under an Attribution–Noncommercial–Share Alike 3.0 Unported Creative Commons License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0>).

“ASCB®” and “The American Society for Cell Biology®” are registered trademarks of The American Society for Cell Biology.

celery vascular tissue, painting with ground plant tissue, and testing the effects of fertilizer on plant growth. These are great experiments for any age that can be geared up or down, depending on the audience.

It might be easy for adults, especially professional scientists, to miss the cleverness of what the authors have accomplished in this book. To be successful, activity books of this sort have many careful balances to strike, for example, making science content seamlessly fun, ensuring the content is accessible for both readers and prereaders (through clear visuals), presenting material in such a way that it is relevant both for children who work sequentially and those who might open the book to a random page. Authors Alan Jones (former president of the ASPB) and Jane Ellis (former chair of

the ASPB's Education Committee), along with a team of designers and artists, have masterfully navigated those balance points.

Finally, the book is also commendable for its accessibility. It is freely available online (http://my.aspb.org/?page=My_Life_As_A_Plant) in 10 languages, making it relevant for families and educators around the world. A paper version is also available for \$4.25 on Amazon.

Overall, this activity book is highly recommended for young children, especially in guided settings at home or in school from pre-K through second grade. It could be used just for fun, to guide instruction, as a teaching supplement, or for reinforcement activities.