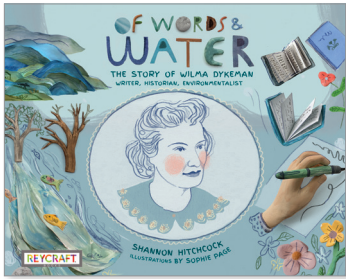


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*Of Words and Water:*  
*The Story of Wilma Dykeman—Writer,*  
*Historian, Environmentalist*  
 by Shannon Hitchcock  
 illustrated by Sophie Page

## SUMMARY

This lyrical picture book biography of writer and environmentalist Wilma Dykeman traces how her love for a local river led to her efforts to protect it and the livelihood of those who depended on it. Throughout her life, she taught that water is the irreplaceable gift; it is life.

## CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

- Wilma was born in North Carolina in 1920 to parents who instilled an early love of nature. According to her son, her environmentalism reflected her belief that “everything was connected and that humans are part of nature.” Her book, *The French Broad* (1955), was groundbreaking because she argued that areas would benefit from both economic development and environmental preservation. To learn additional details about Wilma, see the Author’s Note.
- To build your own background about Wilma Dykeman, visit the Wilma Dykeman Legacy’s website to see a photo-illustrated timeline: [wilmadykemanlegacy.org/who-we-are/about-wilma-dykeman](http://wilmadykemanlegacy.org/who-we-are/about-wilma-dykeman) or watch this video: [youtube.com/watch?v=8Tps\\_TsCGfo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Tps_TsCGfo).

For read-aloud videos of Reycraft books, visit [reycraftbooks.com/videos.html](http://reycraftbooks.com/videos.html).

## Book Talk Blurb

“Be good to the earth, fair to other people, use words to fight injustice.” These are just some of the messages that Wilma Dykeman shared. If you’d like to learn more about this writer, historian, and environmentalist, check out this biography. As you’re reading, ponder the meaning of the title, *Of Words and Water*.

## Set Purpose: Invitation to Readers

A biography is the true story of a person’s life. The exciting thing about reading a biography is that you can learn about someone you might not know. Have you heard of Wilma Dykeman? She’s an inspiring woman who you need to meet! The title of this book is *Of Words and Water* and the subtitle is *The Story of Wilma Dykeman—Writer, Historian, Environmentalist*. A historian is a person who studies the past to understand how people lived and why events happened. An environmentalist works to protect nature and keep our planet healthy. Let’s read to discover the roles words and water played in Wilma’s life.

## During Reading

### Read-Aloud Conversation Starters

(Note: It may be helpful to number the pages of this book for reference, where the first two pages of the story are pages 2–3.)

- Page 7: *As fall faded into winter, Wilma’s mother read aloud before the blazing fire. Now that we’ve read a few pages, think about the title. What have you learned about Wilma that has to do with words or water?* (She lived by a river; she studied animals in the creek; her mother read to her.)
- Pages 14-15: *Wilma longed to write a book about the river she loved. Why do you think Wilma’s collecting stories from local families?* (To learn more about the river and its history.) *Finding firsthand stories is one way to research. Can you think of other ways she might have researched in a time before the Internet?*
- Pages 16-17: *Wilma’s book highlighted the trouble long hidden in the mountain’s shadow. How does this page make you feel? What would you do if you saw this happening to your community?*
- Pages 18-19: *A New York publisher agreed to buy the book but, only if Wilma ignored the poison being dumped in the river. Do you think it was easy for Wilma to stand up to the publisher? Why or why not? Discuss your thinking with a friend.*
- Pages 28-29: *To this day, tourists stroll along the Wilma Dykeman Riverway. Talk with a classmate about one of Wilma’s accomplishments. Why do you think she was called an environmentalist?*

## Respond, Reflect, React, or Research

### • Respond—Read Like a Writer (Descriptions that Bring Places to Life):

Let's think about some of the phrases the author uses to describe settings in this biography. Descriptive language helps readers use their senses to experience a place. Think about how you can add descriptive language to your own writing. Display the phrases below on a chart or electronic document.

Descriptive Language	
flowering dogwoods	blazing fire
tumbling streams	misty, cloud-kissed mountains
brisk autumn evenings	starkness of winter

- **Reflect on SEL Competency—Responsible Decision-Making:** Wilma saw a problem and used both written words and speeches to be part of the solution. She wrote to explain to others how to take care of both the rivers and the town. Responsible decision-makers notice issues and look for ways to solve them. What are some problems you notice in your school or community? Can you name some actions you might take to try to solve them?
- **Research—Learn About Local Rivers:** Working in pairs or small groups, students can research a river in their neighborhood, city, or state. Some questions that can help their research include: What is the name of the river? What kinds of wildlife live in and around the river? What activities can people do in or around the river? Are there any groups or organizations working to keep the river healthy?

### Real World Action

#### Treat Water Like a Gift

Wilma wrote, "Water is the irreplaceable gift. It is life. Use, cherish, celebrate, preserve, enjoy." Talk with students about ways they can treat water like an irreplaceable gift. Put together a list of everyone's responses. For example:

- Turn off the water while I'm brushing my teeth
- Take shorter showers or use less water when I take a bath
- Drink all the water in my water bottle
- Encourage my friends and caregivers to do the same.

## If your students liked this book . . .

### *She Sang for the Mountains: The Story of Singer, Songwriter, Activist Jean Ritchie*

by Shannon Hitchcock

illustrated by Sophie Page

New York: Reycraft Books, 2021

This lyrical picture book biography of songwriter and activist Jean Ritchie-Singer traces her life from the Cumberland Mountains of Kentucky to New York City and beyond as her protest songs inspired a nation.

### *Saving Granddaddy's Stories: Ray Hicks, the Voice of Appalachia*

by Shannon Hitchcock

illustrated by Sophie Page

New York: Reycraft Books, 2020

As a young boy living in the Appalachian Mountains, Ray Hicks loved his grandfather's stories because he told them "the mountain way." After his grandfather's death, Ray continued to tell these stories to anyone who would listen. Years later, his storytelling became so famous that he was known as the "Voice of Appalachia."

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