Book Review

The book I read was The Story of More by Hope Jahren who is an award-winning scientist and teacher. The book is a non fiction science guide. This book is about everyone living on this planet. It talks about the small farmers, the massive companies, and groups of people from countries all over the globe who have contributed to climate change.

Jahren’s intended audience here are people who are curious about climate change and want to know the different things which humans have done to lead to it. The chapters are split up into five categories—life, food, energy, earth, and an appendix—and each of the categories have their own different happenings and events which are talked about. This book takes from history, so the events which are in the book are all over the place. In addition to historical events, Jahren pulls from her teaching experience in the past and stuff that her students have said. This is about history of how we got to climate change, so there are lots of different places in which this book takes place. The main place it talks about is America and how we are a huge part of this whole problem. Why did these events occur? Greed and unintended consequences. America and other countries not wanting to cut back on stuff because it would not bring in any wealth. And laziness on the parts of everyone.

Despite all the foreboding facts, this book ends with a positive note. I chose this book initially because I was curious about what we could do about climate change, as I hear a lot of mixed things about it. Some say we’re doomed no matter what, while others say it is reversable. Despite having a lot of heavy chapters about how humans have screwed up the planet, Jahren concludes with saying that history has told us that in times of crisis, humans ultimately can work together. She says that there is hope for the planet and we aren’t doomed. She also gives some steps as to what we can do and questions we can ask ourselves.

The first section which was about life had chapters titled “Our Story Begins,” “Who We Are,” “How We Are,” and “Where We Are.” I like how Jahren starts out the book with just beginning to understand who, how, and where humans are. It gives a background of the nature of humans and their faults. She says, “Convincing people to examine their energy use is like trying to get them to quite smoking or eat more healfully; they already know that they should do it, but there’s a billion dollar industry working round the clock making sure they don’t.” By stating this right off the bat, Jahren makes this book more reader friendly. It isn’t attacking the reader by saying that they suck and they need to re-evaluate their entire life; rather, it asserts that the reader does know what they are doing and that they are right. There are just other forces that are preventing them from doing the right thing. This is a great move by Jahren to not scare the reader off and get in a defensive mindset when reading the book. I also noticed that she uses the term ‘we’, making it so that she is also the one taking action; it’s not just her telling us what to do. This makes it a more personable read.

I thought the section about food was the coolest. The chapters were titled “Growing Grain,” “Raising Meat,” “Finding Fish,” “Making Sugar,” and “Throwing It All Away.” This chapter especially does a great job making it easy for readers to understand the magnitude of what is going on without using too headachy of language. She keeps it clear and concise along with some fun facts along the way, such as one can of spam being eaten every 78 milliseconds. I also appreciated how Jahren used scales to things which readers could visualize, such as saying the amount of imported sugar is enough to fill Yankees stadium three times over. This is much more effective and entertaining for the reader rather than just having an enourmous number thrown at them.

The part about energy was the most educating, while still being easy to understand. Reviewer Carolyn Kroehler puts Jahren’s message of this chapter simply: Use less and share more. Another reviewer, Gretchen Lida, says, “She pulls off the feat of presenting climate change without emotional baggage through accessibility and humor.” The fact that Jahren could convey all this super smart knowledge into understandable language for someone like me who has virtually no knowledge in science is a testament to both her writing skills and scientific knowledge. She gives multiple examples of different ways we can use energy and describes in ways which are easy to understand. I had no idea what a biofuel was, but now I know it’s basically just turning food into fuel. It’s a basic concept, yet I’m sure there’s people out there who would describe that in a more complicated way which wouldn’t be as easy to understand. Jahren also then talks about the positives and negatives of these energy sources. For instance, biofuel does give us a lot of energy so if fossil fuels and coal does run out, which Jahren implies could happen in the future, we have an energy source. The negative is that we’re literally burning food, and there’s millions of people out there starving and we’re using that to just get to school 25 minutes faster because we want to drive a mile rather than walk.

The appendix which was called, “The Story of Less” had four chapters: “The Action You Take,” “The Difference You Make,” “An Environmental Catechism,” and “Sources and Suggested Readings.” This was an absolutely amazing way to wrap up the book. The first two chapters which were about the difference things that we can do as individuals to help out in regard to climate change were very positive and uplifting. Jahren has four simple steps for us to take and she makes us question exactly what we need and what we do not. The only thing I wish Jahren did more of was write about what more we could do. Yes, she gives some great self reflection questions and a call to action, but ultimately, like she mentioned at the start of the book, there are billion dollar companies who are trying their darndest to not have us save energy because that doesn’t translate to money for them.

I would most definitely recommend this book to anyone over the age of eighteen, or if someone below the age of eighteen has a passion or curiosity about global warming (Typically people under the age of eighteen don’t find reading about a bunch of facts exciting, so I think they wouldn’t be very engaged with the text unless they have a curiosity about it). The language is very easy to understand and Jahren uses comparisons and statistics to make it easy for the reader to understand exactly the magnitude of what is going on. Kroehler, says that “Jahren is good at explaining the climate change crisis, and she excels at conjuring relatable images,” and I agree. The only people who I think would not like this book are experts who are pursuing more knowledge on the topic, as this is very much so a beginner/medium level of knowledge. And of course people who don’t think global warming is a thing will not like this book either.

Jahren does a great job writing an engaging book which sparks curiosity as one reads along. She inserts fun facts in chapters which give the reader huge eye openings, maintaining the reader’s focus. Each chapter also starts with a fun little quote. She engages the reader by writing in first person, and the language is very informal, making it seem like the reader is just having a conversation and draw upon her childhood and experiences while teaching to give questions which a reader might come up with. In all, this book exceeded what I thought it would be and I’d give this book a nine out of ten.

References

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