

Geography: a visual encyclopedia Smithsonian

Supposedly for 8 to 12. My five-year-old loves it.

Little boys are full of questions about violence in nature. My five-year-old son talks often about the great extinction, when a meteor strike 65 million years ago killed all the dinosaurs. He looks forward with great anticipation to seeing a volcano next year on our trip to Italy. Video of earthquakes fascinates him.

This book does a good job of explaining the history and character of our planet, and why these occasional rather violence events take place. It also does a good job with the peaceful, everyday evolution of our planet. The photography is wonderful.

In this era print must compete with video for a child's attention. Print is richer. A child can absorb more information in a shorter period of time from print than video, and can revisit it easily to make sure of his understanding. Print gives the parent an opportunity to discuss the material as they are reading. Video on the other hand condemns both to be passive observers to whatever the producer has put together. Reading is a more intellectually stimulating activity.

For all those reasons I applaud this book. I'm sure that my five-year-old son will be looking at it for years and that will remain a treasured part of his library. More than that, the English is accessible enough that I expect he will be able to share it with his friends for whom English is a second language. Five stars.