Lost in the Eco-struggle: A Post-colonial Ecocritical analysis of "Lost at the Beach."

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Abstract

This study is a textual analysis of a Ghanaian children's literature book titled *Lost at the Beach,* using Post-Colonial Ecocriticism. The research examines how the story reflects and critiques the complex relationship between humans and nature. It highlights the environmental consequences of extractive practices, such as illegal sand mining, and the ways these are embedded in societal activities, economic systems, and the authority of adults. Central to the study is the symbolic role of the beach as a site of both cultural memory and ecological loss, and the position of young people. By focusing on the experiences of child characters, the narrative reveals how colonial legacies and adult decisions alienate younger generations from sustainable relationships with their environment. This study contributes to children's literature scholarship by highlighting the capacity of literary texts to engage young readers with themes of ecological justice, cultural continuity, and resistance to exploitative systems. It also highlights the value of post-colonial ecocriticism as a framework for analyzing African children's literature in ways that center both environmental and decolonial consciousness.

Keywords:

Children's literature, Nature, beach, environment, sand mining, Post-colonial Ecocriticism

Introduction

The global ecological space of the current young generation is marked by escalating climate crises and environmental problems. Although young people globally have shown interest and anxiety in the climate change crisis, and are taking a keen interest in managing the looming environmental catastrophe, most of their inputs are situated outside of the political decision-making landscape (Corner et al, 2015; O'Brien et al, 2018; Sloam et al, 2022). The growing environmental crises and climate anxiety highlight the need to involve young adolescents, who make up about 35% of Ghana's population, in discussions on maintaining ecological balance. Educating and engaging them is crucial for addressing environmental challenges. Children's literature serves as an important tool to raise ecological awareness and empower young minds to combat environmental issues.

Children's Literature uniquely reflects societal issues and offers solutions to social vices that affect everyone. It serves as a tool for children to understand their environment and navigate societal concerns (Boudreaux, 2006). While many studies focus on children's relationship with the

environment, it is important to explore how children's literature engages young readers in interpreting and responding to ecological narratives in storybooks

In Ghana, children's stories are crucial for educating youth about important issues, particularly the relationship between humans and nature (Anyidoho, 2012; Opoku-Agyemang, 2000). This article examines how Ghanaian children's literature addresses ecological themes and shapes adolescents' views on the environment and their roles in ecological survival. It analyzes characters' engagement with environmental responsibilities, sustainability, and ecological justice within Ecocritical and Post-colonial frameworks (Dobrin & Kidd, 2004; Huggan & Tiffin, 2010). The study reveals that children's literature serves both as entertainment and a means of fostering ecological consciousness, positioning young readers to advocate for environmental issues. Using Pearl E. Dumenu's "Lost at the Beach", the article emphasizes literature's role in promoting environmental awareness and empowering the younger generation to secure the ecological future of Ghana.

The research was guided by the questions: (i) What is the significance of the representations of nature in the story? (ii) How did the author develop environmental themes in the story? (iii) What literary techniques did the writer employ in the story? and (iv) What is the significance of the nature of the characters in the story?

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundations: Children's Literature and Post-Colonial Ecocriticism

The intersection of children's literature and environmental education is grounded in ecocriticism, a literary theory that explores the connection between literature and the natural environment. Scholars like Dobrin and Kidd (2004) argue that children's literature is essential for shaping ecological awareness, fostering emotional and intellectual ties to nature. Gaard (2009) highlights how narrative can build empathy for non-human life and promote ethical environmental considerations. Ecocritically informed children's books serve as educational tools, turning complex ecological concepts—like interdependence and conservation—into relatable stories (Pulimeno et al, 2020; Simpson and Cremin, 2022). These texts often portray nature as an agent, challenging anthropocentrism and encouraging children to view themselves within a broader ecological context. This examination of literature through an environmental lens is crucial for understanding how texts represent nature and human-ecological relationships. Additionally, scholars advocate for a post-colonial ecocriticism that links environmental issues in Africa to the legacies of colonialism and ongoing global inequalities (Huggan and Tiffin, 2010; Li, 2022; Traoré, 2019).

The post-colonial ecocriticism approach offers insights into how colonial histories shape current ecological narratives in Africa. Analyzing African children's literature through this lens reveals its role as an educational tool and critique of exploitation and consumerism, while also valuing indigenous ecological knowledge (Adugna & Gebremariam, 2024; Adugna & Hailu, 2024). Such literature echoes young readers' experiences and raises awareness of environmental issues. In Ghana, where illegal mining (galamsey) and coastal erosion threaten livelihoods and ecosystems, children's texts like "Lost at the Beach" illustrate these challenges, highlighting the importance of environmental stewardship. These narratives encourage readers to reflect on human impact on nature, fostering collective responsibility for environmental protection (Amoako & Frimpong,

2015; Asiedu & Boakye, 2017; Boateng, 2012; Gyamfi & Boamah, 2020; Mensah & Antwi, 2020). This approach deepens our understanding of the connections between literature, culture, and contemporary ecological issues in African societies.

Children's Literature as Environmental Education

Children's literature has emerged as an important educational tool for moral, social, and environmental development. Scholars recognize its potential to shape young minds, particularly in cultivating ecological consciousness. Thus, children's books can serve as agents of environmental education through narrative strategies and thematic concerns.

The relationship between humans and nature is vital, especially regarding the effects of nature on human health and vice versa (Patterson, 2024; Soga & Gaston, 2020). Despite being part of nature, humans often perceive themselves as separate from it, creating a tension in ecological thought (Buell, 2005; Garrard, 2012; Plumwood, 2002). If children grow up disconnected from nature, they may lack empathy and responsibility toward their environment (Garrard, 2012; Louv, 2005). Early representations of nature in storytelling and media shape children's perspectives profoundly. Therefore, literary and educational interventions that portray nature as interconnected and valuable are crucial for fostering positive ecological behaviors. Engaging narratives and educational materials, like storybooks and outdoor experiences, can inspire appreciation and stewardship for the environment (Chawla, 2006; Goga, 2018; Nikolajeva, 2014), enhancing ecological literacy and encouraging proactive environmental action.

Contemporary African Children's Literature and Environmental Education (reduce references first)

Children's literature is a powerful medium for imparting moral and social lessons, serving both to entertain and educate young minds. In recent years, it has gained recognition for raising environmental awareness among readers. Ecologically themed books employ narrative techniques and vivid symbolism (Dobrin & Kidd, 2004; Gaard, 2009) to foster emotional connections with the natural world, enabling children to understand concepts such as interdependence, conservation, and environmental justice. Engaging with these themes fosters stewardship and responsibility towards the environment, encouraging empathy and deeper reflection on human-nature relationships (Pulimeno et al., 2020; Simpson & Cremin, 2022). As children read these stories, they develop critical consciousness about social and environmental issues, inspiring them to advocate for a sustainable and equitable world. Thus, children's literature is not just entertainment but a vital educational tool for shaping attitudes and inspiring action towards a healthier planet.

In the African context, children's literature has a rich tradition of intertwining nature with folktales and oral storytelling, where animals, forests, and rivers play pivotal roles in conveying moral lessons and cultural values (Muthien & Taylor, 2008; Nsamenang, 1992; Opoku-Agyemang, 2000). These narratives not only entertain but also emphasize the significance of living in harmony with the natural world, illustrating the vital connections between humans and their environment. They often convey the consequences of environmental disrespect, highlighting both the beneficial and detrimental actions of individuals toward nature. In recent years, contemporary African authors have taken this foundational aspect of children's literature and infused it with modern environmental

concerns. They are adeptly blending traditional themes with urgent issues that resonate with today's world, such as deforestation, pollution, and the overarching effects of climate change (Anyidoho, 2012; Caminero-Santangelo, 2014; Makokha, 2021). Through their stories, these authors aim to raise awareness among young readers about the pressing need for environmental stewardship, weaving together age-old wisdom and contemporary challenges. This synthesis not only preserves the cultural heritage of storytelling but also fosters a sense of responsibility and advocacy for the environment among the younger generation.

Children's literature serves as a critical medium for environmental education, offering young readers stories that entertain and also inform, challenge, and inspire. Globally, scholars have shown how ecocritical narratives shape children's values and encourage responsible environmental behavior (Pulimeno et al, 2020; Simpson & Cremin, 2022). In Africa, the rich tradition of ecological storytelling is being reimagined by contemporary authors who blend ancestral wisdom with present-day concerns (Adhuze, 2021).

To fully harness the transformative potential of children's literature, more research is needed to bridge theory with practice and foreground the voices of young readers themselves. In doing so, scholars, educators, and writers can ensure that this important literary form continues to cultivate the environmental consciousness needed for a sustainable future.

Overview of the sampled text, *Lost at the Beach*

Lost at the Beach is a story set in southeastern Ghana, where coastal villages face severe environmental threats from erosion. This not only impacts fishing communities and livelihoods but also endangers homes and farmlands. As the sea encroaches, tidal waves and erosion have displaced many residents, causing significant financial and psychological struggles. Traditional fishing grounds are lost, and national tourism sites suffer a decline in income.

Lost at the Beach tells the story of fraternal twins Atsu and Atupui, along with their friend Akoto, who visit the beach on a forbidden day out of curiosity about a dead whale washed ashore. Their disobedience leads them to encounter three villains who mine sand and attempt to steal the whale. The villains try to kidnap them, but the children cleverly evade capture and help trap two of them in a sand ditch. They are later rescued by a search party and praised for their bravery. The story, aimed at young readers and illustrated with vibrant images, conveys important ecological messages about environmental degradation in Ghana, promoting values of self-esteem, unity, empowerment, and environmental responsibility.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative approach, specifically textual analysis, to examine *Lost at the Beach* through Post-colonial Ecocriticism. It aims to explore the relationship between environmental degradation and post-colonial influences on human-nature interactions in Ghana. The focus is on how the text represents nature, land use, indigenous knowledge, and power dynamics, especially regarding children's perceptions of the environment. "Lost at the Beach" was

chosen for its relevance to Ghanaian children's literature and its engagement with environmental themes, featuring children as central characters to highlight ecological awareness and cultural values for young readers.

Analytical Procedure

The text was subjected to detailed close reading to identify narrative patterns, symbolic representations, and language that reflect ecological and post-colonial themes. Theme coding was used to put the findings under broad themes, and these were interpreted using post-colonial and ecocriticism concepts. The analysis also considered how children's dialogue and experiences in the story reflect ecological consciousness, or resistance, highlighting the pedagogical role of literature in shaping environmental ethics.

Ethical Considerations

As this is a textual analysis of published material, no human subjects are involved, and therefore, ethical concerns are minimal. Proper citation and acknowledgement of all primary and secondary sources were maintained.

Data Analysis

This section presents the results and discussion of the study, encompassing an analysis of the text and interpretation of the findings.

Representation of Nature.

The writer used techniques to represent nature in the story, notably a colorful illustration on page 10 showing a settlement as children walk home from school. The image features coconut trees and weeds along the path, utilizing nature as a backdrop (Boudreaux, 2006; Sun, 2025) to enhance the setting and meaning of the story, as the environment is crucial to its success.

The first direct mention of nature in the story, even from an adult (their class teacher), concerns sand winning, an environmental issue that only one of the children in the class seemed to be aware of. That awareness stemmed solely from their textbook. The children's initial direct reference to nature occurred when Atsupui prompted,

> *"Start talking". Atsupui said. They were dying of curiosity, but Atsu was enjoying the suspense he was creating. "There is a big fish on the beach!" Atsu said excitedly. He looked from one to the other, waiting for their reaction. "What do you mean?" Atsupui asked suspiciously. "Father was telling the elders that a large fish was seen on the beach early this morning!"*

Their dialogue and fascination centered on the beach and a big dead fish. However, they seemed to overlook the beach itself, focusing instead on the unusual dead whale. This suggests that children often take nature for granted, only noticing it when something striking occurs. As noted by Haney (2021), Pantazis and Sontera (2023), and Soga and Gastong (2016),people typically have a neutral attitude towards nature until faced with significant natural events.

At this point, the two boys had no idea what the fish was, but the girl explained to them that it could be either a whale or a shark, but was skeptical because such fish do not belong in that area.

> *She looked at her twin brother suspiciously, "Are you sure about what you are saying?" Don't you believe me? It's true! Why do you think Teacher Komi sent me? It is too wild a story. I mean, you have just described a whale or a shark and we have never heard of them in these parts, you know", Atsupui reasoned.*

Atsupui is presented as the most knowledgeable of the three children, who reads a lot as her mother encourages them to do so. What finally made them recognize a whale is a biblical allusion; Jonah and the whale. Here, nature was used as a source of knowledge to educate the two boys. This is also evident in;

> *Atsupui ignored him and continued, "I read that fish come closer to the shore when there is little noise". Walking between the two boys, she looked from one to the other, "I believe that, our ancestors knew that, and so they decided to set one day where no one disturbs the migration of the fish for a better harvest.*

Although children have lived in the village and observed the taboo day for so long, they had no idea why there was a need for such a day. The issue of the fish at the beach gave the opportunity to learn about the behavior of fish.

Another reference to nature is seen in the children's visit to the part of the beach that is no longer used. The idea of nature that is no longer in use only points to danger to humans. The children's surprise at what they saw is evident in;

> *The children were right, of course. What used to be a flat sandy beach had now turned into open pits and steep slopes. Serious erosion had taken place so much so that a sea defense wall may soon be needed for that part of the beach. From where the children stood, a few meters' walk towards the water was impossible without encountering a ditch. The sea, of course, had entered some of these man-created ditches, making it a dangerous trip for anyone walking or swimming on these parts of the beach.*

What is known of the beach has changed to one that poses danger to anyone, man or animal, to walk there. The irony is that this part of the beach used to be vibrant with human activities for as long as the place was useful. Once it became "useless", it was tagged dangerous, and the people moved to the next safest part of the beach.

The conversation among the children vividly illustrates their reactions to the effects of human actions on the environment.

> *I really do not like what I see", she said finally. "Me too," Akoto responded. "Do you think that the village is going to be covered by the sea?" Atsu asked fearfully. For a minute, he was just a frightened boy.*

The emotional weight of their understanding becomes clear as the children transition from seeing the beach as a safe space to confronting its deterioration caused by human negligence. This shift represents a move from innocent enjoyment to ecological awareness, aligning with "significant life experiences" that foster pro-environmental sensitivity in youth (Mathers & Brymer, 2022; Rosa & Collado, 2019). Their feelings of sadness and fear reveal an emotional connection to their environment and the early development of ecological ethics. Research by Crandon et al. (2022) and van Heel et al. (2023) suggests that children's responses to environmental degradation spark lasting concern for the planet. Literature that highlights such experiences, especially in African contexts, encourages young readers to empathize with ecological damage (Aslan & Bas, 2020; Goga et al, 2023). Thus, this scene serves as both a critical narrative moment and an educational tool in children's literature.

In the story, the children often overlook nature, despite its constant presence. For instance, when a crab unexpectedly pops out of a hole, it startles Atsu and prompts laughter among the group.

> *They all fell silent for a while as the sea breeze sang to them. A crab popped out of a hole. Atsu jumped up, startled. For the first time since their journey, the other two laughed.*

This small crab could easily be overlooked, much like the unnoticed sea breeze. This moment illustrates how people often take nature for granted, recognizing it only when it disrupts expectations or triggers emotions. Garrard (2012) notes that modern societies typically ignore nature until it poses a threat or becomes a spectacle. The children's indifference to the calming breeze suggests a detachment, akin to Louv's (2005) "nature-deficit disorder," where they lose sensitivity to the environment's restorative qualities. The next mention of crabs occurred in crab hunting, serving as a backdrop to how the kids trapped two men in a hole made by sand miners. This shift illustrates how nature is acknowledged only when it can be exploited, a critique seen in post-colonial ecocriticism (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010). Overall, this pattern reveals a broader theme of human indifference to the environment, engaging only when it surprises or serves a purpose.

The children's encounter with the dead whale lifted their mood a bit as they squealed and admired the huge fish. Their joy was in being so close to such a wonder. They discussed the size, the hair on the whale, its age, and what might have caused its death.

> *"Over there!" Atsu shouted out with excitement. Atsupui looked towards the left, where Atsu was pointing. She could see a huge black shape on the sand. She raced towards it. "That must be the whale!" Akoto shouted in glee. Truly, a few yards from the sea were the remains of the young whale. Squealing with delight, the children, forgetting the danger they were in, ran to where the creature lay with the waves splashing against its solid body. "Wow, this is huge" Atsupui said "Whoa this is the biggest fish I have ever seen in my life" Akoto chirped*

Their conscious encounter with their natural living environment was with mixed feelings; the dead whale evoked curiosity, excitement, and admiration; however, the idea of a snake evoked fear. Whereas they were fascinated by a dead whale, they were terrified by the idea of a living snake, even when it was just a footpath that looked like a snake.

> *The footpath led to the abandoned portion of the beach. On each side of the path were shrubs and patches of tall grass. They all froze where the footpath began. The path zigzagged through the patches of tall bushes like a snake; it looked very forbidding.*

Nature is depicted as both fascinating and terrifying, or as non-existent. DeLoughrey et al. (2011) and Egya (2020) argue that people's perceptions of nature often stem more from human philosophy and cultural ideology than from nature itself. This transforms nature into an idea shaped by human perspective, influencing how individuals relate to their environment. In the story, nature is represented by opposing images: the sea and the dead whale. The children's awareness of sand erosion highlights that humans only recognize nature's threats when their lives are at risk.

The children's fascination with the dead whale was evident as they squealed with delight, rushing to the creature despite the danger, while their fear of the mention of snakes showed a different response. Wofa Atta's comment about "little snakes startled them into the open, causing the three men nearby to flee in terror.

> *"No boss, it could be those little snakes found in these bushes!" Wofa Atta said.m The children, hearing the word "snakes", jumped out of the bush and into the open! Startled, the three men turned and began to run in terror in the opposite directions,*

This contrast indicates that the children perceive nature as static and inanimate, suggesting that a greater awareness of nature's activity could improve their understanding and relationship with it.

The sea, often viewed both aesthetically and recreationally, could symbolize danger and death as indicated in

> *Well … something about the sea coming closer to the village because of the sand that people are collecting …" Her voice trailed off.*
> *Akoto frowned, "That sounds serious".*

The notion of the sea encroaching upon the village hints at a serious threat to human life. This perspective reflects how humans often neglect their connection with nature until faced with danger, as evidenced by research highlighting the consequences of environmental neglect (Allen, 2020; European Environment Agency, 2023; Patterson, 2024). For example, Fanning et al. (2021) note that humans' dependence on nature can harm the environment.

Human-Nature Relationship

The ideal relationship between humans and nature is one of mutual respect and sustainable coexistence (Barragan-Jason et al., 2025; Halkis & Waldani, 2024). This perspective stresses the importance of connecting with the natural world beyond consumption, advocating for a harmonious existence instead of short-term exploitation. Acknowledging nature's intrinsic value highlights the interconnectedness of human well-being and ecological health. By embracing this interdependence, individuals and communities can adopt environmentally responsible practices that improve the quality of life for current and future generations. Cultivating a respectful relationship with nature is

crucial for both human progress and ecological preservation (Ojeda et al., 2022; Raatikainen et al., 2024).

The narrative explores two views on humanity's relationship with nature: one that appreciates nature's beauty and another that sees it as a resource for profit, illustrated by the contrasting experiences of the children engaging with the beach and those exploiting it for monetary gain. The twins and Akoto find immense joy and freedom in playing on the beach, a setting that embodies the carefree spirit of childhood. This is indicated in their mother's admonition.

> *"Now listen, I know you children like playing on the beach, but remember today is Friday, and no one goes there."*

This excerpt highlights the children's fondness for playing at the beach, emphasizing their enjoyment of the location as a key factor in their attraction to it. This appeal is not limited to children; adults are also drawn to the beach, suggesting that it serves as a convenient space for recreational activities for all ages.

The other human-nature relationship is depicted in hunting for crabs, sand winning, and stealing a dead whale, all for economic purposes. The children were terrified by the three men who tried to kidnap them to stop them from reporting their criminal activities to the chief.

> *"Don't let them escape this time, catch them!" Fat Man instructed Wofa Atta and Old Soldier. "For what? Surely you don't think my father will not get you?" Atsu shouted. "By then we would be gone with our heap of sand and that lovely fish. I bet it would fetch a huge sum of money. Fat Man said "You are going to sell the whale?" Atsupui exclaimed. "And you as well!" Old Soldier added and laughed. Atsupui shivered and held onto her brother's hand in fright*

The exploitation of nature for selfish gain is prominently highlighted here. The men involved in sand winning are motivated purely by monetary profit. Also, when a dead whale washed ashore, they seized the opportunity to capitalize on the situation, quickly devising a plan to take advantage of it. This indicates that they not only engaged in illegal activities (such as sand winning) for financial gain, but are also constantly seeking new opportunities to exploit nature for profit.

The final human-nature relationship depicted in the story relates to catching crabs, and this could be for either food or economic reasons. However, it is not an illegal activity. In the story, some children are portrayed as going crab hunting regularly, which could not be for food only.

> *"I remember one of the boys from school talking about being trapped in one of the holes left by sand winners between the rock and Anoma. From the description, we had already run beyond the rock, and we are not too far from Anoma. So I put two and two together," Atsu explained to her. "He also mentioned that unusual tree over there." Atsu pointed towards the south. "He said he and his brother used it as a landmark when hunting crabs. "Let's hunt for some and take home" Akoto said with excitement. For a moment he had forgotten*

their present predicament. He began to think about a bowl of palm-nut soup with crabs and fufu. His tummy began to growl.

The conversation among the children suggests that they are at ease with the activity of crab hunting, lacking the horror they displayed towards the actions of the three men engaged in sand extraction and the theft of the dead whale. This distinction may arise from their awareness of the illegal activities that harm nature versus socially acceptable practices. Even at a young age, they are influenced by local knowledge regarding both commercial and domestic endeavors. Essentially, they understand that nature can be utilized for sustenance and trade, provided such actions are deemed acceptable by society.

A study by Barragan-Jason et al. (2022) highlights how people's connection to nature influences their attitudes and actions toward sustainability. Building stronger relationships with nature and emphasizing its emotional and positive values can promote sustainability (Ives et al. 2018; Lumber et al. 2017; Yletyinen et al. 2022). People's appreciation for nature varies by background and beliefs, and recognizing this diversity can benefit both individuals and the environment. Children's activities on the beach are not merely for fun; they help them reconnect with nature and assert their cultural identity, especially in post-colonial contexts (DeLoughrey & Handley, 2011). Adults also find solace on the beach, but issues of access arise as many beaches become privatized or commercialized (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010).

From a post-colonial ecocriticism perspective, the story embodies two human-nature relationships. The children represent a local relationship with nature through play and cultural continuity, while the men involved in sand winning exemplify a colonial model driven by extractive capitalism. Nixon (2011) described this as “slow violence,” that is, actions that prioritize short-term gains over sustainability, leading to ecological damage and community displacement.

Environmental Themes and Messages

The central theme of the story addresses environmental degradation and its significant impact on nature and humanity. Human activities, such as deforestation, pollution, and overconsumption, lead to biodiversity loss and climate change, which threaten human health and well-being. Widespread ignorance, especially among children, creates a disconnect from nature and hinders action. Prioritizing education and awareness is essential to empower the next generation for environmental stewardship and ensure a sustainable future for both humans and nature.

In a classroom in Kassi, the setting of the story, a village along the Southeastern coast of Ghana, a teacher asked her students about sand winning. While three children raised their hands, it was clear that two were unsure of the answer. Although it offers economic benefits to landowners and supplies essential materials for road and various construction projects, sand winning poses serious risks to communities, such as Kassi (Amoako & Frimpong, 2015; Asiedu & Boakye, 2017; Mensah & Antwi, 2020). Many coastal villages in the Volta Region of Ghana face significant threats posed by sand mining (Boateng, 2012; Gyamfi & Boamah, 2020). However, the children’s response to the teacher’s question reveals their lack of awareness about this issue, despite their frequent play on the beach. While the writer draws attention to the environmental challenges associated with sand

mining in the narrative, she also subtly highlights the limited awareness among the young adolescents residing in the village.

The lack of awareness of threats to the environment is further revealed in

> *He laughed and asked curiously, "But what did your father say to the visitors about sand winning?" Well ... something about the sea coming closer to the village because of the sand that people are collecting ..." Her voice trailed off. Akoto frowned, "That sounds serious". For a moment, they both became silent as they thought about what Atsupui had said. The threat of the great sea coming close and swallowing up the houses was frightening. It was in this pensive mood that the two children arrived at the assembly grounds.*

Sand winning poses vicious social problems such as environmental degradation, coastal erosion, farmland destruction, health problems, illegal activities, and social conflicts. All of these directly or indirectly affect children in the environment, but according to the story, they are unaware of it. However, once they were made aware of it, they understood the seriousness of the situation, as evident in Akoto's reaction in "*Akoto frowned, 'That sounds serious',* and the subsequent change in their mood. Hence, the problem with environmental degradation is not only the activities leading to it but also the lack of social awareness about it.

The writer establishes the issue of sand winning as fundamentally theoretical. Even the most intelligent child, Atsupui, only became aware of it through a textbook (specifically in chapter 4), not from community loudspeakers or information centers in the village. This starkly illustrates a critical gap in education and awareness. The children are largely uninformed about this urgent issue because it remains confined to theoretical discussions. Without the proactive use of field trips as a teaching strategy, these children will remain oblivious to the true realities of sand mining.

The reality of environmental degradation dawned on the three children when they finally got to that part of the beach that is not in use anymore. Again, their ignorance of the problem is evident in their reaction to what they saw.

> *"But the sand is not as white as on the other side of the beach". Akoto said And I see more rocks than sand!" Atsupui pointed to the right where sand dunes and shallow pits occupied the coastline. "I now understand why this side of the beach is not used anymore," Akoto said. "Sand winners have collected all the sand," Atsupui said. "I read in the library that the sea takes over any space that was previously occupied by sand!" "If you are right, then it is not safe to step into even the shallow part of the water," Atsu said. "Yes, of course, you can easily disappear into a pit that has been covered by sea water!" Akoto said.*

Their ignorance is unmistakable, yet their reactions reveal a clear understanding of the problem, the inherent dangers, and the urgent need for decisive action. This suggests that, if provided with the

right opportunities and guidance, children have the potential to take meaningful steps to halt and reverse the ongoing degradation of our environment.

The author highlights two major issues: environmental degradation and widespread ignorance. To address these, it is essential to raise awareness, ensuring future generations can protect our planet and make informed choices. This will foster a generation committed to environmental stewardship and sustainability.

Symbolism and Metaphors Related to Nature

The author skillfully employs symbolism and metaphors to evoke a vivid and compelling awareness of the dire consequences of environmental degradation. Through carefully crafted imagery, the writer effectively emphasizes the urgency of addressing this pressing issue, stressing that delay could lead to irreparable damage.

One striking example is the phrase *"the sea coming closer to the village"* (page 7), which powerfully illustrates the unequal nature of the conflict between humanity and nature but is ironically initiated by the more vulnerable side. This image instantly conveys the peril faced by communities that are encroaching upon fragile coastal lands. The juxtaposition of land and sea serves as a stark reminder of the threat posed by rising tides due to climate change and poor environmental practices. This imagery not only draws attention to the dangers inherent in the degradation of beach environments but also invites its readers to reflect on the broader implications of such actions. The visual impact of this mental picture paints a scenario of human catastrophe, one that could be avoided through conscious efforts to protect and preserve our natural surroundings. By enhancing our understanding of the relationship between humans and the environment, the author underscores the crucial importance of taking immediate action to avert the looming crises we face.

Another striking imagery appears on page 22, where a simile conjures a palpable sense of danger: *"The path zigzagged through the patches of tall bushes like a snake; it looked very forbidden."* The children's innate curiosity urged them to defy their mother and challenge societal norms. The serpentine nature of the path not only suggests its treachery but also serves as a chilling metaphor for the hidden perils that lurk ahead. Just as a snake can deliver a fatal bite, this path led toward a treacherous part of the beach. Furthermore, just as the path was shaped by human hands, the beach's dangers were also crafted by human intervention. Had the children been entrusted with designing the path, they would have certainly avoided creating a serpentine route. In a similar vein, if they had the opportunity to safeguard the beach, they would never allow it to morph into such a hazardous place. This stresses the urgent need to enhance ecological awareness among the younger generation, as they represent the future.

The inclusion of a local figure, Wofa Atta, among the three criminals serves a number of literary objectives; first of all, it serves as a compelling narrative device that highlights the role of local involvement in environmental degradation. It also serves as a situational irony, where the local, who is expected to fight to save the environment from degradation, instead turns out to be the one degrading it. This character challenges the prevalent perception that environmental harm is primarily caused by "foreigners." The writer utilizes Wofa Atta to confront the problematic

dichotomy of innocent locals versus external exploiters. This illustration reveals how certain individuals within the community, particularly those in influential positions like the gong-beater—who is expected to be the informed voice for residents—contribute to the degradation of their own heritage.

Through this characterization, the author highlights a key idea in post-colonial ecocriticism: the impact of colonialism and global capitalism can create inequalities within communities. Such disparities may compel some residents to adopt environmentally harmful practices just to make ends meet or for personal gain (Caminero-Santangelo, 2014; Nixon, 2011). The author used Wofa Atta's role to show that environmental damage doesn't just come from outside forces; it can also stem from within the community itself, making the situation more complicated and deeply connected to social, economic, and historical factors. This representation encourages young readers to think about the ethical implications of their everyday choices and highlights the importance of communal responsibility, rather than just pointing fingers at external influences.

The author skillfully employs rhetorical questions to emphasize and engage readers in reflecting on the critical issue of environmental degradation. One notable example is the statement, *"Who would have thought that the gong-beater is stealing sand?"* This remark prompts readers to consider the situation from three distinct perspectives. Firstly, the speaker, a child, comments on the actions of an adult, implying that the younger generation has certain expectations for the older generation, who seem to be failing in their responsibilities. These responsibilities encompass not only safeguarding the environment but also setting a positive moral example for children. Secondly, the perspective of the adult, referred to as "the gong-beater," comes into play. He is traditionally viewed as a custodian of societal knowledge and expected to possess greater wisdom than the youth. Ironically, the situation is quite the opposite. Lastly, we consider the viewpoint of the listeners, who are also children. In traditional African society, adults are typically held in high moral esteem, and children are not expected to mock or critique their conduct. However, the moral decline represented by Wofa Atta undermines this authority, allowing children to call attention to his lack of decorum.

The author employs this rhetorical question to sharply critique the alarming decline in moral and environmental responsibility exhibited by adults. This technique simultaneously empowers younger generations to confront and question prevailing societal norms, thereby underscoring the evolving moral landscape in response to ecological degradation.

Beyond its moral critique, the narrative also points to a deeper post-colonial ecological crisis. The gong-beater's betrayal of collective trust reflects the erosion of local systems of environmental protection—systems that were historically rooted in communal responsibility and reverence for land and sea. His involvement in this illegal venture reflects how traditional roles have been corrupted by post-colonial economic pressures and exploitative practices (Brahim & Kabo-Bah, 2022; Mensah, 2017), such as unregulated sand mining, which is often driven by global demand and weak environmental governance. In this way, the rhetorical question not only indicts an individual's actions but also symbolically exposes how post-colonial realities have disrupted moral and ecological stability within local communities (Caminero-Santangelo, 2014; Nixon, 2011).

The title *"Lost at the Beach"*, which arises from the children's flight in response to adult threats, carries symbolic weight beyond the literal. It foreshadows the potential fate of the younger

generation if the adult world continues to exploit nature without heeding the concerns and voices of youth regarding climate change. In this reading, "lost" becomes a metaphor for generational displacement — a loss not only of physical space but also of future security, identity, and ecological belonging. The beach, once a place of freedom and play, becomes a contested site where profit-driven exploitation silences sustainability and erases childhood innocence. This reflects a broader post-colonial ecocritical concern: that the legacies of colonial resource extraction are reproduced through present-day environmental injustices, disproportionately impacting those with the least power — especially children and future generations (DeLoughrey & Handley, 2011; Nixon, 2011).

The dead whale symbolizes the environment — once majestic and full of life, now lifeless due to human exploitation. While commonly associated with strength and wisdom, its death highlights the ecosystem's fragility in the face of relentless abuse. The whale's size symbolizes the magnitude of the environmental crisis, which worsens with unsustainable practices. This serves as a warning that even the mightiest aspects of nature are vulnerable to destruction, leaving future generations to deal with irreversible consequences.

A typical example of such consequences is illustrated in the story, where sand miners are trapped in a hole created by the very activities of their own kind.

> *The two men, who were chasing them, realized too late what the kids had planned. The speed at which they were running was great so they could not stop on time. Screaming and trying desperately to stop, the run headlong into the ditch below.*

This scene implies that the seemingly lucrative practice of environmental degradation may ultimately lead to the downfall not only of those directly involved but also of innocent bystanders. It highlights the far-reaching and unintended consequences of exploiting nature without regard for sustainability or future harm.

From a post-colonial ecocritical perspective, combined with literary devices such as imagery, metaphors, symbolism, rhetorical questions, etc., "Lost at the Beach" illustrates the harmful effects of exploiting nature and encourages young readers to consider the consequences of natural resource exploitation within their own social and environmental contexts. In this regard, African children's literature emphasizes environmental awareness for advocacy, as highlighted by Adhuze (2021).

Role of Indigenous or Traditional Ecological Knowledge

In the story, indigenous or traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) emerges as a powerful tool for environmental stewardship and ecological resilience. This is evident in Atsupui's statement:

> *"I read that fish come closer to the shore when there is little noise"*, followed by her recognition that *"our ancestors knew that, and so they decided to set one day aside where no one disturbs the migration of the fish for a better harvest."*

Here, ancestral wisdom is not romanticized but validated through both lived experience and ecological understanding. Such knowledge systems reflect a sustainable ethic that prioritizes harmony with natural rhythms — in contrast to modern practices that often disrupt these cycles. From a postcolonial ecocritical perspective, this moment revalues traditional knowledge, which was often marginalized or dismissed under colonial paradigms of resource exploitation (Awuah-Nyamekye, 2015; Mawere, 2014; Mawere, 2015). It positions indigenous practices not as relics of the past, but as crucial, living strategies for protecting the entirety of nature and ensuring environmental justice.

In the story, children are depicted as proactive moral agents rather than victims, reinforcing the idea that age does not limit one's capacity for action or wisdom. This narrative aligns with the broader goal of children's literature to cultivate moral imagination (Nikolajeva, 2014). Set in a familiar African coastal environment, the story reflects ongoing post-colonial tensions related to economic and environmental exploitation. It critiques the extractive mindset present even among local miners and promotes the reclamation of indigenous ecological values.

Conclusion

Children's literature in African contexts is crucial for developing moral awareness, cultural identity, and ecological consciousness among young readers. This paper focused on Pearl E. Dumenu's "Lost at the Beach," which tells the story of three children who confront significant environmental and ethical issues. The narrative blends entertainment with education, highlighting local realities and global themes as the children progress from ignorance to realities about environmental problems. Despite its serious themes, the narrative remains engaging for young readers, balancing enjoyment with education, as indicated by Pulimeno et al (2020) and Simpson and Cremin (2022). Overall, "Lost at the Beach" stands out as an impactful piece of children's literature that integrates environmental advocacy, ethical lessons, and cultural affirmation, empowering children to become moral and ecological advocates while resonating with global audiences.

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