



Family Activities, Family Stories: Where Nature Meets Story....

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NOTE: The following resource from the Children & Nature Network (www.childrenandnature.org) will soon be available online in a variety of ways, with links to books, other web sites, and more. And, this material will be updated, expanded, and enhanced. In the meantime, this PDF version is available for your enjoyment and use! Of the many treasures in this wonderful resource, there are numerous nature-based activities for all seasons and settings. And there are short excerpts from books that are perfect for reading aloud with children—ways to bond with each other, the magic of words, and nature itself. For more great ideas, also see www.naturerocks.org. And, always take precautions to assure everyone's safety when enjoying the outdoors!





WELCOME!

Did you ever read stories about animals when you were young?

Did you get swept up in adventure tales about pioneer families or seafaring pirates or mountain climbers?

Did you have family members who liked to swap funny fishing stories?

Stories about animals, plants, and wild places can be a big part of helping kids connect to nature. Stories let kids know what blossoms and buzzes outside their door. They whet kids' appetites for outdoor adventure. They make places come alive with the experiences of those who came before us. Stories can even be kids' own way of letting others know what spending time in nature has meant to them.

For all these reasons, we've created a special section of www.childrenandnature.org—a place where you can turn to find ideas for spending time in nature with your kids, as well as lists of great stories to read along the way. We'll post thoughtful essays here from leading writers, educators, and other experts about the interplay of nature and story. And we'll feature revolving stories and poems by kids who have spent time in nature and have something to say about what they've found. Here are two examples . . .

OWL

by Ellanora R. Lerner, seven years old

*Hope flies on silent wings.
Standing on that moonlight beam.
Big, but hopeful if it's seen.
Crouching down eyeing its prey.
Weaving its way through the trees
Under the moon
And that's how hope flies on silent wings.*

SPRING

by Olivia, nine years old

*Where the wind comes
It might never come back.
Every wind has its own path.
As the red and blue come
There are flowers.*





*Stay . . . the sun light comes every way
The people don't watch
The flowers bloom.
Magic comes with the little flowers that bloom.
FLOWERS – SUN – RAIN all have a different path.
SPRING.*

So take a look around, come back often, and let us know if your own kids want to share their best stories about connecting with nature. Who knows, their writing may find its way to our chalkboard next!

Read More!

Here are a few thoughtful commentaries on children, nature, and story.

- “The Wilderness of Childhood” by Michael Chabon (*New York Review of Books*, July 12, 2009)
- “Children in Touch, Creatures in Story” by Gary Paul Nabhan in *Cultures of Habitat: Nature, Culture, and Story* (Counterpoint Press, 1998)
- “Thanking the Birds: Native American Upbringing and the Natural World” by Joseph Bruchac in *Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years*, edited by Bill Bigelow and Bob Peterson (Rethinking Schools, 1991)
- “Words Full of Wonder” by James E. Higgins (*Orion Nature Quarterly*, autumn, 1987)
- “Dr. Seuss and Dr. Einstein: Children’s Books and Scientific Imagination” by Chet Raymo (*Orion Nature Quarterly*, spring, 1993)





FAMILY ACTIVITIES, FAMILY STORIES

Where should you go? What should you read? Discover our simple but enticing ideas for getting outside with your kids. Each thematic area comes with a list of relevant books and stories for kids of every age.

A note about the recommended books: Don't be surprised if you find gnomes, talking sheep, and cupcake-eating caterpillars in this book list. We believe imaginative tales are at least as good as realistic ones for making the outdoor world come alive!

You can see the complete list, or choose from one of the themes below:

- Row, Row, Row: Activities on the Water
- A Fort of One's Own: Making Hideouts
- Trail Mix: Activities for Family Hikes
- Of Fairies, Gnomes, and Hobbits: Imagined Worlds in Nature
- We Gather Together: Harvesting and Collecting
- Going Wild: Camping and Wilderness Adventure
- She Sees Seashells: Activities for the Beach
- Where the Sidewalk Is: Connecting to Nature in the City
- Baby, It's Cold Outside: Winter Play
- Where the Wild Things Are: Animal Fun
- Twinkle, Twinkle: Adventures After Dark





STORIES FROM WHERE WE LIVE

Since 2001, the nonprofit publisher Milkweed Editions (www.milkweed.org) has been producing *Stories from Where We Live*, a series of books filled with lively stories about nature from across North America. Each volume brings to life a different region with stories, poems, essays, and other colorful writing that can be enjoyed by kids of all ages—and adults, too! Each volume also contains habitat descriptions and lists of local parks to help you explore the region firsthand. Milkweed Editions has kindly given us permission to excerpt relevant pieces of these volumes in the “Read Me” sections below. We think they’ll give you—and your kids—a bit of inspiration as you embark on your time outdoors. Visit Milkweed’s ecoregion map with links to more literature about each region.





ROW, ROW, ROW: ACTIVITIES ON THE WATER

Kids love water. But why limit them to swimming pools and Super Soakers? Try these activities to turn water play into nature play.

1. Throw pebbles. Pause on the edge of a puddle, stream, or pond, and let your little ones toss pebbles into the water. Older kids might try skipping stones. You'll be amazed by how long they'll be entertained, and by all the other sights, sounds, and textures they'll notice along the way.
2. Walk a stream. Roll up your pant legs and walk a shallow stream. Notice the plants along the shore, the fish and insects darting from your path, the birds swooping overhead.
3. Play Pooh-sticks. Winnie-the-Pooh and Piglet created this winning game: Stand on a footbridge over a stream. Drop sticks over the upstream side of the bridge, then run to the downstream side to see whose stick emerges first. This game can also be played with feathers, leaves, cattails, and more.
4. Rent a boat. Find a company that rents rowboats or canoes to paddle on a quiet stretch of lake or river. Paddle hard, float lazily, sneak up on turtles and wading birds, munch on snacks. The busy world never felt so far away.

Read me!

At the age of stubby pigtails, I rowed a featherweight dinghy to the limits of our cove—far enough to taste adventure, but close enough that a parent could look out a window and see me. If I shipped the oars and made no noise floating, I could see lots of birds and animals along the shoreline. The kingfishers scolded me as they swooped between pine branches, and the great blue heron squawked if she was stalking fish. I counted baby goslings swimming tight in line behind their goose mother. Mid-cove, mute swans were ornery despite their white beauty, and I stayed clear of them. I picked up their white wispy feathers floating on the water surface. If I were really quiet, I might glimpse a shy otter on the shore, or see just its dark head bob underwater. I always hoped a jumping mullet fish would land in my boat.

—from “Chesapeake Homeplace” by Susan Schmidt in *The South Atlantic Coast and Piedmont (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2006.

5. Launch a raft. Craft miniature rafts out of sticks and twine, or out of flat pieces of driftwood. Try floating them on puddles or ponds.
6. Find a swimming hole. Next time you're thinking of going swimming, opt for a quiet swimming hole, pond, or lake instead of a pool. You'll cool off nicely and give your kids a good dip into nature, too.





Read me!

Between 1932 and 1942 the rivers that split and ran through Wichita were sweet and clean and perfect for swimming. For my money, the best swimming hole of all was on the east bank of the Little River at about Eighteenth Street.

There was a small beach that eased into the water. You could wade to any depth you chose. The main channel near the west bank was the deepest spot. The riverbank behind the beach was steep and thickly covered by bushes and clumps of willows and a heavy stand of cane....

Adults came to Eighteenth Street, too. They were, for the most part, women with children too young to swim. The mothers would wade in wearing their dresses, holding their children's hands. Grown men would roll up the legs of their overalls and stand in the cool water. Most of the swimming garb was catch-as-catch-can. In a nation and city of poor people, we generally represented the poorest of the poor. Under certain circumstances, even underwear was all right.

The water on Eighteenth Street was always warm and friendly and inviting. You had to go deep in the main channel to find a cold current. A crude diving platform was nailed twenty feet up into a huge cottonwood tree right on the edge of the river. A heavy rope swing hung down from a limb just below it.

No one was in charge at the Eighteenth Street swimming club. Actually, it wasn't even a club. It was more like a hobo jungle. A calm, quiet, secret place where anyone could find soft breezes, cool water, silky sand, and a haven from the rough, raw edges of reality.

—from “The Last Best Swimming Hole” by Patric Rowley in *The Great North American Prairie (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2001.

7. Catch frogs. Head to a nearby pond in the spring or summer and try catching frogs with a net. You might scoop up tadpoles, salamanders, and water insects while you're at it. Remember to return every creature gently to the water when you're done.

8. Jump in the puddles. Next time you're walking home in the rain, consider giving in to your kids' natural desire to stomp, slosh, and even dip into the gathering puddles. They'll be so grateful you did!

Read me!

Halfway home, the sky goes from dark gray to almost black and a loud thunder snap accompanies the first few raindrops that fall. Heavy, warm, big drops, they drench me in seconds, like an overturned bucket from the sky dumping just on my head. I reach my hands up and out, as if that can stop my getting wetter, and open my mouth, trying to swallow the downpour, till it finally hits me how funny it is, my trying to stop the rain.

This is so funny to me, I laugh and laugh, as loud and free as I want. Instead of hurrying to higher ground, I jump lower, down off the curb, splashing through the puddles, playing and laughing all the way home. In all my life till now, rain has meant staying inside and not being able to go out and play. But now for the first time I realize





that rain doesn't have to be bad. And what's more, I understand, sadness doesn't have to be bad, either. Come to think of it, I figure you need sadness, just as you need the rain.

—from “Rain” by Antwone Quenton Fisher, excerpted from *Finding Fish in The Great Lakes (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2003.

9. Make pretend soup. Give your little ones a feel for freshwater life by making pond soup. Dip a bucket in the water. Add reeds, leaves, pebbles, flowers, seeds, and more. Stir with a stick. What does it look like? How does it smell? Did any living creatures sneak in? Try making soup again at your next freshwater stop and see how it compares.

10. Go fish! Nothing compares to the lazy anticipation of fishing. Bait your hooks, drop your lines, and spend the next few hours sharing the enlivened silence together.

Read me!

The sun rose as they baited their hooks, cast their lines, and watched a kingfisher dive for its breakfast.

Morning came and went.

No fish.

“Nothing’s happening,” complained Christopher.

“Fishing is mostly waiting,” said his uncle as they rowed ashore for lunch.

Uncle Johnathan poked through the lunch bucket. “I’m tired of salt pork,” he said. “Fried fish will taste mighty good for supper.”

Uncle Johnathan got ready for a nap. He stuck his pole in the sand with a mess of sticks and string and a spare fish hook that would lift his hat if he got a bite.

“Never let the fish know you’re sleeping,” he said.

—from “Never Go Home without a Fish” by Gretchen Woelfle in *The North Atlantic Coast (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2001.

RECOMMENDED READING (ages in parentheses)

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain (Puffin, 2008)

The classic story of a boy named Huck, a slave named Jim, and their raft ride down the Mississippi. (Young adult)

Boat Ride with Lillian Two-Blossom by Patricia Polacco (Philomel, 1989)

An ordinary fishing trip turns magical when two kids welcome a remarkable old lady into their boat. (3-7)

The Dark Canoe by Scott O’Dell (Sourcebooks Jabberwocky, 2008)

A dramatic story of a boy and his brothers setting sail in search of a sunken ship. (9-12)





Mr. Gumpy's Outing by John Burningham (Henry Holt, 1971)

Next time you go boating, you might want to leave your chickens, goat, and cow on land! (Infant-preschool)

Paddle to the Sea by Holling C. Holling (Sandpiper, 1980)

A young Indian boy longs to travel from his home to the Atlantic Ocean. He sends his carved toy instead, and we get to watch the adventure! (6-10)

The Raft by Jim Lamarche (HarperCollins, 2002)

When you're dropped off for a summer with grandma and she doesn't even have a TV, it's a good thing she's a "river rat"! (3-7)

Ring of Endless Light by Madeleine L'Engle (Square Fish, 2008)

Fifteen-year-old Vicky spends the summer with her grandfather on a New England island, sorting out her relationships with three boys and honing a newly discovered talent for communicating with dolphins. (9-12)

Sheep on a Ship by Nancy Shaw (Sandpiper, 1992)

Rhyming adventures at sea with a silly set of sheep. (Infant-preschool)

Treasure Island by Robert Louis Stevenson (Signet, 2008)

Don't be surprised if boating adventures turn your family crew into a pack of pirates—it's all part of the fun! (Young adult)

Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea by Jules Verne (Sterling, 2006)

Venture to the bottom of the sea and discover its wonders in this science fiction classic. (8-12)

The Wanderer by Sharon Creech (HarperCollins, 2002)

Sophie gamely joins her uncles and male cousins on a sailing trip from Connecticut to England. Many adventures and discoveries ensue. (8-12)





A FORT OF ONE'S OWN: MAKING HIDEOUTS

For kids, nothing makes nature feel like home more than making a home in nature! Join your kids, or set them loose, in making forts, bird blinds, tree houses, and other outdoor getaways.

1. Make a mini tree house. If your kids are young or the weather is frightful, consider starting with a houseplant tree house. Use sticks, string, and other simple materials to build a multi-level structure inside a potted plant or outdoor shrub. Let your action figures and dolls move in and make the place home!
2. Build a lean-to. Gather tall sticks and lay them at an angle against a rock or hillside. Climb inside.
3. Scoot inside a shrub. Encourage your kids to find secret hideouts between your shrubs and your house, under the boughs of sweeping pines, or in other hidden pockets of your yard. They can outfit their hideouts with blankets, snacks, books, and more.

Read me!

Growing up, I'd been able to satisfy all my cravings for adventure without venturing far from home. My neighborhood may have looked like an ordered assemblage of suburban houses and lawns on the surface, but as kids we knew that there were still untamed places on the margins, and that they belonged to us.

Miss Tilden, the elderly neighbor who once lived across the street, knew all about this other world. She watched us making forts under the blue spruce, racing behind the juniper bushes, tunneling through piles of musty leaves.

"If you're out sometime and you see a plant that looks like this," she said, showing me a picture of a white flower called a trillium in one of her books, "would you let me know?"

"But don't you know where everything is?" I asked her. Miss Tilden knew the names of all the wildflowers and trees and birds in the neighborhood. She let a tangle of bushes grow on part of her yard so the birds would have places to feed and nest.

"I know about some things, Liza," she said. "But I don't sneak into as many scruffy places as you do."

—from "Leaves" by Sara St. Antoine in *The Great Lakes (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2003.

4. Create a lasting fort. See if your kids can find a place in the yard or a nearby vacant lot to build an old-school fort. Can they line up rocks to create borders? Rope together big branches to create walls? Or even build something from scrap plywood and nails? Once you establish basic safety rules, you may find your older kids can handle the challenges inherent in designing and putting together a serious den.





Read me!

By the time we placed the last oak leaf on the wall, the evening geese were returning to bed down at the lake, and the crickets and frogs had started their evening chorus. We'd been right: the blue of the sky had stretched long enough for us to build our Rome. Our fort was complete.

From that day on, Lydia and I spent as much time as possible at our fort. Some days it was our camp. Some days it served as a makeshift church for us—a place for us to say the Lord's Prayer and sing "Fairest Lord Jesus" and "Amazing Grace." It just as easily became a rustic library when we brought out our Nancy Drew mysteries and Archie comic books. Sometimes it was just our quiet place. But it was always a refuge somehow from the rest of our lives. It was the first structure we'd built with our own hands. The first spot of earth we could claim as our own.

—from "The Fort" by Kimberly Greene Angle in *The South Atlantic Coast and Piedmont (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2006.

5. Put up a teepee. Whether you make it or buy it, a teepee is a great structure for hiding from the sun, the wind, and busybody adults.

Read me!

We girls built playhouse tepees for ourselves and our dolls. We would hang little pieces of meat upon bushes and play like we were drying meat, the same as our mothers did at the home lodges. Sometimes we would play at moving camp. The boys would come with willow baskets. Everything would be put into the baskets and then the boys would drag them to wherever we might want to go. We would ride stick horses. The doll might ride on a stick horse beside the play-mother, or it might be carried on her back.

—from "Recollections" by Iron Teeth in *The Great North American Prairie (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2001.

6. Make a tree house. Sure, this one can be a challenge. But if you're handy with a hammer and saw, you can join the long list of dedicated parents who have built a sturdy tree house getaway with their kids. Even better, give them a few supplies and then let them find the rest—and do it all themselves. Or simply help them find a climbable tree to call their own. They're sure to spend many fine hours hidden in the treetops with the birds and the squirrels.

Read me!

Immense, entirely itself,
It wore that yard like a dress,
With limbs low enough for me to enter it
And climb the crooked ladder to where
I could lean against the trunk and practice being alone....





—from “The Copper Beech” by Marie Howe in *The Great Lakes (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions. 2003.

7. Map your favorite place. Ask your kids if they already have a favorite place to spend time outdoors. Have them draw a picture of it and create a map showing its location. Encourage them to keep a journal describing what they do and see in their favorite place.

RECOMMENDED READING

Bridge to Terabithia by Katherine Paterson (Harper Trophy, 1995)

Fifth-grade classmates Jess and Leslie build an unlikely friendship as they create a secret magical kingdom in the woods called Terabithia. (9-12)

Chasing Redbird by Sharon Creech (HarperCollins, 1998)

Zinny is coping with the recent death of a beloved aunt when she discovers an overgrown trail leading away from her family’s farm. She determines to clear the trail and find where it leads. (8-12)

Henry Builds a Cabin by D. B. Johnson (Houghton Mifflin, 2002)

Henry the bear (aka Henry David Thoreau) builds a cabin, which is only too small if you forget that you can spend much of your day living outside! (3-7)

Roxaboxen by Alice McLerran (HarperCollins, 2004)

Build a fort and maybe you’ll find you’ve built a whole town. (3-7)

Swiss Family Robinson by Johann Wyss (Penguin, 2007)

Watch how a family builds a life after being shipwrecked on a desert island. (Young adult)

The Wild Girls by Pat Murphy (Speak, 2008)

Two girls with the nicknames Newt and Fox forge a friendship in the secret clearings and treehouse of their nearby woods. (9-12)





TRAIL MIX: ACTIVITIES FOR FAMILY HIKES

Kids of all ages love a good hike outdoors—in the woods, across meadows, through the desert, over dunes, along a river, and beyond. Dip into these activities to help them get started, but don't be surprised if the best fun happens when you're not even trying!

1. Match colors. Pick up some paint samples from a local hardware store and give one to each of your little ones. See if they can match the colors on their samples with those they see around them.
2. Climb. Keep a lookout for nature's jungle gyms—trees, fallen logs, big boulders, and more. With little or no assistance from you, your kids can scale these “structures” and gain agility, balance, and confidence in the process!
3. Count sounds. Encourage your group to be silent for a five-minute stretch of the hike. Count sounds on your fingers as you walk. Can you guess what made them? Repeat this activity in different places and at different times of day. How do the sounds compare?

Read me!

But then, one Saturday, I woke up early, in that blue, inky light before dawn.
Nanna, her flowered robe wrapped tortilla tight, was creeping by my bedroom door.
Where was she going? I wanted to know.
So I grabbed my clothes and followed her on tiptoed feet: First into the kitchen,
then out the door into the yard.
Cold air forced my eyes wide open.
“Who-cooks for you?” called the last owl of the night.
Nanna disappeared into the woods.
I worried that Nanna might fall in the dark, tangled woods. But I was the one who
tripped and fell.
“Be quiet and listen,” she ordered, sounding stern.
I did, and heard echoes and eerie sounds. They were strange, wet whistles, like
songs sung in a cave.
“Dawn songs,” explained Nanna. “Birds sing them only at dawn.”
I listened a while longer. But then I had to ask. “Where are you going so early?”
“To see the jewel bird,” she said, and pushed aside a branch. It snapped back,
splattering water on my shirt. When I looked up again, she was gone.

—from “Fairies’ Washing” by April Pulley Sayre in *The Great Lakes (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2003.

4. Follow tracks. Keep your eyes peeled for footprints of other creatures that have crossed the trail. (This works especially well in mud or snow). Can you identify what you see? Use a field guide to help you.





Read me!

I set off a few days later to track the otter. The mid-February rains followed by a freeze had produced a hard and glassy ice. I skated the meandering marshy streams, through the muskrat and beaver swamps, following the frozen slush trail of the otter. The post-rain soggy snow had not slowed her progress. I could see sprays of slush from her sliding, frozen near her tracks. Underneath the sultry black ice, air bubbles were trapped eight inches beneath my feet. Using these bubbles, otters can stretch their under-ice time from the regular two-to-four minutes to an hour.

—from “Otter Delight” by David Sobel in *The North Atlantic Coast (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2000.

5. Make a leaf bracelet. Make a bracelet around your kids’ wrists using thick masking tape, sticky side out. As the kids hike, have them pick up leaves, flower petals, and other natural objects, and stick them on their bracelet. When they get home, they’ll have a nice record of their journey (and a bit of nature’s bling!).

6. Lie down. Take a moment to sprawl out on a soft stretch of moss, some feathery grass, warm sand, or a thick leaf pile. Look at the trees and the sky overhead. Soak up your natural surroundings.

Read me!

To appreciate grass, you must lie down in grass....Just after the snow has melted each spring, it is good to throw oneself on grass. The stems have packed down all winter, in swirls like a sleeper’s hair. The grass sighs and crackles faintly, a weighted mat, releasing fine winter dust.

—from “Big Grass” by Louise Erdrich in *The Great North American Prairie (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2000.

7. Find a treasure. Give your toddlers a small bag to carry on your hike. As they walk along, they can place safe objects from nature in the bag—stones, feathers, twigs, and more. When you reach your turnaround spot, sit down and examine the contents of the bag. Then, if they’re willing, have them return the objects to the trail as you hike home.

8. Be silent. If your kids are old enough, have everyone in your group choose his or her own spot just off the trail to sit silently for five minutes. Did you see anything new? Hear anything new? Better still, have each person sit silently alone for about 15 minutes and make a sketch. They’ll get a nice record from their hike...and possibly see a shy bird or other forest animal come into view.





Read me!

Journal Entry: Lake Michigan, July

Writing, how quiet
I am. Chipmunk and sparrow
Visit my small porch.

by Roger Pfingston in *The Great Lakes (Stories from Where We Live)*.
Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2003.

9. Organize a scavenger hunt. Before you set out on your hike, make a list of a dozen or so items you might see along the way. You might list specific objects, such as a feather, a big boulder, or a tree with needles. Or use descriptive phrases, such as “something yellow,” “a place where insects live,” or “something that’s rotting.” As you hike, your kids can check off every item they find.

10. Create leaf pictures. Pause on your hike to make some beautiful art—out of leaves! Gather a pile of leaves together. Sit someplace comfortable. Now assemble the leaves into a collage. Can you make a person? A rabbit? A rainbow?!

11. Make a nature scrapbook. Staple together some blank pieces of paper to make a simple nature scrapbook for each kid in your group. As you go on different hikes, encourage the kids to write observations, make sketches, make leaf and bark rubbings, take photographs (which can be pasted in later), and so on. Soon the scrapbook will be bursting with words and images from the trail.

12. ABC hike. As you go for a hike, have your kids try to find one object from each letter of the alphabet, in order. Don’t go on to the next letter till you’ve found something to represent the previous one. You can bring along field guides if you want to have some help learning names for unusual plants, insects, and so on.

RECOMMENDED READING

All Around Me I See by Laya Steinberg (Dawn Publications, 2008)
See the wonders of the world through the eyes of a young child. (3-6)

The Brilliant Fall of Gianna Z by Kate Messner (Walker Books, 2009)
Fall means cross-country races for Gianna, but then there’s a leaf-collecting project she has to finish for school. How will she juggle her responsibilities, especially as family concerns, too, loom large? (8-12)





The Complete Adventures of the Mole Sisters by Roslyn Schwartz (Annick Press Ltd., 2004)

Utterly charming short tales of two mole sisters taking delight in the world around them. (3-7)

The Evolution of Calpurnia Tate by Jacqueline Kelly (Henry Holt, 2009)

Twelve-year-old Calpurnia spurns the domestic activities of other girls of her era (late 19th century) and joins her naturalist grandfather on treks through the Texas countryside. (8-12)

Fancy Nancy, Explorer Extraordinaire by Jane O'Connor (HarperCollins, 2009)

Fans of Fancy Nancy will enjoy her introduction to backyard nature exploration. (3-7)

Heidi by Johanna Syri (Puffin, 2009)

Who loves being outside in the mountains more than a young girl named Heidi? Maybe your kids will—take them hiking and find out! (8-12)

Henry Hikes to Fitchburg by D. B. Johnson (Sandpiper, 2006)

Join Henry the bear (a stand-in for Henry David Thoreau) as he finds satisfaction in a long day's hike. (3-7)

Hooray for Fall by Kazuo Iwamura (North South Books, 1984).

Three little squirrels don their new red sweaters and set out to see the changing colors of fall. (3-7)

Leaf Man by Lois Ehlert (Harcourt, 2005)

The text and pictures are sure to inspire a leaf hunt and some beautiful leaf collages! (3-7)

Leaves by David Ezra Stein (Putnam, 2007)

Charming and simple story of a bear befriending the autumn leaves. (3-7)

The Little Yellow Leaf by Carin Berger (Greenwillow, 2008)

Beautifully designed story about a lone leaf that clings to a tree in autumn. (3-7)

Mouse's First Fall by Lauren Thompson (Simon and Schuster, 2006)

Come out with Mouse and enjoy the simple pleasures of a leaf tumble. (Infant-preschool)

The Other Way to Listen by Byrd Baylor (Aladdin, 1997)

A young boy in the desert learns from an old man how to listen to nature. (3-7)

Pouch by David Ezra Stein (Putnam, 2009)

Your youngest explorers may well relate to a little kangaroo venturing from his mama's pouch for the first time. (Infant-preschool)





Family Activities, Family Stories: Where Nature Meets Story by Sara St. Antoine

Sheep Take a Hike by Nancy Shaw (Houghton Mifflin, 1994)

Silly sheep can get muddy, lost, and wet, and still chalk it up as a perfect hike. (Infant-preschool)

We're Going on A Bear Hunt by Michael Rosen (McElderry Books, 2003)

Splish splash, swish, swish... So much good terrain to get through on an adventurous family hike. (Infant-preschool)





OF FAIRIES, GNOMES, AND HOBBITS: IMAGINED WORLDS IN NATURE

Some of the most imaginative books for children render the natural world with exquisite detail. They open kids' minds to the possibility that an acorn cap is somebody's cup, that a hole leads to somebody's house, that every flower has its own special caretaker, and much more. Sample these books and stories along with outdoor activities, and you'll see how you can broaden your kids' creative and physical horizons at one and the same time!

1. Make a woodland elf house. Make an elf or fairy house under the trees with any natural materials you find. For example, you can use sticks for walls, moss for roofs, rocks for steps, pinecones for chimneys, and so on. Your kids will love creating their houses, alone or as a group. And because they're made of natural materials, you can leave them where you build them for as long as they last.
2. Plant a fairy garden. Do you have a patch of garden you can designate for fairies? Plant flowers, create rock walkways, place a "fairy door" against a tree trunk (a thin piece of painted wood works well), and so on. Some garden stores even carry miniature chairs, figurines, mushrooms, and other fairy-friendly items that are made out of durable materials suitable for outdoor use.
3. Make acorn fairies. Gather acorns, with and without caps. Using one acorn as a body, glue a silk flower (without stems and leaves—available at local crafts stores) on top, then glue a capped acorn on top for the head. Draw a face. Glue yarn hair just under the cap. Glue the whole thing to another acorn cap, if necessary, for stability.
4. Make a mudbrick house. Find a patch of soil near your house that has lots of clay in it. Dig out a bunch of wet clay, smoosh it into an ice-cube container (ideally the old-fashioned metal kind with the handle) and let it harden a bit. Then take out the individual mud cubes and let them dry in the sun for several days. Now you're ready to make a mudbrick house. Find a good spot in your yard or garden. Build walls by layering the bricks with wet mud for mortar. Use sticks to create door and window frames. Cover the top with more sticks and/or moss. Decorate with bracken and leaves. Now find some nice fairies who want to move inside! (Activity used with permission of www.imaginechildhood.com.)
5. Go on a fairyfolk hike. Take the kids on a magical walk by having them look all around for "signs" of gnomes, elves, hobbits, or fairies. Could that hole in the ground belong to a hobbit? Could that patch of flowers conceal a school of flower fairies? Encourage them to look high and low as they imagine these secret worlds.





Read me!

Pink light was making a bubble on the edge of the hill. It spread out, slowly, like jam. Bumblebees clinging to flower petals were still cold and asleep and unaware.

“Look. Fairies’ washing!” whispered Nanna.

Fairies? Maybe Dad was right about Nanna’s imagination. But then I saw what Nanna meant: glistening, like strings of pearls. Like lace, the fairies’ washing hung from fences, flowers, grass. It was exactly what a fairy would wear.

“Every morning the fairies hang their washing out to dry. But soon after sunup, it’s gone.” Nanna smiled and said it just like truth. But I knew I’d have to see that for myself.

—from “Fairies’ Washing” by April Pulley Sayre in *The Great Lakes (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2003.

6. Make imaginative sketches. Take your pencils, crayons, and sketchbook or clipboards outside and have your kids make drawings of both the world they see and the world they imagine. For example, they might draw a tree filled with swinging gnome children or a pond filled with sea serpents. Encourage them to pay close attention to real natural details before letting their creative imaginations run wild.

Read me!

We turned inland and rode a mile north before stopping on the banks of Bixby Creek to set up camp. Tim went upstream to fish. My passions pulled me the other way, back to the ocean and its unending watery horizon.

As I rode Star Blazer along the creek toward the ocean, my mind filled with the creatures of the sea. In my imagination, stingrays, sharks, and octopuses battled with slimy sea monsters and mermaids.

My imagination. Dad thought it was a problem, past time for me to put my fantasies and sketchpad aside and focus on the real world. Momma wanted me to work harder on my studies and spend more time with her in the kitchen, baking bread and canning vegetables. Tim liked my fanciful drawings well enough, but he pestered me to make more of Star Blazer, of the pigs and the barn. Me, I liked to draw what is not there, the unseen.

—from “Seacoast Secret” by Nancy Dawson in *The California Coast (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2001.

7. Make an indoor fairy garden. Want a fairy garden to play with year-round? Design and create one on top of a piece of cardboard. Begin by going outside and having your kids collect beautiful flowers. Tie them in bundles and hang them upside down (blossoms not touching) in a dry, dark place until they’re completely dry. (It usually takes about four weeks.) Now have them sketch out a garden design on their cardboard. They should paint in walkways and other open areas. Then have them glue in the flowerbeds with their dried flowers. Once the garden is dry, they can use it as a playspace for their dolls and other figurines.





8. Make a fairy wand. Have each of your kids select one large stick (not too heavy) and three smaller ones. Glue or tie the three small sticks together (criss-crossed) to make a star shape. When that's dry, glue the center of the star to the end of the bigger stick. Now use glue to affix a row of dried flowers (see above) to the sides of the smaller sticks. Tie a few ribbons around the stick and now you have a dazzling natural fairy wand!

RECOMMENDED READING

Afternoon of the Elves by Janet Taylor Lisle (Putnam, 1999)

Nobel honor book that tells of two girls (one privileged, one poor and cared for by a mentally ill mother) who become friends over the latter's elaborate backyard elf village. (9-12)

The Borrowers Afield by Mary Norton (Sandpiper, 2003)

The tiny family of the famous *Borrower* series sets out across the country in search of a new home, and daughter Arietty develops a love of outdoor living. (8-12)

Children of the Forest by Elsa Beskow (Floris Books, 2002)

Nature will never look the same now that your kids know where the fairies hide. (3-7)

The Complete Book of Flower Fairies by Cecily Mary Barker (Penguin Books, 2002)

Classic collection of illustrations and poems about common flower fairies. (6-10)

Fairy Houses by Tracy Kane (Light Beams Publishing, 2001)

Kristen's parents take her to Maine and give her a fairy house. Who will come to visit it? (3-7)

The Girls' Book of Flower Fairies by Cecily Mary Barker (Penguin, 2008)

Fairy chapter stories, facts, and activities give new life to Cecily Mary Barker's classic illustrations of flower fairies. (6-10)

Gnomes by Rien Pourtqvliet and Wil Huygen. (Henry N. Abrams, 2006)

The definitive, enchantingly illustrated guide to gnomes of the forest, field, and more. (8-12)

The Green Man: Tales from the Mythic Forest by Terri Windling and Ellen Datlow (Firebird, 2004)

Short stories and poems from a number of authors that convey the wild and magical spirit of nature. (Young adult)

The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2007)

In a cozy little hole in the ground lives Bilbo Baggins the Hobbit. Welcome to a remarkable hidden world. (9-12)





The Minpins by Roald Dahl (Puffin, 1994)

Little Billy's mother warns him not to venture outdoors and into the dark, foreboding forest. Thank goodness he ignores her advice, or he never would have met the Minpins (and so much more!). (6-10)

Odd and the Forest Giants by Neil Gaiman (HarperCollins, 2009)

A lively tale about a crippled Viking boy named Odd who ventures into the forest and befriends a fox, a bear, and an eagle—really, three Norse gods in disguise—and helps them with their plight. (6-10)

Story of the Butterfly Children by Sibylle Von Olfers (Floris Books, 2009)

Story of the Root-Children by Sibylle Von Olfers (Floris Books, 1980)

Story of the Snow Children by Sibylle Von Olfers (Floris Books, 2005)

Story of the Wind Children by Sibylle Von Olfers (Floris Books, 2006)

Four beautifully illustrated stories about the fairy folk who share our living world. (3-7)

The Tomten by Astrid Lindgren. (Putnam, 1997)

The story of an invisible troll who cares for farm animals and families alike on a cold winter's night. (3-7)

Woody, Hazel, and Little Pip by Elsa Beskow (Floris Books, 1990)

Three forest children from the Acorn family go on an adventure that leads them to squirrels, gnomes, glow worms, and more. (3-7)

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WE GATHER TOGETHER: HARVESTING AND COLLECTING

Visit an orchard or garden or berry patch, and your kids will gain a whole new way of connecting to nature—with their tastebuds! Or gather items such as shells and rocks for a more permanent nature harvest.

1. Pluck an apple. Take your kids to an apple orchard and let them pick a bag of apples. Spend some time wandering, tasting, and (if it's allowed) climbing. Come home and make a pie or some applesauce!
2. Pick a berry. Find a place to pick berries—a farm, or, better yet, someplace wild. Fill a pail with blueberries, raspberries, strawberries, blackberries, or any other edible berries you can find. How do they taste straight off the plant? Who else is wandering by for a sip or a nibble? Find a place to sit and eat your sun-soaked berries.

Read me!

One Sunday afternoon in June, I spotted a man on a sidewalk, surrounded by a horde of neighborhood kids. As the children held his large umbrella upside down, he shook the branches of a large mulberry tree. Round and round they went, shaking and laughing. Once all the ripe berries had fallen, they trooped inside a nearby house, washed them, and gobbled up all they'd collected.

In July, I took my own daughters out in the buggy for a ride on a hiker-biker trail that stretches like a thread from the northwest quadrant of Baltimore all the way to the inner-harbor. On our ride we discovered large patches of wineberry bushes (an invasive, fuzzy, and equally delicious relative of raspberry). An hour later, we headed home with only a pittance in our pails, but a bounty in our bellies, singing our own version of a song from one of the girls' favorite books:

*Shrub berry, vine berry, pick me a wineberry,
Yours berry, mine berry, they're so fine berry,
Ridin' on the trail on the Fourth of July,
Picking wineberries for wineberry pie.*

—from “Bounty” by Paul Jahnige in *The South Atlantic Coast and Piedmont* (*Stories from Where We Live*). Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2006.

3. Catch a fish. Grab a rod, a pole, or a net, and try your hand at fishing. Whether you catch something or not, your kids are sure to remember the experience for years to come.

Read me!

How do you say you're ready to fish with the experts at dawn? How do you put it when yours is a serious fishing family, your dad known as the best fisherman on the lake since his father before him? John's dad hadn't been allowed in a fishing boat until he'd turned sixteen. John was only ten.





Then one morning toward the beginning of August when John heard his father's footsteps crossing the porch near his bed, he sat up. "Take me with you," he blurted out. "I've been casting off the dock. I caught a bass."

His father looked at him in surprise. He was a quiet man and in the summertime John figured his mind was so filled with fishing that he didn't much notice him. His dad hesitated. "You'd have to wear a life jacket." He glanced outside. "Looks like rain. We won't stay long."

—from "Great Northern Pike," by Katharine Crawford Robey in *The Great Lakes (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2003.

4. Pick a stick. Have you ever noticed how much little kids love a good stick? Whether walking around your neighborhood or hiking a nearby trail, let them choose a nice stick to hold. You may be surprised at how long they take to find the perfect shape and size. Once they do, they might want to drum it on the ground, wave it in the air, poke it into mud patches, tap it on a tree trunk, or use it as a baton as they march over hill and dale.

5. Plant a vegetable garden. Few things are as wondrous as planting tiny seeds or seedlings and reaping a meal's worth of vegetables a few months later. Find a good growing spot in your yard. Test the soil to see what nutrients you need to add and to make sure the lead levels are low. (If not, you can build raised beds and fill them with safe soil.) Talk to your local nursery about the best kinds of vegetables to grow in your climate. Have your kids help select the seeds, plant, weed, water, and, of course, harvest. You may find they're more willing to eat a vegetable that they helped grow!

Read me!

June 14

All morning, harvesting carrots—the CSAers, full-time workers, Molly, Ted, and me. Everyone jumping on pitchforks, driving them into the ground, the sound of roots groaning and snapping, dirt shifting, the ground erupting in orange.

These aren't the kind of carrots you see at Giant Eagle—they're half the size, and they all look different, like corkscrews, witches' gnarly fingers, or the braids in Meghan's hair. Some are split down the sides, like they laughed too hard.

Mrs. Wilson says she rejoined the CSA this year just for the carrots. One hundred percent crunch, and super sweet, fresh out of the ground. No grocery store compares. Andy, her toddler, called a pair that were stuck together "kissing carrots," and begged to take them home.

—from "Summer at Silver Creek Farm" by Shannon Sexton in *The Great Lakes (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2003.

6. Plant flowers. Brighten up a walkway, yard, patio, or even a window by planting colorful flowers. Better yet, plant flowers such as bee balm, joe-pyeweed, and purple coneflowers to attract butterflies and hummingbirds. Your kids are sure to enjoy preparing the yard for these colorful visitors and watching them visit.





Read me!

I stared out the window at the splash of color beyond. Granmé had a tiny garden. But it had enough color to fill up my whole neighborhood back in Saint Paul.

“*Alé déyo*—go outside and get me some flowers. Brighten this place up,” Granmé ordered. Mama had bought yellow roses the day after we’d arrived, but they’d faded and wilted into sad crumples.

I felt instantly better when I stepped outside, even though the air was thick with heat. The tall palms beyond the tiny yard swayed in the breeze. Most of them stood straight and tall, like guards. Some leaned over, wanting to tell a secret. Their trunks were propped up by wooden stakes at the bottom, to keep them perfectly straight, I guess. And most of them looked wrapped, as though you could peel off the bark in one long strip, like an Ace bandage. Giant silky palms sprouted out of the top, like a plume of tail feathers from an exotic bird.

A sweet scent hovered in the air from the honeysuckle bush next to the mailbox. Gnarly gray wisteria vines hung their purple flower clusters from the top of the concrete wall. Sunny orange roses nestled next to the red-veined crotons that seemed to be everywhere. In the corner of the tiny yard were pink azaleas and white camellias.

—from “Welcoming the Waves” by Mélina Mangal in *The South Atlantic Coast and Piedmont (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2006.

7. Harvest greenery. Give your winter outing a special purpose by having your kids gather holiday greens. Explore your yard or other wooded area where cutting is permitted to see if you can find ideal greenery such as balsam and Douglas fir, yew, holly, boxwood, and juniper. Once you’re back home, you and the kids can decorate shelves, tables, and banisters with your arrangement. Or pick up a wreath mold at a crafts store and make your own wreath!

8. Start a rock collection. Whether you suggest it or not, your kids are likely to start collecting rocks on your various outings. Toddlers are especially fond of a slow-paced rock hunt. Encourage the kids to select one or two favorite rocks on every hike you take. You can collect them in a glass jar, display them on a shelf, or even label them by location.

9. Press flowers. At the height of spring or summer blooming, head out to a field to admire the flowers and collect some for pressing. Select flowers when they are fresh and dry (no dew). As soon as you get home, arrange the flowers on a few sheets of plain newsprint or extra thick paper towel. Cover with another piece of paper and a piece of cardboard. Then stack heavy books on top. Wait a couple of weeks for the flowers to dry. You can use your pressed flowers for decorating stationery, gifts, and more.





RECOMMENDED READING

All in a Day by Cynthia Rylant (Harry Abrams, 2005)

See the many pleasures a kid can reap from a day outside, from planting a seed to picnicking. Beautiful woodcuts. (3-7)

The Bee Tree by Patricia Polacco (Putnam and Grosset Group, 1993)

Why buy honey from the store? Chasing a bee to its bee tree is much more fun! (3-7)

Blueberries for Sal by Robert McCloskey (The Viking Press, 1948)

Plink, plank, plunk. Eat a berry, see a bear. It's all good in this classic picture book. (3-7)

Blueberry Shoe by Ann Dixon (Alaska Northwest Books, 1999)

Next time you're out picking blueberries, make sure everyone keeps their shoes on! (3-7)

The Carrot Seed by Ruth Krauss (HarperCollins, 2004)

Sometimes growing a garden requires a little stubborn faith. (Infant-preschool)

Crow Call by Lois Lowry (Scholastic, 2009)

Liz and her father, who has just returned from WWII, head into the woods to hunt crows, but things don't go quite as planned. (8-12)

Farmer Boy by Laura Ingalls Wilder (HarperCollins, 2004)

Almanzo tends crops, trains oxen, and even harvests ice in this incredible story of life on a 19th century farm. (8-12)

A Fishing Surprise by Rae McDonald (Northword Books for Young Readers, 2007)

Two kids spend the day fishing. What a surprise to see what they bring home in their nets for dinner! (3-7)

A Garden for a Groundhog by Lorna Balian (Star Bright Books, 2004)

The O'Learys tend their garden carefully each year, but who wants to eat the vegetables? (3-7)

Garmann's Summer by Stian Hole (Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 2006)

Captivating text and pictures suggest the ways a boy reaps understanding from summer days spent in the company of three elderly aunts. (6-10)

Jacob Have I Loved by Katherine Paterson (HarperCollins, 1990)

Raw and affecting novel about sibling rivalry, set in the crabbing communities of the Chesapeake Bay. (9-12)

Miss Rumphius by Barbara Cooney (Puffin, 1982)

Pursue big adventures around the world, but don't forget to make your own neighborhood a little more beautiful. (3-7)





The Old Man and the Sea by Ernest Hemingway (Scribner, 1995)

The classic tale about an aging fisherman and his efforts to catch a huge marlin. (Young adult)

The Ox-Cart Man by Donald Hall (Puffin, 1979)

See how the ox-cart man grows and makes everything he needs to support his little family. (3-7)

Planting a Rainbow by Lois Ehlert. (Scholastic, 1988)

Why just plant a garden when you can plant a whole rainbow? (Infant-preschool)

The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett (Candlewick, 2008)

Watch how a remarkable garden—and some new friendships—blossom on the moors of England. (8-12)

Stone Crazy by Tracy Gallup (Mackinac Island Press, 2007)

Collect some stones and turn them into sculptures like these! (3-7)

That's Papa's Way by Kate Banks (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009)

The perfect delights of day spent fishing with dad, from digging out the worms in the forest to sitting on the porch swing after a fish supper. (3-7)

Waiting for Wings by Lois Ehlert (Harcourt, 2001)

Plant the right seeds and you'll have a garden full of flowers *and* butterflies! (3-7)

Where the Red Fern Grows by Wilson Rawls (Bantam, 1974)

A beautiful but heart-wrenching tale about a boy and his hunting dogs, set in the Ozarks of Oklahoma. (9-12)

The Young Man and the Sea by Rodman Philbrick (Scholastic, 2005)

A boy name Skiff, living on the coast of Maine, tries to catch a prize tuna in his quest for a better life. (9-12)





GOING WILD: CAMPING AND WILDERNESS ADVENTURE

Whether your kids are toddlers or teens, you can give them a tremendous boost of experience and excitement by going on a family camping trip. Fresh air, hearty exercise, beautiful landscapes, wildlife encounters—it all adds up to a glorious deepening of your kids' relationship with the natural world.

1. Sleep in the backyard. You don't need a pile of equipment to spend your first night under the stars. Choose a beautiful summer evening and take your sleeping bags (or even blankets and pillows that wash easily) outside in your yard (or on the rooftop, if you're a city dweller with that option!). Play up the adventure by roasting marshmallows on a portable grill, outfitting everyone with canteens and flashlights, and telling stories in the dark. Then climb into your bags, stare at the stars, and (eventually), slip into sleep.
2. Find a family-friendly campground. Try car-camping in a scenic natural area. Search online for nearby natural areas with tent campgrounds (it's hard to get too close to nature if you can hear the TV at someone's RV camp). If your kids are small, you might want to pick a site less than a hundred yards from a parking lot. Some are stocked with wheelbarrows to help haul your gear. Many have platforms for your tent. And most have campfire pits with grills. Set up camp, take a walk, cook dinner, sing songs, and then curl up in your tents for a cozy family sleep.
3. Try canoe camping! Consider taking your kids on an overnight canoe trip. Look for a route with long lakes or easy rivers and short portages (land crossings). Some outfitters rent waterproof equipment bags and other camping gear along with canoes. If you've never done it before, try going with a family with previous experience. Next time, you'll be the pros!
4. Hike to a hut. Did you know that many trails have huts you can reserve for cooking and sleeping? They're a great way to introduce your kids to backpacking without having to haul quite so much gear. You'll have a solid roof over your heads in case of bad weather. And some huts even have cook staffs who prepare dinner and breakfast for hikers! Visit your state parks and recreation website or other hiking sites to locate huts near your. In the winter, you might even be able to ski to one!
5. Focus on the fun. Does hiking with a loaded backpack sound too hard? Wherever you choose to go, be sure to help your kids find the fun in their exertion. Hike at a reasonable pace. Take frequent breaks for water and snacks. Hand out hard candies to keep little mouths from drying out as you hike. Let the slowest hiker take the lead (they often speed up considerably!). Sing songs. Create switchbacks when hiking up a steep slope in areas without trails. And if hiking with a pack is really hard on your team, plan on staying several nights at one base camp so you can explore the surrounding areas with a little or no load.





6. Join an organized backpacking trip. Are your kids itching for an adventure in real wilderness? If you're daunted by the idea of a multi-day backpacking trip, consider joining a family trip organized by the Sierra Club or a similar group. You may find yourself at a beautiful base camp in the Rockies or the Smokies taking day-hikes into the surrounding peaks, or rafting down a wild river, or wandering around a rocky coast! You'll have professional leaders who can teach you how to set up camp, cook meals, store your food, read topographic maps, and administer first aid. Best of all, you and your kids will explore the incredible beauty and biodiversity of a real wilderness area in the company of other fun adults and kids.

7. Take a real backpacking trip. If you've assembled the gear and the skills you need, consider planning a multi-day backpacking trip on your own or with another family. You'll be amazed at what a life-changing, family-bonding experience this can be, especially if your kids are teenagers who have become increasingly distracted by the buzz of electronic communications. Consult hiking guides to locate recommended routes. Get topographic maps of the area. Develop a menu and buy the provisions you'll need. And help your kids prepare for the trip by taking lots of shorter hikes with packs. Bring a camera to help you remember what is bound to be an incredible trip....the first, hopefully, of many long forays into the wild world.

8. Camp at camp. Another great way to get your kids outdoors and into the great outdoors is to sign them up for a sleepaway camp. Many camps consist of—or at least offer—camping trips by foot, bike, or canoe. Your kids may be especially adventurous in the company of like-minded peers and counselors who are gifted interpreters of nature and young people alike.

RECOMMENDED READING

Arthur's Camp-Out by Lillian Hoban (HarperCollins, 1993)

Big brother Arthur thinks he knows more about camping than little sister Violet. Guess which one gets scared and which one comforts with roasted hot dogs and campfire songs? (3-7)

Bailey Goes Camping by Kevin Henkes (Greenwillow, 1997)

Bailey's too young to join his Bunny Scout siblings on their camping trip, but his parents save the day by introducing him to camping indoors! (3-7)

Brian's Return by Gary Paulsen (Laurel Leaf, 2001)

In this sequel to *Hatchet*, Brian struggles to readjust to high school society following his return from the wilderness. He formulates a plan to go back and revisit the wild places he came to know so well. (9-12)





The Brute by Mike Klaasen (Blue Works, 2005)

Sixteen-year-old Fortney reluctantly joins a scouting trip to the Flint Hills, only to discover he has to contend with the brute forces of nature—and his own temper—to get himself and five other scouts home alive after a tornado strikes. (9-12)

The Cabin on Trouble Creek by Jean Van Leeuwen (Puffin, 2008)

Two boys left alone in their family's cabin in the Ohio wilderness in 1803 survive with the help of a passing Indian who teaches them how to snare animals and look closely at nature. (8-12)

Duck Tents by Lynne Berry (Henry Holt, 2009)

Oh, the funny adventures that unfold when five little ducks go camping in the backyard. (Infant/preschool)

The Fear Place by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor (Aladdin, 1996)

On a family camping trip in the Colorado Rockies, 12-year-old Doug is forced to overcome long-standing fears. (9-12)

Hatchet by Gary Paulsen (Aladdin, 2006)

When the small plane he's riding in goes down in the Canadian wilderness, 13-year-old Brian fends for himself with little more than clothing and a hatchet. (8-12)

Henry and Mudge and the Starry Night by Cynthia Rylant (Aladdin, 1999)

Henry and his big dog Mudge go camping with Henry's parents. (4-8)

Island of the Blue Dolphins by Scott O'Dell (Thorndike Press, 2005)

Fictional account of the Chumash woman who survived for years on an otherwise uninhabited island off the coast of California. (9-12)

Lord of the Flies by William Golding (Perigree Books, 1954)

Not the prettiest story about boys surviving on a deserted island, but sure to captivate teenage readers. (Young adult)

Paint the Wind by Pam Muñoz Ryan (Scholastic, 2009)

A story for horse lovers set in the Wyoming wilderness. (8-12)

My Side of the Mountain by Jean Craighead George (Puffin, 2004)

Sam runs away and makes a new home in the Catskill Mountains of New York with his two companions, a falcon and a weasel. Classic adventure tale told with captivating details and gentle humor. (8-12)

The Sign of the Beaver by Elizabeth George Speare (Yearling, 1984)

Left behind on his family's cabin in Maine, Matt survives painful bee stings and other challenges with the help of a Native American man and his son. (8-12)





Swallowdale by Arthur Ransome (David R. Godine, 1985)

A classic tale from the early 20th century about a family and their adventures camping and exploring around England's Lake District. (8-12)

Tacky Goes to Camp by Helen Lester (Houghton Mifflin, 2009)

Pure silliness as a pack of penguins heads to camp on the ice. (3-7)





SHE SEES SEASHELLS: ACTIVITIES FOR THE BEACH

Do your kids love the beach? What better place to deepen their connections to the natural world?! Just remember that beach fun isn't just for summertime.

1. Collect shells. Grab a bucket and walk along the beach looking for shells. Do you have a favorite shape? A favorite color? Make sure no creatures are living in your shells before you decide to take them home. You can create a shell display on your table or shelf when you return.

Read me!

As she taught the alphabet
my mother collected shells,
mounting polished conchs,
augers, sundials, and whelk
in a glass case on velvet.

As a child, I recited the alphabet
as waves rolled from the sea to land.
I have never lost the words
found in a harbor, the shells
brought home from the beach.

—from “Shells” by Wally Swist in *The North Atlantic Coast (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2000.

2. Dig for clams. Take a bucket and rake or shovel to the beach and try digging for clams. Look for their little breathing holes.

e alphabet





the sea bottom up
until our hands
were smiling with clams.

—by Anina Robb in *The South Atlantic Coast and Piedmont (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2006.

3. Dip into a tide pool. Wait for low tide to start exploring tide pools—the little pools of water created on and among the rocks after the tide recedes. In them, you can find wriggling crabs, swaying anemones, tiny fish, and more. To add to the fun, make an underwater scope: cut the top and bottom off a cardboard milk carton, using a rubber band to secure a piece of heavy-duty plastic over one end. Gently press the scope into the water at an angle, making sure not to let any water in the top. What can you see? Don't worry about being able to identify the creatures you find. Just encourage your kids to notice the different shapes, sizes, and colors. Or try making replicas of what you see with some clay or "model magic!"

Read me!

You were entranced, utterly. Leaping from rock to rock, tide pool to tide pool, you poked and probed and watched everything you could watch. Lying on your belly at the edge of a particularly rich pool, you would be driven by the small boy's insatiable need to know, to understand, to experience—in short to meddle. You would take out your little tin shovel from the sand bucket and use it to stir up a sleeping ray, if you could reach him. You would use it to stroke the petals of a crimson anemone, shuddering as the petals convulsed in an attempt to draw the shovel into its maw; thus you discovered that beauty could be a trap—a very large thing to learn at so young an age. You would seek out a large crab and toy with it until in its rage and fear it gripped the shovel firmly.

—from "Mysteries" by T.H. Watkins in *The California Coast (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2001.

4. Adopt a hermit crab. See if you can find a little hermit crab for each kid in your group (a tide pool is a good place to look). How does it feel to hold one in your hand? Can you make a miniature home for the crab with some sand structures and pooled water? How does the hermit crab move? Be sure to leave the crab in its original home before you leave.

5. Make an art installation. Use rocks, seaweed, driftwood, shells, and even just lines in the sand to create a work of art on the beach. Take a picture, then leave it to wash away.

6. Make seashell candles. Collect shells with wide cavities, such as whelks. Bring them home and wash them out, then lay a piece of candlewicking inside the cavity. Melt wax in an empty soup can placed inside a pot of hot water. Carefully pour the melted wax into the cavity, let it harden, and trim any excess candlewicking. (You can find both wax and candlewicking at a crafts store.) Now you have a seashell candle!





7. Look for animal tracks and traces. You might see the zigzag tracks of plovers and sanderlings along the surf line. Or an air hole above a burrowing clam. Or the delicate prints left by beach insects. Have the kids make sketches of the tracks in a notebook so you can identify them later.

Read me!

In the tidal flat and marsh, the sludgelike soil can tug tennis shoes off feet. The sticky goo reeks with the smell of decaying plants. Restless tides lap at the ever changing shoreline.

Moving inland, the soil changes to deep sand. Refuge trails reveal tracks of the abundant but shy wildlife. White-tailed deer leave two-pronged points in the silty sand. Opossum leave starlike marks. Raccoons leave babylike handprints.

—from “Winter Texans in Aransas” by Virginia E. Parker-Staat in *The Gulf Coast (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2002.

8. Wade. Even if your youngsters are too young to swim far out into the waves, they can enjoy an easy ocean wade. Walk where the sand is wet and soft for little toes. Walk deeper where fingertips can easily drag along the water’s surface. Bring a shovel and a pail, and be prepared to stop often, scooping up the treasures you encounter.

9. Watch shorebirds. Take advantage of a quieter moment at the beach to focus your kids’ attention on birds. Are there gulls wheeling around in the sky? Sandpipers skittering to and fro with the waves? Pelicans piloting just above the water? Depending on your kids’ interests, you might try one of these three activities: 1) Have them sketch a favorite shorebird; 2) Have them observe a bird long enough to ascertain how it moves, how it spends its time, and what it eats; or 3) Have them search for clues on a bird scavenger hunt of your making (find a bird on the sand, find a bird with pink feet, find a bird that’s smaller than a soccer ball, and so on).

10. Construct a grand castle. Kids of all ages love making sandcastles. Get the whole family involved and you’ll be amazed by what you can create. Do you want to build a model of your own home? A fort? A whole village? Use shells and stones to create walkways, beach glass for windows, and seaweed for roofing. Let your imaginations run wild.

RECOMMENDED READING

The Cay by Theodore Taylor (Laurel Leaf, 2005)

A white boy, an old black man, and a cat survive a shipwreck and wash up on a deserted island where they must overcome prejudices and countless other obstacles to their survival. (9-12)





Duck Dunks by Lynne Berry (Henry Holt, 2008)

Hilarity and joy reign supreme as five little ducks skip down to the beach for a day of fun. (Infant-preschool)

Gifts from the Sea by Natalie Kinsey-Warnock (Yearling, 2005)

Quila, the motherless daughter of a Maine lighthouse keeper, finds a baby washed ashore after a ship sinks just off the coast. (9-12)

Nim's Island by Wendy Orr (Yearling, 2008)

Nim can and does survive a host of island challenges with the help of her trusty sea lion and iguana pals! (8-12)

Olive's Ocean by Kevin Henkes (Greenwillow, 2005)

Twelve-year-old Martha spends a thoughtful summer with her family on Cape Cod. (8-12)

Sally Goes to the Beach by Stephen Huneck (Harry Abrams, 2000)

Join the big black Labrador Sally on her trip to the seashore. (3-7)

Shell Crazy by Tracy Gallup (Mackinac Island Press, 2007)

The fun and angst of seashore shell collecting! (3-7)

Time of Wonder by Robert McCloskey (Puffin, 1989)

Days of gentle summer pleasures on the coast of Maine. (3-7)





WHERE THE SIDEWALK IS: CONNECTING TO NATURE IN THE CITY

You don't need to travel out into wild lands to give your kids a renewed connection to nature. Look no farther than your sidewalk, stoop, yard, or corner lot for easy opportunities for nature play and discovery.

1. Take an ant hike. Cut a piece of string about two feet long and lay it across a patch of grass or dirt. Have your kids imagine they are ants and this is their world. What do they see? What obstacles do they have to surmount? What other living things do they find?
2. Sketch plant shadows. Look for the shadows of trees, shrubs, or even tall flowers falling across a stretch sidewalk or asphalt. Use chalk to outline their shapes. Or, better yet, lay a piece of paper on the ground and use pencil or paint to sketch the shadows.
3. Catch a moth or butterfly. A surprising diversity of moths and butterflies pass through city spaces. Use a butterfly net to catch one. Hold the net carefully to observe the butterfly's size, color, and other distinguishing features. Can you identify it? Then let it go. Keep track of the different moths and butterflies you observe in your area.

Read me!

I had built a small cage for my last moth, from a section of coarse wire screen tacked to two wooden disks. That evening I took the cylindrical pen and placed it on a table in the garden. The moon silvered the staked tomatoes and pressed bold shadows of them into the russet brown garage wall. I sat and waited and watched, hoping that the newly emerged insect would attract a mate from the moonlit city sky. My *Golden Guide*, or some other trusty text, had hinted that such a thing would happen, that from as far as five miles away a mate would be called to join the female and together stoke the engines of life. As optimistic as I was, I suspected that the writers of my well-worn *Guides* had not Brooklyn (or any city, for that matter) in mind when they wrote their evocative little essays.

I had fallen asleep on the chaise lounge in the backyard. My mother had placed a blanket on me and let me be with my moth. It was deeply quiet and still when I awoke; the moon was low and dim, but I could see in the pale of light that my companion was no longer alone. Through the wide gaps in the wire screen, the caged moth was locked in procreative embrace with a male she had lured out of the night sky. Her pheromones had conquered Brooklyn; a tiny bit of wildness had slipped into my presence, into this one small garden in the city. Led by its frondlike antennae, the visitor had glided over the tarred flat roofs of Flatlands, over the idling buses and parked cars, to be with my moth. It may have come from as far away as the Rockaways or Prospect Park, though I suspected it was just another lost child from Exit Eleven.

—from “A Moth Flies in Brooklyn” by Thomas J. Campanella in *The North Atlantic Coast (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2000.





4. Follow the train tracks. Look for an abandoned train or trolley line in your neighborhood that you and your kids can hike along (or an active track that you can follow safely). You'll be amazed by the diversity of plant and animal life on these overlooked, undeveloped corridors. Some communities have even turned unused rail lines into linear bike/hike trails.

Read me!

Another mile more and I turned right, my bike shuddering as it bumped over an abandoned set of rails. Before me loomed the scalloped wall of the elevator. To the left lay a wide stretch of beaten dirt, pocked with tufts of brown grass and abandoned pieces of equipment, giving way to the southeast to a scruffy field. I pulled up on my bike, dismounted, and leaned it against a small shed of corrugated aluminum.

Here, amidst the white silos, the morning light was especially fine, and overhead the sky, blown wide by the spaces of the Midway, stretched out its guarantee of blue. I walked along the abandoned tracks, through goldenrod and ragweed and wildflowers whose name I didn't know. Ned Abrahamson told me once that here and there along the rail beds you could find pieces of prairie tucked among the weeds. I found a discarded brown bottle, which, when I held it up in front of my eyes, made the world look like an old photograph. Strange as it may seem, I felt closer to the earth here than at the park. Among the train elevators, life was messy and rich. I saw hawks here, as well as rabbits, woodchucks, and a heron down by the trickling stream that ran beneath the frontage road. Today I was happy to watch sparrows picking through the stalks and stems of the rail beds, and a field mouse darting out from under a rusting bin.

—from “Midway Morning” by Robin E. Kelsey in *The Great North American Prairie (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2003.

5. Adopt a tree. Have your kids pick a favorite tree on their block. They can feel the bark, sketch the tree's shape, collect some fallen leaves. Visit the tree on a regular basis to see how it changes. Watch and care for it through all the seasons. Name it. See if it needs any tending (mulch, water, straightening, a protective fence around the trunk, some flowers planted at its base, and so on). Make it your own.

Read me!

They are the only ones who understand me. I am the only one who understands them. Four skinny trees with skinny necks and pointy elbows like mine. Four who do not belong here but are here. Four raggedy excuses planted by the city. From our room we can hear them, but Nenny just sleeps and doesn't appreciate these things.

—from “Four Skinny Trees” by Sandra Cisneros, excerpted from *The House on Mango Street*, in *The Great Lakes (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2003.





6. Plant window boxes. Who says a city kid can't have a garden? Buy a window box or as big a planter as your stoop can handle, fill it with soil, and plant it with seeds. Choose flowers for color, basil and other herbs for flavor, or even small vegetable plants to keep young tummies filled! Just think—you won't have to work as hard as country folk to keep away the bunnies, deer, and even common insect pests.

7. Have a cloud race. Lie down on the ground where you have a good view of the sky. Pick a cloud and describe what it looks like to you. When everyone has selected a cloud, have a cloud race! See whose cloud gets the farthest in 10 seconds.

8. Make leaf placemats. Next time you and the kids find yourselves kicking through piles of colorful dry leaves, consider scooping some up for this great art project. Place a sheet of wax paper on a sheet-covered ironing board. Arrange attractive leaves on top, keeping overlap to a minimum and preserving some empty spaces. Place another sheet of wax paper over the arrangement, press with a warm iron to seal the wax paper together, and voilà!—you have a beautiful autumnal placement. Make one for every member of the family and celebrate with a harvest dinner.

9. Paddle a city stream. A great way to get to know urban nature is by paddling or rowing a boat. First, find a boat rental facility as close to home as possible. Once you're outfitted with paddles and lifejackets, set out for a journey as short or long as your group can handle. Paddle across the open water to feel the breeze and soak up the sun. Meander along the shoreline to look for ducks and turtles. Try to find familiar landmarks—do they look different from this vantage? You may be surprised at what a secret world a city stream can contain.

10. Take a city safari. Wander your neighborhood looking for signs of city animals. Are there squirrel nests in your trees? Have you ever smelled a skunk? Have any neighbors spied raccoons around their garbage cans? Do rabbits emerge at dusk to feed on nearby lawns? Is there a park where Canada geese and other waterfowl are common? Visit local nature centers and online blogs to find out which other animals frequent your area.

Read me!

Later on Monday (Something finally happens)

This afternoon I found an amazing creature under the tallest pine in the yard. It's a huge baby bird, downy white with piercing yellow eyes with huge black pupils, small wings, and big black feet. The black skin around his eyes gives him the look of a monkey or maybe a baboon. Great Aunt actually stopped knitting when she saw him and threw up her hands . . .

At dinner Great Aunt broke the silence. "With his curved-down beak and big eyes he must be an owlet, the baby of a very large owl." A large owl, in the middle of the city? Whatever he is, he's the oddest cute-looking bird I've ever seen.





—from “Tiger of the Air” by Katharine Crawford Robey in *The South Atlantic Coast and Piedmont (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2006.

RECOMMENDED READING

At Night by Jonathan Bean (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007)

If the outside calls on a hot summer night, there’s always rooftop camping! (3-7)

The Curious Garden by Peter Brown (Little Brown, 2009)

See what a green thumb and a little determination can do to perk up a dreary city. (3-7)

Make Way for Ducklings by Robert McCloskey (The Viking Press, 1941)

Watch how the mallard family makes a home in the city of Boston. (3-7)

One Hot Summer Day by Nina Crews (Greenwillow, 1995)

A city girl refuses to stay indoors on the hottest of summer days. (3-7)

Secret Place by Eve Bunting (Clarion, 1996)

A young boy discovers a secret place in the city where nature thrives. (3-7)

Wild in the City by Jan Thornhill (Maple Tree Press, 1996)

Discover the wonderful wild menagerie that inhabits a young boy’s neighborhood. (3-7)





BABY, IT'S COLD OUTSIDE: WINTER PLAY

Even when the temperature outside is holding steady at 32 degrees or colder, your kids can reap great benefit and delight from time in nature. Head out when the sun is high. Stay moving. Make sure your gear and snacks are good warmers. Your wintering adventure is sure to make everyone feel refreshed.

1. Bundle up and take a winter walk. With proper clothing, you can take a comfortable and refreshing walk with your kids even on cold days. Wear layers, including fleece and wool. Pack snacks and a Thermos of hot cocoa. Then tromp on a trail looking for animal tracks in the snow, beaver and muskrat lodges, and more signs of winter life.

2. Sled. Spend a snowy afternoon sledding down a favorite hill. Pause from the exhilarating rides to look at the sky, flop on the snow, and even look for winter birds! Even if you do nothing but slip and slide, you'll be keeping your kids from getting too cooped up indoors.

Read me!

The east hill road was equally steep but less dangerous because there was no town at the foot of it. There was a railroad crossing there, to be sure, but the Ann Arbor railroad did not run many trains and we had a fair idea of the schedules, and there were massive drifts along both sides of the highway in case one had to bail out in a hurry. When a bobsled ran into one of these drifts at high speed there was always a hilarious mix-up; the sled would come to a most abrupt stop and the five or six occupants would be catapulted off into the snow, landing head downward as likely as not. One time Robert and I took our mother down this hill, because she had never gone coasting and wanted to see what it was like. Just as we went down the steepest part, whirling along at a prodigious clip, she concluded that it was like nothing she wanted any more of and she firmly ordered: "Robert! Robert, stop it!" We were dutiful sons and did what our parents told us to do, so Robert obediently guided the sled into a deep drift. As anyone but Mother would have known, the sled stopped but its passengers did not. Mother, who was no lightweight, shot through the air like a rocketing partridge, going completely over Robert's head and coming down wrong-end up in five feet of powdery snow. It took us several minutes to get her out, because she was laughing so hard that she was unable to act in her own behalf. I do not recall that she ever went coasting again.

—from "Winter Season" by Bruce Catton in *The Great Lakes (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2003.

3. Skate on wild waters. Has it been cold enough for long enough that a nearby pond or canal is deemed safe for skating? If so, pounce on the chance to skate in nature with your kids. They'll get fresh air, great exercise, and wonderful views of shoreline plants and maybe even winter wildlife.





Read me!

We dreamt
of ice skating,
worn out,
whispering,
on the flinty bank
of the river.
We couldn't afford
skates, but carved
imaginary eights
with our boot-soles,
balled fists
punched together
for warmth.

—from “Miracle” by Gwen Hart in *The Great Lakes (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2003.

4. Make snow animals! Why limit yourself to snow people? This winter, encourage your kids to make snow sculptures of local wildlife. Can they make a hare? A squirrel? A deer?! Build away, and soon you'll have a snowy display of a whole winter wildlife menagerie.
5. Play games. Winter's a great time to run around playing games and keeping your body warm! Try snow tag—just like regular tag in the snow. Or play shadow tag, where you get out if the person who's It steps on your shadow.
6. Sketch winter trees. Take advantage of the winter season to become more familiar with the shape and bark of local trees. Have each kid pick a tree. Then use novel materials such as charcoal on paper, or black string on cardboard, to record the shape of its trunk and branches. Now make a rubbing of its bark using the side of a crayon on white paper. Save the images for spring, when you can add pictures of buds, leaves, fruit, and more.
7. Hang a bird feeder. Wherever you live, you can hang a bird feeder to help your feathered neighbors survive the cold winter. Take your kids to the hardware store, or look online, for a style that suits your home situation. Can you affix a feeder right to your window? Hang it in a nearby tree? Once you get your feeder set up, encourage your kids to keep a log about which birds (or mammals!) come to visit.





Read me!

In the alley
Under the last cold rung
Of the fire escape
Birds are printing
The new snow
With a narrow alphabet.

—from “Snow Print Two: Hieroglyphics” by Barbara Juster Esbensen in *The Great North American Prairie (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2001.

8. Make ice sculptures. Gather some pails and buckets, spray the interiors with nonstick cooking spray, fill with water, and let them freeze. Now slide out the resulting ice chunks and let your kids make ice sculptures! Use shovels to chisel and shape your ice chunks, and use freezer ice-cubes for decorative finishes.

9. Go iceboating! Who says you can’t take a boat onto a frozen pond? If your region is cold enough, you may find there’s an active community of iceboaters around. See if you can arrange a ride for members of your family. Or make mini iceboats with sticks for the boat and fabric for the sail, and launch them on a frozen puddle!

Read me!

Chester walked back to find his scarf. As he wound it round his neck, he gazed at his boat. She was a beauty and he could sail her alone.

The wind filled the sails and he took off down the lake. For the first time, he saw the full moon shining bright. Ice mounds sparkled like heaps of diamonds.

Why go home yet? He could sail by the moon. The wind lifted a side runner. The boat leaped ahead. Chester clutched the tiller, then relaxed. He balanced the boat so the runner stayed a foot off the ice. He was floating, he was flying.

“I could beat an express train!” he thought.

Snow-clad pine trees glowed along the shore. The wind whistled in his ears. The runners scraped white across the black ice as Chester circled a small island. He passed a snowy mound and called, “Hello, beavers!”

He raced up the lake. “Faster,” he called to the wind and laughed out loud in the frosty air. The moon lit up a path to lead him home.

—from “Sail by the Moon” by Gretchen Woelfle in *The North Atlantic Coast (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2000.

10. Go for an icicle hike. Take a walk in your neighborhood or a hike in the woods, counting every hanging icicle you see.





RECOMMENDED READING

Black Star, Bright Dawn by Scott O'Dell (Sandpiper, 2008)

A young Eskimo girl braves the frozen tundra when she takes her injured father's place in the Iditarod dog sled race. (9-12)

Duck Skates by Lynne Berry (Henry Holt, 2005)

Little ducks enjoy playful winter moments in this cheerful rhyming book. (Infant-preschool)

Frederick by Leo Lionni (Knopf, 1987)

Frederick the mouse knows that storytelling can help sustain us through the cold dark days of winter. (3-8)

Ice Drift by Theodore Taylor (Harcourt, 2006)

A gripping arctic adventure tale involving two Inuit boys stranded for months on an ice floe. (9-12)

Julie of the Wolves by Jean Craighead George (HarperTeen, 2003)

An Eskimo girl runs away from her forced marriage and finds herself alone on the Alaskan tundra with only a pack of wolves for company. (Young adult)

The Long Winter by Laura Ingalls Wilder (HarperCollins, 2004)

Your kids will have a hard time complaining about cold car seats after reading about the Ingalls family's long, cold winter. (8-12)

The Mitten by Jan Brett (Putnam, 2009)

Watch how some wily animals make use of a fallen woolly mitten! (Infant-preschool)

Ollie's Ski Trip by Elsa Beskow (Floris Books, 2008)

Six-year-old Ollie sets off on his first pair of skis to visit the palace of King Winter, meeting other winter folk along the way. (3-8)

Snow by Cynthia Rylant (Harcourt, 2008)

Graceful writing and captivating images make this a perfect celebration of the joys of snow play. (3-7)

Snow Crazy by Tracy Gallup (Mackinac Island Press, 2007)

A young girl awaits a snowstorm—and then romps happily when it arrives. (3-7)

Snow Riders by Constance W. McGeorge (Chronicle, 1999)

Molly and Matthew decide to build snow horses instead of snowmen. That night, they climb on their steeds and have the ride of a lifetime! (3-6)





The Snowy Day by Ezra Jack Keats (Puffin, 1976)

A big snowstorm makes the city a wondrous and fun place for a little city boy. (Infant-preschool)





WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE: ANIMAL FUN

From a very early age, most kids are incredibly awed, amused, and fascinated by animals. Get them out seeing animals whenever you can—from pigs on a farm to marmots on a mountain peak—and round out those experiences with great animal stories.

1. Practice wildlife watching. Ask your kids what they think it takes to be a good wildlife watcher. Then head out to a marsh, beach, field, or other natural area and see if they can sit quietly long enough to see some interesting animal activity. Even a silent ten minutes observing squirrels might prove fascinating!

Read me!

Snowy Morning with Squirrels

First Grey One
chasing Black One
(so fast the eye's weary
after thirty seconds of watching them),
along telephone wires
with a snow-layered insulation,
headlong down trees
dressed in ice-shiny bark,

then a little snow-hopping
for a change of pace,
and a final charge across the back fence
until they come together
for a moment's touching,

then it's Black one
chasing Grey one
up the nearest tree-trunk
(giving her a modest head-start),
and with my eyes still spinning
I watch the splendid game repeated
pole to ground to fence to tree,
wishing it could go on forever.

—by Raymond Souster in *The Great Lakes (Stories from Where We Live)*.
Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2003.





2. Build a bird blind. Make a simple bird blind out of cardboard box. Lay the box on its side. Make sure it's comfortable for a kid or two to sit inside. Then cut out a rectangular viewing window. You may want to color the sides green and brown for camouflage. Position the blind near a bird feeder or other area where birds gather. Climb inside with snacks, binoculars, sketchpad, pencils, and binoculars. Now wait! Eventually the birds will venture back, and your kids will get a nice clear view of them.
3. Make a slug playground. Have your kids gather some natural materials from your neighborhood—pine cones, sticks, milkweed, moss, rocks, and so on. Then have them build a miniature playground for a slug, pill bug, or other small creature. They can build it on a flat piece of cardboard (a case for soup cans or cat food works nicely) and use additional pieces of cardboard for slides, ramps, and other structures. Now have them place their chosen creature inside. Does it enjoy exploring its new habitat? Be sure to put the animals back in their original homes after you're done.
4. Play possum. Try experiencing the world as other creatures do. Have everyone in your group pick an animal that's common where you live—for example, a chipmunk, a snake, a frog, or a possum—and spend some time imitating its movements. Get down on the ground and skitter, slither, and hop. Clamber onto a fallen log and pretend to nibble an acorn. Climb a low tree and chirp at the people below you. You'll probably find you never look at the world the same way again.
5. Name the animals. Kids can be a bit overwhelmed by the idea of learning the names for all the insects, birds, fish, and other animals they encounter in nature. But more important than the names is paying close attention to the many living things around us. With that in mind, encourage your kids to come up with their own names for the creatures they encounter. They can even create their own field guide (e.g. *Lucy's Field Guide to the Animals of Chicago*) with pictures, descriptions, and maps for each animal they name. In time, you can introduce them to the common names for these creatures.
6. Start a bird list. Many people enjoy keeping a lifetime list of every bird they encounter. Who knows—maybe your kids are future birders, too! You can get them started by helping them create a simple bird journal. Every time they see a new bird, have them write down its name and one observation of it. Or locate a simple bird sticker book or other existing bird list that they can use to check off every bird they encounter.

Read me!

Then a flash of color caught Lily's eye and she stopped. A wave ran up the shore and over her shoes, but Lily didn't notice. She was concentrating on a strange bird strutting around a small pile of driftwood covered in brown seaweed. She had been to this beach a hundred times before, but she had never seen this bird. She was sure of it. It would be impossible to forget. Its shape and sand-poking feeding method told Lily it was a shorebird, but bigger than the little sanderlings and plovers that darted along the waterline. And no shorebird she had ever seen had a beak like this one. Long and thicker than most, it almost glowed with a brilliant red-orange color, made even brighter by its





dark black head and neck. As its search for breakfast brought it warily closer, Lily could see a matching fiery ring around the deep black eye.

Then the strange-looking bird stopped and cocked its head at Lily. She stood as still as she could, her hands clenched together against her chest to hold in any movement that might send the bird flapping away from her. She realized she wasn't breathing. She exhaled a narrow stream of air. The bird's neck feathers ruffled and, for a moment, Lily thought her breath had done it; she felt that close. But she was still a good fifteen feet away.

—from “Oystercatchers on the Moon” by Joe Shepherd in *The South Atlantic Coast and Piedmont (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2006.

7. Be animal detectives. Go for a hike and have the kids make a list of every animal sign they see—a chewed leaf, a track, a feather, droppings, a nest, and so on. Or have them sketch the signs. At home, read about animals of this habitat and try to guess which ones you were tracking!

RECOMMENDED READING

Birds by Kevin Henkes (Greenwillow, 2009)

Simple words and pictures render a child's view of birds. (3-8)

Charlotte's Web by E.B. White (HarperCollins, 2001)

No novel has ever done more to improve the reputation of spiders! A must read for every lover of farms and animals. (8-12)

The Day My Mother Left by James Prosek (Simon and Schuster, 2009)

A nine-year-old boy whose mother has left the family finds solace in watching and sketching local birds. (9-12)

Diary of a Worm by Doreen Cronin (Joanna Cotler Books, 2003)

An earthworm's hilarious journal is a perfect way to start thinking about the good little creatures beneath our feet. (3-7)

Every Living Thing by Cynthia Rylant (Atheneum, 1988)

Twelve short stories reveal a moment when an animal changed a person's life. (8-12)

Fletcher and the Falling Leaves by Julia Rawlins (Greenwillow, 2008)

What do woodland animal youngsters make of autumn's falling leaves? Fletcher the fox is terribly concerned! (3-7)





Fletcher and the Springtime Blossoms by Julia Rawlins (Greenwillow, 2008)

Gorgeous watercolors accompany this light-hearted tale of a little fox's confusion over a squall of spring blossoms. (3-7)

Incident at Hawk's Hill by Allan Eckert (Little Brown, 1995)

A little boy wanders into the prairie and is protected by a wild mother badger. (8-12)

Owls in the Family by Farley Mowat (Little Brown, 1961)

While it's no longer legal to own a pet owl, Farley Mowat's vintage story will be sure to charm you and your kids alike. (8-12)

Rabbits and Raindrops by Jim Arnosky (Puffin, 1997)

Watch bunnies and other creatures duck out of the rain.

Rascal by Sterling North (Puffin, 2004)

The story of a motherless boy and his pet raccoon. (8-12)

Spider Boy by Ralph Fletcher (Sandpiper, 2009)

Seventh grader Bobby is a walking encyclopedia of spider trivia. But will that help him get accepted in his new school in New York? (9-12)

That Quail, Robert by Margaret Stranger (Harper Paperbacks, 1992)

An older couple discovers an unhatched quail egg. When it hatches, they rear the young quail as one of their own, with remarkable results!

The Trumpet of the Swan by E.B. White (Scholastic, 1987)

Triumphant story of how a mute swan learns to communicate with the help of a stolen trumpet.

The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle (Penguin, 1986)

Hungry, hungry caterpillar has big things in store. (Infant-preschool)

The Wind in the Willows by Kenneth Grahame (Candlewick, 2003)

The classic country adventures of friends Mole, Mr. Toad, Badger, and Rat. (8-12)





TWINKLE, TWINKLE: ADVENTURES AFTER DARK

The world looks and feels different at night, especially out in natural areas where a whole new nocturnal community emerges. Guide your kids on safe journeys outdoors at night to awaken their senses and infuse them with a sense of nature's richness *and* mysteries.

1. Take a flashlight hike. Give your kids a simple thrill—and a new view of their neighborhood—by taking them on a nighttime walk. Outfit everyone with a flashlight. Hold hands with your littlest ones. Then set out through streets, in yards, or, better yet, in slightly wild parks and lots. Are there creatures scuffling under the bushes? Does the air smell different? Who else goes out at night?
2. Stargaze. On the next clear night, grab a big blanket and have the whole family lie down to gaze at the stars. What patterns can you see? Which ones are planets? Are there any shooting stars?
3. Play night games. Teach your kids the night games you played as children. Try Sardines—where one person hides and each person who finds him packs into the hiding spot till just one person is left.
4. Have a bonfire. Head to a beach or campground that allows campfires and have a raucous bonfire with your family and friends. Roast marshmallows. Sing silly songs. Tell stories. Remember the magic that comes with a dark night, a glowing flame, and a circle of friends.
5. Follow the moon. Spend some time looking at the moon over a series of nights or weeks. How does it change? How does it move? Do animals behave differently when the moon is full? Draw pictures in a moon journal to record what you see.

Read me!

If humans in all their sophistication permit moonlight to affect them, how much more does it affect animals? In my own moonlit wanderings I have had abundant occasion to see what it does and how animals in the wild respond to its charm. I have listened to loons go into ecstasies on wilderness lakes, have heard them call the whole night through and dash across the water as if possessed. I have heard sleepy birds begin to sing at midnight; wolves, foxes, frogs, and owls respond to the same inherent urge.

But the most delightful expression I know is the dance of the snowshoe hare in midwinter. If when the moon is bright you station yourself near a good rabbit swamp and stay quiet, you may see it, but you will need patience and endurance, for the night must be cold and still. Soon they begin to emerge, ghostly shadows with no spot of color except the black of their eyes. Down the converging trails they come, running and chasing one another up and down the runways, cavorting crazily in the light.





—from “Moon Magic” by Sigurd F. Olson in *The Great Lakes (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2003.

6. Call an owl. See if you can obtain a tape recording of an owl that lives in your area. Then play it back, or imitate it, in a wooded area where owls live. If you’re lucky, you may just get a response!

7. Catch fireflies. Next time you see fireflies outside your home, grab a jar and see if you can fill it with the lit-up creatures. Be sure to poke holes in the top of the jar, and to let them go before the night is through.

Read me!

Jewels of the Night

young girls yearning to be beautiful
we pinch off fireflies’ glowing gold
adorn dirty fingers with luminescent rings
pudgy arms with bracelets of light

—by SuzAnne C. Cole in *The Gulf Coast (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2002.

8. Camp in the backyard. Grab a sleeping bag and a lawn chair, and spend the night sleeping outdoors! It’ll give all of you a whole new view of your neighborhood.

9. Shine deer. Go for a night hike or drive on a quiet road where deer are common. By directing the light of a strong flashlight into the trees, you can “shine” the eyes of deer and other nocturnal animals,

10. Listen. Take the family outside as far away from human noises (cars, radios, and so on) as possible. Sit in a circle and be perfectly still and quiet. Keep track of the noises you hear. You might suggest that your kids cup their ears with their hands. Can they hear better this way? Have them shift the “cups” around to pick up different noises in different directions. Tell them they’re making their ears bigger and more like animals such as deer! Afterward, see if they can guess what they heard.

11. Hike in the dark. For a true adventure, try hiking with your kids with no artificial light at all. You might choose a clear night with a full moon. Go someplace familiar but as undisturbed as possible. You’ll be amazed what a bond this can bring.

Read me!

So at last I was permitted to go for a night walk with Grandfather. When he opened the door, the light from our room in the earth leaped into the dark, and we with it; when he closed the door, the light was pressed back as into a box. We stood in the night. I





saw nothing but blackness, but I heard the horses in the barn nosing the hay, blowing against their lips with a peaceful rippling sound.

Grandfather did not go through the west gate but struck off across the cane patch to the south. The cane was tall and cool. Walking along the rows, brushing against the crisp leaves, smelling the cane's green fragrance, I knew my way. Field mice squeaked and ran, their feet making small soft sounds. Bounce followed stealthily along although he had been forbidden this particular jaunt. At the fence, Grandfather stepped on the lowest barbed wire and held the middle one up for me to go through, then he half-stepped, half-leaped over the top wire.

Our eyes had grown used to the dark; the dark had a sheen from the stars. Ahead, Grandfather walked as if to a destination, the sound of his long steps guiding me. Bounce stayed close at my heels and I was glad. I was not afraid of the night; I liked being in it, but this was no ordinary walk. I had wondered all summer about these night walks and now felt a sense of promise and portent. The moon slid up fast from another region, revealing the straight horizon a world away. Black shadows appeared beside the scattered sage and soapweeds, but the big plain lay under the moonlight in opal clarity.

—from “Nature’s Ways,” by Sanora Babb, excerpted from *An Owl on Every Post* in *The Great North American Prairie (Stories from Where We Live)*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2000.

RECOMMENDED READING

At Night by Jonathan Bean (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007)

Feel the pull of the summer night? Try camping on your city rooftop! (3-7)

Every Soul a Star by Wendy Mars (Little Brown, 2009)

Three teens find their lives changed forever when they gather in the wilderness with other families to watch the solar eclipse. (9-12)

Fireflies by Julie Brinckloe (Aladdin, 1986)

A young boy catches a jar full of fireflies. (3-7)

Henry’s Night by D. B. Johnson (Houghton, 2009)

Henry the bear (a stand-in for Henry David Thoreau) can’t sleep, so he sets out exploring the sights and sounds of the night. (3-7)

I Took the Moon for a Walk by Carolyn Curtis (Barefoot Books, 2003)

Lovely invitation to join the moon for a nighttime walk. (3-7)

The Midnight Farm by Reeve Lindbergh (Puffin, 1995)

A mother takes her son on a tour of the farm at night to help him overcome his fears of the dark. (3-7)





Night of the Spadefoot Toads by Bill Harley (Peachtree, 2008)

Fifth-grader Ben moves from Arizona to Massachusetts and develops an unlikely friendship with his science teacher, who introduces him to local wildlife, including the elusive spadefoot toad. (8-12)

On the Night You Were Born by Nancy Tillman (Feiwel and Friends, 2006)

Enchanting images and lulling words celebrate the reader's arrival in the world. (Infant-preschool)

One Dark Night by Lisa Wheeler (Sandpiper, 2006)

Mole and Mouse (and the reader) will be a little bit scared on this nighttime trek, but all's well that ends well. (Infant-preschool)

Owl Babies by Martin Waddell (Candlewick, 1992)

How long can three baby owls sit and wait for their mother to come home without losing hope? Just long enough. (Infant-preschool)

Owl Moon by Jane Yolen (Philomel, 1987)

Follow a girl and her father as they trek through the winter night searching for a great horned owl. (3-8)

Same Stuff as Stars by Katherine Paterson (HarperCollins, 2004)

Angel and her little brother have endured grim childhoods with an erratic mother who finally deposits them at their great-grandmother's house in rural Vermont. There Angel befriends a neighbor she calls the "star man" and begins to get perspective on her life by looking at the night sky. (Young adult)

Switch on the Night by Ray Bradbury (Dragonfly Books, 2004)

Mysterious pictures and poetic verse tell the story of a young boy's first forays into the world at night. (4-8)





The mission of the Children & Nature Network (C&NN), www.childrenandnature.org, is to build a worldwide movement to reconnect children and nature. The primary goal of the C&NN is to achieve systemic change so every child, every year, every day, will have the opportunity to directly experience contact with nature. Research indicates that children who explore, learn, and play outside on a regular basis are happier, healthier, smarter, more cooperative, more creative and more fulfilled. Their well-being is enhanced while they develop a sense of place and bond with family, community and their environment.

C&NN builds awareness, provides access to state-of-the art resources, supports the grassroots with tools and strategies, develops publications and educational materials, synthesizes the best available research, and encourages collaboration to heal the broken bond between children and nature. Since our founding in 2006, C&NN has fostered grassroots initiatives in more than 65 cities, states and nations. Our geographic reach is international, beginning predominantly in the United States and Canada. No other organization offers such a comprehensive, non-partisan, multi-sector approach to effecting social change to reconnect children and nature.

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