

CHILDREN'S BOOKS AND RESOURCES REVIEW

Brenda Weiser and Jill Smith, Editors

Each issue of the journal will focus on a theme for children's books, activity guides, and resources. The theme for this issue is "Taking Learning Outdoors". Summer is a great time to take children outdoors and introduce plants and animals. Children can use their five senses to discover what lives around them and how all things interact. Here are few resources that can enhance your teaching during the summer.

Future themes include *All about Fall* where the focus will be on fall events, changing of the seasons, and scary animals. *Winter Wonders* will concentrate on how plants and animals survive along with what you can do for animals in the winter. For the spring, *Gardening with Children* will follow the winter and the emphasis will be getting children outside and planting gardens with them.

Environmental Experiences for Early Childhood

American Forest Foundation, Project Learning Tree



As you open this activity guide, you are quick to notice the introduction, the three themes, and appendices. Each theme, along with the

introduction and appendices, are printed on a different color so that it is easy to find.

This activity guide includes 11 activities (over 130 experiences) for those teaching early childhood. Each activity may have several other activities embedded within them. There are three sections, each focusing on a specific theme. Section one addresses the five senses; section two includes an activity for each of the four seasons; and section three stresses the importance of trees. Each activity includes background for educators, how to introduce the theme, the featured experience, group experiences, and ideas for learning centers (art, outdoor play, discovery table, math and manipulatives, woodworking, and dramatic play). In addition, each activity includes a reading and writing connections. Music is an integral part of the activities and an optional CD is available with songs by Billy B. A sidebar is included in each activity that can be used as a quick reference providing an overview, objectives, assessment, word bank, and a list of activities from Project Learning Tree's PreK-8 Environmental Education Activity Guide that can be used to extend and enhance the given activity.

The introduction provides tips on facilitating experiences for early childhood learners, teaching about nature, and learning about forests and trees. Safety in the outdoors, setting up an outdoor classroom, and taking neighborhood walks are a few of the topics found in the appendices.

The activities and the activity guide have been peer reviewed and field tested by early childhood educators (names of the reviewers are included). The guide has been correlated to the national standards for preschool education including the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) Early Childhood Environmental Education Guidelines for Excellence, and the Head Start Childhood Outcomes Framework.

An example of one of the activities is The Shape of Things. Here children learn the shapes as they explore the outdoors using labeled shapes cut from paper. After the students explore their outdoor surroundings and identify shapes, they may come back into the classroom and create and eat fruit kabobs. The fruit is cut into different shapes and the children can identify the shapes as they place each on the kabob.

This activity guide is the *Learning*® Magazine 2011 Teachers' ChoiceSM Award winner.

Participants attend a workshop offered within your state to obtain a copy of this guide. The length of the workshop and cost may vary according to your state and the setting. Contact your state Project Learning Tree coordinator for more information regarding attending or setting up a workshop. The National Project Learning Tree website will have your state contact listed: <https://www.plt.org/your-state-project-learning-tree-program>

Nature and Young Children, 2nd Edition

By Ruth Wilson



Ruth Wilson has been an educator for over 30 years and writing about nature and children for the past 20 years. She brings both her experience as a teacher and her love for teaching children about nature together in her latest edition of *Nature and Young Children*. So when you first dive into *Nature and Young Children*, you may wonder if this is a book for early childhood practitioners or one for environmental educators. As you begin exploring the eight chapters within the book, you will find it addresses the goals and objectives of both early childhood educators along with those of environmental educators.

The book addresses many diverse topics related to early childhood and the environment. From gardening with children to how to include nature programs and placespaces for children with special needs to how creative play in the natural area can foster the holistic development of a child are just a few of the topics included in the book. Wilson explains how nature play impacts children and the benefits of it for all children as they develop their sense of wonder. She also provides ideas on how to develop environmentally literate attitudes, responsible behaviors and values with early childhood activities and experiences.

This book also offers direction on the development and implementation for alternative settings for nature-focused programs; international approaches to nature play in early childhood; the role of adults in an outdoor learning setting; how to integrate nature education into play; and the importance of safety and health for children and outdoor playspace. Each concept is presented with both the early childhood educator and environmental educator in mind.

One area that was most interesting was the chapter on ways to utilize the indoor classroom to promote an understanding and appreciation for the natural environment. Often, when educators are asked to teach about the outdoors and nature, many immediately think this cannot be accomplished if they do not have access to a natural area, park, or outdoor

playspace. Wilson provides specific ideas on how to bring the outdoors inside such as using pro-nature books. In addition, she provides direction as to how to set up both an outdoor and indoor nature playspace.

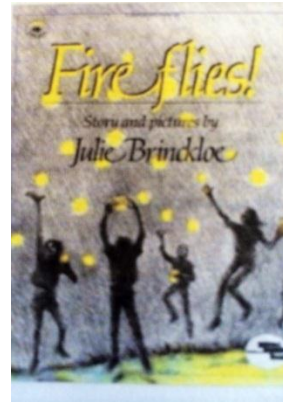
Many educators recognize and promote the concept of interdisciplinary teaching – especially when teaching outdoors. Wilson presents an activity/learning grid which correlates outdoor play activities to different subjects (language and literacy, mathematics, science, and social studies). This grid also includes the supporting materials needed to conduct the outdoor play activity. Activities included are dramatic play/cooking, construction, gardening, and field studies. This portion of the book proves to be a valuable tool for those just venturing into the world of early childhood and environmental education.

Wilson addresses not only the importance of play and the environment but also the research associated with this concept. The theory behind the research as to why children need time outdoors and the opportunity to interact with the natural environment is also supported in the book.

Finally, an epilogue and two appendices are included in the book. The epilogue includes a discussion on the relationship between creative play in natural environments and a more peaceful society. The appendices describe a few natural placespaces and selected resources for the educator. This book is a wonderful resource in itself and would benefit any early childhood or environmental educator, including students in early childhood courses. ISBN - 978-0-415-52674-6; Cost: \$30/\$35 online.

Fireflies!

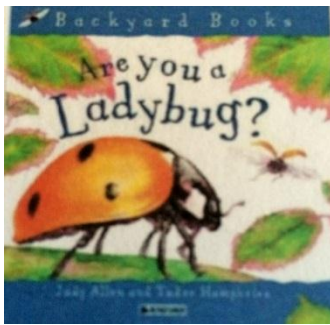
by Julie Brinckloe



This is the tender story of a young boy whose attention is drawn to the soft glow of fireflies as he gazes longingly out the window on a warm summer evening. Though the evening sky is growing dim, the delight of catching the fireflies is overwhelming. He scurries with anticipation to the cellar to fetch a jar in which to capture the tiny, glowing creatures. Eagerly, he joins his friends, leaping with joy as they gather the precious fireflies into their jars. As the young boy retreats to his bedroom, admiring his cherished possessions, he realizes that their light is gradually grown dim. As they succumb to their imprisonment, a wave of compassion sweeps over the lad as he realizes that he must release his captives, if they are to live. With bittersweet resolve, he opens the jar and releases his treasures back to the freedom of the night sky. The appeal of this book spans multiple age groups. Very young children are captivated by these magical creatures that turn their backyard into an enchanted playground. Older children find allure in an opportunity to join their friends and engage in a delightful romp in the dark of night. Adults fondly remember their carefree youth, the smell of freshly mown grass, the cool dampness of the earth, and the joy of simpler times. Through this delightful story, Brinckloe reminds us all of our responsibilities; to lovingly care for even the smallest of earth's creatures. Ages 3-8. Macmillan Publishing Company, 1985, ISBN: 0-02-713310-9, 28 pages.

Are you a Ladybug?

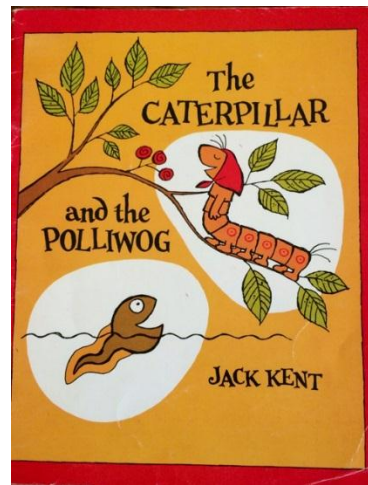
by Judy Allen and Tudor Humphries



A simple, yet delightful little book tells the story of the life-cycle of a ladybug. Allen and Humphries tell the story through the perspective of the ladybug, explaining how it changes from an egg, to an adult ladybug. With clear and simple text, the authors explain important facts about the ladybug. The engaging, close-up water color illustrations offer depth and precise detail to the narrative, which captivates the audience while they learn about the physical characteristics, diet, habitat, and natural enemies of the ladybug. The narratives in the story draw the reader in, speaking directly to their audience and using phrases such as, "If you are [a ladybug], your parents eat aphids and look like this". The authors' refreshingly simplistic style invites children to enter the world of a ladybug in an entertaining, yet scientifically valuable manner. Ages 3-8. Kingfisher, 2000, ISBN-10: 0753456036, 31 pages.

The Caterpillar and the Polliwog

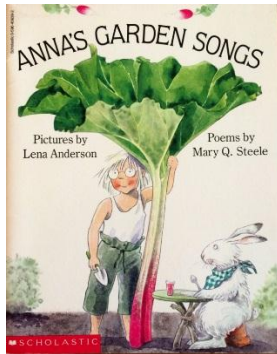
by Jack Kent



The author takes the reader on a journey with a sassy caterpillar, who befriends a simple polliwog and brags to all her friends that she will turn into something special someday. The polliwog is fascinated with this prospect and longingly wishes that he, too, could be like the caterpillar and turn into something special. He learns from the fish that he will also change into something special and assumes that he will also turn into a butterfly. As he faithfully observes the caterpillar's metamorphosis, he is unaware that his body is also changing. Despite his dismay that he had not turned into a butterfly after all, he realizes that frogs are beautiful creatures, too. This whimsical story, showcasing cartoon-like characters, introduces young children to the basic facts of the life cycles and metamorphoses of the frog and the butterfly. The engaging illustrations and the believable personalities of the animal characters, holds the attention of young children, while at the same time introducing them to some important scientific concepts. The underlying message of this story relates the theme that all nature's creatures are special and beautiful in their own way. Ages 4-8. Aladin, 1985, ISBN-10: 9780671662813, 32 pages.

Anna's Garden Songs

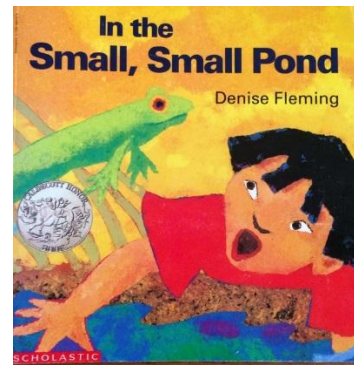
Poems by Mary Q. Steele and illustrations by Lena Anderson



Mary Steele introduces 14 poems featuring fruits, vegetables, and plants grown in a garden. The poems, conveyed in a young girl's voice, add to the distinctive qualities of this book. While the setting of the story, the young girl's garden, adds charm and convenient credibility to the portrayal of each garden item, the real delight of the story are the illustrations. Using detailed watercolors the illustrator combines realistic features of gardens and their produce with whimsical and imaginative characteristics that appeal to young children. Each child in the story is drawn to detail the very personality of the character and a recurring rabbit adds continuity and anticipatory value, which further engages those who share the story together. A mixture of authenticity, child-like wonder, and charming poetry this book offers the perfect segue to introducing gardening to young children in more practical and hands-on way. Ages 5-8. Scholastic, 1990, ISBN-10: 0590436392, 31 pages.

In the Small, Small Pond

by Denise Fleming



True to the style of Denise Fleming's previous books, readers are guided through the story by a recurring animal. In the case of the story, *In the Small, Small Pond*, a frog plays the role. The brilliant colors and unique pulp-painting artistic qualities of this book won Fleming a Caldecott Honor in 1994. The setting of the story provides a backdrop to introduce the animals and plants found in a pond ecosystem. The frog guides the reader on a journey around the pond, showcasing one animal on each page, and recounting descriptive characteristics of the animals with the use of engaging and playful action verbs, alliteration, and rhyme. There is an undertone of growth and change as the story begins with the contrast of tadpole and frog, and concludes with the contrast of change in a pond ecosystem from summer to winter. The text is simple enough to engage a toddler, while the illustrations, rhyme and rhythm of the story captivate older audiences. Fleming combines educational qualities, such as the appreciation of nature, together with the beauty of prose. Adults are drawn back to their youth and memories of visits to a pond, while at the same time, re-examining and interpreting the remarkably complex ecosystem of a pond, through the simplistic wonder and excitement of a child. Ages 2-6. Scholastic, Inc., 1993, ISBN: 0-590-48119-3, 32 pages.