

# Connections

Volume 34 Number 1 Spring 2014



*Bunchberry (Cornus canadensis)*  
Photo by Antonella Bell

The journal of the Global,  
Environmental & Outdoor  
Education Council



To promote involvement in  
quality environmental and  
outdoor education

# What GEOEC Does

The Global, Environmental & Outdoor Education Council (GEOEC) is an interdisciplinary specialist council of the Alberta Teachers' Association. Our mission is to provide resources and venues for dialogue and networking, as well as to promote quality professional development for Alberta teachers in the area of global, environmental and outdoor education. Members receive current news items, teaching ideas, information about our workshop series and food for thought through our quarterly journal *Connections*. We are also active on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/geoecalberta](http://www.facebook.com/geoecalberta)) and Twitter (@GEOEC) with up-to-date information on PD opportunities and initiatives in Alberta.

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*Connections* is published for the Global, Environmental & Outdoor Education Council (GEOEC) by the ATA. Editor: Antonella Bell, 4416 211 Street NW, Edmonton, AB T6M 2P3; e-mail [antonella.bell@ualberta.ca](mailto:antonella.bell@ualberta.ca). Editorial and production services: Document Production staff, ATA. Address all correspondence regarding this publication to the editor. Opinions expressed by writers are not necessarily those of the GEOEC or the ATA. ISSN 0701-0400

Membership in the GEOEC includes a subscription to *Connections* and a reduced fee at the annual conference. Please address your inquiries to the memberships office of the ATA at 1-800-232-7208 (toll free in Alberta) or 780-447-9400 (in Edmonton).

Printed on unbleached 100 per cent postconsumer recycled paper to decrease our impact on the earth.

Individual copies of this journal can be ordered at the following prices: 1 to 4 copies, \$7.50 each; 5 to 10 copies, \$5.00 each; more than 10 copies, \$3.50 each. Please add 5 per cent shipping and handling and 5 per cent GST. Please contact Distribution at Barnett House to place your order. In Edmonton, dial 780-447-9400, ext 432; toll free in Alberta, dial 1-800-232-7208, ext 432.

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# Message from the Editor



Learning through the arts, whether that is visual, dramatic, oral or musical, can reach levels that are largely inaccessible through traditional methods of teaching and learning. Arts-based learning could also be called heart-based learning, because it accesses our feelings. Some say that learning through the arts is learning through the soul. Because these educational strands must not remain only theoretical in nature, this issue is dedicated to looking at some of the ways people and organizations use arts-based learning for global, environmental and outdoor education. In order to significantly change attitudes toward other cultures and the natural world, we need to involve the heart and soul.

Ron Wigglesworth is an artist and a teacher, and his piece about taking students to Madagascar on a photography trip is truly inspiring. With all the new digital camera technology being so readily accessible these days, it is good to be reminded just how powerful a tool a camera can be in getting us to see the world differently. Monica Chahal's visual piece on the art of graffiti provides another look at how nonmainstream art can be a positive and strong influence on society. Storytelling is at risk of becoming a lost art, and Diane Conrad's article shows how powerful this medium can be to reinvolve a sense of self and place in youth. Land or earth artists have been using the natural environment as studio and gallery for years now, and Nancy Schulz shows us how easy it is to engage children to produce their own ephemeral art projects in the great outdoors. The Alberta Wilderness Association has allowed us to reprint an article by artist and student Christine Thomson, who highlights how art can be a voice for those who cannot speak. Emma Ausford's piece outlines how to use drama to encourage children to place themselves in nature's place. This workshop comes out of her master's thesis. It is so important to have children imagine the world from the perspective of other animals, and they absolutely love the opportunity to do so! iHuman is the result of two visionary artists who saw the power that fostering creativity has for underprivileged youth, and the results are as astounding as they are heartwarming. For those of you who are interested in art and youth, and have the opportunity to be involved with this important and inspirational organization, I encourage you to do so. The final article in this issue is a lovely piece by Muna Saleh, who writes about 12 children's books all centred on peaceful interactions between different cultures around the world.

In the resources section I have highlighted the Leighton Art Centre, outside of Calgary; the Travelling Exhibition Program (TREX), sponsored by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts; and Voices of Nature, a group from Victoria—all of whom offer unique and informative arts-based learning opportunities for your classrooms. If you are interested in taking any painting or photography courses, I have included some offerings for you to consider. Last, we are announcing a GEOEC Photo Contest and hope that many of you will submit your photos. The winners will be published in the winter issue, and we are looking at the possibility of creating a calendar for members with the winning entries.

Happy spring!

*Antonella Bell*

**Correction:** It has come to the attention of *Connections* that Monica Chahal's name was misspelled in the last issue. We apologize for any inconvenience this has caused.

# GEOEC Business and News

## President's Message



Greetings, everyone! I'm hoping the arrival of this issue of *Connections* coincides with the arrival of spring—longer days to enjoy the outdoors and the winding down of another successful year full of many global, environmental and outdoor education experiences for your students.

Our council enjoyed the opportunity to cohost with the Alberta Council for Environmental Education (ACEE) a second Earth Matters conference this past April in Canmore. The conference was full of chances to connect with teachers interested in pursuing professional development opportunities that focused on acting locally, while thinking globally.

Summer is now just a few short weeks away, and in this issue is an opportunity for members to share their summer adventures through a GEOEC photography contest. Consider sharing a few of your photos by entering our photography contest—perhaps it's travel that highlights work and issues in the global community, captures environmental education or simply involves taking the lesser travelled trail. The focus of the photography contest is to stir the imagination of our members and highlight the importance of the work that we do in education.

With the coming of summer, plans are already under way for the 2014 ATA Beginning Teachers' Conferences this fall in Edmonton and Calgary. Our council has already firmed up two proposals for each of these important professional development opportunities for beginning teachers. Contact Debbie Halvorson by e-mail at [debbie.halvorson@ata.ab.ca](mailto:debbie.halvorson@ata.ab.ca) to obtain the link to the presenter form if you wish to make a presentation at either or both of the Beginning Teachers' Conferences in Edmonton and Calgary.

On behalf of the GEOEC executive I would like to wish each of our members a safe and enjoyable summer.

*Don McLaughlin*

# Articles

## Learning to See Through the Camera Lens—Part 1

Ron Wigglesworth



I am fascinated by wilderness and the complexity of nature. Its shapes, textures, colours and sensations have been the source of most of my art imagery for over 30 years. I have sought out life-rich biological systems where nature's wealth reveals the power of the earth's ancient cycles. I have made wilderness trips to photograph and study humpback whales in Alaska and grizzly bears in British

Columbia's Knight Inlet. It is life-changing to share your world with pods of whales swimming and feeding beneath your small Zodiac inflatable boat then singing you to sleep at night on the beach. It is a powerful and primal experience to walk toward grizzlies as they browse on ocean sedge grass or to watch them nuzzle each other like teenagers. Walking into pristine areas, all senses alert, I have felt

reverence for nature. When untouched by man, nature's presence is humbling. It has also led me into endangered spaces—ecosystems and sacred places—where man's intrusion can give rise to losses from which nature cannot recover. I am drawn to the cautionary tales of disappeared cultures such as the Anasazi and their kachinas, the changing face of the Masai of Tanzania or the Malagasy tribal peoples of Madagascar. We are losing our understanding of our natural place on earth, and to safeguard our future we must listen to the earth again.

Children are the future of the human race, so we must teach them well. Early on, I came to believe that art is a foundation stone of learning, yet it is not always treated that way. I have spent my teaching career seeking alternative and effective means to reach my students and unlock their potential to see through an artist's eyes. The gift artists give to the world is a momentary look through their eyes.

No matter how sensitive or aware we think we are, there are always other points of view. I have spent over 30 years as a teacher-artist seeking ways to reach my students and unlock their potential to see through an artist's eyes. One of the ways involved transforming a traditional art classroom into a studio classroom. Instead of the conventional teacher-student relationship, I partnered with my students in an atmosphere of shared learning. The tone changed from that of a classroom to an art studio with a level playing field between student and teacher/artist. We drew together and solved problems cooperatively. Shared learning frees everyone to become both student and teacher. This learning/teaching praxis has resulted in remarkable growth in the students' learning levels and ownership of their work. Their questions became increasingly sophisticated and often led to in-depth self-study. The resulting level of real learning is remarkable and powerful, and potentially transformative for student and teacher alike.

Teaching at the Swiss boarding school gave me the opportunity to set up dozens of educational trips throughout Europe. I used photography and art-making to teach the students about history, science, ecology, architecture, art, culture and nature. The same tool—a digital camera—when held in different hands yielded unique perspectives on the world before us. Looking through another person's viewfinder is a way of sharing our individual ways of seeing the world. Each trip offered up new

experiences and widened the lens through which we saw the world and our place in it. Thousands of digital photographs later, an empowering shift occurred when we shared our photographs each night comparing what we had collected and discussing what we saw and felt. Photos transformed each day as we all saw through each other's eyes. Taking both micro and macro photographs led to intense shifts in their observations, awareness and curiosity. This art-based approach to observation through a camera lens was a formative experience, and the students taught me as much as I taught them.

The beauty, complexity and fragility of our environment shone though most poignantly during our two-week photography journey through Madagascar. We were a diverse group of thirteen students and two teachers representing ten nationalities. The shared learning started even before we left the school. Grade 12 student Sean Marz said, "Suddenly I was thrown into an eclectic group of schoolmates, only two of whom I knew well. We met before the trip and I was forced beyond my normal circle of friends into a group of travellers ready and eager to study photography. I had a D- in my photography class, but they still let me come." We familiarized ourselves with the world's fourth largest island, from beaches with sand as fine and white as flour to montane forests tangled with tree-ferns, epiphytes and mosses; from the hot and sticky rainforest to the bizarrely beautiful spiny desert. Madagascar is home to a multitude

of species found nowhere else on earth: a thousand orchids, thousands of succulents, over 300 (and counting) frogs, 270 reptiles, 5 entire families of birds and 6 of plants. Madagascar is most famous for its 100 endemic mammals, most prominently the lemurs, an entire group of primates.

Digital cameras constantly in hand, we hiked through jungles, spiny forests and villages. We paddled (and bailed) leaky pirogues (dug-out log canoes) around a sacred island and watched a colony of thousands of fruit bats lift off their roosts. We photographed plants whose ancestors rooted there 200 million years ago, in a rainforest right out of a scene in Jurassic Park. We walked on tiptoe through the sharp tsingy rock, grey limestone pinnacles reaching up around us like a stone forest. We snorkelled among a rainbow of tropical fish along the coral reefs near Nosy Be. In Andasibe-Mantadia National Park, we fairly fell over ourselves on the thick jungle slopes to photograph the rare indri indri lemurs as they leapt sideways up to 10 metres between spiked trees. Some of us were lucky enough to see the sifaka lemur, Madagascar's best candidate for a stuffed toy. Their comically long legs are perfectly adapted to life in the trees, but on the ground they jump sideways like line dancers in a sack race. Night-time walks, cameras in hand, through the spiny forest trails revealed the glowing red eyes of nocturnal reptiles, insects and animals, including the mouse lemur, a palm-sized mammal that looks more like a hamster than a primate.

At the other end of the scale, we saw the flying fox fruit bat, whose one- and one-half metre wingspan allows it to forage over 700 kilometres in a single night. Along the way we were welcomed by the local children who quickly abandoned their attempts to hawk souvenirs so they could play games with us—cultural lines disappeared.

Madagascar is an island that pushes all the limits. One hundred and sixty-five million years of isolation from the African mainland bred a diverse and unique natural history unrivalled on the planet. Tragically, the unique biodiversity is vanishing as a result of multinational corporate greed. But Madagascar's extremes push in another direction, too—the poverty of its people. It is one of the world's poorest countries, and day after day its people struggle to provide for themselves and their large families. In some Malagasy tribes, the ideal family size is nine boys and nine girls. Unsustainable slash-and-burn agriculture yields only a subsistence livelihood while destroying precious forests. The cultivation of huge needle-covered succulent plants called sisal (a species of agave that yields a stiff fibre used in making various products, including Tetra Paks) is a monoculture that provides workers with higher income but again at the forest's expense. As the students shared their photographs and thoughts, they asked themselves how the world could support both the Malagasy people and still conserve this island's extraordinary biodiversity.

Our group met with Lisa Gaylord, the environmental/rural

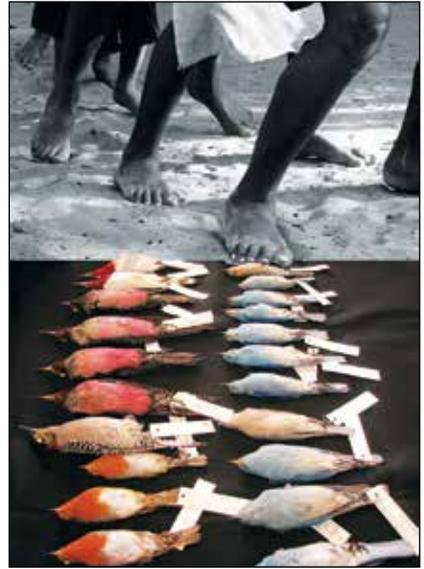
development team leader with the US Agency for International Development. She explained the challenges facing the Malagasy government in balancing economic realities with environmental conservation. In a country regularly battered by cyclones, erratic harvests contribute to the vicious circle of deepening poverty and environmental destruction. In conjunction with USAID, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the World Conservation Society (WCS), Conservation International (CI), the World Bank, the UN Development Program, the governments of several European countries and other organizations, the Malagasy government developed a National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP) to decrease the pressure on natural resources while improving the people's quality of life. Meeting the needs of the land and its peoples requires a comprehensive approach that links community-based environmental efforts with education, health intervention and family planning.

The students realized their generation needs to figure out how they can support both the impoverished Malagasy people and the country's unrivalled array of habitats. Sean says he valued the opportunity to discuss Madagascar's future with 13 other travellers, each of whom brought his or her own life and cultural experience to the discussion. By looking through each other's viewfinders, our students learned to think incisively and see more clearly the obstacles between us and our endangered planet. "We cannot

eradicate poverty by dealing with people on an individual level," Sean says. "It requires a systemic approach. Education is the cornerstone. It will give the next generation the tools to make decisions for themselves regarding the best management of their lives and their lands."

The digital camera was integral to our Malagasy environmental education. In recent years, digital imaging and our increasing reliance on digital media has triggered profound changes in education and learning. Digital cameras can be easily used in any classroom or trip. Students' and teacher's eyes and minds open when images and observations are shared. The invisible becomes visible. Digital technology straddles the worlds of science and art, and digital images increasingly shape what we see and how we understand it.

I did a series of my own artwork based on my experiences in Madagascar. The villagers of a sisal plantation danced for us after I extracted a four-centimetre sisal needle from a student's leg, and this inspired me to print a series of images of that primal dance. The sensual movement of their feet incorporated the plurality of the human condition—joyful and fierce, solid but soulful, aggressive and free. The prints bring to mind man's connection to the earth—a relationship being eroded by the intrusion of corporate culture. I also made a series of nine diptychs. Some show the harmony of humans when engaged with nature. Others depict that world at risk, and the sense that the ancients are reaching



forward through time to warn us. My images try to evoke the viewer's sensitivity to the consequences of losing that connection by reflecting the impersonal scientific view where nature is reduced to specimens in drawers, bags of feathers and notebooks of observations. If we are not mindful, all we may have left are empty nests, formaldehyde jars

on museum shelves and small protected islands of nature and spirit. This tension informs my work, and my prints provoke a sense of urgency in the viewer. My art is my other voice.

*Please see Part 2 in the next issue of Connections entitled "Learning to See Through the Hand."*

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# Connecting Self, Subject and Society Through Graffiti

Monica Chahal



Photo 1<sup>i</sup>

*Art is an evolutionary act. The shape of art and its role in society is constantly changing. At no point is art static. There are no rules.*

—Raymond Salvatore Harmon

## Introduction

In the last issue I provided a brief introduction to what I consider the future of education—Hip-Hop-Based Education (HHBE). Christopher Emdin (2012) describes hip hop as heart inspiration power, heal oppressive pedagogy. I believe there is one aspect of hip hop that inspires power in order to heal oppressive pedagogy better than any other facet—graffiti. For many the word *graffiti* conjures notions of vandalism and criminal activity; however, there is far more to it.

## Defining Graffiti

Graffiti is an art form that is both appreciated and created by the young; it is analytical, thoughtful and requires an immense amount of planning and imagination. The word *graffiti* stems from the merging of two very distinct terms: *graphein*, meaning to write, and *graffiare*,

meaning to scratch or scratch on walls. Consequently, I interpret graffiti as writing through scratches linking the definition to why within the culture of hip hop graffiti artists are identified as graffiti writers. Graffiti is a means for a voice without words; it is a “complex way of imprinting the urban landscape” (Dennant 1997) as illustrated by photo 2.

It allows those who are overlooked and underrepresented to express themselves. An essential feature of graffiti writing is that the writers themselves do not wish to have their work deciphered; there is no “correct” interpretation because “graffiti requires its audiences to inquire after the meaning of its meaninglessness” (Halsey and



Photo 2<sup>ii</sup>

i Photo taken by Monica Chahal in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

ii Photo taken by Monica Chahal in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada



Picture 1<sup>iii</sup>



Picture 2<sup>iv</sup>

Pederick 2010, 83). For example, the writer featured in photo 2 may be telling us his or her name/ pseudonym is Sens, asking us if carrying products through train yards makes Sens or simply trying to make his or her mark in the world. Regardless of what we spectators believe, we will never know the truth; the erroneous answer is an extremely important feature for students.

Graffiti, like many art forms, has its own history and language. A history that stems as far back as Pompeii finds itself flourishing

during the Great Depression and a comfortable if not at times contentious home within global train yards. Graffiti has been used as a mode of communication between the homeless, hobos and the oppressed. Graffiti writing and style are as unique as the places they originate from; for instance, the formation of the letter S is very different in California than in New York. Additionally, the significance of the writing is as distinctive as the writers. For example, while writers in Canada, London and Guatemala may write with a common thread, there is an exceptionality that is

particular to their nations. Simply, graffiti is created in opposition to confinement, order and conformity, thus the appeal to revolutionaries, anarchists, subjugated and young. Graffiti provides a space for expression and a connection of self to subject and society.

## What Is Graffiti?

As described by Young (2010) graffiti consists of many facets, from spraying stencils, alteration of words and billboards (BANKSY), posting of posters or stickers on surfaces (Dondi), placement of objects or images in the urban space (TAKI 183). BANKSY, Dondi and TAKI are international graffiti personalities.

BANKSY is an English graffiti writer with a unique stencilling format who is known to comment on capitalism and has a strong dislike of governmental control. His writing consists of commentaries regarding class structure, poverty, homelessness and capitalism. For example, pictures 1 and 2 are stencilled pieces by BANKSY illustrating the critical eye that many writers have and his personal critique of the British government.

Picture 3 is an example of how writers can alter billboards to exemplify their opinions regarding advertising for a major multinational



Picture 3<sup>v</sup>

iii Piece by BANKSY can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/jw3772m>

iv Piece by BANKSY can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/k3mkw7k>

v Picture 3 can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/yj97ndx>

company. Within a classroom, altering billboards with students could be a way to engage your students in media literacy through a mechanism that speaks to them directly. Providing examples of billboards and asking students to critically alter the billboard in a manner that illustrates what they think about consumerism and the impact of media in a few words or pictorially requires ingenuity, creativity and analytical skills.

In the 1970s Dondi<sup>i</sup> started by painting his name on street surfaces, but soon his artistic nature took the form of grand pieces of artwork through a spray can. Dondi became a mainstream artist in the 1980s. TAKI 183<sup>2</sup> in 1971 was the “first New Yorker to become famous for writing graffiti.” The name TAKI stems from his Greek heritage and 183 is his street number.

Photos 3 and 4 represent examples of stencilling and placement of objects that are artistic yet deemed illegal.

## Global Voice Against Oppression

Graffiti can provide a voice for how people respond to injustices or crimes against humanity; some examples can be found in Timor-Lest, Myanmar (formally called Burma), Bahrain, Russia and Afghanistan. Where there has been civil unrest, upheaval, war and terror, graffiti can be found (picture 4).

One such example is the Against the Wall project. Against the Wall brought together a team of international graffiti writers who travelled to Bethlehem to bring awareness to the wall being built in the West Bank. Against the Wall (pictures 5 and 6) is an illustration of how graffiti can provide the opportunity for writers to voice their concerns regarding oppression and inequality in a manner that is beautiful, haunting and complex. It is due to this complexity that the onlooker is forced to attend to the

subject matter, regardless of how troublesome or upsetting it may be. For instance photos 5 and 6 were created in response to a bloody and devastating civil war in San Salvador; it became widely known that each white flower represented a murdered child.

## Conclusion

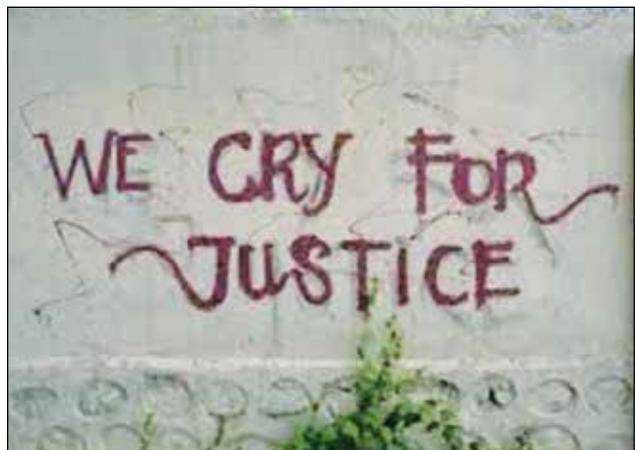
This very brief discussion of graffiti is meant to provide you with a sense of its complexity. Because graffiti is global and an art form that is conducted by the young, it appeals to students in a way that is uniquely youth orientated. By bringing graffiti into classrooms to tackle such issues as capitalism, media literacy, suppression and poverty, you utilize an instrument for students from their world while encouraging creativity, originality and critical thinking skills. Additionally, I would advocate discussions regarding what public and private space really means as



Photo 3<sup>vi</sup>



Photo 4<sup>vii</sup>



Picture 4<sup>viii</sup>

vi Photo taken by Monica Chahal in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

vii Photo taken by Monica Chahal in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

viii Picture 4 in East Timor can be found at <http://tiny.cc/r5l1dx>



Picture 5<sup>ix</sup>



Picture 6<sup>x</sup>

well as the fairness of the judicial system. Essentially, issues that are thousands of miles away become understandable, and topics that may be considered uninteresting become relatable. This is why I consider the foundation of hip hop known as graffiti a subject that is far more than the vandalism it is perceived to be. Graffiti at its core is a mode of communication for those who feel voiceless. The bigger questions at

play are who is being subjugated and why?

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Picture 5<sup>xi</sup>

ix Picture 5 in Russia can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/l5j2utz>

x Picture 6 in Afghanistan can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/lflakv6>

xi Pieces by BANKSY can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/mgzbzd>



Photo 5<sup>xii</sup>



Photo 6<sup>xiii</sup>

## Notes

1. See <http://dondiciakings.com/index.html> (accessed April 28, 2014).
2. See <http://taki183.net/> (accessed April 28, 2014).

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xii Photo taken by Monica Chahal in San Salvador, El Salvador

xiii Photo taken by Monica Chahal in San Salvador, El Salvador

# Reimagining Relationships with Animals Through Traditional Storytelling with Incarcerated Youth

Diane Conrad

For three years I facilitated an arts-based educational research project with youth at an Alberta youth corrections facility. Invited by the centre's native program coordinator to contribute to her program, I visited the facility once a week to deliver an after-school drama program. It should be noted that approximately two-thirds of youth incarcerated at the facility were of Aboriginal descent; in fact, across Canada, Aboriginal youth are eight times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Aboriginal youth—a tragic symptom of systemic injustices.

The youth I worked with, aged 14–19, all boys for this project, were at the centre either remanded or serving their sentences. While the public may harbour an image of young offenders as hard to engage, the time I spent with them was joyful. The youth were interesting, insightful, funny, generous and always eager to participate. They appreciated the time we spent doing drama; our work together was exhilarating. I engaged the youth

who volunteered to participate in such drama-related activities as improvisation, character creation, storytelling, digital storytelling, comic book creation and play building.

The project described here developed from the interests in environmental studies of my grad student research assistant at the time. We set out to explore aspects of environmental education through drama. We began by sharing stories of our experiences with nature. The youth talked about seeing bald eagles while canoeing, walking in the bush and finding pine cones with kohkom, fishing with mosom, digging tunnels in the snow and sledding, picking blueberries, hunting, encountering bears and so on. Many of the youths' stories involved cultural activities and revolved around conflict with animals; for example, hunting animals, animal attacks and fighting animals for sport. We decided that relationships with animals might be a fruitful area for further exploration and chose to do so through



Youth artwork

traditional storytelling. We found a traditional Cree story online, which coincidentally was told to one boy by his grandfather. The story entitled “Ghost Stallion” (<http://tinyurl.com/qevepe6>) was about a Cree chief who was cruel to his horses if they were weak and sick. In retribution a supernatural power in the form of a ghost stallion took away his prized horses and cursed him—sentencing him to spend the

rest of his days travelling the land searching for them.

We decided to devise an alternate ending to the story to disrupt the negative patterns in the chief's life in relation to animals and break the curse and allow him to redeem himself. The episodic alternate ending that the youth collectively devised took twists and turns that I could never have imagined. The ghost stallion shows sympathy for the chief but tells him he must prove himself. On his travels in search for his lost horses the chief steps in a gopher hole and breaks his leg. In his weakened state he is threatened by wolves. Wounded and near starvation he is tempted with an old and battered horse; he cannot resist and kills the horse for food. He encounters a pair of orphaned coyote pups, one strong and one weak, and the ghost stallion asks him which he will choose. The chief chooses the strong one, but this is not the answer the stallion wants to hear. He is given the mangy pup to care for.

As the alternate ending unfolded two different opportunities for the chief's redemption arose, but both times he failed to change his offending behaviour. When I asked the youth about this, they explained that the man ought to be given at least three opportunities to fail before he could be expected to make meaningful changes in his life. This was an interesting reversal of

the popular three-strikes-you're-out policy, so common now in criminal justice and in school-discipline procedures. The youths' understanding of human nature and the challenges involved in making life changes, proved much more realistic, charitable and compassionate than the intolerant three-strikes policy.

In the conclusion to the story the chief manages to bring the weak coyote pup back to health. He is then given both pups to care for equally, to teach them to hunt and return them to the wild. To accomplish this and to learn to empathize with animals, the ghost stallion tells the chief he will transform him into a coyote. The chief agrees. As a coyote the chief meets a female coyote and they have pups. When his new family comes under attack by a bear, he fights to protect them. His bravery in the face of danger and his loyalty to the coyote community earns his redemption, but when the ghost stallion offers to return him to his life as a man, the chief chooses to remain a coyote in order to look after his vulnerable pups.

The storytelling project revealed insights into the youths' understanding of offending behaviour, discipline and punishment that are instructive to our society, which is so quick and decisive about meting out punishment to offending individuals

without adequate opportunities for them to make meaningful change. The heart-wrenching ending demonstrated the youths' understanding that to truly know the other is to become the other oneself and display the extraordinary human capacity for empathy, given the chance.

Although our work did not overtly address environmental issues, through opening up new ways of thinking about relations with animals, through performative playfulness, comic strategies—reversals of status, unexpected responses, surprises or other moments of honesty—disclosures, insights into the human condition or telling it like it is, the youths' performance was motivated by the pursuit of greater awareness. Engaging the youth through drama activities to express their perceptions and analyze the situation spoke to their experiences within a larger social reality. It helped them to better understand their experiences, thereby awakening the potential for making positive change in their lives and contributing toward social transformation.

I'd like to acknowledge the assistance of Doreen Lesperance, the native program coordinator, and Tai Munroe, the graduate research assistant, as well as all the youth who contributed to the project.

# The Art of Creating in the Great Outdoors

Nancy Schulz

When I arrived at art school at the age of 17, I was blown away by the diversity of artistic creation. Growing up in rural Alberta, I was taught that art was a landscape painting that you hang over your couch or a sculpture of a famous person that sits on your fireplace mantel. I discovered that art is so much more than that! Art doesn't have to be in a gallery. Art doesn't have to cost money. Art can be a vehicle to share ideas and tell stories. The best art is accessible to all. Art education often limits itself by reinforcing the notion that art has to be a certain way and yield a specific end product. Children are so creative; they just need to be given permission to explore the infinite possibilities of their imagination.

In a world where children are spending more and more time indoors, it is important for us educators to encourage students to slow down, take the time to observe and interpret nature in their own way. When children are empowered, the outdoors can be a place where they become creative beings. Through touch and experience, young artists can become connected to the materials nature has to offer. It is often easy to forget that

materials for creating art are all around us. In fact, the supplies you can find at the craft store can't beat what nature has to offer.

At its heart, land art (otherwise known as earthworks) is the act of creating art using materials from the environment. Soil, rocks, leaves, sticks and snow are just some materials an artist might use. On any given day, materials available to a land artist will depend on factors including place and season. It is also interesting to note that the placement of land art in the environment is just as important as the work itself.

For most people, the hardest thing to accept is the temporary nature of land art. These artworks are washed away by rain, dismantled by wind or stepped on by creatures—humans or otherwise. In fact, a big part of the beauty of land art is its ephemeral presence. Land art is, in a way, free of the idea that artwork has to be a permanent, archival creation.

When I go outside, I see limitless possibilities to make my mark on the landscape. As I walk across my lawn after a fresh snowfall, I use my feet to create a pattern. When I go to the beach with my stepdaughters,



Land art on a lamp post created by Nancy Schulz and Claire Uhlick at the Kaliedo Arts Festival 2010, in Edmonton.

we use sticks to draw in the sand. Land art can be a large, monumental thing, but it can also be a natural way for everyone, adults and children alike, to express themselves in the great outdoors.

Here are some of my tips to facilitate land art activities with students:

1. Get inspired. Some of my favourite land artists are Andy Goldsworthy, Robert Smithson, Simon Beck (be sure to check out his amazing snowshoe art) and Richard Shilling.
2. Designate boundaries. This may simply be the edges of your schoolyard. In some cases

though, the boundaries are not as evident. Do not, however, designate where the art should be placed. Placement is a critical artistic choice that should be left to the artist(s).

3. Make note of any materials that are off limits and discover innovative ways to acquire new materials. For example, your school's janitorial staff may discard grass clippings and deadheads from flower beds that could be reused for land art.
4. Discuss the temporary nature of land art with children and facilitate a class discussion about finished artwork. Children often have very unique creative

processes. It is important to encourage children to articulate what they made and the message it carries.

5. Encourage children to give and receive respectful constructive criticism. Rather than saying such things as I like it or I hate it, ask What is this artwork about? and How can it be more about that idea?
6. Document the art. One way to do this is to photograph the artwork. Remember to take close-up photographs to capture small details and landscape photographs that capture the artwork in its environment.

Land art activities encourage children to look at the environment in new ways by considering colours, textures and patterns. It also empowers children to see the beauty and potential in common, everyday things.



Drawing in the sand on the shores of the Slave River, NWT, with stepdaughter Loganne.

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*Nancy Schulz is an artist, illustrator, museum educator and community engagement professional based in Edmonton, Alberta. She holds a bachelor of fine arts degree from the University of Alberta and is currently doing her graduate studies in heritage resource management. Her interests in history, culture and personal expression have opened many exciting opportunities. Schulz has shared her passion for education through her work at the Royal Alberta Museum, City Hall School (Edmonton), Fort Edmonton Park, John Walter Museum, Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village and the Canadian Centre for Research on Literacy. Contact her at [nschulz@ualberta.ca](mailto:nschulz@ualberta.ca) to inquire about in-class sessions and conference/presentation availability.*

# Three Artists Who Give Voice to the Silent

Christine Thomson

The Alberta Wilderness Association's (AWA) offices played host to a timely exhibit in April earlier this year. The exhibit was titled *A Shifting Balance* and featured three emerging Alberta artists with a focused directive. The art of Dana Bush, Amanda Oberacher and Elisa Sereno-Janzen worked as a cohesive exhibit at a most appropriate venue. To enter into the AWA's offices was less like entering into a white-walled box gallery and more like being welcomed into the warmer environs of an artist's studio. The lighting and wood floors added to the intimate feeling of the exhibit, as the artists wanted less to hit you over the head with their message, but more to educate and

beguile the viewer with the imagery and their reality of shifting balances in the environment.

The background of the three artists led them to take different approaches to their subjects. Bush, as an ecologist and biologist, takes as her subject matter the interconnectedness of the species. Oberacher, like Bush, a recent graduate of the Alberta College of Art and Design (ACAD), focuses her paintings on the effect of environmental abuse on wildlife. Sereno-Janzen is still a student at ACAD, but the maturity garnered from her professional career as a musician is evident in her masterly paint strokes and the lyrical sinuous lines of her paintings.

Dana Bush's three mixed media pieces in the show were entirely concerned with ecosystems and the delicate balance of relationships. From *Only 13 Males Left (Greater Sage-Grouse)* (2011, silk, natural dyes, mordant and wood), which outlines the tragic status of the sage-grouse on the prairies, to her *Sweetness of Bees* (2013, silk, natural dyes, mordant, soy wax, maple and cherrywood) detailing the intricate role that bees play in the pollination and success of the development of fruiting plants, she gently steers the viewer to a greater awareness and appreciation of her message. Incorporating "didactic panels" with her work, Bush seeks to educate her viewer scientifically,



*Only 13 Males Left (Greater Sage-Grouse)*

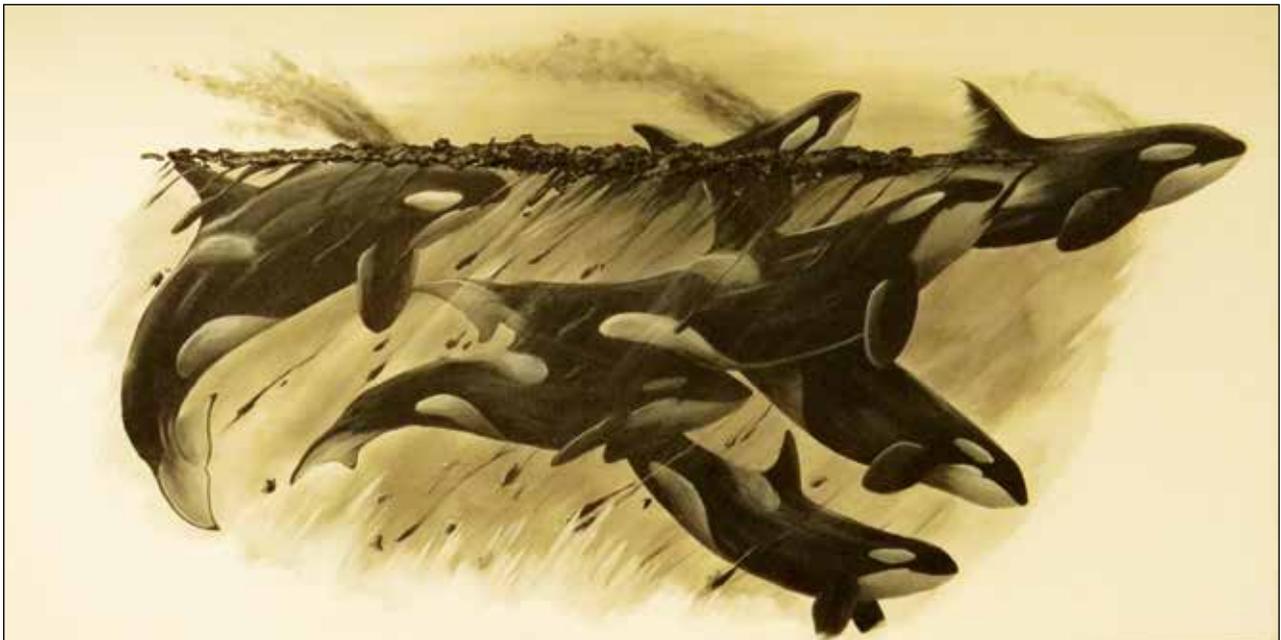
Photo © D Bush



*Red Deer River, South of Schrader Creek*  
Photo © E Sereno-Janž

while illustrating her message in a visually arresting format. Using compostable products such as silk, natural dyes and organic subject matter, Bush shows a sensitivity about her belief system that is intrinsic to the subject matter.

Amanda Oberacher is a painter who critiques the abuse of the animals and mammals that inhabit this earth with humans, yet systematically lose in the human quest for progress. Her work concentrates on current environmental issues such as oil exploration into caribou-calving grounds and the effect of oil spills on marine life and waterfowl. Her painting *AT1 Transients: Prince William Sound* (2012, recycled acrylic paint, acrylic paint and polybitumen, 48" × 96") is a stunning canvas of a pod of orcas striving to break through a thick surface crust of polybitumen.



*AT1 Transients, Prince William Sound*  
Photo © A Oberacher

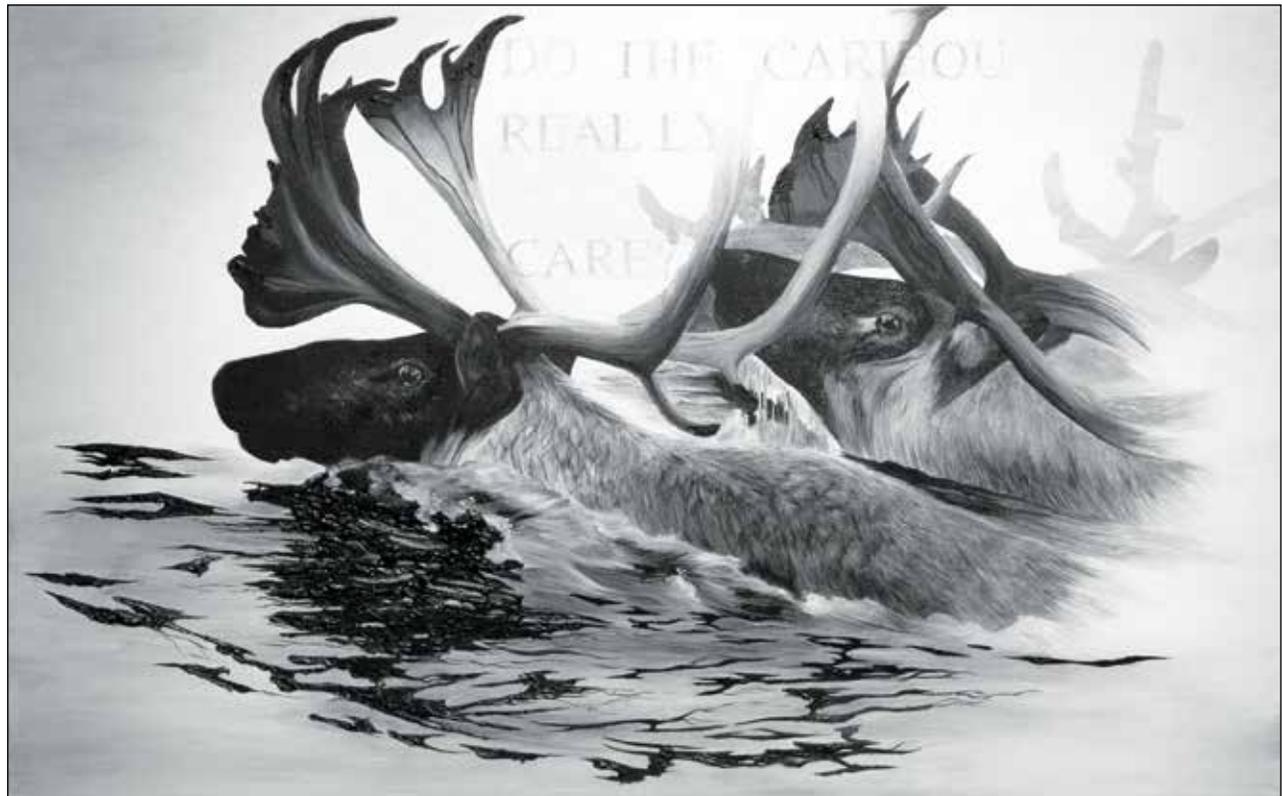
Research into the title shows us that prior to the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill, there were over 22 whales in the AT1 group. This AT1 Transient Killer Whale group was one of the most frequently encountered groups, and in the 1980s was sighted year-round in Prince William Sound, Alaska. Scientists estimate that there are only seven killer whales remaining in this group (NOAA 2014). Her dramatic representation of this pod, struggling to breathe through the thickly encrusted layer of oil, while tear-shaped droplets of oil coat their bodies and sink in the sea around them, is visually arresting and heartbreaking.

Elisa Sereno-Janz's work was the least representational of the three

artists exhibited at the AWA, and thus complements and allows for a moment of quiet reflection between the other artists' work. Her oil-on-wood panel paintings are abstractions of Google Earth satellite images of prairie river valleys that she has walked, hiked and known intimately. Her love of the earth and fascination with the role of prairie rivers in the arid climate of Alberta informs and shapes her paintings. The symbol of a river as it cuts through her paintings is read as such, but the hay fields, grain farms and evidence of the human hand are almost romantic in their rendering. We wander with her in the valleys of her memories, and the paintings are dreamy reflections with initially little

statement about man's effect on his surroundings. In *Bow River, South of Bassano* (2013, Oil paint on panel, 48" x 48"), we are beguiled by the colours and shapes that she creates on her panel. It is only when we break out of this state that we notice the shapes of the fields as created by humankind and of our impact on the ecosystem. Sereno-Janz's musings reflect the force of water and flooding (as we so recently experienced in June earlier this year) and comment on the intractable capriciousness of waterways and the effect of human intervention. What did it look like before the imprint of the human hand?

In experiencing the three artists' work in the exhibit, one comes to



*Area 1002*

Photo © A Oberacher]

the horrifying realization that the viewer is complicit in the disasters that are crippling the artists' subject matter. In the quest for more oil and industrial development on the prairies, the habitat of the greater sage-grouse is being destroyed. Between 1988 and 2006, 90 per cent of this species' population died out (Shearon 2011). Although very recently (September 18, 2013), Ecojustice has won their case against the Canadian government for emergency protection to be placed on the sage-grouse, critics are wondering how and when this plan will actually happen, and if it will indeed be in time to save the sage-grouse. Using the waterways of Alaska for oil tanker routes will inevitably lead to human error and the destruction of sea life. And the hand of man again plays in

Sereno-Janž's paintings as she reflects on the manner in which we reshape our environment to suit our needs, and not the needs of the animals that depend on natural grasslands, woodlands and clean water.

The three artists in the show *A Shifting Balance* tried to illustrate to us what is happening to our planet and our relationship to it. Their practice is concerned with illustrating and educating their viewer to become more than a bystander but an active positive force for protecting those who have no voice in their destruction. In their poignant and arresting art, Bush, Oberacher and Sereno-Janž have succeeded in bringing the message to us that we need to be active in protecting those that have no voice and the environment in which we share.

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*Christine Thomson is a fourth-year student at ACAD with a practice concerned with social and environmental issues. Her most recent exhibit was part of a reflection on Treaty 7, entitled Past, Present and Imagined. A professional costume designer for film, she spends as much time as she can exploring Alberta's wilderness with her horse.*

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# When Nature Speaks: Using Role Play to Encourage Feelings of Environmental Connectedness in Children

Emma Ausford

Unearthing activities and programs that successfully connect students with their environment can be a struggle. While visits outdoors are useful, there remains the challenge of how to engage students with their surroundings. Dramatic activities such as role playing are a useful way to get students excited about nature and open them up to further environmental learning opportunities.

While current environmental education programming aims to improve children's knowledge about the natural world, it can leave students feeling apathetic, depressed or bored, rather than inspired to be outside. Such programs are often crammed with activities and rich with technical information and instruction, resulting in little or no time for thoughtful reflection, hands-on play or inquiry. It is understandable that these programs appeal to educators because they are rich in content, but often they only allow for a superficial connection between students and the outdoors, sacrificing quality of

experience for curriculum coverage and outcomes (Nabors, Edwards and Murray 2009).

Drama and character-based programs incorporate place-based learning, creative teaching practices and student inquiry, which give participants the opportunity to learn through the use of their imagination. More unstructured time spent outdoors along with a greater offering of creative activities and dramatic role-play opportunities allows for more hands-on interaction with the environment, encouraging children to identify and empathize with the natural world (Levey 2005). Role play and other dramatic programs provide students with an entertaining activity that feels like play, making the thematic message of a program easier to engage in and understand.

## The Benefits of Role Play

Interactive role play enhances learning by encouraging students to help shape the activity; students

shift from being passive observers to active creators of their program. Students consequently feel increased ownership over the activity, which elicits more thoughtful reflection from the participants (McNaughton 2010). The end result is students who feel connected to nature more strongly than if they had simply been taught environmental concepts in the classroom.

When children assume and develop a role, their emotions and feelings of empathy for the character are engaged. Students experience, through imagination, the perspective of creatures from the natural world, and are more likely to be empathetic and appreciative toward the environment and its inhabitants (Levey 2005). For example, a child pretending to be a squirrel might make meaningful connections between squirrel habitat, behaviour and food sources and the necessity of the supporting ecosystem.

Perhaps the most compelling benefit of role play is its ability to create memorable and enjoyable

learning experiences for both the students and the activity leader. As role play is a creation of its participants, it is never the same twice, and this mystery helps maintain active engagement throughout the program (McSharry and Jones 2000). As a result, role-play activities tend to be highly charged and entertaining, driven by the instructor, but powered by the energy and imagination of the students.

## How to Make Role Play Effective for Your Class

All classes are unique, and through creative planning, role plays can be designed to benefit every class, regardless of size or student learning level.

**Class Size.** Most scripted plays are limiting because they are designed for a particular number of preset characters. More creative role plays (such as the activity included with this article) allow for greater flexibility in number of participants and run successfully with a class size of 4 to 40 students. With larger classes, the students can be split into smaller groups, who each run through a scenario or situation, allowing the teacher to travel between each to observe and participate in the discussions.

**Behaviour and Management Issues.** Role play allows students greater freedom and more control over an activity than traditional programs, which can be nerve-racking for educators who have

students in their classes with behavioural issues. However, role play is often a great fit for students with behavioural issues because it is highly active and dynamic, which increases student participation and engagement, frequently resulting in improved behaviour. Role play also makes use of increased hands-on learning and imaginative play, which engages the whole student (mind and body) and appeals to a wide variety of learning styles.

**Physical Limitations.** Role play offers several benefits for working with groups of students with physical disabilities. Many traditional programs work on the assumption that all students are equal in ability, which can be limiting and frustrating for students with disabilities. Role play allows students to take on a variety of different parts, which can be individually tailored to students, with physical impediments easily incorporated into the role-play character. As an example, students with reduced mobility could be given the role of a porcupine in a wildlife role play. The porcupine, although slow, has a number of unique and interesting adaptations that would help the students identify more with the animal, and consequently are less likely to feel deterred because of their own disability.

## Setting the Stage for an Effective Role Play

For teachers unfamiliar with leading role-play activities, the

following tips will help you and your students to create a fun and effective program:

### Prior to the Role-Play Activity

- **Slow down.** Role plays require time for students to learn about their characters, visualize their roles, participate and debrief. Give yourself plenty of time when you organize your first play, so the children have time to truly buy in to the experience without feeling rushed.
- **Inform the participants.** Actors cannot act without knowledge about the scene, and, likewise, students cannot participate in a role play without adequate information about their scenario. Ensure you first educate the students about the scenario, characters and issues so they can fully engage in their role.

### During the Role-Play Activity

- **The leader sets the tone.** As the students' role model, it is critically important that you actively participate in the role play as a character; if you don't feel inclined to play along; neither may some of your students. Your participation in the activity often provides a vital ingredient to the drama, giving students the courage to participate as well (McSharry and Jones 2000).
- **Make the participants comfortable—physically and emotionally.** Role plays can be stressful and mentally taxing for some students. Make sure the

activity is conducted in a secluded and comfortable location. It takes an enormous amount of bravery and mental exertion for many students to participate in such an activity; they don't need to be worried about a gathering audience or frigid temperatures as well.

- **Go with the flow.** Perhaps most important, remember that role-play is organic. This is an activity that cannot be fully planned in advance, and while there will be some role plays that are more successful than others, the best role plays come together spontaneously, and variance and uniqueness is to be encouraged. Come prepared for a variety of situations, then hold on for the ride.

## Following the Role-Play Activity

- **Validate the emotions experienced.** Depending on the topic of your role play, complicated concepts may arise, such as environmental health or the treatment of animals by humans. These topics can elicit a variety of emotions in the participants, which can be difficult for some individuals to understand and communicate.

Ensure the participants are listened to thoughtfully and their emotions discussed in order to validate the importance of their experience.

- **Maintain the natural connection formed.** Like all relationships, multiple encounters are required to forge strong connections. Use role play in addition to other nature-based activities, such as outdoor journaling and nature hikes, to help your students form stronger feelings of connection to their local environment.

## Conclusion

Most children have an innate interest in play and using their imaginations, which can be powerful tools for significant educational experiences when embraced. Role-play activities are the perfect medium to use in environmental education because they provide excitement and mystery to students, and engage them to participate, have fun and deeply connect with the meaning behind the lesson. As an educator, let your students see your love of nature by jumping into a role-play program and setting your inner animal free!

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## Role-Play Activity: When Nature Speaks

**Purpose:** To encourage students to assume the role of a forest creature and elicit feelings of natural connectedness and empathy toward wildlife and the environment as a whole.

**Grade Level:** Grades 4–9

**Time:** 60–90 minutes

**Setting:** A natural, outdoor location works best. A secluded, wooded space is preferred because it acts as a sanctuary, allowing students to engage more deeply in the activity.

**Materials:** Species Cards—Make up five to six cards featuring one local animal species per card. Include details about the animal, such as its diet, adaptations and any fun facts. Print enough for one card per participant. *Example cards created for wildlife from the Aspen Parkland/Boreal Forest region of Canada can be found on the following page.*

### Procedure

1. Lead the students to the centre of the wooded space and ask them to sit comfortably and close their eyes.
2. With the students' eyes closed, introduce them as Mother Nature and tell the students a story of transformation, asking them to visualize themselves transforming from human into a more-than-human creature of the forest. *(It can help to prewrite a small story ahead of the activity for those less comfortable with improvisation. Have fun with it—the story should be detailed and whimsical—the more visual imagery the better.)*
3. Following the story, with the students still sitting reflectively with closed eyes, hand each an animal character card.
4. After the students receive their cards, ask them to take a moment to go over their species' characteristics quietly, then hand in the card and head off to explore the forest on their own as their new character. *This time is important for the students to be active in developing and shaping their characters as well as their stories, not just asked to re-enact a prewritten script.*
5. After giving students adequate time to explore the forest as their animal (5–15 minutes depending on the students), call the students back, asking them to find others of the same species without using their human voices. *This allows the students to employ aspects of improvisation and creativity through inventing ways to communicate with their classmates without their voice. Encourage them to act physically and use props (for example, sticks for antlers).*
6. Once all of the “animals” have found each other, Mother Nature will convene the animal groups, informing them of important environmental situations the groups need to discuss (that is, a wildfire is approaching the forest, an increase in predators is experienced and so on). After each situation is presented by Mother Nature, have each animal species discuss its effects on them and, in turn, present their views to the group. Have the students come up with solutions for the predicament based on their species.
7. After several rounds of these discussions, Mother Nature can lead the students through an exciting story where they are asked to return to their human state.

**Optional Additions:** *The activity can be extended over a few hours or even a few weeks by adding additional activities to the role play. Such activities could include journalling as their character, mask making or doing additional research into their particular animal species.*

## Porcupine

### Food:

- Herbivore—eats bark, twigs, leaves and herbs

### Adaptations:

- Barbed quills for protection
- Camouflage colours

### Fun Facts:

- Slow moving
- Primarily nocturnal
- Third largest rodent in the world
- Great climber when looking for food; spends most of its time in trees

## House Mouse

### Food:

- Herbivore—eats grains and vegetables

### Adaptations:

- Fast and good jumper
- Camouflage colours

### Fun Facts:

- Most active at dusk and night
- Makes nests out of soft material
- Lives in colonies
- Often lives under a year due to high levels of predation

## Snowshoe Hare

### Food:

- Herbivore—eats grass and leaves in summer; bark and twigs in winter

### Adaptations:

- Fast and agile
- Large ears for hearing predators
- Camouflage colours: brown in summer, white in winter

### Fun Facts:

- Most active at dusk and dawn
- Named snowshoe because of its huge hind feet

## White-Tailed Deer

### Food:

- Herbivore—eats grass, twigs and leaves

### Adaptations:

- Fast and agile
- Can jump as high as 2.5 metres
- Camouflage colours
- Raises white tail to signal danger

### Fun Facts:

- Most active at dusk and dawn
- Males grow antlers to fight other males and attract females; grow a new set each year

## Red Squirrel

### Food:

- Herbivore—eats primarily seeds of conifer cones, but also mushrooms, flowers, leaves and buds
- Stores food in cache underground

### Adaptations:

- Camouflage colours
- Fast runner and climber
- Bushy tail to stay warm in the winter

### Fun Facts:

- Uses ground burrows in winter, and tree nests the rest of the year
- Defends territory year round

# iHuman: Be a Hero to Your Creativity

Catherine Broomfield



**iHuman Youth Society is a nonprofit organization that engages traumatized youth who exhibit high-risk lifestyles to foster positive personal development and social change.**

*The Gun Sculpture*, stemming from a millennium art exhibit and project in 1997 by two local artists, Sandra Bromley and Wallis Kendal, resulted in street youth becoming interested in art. With guidance from the artists, the youth began working on their own exhibit on anti-violence called *Red Tear*. Both exhibits were displayed concurrently at the then Edmonton Art Gallery. Following the completion of the exhibits, the youth petitioned to continue to express their voices on social justice issues through art; thus, iHuman was established.

*We are young people who range in age from 12 to 24. Many of us have lived in group homes, foster care or on the streets. We're considered youth at risk because we've had trouble with the law, and we haven't done all that well with staying in one place. We all have drug or alcohol problems, and some of us are struggling with being abused, or having to battle with problems such as attention deficit disorder. We all want the best, and we're trying to make that happen. That's where iHuman comes in. They have this cool place where we can work on making our dreams come true.*

—An iHuman youth

**At iHuman, we develop and implement innovative arts-based programming that functions as a positive engagement tool.** We seek to reintegrate youth into the community by developing skills, self-esteem and a sense of worth and ability through mentorship, crisis intervention and targeted programming. iHuman annually serves 500 youth in the Edmonton area aged 12–24 years. Aboriginal youth make up a significant portion

of our clients; however, we serve youth from every demographic and socioeconomic group.

**Our youth-driven programming engages head-on the issues of addictions and mental health with successful and meaningful impact on the youth and therefore the health of communities.** Our youth deal with toxic stress on a daily basis—poverty, homelessness, addiction use or abuse, mental health issues, fetal alcohol syndrome, gang affiliation or membership and familial neglect—which means that our youth are often known to the criminal justice or child welfare systems. A significant majority also exhibit some brain trauma or compromise to their brain development and functioning. These youth are already experiencing mental health challenges; however, because of the challenges listed above, they tend not to be patients of the mental health care system.

**Our harm reduction programs are innovative because we listen to the youth.** It is through their challenges that imaginative approaches are developed and piloted. We engage and encourage the youth to mentor their peers and contribute to our community in affirming ways. Artistic creativity is the engagement tool by which we create meaningful trust relationships with youth. Our brand promise “be a hero to creativity” offers an empowering call to action to traumatized youth who have seemingly lost everything. Our innovation was honoured in 2011 with a Duncan and Craig Gold

Laurel Award for creativity and innovation in nonprofit organizations. The high-risk youth uncensored drama-based program has youth develop and deliver a curriculum to train social service providers and authorities to engage in nonadversarial ways. This program was delivered to over 300 people in 2011.

**Fostering an environment of acceptance and encouragement where youth can challenge old habits and stigmas to start building toward healthier lives.** We advocate on behalf of youth to provide solutions and opportunities, working with them as a group, as well as providing individualized planning and programming based on each youth’s strengths and challenges. We never give up on a youth, knowing that creativity combined with authentic care can lead to many transformative changes. In 2012, we were honoured with the inaugural Lieutenant Governor’s Circle on Mental Health and Addictions True Imagination Award. A clean and sober group called Friday Night Challenge operates weekly using peer support to facilitate the development of a community-based solution to alcohol and illicit drug use among youth. Routinely, 15–20 youth attend to share their stories.

**We have street credibility.** By building trust and respect, encouraging dignity and developing a sense of belief and hope, iHuman is contributing to a safer community and innovative solutions that demonstrate positive outcomes that

reduce stigma, promote understanding and enable holistic treatment for a segment of our young population that is otherwise seen as a drain on society.

**iHuman is a living laboratory for incubating new and effective strategies for engaging youth in finding solutions to social justice issues that are systemic.** Our newest caring service is the establishment of the LiNKS Mental Health Clinic. Delivered through partnerships with professionals, agencies and postsecondary institutions, LiNKS can offer youth mental health and counselling support. Another partnership is developing with Harvard University. As a collaborator with us in a research project exploring the gaps and challenges Aboriginal and youth engaged in high risk behaviours have in the mainstream education system, we are developing models using experiential learning that will redefine and re-engage youth in their learning.

The words and lyrics of our youth say it best:

iHuman is improving me and hip  
hop has given me a reason  
To get up in the morning and keep  
on breathing  
And keep up my chin no matter the  
season  
And even if I have these diminishing  
feelings  
I just grab my pen and my pad and  
I hit an instrumental  
I hope that this track will help you  
remember  
that iHuman and youth will always  
stay together

—Chekm8

...Articles...

Honestly  
we mighta lost property  
but my raw spirit can never be  
robbed from me  
all of us prodigies  
living a life of hip hop  
Cause it means a lot to me  
More than just a hobby  
It's my daily vent  
Just like sustenance  
As I grab that pen and I represent  
iHuman my family my home  
where we make music that resonates  
a sense of hope  
—Deejay

In the coming months, iHuman will relocate to its new permanent facility with the help of many community and corporate heroes taking part in our All In! Edmonton Capital Project. To support our sustainable future visit the [hereosneedapply.org](http://hereosneedapply.org) website. If you're someone who enjoys making things strong, check out our [onemillionpushups.org](http://onemillionpushups.org) inaugural fundraiser. On August 30, 2014, be one of 1,000 heroes who will do 1,000 push-ups each in a single day to raise \$1,000,000 for iHuman.

Curious about how iHuman engages youth in a caring, creative and authentic way? Visit [ihuman.org](http://ihuman.org) and see what's happening in the studio.

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*Catherine Broomfield is passionate about investing in community well-being by supporting the needs of the individual. Inspired by social justice issues experienced as a child immigrant to Canada and later, as a teenage mother; she holds two bachelor degrees from the University of Alberta as well as a certificate in peace and post conflict. Broomfield is currently the executive director of iHuman Youth Society.*

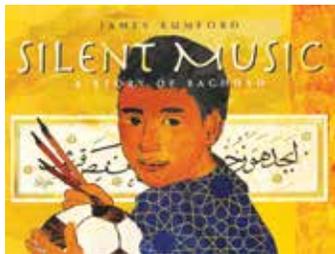
# Picture Books for Peace: Twelve of Our Favourite Picture Books<sup>1</sup>

Muna Saleh

In our teaching of graduate and undergraduate classes at the University of Alberta, we at the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development (CRTED) often start and end classes with picture books that pick up a thread or a theme related to the topic of each class. We have done this in the courses and activities during the Mahatma Gandhi Summer Institute on Building Peaceful Communities.<sup>2</sup> D Jean Clandinin, director of the CRTED, approached me one day and asked if I would like to blog about some of our favourite books related to peace building. And I am so happy that she did! My children and I approached this opportunity with excitement, exploring the following books over the course of the winter semester. Here, I invite you to live alongside us as we savoured these amazing picture books.

## **Book 1: *Silent Music***

Rumford, J. 2008. *Silent Music: A Story of Baghdad*. New York: Roaring Brook. ISBN-13 978-1-59643-276-5.

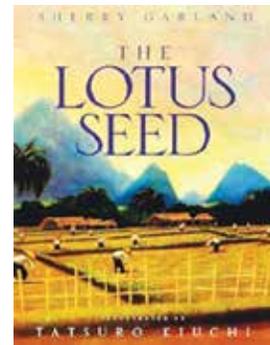


Alongside stunning illustrations, we are introduced to Ali, a young child of Iraqi descent, in this thought-provoking story. Ali loves soccer, music and dancing, but his passion lies in practising the art of Arabic calligraphy where he imagines the flowing words “stopping and starting, gliding and sweeping, leaping, dancing to the silent music in my head.” Halfway through the book, we were sad to learn that Ali lives in the midst of a violent war and, like his hero calligrapher, Yakut, Ali “shut out the horror and wrote glistening letters of rhythm and grace.” Rumford ended this beautiful story with Ali resolving to practise writing the word peace “until this word flows freely from my pen.”

As my children and I discussed the story following a tension-filled day for each one of us in some way, the children and I were left marvelling at how, similar to Ali’s calligraphy, reading stories about peace can help bring peace. We wondered at Ali’s ability to live salam amid the brutality around him, and we made connections to the types of things we can do, or can continue to do, to add a touch of silent, but beautiful, music to everyday life.

## **Book 2: *The Lotus Seed***

Garland, S. 1993. *The Lotus Seed*. San Diego, Calif: Harcourt Brace. ISBN 0-15-249465-0.



“My grandmother saw the emperor cry the day he lost his golden dragon throne.” With these words, my children and I were drawn into *The Lotus Seed*, a touching book by Sherry Garland. Illustrated by Tatsuro Kiuchi, the artwork, like the prose, is lovely in its quiet elegance.

With the lyrical narration of her future granddaughter guiding us, we travelled alongside Ba as a young girl as she moves from the palace grounds of Vietnam to the Imperial garden next to the River of Perfumes. There, Ba plucks a lotus seed from the garden to remember the young and final Vietnamese emperor and hides it under her family’s altar for safekeeping. This seed is Ba’s constant companion, with her even on her wedding day,

as a talisman “for good luck, long life, and many children.”

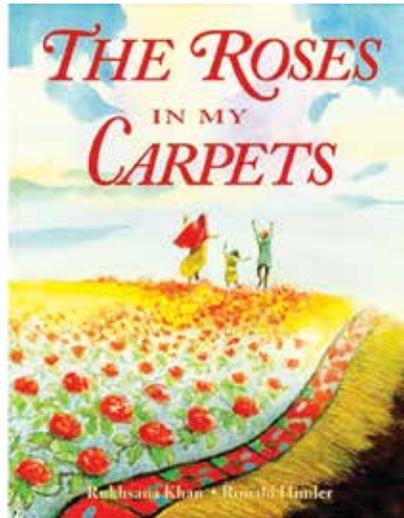
Our hearts constricted when we learned of the myriad ways that war irrevocably shifted the life Ba was composing with her loved ones. We could almost feel the lotus seed in our grasp as Ba chose to save it amid other valuables she could have saved the day “bombs fell all around,” and as Ba and her family were forced to flee their beloved home. The seed was safely hidden under the altar in her American home as Ba and her family worked hard to imagine and compose new lives in a foreign landscape. Without giving away too much of the book’s beautiful final pages, I will only say that our hearts were warmed by the way that Ba’s stories were honoured and woven within hope, love, remembrance and—of course—peace.

After we sat in silence for a few moments, always reluctant to part with a good story, we read the author’s note at the very back of the book and learned about some of the ways in which Ba’s experiences were rooted in historical events. My oldest child surprised me a little when she said that the book reminded her of her great-grandmother and how she was forced to leave her home—I was not aware that my grandmother had shared the story of becoming a refugee with her. We talked about the ways that Ba’s experiences may have been similar to my grandmother’s and to others who have been forced to leave their homes. We talked about how, like Ba and her family, we could be in affinity with, and honour, them by

planting seeds of peace whenever, wherever and however we can.

**Book 3: *The Roses in My Carpets***

Khan, R. 1998. *The Roses in My Carpets*. Toronto: Stoddart. ISBN 0-7737-3092-3.



There are some books that sit with you long after you close the cover. *The Roses in My Carpets*, by Rukhsana Khan, is, for me, definitely that kind of a book. Narrated amid Ronald Himler’s haunting illustrations, the book is a heart-wrenching rendition of the effects of loss, trauma, poverty and displacement in the wake of war from the perspective of a young Afghan boy living in a refugee camp in Pakistan.

My children and I have read this story together several times, but the first few lines of the book always draw us into the young narrator’s plight: “It’s always the same. The jets scream overhead. They’ve seen me.” Waking up to find himself next to his mother and sister in their mud home, the young boy is haunted not only by the recurring nightmare, but by feelings of shame for accepting the help of an

anonymous sponsor. He feels that his late father would not have approved because “he would never have taken aid from a sponsor.”

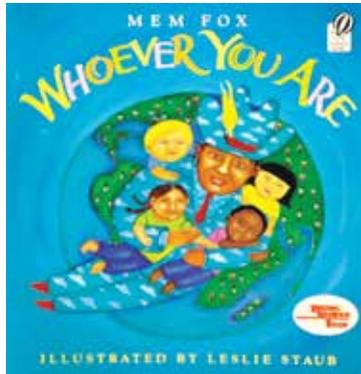
Our young friend is determined to cast this assistance off by becoming a “master craftsman” with his skill in carpet weaving. Carpet weaving, however, means a lot more to him than just financial independence. Much like the striking roses in the carpets he weaves, the practice of weaving is the main source of beauty and peace in his life: “When I am weaving I can escape the jets, the nightmares—everything. As if with my fingers I create a world the war cannot touch. A paradise like the one where my father is.”

We all seemed to experience a visceral sense of life within the story as we read about the early morning “eerie cry of the muezzin”; the way the plastic handle of the heavy water bucket cuts into the flesh; the seeming futility of washing up amid mud walls, floors and surroundings; sitting on classroom mats that chafe the skin; cars whizzing by recklessly on narrow streets—it is always so hard to awake from the world that Khan has so vividly depicted.

The story ends on a hopeful note after a heart-stopping event disrupts the boy’s world yet again. My children always ask after every single reading, “Is this a true story?” Each time they ask, I tell them that it is based on a true story,<sup>3</sup> and that it really feels true to me. My son said that he wishes the boy will be able to make a lot of beautiful roses and dream only good dreams in the future. I think this is a wish we all share.

**Book 4: *Whoever You Are***

Fox, M. 1997. *Whoever You Are*. New York: Harcourt. ISBN 0-15-216406-5.



With wonderful picture books like *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge* (1984) and *Harriet, You'll Drive Me Wild* (2000), it's no wonder that we're fans of Mem Fox. Always on the lookout for books that we can highlight in this blog, I recently came across *Whoever You Are*, by Mem Fox, and fell in love. Leslie Staub's extremely vivid and unique illustrations, along with a surprisingly lyrical text, contribute to the simple, yet extremely poignant, story of the book.

Accompanied by Fox's poetic prose, Leslie Staub's narrator (a cowboy clad in a cloud-patterned suit) travels to different places around the world to assure children that —while we may come from different places, with different types of homes, families, schools, skin colours, languages and lives—we share so much:

Joys are the same, and love is the same. Pain is the same, and blood is the same. Smiles are the same, and hearts are just the same—wherever they are, wherever you are, wherever we are, all over the world.

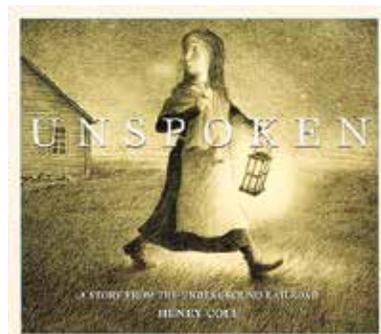
I think the reason why I really appreciated this picture book, and why I see so many ways that it could resonate with children (and adults!) in our classrooms, is that our commonalities are emphasized without disregarding the very real differences that contribute to how we story ourselves. Through her narrator, Fox shares her belief that it is possible to honour the myriad ways, not always visible, that we are different whilst honouring our shared humanity.

Reading this book with my children was especially enjoyable. They asked me to read the book a second time ("more slow") so they could have time to delight in and savour the artwork. My eldest was even inspired to compose this illustration in response to the story:



**Book 5: *Unspoken***

Cole, H. 2012. *Unspoken: A Story from the Underground Railroad*. New York: Scholastic. ISBN 978-0-545-39997-5.



The stunning graphite illustrations in Henry Cole's wordless picture book, *Unspoken: A Story from the Underground Railroad*, tell an amazing story of courage, compassion and friendship. Set in Virginia during America's Civil War era, the story begins with illustrations of a star-patterned quilt atop a barnyard fence (symbolic of the North Star and freedom) and the lingering gaze of a young girl.

The young girl had been leading a cow through the fields of her family's farm when soldiers (carrying a Confederate flag) trot by on their horses. Her lingering gaze, directed at the passing group of soldiers, suggests that she suspects something is amiss.

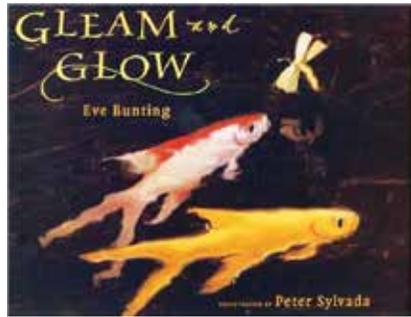
As she continues her chores, the girl seems to sense another presence with her in the barn somehow. She turns around to see an eye gazing at her from within a pile of cornstalks. The young girl rushes away, obviously frightened. As the story unfolds, however, we witness her courageously stealing away from her (seemingly?) unsuspecting family to offer the escapee nourishment. She continues helping the escapee even as search parties come by offering a reward for his or her capture. In the final few illustrations, the girl travels to see her secret friend, only to find.... (Now, you didn't think I would give away the ending did you?)

While the author's note at the back contextualizes many of the book's details, even the youngest readers will be able to connect with the hauntingly stunning illustrations

because, as the author makes clear, the two main characters “speak without words.”

**Book 6: *Gleam and Glow***

Bunting, E. 2001. *Gleam and Glow*. San Diego, Calif: Harcourt. ISBN 0-15-202596-0.



Looking at the cover of the book *Gleam and Glow*, by Eve Bunting, one might understandably assume that the story revolves around two fish in some way. And to some extent it does, but in a roundabout, tear-jerkingly beautiful way. With his oil-based illustrations, Peter Sylvada’s evocative artwork poignantly accompanies Bunting’s prose to tell a story that resonates long after it is read.

“When Papa left to join the underground, Marina cried. To be truthful, Mama and I cried, too.” With these words, Bunting invited me and my children to come alongside eight-year-old Victor, his mother, father and five-year-old sister Marina. We quickly learned that joining the underground meant “fighting secretly ... on top of the ground” and that Victor’s father was on his way to join the Liberation Army. We were very saddened to see Victor’s father leaving (one of Sylvada’s truly haunting illustrations) and then were frightened to hear of the impending

arrival of enemy soldiers that meant Victor, Marina and their mother would need to leave their home and escape to a neighbouring country.

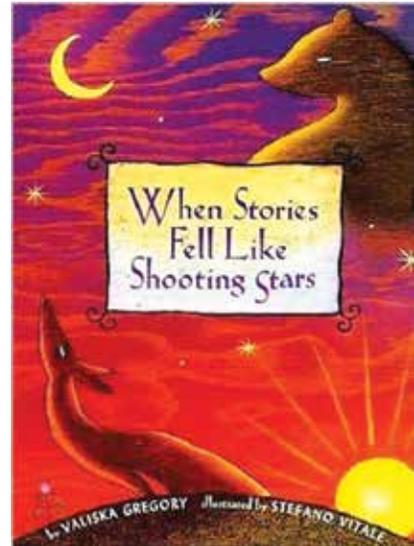
While all of this was happening, a number of people stopped to rest at Victor’s house on their way to the border. One of these strangers left a bowl with two fish at Victor’s house because it was becoming too difficult to carry. Marina and Victor became attached to the fish during the few days they were able to care for it (“It seemed to me that all the light of the world was trapped inside that glass bowl”), and Marina named the fish Gleam and Glow.

Sadly, the children were forced to leave their home soon after, and Victor decided to release Gleam and Glow into the family’s pond, quietly wishing them “one or two extra days of life.” After walking to the border and then spending time in a refugee camp, Victor’s family is finally reunited and then return home to find ... (it was a beautiful, simultaneously painful and hopeful, ending).

*Gleam and Glow* portrays the life-wrenching experience of being forced to flee one’s home and country in a vivid, yet not overly graphic, way. It was only after reading Bunting’s note on the very last page that we learned that Gleam and Glow was inspired by a “true and magical story” of similar events during the Bosnian war. Bunting emphasizes, however, “My version is not only a story for a particular country or people— it’s for people everywhere who have been forced from the lives they have known, and who find hope in the most unexpected places.”

**Book 7: *When Stories Fell Like Shooting Stars***

Gregory, V. 1996. *When Stories Fell Like Shooting Stars*. New York: Simon & Schuster. ISBN 0-689-80012-6.



The title of Valiska Gregory’s book alongside Stefano Vitale’s striking oil-on-wood paintings compelled me to read *When Stories Fell Like Shooting Stars*. And I am so glad that I did. I was awed (I am still awed) by Gregory’s enchanting prose and by the puzzle she sets for readers on the very first page:<sup>4</sup>

“Long ago, when Earth was new  
and sky was black as printer’s  
ink,  
two stories fell like shooting  
stars—  
one told of Fox, one told of  
Bear,  
and only you can say which story  
is true.”

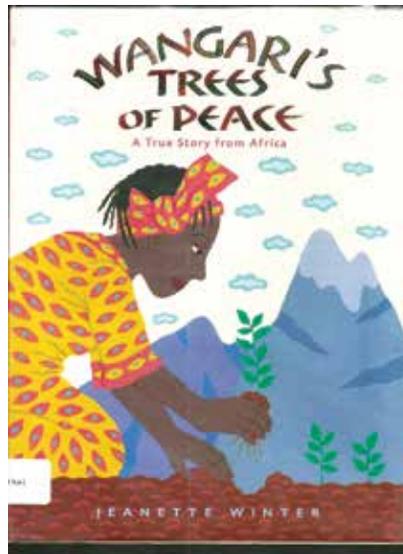
The book comprises two fables. Fox’s story is told first. We learn how Fox looked up one day to see Sun fall “from its cradle of clouds” only to become entangled in a tree

like “a glittering coin, caught in a many-fingered net.” Momentarily in shock and disbelief, Fox quickly recovered his senses and “sewed a cloth big enough to cover the tree.” He gathered all the animals together and proclaimed that from that day forward, using his cloth to cover and uncover Sun, he would control day and night. That initial selfish, power-seeking act begets many others and soon the animals were at war, mired in violence, fear, and destruction ... and “no one remembered Sun, still caught like a beating heart in the hands of the tree.”

Bear’s (counter) story is told next. Bear was awakened one night to see Moon “slip through a buttonhole of sky and fall to his feet as if it were a ball no bigger than your hand.” Some of the animals thought that they should divide the moon for everyone to own, or that they should try to see what they would find inside of Moon. However, Bear, being the one who “knew the old stories best,” reminded the animals that they needed to care for Moon, not claim ownership. The rest of the fable tells how the animals work together with care, concern and patience to make sure that Moon returned home to “hang like an opal in an ebony sky, shining.”

So, my friends, I ask myself and I ask you, Which story is true?

**Book 8: *Wangari’s Trees of Peace: A True Story from Africa***  
Winter, J. 2008. *Wangari’s Trees of Peace: A True Story from Africa*. Orlando, Fla: Harcourt. ISBN 978-0-15-206545-4.



Written and illustrated by Jeanette Winter, *Wangari’s Trees of Peace: A True Story from Africa* is an inspirational story brimming with determination, community and possibility. The story is based on events in the life of Wangari Maathai (1940–2011), founder of the Green Belt Movement and winner of the 1994 Nobel Peace Prize.<sup>5</sup>

Delighting in stories based on actual events (“Is this a true story, Mama?”), we eagerly read about Wangari, a girl who “lives under an umbrella of green trees in the shadow of Mount Kenya in Africa.” Joining Wangari in her day-to-day activities, we gain a sense of her deep love for—and connection to—her family, community and beautiful Kenyan landscape.

Winning a scholarship, Wangari travels to America to pursue postsecondary education. Upon her return, however, Wangari is distressed to find her once-green Kenyan community barren. We are pained alongside her as she wonders, “What has happened? ... Where are the trees?”

Wangari learns that the trees had been cleared to make space for construction, a process that neglected planting trees to replace those that had been cut down. Starting individually, and then joined by the women of her community and other communities in Kenya, Wangari plants tree after tree in an attempt to reverse the devastating effects of deforestation. Her resolve is tested when she is imprisoned following ongoing acts of defiance, yet Wangari knows that “right is right, even if you’re alone.”

Wangari, however, is far from alone. Even during her imprisonment, more and more Kenyan women continue to plant seedlings until ... (a truly inspirational ending!). The author’s note highlighted an excerpt from Wangari’s Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech that, for me, really speaks to building peaceful communities: “We are called to assist the Earth to heal her wounds and in the process heal our own—indeed, to embrace the whole creation in all its diversity, beauty and wonder.”

**Book 9: *The Arrival***  
Tan, S. 2006. *The Arrival*. New York: Arthur A Levine Books. ISBN 10 0-439-89529-4.



*The Arrival*, by Shaun Tan, is one of those books that you cannot help but live again and again. I purposely write the word *live*, for I can't shake the feeling that I travel to so many worlds every time I turn the pages of this wordless picture book/graphic novel.<sup>6</sup>

Tan's surreal, intricate and incredibly creative illustrations less tell a story than invite readers to travel alongside the main character as he embarks upon a journey to a new land. Inspired by his father's story of migrating from Malaysia to Australia, other stories of migration by family and friends, and by historical images from many places—including Australia, New York and postwar Europe—Tan artfully weaves these diverse inspirations to create a heart-tugging unforgettable story.

My children and I travelled with Tan's protagonist as he leaves his family (the emotion-filled goodbye scenes stay with me long after I lay the book down) and his homeland to board a train, and then a ship, headed for a new land. The illustrations ingeniously guided us in gaining a sense of the passage of time, the confusion and the loneliness felt by many newcomers to lands all around the world as they journey away from the familiar toward the—at least momentarily—strange. We met other newcomers along the way who, in quite striking ways, share the stories of their journey to this unfamiliar terrain.

*The Arrival* is sometimes sad, sometimes funny and sometimes downright haunting, but always meaningful as you are required—perhaps more than you would in

other works because of the absence of words—to lay your stories alongside those of the characters. I found myself thinking of my father (the first person in our extended family to immigrate to Canada) as I turned the pages, wondering if he felt the nerves and profound confusion I felt as Tan's character stepped off the boat and into the dizzying mixture of confining vastness. I wondered if he experienced that initial heady sense of strangeness and when and how that sense waned for him enough to call Canada (as I know he now does) home.

#### **Book 10: *The Composition***

Skármeta, A. 2000.

*The Composition*.

Toronto: Groundwood.

ISBN 0-88899-390-0.



“Am I against the dictatorship?” is the tension-filled question nine-year-old Pedro grapples with in this thought-provoking story by Antonio Skármeta. Alongside candid, yet elegantly understated, illustrations by Alfonso Ruano, *The Composition* narrates the tale of young Pedro's awakening to an uncomfortable truth.

The story begins with our young friend's disappointment in receiving a plastic soccer ball for his birthday, rather than the leather one with

white-and-black patches (“like the ones real soccer players used”) he had been hoping for. In these first few pages, we appreciate just how much Pedro loves playing soccer with his friends (some of the dialogue is pretty humorous). We also, however, get the immediate sense that something is somehow off in this unnamed landscape, as we learn that soldiers are a constant presence in the streets and that Pedro's parents huddle together over the radio every evening to listen to voices from “a long way away.”

The first major disruption for Pedro is the day he witnesses his friend Daniel's father “being dragged down the street” by two soldiers. Pedro asks why this happened, and Daniel replies it is because his father is “against the dictatorship.” Pedro is unsure what this means, and Daniel explains, “They want the country to be free. For the army not to be the government.” Deeply troubled, Pedro decides to wait for his father's return from work here:

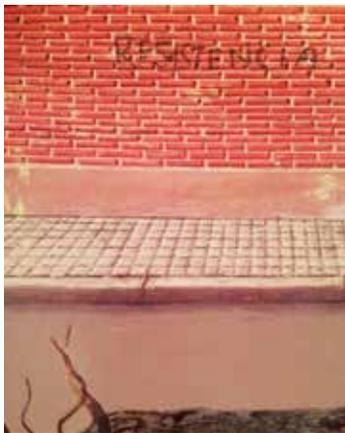


For me, this wall is strikingly symbolic, representing so many of the walls—both past and present, real and metaphoric—that have been constructed out of arrogance, hatred and fear.

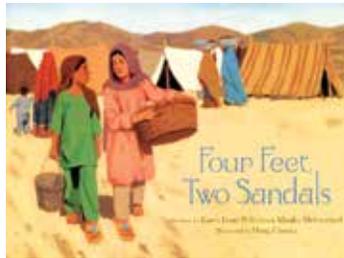
We accompany Pedro and his father home and experience an extremely tense evening in which the earlier events of the day hang as a heavy spectre over the family. Pedro, confused and anxious, questions whether his parents are “against the dictatorship” and, if so, whether he should be as well. His mother’s touching response highlights what children across the globe should rightfully be able to expect from a humane world.

All of these tensions seem to converge the next day when a military man, Captain Romo, invites/orders the children in Pedro’s class to write a composition entitled “What my family does at night.” He, quite disturbingly, offers the child “who writes the very best” a gold medal, a sash and flag-bearing honours. Reflecting upon the events and discussions of the previous day, Pedro writes ... [I will stop there since that’s the best part!]

OK, friends, here is a little hint: This is another wall, featured toward the end of the story, tattooed with the Spanish word for “resistance.” This image inspires me and compels me to believe that we can live a story of resistance to all the walls that separate us.



**Book 11: *Four Feet, Two Sandals***  
Williams, K L, and K Mohammed.  
2007. *Four Feet, Two Sandals*.  
Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans.  
ISBN 978-0-8028-5296.



Inspired by a girl who asked why there were no books about refugees like her, *Four Feet, Two Sandals* is a story of love and friendship in the face of sacrifice and separation. Coauthored by Karen Lynn Williams and Khadra Mohammed, the story unfolds alongside Doug Chayka’s lovely acrylic-based illustrations.

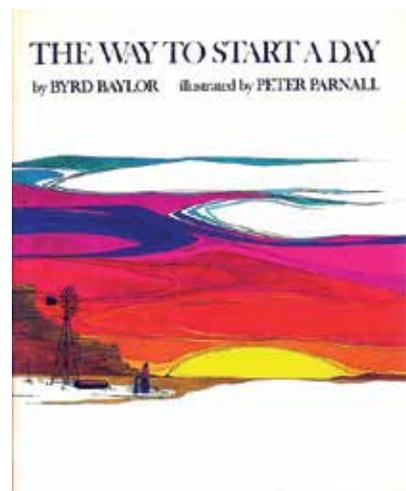
We first meet 10-year-old Lina, an Afghan girl living in the Peshawar refugee camp in Pakistan, as she races to secure something she could use from the most recent relief agency delivery. After the initial rush to claim clothing, Lina discovers one lone sandal amid the clearing dust. Having walked around the camp barefoot for the past two years, Lina looks around for the sandal’s mate and finds it adorning the foot of another young girl standing nearby. Lina tries to engage the girl by greeting her with an invocation of peace (“As-salaam alaykum”), but the young girl’s only response was to stare and then turn away from Lina.

The next morning, as Lina was in the midst of completing some of her chores, the young girl with the matching sandal approaches her and

offers to give Lina her sandal. Lina tells the girl, whose name is Feroza, that they can share the sandals. Feroza asks, “What good is one sandal for two feet?” to which Lina responds, “You can wear them today and I will wear them tomorrow ... four feet, two sandals.”

The rest of the book narrates the tale of their growing friendship until there is an unexpected interruption that changes the course of their lives and friendship forever. While I cannot in good conscious ruin the ending, I can tell you the interruption is a mostly positive one, with one bittersweet repercussion. I will leave you with this thought-provoking line from the authors’ note at the back: “Though this story is based on a camp in Peshawar, the experiences of children like Lina and Feroza are shared by refugees around the world.”

**Book 12: *The Way to Start a Day***  
Baylor, B. 1978. *The Way to Start a Day*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons.  
ISBN 0-684-15651-2.



I absolutely love Byrd Baylor's work, especially *The Way to Start a Day* and *The Other Way to Listen* (it was so hard to choose which of these two books to profile!). Both stories unfold as poems beautifully illustrated by Peter Parnall, and both underscore the importance of peaceful and loving relationships with ourselves, each other, nature and our environment. But the opening line in *The Way to Start a Day* may have tilted the scales a bit in its favour:

"The way to start a day is this—  
Go outside  
and face the east  
and greet the sun  
with some kind of blessing  
or chant  
or song  
that you made yourself  
and keep for  
early morning."

And so the enchanting intermingling of Baylor's poetry and Parnall's illustrations continues, explaining that "a morning needs to be sung to. A new day needs to be honored" and how people—from all

over the globe, in times past and present—have honoured the blessings of a new day. May we all honour the blessings of every new day, may we embody peace in all of our interactions and may we be this kind of person that Baylor envisioned:

"and you'll be  
one more person  
in one more place  
at one more time  
in the world  
saying  
hello to the sun,  
letting it know you are there."

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*Muna Saleh is a PhD student in the Faculty of Elementary Education at the University of Alberta (U of A). She is also a member of the U of A's Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development within the Faculty of Education. Saleh draws upon her rich experience as a parent, student, teacher, administrator and school board member in in her doctoral work. She is looking forward to engaging in narrative inquiry alongside several Muslim students, families and teachers in the near future. She can be contacted at mhsaleh@ualberta.ca.*

## Notes

1. An online version of this piece is available at the University of Alberta's Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development (CRTED): [www.elementaryed.ualberta.ca/Centres/CRTED.aspx](http://www.elementaryed.ualberta.ca/Centres/CRTED.aspx).

2. More information about the Mahatma Gandhi Summer Institute can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/kbcs4vo>.

3. Rukhsana Khan explains her inspiration for the story here: [www.rukhsanakhan.com/articles/politicsandchildrensbooks.html](http://www.rukhsanakhan.com/articles/politicsandchildrensbooks.html).

4. Read more about "The story behind the story" here: [www.valiskagregory.com/Website-Val/Stars2.html](http://www.valiskagregory.com/Website-Val/Stars2.html).

5. For more information about the Green Belt Movement and Wangari Maathai, please visit this page: [www.greenbeltmovement.org/wangari-maathai](http://www.greenbeltmovement.org/wangari-maathai).

6. Shaun Tan describes *The Arrival* as more of a graphic novel (and other contextual details) here: [www.shauntan.net/books/the-arrival.html](http://www.shauntan.net/books/the-arrival.html).

# Resources

## Art and Nature at the Leighton Art Centre

At the Leighton Art Centre we grow artists! Our unique programs provide teachers and students the opportunity to combine hands-on art lessons with the grandeur of nature in the Alberta foothills. Just 20 minutes south of the Calgary city limits, the centre encompasses three historic art studios, art gallery and museum. Situated in the original home of artists A C and Barbara Leighton, the centre provides a vibrant display of Alberta's artists past and present. The centre was established by Barbara Leighton in 1970 and was incorporated as a society in 1974.

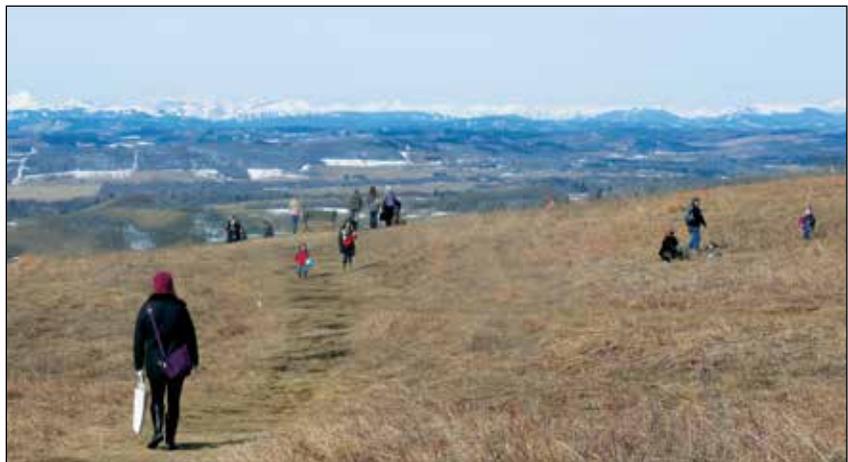
The four-hour on-site school program combines touring and learning about art in the centre's museum and gallery with art lessons in a variety of mediums including

acrylic, clay and wire. Artist and teacher Chad Pratch is the program's director. A graduate of both a fine arts program and education, he is able to use his teaching skills with his real-life art experience to give students a structured and exciting experience. Instructor Scot Paisley is a graduate from the Alberta College of Art and Design with extensive experience in portraiture. Both Pratch and Paisley share the vision of promoting visual literacy, thoughtful observation and critical thinking to help interpret artworks and gain inspiration from the landscape around us. Students will enjoy a nature walk while recording their thoughts and experiences in their own handmade sketchbook.

The mission of the centre is to inspire an appreciation of art and

nature and to discover the connection between the two. We believe deeply in carrying on Barbara Leighton's dream to "unleash the art in everyone." Here at the Leighton Art Centre, nature is our inspiration, our classroom and our playground.

The centre is open to the public year-round and offers a wide range of programming, including a school program, weekend art programs for children, summer camp, adult workshops, professional artist workshops, lectures, contemporary art exhibitions, rotating museum displays, art sales and special events. Museum and gallery hours are Tuesday to Saturday 10 AM-4 PM. For more information, please see our website at [www.leightoncentre.org](http://www.leightoncentre.org) or call 403-931-3636.



# TREX

The basic aim of the TREX (Travelling Exhibition) program as it is currently organized is to take art beyond the wall and the art teacher: to make as available as possible this important cultural resource and make it accessible for use to all subject teachers and all viewers, regardless of their actual knowledge of or experience with art. TREX is accompanied by an Education Interpretive Guide which is the venue's to keep. These valuable resources provide reference images for the works in an exhibition, information on the artists (biographies, artist statements) whose works are included in the exhibition and hands-on art-making projects that relate to the works in the exhibition. Guides produced by the Art Gallery of Alberta also include art curriculum and cross-curriculum connections and art

historical and other information related to the theme and works of AGA-produced exhibitions, enabling classroom teachers to make the TREX program an integral component of their classroom instruction.

The AFA Travelling Exhibition program is managed by three art institutions and one art association. To inquire about booking an exhibition for your venue/school, please contact the TREX manager concerned.

- Northwest Region (Jasper to High Level area): Art Gallery of Grande Prairie, Grande Prairie. TREX manager/curator: Todd Schaber, phone 780-357-7483
- Northeast and North Central Region (Lacombe to Fort McMurray/Lloydminster): Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton. TREX manager/curator: Shane Golby, phone 780-428-3830

- Southwest Region (Red Deer, Calgary to High River/Banff area): Alberta Society of Artists, Calgary. TREX manager/curator: Caroline Loewen, phone 403-262-4669
- Southeast Region (Medicine Hat, Lethbridge to Waterton area): Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre, Medicine Hat. TREX manager/curator: Xanthe Isbister, phone 403-502-8586

Each TREX region publishes a booking catalogue concerning exhibitions available for the upcoming season (September to August) in May/June of each year. This catalogue is mailed to active venues and placed on each institution's website. If interested in booking an exhibition, please contact the manager/curator of your region to confirm that your school is on the mailing list and check the website of the institution concerned. Exhibitions book up quickly.

## Alberta Foundation for the Arts

# TRAVELLING EXHIBITION PROGRAM

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA) has supported a provincial travelling exhibition program since 1981. The mandate of the AFA Travelling Exhibition Program is to provide every Albertan with the opportunity to enjoy visual art exhibitions in their community. Three regional galleries and one arts organization coordinate the program for the AFA:

**Northwest Region:** The Art Gallery of Grande Prairie, Grande Prairie

**Northeast and North Central Region:** The Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton

**Southwest Region:** The Alberta Society of Artists, Calgary

**Southeast Region:** The Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre, Medicine Hat



**Government  
of Alberta** ■



Each year, more than 300,000 Albertans enjoy many exhibitions in communities ranging from High Level in the north to Milk River in the south and virtually everywhere in between. The AFA Travelling Exhibition Program also offers educational support material to help educators integrate the visual arts into the school curriculum.

Exhibitions for the TRES program are curated from a variety of sources, including private and public collections. A major part of the program assists in making the AFA's extensive art collection available to Albertans. This growing art collection consists of over 8,000 artworks showcasing the creative talents of more than 2000 artists. As the only provincial art collection in Alberta, the AFA collection reflects the development of the vibrant visual arts community in the province and has become an important cultural legacy for all Albertans.



# Voices of Nature

Voices of Nature School Music Programs are produced and led by singer/songwriters Holly Arntzen and Kevin Wright of the Artist Response Team (ART). The program draws on a library of eco-songs created by ART since 1989—songs about oceans, rivers, forests, bears, salmon, climate change, endangered species, recycling and related social issues. They are not kids' song per se, but youth invariably embrace the music and sing it with all their hearts.

Music is the medium. Songs are the message. Artists and children are the messengers. The result is joyous and effective action.

Voices of Nature is an integrated, cross-curricular, project-based approach to ecological learning through music. ART provides customized rehearsal CDs; students

learn songs over 6–12 weeks. Holly Arntzen and Kevin Wright arrive in the school for a four-day artist in residency to rehearse with students. Students write about the issues raised in the songs and what they believe people can do to help. The culmination is a professional concert for families and friends, where every child is put in a leadership role to sing out and speak up for nature.

Watch live concert videos at [www.artistresponseteam.com](http://www.artistresponseteam.com).

Teachers are given ART's award-winning Educators' Handbooks ([www.artistresponseteam.com/handbooks/](http://www.artistresponseteam.com/handbooks/)); they provide activities in many subjects that are linked to the song lyrics and fulfill prescribed learning outcomes. Their newest project is the Urban Mining song video and student and teacher

handbook. The song is about recovery of materials. The handbook makes the connections between natural resources, recycling, reducing our carbon footprint and protecting oceans. Go to [www.artistresponseteam.com/educators-schools/](http://www.artistresponseteam.com/educators-schools/) to view the Urban Mining video filmed in Edmonton's Jubilee Auditorium, and download the free pdf file for the handbook: [www.artistresponseteam.com/handbooks/urbanmining/](http://www.artistresponseteam.com/handbooks/urbanmining/).

It's been two weeks since you left our school and your beautiful songs are still ringing in our hallways. Wow! What a tremendous impact your Voices of Nature program has made on our students, both in song and in their thinking. I've heard more mature, thought-provoking conversations in the past three weeks than I've heard in my entire teaching career. You found a way to probe our senses and touch our collective conscience. Teachers and students alike are reflecting about important environmental issues that we can no longer ignore.

—Katherine Key,  
*music specialist, Kelowna, BC*

For more information, please contact Holly Arntzen or Kevin Wright at [artistresponseteam@shaw.ca](mailto:artistresponseteam@shaw.ca); phone 604-385-4667.



# Professional Development

## Watercolour and Photography Courses

### Courses at the Devonian Botanic Garden

#### Willie Wong Watercolour Courses

Join Willie Wong, a renowned Edmonton artist, for a day of watercolour fun at the University of Alberta Devonian Botanic Garden. Courses are suitable for all levels, from eager beginners to more experienced painters. Wong's techniques are easily taught to children. A short supply list will be sent at time of registration.

Fee for each course is \$60. Please go to [www.devonian.ualberta.ca](http://www.devonian.ualberta.ca) to register.

#### Clematis

The clematis is one of the favourite perennials in Canadian gardens with many colours to choose from. Learn to draw the basic form of the flowers and paint them vertically on an elongated piece of paper.

Course Number 38WW  
June 22, 2014 (Sunday)  
10 AM–4 PM

#### Flooded Road

After a summer rain, the rural lane is slightly flooded with the early morning sun shining from the side. Refreshing and sleepy, you can even hear the birds.

Course Number 39WW  
July 6, 2014 (Sunday)  
10 AM–4 PM

#### Pansies and Daisies

A lovely combination of purple, yellow and white in a blue willow jar brings back a hint of romance from the Victorian era.

Course Number 40 WW  
July 20, 2014 (Sunday)  
10 AM–4 PM

#### Seascape and Waves

Who wouldn't want to sit in front of an ocean watching waves hitting the rocks and smelling the sea breeze? This class will teach you how to create a peaceful painting of an ultimate escape!

Course Number 42WW  
August 10, 2014 (Sunday)  
10 AM–4 PM

#### Dragonfly on Asiatic Lily

It was a hit last year, and we are again offering this irresistible course on how to draw and paint a

dragonfly. A special insect deserves to be immortalized on paper.

Course Number 43WW  
August 24, 2014 (Sunday)  
10 AM–4 PM

#### Birch Trees–Big Format

Using masking tape, this class will help you create a beautiful painting of birch trees that will be perfect for your or anyone's living room wall!

Course Number 45WW  
September 7, 2014 (Sunday)  
10 AM–4 PM

#### Fall Trees with Distant Mountains

The contrast of yellow and black in this painting will dramatize the whole landscape, with snow-covered mountains looking down from beyond.

Course Number 49WW  
September 21, 2014 (Sunday)  
10 AM–4 PM

#### Leaves, Rocks, Snow and Mountain Ash Berries

A typical early winter ground—fallen leaves on rocks, half covered with snow and a splash of red berries to cheer your heart.

Course Number 52WW  
October 5, 2014 (Sunday)  
10 AM–4 PM

## Photography

### A Beginner's Photography Workshop

This is the perfect course for anyone who is learning how to hold a camera or has tried photography with poor results. The course will study camera basics and great photography techniques. Digital and regular film cameras welcome.

Course Number 07NB

Instructor: Nathan Burge

Fee \$120

**Session 1:** March 15–16, 2014  
(Saturday and Sunday) 9 AM–4 PM

**Session 2:** September 13–14,  
2014 (Saturday and Sunday)  
9 AM–4 PM

### New! Intermediate Level Photography Workshop

Increase your photography knowledge and skill in this weekend workshop designed for those who have already taken an introductory photography course. Digital and regular film cameras welcome.

Course Number 50NB

October 4–5, 2014 (Saturday and Sunday) 9 AM–4 PM

Instructor: Nathan Burge

Fee \$120

Please go to [www.devonian.ualberta.ca](http://www.devonian.ualberta.ca) to register.

## Course at the University of Alberta

EDCT 400 (51560)

Photography and Graphic Design  
Summer session July 7–25, 1–4 PM  
each day

Instructor: Ron Wigglesworth

Studio course exploring photography—aesthetics and elements of design, simple animation and graphic design using digital manipulation. Register at the U of A website. For more information, e-mail [rwigglesworth@ualberta.net](mailto:rwigglesworth@ualberta.net).

# Activities and Contests

## GEOEC Photo Contest

We are happy to announce the first ever (I think!) GEOEC photo contest! We hope that you will send us your photos from your travels this summer, both near and far. Please select one of the following categories to submit your entry to:

**Alberta Parks**—Our parks are a huge part of our Canadian identity, and we are blessed to have several in our province. We would like to showcase some of these special areas in this category.

**Wildlife**—It always amazes me how some people are able to get incredible shots of the wildlife that share this world with us. This category will include both the flora and the fauna that are found in our province. Please include the common name of the species in your photo if possible.

**The Trail Less Travelled**—For this category, we are looking for images that capture that phrase, whether they are environmental or cultural in

nature. Please include a brief description that justifies why you have entered your photo in this category.

**Celebrating Culture**—We are so fortunate to be able to experience so many different cultures right here in Alberta. We also have many globe-trotting teachers who travel both for pleasure and for service. Your entry in this category should highlight the global flavour of our province and beyond.

**Controversial Issue**—Here is a chance to highlight something that you feel passionate about—something that affects your life as an Albertan. Please include a short description of the issue and your stand on it.

**Bring the Wild to Town**—This category should highlight the “wild” in the city, whether that be wild creatures or wild plants. We need nature to be accessible to us in our man-made world!

Please e-mail your entry as a JPEG with a subject title of GEOEC photo contest to [antonella.bell@ualberta.ca](mailto:antonella.bell@ualberta.ca) and include the following:

- Name and address
- Category submitted to
- Date and place taken
- A short paragraph describing the event that led to the photo
- One sentence or phrase that captures your photo and will be published with it

If you have people in your photos, please obtain their permission by having them sign the FOIP form that can be found on our website ([www.geoec.org](http://www.geoec.org)), and include this form when you submit your entry. Entries must be submitted by September 30, and the winners will be notified by October 30. The winning entries will be published in the next issue of *Connections* and will possibly be used to make a calendar for members.

Looking forward to seeing your photos! Have a wonderful summer!

# Global, Environmental & Outdoor Education Council

## Mission Statement

To promote involvement in quality global, environmental and outdoor education

## Objectives

- To provide a vehicle for Alberta teachers for professional development and communication in global, environmental and outdoor education
- To study and make professional recommendations about global, environmental and outdoor education issues
- To network with other provincial organizations that have similar concerns

## Membership

- Regular member—Active and Associate members of the Alberta Teachers' Association, as specified in ATA bylaws, are entitled to full privileges of council membership including the rights to vote and to hold office.
- Student member—Student members of the ATA are entitled to all benefits and services of council membership except the right to hold office.
- GEOEC members may also choose to belong to the Canadian Network for Environmental Education and Communication (EECOM) for an additional fee.
- ATA members may sign up for a GEOEC membership through the ATA website as their choice of one free specialist council membership included in the ATA annual fee.
- ATA members and subscribers may also sign up for a GEOEC membership and pay a fee determined by the GEOEC executive. From time to time the executive may decrease the fee to provide incentives for membership recruitment.

## Subscribers

- Persons who are not ATA members as specified by ATA bylaws receive all the benefits and services

of council membership except the rights to vote and hold office. Subscribers do have the right to serve as community liaisons on the council executive.

## Publications

- The GEOEC recognizes the wide range of interests among members and strives to foster the exchange of ideas and provide information and articles relating to the various components of the elementary and secondary curricula through the publication of *Connections*.
- The GEOEC maintains a website in order to publish timely information and provide access to like-minded organizations and individuals.

## Annual Conference

- The annual conference features a blend of activities, indoors and outdoors, ranging from hands-on workshops to social gatherings. All grade levels are represented in sessions. The emphasis is on practical information and application. The annual general meeting of the GEOEC is held in conjunction with the conference.

## Executive

- Members are elected to serve on the GEOEC executive.
- Contact the president or past president of the GEOEC through the ATA office if you are interested in seeking a position.
- Elections take place at the annual general meeting during the annual conference.

## Workshops

- Various activities and workshops are organized by the GEOEC either as standalone events or in conjunction with other organizations.

### Join now and become involved in the Global, Environmental & Outdoor Education Council

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Alberta Teaching Certificate No \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_  
School or Employer \_\_\_\_\_ Grade Level/Specialty \_\_\_\_\_  
 New Membership  Renewal of Membership  
 \$25.00 Regular Membership  
 \$12.50 Student Membership  
 \$30 Subscription  
 \$10 EECOM Membership (in addition to GEOEC membership)

Make cheque payable to the Alberta Teachers' Association and mail it with the application to the Association at 11010 142 Street NW, Edmonton AB T5N 2R1.

# Permission for Use of Photographs or Student Work

The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) requests the permission of parents/guardians for the reproduction of photographs depicting their children and/or the reproduction of work assignments completed by their children. The photograph/work will be reproduced in the Global, Environmental & Outdoor Education Council (GEOEC) newsletter, *Connections*, and is intended for teacher professional development.

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**Name of student** \_\_\_\_\_

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (printed name of parent/guardian of student), agree to the use of this photograph/work for the purpose stated above.

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Relationship to student** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Postal code** \_\_\_\_\_

We have recently begun posting archived issues of *Connections* on the GEOEC website ([www.geoec.org/newsletter](http://www.geoec.org/newsletter)). Are you willing to have your child's written work posted on the Internet as well?

- Yes, I agree to have my child's written work posted on the GEOEC website.
  - Yes, I agree to have my child's written work posted on the GEOEC website, using a first name only.
  - No, I do not want my child's written work posted on the GEOEC website.
- 

**Please fax or mail forms to**

**Supervising Editor  
The Alberta Teachers' Association  
11010 142 Street NW  
Edmonton T5N 2R1  
Phone 780-447-9491  
Fax 780-455-6481**



**The Alberta Teachers' Association**



Diversity • Equity • Human Rights Diversity • Equity • Human Rights

**We are there for you!**



The Alberta Teachers' Association

Diversity • Equity • Human Rights Diversity • Equity • Human Rights

## Specialist councils' role in promoting diversity, equity and human rights

Alberta's rapidly changing demographics are creating an exciting cultural diversity that is reflected in the province's urban and rural classrooms. The new landscape of the school provides an ideal context in which to teach students that strength lies in diversity. The challenge that teachers face is to capitalize on the energy of today's intercultural classroom mix to lay the groundwork for all students to succeed. To support teachers in their critical roles as leaders in inclusive education, in 2000 the Alberta Teachers' Association established the Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Committee (DEHRC).

DEHRC aims to assist educators in their legal, professional and ethical responsibilities to protect all students and to maintain safe, caring and inclusive learning environments. Topics of focus for DEHRC include intercultural education, inclusive learning communities, gender equity, UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network, sexual orientation and gender variance.

Here are some activities the DEHR committee undertakes:

- Studying, advising and making recommendations on policies that reflect respect for diversity, equity and human rights
- Offering annual Inclusive Learning Communities Grants (up to \$2,000) to support activities that support inclusion
- Producing *Just in Time*, an electronic newsletter that can be found at [www.teachers.ab.ca](http://www.teachers.ab.ca); Teaching in Alberta; Diversity, Equity and Human Rights.
- Providing and creating print and web-based teacher resources
- Creating a list of presenters on DEHR topics
- Supporting the Association instructor workshops on diversity

Specialist councils are uniquely situated to learn about diversity issues directly from teachers in the field who see how diversity issues play out in subject areas. Specialist council members are encouraged to share the challenges they may be facing in terms of diversity in their own classrooms and to incorporate these discussions into specialist council activities, publications and conferences.

Diversity, equity and human rights affect the work of all members. What are you doing to make a difference?

Further information about the work of the DEHR committee can be found on the Association's website at [www.teachers.ab.ca](http://www.teachers.ab.ca) under Teaching in Alberta, Diversity, Equity and Human Rights.

Alternatively, contact Andrea Berg, executive staff officer, Professional Development, at [andrea.berg@ata.ab.ca](mailto:andrea.berg@ata.ab.ca) for more information.



# GEOEC Executive 2014/15

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Global, Environmental & Outdoor Education Council

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ISSN 0701-0400  
Printed at Barnett House  
11010 142 Street NW  
Edmonton AB T5N 2R1