

Connections

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Photo by Alison Katzko

The journal of the Global,
Environmental & Outdoor
Education Council



To promote involvement in
quality environmental and
outdoor education

About GEOEC

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 journal, *Connections*. We are also active on Facebook (www.facebook.com/geoecalberta) and Twitter (@GEOEC), where current information on PD opportunities and initiatives in Alberta can be found.

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Cover photo: Elder Saa'kokoto reminds us that *Na'a* is our Mother Earth and that we need to show *Na'a* love and be thankful for all she gives us. Elder Saa'kokoto has shared the Blackfoot song "*Kitsikakomimm*" with students on a couple of his school visits. "*Kitsikakomimm*" means I love you. You can use the phrase to honour someone special such as *Na'a* (mother). The song can also be sung to honour anyone in your life who has done something special. "*Kitsikakomimm*" was also shared with us when Samantha Whelen Kotkas worked with us during a music residency.

A few years ago, our school created a beautiful class set of traditional Indigenous drums in a parent-student evening with Elder Frank Turning Robe and Darcy Turning Robe. We cherish these drums and value taking them out to drum on the land.

Beginning the year-long interdisciplinary studies that connected us and our learning from the land, Grade 4 students from Alison Katzko's class sang "*Kitsikakomimm*" on the land in the naturalization space by our school.

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Submissions Information

If you would like to share resources, topics or ideas with fellow educators, we would love to hear from you! We especially seek lesson ideas and stories about your adventures with students.

Articles can be submitted year-round. When e-mailing submissions, please include the story or article, any artwork or photographs with permission forms, your mailing address and a short biography.

Consent is required to publish personal information about an individual. For more information, please see Publishing Under the *Personal Information Protection Act* at the end of this issue.

Send submissions to connections@geoec.org.

Message from the Editors

As a specialist council for Alberta teachers, the Global, Environmental & Outdoor Education Council (GEOEC) strives to share, support and celebrate the work that involves global, environmental and outdoor learning. Reflecting on the interests of outdoor educators, classroom teachers, students and academics, our journal, *Connections*, focuses on the practice of outdoor experiential education, place-based learning and service learning from elementary to postsecondary levels, in wilderness and urban settings. *Connections* is about telling the stories of inspiring people, innovative schools and impactful programs. Our aim is to provide stories that unite and inspire. We hope that by sharing real stories of inspiration and innovation in education, we can support the amazing work being done by advocates of nature-based education.

In the past few years, we have interacted with people provincewide, who have shared stories of educators turning to outdoor spaces for mental health and well-being, learning and continued inspiration to thrive and grow. There are countless stories of teachers who have impacted lives and continue to love what they do. These are stories of courageous people and approaches that make a difference. *Connections* supports educators who embrace their uniqueness, learn from each other and share their wisdom. Through education we are unified and interconnected.

We also try to feature stories of outdoor locations, so you may plan your adventures and bring experiential learning to your classroom.

As editors, our goal is to enhance knowledge, create enthusiasm, encourage inquiry, incite curiosity, facilitate discovery, and provide a vision and a platform for supporting global, environmental and outdoor learning.

Alison Katzko and Abi Henneberry



Alison Katzko loves the arts and exploring. She currently teaches Grade 4 in Calgary, Alberta, and previously taught in Bhutan, Thailand, and the United States. She values developing a passion for the natural world through greater understanding of Indigenous and land-based knowledge. Her students have connected with explorers and scientists worldwide, including through the National Geographic Educator-Explorer Exchange. She has been recognized as Canadian Geographic Teacher of the month and ESRI ambassador of the month. She is passionate about getting her students outside regularly to engage in meaningful learning.



Abi Henneberry currently teaches full-day English kindergarten at Lois E Hole Elementary School, in St Albert, Alberta, where she has also taught K-6 nature education. She completed the initial Explorer Mindset course through National Geographic and continually uses it as a platform for teaching and collegial inspiration. Abi is an avid outdoor enthusiast who enjoys equestrian activities, camping, hiking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, kayaking and cycling. Abi is certified as a level 1 field leader in hiking, winter and overnight activities through the Outdoor Council of Canada. She currently volunteers with the Little Bits Therapeutic Riding Association, in Edmonton, and is pursuing certification with the Canadian Therapeutic Riding Association. Her plan is to combine her background in education with her love of the outdoors and equestrian experience for the benefit of others in the future.

President's Message

Welcome back everyone! I hope that this school year has started as smoothly as possible, with pieces falling into place for another great school year. Coming out of two pandemic years with a mix of online and in-person activities is something no educator has experienced before, bringing an entire new set of challenges to overcome. What we did get used to during this last school year was an overwhelming increase and rush from people wanting to discover more about getting kids out exploring in nature. Everyone wanted to take their students outside and capitalize on the safe spaces for themselves and their classes. Once again, the Global, Environmental & Outdoor Education Council (GEOEC) was there to lead the way. It started with you incredible members in each of your school communities.



From workshops to webinars, speaker series and conventions, GEOEC had a great year despite all the challenges faced during this second year of the pandemic. Hosting multiple events each month, our executive team worked extremely hard to provide a wide variety of experiences and opportunities for all members provincially. We hope that you were able to attend one or more of the events, and we look forward to having you attend more this year. We are extremely excited to host in-person events once again this year. While we have learned a lot about virtual events, we know that as experiential educators we need and crave that human interaction.

I encourage you to be in touch with our executive team if you need any form of PD in your school division. We would love nothing more than to host an event in your area and provide support on the topics of global, environmental and outdoor education.

We had an incredible time presenting at the Beginning Teachers' Conference and Preservice Carousel. Our Outdoor Playlist and Fall Speaker Series with Barry Blanchard were a huge success! Check our social media for flyers and information for future events.

I really hope that this is a year that environmental and outdoor educators are once again able to capitalize on taking students on off-site experiences and field trips throughout the province. I hope that as I read this issue of *Connections*, I myself am on a bus to the mountains for an adventure with my students! I know so many of you have some excellent adventures planned, and I wish you nothing but the best success! Enjoy those bus rides, late camp nights and campfire stories. Whatever this school year holds, I know you will do your best to provide an incredible experience for the students. Keep working hard and find support in those around you. We can all do this together and will continue to be the best teachers we can for our students. It's who we are!

I would like to take this time to thank each and every executive member of our council for all of their time, dedication and effort put forth to help inspire and support teachers across this province. This council would be nowhere near our target today without this inspiring team!

If there is a need for GEOEC sessions at a convention, conference or PD event near you, please contact us so we can set something up for the future.

Please keep up to date by following us on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Do not hesitate to send us a note with any questions you may have. A huge thank you to all teachers provincially for your amazing work in your communities. Best of luck with all your adventures, and I hope to see you on the trails real soon.

Court Rustemeyer

GEOEC Business and News

2021/22 GEOEC's Year in Review

The 2021/22 school year brought with it a renewed sense of optimism that normalcy would be restored within the education system and the larger global community. While we have not exactly returned to the same world that existed pre-COVID, the day-to-day life in schools almost resembles what it was like before everything changed more than two years ago. We have welcomed the return of field trips, athletics, clubs and events that had all disappeared, drastically changing the in-school culture that many students had come to enjoy. The GEOEC executive team was also hoping for the return of in-person professional learning opportunities, but with COVID still posing a risk we again opted for a year filled mostly with virtual events. Here's what we've been up to since we bid you adieu in June 2021.

Just as I was about to start my summer vacation, Inside Education asked me to present on behalf of GEOEC at one of their forestry and wildlife education programs in the Jumpingpound Demonstration Forest. My role was to showcase the bear cart and explain how I use this tool when teaching about wildlife safety and how to effectively operate bear spray. It was a fantastic event and, like always, I was amazed to see the dedication of fellow educators who were willing to devote a day in July to better the experiences of their students.

In September, the GEOEC executive team arrived in Canmore for our annual fall retreat. This is a weekend I always look forward to as it allows us to develop our yearly plan, bring new ideas to council, network and collaborate with one another, and strengthen our working relationships through team building activities. This retreat sets the tone for the rest of the school year and provides a foundation for us to build on.

Our first virtual event, Around the Campfire with GEOEC and Friends, was held near the end of September. These monthly events became commonplace last year, and we want to carry that momentum forward into this school year as well. This event provided attendees an opportunity to share their plans for the weeks and months ahead, and network with some incredible educators from across Alberta. In fact, this event has been so successful that we took it to the national level with the help of Take Me Outside and the Outdoor Learning Store. The Virtual Campfire Connections series turned into a monthly event with opportunities to circle up with like-minded educators from coast, to coast, to coast!

From there we moved into the Alberta Outdoor Playlist, another successful event from last year that was reimaged. We were joined by representatives from Inside Education, Nature Alive Adventures, Company of Adventurers, National Geographic and Wild Child, which is an educational program from the Sierra Club of Canada Foundation. Participants were introduced to programming and resources that were offered by all presenters, as well as contact information for future opportunities. In November, we introduced GEOEC's Virtual Nature Walk. This event featured three keynote speakers including Rhonda Thygesen's presentation on "Honey Bees," the "World of Small Biodiversity: Insects and Spiders," by Dan Johnson,

and our very own Preston Huppie's talk about "Sacred Medicines."

We partnered with Ever Active Schools and the Health and Physical Education Council (HPEC) to bring you the four-part In the Round series. This professional development opportunity was ideal for anyone interested in a deeper, community-based learning experience that culminated with a full-day in-person workshop facilitated by our president, Court Rustemeyer, as part of the "Shaping the Future" conference that was held in Kananaskis Country. You'll read more about Court's speaking engagements near the end of this story.

In April we hosted our Spring Speaker series and annual general meeting in one event. Executive team member Paula Huddy shared a fabulous presentation about her work with Canadian Geographic and how educators can use their resources and professional development courses to further their own practices. The keynote speaker was Jill Heinerth, who is the current Royal Canadian Geographic Society's Explorer-in-Residence, as well as a bestselling Canadian author (*Into the Planet: My Life as a Cave Diver* [2019]), photographer, cave diver, TV presenter, speaker, Explorer's Club Fellow and inductee into the Scuba Hall of Fame. Jill gave a passionate presentation filled with incredible stories and images from her diving adventures all over the globe.

Sprinkled throughout the year, we offered Project WILD training and certification courses and Outdoor Council of Canada: Field Leader training and certification programs to anyone who was interested in getting certified. This is something we will continue to do moving forward as the response from our members has been overwhelmingly positive.

We were also busy developing a brand-new resource. *Five-Minute Field Trips: Volume II* is the follow-up to the wildly popular *Five-Minute Field Trips* that was originally published 20 years ago. Both publications are available to download free from the resources tab on our website.

Our president, Court Rustemeyer, has been extremely busy representing GEOEC at various conferences and events throughout the year. He presented at the Beginning Teachers' Conference, the Calgary City Teachers' Convention, Central Alberta Teachers' Convention Association Conference and the Southern Alberta Teachers' Conference, and he was on the roundtable for the PHE National Conference. In addition to all of that, he was twice a guest speaker for *Play Outdoors Magazine's* online events and was a keynote speaker for the Early Childhood Education Council's 2022 conference. His time and dedication to promoting GEOEC, and what we stand for, was outstanding this past year.

We find ourselves again looking toward the 2022/23 school year with anticipation of normalcy returning to schools and communities. We had a wonderful year connecting with all of you, and we look forward to what the upcoming school year will bring.

Please keep up to date on the latest news and events by following us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/geocalberta), Twitter (@GEOEC) and Instagram with up-to-date information on PD opportunities and initiatives in Alberta. If you would like to be involved in future webinars and workshops, please visit our website (www.geoec.org) and remember to become a GEOEC member!

Tyler Dixon

Conference 2022

Conference 2022, “Shaping the Future,” was a wonderful experience. The beautiful Indigenous dancing, powerful keynote speakers, educational workshops and lovely people made it an exceptional weekend of learning and meeting like-minded educators.

I attended a session by Danielle Bates, a researcher from Ontario who is exploring the inclusivity of girls in physical education. Bates encouraged educators to brainstorm new ways to encourage inclusivity for all students in physical education, especially girls. Bates highlighted common teacher practices that continue to instigate gender bias and challenged educators to introduce new strategies that work to eliminate gender bias. I am aware that I perhaps carry bias and weave my bias into my pedagogy. It was valuable to learn about common biases so that I may address any unwelcome biases that I have.

I also attended “Up to Snow Good! Adventures, Games, Leadership and Team-Building for All Seasons,” a session by Court Rustemeyer. Although I was fortunate enough to learn some of the activities previously, it was beautiful to watch educators participate together—and with enthusiasm! We played lightsaber tag with pool noodles, chuck the chicken and

alphabetical organization activities. It was valuable to learn about the execution of each of these activities. Although I have played these games before, and in my classroom, it was helpful to learn tips and tricks to improve my execution.

Arguably the most beneficial session I visited was put on by Tammy Peirson and students from Maskekosak Kiskinomatowikamik. The high school students led us through traditional games with traditional materials. These included tug-of-war style games, individual challenges and partner games. The activities were relatively simple and straightforward, but challenging and engaging. My take-away from the session was two-fold. First, the delivery by the high school students was exceptional. They did not shy away from leading a group of teachers in activities and stepped up to the challenge with eloquence. I hope to instill in my own students the confidence that these students embody! Second, I learned an incredible number of games I would love to use with my students.

“Shaping the Future” was an exceptional experience and a great first conference!

Carissa Esau

Featured Outdoor Locations

Horton Hill Hike

Don McLaughlin

The Stats

Round-trip distance: 3.2 kilometres

Elevation gain: 330 metres

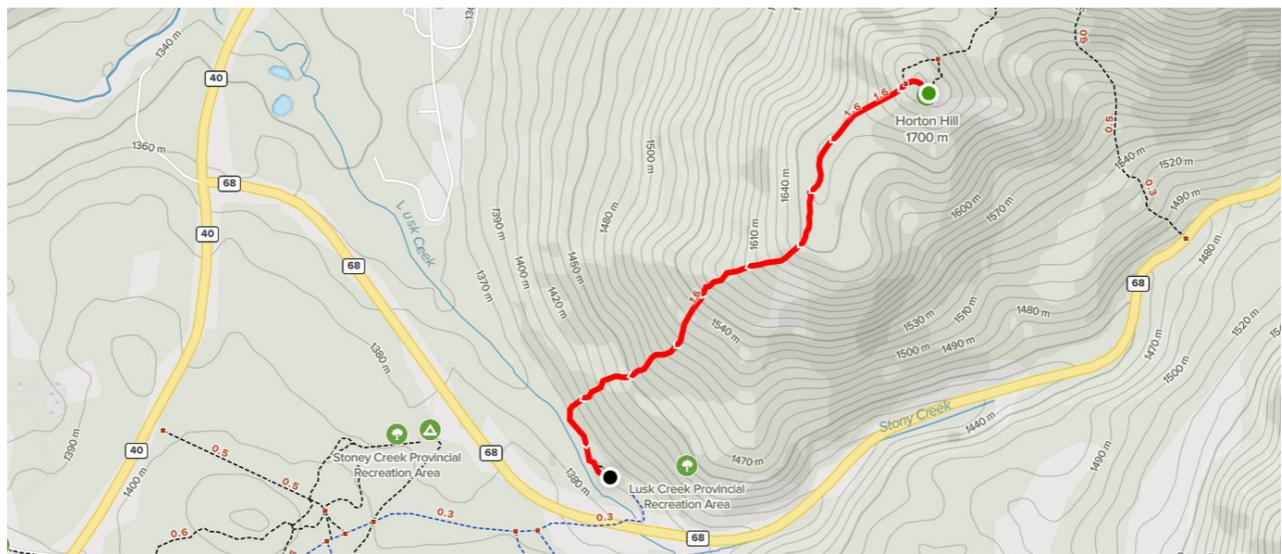
Round-trip time: 2.5–4 hours

The Hike

From the north end of the Lusk Creek PRA parking area, pick up the trail that at first trends north and later northeast. The initial section of the hike is through thin forest (relatively steep at first), which quickly delivers you to an open ridge with nice initial views of Barrier Lake. Travel to the Horton Hill summit is along a reasonably good trail with good views to the south and southwest. Once you near the summit, look for a large ammo can with the summit register and soak in the splendid views.

Preparation

1. Pack adequate hydration and snacks, and a sun hat and sunscreen.
2. Pack bear spray. You never know where Yogi might be in these parts. It's always a good idea to make noise, and this will probably help you avoid a bear encounter.
3. You might find it useful to carry a light day pack (15–20 litres) to hold all of your hiking necessities.



Horton Hill Route

... Featured Outdoor Locations ...



Views from Horton Hill

Getting to the Trail from Calgary (45–75 minutes)

- Highway 1 west from Calgary to Highway 40 south
- Highway 40 southbound to Highway 68 (roughly 7 kilometres)
- Highway 68 eastbound to the Lusk Creek Provincial Recreation Area (PRA) (roughly 2 kilometres)
- Find a spot in the Lusk Creek PRA parking, and the trailhead starts at the north end of the parking area



Barrier Lake from Horton Ridge

A Naturalist's Guide to Grande Prairie

Nicholas Carter

Many folks from Alberta's big city areas might envision the great northern region of our province as an unbroken expanse of evergreen trees, wild rivers and mosquito-filled bogs; a sprawling land of lumberjacks, oil drillers and moose hunters. While this isn't necessarily false, there's more to be seen in northern Alberta for those interested in something else. Somewhere between the bustling streets of Edmonton and the remote Yukon woods lies the gem of the northwest, the Grande Prairie.

This name refers not just to the city but also to the rolling fields and woodlands that make up the southern part of Alberta's Peace Region. The area is an island of prairie-like landscape bordered by the foothills of the Rocky Mountains to the south and west, and the boreal forest to the north and east. Ecologists know it as the Peace River Parkland Natural Region.

The Parkland is a sort of transitional area between the open prairies of the south and the great boreal forest northward. Edmonton, Red Deer and part of Calgary lie within parkland natural regions, and residents of these areas will know the landscape well: open, mostly farmed fields with patches of trembling aspen trees and river valleys dense with white spruce, balsam poplar and birches. Willows, wild rose and saskatoons make up some of the more recognizable shrubs. The Peace River Parkland is the smallest and most northern parkland subregion. Nature lovers from more southern areas will recognize many of the same plant and animal species, but there are quirks to this ecosystem that make it worth exploring.

While the Peace River Parkland is small and patchy, the landscape of this region gives it an impressive mightiness. The valleys of the North Saskatchewan, Red Deer and Bow Rivers are popular outdoor recreation places, but the deep, wide gorges of the Wapiti, Smoky and Peace Rivers truly take the breath away. These huge valleys were carved out by glacial erosion at the end of

the Ice Age, roughly 10,000 years ago. The remains of creatures from those days, including mammoths, bison and horses turn up in this area, as do the tools and other signs of the people who hunted them for thousands of years before Europeans arrived. Many popular sites in this region were and are of great importance to the Beaver First Nation, something for all visitors and residents to keep in mind. My friends with the In My Backyard Society are working toward bringing the Indigenous history of this land to the forefront of outdoor education and recreation sites and are a more knowledgeable source of information there.



Bear tracks

... Featured Outdoor Locations ...



Dinosaur footprint



Dinosaur leg bone

For those interested in things from further back in the past, the Grande Prairie area is an emerging frontier in the field of dinosaur paleontology. In fact, I spent the past five years in the area as an educator, interpreter and occasional field assistant on this very subject. The southern badlands along the Red Deer River, which includes places like Drumheller, the Royal Tyrrell Museum and Dinosaur Provincial Park are highly regarded for the stunning dinosaur-era fossils discovered there. But did you know that the rock exposures around Grande Prairie are about the same age as the more famous badlands? This rock, called the Wapiti Formation, was laid down between 80 and 68

million years ago, making it late Cretaceous in age and near the end of the age of dinosaurs.

So far not as many fossils have been collected in the Grande Prairie area, and the main reason is that it can be a lot more difficult to simply find them up there. The Wapiti Formation is exposed in patchy, often hard to reach spots deep in heavily forested river valleys, as plant growth works faster than erosion in this cool, damp region. Take a walk along Pipestone Creek, one of the streams that flow into the Wapiti River, and you'll see grey-coloured mudstone and siltstone from the Age of Dinosaurs eroding down into the creek, occasionally exposing new fossils in the process.

As a matter of fact, Pipestone Creek is the site that first put the Grande Prairie area on the map, paleontologically speaking. A massive bone bed, kind of like a dinosaur graveyard, was found by a local teacher in the early '70s. It turned out to be the remains of a giant herd of horned dinosaurs called *Pachyrhinosaurus*. Since then, bones, teeth and footprints from other creatures like duck-billed dinosaurs, carnivorous tyrannosaurs and raptors, prehistoric turtles and more have been found along the Wapiti and Redwillow rivers. They're a little off the beaten track, but ambitious hikers can access these areas to see them for themselves. For an easier paleontology experience, check out the fossil displays at the Philip J Currie Dinosaur Museum just outside Wembley.



Redwillow River

There is also a local exception to the trend of badlands being a southern Alberta-only landscape feature. Just east of the city of Grande Prairie lie the

... Featured Outdoor Locations ...

Kleskun Hills. These exposures rise out of the surrounding grassland and are worth checking out for anyone interested in natural history. The badlands are small but still make you feel like you're walking around in the Drumheller valley. They're also from around the same age, meaning fossils are quite abundant in certain places here. For some reason, only very small fossils are found in the Kleskun Hills. Fragments of bone, dinosaur teeth, fish scales and petrified wood tell us that this was once a swampy forest where plant-eating dinosaurs may have gone to lay their eggs and where predatory species went for an easy meal.



Kleskun Hill

It's worth noting that fossil collecting in the Kleskun Hills is illegal without a government permit because the area is controlled by Alberta Parks. This means that the plants, animals, rocks and fossils of the park are all protected. This is fortunate, because the Kleskun Hills are not only Alberta's northernmost badlands, but the park also preserves some of the last remaining wild Peace River grassland.

Some species more commonly associated with the southern plains can be found here. Prairie birds like Vesper sparrows, Say's phoebes, Mountain bluebirds and Western meadowlarks enjoy the protected grassland. Insect enthusiasts can find many different butterflies, grasshoppers and ground beetles among the vegetation. Prairie crocus flowers add a beautiful dash of colour to the landscape in spring, and you can even see little prickly pear cacti growing in dry areas on the hills. Be careful not to touch them. You can accidentally damage these little cacti easily, and they can damage you back.

There's no shortage of other neat places around Grande Prairie for nature lovers to check out modern plants and animals. The city itself has the wooded Muskoseepi Park that runs from the north to south end of town following Bear Creek, as well as Crystal Lake on the northeast side and a great network of hiking trails on the south side of town. These are convenient spots of birdwatching, especially in the spring and fall as waterfowl congregate on the water and songbirds move through the wooded areas. Crystal Lake normally hosts a family of trumpeter swans each year, a species which has become an icon of northwestern Alberta thanks to the efforts of locals to save this once-endangered species.

For some less urban places to experience nature, there are some wonderful parks a short drive from town. O'Brien Provincial Park offers trails through the balsam poplar woods on the south side of the Wapiti River, making it a popular spot for locals to cool off during the heat of summer. Canoers can also put-in on the river here, and a boating trip down the Wapiti can offer great views of the valley and neat wildlife sightings. Bald eagles, moose, boreal songbirds and black bears can be seen down in the river valley.

West of Grande Prairie is Saskatoon Island Provincial Park. At 90 years old as of this year, this is one of Alberta's oldest parks. It was once indeed an island on the south end of Saskatoon Lake but dropping water levels over time split the lake into two. The land the park now occupies became an isthmus between the larger Saskatoon Lake to the north and the aptly named Little Lake to the south. Along with easy interpretive trails through the park, there's also a campground and recreation spaces for visiting families. The park is a



Saskatoon Island

... Featured Outdoor Locations ...



Little Lake



Trumpeter swans



Moose



Saskatoon berries

great spot to see flocks of ducks and swans, especially during migration season. Bug enthusiasts can find a great diversity of butterflies, damselflies and other watchable bugs among the plants. During the summer you can see eastern kingbirds along the Little Lake trail defend their territories as they furiously chase off birds several times their size. Songbirds like warblers, sparrows and waxwings feed in the aspen woods and saskatoon meadows. These fruit-bearing bushes give this place its name, and you'll be hard pressed to find bigger and more delicious saskatoon berries anywhere else in the province. Keep an eye out for moose browsing on leaves and twigs in the woods.

Further west is another landmark named after the ubiquitous saskatoon berry. Saskatoon Mountain lies just east of the town of Beaverlodge. It's not so much a mountain as it is a really big hill, but it's the highest point around and, from the top, you can get a great view of the surrounding farmland as well as the Rocky Mountains to the southeast. Saskatoon Mountain offers day-use areas for visitors as well as hiking trails through the forest that crowns the hilltop. The strange white building on the hill is actually an old Canadian Forces radar base. Despite its popularity as a recreation area that draws off-roaders and the like, Saskatoon Mountain is home to a variety of different animals. I've heard stories from locals of a resident elk herd, and a former colleague of mine once filmed a family of grizzly bears near their property at the base of the hill. My first and only lynx sighting was on Saskatoon Mountain as well. In rugged country like this, travelling in groups with bear spray is always recommended.

Many other natural history sites are a day trip away from Grande Prairie. Eastward, just outside of Valleyview, is Sturgeon Lake and Young's Point Provincial Park. Heading south into the foothills you can find Musreau Lake just off Highway 40. The stretch of highway south of Grande Prairie can be a wonderful area to see grizzly bears foraging by the roadside, especially during the autumn when they're really trying to put on the pounds for winter. I once saw four individual bears within an hour or so. Canada jays boldly zip across the highway or perch on road signs and forestry equipment. Keep heading south and you'll reach the small mining town of Grande Cache on the northern edge of Alberta's mountain caribou country.

... Featured Outdoor Locations ...

Southwest of Beaverlodge near the BC border you can check out the Red Willow falls. The river near here is abundant in dinosaur trackways. Even more dinosaur tracks can be found further west in the rugged mountains around Tumbler Ridge, BC. An hour's drive north of Grande Prairie will take you to the majestic Peace River valley and the old Dunvegan fur trading settlement. Brave the narrow suspension bridge over the river and check out Dunvegan Provincial Park which, aside from the historical buildings from the region's past, is a pleasant spot to look for songbirds and pollinating insects around the gardens.

While northern Alberta usually doesn't get the same attention as the more urban or accessible areas further south, a trip up here is an authentically rugged and adventurous experience. The abundant wildlife, varied habitat types and relatively low human density make Alberta's Peace Country a naturalist's dream. In few other places can you experience dusty badlands, lush prairie lakes and wild northern forests all within a fairly short drive of each other. Many folks who intend to spend only a few years working here never end up leaving. I didn't wind up as one of them, but the Grande Prairie area undoubtedly left its mark on me, as it might for you as well.



Grizzly bear



Rockies from Saskatoon Mountain

Mental Health Outside

School and Community Gardens: Holistic Benefits to Well-Being

Maya Willms

In some native languages, the term for plants translates to “those who take care of us.”

—Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013)

Connection to the natural world has been prescribed in a therapeutic way for centuries across the world. The benefits of being outdoors are numerous, yet for many, the urbanization of populated areas has unfortunately restricted access to daily interactions with nature. In our urban schools, we see emotional, social and physical problems multiply as a result (Vujcic et al 2017). Many schools are fortunate enough to have some greenspace; however, the opportunity for enhancing student well-being lies in the

engagement and reawakening of these spaces. School garden programs may be one way to reconnect students with the natural world. Soga, Gaston and Yamaura (2017) found that a regular dose of gardening can generally improve health across the board. If we think about health in a holistic manner, involving the social, emotional, cognitive and physical domains, gardening can have benefits for all of these areas (Bruce 2006).



Connecting with plants in the garden

Social

In the western world, we have come to segment species as if they belong to different worlds, when, in fact, we all belong to the same world. Our connection to plants, animals and natural processes is equally as important as our connection to other human beings. When we discuss social benefits in schools, many will assume the primary importance is human to human contact. This is a limited and narrow worldview that fails to recognize the immense social benefits that come from connection to other living entities. In a study by Alexander, North and Hendren (1995), it was found that elementary-aged children were able to learn the

value of life through a school garden project, particularly in relation to the anger and frustration felt when connections they valued were harmed from neglect or violence. In this same study, children were able to highlight the importance of nurturing and caring for plants and animals, and how this connected to the way they treated their peers. Similarly, teachers in a study conducted by Learning through Landscapes also noted the reduction in aggression and bullying behaviours after implementing a school garden (Hussein 2012). The opportunities for lessons on reciprocity, respect, relationship and renewal are endless when acting as caretakers for the natural world. Not only do students feel a sense of connection, but many studies have indicated an improvement in perceived self-esteem when students are given a role to fulfill as a part of a collective group (Retzlaff-Furst 2016).

With the inherent collaborative nature of gardening, young people are engaged in an authentic social experience wherein teamwork and relationships support social skill development. In community gardens and multigrade schools, the garden can act as a meeting place where individuals and groups who might not otherwise interact are now interacting. This reinforces social ties and a general sense of community, which in turn enhances an individual's sense of place and belonging (van den Berg et al 2010). The mixing of diverse members in an ecosystem, also known as biodiversity, is proven to enhance productivity and ecosystem health (Zari 2018). It could be argued that



Garden bounty

the need for biodiversity is equal to the need for diversity within the human species. When examining the benefits of gardening in urban settings, Soga, Gaston and Yamaura (2017) found that there was no significant difference in the benefits to gardeners based on their socioeconomic status, meaning that gardening is beneficial for all members of our community, society and world.

Emotional

The emotional development of young people cannot be assumed to happen naturally. Explicit instruction and regular conversation about emotional literacy can improve students' ability to regulate their emotions amid challenging stimuli and scenarios. The emotional well-being that comes with improved self-esteem, self-confidence and resiliency can be an important result of developing an intentionally designed school garden community. Through the act of cultivating, weeding and caring for plants, the chemistry in our brains can shift, greatly impacting our stress levels and overall mood (Yusop and Yassin 2020). Even short-term and irregular interactions in a garden can provide reduction of depression and anxiety symptoms (Soga, Gaston and Yamaura 2017). Although this may be a result of the inherent mindfulness that comes with many gardening tasks, Bruce and Folk (2003) found that children, especially, were able to see gardening and yardwork as a positive way to manage their anger and aggression.

In addition to the innumerable anecdotal and qualitative indicators supporting the mental health benefits of being with plants, there is also scientific evidence of these benefits in the very soil we work with in the garden. Soil microbiology and the mycelium layer are quickly being acknowledged as the solution to many of our health problems in the world. Healthy soil means healthy plants which support the health of animals. Healthy soil also includes a plethora of fungus and bacteria playing an essential role in nutrient cycling within the soil (Goldowitz Jiminez 2021). Furthermore, the mycorrhizal network supports the relationship between plant roots and the nutrient cycle, maintaining an intricate fungal network beneath our feet (Carroll 2021). When we put our hands in the dirt to weed,



Garden responsibilities



Golden garden sunflower

plant seeds, transplant plants and add mulch, we are interacting with the microbial network. In healthy soil, a common bacterium that can be found is *Mycobacterium vaccae*, which studies have demonstrated, can cause cytokine levels to rise, which results in higher production of serotonin. Low levels of serotonin can be linked to several mood disorders, including anxiety, depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder (Lowry et al 2003). By inhaling the bacteria, and through topical contact, we are able to access these mood-boosting bacteria, literally at our fingertips (Grant 2021).

Cognitive

Community and school-based gardens require keen observation and engagement with natural processes. In order to nurture and care for other living beings, you must first get to know them and pay attention. This act of paying attention to plants allows young people to interact with authentic problem solving, hypothesizing and solution-focused actions. By experiencing these cognitive processes in an authentic way, students may be able to better connect these experiences to in-class learning (Lowry et al 2003). In addition to these evident benefits in intellectual processing, Kaplan (1995) also found that exposure to the natural world inherently restores cognitive processes and has immense potential to restore attention fatigue. As so many students struggle with attention and focus in

their learning, having a naturalized gardening space in the schoolyard could be a solution to decreasing screen time and increasing the ability to re-engage with learning in an authentic way.

Physical

The physical benefits of gardening are an important consideration when working with young people. Not only is an exercise component required with many gardening tasks, but the opportunities for fine and gross motor skill development along with sensory input makes having a school garden essential (Soga, Gaston and Yamaura 2017; Bruce and Folk 2003). When considering the sensory potential of a garden, you can begin to recognize the potential of the edible plants, the colourful flowers, the abundant textures, the smell of soil and flowering plants, and the sounds of birds, insects and perhaps running water. If you are able to visualize this, you might immediately see how these sensory indicators could support general well-being. Wagenfeld (2009) describes an intentional sensory gardening program as involving touch, body awareness, balance, smelling, seeing, hearing and tasting. By first teaching reciprocity and respect for living beings, children can learn how to interact in a garden in a responsible manner. Some things to pay attention to are how to handle plants without harming them, how to harvest responsibly without taking too much or harming the plant, when to harvest to allow the plant



Mushrooms



Sunflower

to grow before we take, and showing gratitude for harvesting plants by paying respect. It is after these lessons are initiated that children can truly benefit from exploring the plant world through a multisensory channel (Green 1994). Much like a tree that needs strong roots to flourish, children need a strong sensory foundation to grow (Wagenfeld 2009).

Conclusion

The power of plants is simply amazing, and with care and determination, the process of greening schoolyards across the planet in an intentional way will allow for outdoor learning spaces that are accessible, holistically beneficial and engaging. With the ever-growing environmental problems in the world, reconnection and re-engagement with the natural world are essential. Creating spaces where children feel at home and experience a sense of belonging is the first step. Hussein (2012) highlights four elements that children looked for in school grounds: “a place for doing (opportunities for physical activities); a place for thinking (opportunities for intellectual stimulation), a place for feeling (to provoke a sense of belonging) and a place for being (to allow them to be themselves).” With this wisdom, we can start to imagine spaces differently and see the potential in getting all students outside.

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Articles

iyiniw êkwa otâpêwatim: The Original People and the Sled Dog

Kevin *wâsakâyâsiw* Lewis

Abstract

kâniyâsihk Culture Camps have experienced positive outcomes since adopting the Alaskan sled dog into its land-based programming. This article is part of an unpublished dissertation that will review the research on how this working dog reminds us of our relationship with the environment, which has been with the Cree since time immemorial. Indigenous knowledge (IK) serves as a daily reminder of the importance of having a responsible relationship with our lakes, rivers, forests and lands. Stars are assigned to play as a mnemonic of this relationship. Teaching stories, called *âtayôhkêwina*, are steeped in sustainability and keep stories and agreements sacred. Teaching stories about the dog and the origins of the dog need to be compiled, researched and shared. It's always been understood that the Inuit were the only ones who used the dog for dogsledding. It is also known that the Cree have used dogs this way from the beginning.

Background

Oral traditions of the *miniscikoskâwiyinîsak* (Ministikwan Lake Cree) record camping, hunting and fishing around *miniscikoskâwâyisis* (Ministikwan Lake), *nohcipânânihk* (Mudie Lake), *ayahciyiniw sâkahikan* (Blackfoot Lake), *atihkamêk sâkahikan* (Fishing Lake), *môswa kâ-nipit* (Bronson Lake), *miniscikos sâkahikanis* (Little Island Little Lake), *kâ-miscakawatinâsihk* (Levels Lake), *ayítaw kâ-sâkahikaniwik* (Worthington Lake), Peck

Lake and *cascowiyâsihk* (Galatly Lake), all the smaller lakes and streams that run in and around what was also recently called the Bronson Forest Recreation Site as well as the water systems of the Meadow Lake Provincial Park in northwestern Saskatchewan. They also extend as far as the Waterhen River, Beaver River and Saskatchewan River systems. These communities all sit within the Treaty 6 territory boundaries and traditional territory of *miniscikoskâwiyinîsak*.

*kâniyâsihk*¹ Culture Camps was established through the research of local Indigenous knowledge systems (IK) of the western Plains Cree in the boreal forest of what is also known as northwestern Saskatchewan, Canada.

kâniyâsihk Culture Camps² (kCC) and *kâ-niyâsihk* Research and Development Institute (kRDI), a registered nonprofit educational and research organization, were developed to keep traditional land use alive. At first, the camps were offered in the fall and winter, then they evolved into seasonal events. kCC now operates every month offering such activities as hunting, egg gathering, fishing, trapping, camping, visiting old camps and cabins, gathering plants (berries, medicines, trees and willows), visiting historical trails, paddling, and keeping the Cree place names. The Cree language is spoken by the guides, instructors and researchers because the communication with the Knowledge Keepers and Elders for IK is a fundamental part of the camps' cultural curriculum and continued research.

Traditional travel has always been emphasized with canoeing in the summer and dogsledding in the winter. Today, motorized vehicles, such as automobiles, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and snowmobiles, are also used to transport people and goods. These are also convenient for clearing traditional/historic wagon-and-horse trails and dogsledding trails as well as trails for emergencies. This allows our program to see a lot of our traditional territory.

This article examines how keeping a kennel of working dogs makes our program unique because of the infusion of IK into kCC and kRDI. Keeping dogs is a year-round responsibility, and this has never changed. The activities associated with kCC and kRDI reinvigorated communities and requested programming for the local children. *kâ-niyâsihk mîkiwâhpa* Cree Academy of Excellence (kCAE) was then crafted into a Cree immersion land-based program. Ongoing research has developed programming and curricula for our students and community to use. This helps to build relationships and keep communication open with industry, governments and neighbouring First Nations.

Going back to our stories, the wolf and the Cree people have always had a brotherly connection. This article will examine the connection with a story about the first Cree named *wisahkêcâhk*, also known as *kistêsinaw* (older brother), and his twin brother Black Wolf who explored the world. Four collected stories focusing on the ethnozoology of the Cree and the canine family will be studied. People continue to keep dogs for all sorts of reasons, including transportation, companionship, safety, guidance, well-being, survival and as a reminder of stewardship.

History of the Dog and the Cree

atim is the Cree word for dog. The Cree have used dogs for fishing and trapping, travelling with packs in the summer, dogsledding in the winter and guarding the camps year-round. They are rarely used for hunting, but there are stories of them splitting buffalo herds. They were also property of the Cree women. They were valued property, a part of commerce and

had a spiritual significance.³ They were part of the kinship and played a significant role throughout the various seasons.

There is a Dog Star Story that begins with people who had no dogs to protect them. The wolf, coyote and fox saw this, had a council and sent two of their pups to live with humankind. They became domesticated, and this is how all dogs came into the world to help keep homes and camps safe. To honour this sacrifice, the Creator placed this reminder in the stars. Polaris, known to the Cree as *mahikan acâhkos*, anchors the leash as the dogs run around their sky camp. The three stars of the Little Dipper's handle represent the wolf (Polaris), coyote and fox. The four stars (*atim acâhkosak*) represent the pups that were sent out to the four directions of humankind.⁴

wisahkêcâhk or *kistêsinaw* is the first Cree and our older brother. He had a twin brother, named Black Wolf or *mahikan*, who also looked like a wolf pup.⁵ They travelled and explored the world together on epic expeditions. Their stories are filled with adventure and failures. Everything seemed to go well when they were together, but when astray or separated, our older brother would come across mishaps, misfortune and tough lessons. There were new discoveries in their teaching stories. These teaching stories are called *âtayôhkêwina*⁶ and are told during the winter months when everyone is indoors thawing from the extreme cold temperatures. They are also told during the winter months because that's when certain spirits are resting. The Cree have a very animated worldview in terms of being related to animals and elements. *kisê-manitow ê-kî-wahkohtahikoyahk kahkiyaw kîkway* (Creator made it so that we are related to everything). The wolf and dog represent our four-legged relatives, specifically the canine family. Sun, the Thunder Beings, Wind, Bear, Buffalo and Horse are all addressed as grandfathers and grandmothers. In one story, Wolf shows our older brother how to make a sled and incorporate Wolf's future generations to work alongside the Cree. Another story also addresses Wolf's facility with other technologies, such as the bow and arrow.

Dogsledding and the *kâ-niyâsihk* Research and Development Institute

Dogsledding races and recreational activities still take place in the prairie provinces. Today the dogs are mostly used for recreation; there is some competitive racing, but only a few people make a living at it. The remainder do it for the sheer pleasure and companionship of running dogs. A few outfits do winter and summer tours as well. The tours done at kCC have incorporated kRDI and kCAE with many perceptions. More research needs to be done with kCAE on animal assisted therapy and the healing power of these animals.⁷ Throughout the years, students in our program have been diagnosed with autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), depression, diabetes and heart problems. We've seen them become pain free, create an environment of healing and actively deal with trauma. There are also several accounts of people overcoming fears and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). With the creation of the research arm of kRDI, further studies and research are now possible. They will assist in incorporating traditional values when dealing with internal governance and external governmental decision-making processes, or how to initiate new innovative governance models that suit the needs of our people.⁸ There is a need for our people to develop research protocols to protect and preserve our Indigenous intellectual property, culture and traditional knowledge. kRDI has started to draft ethical research regulations, collaborative research agreements and data-sharing protocols with the help of the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre (MFNERC), as well as establish the importance of implementing Indigenous research methodologies. This study can branch out to initiatives including water projects, animal and aquatic life, the boreal forest, a moose project, waterfowl and climate change. It can also be implemented in short- and long-term studies, qualitative and quantitative methods, or mixed methods.

Care of Dogs by Cree Today

Today many dogs are not properly taken care of as they once were by the Cree. Keeping the dogs healthy and nourished has become a challenge. It's also difficult to house the dogs because the owners' basic needs are not being met. Underlying socioeconomic factors include a lack of employment, housing scarcity, basic health needs, exercise and healthy affordable food. It's challenging to manage a dog's basic needs when the owner and their family lack their own basic needs. This study investigates the disruptive policies, strategic agendas and destructive, oppressive laws made without the consent of Indigenous Peoples of Canada. This is a direct effect of the historical impacts of colonization. In our First Nations communities, a high percentage of social determinants are affecting our people, such as suicide, high rates of depression, poverty, loss of parental skills, alcoholism and drug abuse, family breakdown, and high levels of mental illness.

To assist in dog reproduction management, in the past year I've witnessed and read about First Nations teaming up with nonprofit groups to host spay and neuter clinics. These groups provide veterinary services to dogs that otherwise would have little or no access to medical services. The groups travel to reserves to collect dogs to prevent unplanned litters. This is a great initiative because hungry dogs become aggressive and go where there is food, which is frequently the local schools and high traffic areas. Many possible issues include dog attacks and spread of diseases, as many dogs are strays that have never been vaccinated. The dog-related nuisance and health and safety issues have been resolved through teamwork and planning, ideally resulting in better care of the dogs, minimizing suffering and cruelty. The communities also need to create initiatives to end inhumane animal control practices.

At *kâniyâsihk* dog kennel, there has been a steady improvement in kennel management to ensure that dogs perform at their optimal level. Areas of improvement include housing, for example, individual plastic houses filled with straw bedding. Each dog is individually tethered with individual dishes for watering and feeding. We try to separate the males and females

to prevent fights and accidental breeding. "Reproduction is arguably the most important management factor for the long-term success of a sled dog kennel."⁹ Reproductive preference is given to the top performers of the kennel, so the best genetics are passed on. This allows for the creation of quality dogs and a valuable breeding stock. Our kennel has also brought in injured sled dogs, and we have rehabilitated them from other dogsledding kennels. We have also spayed 18 females through the reserve-initiated clinics throughout the years, which have helped our efforts tremendously.

There are very important laws to teach here. Oral tradition gives laws of *pâstâhowin* and *ohcinêwin*. These two crucial laws of the Cree need to be taught in our schools to act as our "moral compass."¹⁰ *ohcinêwin* stem from wrongful doings toward animals or creation. If we wrongfully treat our animals and our environment, we could in turn "suffer in retribution for an action against creation."¹¹ We need to find ways to change and align with our laws again and to remember our original agreements.

Importance of Keeping the Stories Alive

It's difficult to conceive how the First Nations people would allow such a giving animal to receive such negative treatment. It is important to acknowledge why this has happened. The Indian Reserves of Canada have policies built right into them that make it extremely difficult to self-govern and to be self-sufficient: financial scarcity and inadequate government assistance make subsistence challenging. Keeping a dog safe and healthy easily becomes secondary when primary needs are unmet. Dogs then become strays and breed, resulting in a canine population explosion.

Education is key to changing the attitudes about dogs and their care. Programs such as kCAE and *miyo-pimâtisiwin*¹² implement dogsledding into their school curriculum. Teachers educate students about dog care, compassion and the joy of caring for healthy dogs. The students form a bond with the dogs and develop an understanding about the importance of basic dog care. By feeding the dogs, they learn about proper nutrition

and medical attention when required. The students build doghouses and learn basic construction skills. The teachers are mushers and have dog kennels, which are implemented in these school programs. They improve literacy by reading about the outdoors, working in nature and modelling respect for animals. The dogs move and teach the students in ways the technology-driven world cannot. Dogs are deeply rooted in Cree and Dene culture and empower youth, strengthening communities.

There are opportunities to teach Cree and Dene history, family connections, and places of origin and further develop connection to culture history and traditional knowledge, instilling pride and strength in identity.

The following is a story shared by our Ojibway relatives. They speak an Algonquian language and are closely related to Cree, which ethnolinguists would point out.

The stories connect us with our traditional territories. These policies and laws were placed there to sever the connections to land. These *Indian Act* reserve systems were put into place to keep us separated from these sacred sites. Some of these sacred sites have been decimated and covered. Our ceremonies were considered illegal gatherings at one time. There was a pass system that did not allow free movement within our traditional territories. This kept people separated from harvesting areas, sustenance and commerce.

Now governments and industry are coming into our territories for exploration. They want to extract oil and gas and timbers for pulp and lumber without consultation. These permits are granted without proper notice, communication and consultation.

There is a legend from Ojibway storyteller and Knowledge Keeper Isaac Murdoch (Bomgiizhik). There is a Cree version that is similar, but this legend is used to exemplify the unity in our stories and teachings.

The Origin of Dogs

The story describes how dogs came to the people and the sacred role they play in villages. The synopsis is that there was a man who was sick, and his sister brought him into a healing lodge. The lodge was not

functioning as it originally was intended. The lead had gotten greedy, and the people forgot the power of our ways. A stranger and his brother the wolf came to remind the people of the power and responsibility they had and the connection to song, prayer and to everything else. They had been led away from how to live as a community. There was inequality and greed, and compassion had been replaced. The stranger and wolf had come to restore and revive the healing powers of IK. The stranger left, but he did leave the wolf as a reminder of this good way of life. This is where we got the dog, to serve as a reminder of where we have come from and to remind us of the wrongs so they don't happen again.

Importance of Traditional Land Use Study in Overall Sustainability

There are a multitude of options when committing to launching a traditional land use study (TLUS). Conservation is always front and centre; sacred sites need to be documented and not forgotten. Connection to land and the responsibility of being stewards of the land must continue. Climate change is real; we see this in our area every year. The winters are milder, there is less and less snow, and the water tables are low. We are starting to see the forestry, and oil and gas industry creeping in, so it has become of extreme importance to start documenting and teaching about our traditional territories. Apps and digital technology can be used as tools.

In conclusion, the four-legged family has assisted us in rebuilding our nations and keeping our lands sacred, so our future generations can still drink out of the lake without worry. The fish, waterfowl and moose can still be harvested without question. We have the ceremonial lodges that are our reminders. We do the Sundances, the pipe ceremonies and Sweat Lodges to keep things in balance and to sing those songs about the relationship we were intended to have on this earth walk. We hope to continue our journeys, and learn and share when we can.

Glossary of *nêhiyawêwin* Terms

ana nistam nâpêw: the first man also known as *anishnabe* in Ojibwe
âtayôhkêwina: sacred stories, legends
atim: a dog
atim acâhkosak: Little Dipper
êkwa: and
iyiniw: First Nations person, Indian; person, man
kistêsinaw: older brother also known as *wisahkêcâhk*
mahikan acâhkos: Polaris star
miyo-pimâtisiwin: good behaviour, good life
nêhiyaw: Cree, Cree man, Cree Indian, Indian
ohcinêwin: a suffering caused by ridicule
otâpêwatim: a sled dog
pâstâhowin: transgression, breach of the natural order; use of bad medicine; sin, evil doings
wisahkêcâhk: Cree culture hero, legendary figure; first Cree

Notes

1. *kâniyâsihk* is spelled *kâ-niyâsihk* in Standard Roman Orthography (SRO), meaning the point in the lake. Also, a specific place at Ministikwan Lake, Saskatchewan.
2. Website: www.kaniyasihkculturecamps.com
3. More information can be found in David Mandelbaum's ethnographic study.
4. Story taken from First Nations Astronomy: Seeing the Cree and Ojibway Sky (<http://jane.whiteoaks.com/2009/10/13/first-nations-astronomy-seeing-the-ininewuk-cree-and-objibway-sky/>) (accessed April 22, 2022).
5. Story taken from *The Birth of Wesakechak: Wenonah Gives Life to Twins*, a sacred Cree genesis teaching on birth.
6. These teaching stories are now told year-round from the direction of our Cree Elders who took it to ceremony.
7. See drmartbybecker.com and *Handbook on Animal-Assisted Therapy* (2015) for more information.
8. Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre (MFNERC), First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC) and Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) have Indigenous research resources.
9. Friedlund's (2017) thesis, *Sled Dog Code of Practice* (www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/farming-natural-resources-and-industry/agriculture-and-seafood/animal-and-crops/animal-welfare/sled_dog_code_of_practice.pdf) and

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Wild Jobs: Dogsled Guide

Tyler Dixon

I've been trying to make this story a reality for years now. I've come close a few times, but there's always been an obstacle on the path to completion. If you can name a dogsledding company in southern Alberta, I've reached out to them for an interview. After a lengthy conversation with Jereme Arsenault, boy am I glad Snowy Owl Sled Dog Tours answered my call. To say I'm psyched that this story is finally coming to fruition is an understatement. The goal when I started this series was to showcase exciting outdoor careers, and I think I've accomplished that to some degree, but as a dog owner/lover there was always something missing. Sure, I've covered Avalanche Rescue Dogs, Alberta's Conservation K-9 Unit, and even the Wolfdogs of the Yamnuska Sanctuary, but the sled dogs kept calling. Finally, I am proud to present a profile of what it's like to be a dogsled guide.

As mentioned, I had a great conversation with Jereme, who is the sole owner of Snowy Owl Sled Dog Tours. Snowy Owl has always been a family business that was started by Jereme's parents back in 1983. In fact, it was the first incorporated dogsled tourism company in western Canada. The company got its start with just six dogs. Today that number currently sits at 177, but the original bloodline still flows through Snowy Owl's kennel today. Jereme, who's been involved with the business since before he could walk, conservatively estimates he has logged more than 600,000 kilometres on a dogsled. With a mind-boggling number like that, I figure there's nobody better to shed some light

on what it's like to operate a dogsledding business and give us an insider's look into one of Canada's oldest sports. Without further delay, here are the highlights from an insightful interview.



Calgary Guardian (CG): “Let’s start with the dogs. You’ve got close to 180, which is astounding. What makes a good sled dog? Are you looking for specific traits?”

Jereme Arsenault (JA): “Imagine you could pick the perfect athlete, well everything you can think of would be the same with the dogs. In the tourism industry, personality takes rank over performance. It’s not always about speed and strength, they’re all professional-calibre athletes. Our clientele wants to be able to interact with the dogs, pet the dogs, hug them, so personality is incredibly important. Work ethic is also a key piece of the puzzle, because at the end of the day



*Jereme and one of his sled dogs.
Photo Credit: Caleb Huizinga Photography*

they are working dogs. We also look for their 'learnability,' which essentially means we're looking at their willingness to learn. The ones that pay attention get the most attention. We're trying to breed for positions within the team, and we're always thinking two years down the road. Training a lead dog takes longer than two years, so they need to earn their spot as the lead."

CG: "To be successful, the dogs must work in teams. How do you decide which dog goes where in the lineup?"

JA: "Personality. At the end of the day it all comes down to the personality of the dog. They can't all be lead dogs, or it would just be chaos."

CG: "Considering what you said about the importance of personality in the tourism industry, are your dogs considered pets, working dogs or a bit of both?"

JA: "A bit of both depending on what stage they're at in their life. We like to refer to them as 'working pets.'"

CG: "What's the average career length for a sled dog?"

JA: "That all depends on the dog. As a general rule in my kennel, dogs are in their prime between two and

seven years of age. Dogs in their prime will run between 40 and 50 kilometres per day, which sounds like a lot but is nothing for a sled dog. If I were to enter a race with my dogs, we'd finish dead last because they're used to stopping for photos! My dogs operate on a typical work week of five days on and two days off. We have enough dogs to operate up to 16 teams at one time and still give between 50 and 60 dogs the day off. Dogs younger than two and older than seven are all assessed individually. All the dogs follow a strict diet and obviously get tons of exercise. They get lots of love from a lot of different people. Their absolute favourite thing to do is run and they are paid with affection.

At eight years of age the dogs are put up for adoption, but are typically still used while they wait to be adopted. The adoption process is lengthy and in-depth. We attempt to match a dog according to the lifestyle of the adoptive parents. Some of my dogs make great house pets and wouldn't care if they ever went for a run again. There's a 10-visit minimum to adopt any of my dogs, and in the final stages of the adoption process the dogs will go for sleepovers to ensure the match is right for both the people and the dog. These dogs gave me the best years of their lives, so I won't just give them to anybody."

CG: "How many dogs are required to run a team?"

JA: "That all depends on the length of the tour, the snow conditions and the temperature. Typically, we'll run between five and twelve dogs, depending on the weight of the sled and the terrain. Our sleds never exceed 500 pounds. The dog team can also play a factor, because you can't put one huge dog with five smaller ones. It's all about matching the right sized dogs together."

CG: "Once a dog team is established, do you keep that same team together indefinitely?"

JA: "In the beginning dogs are on set teams, but just like in hockey the coach might shuffle the lines. Our dogs are shuffled as needed. All dogs perform differently depending on who the instructor is, the clientele for the day and so on. The dogs communicate 90 per cent through body language, so you really need to check yourself and watch what you're doing. Running a kennel is like running a massive preschool, but in my case the 'students' can outrun you."



*Each dog has their own distinct personality.
Photo Credit: Caleb Huizinga Photography*



*Exploring the incredible Canadian Rockies by dogsled.
Photo Credit: Snowy Owl Sled Dog Tours*



*The Snowy Owl kennel.
Photo Credit: Caleb Huizinga Photography*



*On the trail with the Snowy Owl team.
Photo Credit: Caleb Huizinga Photography*

CG: “When the dogs aren’t working where do they live?”

JA: “This is the most important question you’ve asked so far. Like any outfit with this many dogs, they live in an outdoor kennel. Huskies are well equipped for life outdoors. The industry norm is to house sled dogs outside. We believe this is an acceptable practice provided the dogs are supervised 24/7, which mine are. Each of our dogs has their own four-season house that is hand-built by us. The kennel is meticulously cleaned six times per day to ensure the dogs remain healthy. Living conditions in most kennels across the world aren’t great. I’ve rarely been to a kennel where I’ve been impressed with the living conditions. We are proud of our kennel and aren’t afraid to show it off. We have always been very transparent about the care our dogs receive, but that all costs money. We’re fortunate that our kennel makes enough to put that money back into the dogs, but that’s not the case for everyone.

Most people don’t realize this, but there is no official governing agency for dogsledding except the SPCA, and unfortunately, they don’t know a lot about dogsledding. Nobody has ever checked Snowy Owl, EVER! Activists are constantly protesting the industry and they aren’t totally wrong, but there’s lots of ignorance out there. Tethering dogs seems to be the biggest concern, but there’s no evidence that tethering impacts them mentally. My dogs are tethered overnight, so they don’t kill each other, during meals so each dog can eat and right before they go to work. Once they’re at work they’re set loose to run. But these dogs can’t be let loose unsupervised. Sled dogs are the closest living relatives to the wolf, so when these dogs fight they will fight to the death. Every breed of dog has been bred for a purpose, but when that purpose isn’t fulfilled you create problem animals. My dogs’ purpose is to run, so we see very few problems with our animals. In the end, there needs to be a governing body that sets a standard for this industry, but there’s not much interest from any level of government to make those changes.”

CG: “Switching gears for a minute, let’s talk about your guides. What type of qualifications or training do your guides need to operate a dogsled team?”

JA: “I prefer that my first-year instructors have no prior dogsled experience. I don’t want anyone mishandling my dogs or any heavy-handed instructors



This could be you!
Photo Credit: Snowy Owl Sled Dog Tours

coming from another kennel. Of course, I teach my team to discipline the dogs, but I want them to know when it's appropriate and how to go about it. I also want them to know how to reward the dogs. If they're green I can mould them to my liking. I prefer folks with forestry or farming backgrounds because they know what it means to suffer. The dogs and clients are always serviced first and then the guides. Guides average about 24 kilometres per day while on the trail, and then you have to take care of the dogs. There is no dogsled guide certification, but all of my guides have Level C Standard First Aid, with the majority holding Wilderness First Aid certifications."

CG: "Let's talk about the tours. Do you have specific areas or trails that you use or are you free to go wherever you like?"

JA: "We operate in Spray Valley Provincial Park, which wasn't actually a provincial park when Snowy Owl was incorporated. We have access to a 100-kilometre



Working together as part of a team.
Photo Credit: Caleb Huizinga Photography

trail system and our staging area is the Spray Lakes. The dogs need to be transported from the kennels to the staging area and back again each day. Little known fact is that recreational dogsledders can go almost anywhere, as long as dogs are allowed in that area or on that specific trail."

CG: "What is the best thing about your job?"

JA: "I think I would have answered that question differently based on the stage of my career. It has changed as my career has evolved. Ten years ago, I would have said the best part of my job was sharing the experience with people from around the world and working with my best friends. I've always said, if dogsledding isn't the coolest thing you've done, it'll be in the top three! These days I'm eager to engage with my friends and the dogs on a deeper level. Building that relationship with the dogs is just so rewarding. My dogs have gotten me through a lot of tough times and that relationship cannot be taken for granted."

CG: “There are several other dogsledding operations in southern Alberta. Why should folks choose Snowy Owl? What sets you apart from the competition?”

JA: “The most commonly searched activity on the Travel Alberta website is dogsledding. We are a real, genuine experience. We’re not faking anything or covering up anything. When you walk away from this you’ll know how to drive a dog team on real mountain terrain. Of course, you can opt for a guided sled. Riding in a sled is fun, but driving your own team is just way better! You’ll get the real deal, with class! It’s a high-end experience, but you get value. If you want healthy, happy dogs and a top-notch experience, we’re that company.”

One thing we didn’t talk about was the celebrity status that his dogs have garnered. Over the years the Snowy Owl pack has been featured in numerous movies, commercials, tourism campaigns and TV shows. You’ve seen them featured in various Travel Alberta campaigns, a Suzuki Super Bowl commercial, *Santa Baby 1 and 2*, and most recently in the Disney blockbuster *Togo*, to name just a few.

Jereme and the Snowy Owl team are busy gearing up for their 38th winter, which kicks off on December 1. I want to take this opportunity to thank Jereme for being so open and honest about dogsledding and offering a glimpse behind the scenes of this industry. I really appreciate your time and sincerity. Snowy Owl will be the only company I choose or recommend going forward.

To learn more about the tours they offer, the welfare of their pack, the adoption process, how they’re dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, what truly sets them apart from their competitors, or to book your next adventure, please visit the Snowy Owl website. You can also connect with them on Facebook and Instagram.

Reprinted with the author’s permission from the Calgary Guardian, <https://calgaryguardian.com/wild-jobs-dog-sled-guide/>. Originally published November 19, 2020, on the Calgary Guardian website. Minor changes have been made to fit ATA style.



*Look at this face, just beautiful.
Photo Credit: Caleb Huizinga Photography*



*Don’t you just want to get on the back of this sled
and go for the ride of your life?
Photo Credit: Caleb Huizinga Photography*

Teaching with Tarps

Samantha Ur

Do you have some tarps lying around that you are not sure what to do with? I bought six \$8 tarps a while ago from Walmart. Below are a few great ideas:

Build a Shelter

I have been using tarps to teach students about shelters. To begin, I give students a long piece of rope (that they cannot cut) and a tarp. Their challenge is to build a shelter large enough for their entire group to fit underneath that will withstand different types of weather (rain, snow, wind and so on). I give them some time to research what they want their shelter to look like and to gather extra materials if necessary (usually sticks or extra tarps).

On the day when they begin to build, they always struggle. What they thought was going to be simple always turns out to be more difficult than they imagined! The best part about this, though, is that you get to see the students come alive. Everyone is involved, trying to solve the puzzle of the missing shelter. I usually end up with some crazy shelters. I always tell them that in the next class, they will need to make it better. And they do. Every time.



Flip the Tarp

Another way I like to use tarps is to play Flip the Tarp (see *Five Minute Field Trips: Volume II* at www.geoec.org)! Split the students into groups. Usually, I try to have at least four people per tarp to start. The idea is they have to flip their tarp without anyone stepping off of the tarp. If it's too easy, I combine the groups, which makes it more difficult for them to flip the tarp. It is so fun to watch them!

They learn to talk to each other. They learn to coordinate. They learn to change direction. This activity is a great icebreaker that can be played in any kind of weather. It is such a nice trick to keep in your back pocket.

All Aboard

Finally, I love All Aboard (another game from *Five Minute Field Trips: Volume II*)! This game seems to be a favourite. Even my toughest crowds ask to play this game multiple times.



Playing flip the tarp

The idea is that you split your group into more than four people per group. You really can do this with any size, but I find four is the sweet spot.

The idea is that the group has to stay on the tarp for 10 seconds. If they can achieve that, they move on to the next level. At every level, they have to fold their tarp in half. The tarps get so small by the end! It is so much fun to watch them really thinking about how they can maximize their tarp space for their group. By the end, you can get some crazy setups!

Tarps are amazing. You can have so much fun with them! Whether they are used for one of the games above or simply something for students to sit on, they really are a wonderful tool!



Playing All Aboard

Reference

Rustemeyer, C, and C Esau. *Five Minute Field Trips: Volume II*. GEOEC website. www.geoec.org/lesson-ideas.html (accessed October 3, 2022).



All of my students loved this one. It doesn't matter if they are best friends or mortal enemies, they find a way to get together and make this happen!

Empowering Learning with an Explorer Mindset

Kelly Koller

Looking for a way to catalyze students' curiosity and foster a love of learning this year? Using an Explorer Mindset and National Geographic's the Learning Framework (www.nationalgeographic.org/education/about/explorer-mindset/) is a wonderful way to build a positive culture for learning and help individual students reflect on their own individual learning path.

The process of learning is exploration and, just like explorers going out into a field study, learning something new is like going to a place you have never been before: pushing boundaries, going further, growing as learners. In our indoor and outdoor classrooms around the world, in formal and informal settings, educators and learners can use the same attitudes and skills as explorers in the field to empower themselves in the process, the adventure, of learning. With that mindset, we catalyze our own growth in

intellectual and emotional wellness while becoming explorers and stewards in our interconnected world.

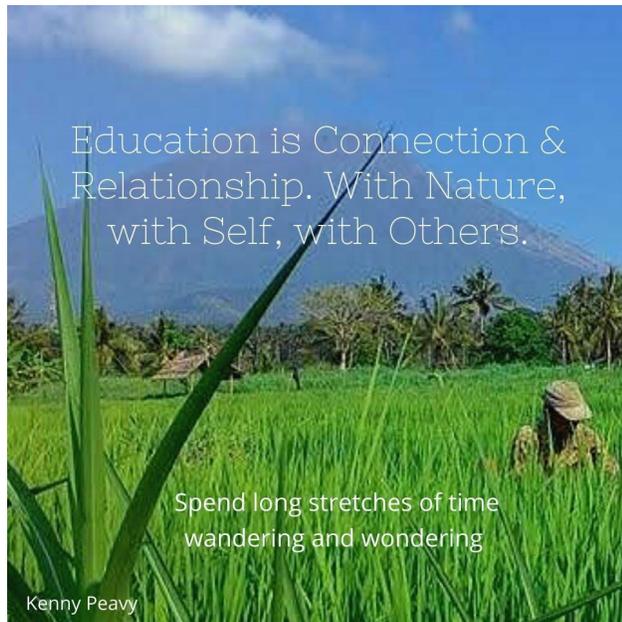
An Explorer Mindset in K–12 education uses the attitudes and skills of the Learning Framework from National Geographic Education as a foundation, and, recognizing that every classroom and individual comes from unique perspectives, encourages adaptation. As a classroom teacher, an outdoor enthusiast, technology nerd and National Geographic Society grantee, I created a website (www.explorermindset.org) and app (explorermindsetapp.com) that encourages students to modify the Learning Framework while they reflect on and create their own Explorer Mindset. In addition to a dedicated course on Developing an Explorer Mindset, National Geographic Society has a wonderful variety of other impactful (and free!) professional development classes at www.nationalgeographic.org/education/professional-development/courses/.

We were meant to explore this earth like children do, unhindered by fear, propelled by curiosity and a sense of discovery. Allow yourself to see the world through new eyes and know there are amazing adventures here for you.

—Laurel Bleadon Maffei

Education Is Connection and Relationship

Kenny Peavy



all the *edujargon*, clamour, ruckus and rumpus about education and learning boils down to?

Connecting and Understanding Our Relationship with Nature

As far as I can tell, everything we do is somehow connected to nature. Every time we inhale a lung full of oxygen, every chip of chocolate we chomp, every single taco and pizza slice we slurp, gobble and gulp rely on photosynthesis and the process of converting sunlight to sugar. This can only be accomplished by plants and organisms that contain a dollop of chlorophyll held fast in their chloroplasts. Those unknown and uncelebrated tiny sac-like organelles encapsulate the green chemical that translates the language of light into the many carbon sugars that fuel our bodies and minds.

Through the most basic and primal acts of breathing and eating, we are intrinsically and inextricably connected to and reliant on nature. There is no escaping it. Photosynthesis truly is an underrated miracle that few understand and even fewer pay attention to. A crying shame, really.

Not only that, but every job we perform and task we complete is somehow traced back to resources extracted from the natural world. I can't think of any exceptions. All of the traditional scholarly subjects we teach and study in the realm of math, physics, biology, chemistry and various and sundry other *-ologies* find their origins in nature and natural philosophy.

Way back when, in days of yore, it was the observation and curiosity about nature and natural phenomena that led to all the fuss about learning nature's secrets. Soon thereafter, all the hubbub and

Education is connection and relationship. With nature, with self, with others.

—Kenny Peavy

At Green Camp in Bali, we have three overarching values that we communicate and demonstrate to every group that visits: respect yourself, respect others, respect your environment.

Could it be true? Is that all there is to it? Is it really as simple as understanding and respecting the natural world we live in, knowing and respecting who we truly are while figuring out how to interact respectfully with the other 8 billion souls we share this planet with? Could that be all we truly need to learn about and what

noise about nature gave birth to the original study and disciplines of natural philosophy, natural history and the natural sciences.

And what about art and music? Surely there is some connection between witnessing the sheer beauty of sunrise or staring at the cosmos on a clear night that stirs us to express ourselves through art and creative expression.

And could it be that our circadian rhythm is roused by the gibbous moon dancing in secret conspiracy with the tides that motivates us to make music?

By my reckoning, it seems experiencing, understanding and seeing our myriad of undeniable connections with nature, while truly comprehending and honouring our relationship with the natural world, is of utmost importance to us as individuals and collectively as a global society.

Every
single
thing
we have,
see
or do
comes from nature.



So it pretty much makes sense to me that education and learning in, about and for nature is vital.

Connecting and Understanding Our Relationship with Self

.....
The job of an educator is to teach students to see the vitality in themselves.

—Joseph Campbell

The eternal question. "Who am I?" A question as old as cognition itself.

I can't claim to know an answer or the answer, but I do believe that questioning our values both individually and as a society takes us down a path of self-discovery. Knowing what we know and what we don't know while being brutally and genuinely honest with ourselves about both is key to introspection and self-awareness. Knowing what we believe is another piece of the philosophical pie. Experience is the ice cream on top which, when coupled with knowledge and understanding, leads to wisdom and insight. Knowing oneself may well be the most complicated and difficult thing a person can do. But it is necessary. It is our task. Our dharma.

All of this is studied in a multitude of different psychologies ranging from emotional psychology and cognitive psychology to neuropsychology and psychiatry.

Art also provides insight into self-awareness and understanding one's self, as does literature. For I believe that we write to understand who we are, and we read to know we are not alone.

Mindfulness and meditation are also popular these days for connecting with self and introspection. Health, well-being, nutrition, anatomy, physiology and exercise science are all variations on the study and understanding of self. Social emotional learning and understanding what we feel, why we feel it and how to

deal with our feelings in a healthy manner are also at the forefront of new and trendy subjects nowadays. And rightly so, considering how many folks have dealt with personal health issues, emotional issues, financial issues, physical health problems and a heap of stress that is being expressed in numerous and novel ways as we find ourselves reeling from the immense impacts of the pandemic.

All of these should be explored when trying to figure out and answer that age-old question, “Who am I?” It is something we must all wrestle with at some point or another if we are to become actualized and reach our full potential. Understanding who you are is arduous and challenging, but exceptionally worthwhile, rewarding and necessary. While self-discovery is mostly a journey completed in solitude, I personally take comfort in knowing that we are all together in our aloneness. As with connecting and learning about nature, it seems obvious to me that introspection and delving deep into one’s own self is another incredibly essential part of education and learning.

Connecting and Understanding Our Relationship with Others

I am pretty certain we all have some sort of intrinsic fear of the other. Unless we grew up and were raised in a vacuum, then we’ve all been exposed and imparted some sort of hesitancy toward others through our culture, our media, our family or our friends. Whether that fear manifests as racism, classism, tribal identity or just plain old distrust depends on you and your personal history.

Once in a great while, fear serves a purpose as a survival mechanism, but those situations seem to be highly contextual and very rare. While fear may be a useful advisor, it is a poor master.

As a global society, I believe we do indeed need to acknowledge and face our fear in order to understand, connect and have relationships with the other 8 billion souls we share the planet with. Relationships are what define us. Relationships make our lives richer. Understanding and knowing how to relate to others is and will increasingly be a valuable skill as the



population continues to clamber up the slippery slope of the J-curve.

Learning more about the humanities, anthropology, social sciences, politics and history will certainly play a role in how we form and develop relationships with others. Studies in international relations and communications won’t hurt either.

Since it seems like the planet will most likely get more crowded with a lot less elbow room, connecting and understanding our relationship with others seems paramount.

As I ponder these three basic domains, I wonder if all of education and learning is ultimately about connection and relationship with nature, with ourselves and with others.

It seems that in all—the scholarly disciplines, nonacademic pursuits, pragmatic training and vocational endeavours—education and learning should lead back to nature, self and others.

What do you think? What else is there? There may be more. I am not sure. I am still seeking.

As it turns out, keeping an open mind and developing a mindset for persistent questioning and genuine seeking may well be the path to the answers and solutions we seek.

Follow Kenny Peavy for more articles about education, nature and connecting with people and planet!

- <https://medium.com/@kennywpeavy>
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*Kenny Peavy is originally from Georgia, USA. He's been teaching overseas for 23 plus years in Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia. Kenny is currently the head of Curriculum and Learning at Green Camp at Green School Bali. In his current role, he teaches science, mathematics and English as a second language in an experiential outdoor setting. He's ridden a bamboo bicycle from Thailand to Bali to raise awareness for sustainability in southeast Asia and circumnavigated Phuket Island in Thailand in a kayak to spotlight marine conservation issues in the region. He is author of *The Box People—Out of the BOX!* (2021), an illustrated children's book focused on sustainable communities with the message to get out of your box and play outside to make deep connections with nature! Learn more at www.amazon.com/Box-People-Out/dp/B09M4R6PRB/, www.greenschool.org/bali/ and www.greencampbali.com/.*

How Does Data Tell a Story of a Place?

Ms Riffel and Mrs Shukin

Through a multicurricular lens, Grade 5 students explored the physical regions of Canada and weather through a variety of media and research. Students have had first-hand experience of our home region and climate, the Interior Plains, but many have not yet personally explored the other vast geographical regions of Canada: the Arctic, Atlantic, Cordillera, Great Lakes and Canadian Shield. Students used second-hand data and explored different points of view through stories, videos, photographs, charts, maps, graphs, timelines, text and tables to begin to glean understanding to create a story of these unique places. This data was used for inferencing, comparing and drawing conclusions to compare and contrast the vast land that is known as Canada.

Students represented their learning through a variety of media by rendering a beautiful phenology wheel and woven representation. Each wedge of the phenology wheel zoomed in on the natural landforms and key attributes that represent a given region.

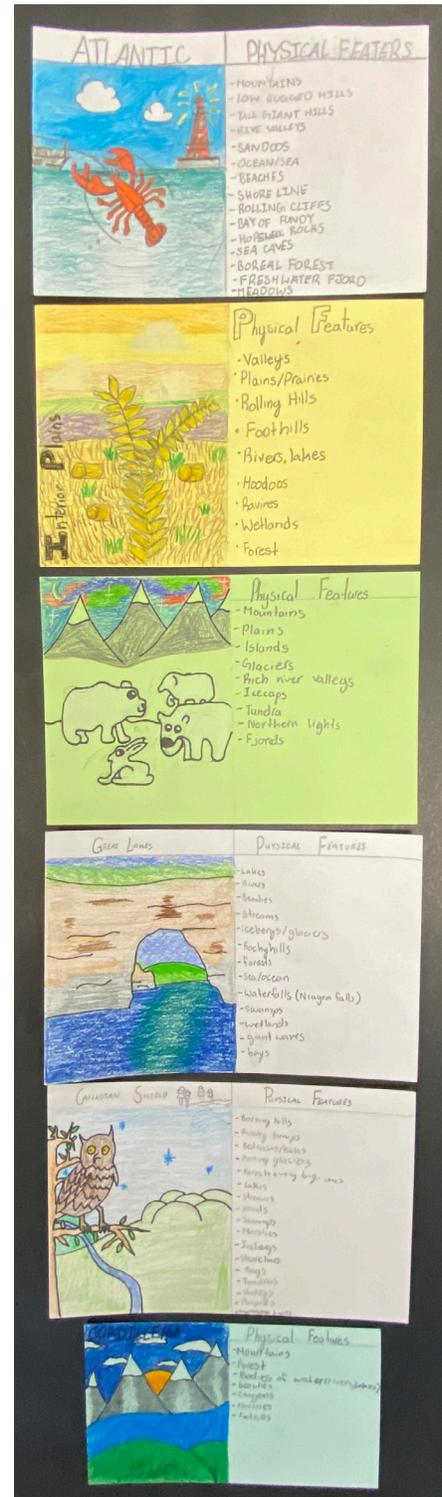
Using the past weather site (www.timeanddate.com/weather/canada/calgary/historic?month=9&year=2020), partners recorded the actual temperature data from September 21, 2020 to March 21, 2021 (fall to spring equinox) for their selected Canadian cities to create a table.

To communicate their regions' weather data, students created an artistic woven graph using a range of warm and cool colours. Students learned proper weaving techniques such as tension, patterning, transition of strings and finishing. Using more than 50 different colours of wool, working on a scale of two, a colour key was created for the different temperatures. The same colour key was used to represent the different temperatures for the cities for each of the six geographical regions.

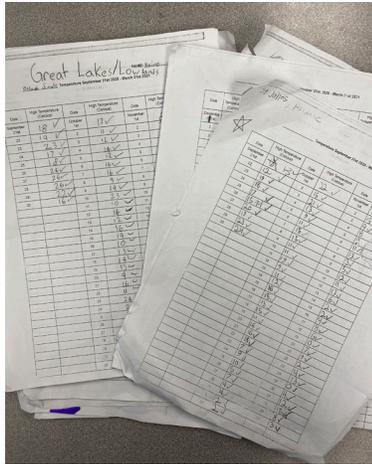
Once their weaving was complete, students partnered with a peer from a different region to compare the 21st of each month for the recorded time in a double bar graph. They considered

- what each other noticed and
- how the regions' temperatures were different and how they were similar.

Applying their figurative language skills, students wrote an "I Am ..." poem from the perspective of the region represented in their



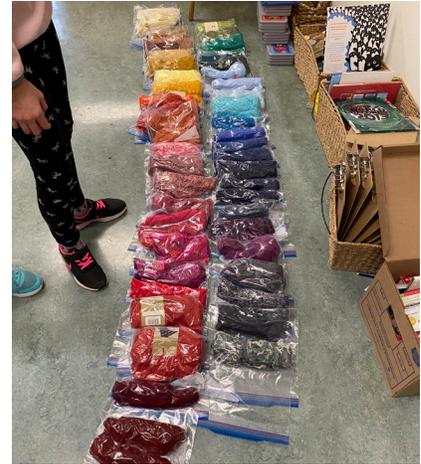
Key research and sharing of each physical region of Canada to begin the process.



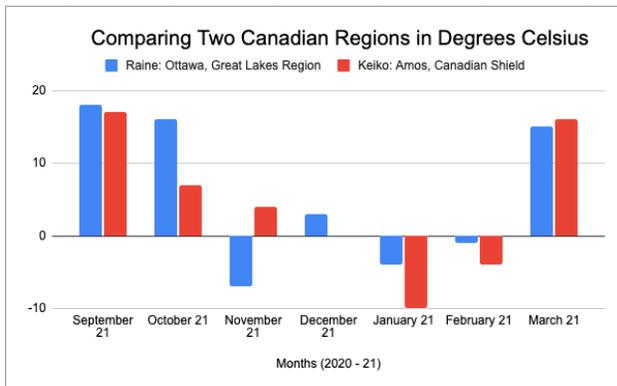
Collecting the data for each physical region of Canada.



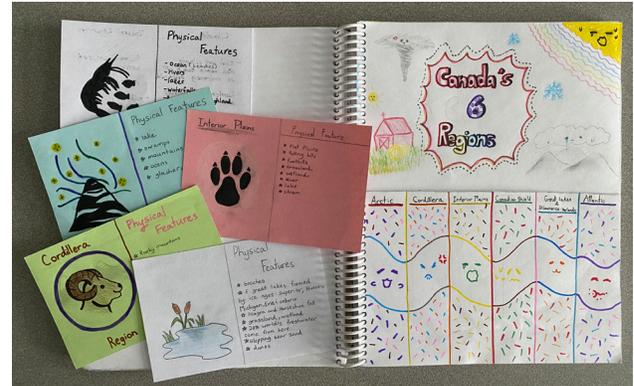
Phonology wheel representing the regions across Canada.



Selecting the colours that will represent each temperature in the weaving.



Comparing two regions of Canada.



Research and postcards of each region of Canada.



The process of weaving the temperatures based in colours.

weaving. Speaking from the point of view of the land, students personified and shared key physical attributes using descriptive language, metaphors and similes.

Students shared their connected body of work with their families through an iMovie digital celebration of learning!

I Am the Great Lakes Region

by Joanna

Tiptoeing down to the great ocean, weaving across the vast land.

I am a graceful ballet dancer, carefully planning every step I take.

Up against the streams, waterways will join me as one. Tracing to the source, no river will end up stray or lost.

I carry the glimmering water down to the tides
splashing quietly.
Once I finish my journey, the sun sends illuminating
golden sparks like fireworks off of the surface of
rippling water glinting.
I can finally rest.

I was once a great cliff, dull and dry till the river sent
their blessings upon me.
Thundering roar of water galloping down me.
I hold a secret of the past.
White mist spreading out like dandelion seeds hitching
a ride on the wind.
I remain at a distance.
I am now attracting more and more tourists, but one
day I shall perish like the waterfall below me.

Water sinking down on land, creating ponds of murky
water.
Wildlife roams around me in every tight corner.
I play an important role of maintaining the water quality
of the great lakes.
Small water insects glide on top of my waters while fish
swims under.
Dark clouds of gray loom across the sky.
Rain pitters, fat translucent droplets fall from clouds.
Finally, it rains.

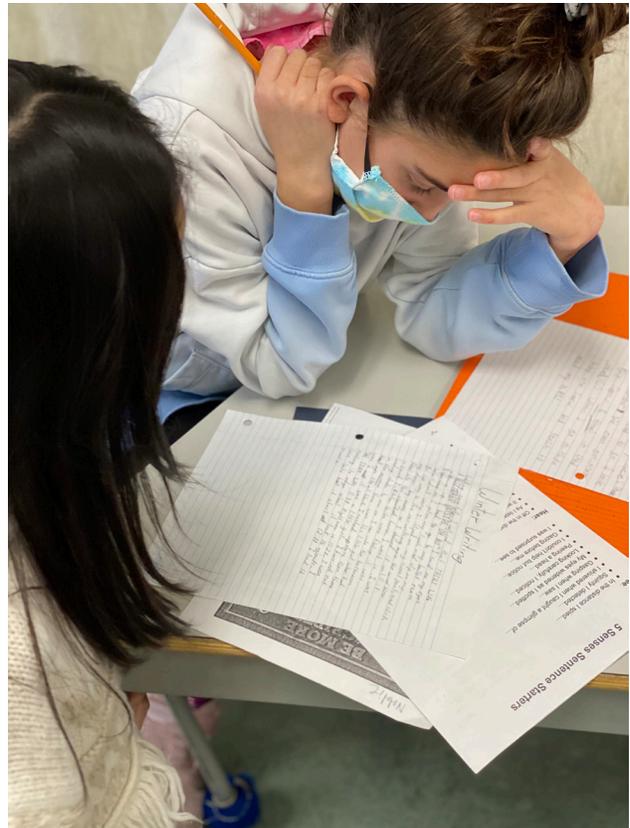
Learning Outcomes

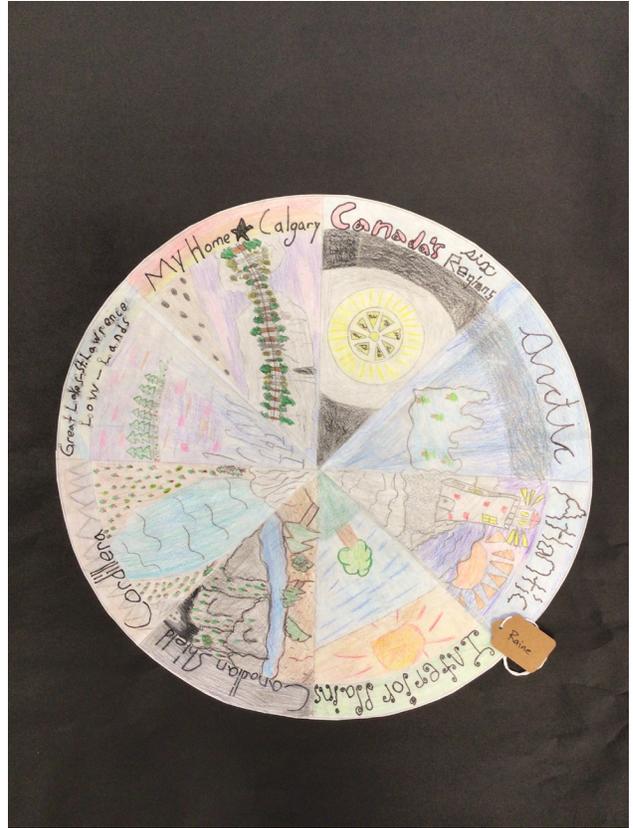
Math: Double Bar Graphs and Woven Art Graphs

- I can collect, display and analyze data.
- I can explain the difference between first-hand and second-hand data.

Fine Arts: Rendering of Wheel and Data Weaving

- I can make art using fabric, demonstrating understanding of specific techniques and skills.
- I can create more refined images and render pictures about life.
- I can create a focal point in my artwork and decide what is essential in my artwork.





- I can create artwork where all the parts work together.
- I can notice how objects are similar and different.
- I can evaluate and improve my work.

Language Arts: Research, Managing and Evaluating Information, and Personification of a Region Poem

- I can listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to explore thoughts, ideas, feelings and experiences.
- I can use others' ideas to understand new ideas.
- I can understand new ideas through talking, taking notes and writing.
- I can preview parts of text and use reading strategies.
- I can keep track of my understanding by comparing my own knowledge with information on the same topic from many different places.
- I can use different forms of writing to organize and present ideas.
- I can find information to answer research questions using a variety of sources.

- I can use criteria to revise my own writing, and add and organize details.
- I can collaborate, listen and respond in group work.

Social Studies: Six Geographical Regions of Canada Research and Geography

- I can critically examine the geography of Canada.
- I can value Canada's physical geography and natural environments.
- I can draw or support conclusions based on information gathered for a research question.

Science Weather: Tracking Temp Over Time, Inferencing and Drawing Conclusions

- I can recognize the importance of accuracy when I observe and measure.
- I can state an inference based on results.
- I can observe, describe and interpret weather phenomena.

Using Technology to Connect Students to the Land in Alberta

Jennifer Janzen

I know, I know. I can hear everyone grumbling, “You can’t teach kids about the land without being on it!” Don’t get me wrong, I totally agree with land-based, inquiry-based outdoor opportunities! But sometimes ... just sometimes ... technology can help us to see some things that just can’t be experienced on the land first-hand.

When I was still teaching full-time, technology was really just becoming commonplace in the classroom. Teachers were encouraged to incorporate technology into their lessons; however, most often this translated into using Powerpoints for notes and lessons. We’ve come a long way in the last 15 years. Now we’re using technology to enhance learning with the development of different programs and apps that can bring a new way of learning to students.

Back in 2014 I attended the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) conference in Ottawa. The conference had a technology stream, and I was pretty excited to show the country our technology that allowed students to time travel and see how the land had changed in the past and may change in the future. Prior to this conference, the feeling was that technology had no place in environmental education, and I thought the tide was changing. As happens with conferences, I had no part in the scheduling and was booked to speak on the last day, after the big banquet the night before, at some ungodly hour in the morning. To say I was disappointed with the conference’s technology stream would be an understatement. The other sessions in the stream had kids using iPads to take pictures of plants, or earthworms. I thought this was my big chance to demonstrate our GIS-based, satellite-imagery-based land use simulator to the world ... and I had five participants. I left Ottawa feeling defeated.



Things have changed a lot since that conference, in terms of how educators view technology, and how we’ve changed Alberta Tomorrow, but the truth remains. Technology *can* allow us to see and do things that we just can’t do out on the land, and sometimes the learnings from that technology can be very powerful.

Let me introduce myself. I am a former plant ecology, park naturalist/interpreter and high school biology teacher, and now executive director of Alberta Tomorrow, a platform that empowers youth to design and live sustainable futures for our shared ecosystems. We’ve been around since 2003 and have evolved since



that rudimentary Version 1. Version 6 is a free, online, user-friendly simulation tool that uses GIS and satellite imagery to allow students to actually “see” what’s happening on the landscape from 1910 to present day, and from present day forward to the year 2050—time travelling to see how the landscape once was and how it may become as a result of human activity. Not only do students see the change on the landscape, but they see the effects of that change on a set of environmental and socioeconomic indicators, truly understanding the impact our actions on the landscape have on what’s important to us. Students can also time travel into the future to see what might happen in the future. Although not a crystal ball, the future simulations are based on Alberta research and data, and present a possible future.

The simulator allows students to test their own futures. They can experiment with different types of land uses, restore areas, take away others, expand cities and towns or shrink them, and see if they can reach the goals they set for water quality, greenhouse

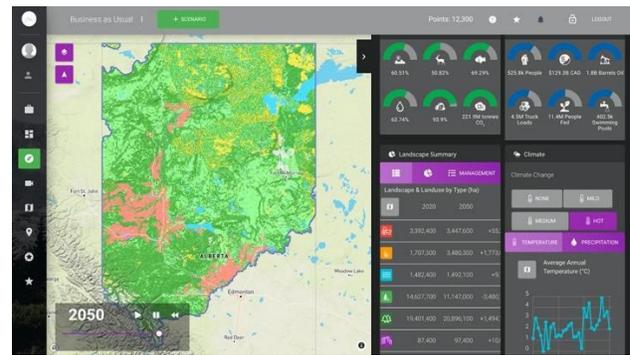
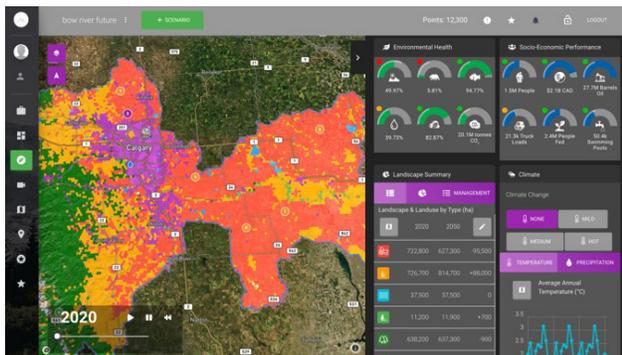
gases and other environmental and economic indicators. You can’t do that without technology, and I have seen first-hand how powerful this technology can be for students!

Our Climate Change module allows students to investigate and learn about the three different climate change scenarios: RCP 2.6, 4.5 and 8.5. Students can see changes in vegetation into the future with the different scenarios; for example, wetlands drying up and being replaced by grassland or forest being replaced with grassland.

In addition to creating their own land use plans for the future, they can explore Alberta’s natural regions by watching our 360° virtual tours for each of the six natural regions. Through 360° photography, sound bites and information hot spots, students can see and learn about the plants, animals, geography, soils, climate, land use and species at risk while being immersed in the sights and sounds and zooming in and out and looking around at the vegetation and land.

Have you ever walked on the Athabasca Glacier? We can take you there! From recorded interviews and lesson plans you can learn about how glaciers move, how much ice is lost in one year, what persistent chemicals are found on the glaciers, how ice cores are analyzed and more.

Students can still go on the land and collect water quality and land use data and enter it into the simulator. This data is stored and shared for others to use. For some time, we have been thinking about how we can incorporate more Indigenous content into the simulator. Thanks to funding from the Calgary Foundation and Alberta Ecotrust, 2022 will see the addition of provincewide maps of treaty areas, traditional territories, residential school locations and



reserve lands. Where available, we will include traditional language names and interviews with Elders talking about culturally significant areas.

Starting with the traditional Blackfoot territory, we will be working with Siksika students to develop the first Indigenous study area using the Two-Eyed Seeing model of blending traditional science and Indigenous knowledge. Rather than looking at the current watershed study areas, students will use the traditional Blackfoot territory and culturally relevant indicators to examine land use changes in their territory.

So, I'll ask again. Can your students do this without the technology? Certainly not. I encourage you to check the simulator out at www.albertatomorrow.ca. If you have questions, e-mail jjanzen@albertatomorrow.ca. We're here to support Alberta teachers and students.



The Simple Complexity of Mother Earth

Carissa Esau

Some say nature is art. Intricate leaves, patterned tree bark, delicate alpine details and profound mountain skylines have a way of touching the artistic mind. A simplistic acknowledgement of natural beauty is only a starting point for the exploration of art in mother earth. We acknowledge natural art by being in its presence: taking a walk in the forest, breathing crisp fresh air, admiring new spring growth or sitting in silence next to running water. Being present is acknowledging, and acknowledgement is a stepping stone to deep appreciation and immersion in natural beauty.

When I take a walk on a mountain trail, I am stepping into a wonderfully detailed world. I am aware of the intricacy and profoundness of nature and the paradoxical simplicity and complexity of our earth. Nature seems so gentle at times—unassuming and a welcome reprieve from the chaos and busyness of a teacher's life. But on closer observation, the complexity of nature is profound.

I have worked to capture the paradox of simplicity and complexity in nature through my own art practice. I began in grade school by bringing my sketchbook and pencils to mountains, lakes and forests and simply recording what I saw. I sketched the ripples in the water. I shaded the shadows of trees. I drew the circular lines found inside tree stumps. I was acknowledging nature's art. I was present and I was interacting with nature's beauty. Interaction with natural beauty instigated a passion for immersion in nature and kickstarted my own art practice as it related to mother earth.

My art practice evolved from sketching to acrylic paintings where I worked to capture the many colours of mother earth. I painted the reds and oranges and yellows and browns of the stunning red rocks of



I explored the complexity of the Jasper landscape through the simplicity of lines on wood.

Nevada. I painted the greys and blues of the Alberta Rockies. I painted the greens and yellows of Alberta's plants. My eyes were opened to the colours of nature as I interacted with mother earth, observed her many coats and worked to simplify her complexity in my own art.

I further studied the lines of nature. I studied the lines of a mountain horizon. I studied the lines of rocks. I studied the overlapping lines of trees and leaves. I studied the lines of trails that weave through the Rockies and prairies of Alberta. As I studied these lines, I explored different ways to represent these lines. I used different media including pencil, acrylic paint, oil paint, India ink, string, stamps and enamel paint. I explored different surfaces for my line exploration including canvas, paper, wood, retired cross-country skis, glassware and more recently in a tattoo design.

The coexistence of clean lines and a vastness of colour in my artwork attempt to unite the simplicity and complexity of nature. The simplicity of a colour palette can juxtapose the intricacy of the lines. In contrast, the simplicity of the lines can juxtapose the complexity of the colours. Yet sometimes the colour and the lines are entirely simple; they encourage an appreciation and acknowledgement of natural beauty, rather than an analysis and critical view of nature's complexity. I will never find the perfect way to communicate the simplicity and complexity of nature, and I will never find the perfect way to fully immerse myself in nature. But for me, my art practice is a way in which I connect with nature. It gives me permission to critically analyze mother earth while thoroughly appreciating her beauty. Creating my own art is a connection point and a way of grounding. Mother earth creates art and I create art; art is our connection point.

I continue to work on bringing these ideas into my classroom. Reinforcing the simplicity and complexity of nature with my students is a challenge I gladly accept. In my science classroom we discuss the complexity of rock formations, the beautiful intricacy of aquatic ecosystems and the detailed process of evolution. My students journal about the beinghood of nature: how rocks "remember" and move through time. They write notes and draw detailed diagrams through a scientific

lens. I have no doubt they acknowledge the complexity of nature. To a Grade 7's mind, studying science can no doubt be overwhelming. The information and detail in nature can be daunting. The challenge I have as an educator is to teach them about the simplicity of nature. I hope they can appreciate the delicateness of nature and acknowledge the beauty of nature's art.

I realize they will not all create their own art as their connection point to nature, as I have done, but I hope they can discover a passion that connects them to our earth. Perhaps this will be through diving or mountaineering, or through scientific study in a lab, or through writing, or poetry, or music or connecting with people in the presence of nature. Our passions connect us to mother earth, as we work to understand her complexity and simplicity.

I see already that some of my 12-year-old students see art in mother earth. They see the different colours in rock formations; they see the simple yet complex lines in hoodoos; they see the shiny beauty of rocks. I hope to instill in my students a passion for nature. An appreciation of its simplicity and an acknowledgement of its complexity. I hope they can discover a way to ground themselves in nature by weaving together their own passions with the art of nature.

Cheers to mother earth. Cheers to her beauty. Cheers to her simple complexity.



I explored the complexity of the Canmore Three Sisters through a variety of colour and lines.

The Place That Raised Me

Heidi Widmer

As a child, I ambled my way to Banff Elementary School accompanied by Cascade Mountain. Crunching frozen puddles under my boots, squishing leaves under my bike tires, running to catch up with friends and rerouting around resident elk were regular occurrences.

These early adventures are why the crisp Rocky Mountain air first thing in the morning remains my preferred caffeine boost. In my teenage years, I remember gazing outside through long, rectangular high school windows, and although I revelled in learning, my curiosity for the view beyond the glass panes was stronger than the lifeless Biology 20 lessons being presented under fluorescent lights.

The disconnect of my learning from the place I love dearly was as curious to me then as it is now. I often wondered, why are we learning about elk in these thick, heavy science textbooks when we could be learning

with the elk I saw on my way to school? Why are we learning about Shakespeare many moons and centuries away, when we could be learning from white-crowned sparrow reciting soliloquies along the Vermilion marshlands? Why are we learning about and not with those who knew this place long before us? Who was here before we were? And before them? And before them? These questions remain with me today.

Currently, I am a graduate candidate in the master of arts in Environmental Education and Communication program through Royal Roads University (RRU) finalizing my research. The birdlife, mammals, weather and landscape of Banff National Park both raised me and continue to nourish me. As the late Norwegian philosopher and ecopsychologist Arne Naess would explain, these are the places and experiences that inform my ecological identity. In a



collection of his writings titled *The Ecology of Wisdom* (2010), edited by Alan Dregson and Bill Deval, Naess describes an ecological identity as a relationship that extends beyond the confines of our skin, bones and consciousness (the “ego-self”) and reminds us how humans are “in, and of, nature from the very beginning of ourselves” (p 82).

With this description in mind, I am unlearning, reflecting and redefining myself in relationship with the world. This shift in perspective, to know myself as an expression “of the earth” rather than “on the earth,” informs my work as an active environmental educator. It also energizes my desire to contribute to a field of environmental education that enables students’ connection to place so they may learn with, for and from the environment in a relational manner.

Guided by the place that raised me, I recently designed a graduate project to contribute to the ever-growing field of research related to place-responsive outdoor learning. Encouraged by Colin Harris, founder and director of the Canadian nonprofit, Take Me Outside (<https://takemeoutside.ca/>), and with immense support from my research advisor, Hilary Leighton, I designed a project intended to support teachers’ well-being through improved connection with the natural world. Fortunately, this research project coincided with my introduction to the influential work of ecophilosopher Joanna Macy and the Work That Reconnects (as published in *Coming Back to Life*) in an ecopsychology course through RRU.

In April 2022, I facilitated a day-long outdoor workshop with seven Calgary-based teachers designed around Macy’s work intending to explore the following:

- How might nature-responsive practices support teacher well-being and professional development?
- Could spending intentional time in nature help teachers cultivate a deeper sense of ecological identity?
- How might these experiences in nature inform pedagogy that supports and fosters reciprocal relationships to place?

Pending approval, the findings and observations of this project titled *In Our Nature: Creating a Way Towards Place-Responsive Pedagogies* will be available in the fall of 2022.

Human-nature relations are, by necessity, deeply personal and fluid. In the same way that we foster relationships with our brothers, grandmothers, neighbours and community, students relate to the natural world in their unique and individual ways. Cultivating these relationships requires tenderness, empathy, attention, respect and patience. As educator and author Parker J Palmer in *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life* (1998) reminds us, “We teach who we are” (p 2). With this sentiment in mind, if we, as educators, teachers and mentors, slow down, breathe, listen and sink into relationships with the natural world, our pedagogy changes, too.

The following creative activity was conducted at the research workshop in April 2022. Informed by the work of Naess, Macy and environmental education author, David Sobel, I designed and now gift this activity to you as a way of remembering and fostering a relationship with the people and places that raised you.

EcoID Poetry Activity

Materials: Piece of blank paper, hard writing surface and a pencil, pen or marker (feel free to add paint, crayon and/or colour to your piece).

Note: Do not reveal the sentence structure before beginning the exercise. It’s more fun if it’s a surprise! This activity can be done on your own or with your class; indoors or outdoors.

Ask your students (or yourself) to do the following:

- Place your dominant writing hand on a piece of paper and trace the outline with your nondominant hand.
- Close your eyes, take a deep breath in, exhale and think of a time as a child when you were playing and felt free outdoors.
- Connected to yourself in this memory, choose one word to describe how you feel (an adjective). Once you’ve chosen a word, write that word within the thumb of your hand outline.
- Connected to your child-self in the same memory, take a look around and choose one word for what you are seeing (a noun). Once you have one word to describe what you are

seeing, write that word in the index finger of your hand outline.

- Connected to your child-self in the same memory, choose one word, an action word, for what you are doing, write that word (a verb) in the middle finger of your hand outline.
- Now, still connected to your child-self in the same memory, think about the humans that were in your life at that time. Choose one word to describe your human relationships at that time in your life (an adjective).
- Finally, still connected to your child-self in the same memory, choose one word for a landscape/waterscape you are in or close to (for example, grassland, forest, river, creek, mountain and so on). Choose one word for a landscape/waterscape (noun) and write it in the pinky finger of your hand outline.
- You should have five words; one for each part of the memory. Fill in the blanks as per the sentence outline graphic. Et voilà—eco-ID poetry!

For those who may feel inclined to reach out and let Heidi Widmer know how your art activities went, you may reach her at heidi.widmer@royalroads.ca.

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Fill in the Blanks

Like (a/an) _____ (thumb) _____ (index)

who is _____ (middle)

I am (a/an) _____ (ring) _____ (pinky)

heidi-widmer.com (2021)

Interviews with Alberta Educators

Learning More About Forest- and Nature-Based Schooling: An Interview with Kylie Gilbert

Alison Katzko

*Nature is the greatest teacher.
That is what I do and why I do it.*

—Kylie Gilbert

Kylie Gilbert is currently travelling the world in search of ways to inspire others to develop curiosity for education that is guided by learning outside the four walls of a classroom. On this journey, she is learning by visiting a variety of places that follow nature-based and forest schooling approaches. Beginning in California, the first stop on her journey has been Alberta. From this interview with Kylie Gilbert, readers will hear about her experience visiting a school in Canmore called Forest Play. This interview is an introduction to her unique journey, and we look forward to learning more about her findings when we check in with her for a future article.

An Introduction to Forest and Nature-Based Schools

Before learning more about Kylie and her travels, it is important to understand her description of forest and nature-based programs. Kylie explained that she





“recognizes *forest* and *nature-based* schools are common terms used frequently and often interchangeably to describe a movement currently taking root across the globe.” These two common terms are used to describe a similar movement.

Kylie shared, “Depending on where you go, the terms around this movement might change. Not everywhere uses the same terminology, and some people are using these terms differently. Although nature-based education has been around for some time with the intention of getting kids outside for learning, I’m mostly curious to learn how the forest schooling movement has grown around the world. Although both focus on getting kids outside to learn, the philosophy behind each term varies. The main thing I think people would be surprised by is that the forest school movement operates outside the four walls of a classroom. We operate in the forest and on public trails (in Southern California this would be beaches, local caves and state parks). We use these spaces as our classroom and achieve all of our educational goals immersed in nature.”

As she travels, she visits schools and learning spaces that may be described as taking either of these approaches. She visits programs and schools that share a concentration around child-led, play-based, pace-based nature immersion.

She referred to author and researcher David Sobel, who explains in his work that the philosophy behind forest schooling is place-based as well as play-based. Researchers like Sobel focus on a phenomenon taking place that highlights all the developmental needs of a child met through play-based nature immersion. Kylie shared that, “Forest schooling also includes a focus on risk being a pillar of the philosophical foundation.” When asked more about risk she explained, “We view risk to be an important part of the early childhood development process and think [calculated] challenges provide opportunity for growth.” She explained that “these forest preschools, or learning spaces, differ from other schools because they operate 100 per cent outside, under all weather conditions, unless it poses a serious threat, such as extreme cold. It is all weather and outdoors.”

An Idea Takes Root

Having grown up in California where she developed a close relationship with nature, she never thought teaching would be her career path. It didn't have that spark she was looking for. "It was not until years later that I discovered forest schooling that everything changed for me." From 2016 until now she's been working in the forest school community in California. From her role as head preschool teacher at one of the first forest preschools in Los Angeles (LA Nature Kids), Kylie focused on connecting city kids to their natural environment by getting them out into the Santa Monica mountains. Currently, with four years inside the classroom and now over five years operating outside the classroom, she feels that "my life as a teacher has greatly shifted. I find increasing freedom in my work. I face little to no resistance from my students or staff, and nearly all of my students are eons beyond the developmental standards for their age."

When asked to share a specific example of how she has seen the benefits and meaning of learning outdoors, Kylie said one student in particular came to mind. She explained, "An instance that brings this to light would

be one student who was initially very uncomfortable in the outdoors. In the beginning, this child resisted taking his shoes off to place his feet on the ground. He was even resistant to wearing a backpack."

Similar to many other teachers who find the transformation of learning outside to engage and build confidence, Kylie went on to share about her process of wondering. "I wondered, because this was the first time I had worked with a student who was diagnosed on the spectrum in a forest school setting, I was curious to see how nature would have an effect. This student was hesitant in the beginning because it was a change to the normal routine." Throughout our interview, Kylie often mentioned wondering about or taking the time to reflect and be curious about a child's response to a learning experience outdoors. This reflection seemed to come from deeply felt personal curiosity and wonder at students' engagement in the environment.

Kylie continued to talk about the student she remembers. "This student was initially challenged by being outdoors in a variety of ways but over time became comfortable and confident in their outdoor classroom. I saw the child start to thrive more and



more with time in a way that was really inspiring. The resistance faded away, and this new comfort opened up a whole new world for them. I saw them take authorship and ownership over the space and environment that they had been initially scared to be in.” Kylie enthusiastically explained how far this student had transformed: “On the last day of our program, the child ran to the van (the transport we used), threw their shoes off into their parent’s car and left them saying, ‘I don’t need these now.’ I saw this child, who previously struggled in a traditional learning setting, become comfortable in our forest classroom and confident in their place.”

Many of the experiences she shared reflected on how students became comfortable and confident in the outdoor spaces where they were learning, building self-confidence alongside knowledge of their surroundings. “After years of doing this, it was fascinating to see what my students were absorbing out there. My preschoolers were practising their basic two-plus-two’s while chewing on freshly foraged fennel and simultaneously curing their friend’s poison oak rash with mugwort that they had found all on their own. It was fascinating to see the extent of their development and their interest in learning how their surroundings could enhance their experience and play.”

As many parents wonder, “Will this work with my child?” Kylie explains, “In my experience, I have seen the forest schooling model provide all sorts of students opportunity to thrive, especially those who aren’t often thriving in traditional programs. It does not matter what a student’s background is, what they are dealing with, what they are coming to the table with. Nature is the great equalizer. That is why I feel that really, I am there to facilitate, but nature is the greatest teacher. That is what I do, and why I do it.”

The Environmental Benefit of a Forest and Nature-Based Model

Kylie has experienced the impact forest schooling has had on students she has worked with in California. She has a true passion and curiosity for “how we can adapt our educational systems to prepare for

transformations ahead.” She stated: “I think the world is changing at a faster pace than provides comfort, and we need to adapt our educational systems to prepare for the upcoming transformations. It is in my interest to push forward this educational model that addresses our changing planet and the need to take action in an innovative way.”

Over the last few years, Kylie has noticed the increased importance of the environment. She reflects that “we are living through an interesting time in history, and these last three years have presented unprecedented challenges with COVID-19. It is an intense time to be alive. We have also had weather intensification in California, including record-breaking wildfires over the last handful of years and elevated pollution levels. For the first time in history, I feel like the general population is reconsidering the scope of education and what that looks like. With the consequences of climate change looming over us and the potential for future pandemics, I am curious how educational leaders may play a role in creating sustainable educational solutions. I’m curious to see if it is possible to stack functions and create an educational system that doubles as a vehicle for positive change. I really feel the forest schooling model is a great vehicle to get us moving in the right direction, not to mention it’s widely adaptable.”

Kylie hopes that more people are beginning to understand the importance of nature in education. She feels that educators are also beginning to see the value in connecting students with the outdoors. During the pandemic she shared that educators were “kind of being forced into different platforms. So many teachers were forced to adapt so quickly. I personally questioned, ‘What do you think is more natural—a child learning from an iPad through a man-made screen or a child learning outside the classroom in the fresh air?’ In certain ways the pandemic opened doors for the forest school movement that highlighted and spotlighted the movement as an alternative, viable educational option. Moving forward we need to be aware of the benefits and worth of this movement. We need to see that nature is the ideal setting, pandemic or not, for children to thrive and learn.”

Professional Background

With the positive experience of engaging outside, Kylie shared how she moved toward researching what she has been experiencing. “I was just fascinated with what I discovered being outside the walls of the classroom, and I saw there was a need for further research. I wanted to contribute to that.”

She decided to go back to school to study this phenomenon regarding what was happening when kids are outside learning. She discovered one of the only university programs in the world that offers a master’s degree in education with a nature-based early childhood focus at Antioch University of Santa Barbara (www.antioch.edu/academics/education/med-exed/med-nature-based-early-childhood-education/). Kylie explains, “This was the master’s program I graduated from. It connected me with a network of people who were evolving the forest school movement. My goal is to continue to connect with universities around the globe to adapt their degrees to offer specialized forest school focused training. My hope is to one day see a world full of universities offering forest school training!”

Kylie also launched her own Forest Nature Immersion Program (LLC) in 2020 that offers a Forest Preschool Program, which she has put on hold to pursue her current research undertaking.

Travelling the World to Visit Forest Schools

A few months ago, Kylie packed her bags and launched a journey around the world to learn more. She shared, “I am travelling the world staying in various places for a month or two at a time, visiting as many forest and nature-based schools as I can along the way. I’m going on a forest school tour, if you will!”

Through being able to visit these schools and learn more through active involvement in their programs, she hopes to build better insight. As she explains, “In America, we have very few public elementary schools offering the forest school model. In other parts of the world (such as the UK) we see the forest school model in the mainstream already and being utilized in conjunction with the public-school system.”

Additionally, “It is also my intention to observe the ins-and-outs of what each school had to go through to operate in their area. I am curious to see the various training opportunities for educators, as well as educational opportunities for students.” Her goal has been to “observe, gain perspective, identify the strengths, driving forces, restraining forces and gaps, in order to help grow the forest school movement.”

In the end, she hopes that she is more able to help the general public better understand the incredible value behind forest school education. She adds, “I am also excited to form a global network and share resources with people and teachers around the world and to see how forest schools operate in different climates.”

She is already learning a great deal as she travels. Her first stop on her journey was Forest Play in Canmore, Alberta. According to their website (www.canmoreforestplay.com/), the Forest Play program is based on the cycles in nature and the life stages children naturally move through. Their programming is based on the eight shields of the coyote mentoring model and forest schools models. Their approach is described as “a unique blend of traditional knowledge from cultures around the world, scientific research and connection mentoring research, and is grounded in the rhythms of the natural world. Forest Play has a focus on safety and building connections, and their programs run exclusively outdoors save for time spent in the heated canvas wall tent in winter.”

Kylie observed some realistic Canadian seasonal changes during five weeks at Forest Play. She enjoyed learning about the influences of the weather on the programs being run, since wintry weather prevailed during her observation. She shared that “I was able to experience Forest Play in negative temperatures and snowy conditions. Having operated in Southern California for years, this was something I was always curious about. To see in action the philosophy that I had touted for years, which is ‘no bad weather, only bad clothes,’ I needed to put that to the test!” In the five weeks of participating there she shared that “there was one day I showed up and it was -15 and snowy. There was a thick layer of ice under fresh powder as we made our way down the hill of the Nordic Centre. I did not hear one child complain about the temperature! Instead they showed up in full snowsuits, ready to slide

down snowy hills with smiles. They were very excited about the conditions. No whinnying was had! It was fascinating to see how it was put to the test in a different climate and there really was not any resistance from the kids. At Forest Play, the coldest they tap out at is about -20. The way these four- and five-year-olds were traversing down steep, icy slopes with ease was impressive. They had next level body control!”

Reflecting on what she had learned so far from her experience at Forest Play, Kylie shared, “It was fascinating, in that I discovered a lot of similarities between the way things are done at Forest Play and the programs I had worked with in Southern California. We shared a very parallel philosophy based on Jon Young’s way of teaching and the Forest Schooling model. This approach is what I mentioned before: child-led, place-based, play-based, utilizing an emergent curriculum—nature as our greatest teacher. What I noticed mostly about my experience at Forest Play was how focused the students were and how present they were in their environment—undistracted, if you will. I have no doubt that has to do with their incredibly pristine, natural classroom. They are operating in one that happens to be a protected forest.”

Goals for the Next Steps on Her Journey

Kylie will continue her journey travelling the world. As I spoke with her for this Interview, she was in Quebec City. She is now in New York where she will be popping into various forest preschool programs throughout the state, in urban parks throughout New York City to programs in the Catskill Mountains [Catskill WheelHouse].

After exploring the East Coast of the United States, Kylie plans to head to Central America and South America. Kylie intends to continue her journey around the world seeking to network and connect with others interested as she goes. As she explains, “I see forest school being a vehicle for change. I personally think that forest schools have the potential to answer questions we will inevitably be asking in the future. I see this as a viable, sustainable model for children now and in the future.”

Resources

If you’d like to follow along on Kylie’s journey as she visits forest schools around the world, visit her website www.oldgrowthkids.com. Stay tuned for an Instagram page soon! Below are some of Kylie’s key resources:

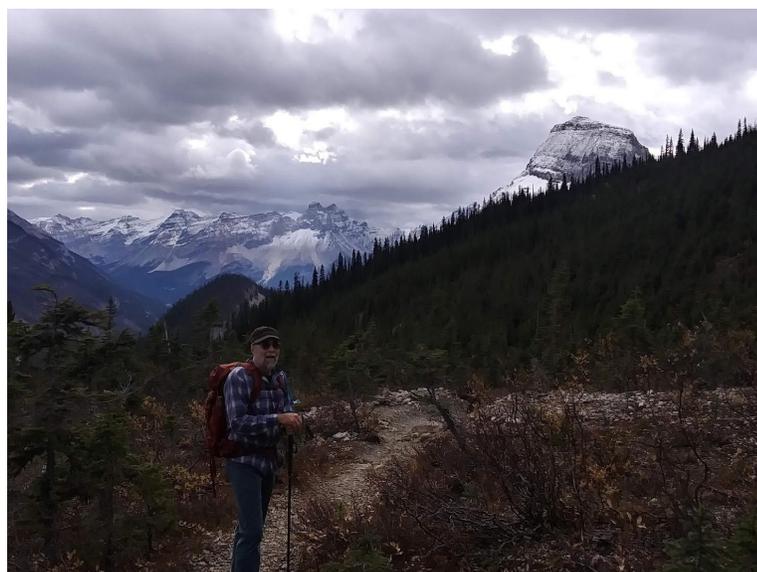
- One resource I recommend is *Coyotes Guide to Connecting with Nature*, by Jon Young, Evan McGown and Ellen Haas (2010, Owl Ink Media). It is like a guide book for nature-based educators to use. It has resources, such as songs, games and all sorts of nature-related and connecting activities. It also carries the nature-based philosophy that I support. www.amazon.ca/Coyotes-Guide-Connecting-Nature-McGown/dp/1579940250
- David Sobel has many great books. *Nature Preschools and Forest Kindergartens: The Handbook for Outdoor Learning* (2015, Redleaf) is a great resource. www.davidsobelauthor.com/nature-preschools-and-forest-kindergartens
- Richard Louv’s *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* (2008, Algonquin Books). He was a leader for sparking interest in connecting with nature and what the benefits are from getting kids outside. He started the conversation about needing more research and personally that got me really activated to take kids outside. <http://richardlouv.com/books/last-child/children-nature-movement>
- Antioch University. I suggest anyone interested in forest school or nature-based programming should look into their programs. They have a very developed degree offering. www.antioch.edu/academics/education/med-exed/med-nature-based-early-childhood-education/
- North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) has a great forum through which educators can connect across the world. <https://naaee.org>

Kylie’s advice for teachers wanting to start out: “If I was going to give advice to someone trying to get children outside, I would suggest working with what you have. You can always access nature wherever you are. There is so much potential for learning (even if you don’t see how that is possible before trying).”

A Leap of Faith: Connecting the Essence of Our Relationship with the Land to Lifelong Learning

A Quilt of Conversation with Hal Soby, Master Teacher, Guest Educator and Mountain Adventurer

Facilitated by Abi Henneberry



Mount Wapta, from the Iceline Trail and Yoho Pass

When Hal Soby was offered an opportunity to share his outdoor experience with our *Connections* journal team, he graciously accepted it, and the race for mutually agreeable meeting dates was on! Hal requested a bit of a framework, as he felt he could go in many directions with a conversation about his time in the mountains. He received some standard interview questions, and what follows is the response that set the stage for a revealing exchange, during which Hal shared his simple and unique perspective regarding our connection to the land and its place in education, life and spirituality:

Abi,

Thank you for sending the questions. I think I might be the wrong “teacher” for this interview. When Darren asked me about this, I thought it was generally about my experiences over many years in, on and exploring mountains far and wide. My wife and I are in the Rockies for most weekends, much of the summer, and if we are lucky, we get to the Spanish Pyrenees. In terms of teaching, I have been a Grade 6 teacher for over 25 years and an elementary teacher for 37 years. Currently, I am guest teaching. As for any opportunity to teach outdoor education, none sadly.

So, I need to apologize for maybe “using” up the precious time you have as a teacher. Judging by the questions I could only tell you how the mountains feed my soul, nourish my spirit and keep me close to my Creator.

I replied, “No, Hal. You are perfect. I sent you what is on our Google Drive as a potential guide for us. I am after exactly what you described. May we please meet and go from the heart?”

Having established solid common ground, we scheduled what became an enlightening, inspiring and affirming conversation yielding the story of a master teacher and his continuing positive influences on students, colleagues and community members.



Reflections from North Molar Pass at Fish Lake Campground



Tangle Summit looking back toward Wilcox Spine and the Icefields Parkway

The Starting Line: A Beginning That Set the Tone for Intuitive Flexibility

Hal's career began before he completed his degree. A principal he still knows told him that she had a teacher leaving and that she was not planning to hire a replacement for her. She encouraged him not to pursue another job for May and June, and instead come to float around her elementary school for those two months. Hal followed through on the offer, thought the experience was "all right," returned to university, completed his degree and was placed in a Grade 9

class the following September as a first-year teacher. He had been in this new position for about a week, when he was called into his employer's office. When he arrived, he was told that someone had pulled a few strings and he needed to contact none other than the principal who had asked him to volunteer in her elementary school halfway through his studies. When he called, she told him that he had 22 Grade 2 students waiting for him and that this is what he was meant to do! He was understandably shocked. She told him that she would get him into teaching high school the following year if he really disliked the assignment, but that in her heart of hearts, she felt that elementary school is where he belonged. He stayed in that position for a long time, moving eventually to Grade 6. "I had a group of parents who asked me to move forward with my Grade 2s into Grade 3, which happened, and then again from Grade 3 on to Grade 4. When they requested the same as their children moved into Grade 5, I declined, noting that this was not healthy for any of us; but, I had that group again in Grade 6! I ended up having them for a third of their education, which I found quite daunting. I'm still very close to that group of people, all of whom are now about 40 years old. They are a remarkable group that I've kept in touch with."

It's the Little Things

Hal went on to describe a special bond he formed with a "little Irish fellow," who he taught Grades 2–4 before the child returned to Ireland. "I've had pints with him in Ireland, and he's been here to visit as well. He was truly a brilliant boy. His Grade 2 year fell at the time of the first Gulf War. He was hearing people say we should pray for this, and we should pray for that, and he got super upset, relaying his thoughts, 'It's not about winning and losing. It's about living and dying.' And that's a seven-year-old boy talking. Amazing! He is the one who has guided me through the Ukrainian situation because he graduated from Oxford with a doctorate in International Relations, specializing in the politics of the former Soviet Union. Can you imagine? He's guided me through a lot if it, because he speaks Russian and Ukrainian, in addition to several other languages. He even contacted me when he was in Kyiv

when he was 26 to tell me he had come across a Pink Floyd bar, and he remembered me playing 'The Wall' in Grade 3. Kinda cool he remembered this, but what all of my students would have known from the very beginning is that the mountains were definitely closest to my heart."

As much as possible, Hal shared his outdoor experiences with his students from the very beginning. "If I was gone for a weekend, we always sat around in a little circle with the Grade 2s, and I'd tell them what I did on that weekend, and where I went and what I accomplished. This would move forward even to during COVID. I live on the edge of Calgary in Silver Springs, and when we were online, my wife and I could leave here at 3:30 and be on the top of a mountain by 5:30 in the spring. I always took videos, posted them in Google Classroom, and talked about what it meant to

be in the mountains and how it was spirit cleansing for both of us. It's where we felt closest to being at peace, for certain."

The Search for Peace

We discussed the peace of which he speaks and treasures, and agreed that it is something people everywhere are striving to find. The search leads many down circuitous paths, but getting outdoors, close to nature, is literally like falling off a log—accessible and seemingly simple, but still requires guidance.

Hal is a teacher who led and continues to lead by example. He feels he is blessed through guidance beyond his own will. "My students often asked, 'Why did you become a teacher?' I don't know. God just definitely had a plan and put the right people in my life.



Iceline Trail, Yoho National Park, looking toward Cathedral Spires Mountain in the distance.

And the joy you get out of being with kids is just unimaginable, right?"

"My other option was to be a park warden, and when I graduated Grade 12 the French language requirement was an issue for me. The deciding factor, though, was that the park service was moving toward relocating staff routinely, rather than permitting long-term placements in chosen park areas." Hal's thoughts were, "No, that's not going to happen!" His love for Banff, Kootenay and Yoho was deep and strong. These are the places he wanted to plant his roots and grow his soul.

Hal's thoughts when he began teaching were similar to those he'd had when contemplating work as a park warden. He stated firmly that he would not leave Calgary, and his reason was that he couldn't leave his mom, who had raised him and his four brothers single-handedly. "I'm kind of glued to this place. My two sons are the same. They've lived in the mountains. From the time they were little, I'd have one on the chest, one on the back, and we'd camp, we'd hike, and it was always about being together, being as close as you can imagine. My grown sons remain extremely close, and that comes from being in a tent, being on a trail, spending an enormous amount of time together. Neither ever expressed wanting to be a teacher, but they said the gift of having a teacher as a parent is that everyone has the same time off school. You do what's in your heart, and it transfers to your own children and your students because you're not trying to be something you're not. You're being true to yourself."

Deep Roots

Hal and his brothers spent their summers spending a lot of time on the mountains with their father, who gave them the gift of his love for the mountains, which Hal still carries. "Dad loved fishing, and we walked all the rivers of the Eastern Slopes, more than I can now imagine."

This early, sustained exposure led Hal to appreciate the view from his home in Silver Springs and the Rocky Mountain panorama on display during his commutes west from Calgary.



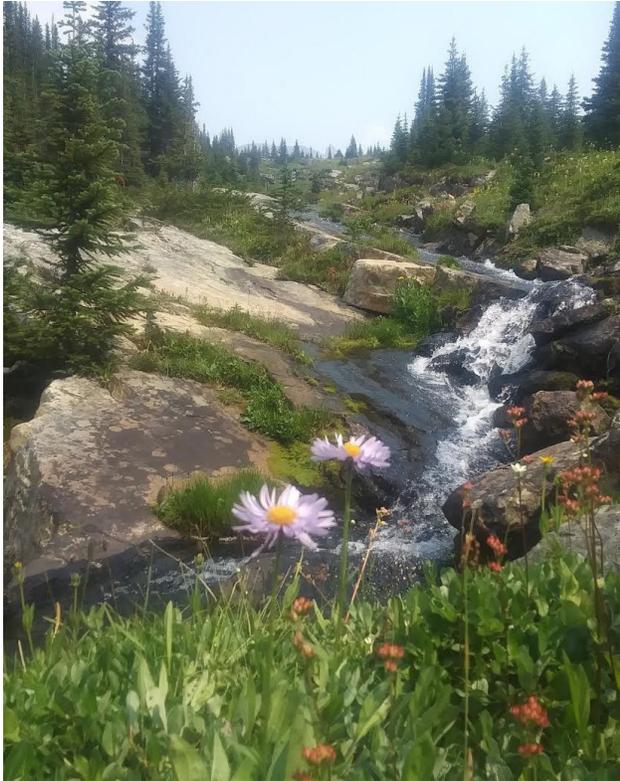
Mount Nilas, from Iceline Trail in Yoho National Park



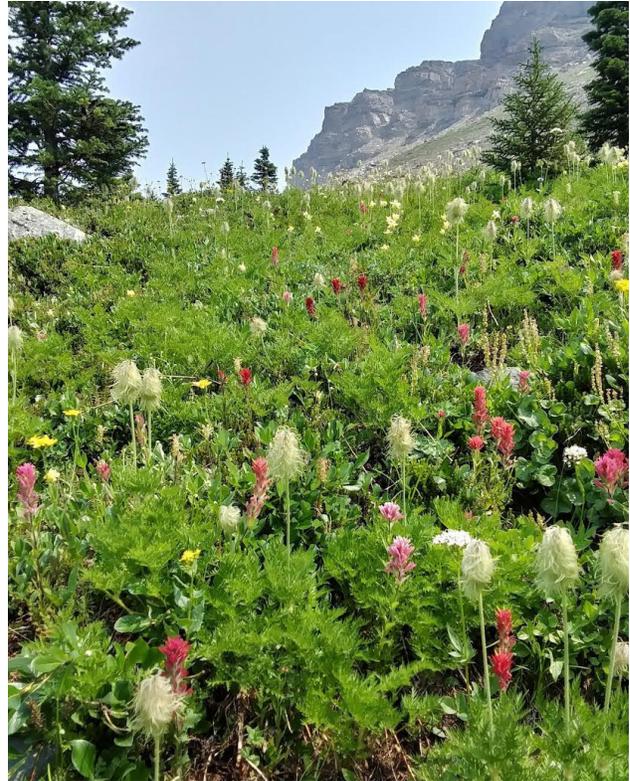
Cathedral Spires, Yoho, Hal's place of awe and wonder



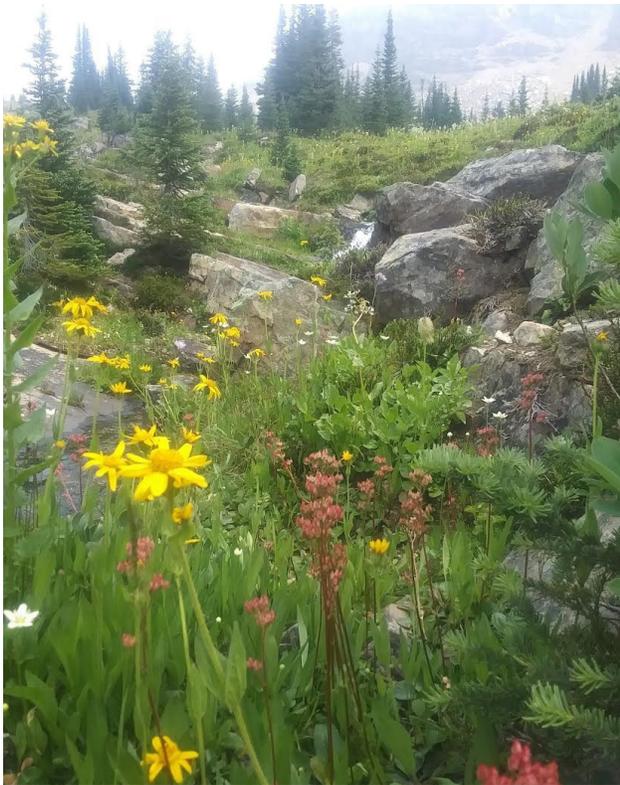
Mount Wapta, from the Iceline Trail and Yoho Pass



South Molar Pass, Icefields Parkway, Banff National Park



More splendour from South Molar Pass



South Molar Pass from another angle

“It would always call to me and call to my wife. There’s just no getting past that. You know there’s times I would say that I wasn’t in the mood or energetically up for the work it would take to get into those vistas, because there are days it just doesn’t feel like it’s worth the work, but as soon as I set foot and I’m moving I feel, ‘Yeah, this is where I’m supposed to be.’”

The joy Hal feels about his favourite spots is palpable, even in conversation through Google Meets: “Mountain-wise a place that’s truly in my heart is Yoho National Park, and I probably went there the first time when I was 11. By the time I was 16, until the present, I have not missed a summer being in Yoho. My boys and my best friend from kindergarten ... when we get there, when you get there, you just feel like you’re at home, if that makes sense. Where you put the tent, like below Mount Stephen, which is part of Cathedral Spires, which is my e-mail and included in my photos that accompany this interview, it’s just ‘there,’ and that’s right in here (pointing to his chest).”



Glenbow Provincial Park west of Calgary, looking at the Front Ranges

Influences Beyond the Classroom

Hal's wife is his motivator, always encouraging his endeavours. She was a rower at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, and she understands the whole psychology of cycling herself down in her breathing rate to calm herself, persevere and build resilience. He cites her expertise and experience as supportive and inspirational. Hal also rode bikes and has witnessed what self-discipline and mental focus can do to overcome inertia in that endeavour.

The current cost of gas does influence the frequency of Hal and Kathryn's trips to the mountains, where they could be found nearly every weekend prior to new constraints with fuel costs. Now, they're weighing the weather with the expense and choosing very carefully!

Hal and his wife were for many years on a three-year schedule of travelling to the Pyrenees in Spain, and it was the same—you'd have it all to yourself. "Persevere past the initial bit, and wonders await ... good things come to those who wait!" exclaims Hal. "You can still tent/camp, which makes it a whole lot more affordable, and there's this joy when the camp host comes by at night and asks if you would like a croissant in the morning, or if you would prefer a baguette! It's these glorious simple pleasures! But again, Kathryn is the catalyst for change, which we all need. She'll be OK with a few nights in a tent then she needs a hotel, but you do, you find this solitude that you can't get anywhere else."

Hal and I wholeheartedly agreed that this shared appreciation is something we want to cultivate in our youth for their own future health and the health of our planet. As teachers, we are able to plant those seeds.

Distractions and Disconnections

“Distraction and disconnection are something I do talk about and have talked about with my students frequently, that there are so many things that will take up your time, and more so now with phones and technology; but, when you get a place that is just so calm and so peaceful . . . like when I first took my sons to the mountains after they entered junior high and high school, I would say ‘No, you can’t take your phones, you can’t take anything like that.’ They would grouch and grumble, but by the second day they were thrilled that they were ‘disconnected.’ You know, the more I kind of watched that, the more impact it had. In guest teaching just seeing how glued people are . . . or at a recent professional conference I attended . . . I sat at the table, there were about eight of us . . . there was a great speaker going on, and everyone was on their phones! And we know the human mind can’t even truly multitask like that!”

Hal adds, “And that’s the part that is so immediate and so key: Disconnection is rampant and acceptable to so many. You go into the Kananaskis, and you don’t go very far before there’s no cellphone coverage. The disconnect with technology and connecting with the spirit of the place is what’s important to create a relationship with the land.”

Presence and Sensory Input

A major point of discussion and agreement for Hal and I became the idea of “the spirit of the place.” Wherever it is you explore, once you experience it, you can’t “unexperience” it, and if it’s true to you, the people around you will feel it. Such a philosophy strongly impacts the kids we teach.

In addition, we lamented that our technological advances have made us extremely adept at visual interpretation of our surroundings, but the whole mindful presence, knowing our world with all our senses, has been subsequently somewhat dulled, and is something we now lack and need to build. All our sensory input is crucial in creating awareness of and appreciation for our world.

Hal selectively guest teaches at only a couple of schools. At these locations, he has the kind of relationships wherein he says, “They tell me, ‘If you feel like ignoring my plan for the day, just do. Just do what you want to do.’ They trust me.”

Vulnerability as a Teaching Tool

Hal relayed a humbling experience at Nose Hill Park in Calgary, which ultimately became a teaching tool when shared with students. “Kathryn and I were hiking along, and suddenly, the ceiling dropped, and we were engulfed in fog. We lost the ability to pick out landmarks, and after several attempts to orient ourselves, we had to admit we were truly lost! It struck me that it was a good learning experience, and when we have so much knowledge, to be placed where we *didn’t* know our whereabouts was really quite something! Once the sun was visible, orientation was possible, but this hour-and-a-half trek had turned into three hours.” Explaining this to his students yielded interesting responses!

“C’mon Mr Soby, you couldn’t be lost!”

“Yeah! I was! And there was a learning process: When do you allow yourself to get lost? Do you allow your mind to just wander? When do you allow yourself to just sit in silence?”

Hal relayed his belief in the significance of creating opportunities to let one’s mind wander and create experiences embodying the freedom of true joy. “When I play this song to them, ‘Just Be Still,’ that’s what it talks about: ‘Just be still, and know in your heart that I am with you.’ That’s often where I show them a video of reaching a mountaintop where it’s just flat enough that I could spin in a circle. I asked my wife to film this, and I explained to them, the students, this is what joy really feels like: ‘Cause you’re just there, you’re in that moment, there’s no distraction and you can feel just at one, at peace, and you see all this unbelievable splendour everywhere around you and *nobody else can take that away.*”

The Significance of Nature Connections in Building Lasting Relationships

Leading by example, Hal continually shared videos of his weekend mountain adventures on Google Classroom. As a direct result of his influence, he still has students from years ago sending him videos of their adventures! He remains in contact with a student from his very first Grade 2 class in 1985, who e-mailed him photographs of cycling in Australia just prior to our conversation on May 4, 2022.

Hal has some very definite thoughts regarding students' needs, which are directly aligned with our connection to the land and all who inhabit it. "What they really want, when you think about it—sure we're teaching them concepts and ideas, but what they really need, what I believe desperately, is solid positive relationships. It's important they know when they come into that room, even if they're having a challenging day, that they're still valued, and that you still care about them. Your caring enough to help them find joy, peace and spiritual fulfillment is valuing them wholeheartedly."

Hal has mentored many people throughout his teaching career. "I have student teachers I have told, 'You have no idea what these kids have at home, so when they come through that door, you're not going to accept all their behaviours, but they know that you care and that you love them. And that they matter.' And I've said that it can be really hard some days. But if you get that, they'll want to be there. And if you can just have little conversations, that give them value through the day, they'll want to be there. Then they'll be open to things. Value, relationship, connection, love—they all make a difference."

"What you end up doing, when you build that relationship, like when I share my experiences in the mountains with them, and all the things that happen there, is that they

see you as a person. They feel and believe that you're part of the classroom, you're not just someone standing there in front of them all the time."

Going the Extra Distance

Hal shared that his boys have taken the special people in their lives to all the places he took them during their growing years—he's heard about it from the other end through their partners and friends! He believes that yes, in fact, he has "left something good on them!" Hal has definitely cultivated an all-encompassing appreciation of nature in his sons. That's something he's proud of. "It's in them. This is something significant!"

Hal believes that through exposure, with the intent of facilitating meaningful relationships with our own children and students, we ensure that some of our values are instilled in them. "It's not that you want to be overshadowing and overpowering; you give them something genuinely valuable. It's theirs to take and make of it what they want."

Hal's sons have clearly stated, "This, these values instilled through navigating the outdoors, is what you taught us, and we want you to know how much we appreciate it." They have reciprocated with adventures in their own places of residence and beyond. His son, who never liked school, said he wished he'd had a



Little Highwood Pass, Kananaskis Country

teacher like his dad and reminds his father that he has no idea the number of people he's impacted. Hal's response is humble and true, "But how they've impacted me! All those students made me the person I am."

Words of Wisdom

Hal shared how he perceives the beginning of each year and what he encourages colleagues and students to contemplate. "What you want to do with your life is you want to surround yourself with givers, not takers. Don't judge people too quickly. Because if you're a giver, you get back. And you won't regret that. People know. They'll sense that. I've taken that to heart and that's how I start every year with my students. You need to be a giver not a taker, and explain about being salt and light. You might be in a Catholic school, you don't have to be religious, and if you think it's all bologna, that's fine. But how can it hurt you to be salt and light for each other, and be a giver rather than a taker? It can only make your life richer and fuller. It's not the religious aspect, it's the moral aspect."

A final relayed thought on human interactions involves a teacher who asked Hal one morning, "How are you?" Hal responded with a counter question, wondering if his colleague really wanted to know, or was he just asking in passing? The teacher thought for a moment and realized that he really did want to know. To do so meant he had to take the time to hear and care. Hal encourages his students to reflect on this scenario, because answering this simple question, "How are you?" can reveal more than we think when we ask just in passing. He encourages people to take that time to listen, to hear, to try to understand and to empathize with others. Be there. Care. Connect.

Thoughts to Ponder

"The Indigenous translation of *Yoho* is awe and wonder. That to me just says so much about what

education should be: That you get that sense of awe, the amazingness of things, and it just causes you to wonder about stuff, right? Like, why is it that way?"

"Curiosity drives learning in the outdoors—what's around the corner? What's over the edge? If I go up this side, what am I going to see? Who knows what's out there?!?!"

"The wonder, the curiosity and the awe—these things drive learning. We're human. This drive has to come from the soul, 100 per cent."

Contact Information

Hal Soby is happy to be reached at his e-mail address: cathedralspires1960@gmail.com.

A Note from the Facilitator

Hal is the father, the partner, the colleague, the teacher, the friend, the mentor and the community member you want in your corner. He has made a lifetime commitment to environmental immersion and mindfulness, and it is clearly evident in everything he does. Bravo, Hal Soby. You are building quite the legacy. I am proud to know that you are a teacher, and we share a profession and a meaningful connection.

Abi Henneberry shares the position of GEOEC publications and Connections journal editor with Alison Katzko. Education is Abi's vibrant second career, her first having been professional dance. That's what prepared Abi to gracefully roll out of a kayak, lightly trip over roots on hiking trails, choreograph the fall off a mountain bike and stretch in contorted shapes while skiing! Abi currently teaches full-day kindergarten at Lois E Hole Elementary School in St Albert, where she gets outside with the littles for at least a kilometre hike every morning before they start their indoor day. She loves having the opportunity to work with young children and inspire awareness of the values that GEOEC represents.

Featured Resources

Get Mapping with ArcGIS Online for Teaching and Learning

Angela Alexander

Great news for educators in Alberta! You have free access to ArcGIS Online software, teaching resources, professional development and technical support. No software installation is required. Agreements are already in place at the Edmonton and Calgary public and Catholic school divisions. Start today by requesting an ArcGIS Online account for teaching and learning at your school division or school.

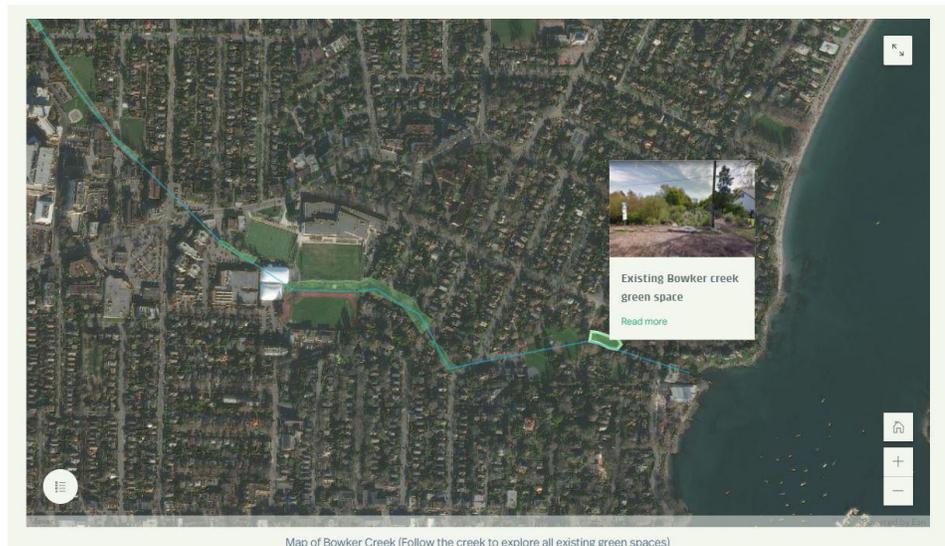
With Esri's online mapping, data and analytics solution, ArcGIS Online (arcgis.com), you can help your students understand where and why things occur, and solve problems with real-world data. In addition, you can use this online software to

- promote critical thinking, inquiry-based learning and geographic literacy;
- enrich your teaching with collaborative, interactive and interdisciplinary lessons; and
- engage your students in science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM).

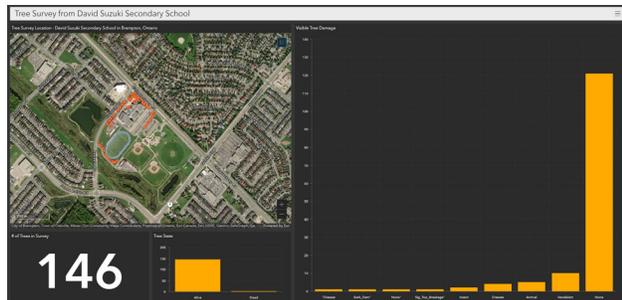
Discover more stories by reading other Esri Canada Education and Research blog posts. These include our new monthly feature called On the Map that highlights a Canadian teacher and student projects.

Join the GIS wave by using the following K–12 Esri Canada resources to get started with ArcGIS Online and ArcGIS apps:

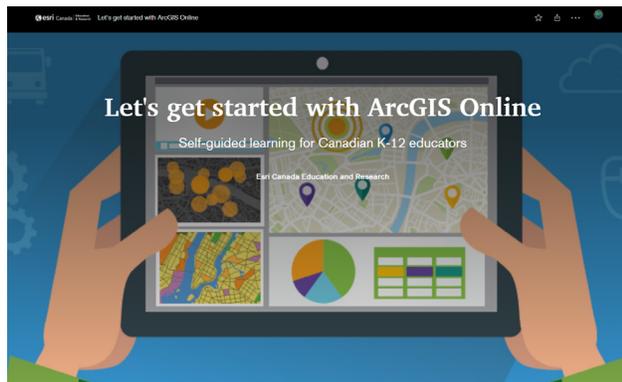
- Teachers: Let's Get Started with ArcGIS Online
- Students: Enroute with ArcGIS Online
- Tutorials for ArcGIS apps:
 - Discover ArcGIS StoryMaps
 - ArcGIS Survey123 Web Designer
 - Creating ArcGIS Dashboards



This student story map integrated multiple maps, including the example shown of green space in their study area.



A tree survey dashboard created using ArcGIS Dashboards. See the tutorial below to learn how you can create your own dashboard.



Teachers can use the Let's Get Started with ArcGIS Online to learn the basics of the online GIS software.

The latest On the Map post is on Scott Alexander, a teacher from Victoria, British Columbia. Find out how his students are using ArcGIS to tell stories about their local watershed.

Access to ArcGIS Apps

Free access to ArcGIS apps like ArcGIS StoryMaps, ArcGIS Survey123 and ArcGIS Dashboards are available once you have an ArcGIS Online account. These apps provide you with more teaching and learning opportunities with your students, and they expand what you can do in the classroom and in the field with your students.

ArcGIS StoryMaps combines interactive maps, text, video, images and other content to tell a story. It's a great way for students to present a project or an assignment. ArcGIS Survey123 is a form-centric data collection tool that allows you to transform paper questionnaires into "smart" digital forms. Each survey created includes a map that can be analyzed and shared with others. ArcGIS Dashboards allow you to make sense of the world through innovative and easy-to-create visualizations of data.

Access to Ready-to-Use Resources

Resources for all levels of ArcGIS Online users are available through the Esri Canada K-12 Resource Finder. They include tutorials, lessons, activities and videos.

Inspiration

Here are four examples of how educators are using our software in Canada.

1. A video showcasing a Grade 5 class in Calgary that used GIS for project-based learning and inspiring teachers at her school and board to use spatial technology to enhance their students' learning
2. A blog post highlighting the use of GIS to mobilize Indigenous Knowledge at a high school
3. A blog post to showcase Alberta's Inside Education's work with GIS
4. A blog post highlighting how a teacher from Quebec has used ArcGIS to engage his students in a data collection activity to explore a common topic around the world

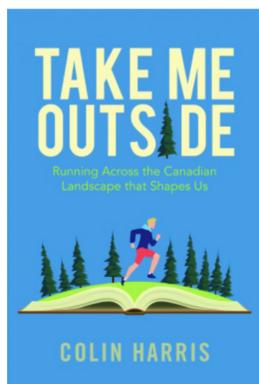
You can sign up for a free account from ArcGIS Online account at

www.esri.ca/en-ca/solutions/industries/education/signup-for-arcgis-for-schools.

Build Your Library with These Amazing Reads!

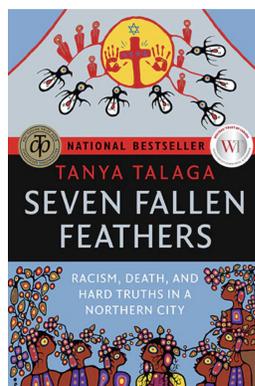
Carissa Esau

Take Me Outside: Running Across the Canadian Landscape that Shapes Us, by Colin Harris



Take Me Outside is Colin Harris's story of spending nine months running from St John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, to Victoria, British Columbia, visiting over 80 schools along the way to engage with 20,000 students about the importance of spending time outside learning, playing and

exploring in the Canadian landscape. With one of the biggest and best backyards in the world, people across Canada are spending the vast majority of their time inside. Yet, our identity as Canadians has always been rooted in our relationship with the outdoors. This wildly entertaining book not only recounts what it's like to run across the world's second-largest country but also implores readers of all ages to reignite their connection with the natural world.

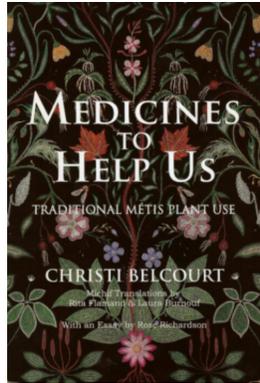


Seven Fallen Feathers: Racism, Death, and Hard Truths in a Northern City, by Tanya Talaga

Seven Fallen Feathers, by Tanya Talaga, is the ground-breaking and multiple award-winning national bestseller work about systemic racism, education, the failure of the policing and justice systems, and Indigenous rights.

Over the span of 11 years, seven Indigenous high school students died in Thunder Bay, Ontario. They were hundreds of kilometres away from their families, forced to leave home because there was no adequate high school on their reserves. Five were found dead in the rivers surrounding Lake Superior, below a sacred Indigenous site. Using a sweeping narrative focusing on the lives of the students, award winning author Tanya Talaga delves into the history of this northern city that has come to manifest Canada's long struggle with human rights violations against Indigenous communities.

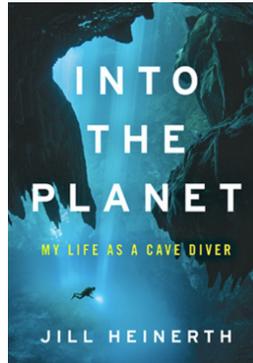
***Medicines to Help Us: Traditional Métis Plant Use,* by Christi Belcourt**



Based on Métis artist Christi Belcourt's painting *Medicines to Help Us*, this innovative and vibrant resource honours the centuries-old healing traditions of Métis women. For this stunning set of 27 gallery-quality prints and accompanying companion booklet, Christi Belcourt

fuses her evocative artwork with Indigenous Traditional Knowledge and western science. With contributions from Métis Elders Rose Richardson and Olive Whitford, as well as key Michif phrases and terminology, *Medicines to Help Us* is the most accessible resource relating to Métis healing traditions produced to date.

***Into the Planet: My Life as a Cave Diver,* by Jill Heinerth**



Jill Heinerth, the first person in history to dive deep into an Antarctic iceberg and leader of a team that discovered the ancient watery remains of Mayan civilizations, has descended farther into the inner depths of our planet than any other woman. She takes us into the harrowing split-second

decisions that determine whether a diver makes it back to safety, the prejudices that prevent women from pursuing careers underwater, and her endeavour to recover a fallen friend's body from the confines of a cave. But there's beauty beyond the danger of diving, and while Heinerth swims beneath our feet in the lifeblood of our planet, she works with biologists discovering new species, physicists tracking climate change, and hydrogeologists examining our finite freshwater reserves.

Written with hair-raising intensity, *Into the Planet* is the first book to deliver an intimate account of cave diving, transporting readers deep into inner space, where fear must be reconciled and a mission's success balances between knowing one's limits and pushing the envelope of human endurance.

Featured Organizations

As any educator or outdoor explorer knows, having some amazing resources can help make your experience more meaningful and memorable! We have developed a list of helpful resources to support you in your journey. The following are recommended by readers or have directly supported GEOEC through workshop presentations, journal article submissions and resource sharing.



CPAWS Southern Alberta provides [fun nature experiences](#) to meet your teaching goals virtually, in the schoolyard or in a local park. Teachers across Alberta can access our cross curricular [Bring Nature Home](#) activities to enjoy in your classroom or [book us](#) for an interactive, virtual experience. In the Calgary region, we offer loanable education kits and [safe](#), in-person programming such as snowshoeing in a local park. Recently, we also expanded our classroom and hiking programs to the Pincher Creek region. Get in touch with us today at education@cpaws.org!

CONTACT:
Jaclyn Angotti (she/her/hers)
 Education Director
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Rocky Mountain Adventure Medicine Inc. is a leader in wilderness and remote emergency response skills training. We offer Wilderness First Aid courses that meet OH&S provincial guidelines as well as CSA standards. We also offer courses in Swift Water Rescue; Ice Safety; Survival; Animal Aware. We work with educators, youth leaders, guides, SAR teams, Provincial and National Parks staff and have presented national and internationally at SAR conferences.

CONTACT:
 Phone: 1-888-849-0933
 E-mail: RMAM@adventuremed.ca
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BirdSmart® engages and inspires students to learn more about birds, conservation and climate change. It focuses on how we can protect the natural world through interactive digital webinars or in-person presentations and features a live bird of prey. Presentations are available for all grade levels and tailored to match topics in the school curriculum. During these presentations, your students will learn from a qualified biologist about wildlife biology and how humans are affecting the planet and what students can do to help. This program is operated by the Beaverhill Bird Observatory, Canada's second oldest bird education and research station.

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 Website www.beaverhillbirds.com
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Alberta Tomorrow's mission is to deliver a platform that empowers youth to design and sustain a future for our shared ecosystem. Our FREE, ONLINE, interactive planning tool is designed for students, teachers and all Albertans interested in the future of our province.

- Exploring our impacts on the economy and environment,
- Discovering how we can learn from the past,
- Creating a sustainable land-use plan for our future,
- Exploring the impacts of Climate Change,
- Experiencing Alberta's Ecoregions and resource use through our 360 Virtual Field Trips
- Providing school programs and the tools to help all Albertans understand the consequences of our actions both virtually and in-person.

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For over 35 years, Inside Education has been bringing no-cost environmental and natural resource education to life for students and teachers K-12 across Alberta. Through hands-on learning, we encourage participants to be well-informed engaged stewards who think critically about our environment and natural resources.

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Do you have an amazing resource that you feel would benefit others? Do you have an organization that connects well with GEOEC's work to bring global, outdoor, environmental education to youth? Is there an app that we just need to see? Let us know!



Lesson Share

Nature Scavenger Hunt

Gareth Thomson and Sue Arlidge

Students will find this activity very exciting and satisfactory—and you will too, as students use language, verbal, visual and kinesthetic skills to explore the diversity of nature. Try to get lots of parent volunteers for this activity!

Time Required

- 30 minutes

Materials Required

- Checklists

Instructions

In this activity, students are divided into groups, and each group has to find (and tick off) as many of the objects on the following list as possible. Every student in the group must observe and feel the object before they can move on to the next object.

Note that two different checklists may be used depending on your groups' abilities. You may wish to discuss the more difficult checklist as a group before asking them to explore the area. In a normal scavenger hunt, you're supposed to collect items. This is *not* the case in this activity: tell students that objects certainly must be seen, touched and felt but not picked up (unless they are lying loose, like a pine cone).

Objects are definitely not to be collected. Tell students that the Nature Scavenger Hunt is not a race! During the hunt they are to be calm, relaxed and observant. Ask them to stay with their groups and not to run. You may wish to invite parents to join you for this activity to give you a parent–student ratio of one to six or better. Alternatively, older students with

adequate reading skills can work in small groups by themselves.

Tell your students that the items below are just to touch and to see but *not* to collect. Check off the following things that you have found:

Basic Checklist

Find...

- a rock
- soil
- something prickly
- something furry
- something smooth and cold
- something bumpy
- something scratchy
- a berry
- a red leaf
- a brown leaf
- a yellow leaf
- a green leaf
- moss
- a pine cone
- a pine cone that has been pulled apart by a squirrel
- something wet
- something sticky
- something made by humans (this is litter—pick it up!)

Advanced Checklist

Find...

- something alive
- something dead
- something that has a happy look
- something that has a fierce look
- a plant growing on a nonliving thing
- a plant that is shaded by a plant
- a plant that is shaded by a plant that is shaded by a plant
- something that is changing back into soil
- an example of erosion
- food that would be good for a sparrow
- a tree with flat needles
- a plant that smells nice
- a leaf that has been chewed by an insect
- a dead branch on a living tree
- something that you think is really interesting
- something that you dislike
- something that helps a robin

Reprinted from Gareth Thomson and Sue Arlidge, Five Minute Field Trips: Teaching About Nature in Your Schoolyard (GEOEC 2002), 6, www.geoec.org/uploads/5/6/7/2/56722653/5min-fieldtrips.pdf. Minor changes have been made to fit ATA style.

Sound Map

Gareth Thomson and Sue Arlidge

As humans, we perceive much of our world through our sense of sight. In this creative activity, however, students focus on the sounds of nature and try to draw what they hear.

Time Required

- 15 minutes

Materials Required

- Pencils and journals

Instructions

Lead a silent walk in a natural area, such as a large, wooded park. Every time a student hears a natural sound they raise a finger, counting up to 10. When a student hears 10 different sounds, they stop. When everyone has stopped, they get out their journals. Students should write their name in the middle of a new double page and draw light lines dividing the two pages into quarters.

Tell the students that instead of drawing a regular map, they will be drawing a sound map. In a bottom

corner, they should draw the map's key. Each new sound heard will be represented with a symbol and recorded in the key. Ask students to also draw an X and their name in the centre of the map. As each new sound is heard, the symbol is recorded on the map where it was heard relative to the X on the map. Have fun making as zany a map as ever was seen!

Discussion

- What happens to the map if you move the "centre of hearing" (you) to one of the corners of the map? Try drawing it.
- How many people had similar symbols? Why?
- How did you feel about the human sounds you heard? Why?

Reprinted from Gareth Thomson and Sue Arlidge, Five Minute Field Trips: Teaching About Nature in Your Schoolyard (GEOEC 2002), 9, www.geoec.org/uploads/5/6/7/2/56722653/5min-fieldtrips.pdf. Minor changes have been made to fit ATA style.

Student Sundial

Gareth Thomson and Sue Arlidge

Seasonal change has so much impact on everyday events. This activity helps to make the concept of directions more concrete and helps students visualize the earth's relation to the sun. This activity has a 20-minute break in the middle when another activity such as a tree observation or scavenger hunt could take place.

Time Required

- 30 minutes with a 20-minute break in the middle

Materials Required

- A sunny day, one pointed stick about a metre in length and one meter stick per pair of students, compasses, 50 large nails with flagging tape tied on the ends, journals, pencils

Instructions

On a sunny day, give each pair of students a pointed stick and a meter stick. Ask the students to find a spot in the grass where they can push the pointed stick into the ground, so it stands upright. Tell them to use chalk to mark the tip of the stick's shadow.

Have the students return 20 minutes later, marking the tip of the shadow with a different colour. Tell them to use the meter stick to form a line on the ground connecting the two chalk marks. Ask: Why does this line represent an east-west direction? Ask the students how to determine the north-south line. (The north-south line will be perpendicular to the east-west line.) Then ask the groups to draw a second line, crossing the first at a right angle. Verify their findings with a compass. Ask the students how they would use this activity if they were ever lost.

Back in class, research the history of the sundial. By allowing pairs of students to record in chalk the shadow of a stationary object each hour, on the hour, they make a simple sundial on their schoolyard. The next sunny day, compare their dial's accuracy with a clock. Ask: "How does the length of the object's shadow change over the course of the day? Why?"

Reprinted from Gareth Thomson and Sue Arlidge, Five Minute Field Trips: Teaching About Nature in Your Schoolyard (GEOEC 2002), 28, www.geoec.org/uploads/5/6/7/2/56722653/5min-fieldtrips.pdf. Minor changes have been made to fit ATA style.

Stuff Sack Relay

Court Rustemeyer and Carissa Esau

This is a relay game using outdoor gear in a stuff sack. This is a great activity to introduce the use of a variety of outdoor gear and focus on teamwork.

Materials

- Stuff sack
- Outdoor gear and equipment (example: flashlight, puffy jacket, hiking boots, pocket stove and so on)

Time Allotted

- 15–30 minutes

Skill Connections

- Teamwork
- Cooperation and collaboration
- Direction

Recommended Grade Levels

- 4–6
- 7–9
- 10–12

Instructions

1. Divide students into groups of three to four. Each group will line up at one end of the playing area (field, gym or hallway). At the opposite end of the

playing area, place a stuff sack for each group. The stuff sack should be filled with outdoor equipment.

2. On the teacher's cue, teams will send one group member at a time to run and retrieve one item from the stuff sack. The first team to retrieve all items is the winner.

Variations

- Have students wear or use any item that they choose from the stuff sack (example: wear a puffy jacket, a headlamp and so on).
- Students must walk backward or crawl or hop on one foot from one end of the playing area to the other.

Reflection

- How did you choose what to take from the stuff sack?
- What was challenging about working with a team?

Reprinted from Court Rustemeyer and Carissa Esau, Five Minute Field Trips: Volume II (GEOEC 2022), 43, www.geoec.org/uploads/5/6/7/2/56722653/5_minute_field_trips__volume_ii.pdf. Minor changes have been made to fit ATA style.

Spider Web

Court Rustemeyer and Carissa Esau

Students will work in teams to get each member of their group through a created spider web without touching the rope or without using the same hole twice. This activity is great for building communication and initiating teamwork.

Materials

- String, twine or ribbon
- Two trees, poles or structures close together

Time Allotted

- 15 minutes

Skill Connections

- Communication
- Leadership
- Teamwork
- Problem solving
- Cooperation and collaboration
- Conflict management
- Direction

Recommended Grade Levels

- 4–6
- 7–9
- 10–12

Instructions

1. Wrap and wind the string between the two poles, creating various holes.
2. Put the students into groups of five to six.
3. Each group will have the task of getting each member through the “spider web” without touching the string and without using the same hole twice. This activity can be timed or untimed.

4. If a participant touches the rope, the entire team restarts the challenge.
5. After each group completes the task, discuss the outcome and challenges of the activity.

Variations

- Younger students may touch the rope.
- Have each group make their way through the web, then back through the web again.
- Blindfold all students in each group, except for one leader who will direct the group through the web.
- Add ribbons or bells to the rope for an extra challenge.
- Participants must complete the challenge without talking.
- Pass an inanimate object (such as a broomstick or log) through the web without touching the rope or ground.
- Let each team create a spider web for the opposite team or for their own team.

Reflection

- Who was the leader in your group?
- Was your group efficient in coming up with a plan?
- Did one person decide how to proceed or did everyone share their opinions?
- What was challenging about this activity?
- If you were the teacher, how would you change this activity?

Reprinted from Court Rustemeyer and Carissa Esau, Five Minute Field Trips: Volume II (GEOEC 2022), 43, www.geoec.org/uploads/5/6/7/2/56722653/5_minute_field_trips__volume_ii.pdf. Minor changes have been made to fit ATA style.

All Aboard

Court Rustemeyer and Carissa Esau

Students will work in teams to get all team members on an increasingly smaller section of the tarp. The team to successfully get all team members on the smallest section of the tarp wins the game.

Materials

- Tarps or fabric sheets × one per group

Time Allotted

- 20 minutes

Skill Connections

- Communication
- Teamwork
- Problem solving
- Cooperation and collaboration
- Conflict management
- Creativity
- Direction

Recommended Grade Levels

- 4–6
- 7–9

Instructions

Put students into teams of five to six. Provide each team with a tarp.

All members of the team must stand on the tarp for 10 seconds. If successful, the team will fold the tarp in half and all team members must stand on the tarp again for another 10 seconds.

Once successful, the team will fold the tarp in half again and stand on the tarp for another 10 seconds.

Continue folding the tarp in half, with all team members on the tarp for 10 seconds. The team able to get all team members on the smallest tarp wins.

Variations

- For an added challenge, reset the tarp (unfolded) every time a team member steps off of the tarp.
- Groups must work together without talking. Give the groups random 10-second intervals to talk.
- Blindfold all team members except for one leader per group.
- Have students move across a playing area while the entire team stays on the tarp.

Reflection

- What leadership styles were used?
- What was challenging about this activity?
- How would you change this activity if you were the teacher?
- How would you improve your teamwork if you did this activity again?
- Was it more challenging when you were not allowed to talk? Why?

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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.
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- 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.

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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.

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