



CHILDREN'S BOOKS AND RESOURCES REVIEW

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Book and Resource Review Editor

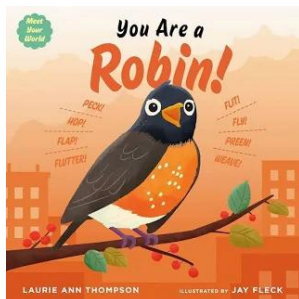
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Developing Empathy in a Natural Context

Young children love to “become” an animal, making the sounds and taking the perspective of nature. David Sobel once said:

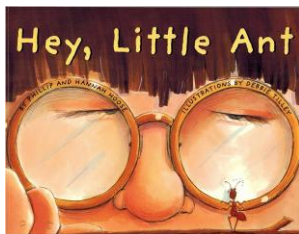
Cultivating relationships with animals, both real and imagined, is one of the best ways to foster empathy during early childhood. Children want to run like deer, to slither along the ground like snakes, to be clever as a fox and quick like a bunny. There's no need for endangered species here – there are more than enough common, everyday species to fill the lives of children. And the environmentally correct notion of not anthropomorphizing animals can be thrown out the window (Beyond Ecophobia, 1996).

Here is a collection of books and resources that might foster that perspective taking and empathy building in early childhood, including a couple of tree-based options and one with the wind.



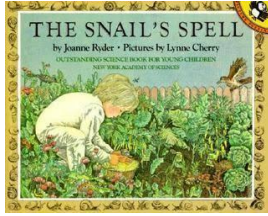
***You Are a Robin!* By Laurie Ann Thompson**

In this interactive board book series, the child becomes the animal! Tap, tap, tap like a robin chick breaking from the egg. Shiver, snuggle, and sleep under mom's wings. Flit, flap, and flutter as you begin to fly. Stop, look, and listen as you migrate home, carry, weave, smooth, fill, and smooth your nest. In each spread of pages, there are illustrations of children doing similar actions in their everyday lives. **See also:** You Are a . . . Raccoon, Garter Snake, Honey Bee by the same author!



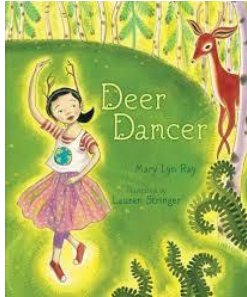
***Hey, Little Ant* by Phillip and Hannah Hoose**

A boy is just about to squish an ant, when the ant pleads to not be squished. The boy and ant converse back and forth as they understand each other better. Even though the boy's parents and friends say he should squish the ant, the ant convinces him to make his own decision. Love the fold out page that makes the boy look huge next to the ant.



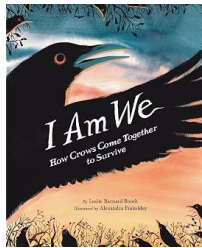
***The Snail's Spell* by Joanne Ryder**

A young child in the garden gradually becomes smaller and smaller, taking on characteristics of the snail, such as no legs or arms and being able to glide on a sticky path. You have tiny teeth on a tongue, feelers on top of your head, and a shell on your back.



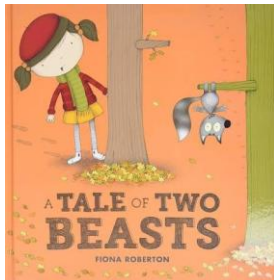
***Deer Dancer* by Mary Lyn Ray**

A girl encounters a deer in a clearing and makes a connection before it runs away. Cut to her ballet class and her teacher tells her to imagine antlers on their heads, yet the girl doesn't move the way she should. However, in the clearing outside, she dances with the deer, leaping, throwing antlers back, and turning round and round.



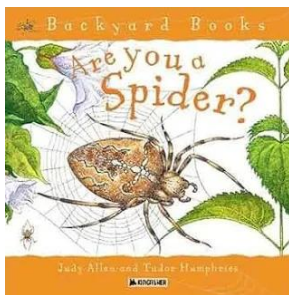
***I Am We: How Crows Come Together to Survive* by Leslie Barnard Booth**

Told in first person and changing to we early on, this book looks at how crows come together in the winter to survive the winter changes. All their eyes work together to stay safe. Good back matter to understand crow behaviors in more depth.



***A Tale of Two Beasts* by Fiona Robertson**

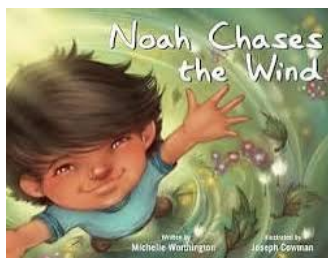
A girl finds a distressed animal in the woods and brings it home, cleans it, and dresses it up. The animal leaves, but later returns. The same story is told again from the animal's perspective, being taken from its home and paraded in clothes out and about. It escapes but returns for the warm hat from the girl. They decide they like each other and head out to the woods.



***Are You a Spider?* by Judy Allen**

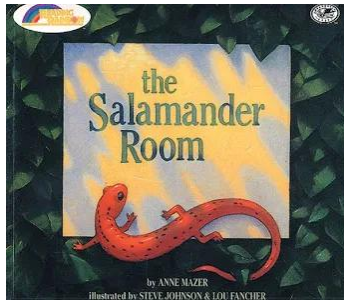
This nonfiction book takes you through being inside an egg, hatching alongside many siblings, the different body parts and functions, how you will move about, spinning a web, catching prey, and avoiding predators. It ends with pictures of children who are humans and how they are different from a spider while comparing how they are similar. It ends with many did you know questions.

See also: Are You a . . . Butterfly, Snail, Bee, Ant, Dragonfly, etc.?



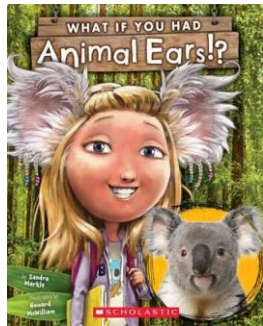
***Noah Chases the Wind* by Michelle Worthington**

Noah experiences the world in different ways, asking many questions. He is curious about the weather, yet the books don't answer his inquiry about the wind. He goes outside to watch it and gets swept away to experience the wind in very different way.



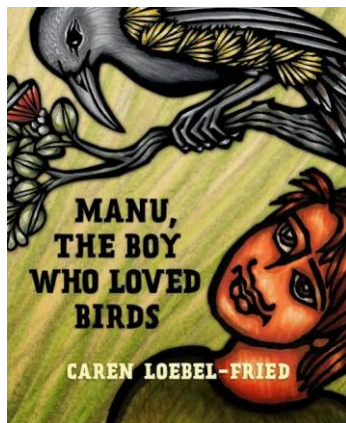
Salamander Room by Anne Mazer

A boy finds a salamander in the woods and wants to bring it home. His mother asks a series of questions about where it will sleep, what it will eat, and other necessities, including where the boy will sleep. As the boy explains his plan, his illustrated room becomes more and more like the forest with trees, moss, insects, tree stumps, birds, bullfrogs, and an open roof.



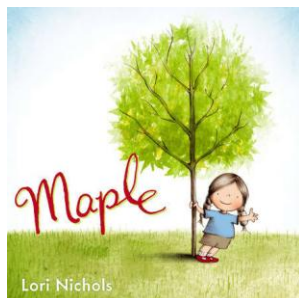
What if You Had Animal . . . ? Series by Sandra Markle

Each book in this series focuses on one animal body part—ears, noses, eyes, feet, etc. The book asks what would happen and then we learn more about how a wide variety of animals and the adaptations that make them unique and suited for living in the wild. A photo of the animal, along with drawings of children with that animal characteristic. Informative and humorous!



Manu, The Boy Who Loved Birds by Carol Loebel-Fried

Manu 'ō'ō is named after an extinct endemic bird. His class visits the Bishop Museum in Honolulu and he sees a cape of 'ō'ō feathers. He gets intrigued about his namesake and learns as much as he can about the bird! He dreams of the song of the 'ō'ō and becomes the bird being caught by a traditional bird catcher. The class considers the perspective of the islands from an 'ō'ō's perspective. Good visualization and perspective taking from the bird's point of view, including Manu flying! His family goes birdwatching on Moku o Keawe and learns about many birds and calls. They also visit the captive breeding spot for many birds. He eventually dreams again of becoming the 'ō'ō. Back matter includes many cultural and historical connections, along with actions to take.



Maple by Lori Nichols

When Maple was born her parents planted a maple tree in her honor. The tree grew as she did and became a trusted friend. She sang to the tree, danced with it, and pretended to be a tree. Some days the tree's leaves danced for her. She shared her coat as it got chilly. Her family had a new baby. While Maple couldn't always please the baby, they both enjoyed being under the maple tree's dancing leaves next to the new Willow tree.

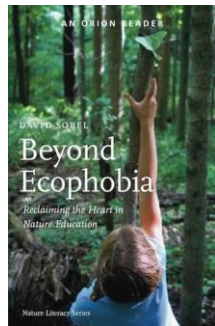


***Be a Tree!* by Maria Gianferrari**

This book compares the human body to a tree, with the trunk like our spine, the bark like our skin, etc. Love the visualizations and social/emotional aspect of the book and how we all need to help take care of each other. This is a book I like to read outside next to trees, imagining our toes rooted in the ground and gently feeling the bark with our skin.

Additional Resources

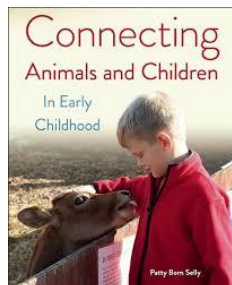
Be a Tree visualization: See page 10 of [5 Minute Fieldtrips](#) (for a guided imagery of a tree experiencing various seasons. The instructions suggest that the exercise can be modified to build empathy with other living things as long as sensory components are rich. Adapted from *Sharing the Joy of Nature* by Joseph Cornell.



***Beyond Ecophobia* by David Sobel**

In this quick read, Sobel suggests children need to connect to the natural world before we ask them to save it. He outlines three developmental stages, starting with empathy and developing animal allies; moving to exploration and teaching the landscape; and then moving toward more ecological action as teens. While still a foundational piece, I also wonder how we will change as children experience more effects of climate change first hand.

Lerstrup, I., Chawla, L., & Heft, H. (2021). **Affordances of Small Animals for Young Children: A Path to Environmental Values of Care.** *International Journal of Early Childhood Environmental Education*, 9(1), 58-76. https://naturalstart.org/sites/default/files/journal/9.lerstrup_chawla_heft_0.pdf. This article looks at how children interact with small animals in outdoor contexts and how it leads to learning to care for them and eventually long-term attitudes to protect biodiversity, connecting to Sustainable Development Goal #15.



***Connecting Animals and Children in Early Childhood* by Patty Born Selly**

I've turned to this book many, many times as I've understood better how children connect to animals. The book connects research and practical advice around developmental benefits, how our language might impact children's relationships with animals, the wide range of animals in children's lives, and application for the classroom. .