
Editor's Note: Dr. Carla Gull is the Book and Resource Review Editor. She teaches beginning college classes online with the University of Phoenix, hosts the podcast *Loose Parts Nature Play*, leads nature programming in her local area, facilitates professional development in early childhood, and shares insights on *Loose Parts Play* on social media. Her passion for children's literature stems from searching for the perfect book to share with children. If you have ideas or would like to contribute book or resource reviews, please contact Dr. Gull at Carla.Gull@phoenix.edu.

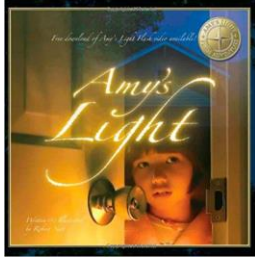
Embracing More Diverse Representations of Children in Nature Inspired Books

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I love sharing book suggestions and have been asked a few times about nature related books that show more diversity in the cultural/racial identity of the children. Some educators have mentioned not sharing picture books about nature play because they do not depict the skin colors of the children in their care. However, more publishers and illustrators are striving to show nature play as a part of childhood for all children, regardless of skin color. I chatted with Carol Malnor from Dawn Publishing, a publisher focusing on nature related books. She mentioned, "Nature is such a unifier across cultures. We talk about diversity in nature, but nature can be a real bridge for bringing people together. We've seen that with educators again and again." Additionally, she mentioned, "Our books are for those children who don't have a lot of access to nature. Our books can be an entry to nature for them with the stories, ecosystems depicted, and rich illustrations with nature. We make sure to have a diversity of children represented. We want children to see kids that look like them interacting with nature. We want to show "YOU" in nature. Many of our books depict urban settings. We can still notice animals around us in urban areas. Nature isn't just off and away in the mountains, but it is right under our noses. Our books become an introduction or a spark to nature" (C. Malnor, personal communication, March 7, 2019).

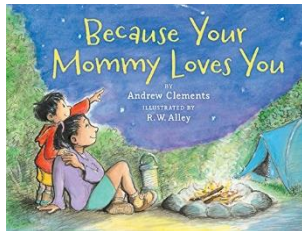
This collection of books merely focuses on nature play with children of more diverse skin colors; however, this conversation can go much deeper. Find additional resources at the end of the article that look at environmental equity, explore the barriers some people of color have in getting outside, and resources on finding more diverse books.



Amy's Light by Robert Nutt, ill. Robert Nutt (2010)

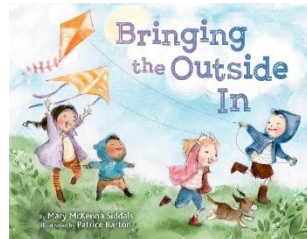
Amy notices the lights flashing outside in the night. She grabs a jar and catches the fireflies, yet finds they do not glow in the jar in her room. When she lets them go, they light up her room and help her feel less lonely in this rhyming book.

Because Your Mommy Loves You by Andrew Clement, ill. R.W. Alley (2015)

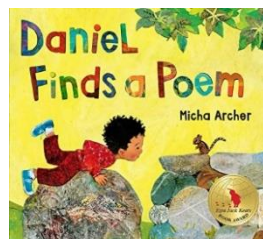


This book shows a mother and son camping as they boy learns the ins and outs of forging a river, putting up a tent, and roasting marshmallows. The mom could rescue him from all these learning experiences, but she doesn't. She lovingly allows him to burn marshmallows, struggle through putting up a tent, and being cold while helping him learn independence and how to be outside. She shows her love by taking him camping and letting him learn and grow.

Bringing the Outside In by Mary McKenna Siddals, ill. Patrice Barton (2016)

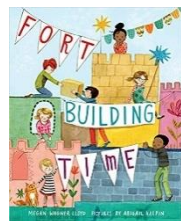


This lyrical book explores how a group of diverse children enjoy being outside playing in nature and consequently bring the outside in. This seasonal book follows them spring puddles, beach visits, fall leaves, and snow angels. The normalness of "cleaning up" after being in nature is portrayed, as mittens dry over the fireplace, leaves are brought back outside, and mud is mopped up. They enjoy looking at pictures of all their adventures again and again!



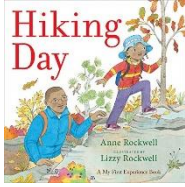
Daniel Finds a Poem by Micha Archer (2016)

Daniel is well acquainted with his local park. When he sees a sign for Poetry in the Park, he asks the spider, squirrel, and other critters what poetry is. Each has a unique perspective when morning dew glistens or crisp leaves crunch. The book shows we can all find poetry as we pay attention to nature around us.



Fort-Building Time by Megan Wagner Lloyd, ill. Abigail Halpin (2017)

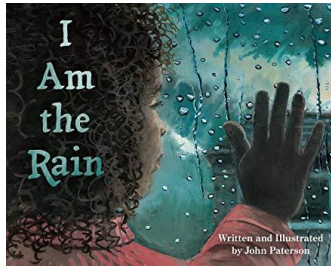
This book goes through the seasons as children create forts in whatever the weather. The friends make snow forts, sheet forts, sand and driftwood forts, and tree forts as each season changes. The children engage in a variety of nature play, imaginative, and literacy opportunities, as well as more traditional blanket and box forts inside.



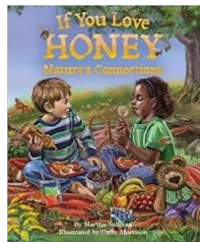
Hiking Day by Anne Rockwell, ill. Lizzy Rockwell (2018)

An African American family drives out of the city in the fall to a nearby trail. They discover forest animals, such as the toad, woodpecker, chipmunk, deer and porcupine. They climb higher and higher until they reach the summit.

I Am the Rain by John Paterson (2018)

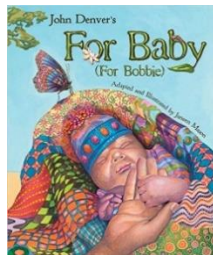


This rhyming story is told from the perspective of water, sharing the many ways water can present itself as part of the water cycle. In the book, water takes on the form of rain cloud, storm water drainage, waterfall, wave for surfing, snowflakes, icy ponds, a bay, a stream through a canyon, fog, and more. Great seasonal approach to the water cycle as well. There is a visual of the water cycle at the end, along with more details on the science behind the different states of water. Also find curricular connections and water saving tips.



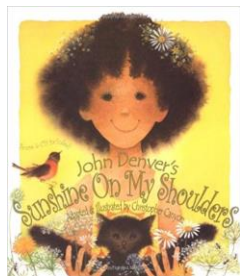
If You Love Honey: Nature's Connections by Martha Sullivan, ill. Cathy Morrison (2015)

While honeybees are important, this circular story shows how making honey is really a big connected web with contributions from dandelions, earthworms, mushrooms, the oak tree, and blue jay. The book includes a seek and find, a section on how nectar becomes honey, and additional resources.



John Denver's For Baby (For Bobbie) Adapted and Illustrated by Janeen Mason (2009)

Love for little ones is shown in many settings across the world, sharing depictions of local culture, people, animals and their babies. John Denver's song for his son is beautifully illustrated to show the universal love families have for their babies.



John Denver's Sunshine on my Shoulders Adapted and Illustrated by Christopher Canyon (2003)

A young girl explores the outdoors in a canoe with an adult, enjoying the sunshine and all it illuminates. This is a fun book and you can't help but sing the song in your head. The sheet music and information on John Denver are also included. Illustrations and whimsical and make you long for sun! Various perspectives are used between pages keeping things fresh, yet very natural.



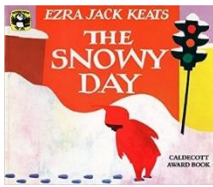
Sometimes Rain by Meg Fleming, ill Diana Sudyka (2018)

Diverse children explore the seasons as they play outside. Another lyrical rhyming picture book that celebrates the seasons and how children interact with nature in very playful ways. Sometimes is a key word as we must seize the seasonal opportunities that nature affords like sledding, stomping in rain puddles, piles of crunchy leaves, etc.

Stick! by Irene Dickson, (2018).

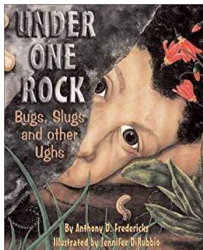


This delightful book explores a boy's adventures with his dog, taking only a stick with him. Imagination kicks in and the stick is used in many ways during their day outside. The stick floats down the water, creates pictures in the sand, assists in walking, helps with balance, becomes a throwing stick, and helps as he meets new people. A stick can be anything!



The Snowy Day by Ezra Jack Keats (1976)

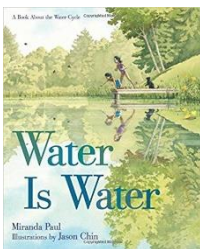
This classic book really captures the magic of a first snowfall in an urban setting. In his snowsuit, Peter experiments with his tracks, explores the high piles of snow, and plays with a stick as a tool to knock the snow.



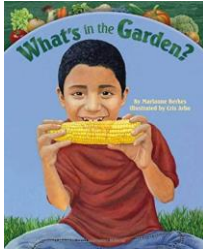
Under One Rock: Bugs, Slugs, and other Ughs by Anthony D. Fredericks, ill. Jennifer Dirubio (2001)

A simple rhyming story about what you might find under one rock. Explore insects, worms, spiders, beetles, and slugs that may be found under a rock. Field notes are offered at the end for additional scientific information about what is hiding under a rock.

Water is Water by Miranda Paul, ill. Jason Chin (2015)



Two children experience the water cycle through their everyday interactions of making cocoa, waiting for the bus, splashing in puddles after school, gliding on the frozen pond building a snowman, and changing of the seasons. They live in a very nature filled setting, catching turtles, frogs, and more. They pick apples, make cider, and go swimming in the pond. A few pages at the back share the technical side of the children's journey, statistics on water, and books for further reading. Fun shape and movement to part of the text.



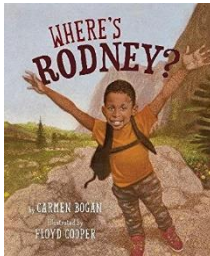
What's in the Garden? By Marianne Berkes, ill. Cris Arbo (2013)

Rhyming clues help us guess what is growing in the garden! The answer page shows a child harvesting the fruit or vegetable and includes a child friendly recipe featuring the food. This tasty connection to local food encourages our connection to gardening with additional information and resources in the back.



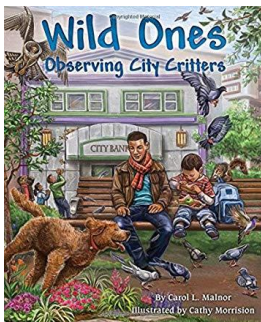
When the Snow Falls by Linda Booth Sweeney, Ill. Jana Christy (2017)

A simple rhyming book looking at what happens when it snows, from getting bundled up, hearing wildlife under the snow, helping dig out of the snow, and going sledding. In generation family togetherness and the magic of a snowfall are a great combination in this book.



Where's Rodney? by Carmen Bogan, ill. Floyd Cooper (2017)

Rodney always wants to be outside, even during school. When the class goes on a field trip to the “park”, Rodney just thinks it is the small neighborhood park. However, the bus keeps driving until they reach “outside” and he can experience nature up close as he is higher, lower, bigger, smaller, louder, quieter, faster, and slower. Rodney finally understands what majestic means from his time at the park.



Wild Ones: Observing City Critters by Carol L. Malnor, ill. Cathy Morrison (2016)

Scooter, a friendly dog, gets loose from his family and explores the nature-filled city. While the dog misses many of the nearby nature like bats under the bridge or the fox kits in the drainage pipes, he does notice other nature and has an adventure. At night he finally heads home to a family happy to see him. Information pages in the back give details on nature and cautions in the city.

Additional Resources:

Black Faces, White Spaces: Re-Imagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors— (2014) Carolyn Finney explores the historical context, geography, and race studies to understand the relationship of the natural environment and black Americans in this book. Janelle Phillips wrote this book “was helpful for me in understanding some barriers the African American community faces in accessing the outdoors.”

Building Cultural Empathy and Celebrating Diversity in Nature-based Early Childhood Education—In this article, Sarah Fogelson suggests tips for embracing and celebrating multicultural experiences, including reflection, being curious and listening, doing research, analyzing hidden messages in the curriculum, including students' cultures as part of the regular routine, and inviting family and community members to visit the program. There is also a good list of recommendations for further reading.

<https://naturalstart.org/feature-stories/building-cultural-empathy-and-celebrating-diversity-nature-based-early-childhood>

Diverse Book Finder—a collection of over 2,000 picture books highlighting people of color and indigenous people. They offer a search tool, interlibrary loan, and analysis of racial/cultural groups represented in various books.

<https://diversebookfinder.org/>

Forest Kindergartens: A Multicultural Perspective—The author of this article, Samantha Leder, shares her perspective of learning through the cultural differences while participating in an internship in a Danish forest kindergarten. She suggests lessons learned from the Danish culture in regards to accommodating differences, freedom to play, spontaneity of learning, and risky play.

<https://naturalstart.org/feature-stories/forest-kindergartens-multicultural-perspective>

Hashtag— #WeNeedDiverseBooks

Outdoor Afro: Where Black People and Nature Meet—This non-profit organization works to create a network committed to inspiring African Americans to connect to nature and build leadership in the outdoors. They also have a good book list geared toward adults.

<http://outdoorafro.com/>

The Nature Book Nook Book—Michael Barton shares children's books about nature on this Facebook page, highlighting representations of diversity when applicable.

<https://www.facebook.com/naturebooknook/>

Nature-inspired Children's Book and Storytelling Facebook group—A great place to ask questions about and share resources around children's books related to nature. Hosted by Nicolette Sowder from Wilder Child.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/naturechildrensbooks/>

The Ultimate List of Diverse & Inclusive Books to Support Nature-based Learning—The Wonderkin website just released this great book list as we were going to press with this edition of book reviews. Wonderkin quotes Rudine Sims Bishop, saying, "When children cannot find themselves in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part." Wonderkin lists 23 diverse books. While a few are also included in this IJECCE review, most are additional titles to add to your repertoire.

<https://www.wonderkin.com/blog-home/diverse-and-inclusive-books-to-support-nature-based-learning>

Urban Environmental Education—(2015) Editor Alex Russ brings together a wealth of information on urban environmental education. In particular, Chapters 15 and 16 look more in depth at environmental justice, underserved populations, and environmental equity. <https://naaee.org/eepr/resources/urban-environmental-education>

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