

## CHILDREN'S BOOKS AND RESOURCES REVIEW

**Carla Gull**

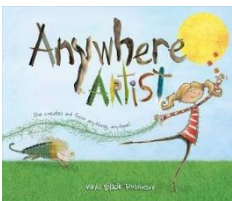
Book and Resource Review Editor

*Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center of Goshen College, USA*

### Deconstructive play: Book and Resource List

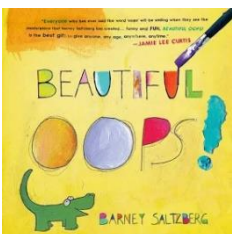
Whether it is a rage room, the demolition derby, a picking board, chopping up wood, a compost pile, or demolition work in a house, humans have a need to deconstruct things. While we do not want children to destroy things in our settings, perhaps we can lean into providing opportunities for deconstructive play that are safe and with materials that are okay to deconstruct. In an outdoor setting, breaking apart the ice, ripping fallen leaves, cleaning off a decaying stump, or dissecting a fallen flower can help with the natural recycling process, allow children to satiate curiosity, promote fine motor skills, and enhance creativity. Marc Armitage stated, "Being destructive for the child in a play context is just as much about tearing up old ideas and notions as it is about tearing up a leaf into tiny, tiny strips...and both should be encouraged." There is a lack of books in this category around nature inspired books—perhaps we can change that!

The following children's books and resources can help set the stage for deconstructive play in a safe and inspiring manner:



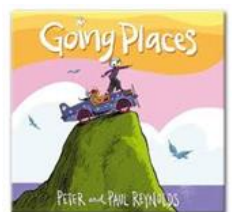
***Anywhere Artist* by Nikki Slade Robinson**

In this book, the girl makes art with found items wherever she may be—the forest, beach, mud, clouds, and rain-puddles. This book focuses more on the reconstruction of art using materials wherever she may be rather than deconstruction. Imagination is key!



***Beautiful Oops!* by Barney Saltzberg**

This book embraces the many mistakes we make like a coffee stain, torn paper, spilled paint, and bent paper as they are transformed into a variety of illustrations. The author encourages imagination and creativity as we explore the beautiful possibilities of a mistake.



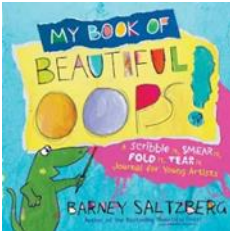
***Going Places* by Peter and Paul Reynolds**

As part of a go-cart race, two friends combine forces to think outside the instructions for building a go-cart to create a unique vehicle inspired by birds. They deconstruct the intended boundaries and directives for a unique solution.



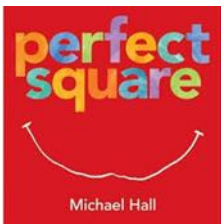
***I Ain't Gonna Paint No More* by Karen Beaumont**

A child's paints are put away, but it doesn't take long before he gets into the paint again. The child starts painting their head, then neck, arms, etc., all the way down to their toes until they run out of paint.



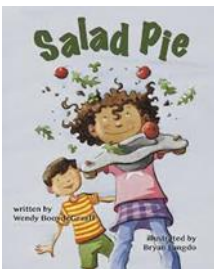
***My Book of Beautiful Oops!* by Barney Saltzberg**

While the author encourages writing, scribbling, and crumpling this book, you might reserve this as a read aloud and encourage the behaviors with paper and other recycled materials. The words and illustrations invite participation in deconstructive play/art. Similar to the original book, yet more invitational.



***Perfect Square* by Michael Hall**

Throughout a week, a square piece of paper is transformed through cutting, poking, tearing, shredding, snipping, crumpling, and more. With each alteration of the paper, the pieces create a new illustration resulting in a story at the end.



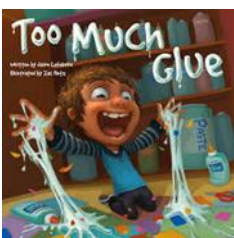
***Salad Pie* by Wendy BooydeGraaff**

Two children at a park eventually become friends as they collect materials for their salad pie. This book shows conflicts that children often engage in, nature play, dramatization, and creative use of resources.



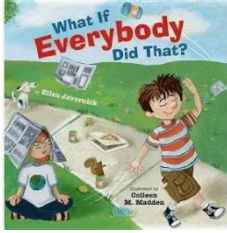
***The Most Magnificent Thing* by Ashley Spires**

A girl who likes to make, along with her dog who likes to unmake, collects cast off appliances and such to take apart for pieces to make her most magnificent thing. She works through the many emotions of creation and doubt as she creates many things that her community finds useful. Learning from the things she did right, she eventually makes the most magnificent thing.



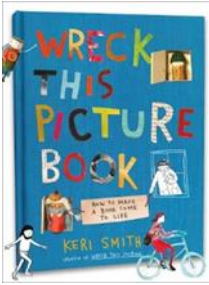
***Too Much Glue* by Jason Lefebvre**

A boy regularly makes glue projects with his dad and then uses perhaps too much glue in art class, plopping himself in the middle of a huge glue blob and sticking to the desk. His dad celebrates his creativity and work of art.



**What if Everybody Did That? By Ellen Javernick**

A boy chooses some irresponsible behavior, such as feeding animals at the zoo, splashing in the pool, or tossing trash out of a car, etc. Each nearby adult asks, “What if everybody did that?” It ends with a hug! While not showing the positives of deconstructive play, it helps highlight the consequences of thoughtless behavior. This could be the basis of a conversation around parameters of deconstructive play.



**Wreck this Picture Book by Keri Smith**

“What some people call wrecking, some people call living.” In this read aloud book, Smith encourages thinking outside the normal parameters of a book to be more interactive. The book includes a note to adults about how it may be uncomfortable to some and invites readers to engage the book through making sounds, poking and knocking the pages, smelling the book, touching it with your toes, etc.

**Additional Resources**



**Artwork by Chelsey Bahe, Take ‘Em Outside**

Through careful tearing, ripping, fluffing, and more, Chelsey Bahe uses scraps of nature for beautiful artwork highlighting children at play. She hosts a nature play group and has insightful blogs about her observations of play. Find her art on social media.



**Wreck this Journal by Keri Smith**

While geared more for adults or older children, this book provides prompts to literally wreck the journal through mud drips, ripping paper, etc. If you’re not ready to embrace deconstructive play, this book provides excellent experiences to try it out yourself. Additionally, the prompts could inspire ideas for deconstructive play with children.



**Loose Parts Alive: Inspiring Child-led Nature Explorations by Dr. Carla Gull and Dr. Laura Wilhelm**

A whole section is dedicated to deconstructive play, helping imagine the possibilities in an outside setting. This includes lists of natural and manufactured items for use in deconstructive play, along with suggested tools to help with deconstruction.

**Deconstructive Play Handout by Loose Parts Nature Play**

I compiled this list of resources, parameters, and quotes to assist in deconstructive play training.

<https://loosepartsnatureplay.org/2022/07/24/deconstructive-play/>

***Destructive Play* podcast episode by Loose Parts Nature Play**

This podcast episode shares various examples from an early childhood nature setting about how children engage in deconstructive play, along with resources and ideas to help guide children to more acceptable forms of deconstructive play.

<https://loosepartsnatureplay.libsyn.com/destructive-play>

***Why the Power of Destruction is Really Good for Kids* by Tinkergarten**

This article looks at the WHY behind deconstructive, considering the STEM connections; bending, blending and breaking as part of creativity; how this is an engaging play schema; and tips on how to support learning through destruction.

<https://tinkergarten.com/blog/why-destroying-stuff-is-good-for-our-kids>

**Acknowledgments**

Thanks to participants in the Facebook groups Nature Preschool Community and Loose Parts Play for additional book ideas! I'd love to hear your book ideas as well. Feel free to email at [insideoutsidemichiana@gmail.com](mailto:insideoutsidemichiana@gmail.com).