

POCKETFUL OF WONDER

Songs for connecting with the Earth
and exploring the wonder of being alive.

An Activity Guide for Home and School

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A Gentle Wind Production
www.gentlewind.com

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This activity book is also available
as a free download on Sarah's website.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE ACTIVITY BOOK: Pocketful of Wonder by Sarah Pirtle

When a friend of mine was young, she thought that the grass grew because ants walked on it. That kind of close-up feeling has stayed with her and has given her a life-long sense of the wonder of life. It's in her pocket, continually refilled, and that's what I want to help encourage for the children of this generation.

As a teacher for thirty-five years and also as a mother, I hope these songs and activities help foster an attitude, an awareness, an appetite for the Earth that once awakened, remains and shapes a human life. Sometimes I call it moving into Green Time because it's a quality of interaction and connection that can happen seated on a couch as well as walking through the woods. It's presence.

For me I want to do more than teach children good social environmental practices like learning to recycle, although these are important ways to carry out our love for the Earth. These songs aim at fostering respect for living things. Moreover, Jane Bell, flower expert, extends this further. I heard her say in a workshop that the plants themselves explained it to her this way: "What the Green Movement is really about is moving into our hearts."

Earth-centering is heart centering.

"My children don't want to go *inside*," a mother told me. Immediately after coming out of the studio where we recorded these songs, I met her and her four children when I walked through their neighborhood in Albany, New York. As I watched her children happily drawing with chalk on the sidewalk and playing with bikes, I saw the basic spirit of childhood play we're celebrating in these songs—the joy of exploration.

Let's go outside. Let's know in our bones that we aren't just on the Earth, but we are part of the Earth.

Let's also go inside ourselves. Let's connect with our children in play and conversation heart to heart.

Standing by a stream or hugging a tree, we feel a rush of joy, a common feeling that people have felt throughout the ages. Caring interactions open a space of reflection and connection that feed a child. The transformative mood of Green Time can happen in a field, in the woods, being with a tree in the park, or inside your home.

Responding to the Earth has always been a part of a young person's life until recently. Richard Louv writes in his book *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* --“The young spend less and less of their lives in natural surroundings, their senses narrow, physiologically and psychologically, and this reduces the richness of human experience. . . .As one scientist puts it, we can now assume that just as children need good nutrition and adequate sleep, they may very well need contact with nature.”

You can learn more about his work and the organization that he helped found at www.childrenandnature.org. The Children & Nature Network “was created to encourage and support the people and organizations working worldwide to reconnect children with nature.”

Doesn't it create an ache to think about this loss and what it means?. I want to speak to other parents and teachers to say that we are urgently called upon today to assure and encourage direct time in nature. Electrical media has a pull on our nervous system that happens unwittingly and insidiously. Rather than feed the historically recent pull of electricity, we need to feed the ancient pull of trees and sky. Our bodies—our brains and hearts—evolved from the direct source of nature, and I bet we require that contact for our very physical, social, and moral development.

While young brains are forming, they call for the good food of direct encounter with people, plants, grass and streams. The wonder of a flower opening, the fresh smell of rain, the joy of walking in mud—these encounters awaken our basic bonding.

What we need also includes person to person time. Human interactions -- building with blocks together, telling jokes, drawing a picture, reading out loud, are also potent in countering nature deficit disorder. In parent trainings I like to offer this question to keep in the back of our minds--**how can I foster person-to-person connection instead of person-to-technology?**

This is a collection that tries to honor the locale of your family – whether city, suburb, grasslands, woodlands, desert, or farm. These songs hope to open doors by highlighting many types of interactions. Lyrics focus on exploring mud, trees, clouds and streams, such as in the song “Let's Go Outside.” The song “Meadow Waltz” talks about delighting in animals and insects. Other songs hope to foster interesting conversations—for instance, about the variety of families in the song “My Grandmas Love Me.”

This booklet describes ways to foster connections. Some song activities encourage outdoor explorations in the woods, backyard, or the park. Some even lend themselves to times when you are waiting – waiting in a restaurant for food to arrive, waiting in a line, driving in a car, waiting for an event to start; you can use the opportunity to play a game suggested here. Other activities encourage writing, drawing or inventing new words to the songs.

Let's have fun--heart to heart, Earth to Earth, drinking in the wonder.

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OVERVIEW

The activities provided here spring from the songs. They aim at building a range of connections. Here's a sample:

- * Play a humorous finger game with your child about the movement of water striders on a pond.
- * Take a wonder walk where time is suspended.
- * Hug a tree together and talk to it.
- * Make a drawing of what you would put in a fairy house.
- * Talk about the wonder of the fresh smell of spring rain.

When we help our children and our students bond with the earth, we don't have to know more or be more. Who we are, with our own interests and responses, is just right. We don't have to have more scientific knowledge. We don't have to know the precise name of a flower or a tree. What we offer is to be able to stand in awe of its beauty with a child.

There are three important things we can do:

- * Bring our own enjoyment of nature.
- * Connect with joy.
- * Interact.

These songs and this booklet are meant to foster a connection between families in a common love of the earth.

Five Types of Activities:

Talking

Important conversations: These are ways to use the ideas in the songs to spur a conversation at home, in the car, or walking along.

Playing

Cooperative games: Here are finger-plays and circle games that spring from the songs. Ways to dramatically bring the lyrics to life are also included.

Exploring

Nature exploration: Here are direct outside activities for backyards, parks, and local areas whether they be woods, streams, fields, deserts, meadows, or mud puddles.

Absorbing Science

Science activities: These suggestions give science information and foster wonder about the natural world.

Creating

New creations: Time for writing, making poems, and new song lyrics as well as drawing gives a chance to use the songs as a jumping off point for more discoveries.

FORMAT:

The sixteen songs below begin with the lyrics for each song.

TWO STARTING GAMES

SPIRAL SHELL: Stand in a group no bigger than twelve, each offering the same hand (like your left) into the center but curled like the letter C. Nest all hands together like the petals of a flower to create a curving spiral. For a variation, create two circles of hands, one on top of the other, one created of left hands nested and the other of right. To get really tricky, make a pulse by opening and then curving, fingertips connected.

FEED THE CIRCLE: Stand in a circle. Place your left hand, palm up, offering it to the person to your left. With your right hand, tap your own left hand. Then tap the left hand of your neighbor so that simultaneously around the circle people keep the beat Tap, tap. Tap your own hand. Tap your neighbor's hand.

Once you have the beat going, add these words as a chant:

Keep together.
Don't leave anyone out.
Feed the circle.
That's what it's all about.

Variation – same rhythmic tap, but different words.

We are passing the power on. We are passing the power on.
We are strong together. And we're passing the power on.

1. *Let's Go Outside*

Lyrics

Let's Go Outside

Words and music by Sarah Pirtle, © Discovery Center Music, BMI, 2009.

1. Oh, the rain was long, and the weather wrong
for exploring round about.
Now the sky is clear and my friends are here
And I can't wait to go out.

Chorus:

Let's go outside. The mud is calling.
I think that barefeet will be fine.
Let's go outside, splash in puddles,
and most of all I'm gonna take my time.

2. When the sky awakes and the morning breaks,
there's a promise in the wind.
I can swing and bike and do all I like,
and the day says – enter in.

Chorus:

Let's go outside. Are the tadpoles bigger?
I'm gonna rock hop cross that brook.
Let's go outside. I see that wiggle.
The water striders say take a look.

3. Sometimes I go where the stream moves slow
and lift up an old log.
I find a slug, and a water bug,
and keep looking for a frog.

Chorus:

Let's go outside. Trees are talking.
I think they're asking where I've been.
Let's go outside. Ants are walking.
Fields are calling—will you come on in?

4. There's a willow tree just right for me.
The branches hang straight down.
And very soon it's like a room
with long green curtains around.

Chorus:

Let's go outside. Clouds are moving.

Who's that up there in that tree?

Let's go outside. There's so much doing.

The earth is opening arms to me.

The earth is opening arms to me.

SOURCE OF THE SONG

For this song, I draw upon memories as a child playing under a willow tree in my neighbor's yard and rock-hopping across a stream just down the block. I had a full life among trees and brooks as a child, and this fed me. We spent every moment possible outside—riding bicycles, playing games, carving acorn cups.

Activities

WONDER WALKS

The song says, "And most of all, I'm gonna take my time." Children drink nourishment from going at their own pace.

Suspend time. Create an unrushed situation where you don't have to go quickly. It could be a walk to the library, a stroll through the park, a time walking a path together, or an opportunity in your backyard. What matters is the opportunity for exploration and the relaxation. Enjoy showing each other things that catch your eye.

Look at this worm! Look at that cloud!

Look at the shape of this stone! Look at the patterns that the rain last night made in the mud! Look at the shape of this cactus! Look at what I found under this rock!

That's the sense of green time – a time for absorption, for drinking in the wonder of nature. See and touch and smell the world.

Drink in the wonder of what you find together.

IN FAMILY WITH THE TREES

Place your hand on a tree trunk and listen.

Notice how your eye enjoys the shapes of the branches.

Say, "hello," and wait. What do you sense?

Trace with your eye from the main trunk to the next branch, and out and out to the tiniest twigs.

Now sense the roots below as deep and far-reaching as these branch.

Feel the bottom of your feet grow roots.

Reflect—this tree is kin to me.

This tree as a species is older than us humans.
This tree is a wise counselor and companion.

WATER STRIDERS' GAME

Insects that walk on water are mentioned in the second chorus –
“Let’s go outside. I see that wiggle. The water striders say take a look.”

Here is a haiku I created to enjoy the action of water striders on the surface of a pond.

Water striders float
Far away from all their friends.
Quick they all come back.

Learn to say the poem together. If you are sitting in a booth in a restaurant waiting for your meal, use this haiku poem as a finger-play. Start with everyone’s palms on the table close to each other like a wheel. Fingers walk away slowly like water striders and then quickly return to each other.

You can use it standing in a classroom. Start shoulder to shoulder. Move slowly away on the first two lines, then return quickly with laughter.

SCIENCE:

INFORMATION ABOUT WATER STRIDERS

Water strider bugs are also known as pond skaters, magic bugs, water scooters, and skimmers.

According to LiveScience Senior Writer Robert Roy Britt’s article, *Walking on Water: Insect's Secret Revealed*, “The amazing water strider doesn't just walk on water. It skips across it with the grace of an Olympic skater and the power of a hockey player. The insect dances up and down to avoid being submerged by raindrops....New research finds the water strider's legs are covered with microscopic hairs that trap tiny air bubbles, allowing the insect to simply float.” The discovery was made by Xuefeng Gao and Lei Jiang of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

ROCK HOPPING

Seek out a stream. If there isn’t one near where you live, place rocks in a pattern within a field or playground. Cross from rock to rock without slipping. Learn how to check a rock to see if it’s tippy before putting your whole weight on it.

A TREE LIKE A ROOM

Look for a tree that creates a wide canopy so that when you are underneath, you feel sheltered by the leaves. The long branches of willow trees create that sensation, but other trees and shrubs as well give a feeling of being inside a sanctuary, like the place underneath forsythia bushes.

PLACES OF WONDER

Describe for your children the favorite places that you enjoyed as a child. Give lots of details so that your words can make pictures in their imagination. Next, discuss which places are favorite ones for you and for you and your child or children today. You might be sharing new information with each other.

WHAT DOES OUTSIDE MEAN?

Have a conversation about the implications of the phrase “go outside.” What is out and what is in? When nature is referred to as *out*, doesn't that put nature farther away?

I wonder when that phrase “outside” came into usage, as if being within a dwelling is the “normal” or accustomed spot. Talk together about the comfort that indigenous people feel at home in direct nature. In a related vein, I asked my friend who is an herbalist about whether a certain plant was in his garden, and he said, “Garden? It's *all* a garden.”

The book *Last Child in the Woods* by Richard Louv details the changes in the lives of today's children as American culture moves away from active play in nature. Donald Person, co-producer of *A Gentle Wind*, suggested that I write a song in response and he came up with the song title.

Here are some reflections. I wanted to give my son the kinds of experiences I had playing outside in the 1950's. My son went to an elementary school located on the edge of a forest where he could have a chance to be happily messing around in the woods. At home he kept a collection of sticks, and I've continued the family tradition by collecting sticks and propping them in corners. We enjoyed large doses of unrushed time exploring the world and that's where the notion of Green Time arose.

When my son was nine, I started a nature camp called Journey Camp that brings young people into the forest. It is located at Woolman Hill Conference Center in Deerfield, MA where the Pocumtuck people had a village until the 1600's. Awareness of native people and learning to find our own indigenous selves are facets of this work. Summer 2010 will be the seventeenth year of Journey Camp.

This song is also born from my experiences directing the Tree of Life School at Red Gate Farm one day a week. We go to a stream in a hemlock forest and create stick houses. The students love to rock hop from bank to bank, turn logs upside down to find salamanders, and watch the crunchy ice form in winter.

2. *A Seed Knows What to Do*

Lyrics

A SEED KNOWS WHAT TO DO

Words and music by Sarah Pirtle, © Discovery Center Music, BMI, 2009.

1. Snow came roaring on the window pane,
so we grabbed that book and we read it again.
A seed catalog with pictures bright.
Peas and tomatoes seemed just right.
Cuz a seed knows what to do

2. Snow was drifting on the window sill,
so we got some dirt and we started to fill
some trays and we found a long grow light,
and we plunked the seeds down in the dirt just right.

Cuz a seed knows what to do. Yes, a seed knows what to do.
The water goes slishy sloshy, and the dirt goes gooshy gah-shey
and the seed knows what to do.

3. When the rain came raining all around,
at night a frost still covered the ground.
The peas were ready but tomatoes not.
Those sprouts need to wait 'til the days are hot.

Cuz a seed knows what to do, a seed knows what to do.
And the water goes slishy sloshy,
and the dirt goes gooshy gah-shey
And the stems go viney wind-ey,
and the roots go intertwiney,
and the seed knows what to do.

4. When the sun was high, I played baseball,
and the peas on the vines were very tall.
A big tomato ripe plopped in my hand.
I took a bite and it tasted grand.

Cuz a seed knows what to do, a seed knows what to do.
And the water goes slishy sloshy,
and the dirt goes gooshy gah-shey
And the stems go viney wind-ey,

and the roots go intertwiney.
And the leaves stretch out so far.
The veggies shout –Here we are!

Cuz a seed knows what to do.

Activities

PHOTOS OF CHILDREN HELPING SAVE SEEDS

When you put this CD in the computer, you can see photos that relate to this song. Click on: SINGING ABOUT FARM LIFE: RED GATE FARM IN PHOTOS AND SONG. You'll see sugar snap peas, jacob's cattle beans, and jars of tomato seeds as well as the process of scraping and drying cucumber seeds for packets.

HAND MOTIONS ON THE CHORUS

It's fun each time the chorus comes around to have repeating motions that incrementally grow as the chorus gets longer. These suggested motions can be done seated or standing.

A SEED KNOWS Brush palms together, fingertips pointing upward, with the action of rising toward the sun in a swishing motion.

SLISHY SLOSHY Fingers sway back and forth as your hands move horizontally.

GOOSHY GOSHY Hands pretend to grasp dirt and squeeze.

VINEY WINDY One finger wraps in spiral motion around the pointer finger of the other hand.

ROOTS INTERWINEY The pointer fingers of each hand weave sideways back and forth like interlacing rootlets.

LEAVES STRETCH Arms bent, hands move out from shoulders like leaves.

VEGGIES SHOUT With hands in fists, make a cheering motion.

MOVEMENT GAME -- SPROUTING SEEDS

Ask children to curl up and become seeds. "You are resting in the Earth, waiting. The ground is cold, but it doesn't bother you.

"Now spring rains come and you plump up from the water. You find yourself moving in

two directions at once. At the top of yourself, you know how to reach for the sun. As you grow in that direction, a sprout comes out and travels upward. Cotyledons form on either side. You also reach your roots down into the soil. What plant are you? You know just how to become who you are ready to be.”

Afterwards take turns revealing what plant you are.

Cotyledon is the name for the earliest leaf growing out of a seed.

GARDENING GAME—ACT OUT THE SONG

For this dramatization, divide into three groups according to what you want to portray: the gardeners, the seeds that grow into plants, or the weather.

Practice how you will move during the lengthening chorus.

For example, the seeds could fold their arms and have knowing looks.

The weather moves on the phrase, “slishy, sloshy” to portray rain.

The gardeners gesture on the words, “the dirt goes gooshy gooshy.”

After each chorus, children regroup for the start of the next verse as the seasons progress through mid-winter, late winter, spring and summer. Let the weather set the stage at the start of every verse.

Follow the words of the verses. For example, the children portraying the gardeners gently press seeds into the dirt on “plunk the seeds down in the dirt just right.”

In the final verse, anticipate the problem that could be caused by the gardener catching the tomato. Either practice doing that carefully, or pre-plan for the tomato plant to stay tall and pantomime releasing a ripe tomato into waiting hands.

KITCHEN FUN: BEAN SPROUTS

Mung beans, alfalfa, barley, sunflower and pumpkin seeds can all be used for sprouting. But be sure not to use kidney beans –they can be toxic sprouted.

Soak seeds, drain, and leave them at room temperature in a jar or colander. Don’t leave them standing in water. Just moisten. Rinse them at least twice a day to prevent souring until they sprout. Sunflower seeds, for example, will take 7-10 days to sprout.

PEA AND TOMATO INFORMATION

Peas resist frost and can be planted in early spring as soon as the ground is warm to the touch. Some peas can be ready as early as mid-June. Both garden peas and sugar snap peas which have edible pods can climb on high vines supported by a trellis, although there are also low-growing varieties.

Tomato seedlings take about eight weeks, so they can be started in February or March. For going into the garden bed, tomatoes, as the song points out, need heat and for that reason are planted later than peas. Some gardeners warm up the soil ahead of time by laying down plastic. When you plant a tomato starter, put it deep, just below the first leaves because roots will come out all along the stem.

GROW LIGHTS AND WINDOWSILLS

At Red Gate Farm seeds are often started under grow lights. If you are looking for some for your home, there's a variety of compact fluorescent bulbs which help focus the light as well as standard horticultural fluorescent tubes listed on the Internet. Seeds will also start right there on the windowsill for the joy of green when it's still cold outside. You can put seeds in trays, or begin lettuce seeds in pots and eat right from your indoor crop.

SEED CATALOGS

A way to see the variety of places to go for organic seeds is to get an overview by going to www.greenpeople.org. You can find a large variety of sources and gain an understanding of how organic growing is a movement toward health and sustainability.

Talk about what it means to get non-gmo seeds. Genetically engineered seeds change the fundamental basis of the seed as well as represent a method of economic gain that can be likened to piracy. Organic seed companies pledge to not knowingly buy or sell genetically engineered seeds.

Twenty years ago in 1989, Seeds of Change began. Its goal is to preserve biodiversity and promote sustainable, organic agriculture. www.seedsofchange.com

The oldest and well-known source for organic seeds is Johnny's Selected Seeds which sells vegetable seeds, flower seeds, herb seeds, garden seeds, garden tools, and garden accessories. For their garden seed catalog, see www.johnnyseeds.com.

Other organic seed catalog sources include:

www.organicseeds.com and www.highmowingseeds.com

CONVERSATION: The Seeds Inside Ourselves

When we grow in our ability to listen, or to be compassionate, we aren't adding in anything foreign to our nature. We are growing from the seeds that already exist inside us. Here are some quotes that help foster an understanding of this:

"It is a great consolation to know that there is a wellspring of love within yourself. If you trust that this wellspring is there, you will then be able to invite it to awaken." -- John O'Donohue, *Anam Cara*, p. 28

"You are never alone or helpless. The force that guides the stars guides you too." - Shrii Shrii Anandamurtii

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3. *The Chicken Song*

Lyrics

The Chicken Song

Words and music by Sarah Pirtle, © Discovery Center Music, BMI, 2009.

Refrain: When my friends come to our farm.
All the chickens sound the alarm.
And this is what they say:
They're gonna chase us around. Oh, no. Don't chase us around. Oh, no.

Chorus: All my friends want to pick up a chicken.
They look so soft, but they can start kicking
If you move real slow, talk real low,
reach your arms, and up they'll go.

1) The first day they met that galloping gray
they ran too fast and scared her away.
They'd sneak and they'd jump but whatever they'd try.
They went puffing round the pen and away she'd fly. CHORUS

2) Pippin the chicken makes a happy face
when I scratch her head on that itchy place.
She's soft to hug and I rock her slow.
When she complains, I let her go. CHORUS

3) Now Pippin the chicken does magic tricks.
I taught her how to walk on a stick.
And when she's happy and she's well fed.
You can see her proudly riding on my head.

REFRAIN: When my friends come to our farm.
All the chickens sound the alarm and this is what they say.
They wanna pick us up. Maybe we'll let them pick us up.
They're gonna chase us around. But don't keep chasing us around.

4) I say keep cooing, kind of sidle up fast.
Set your hands to scoop 'em as they go past.
When they're in your arms, tuck in their wings.
Hold em real snug, and begin to sing.

ENDING: I wish I could fly. Um hum. Like you can fly (um, hum)

Activities

CHICKEN PHOTOS:

When you put this CD in the computer, you can see photos that relate to this song. Click on: SINGING ABOUT FARM LIFE: RED GATE FARM IN PHOTOS AND SONG. There's pictures of hugging a chicken, holding chicks, and more.

HOW DO YOU PICK UP A CHICKEN?

At Red Gate Farm one of the farm rules is not to chase chickens. To write this song, the students at Tree of Life School described to me the methods they use that are shared in the song: like sidle up carefully, and hold them snuggly. Several of the hens like to be supported by their feet and gently patted or scratched, "on that itchy place."

A United Kingdom group called Omlet gives this advice: "Quickly grab their feet from under them. Do NOT chase you chickens around grabbing at their tails or wings. This will only cause them to panic which could be bad for their health....Once you have your chicken by the legs, try to get it into a position which you can carry it whilst supporting its body. Use one hand to support it from underneath by putting your index finger between its legs and securing the legs with your thumb and forefinger."

The mention of a chicken walking on a stick and riding on a child's head is a true story. It comes from a Greenfield, MA family. The daughter of an elementary school teacher, Donna Rivers, has a chicken named Phippen who could ride on her head.

VIDEO OF PICKING UP A CHICKEN

If you go to the website for www.omlet.co.uk you'll find a video that you can watch on your computer about how to pick up a chicken. The clip shows two ways to carry a chicken – head forwards or head backwards.

CONVERSATION: TAKING CARE WITH ANIMALS

Talk as a family about how to respectfully approach and hold cats, guinea pigs, rabbits, dogs, and other pets. Discuss what signals an animal sends about how it wants to be treated and the importance of following those signals.

ACTING OUT THE SONG

Pair up children and ask the pairs to decide which one will be the chicken and which one will be the child at the farm while the song is being played or sung. Take enough time to set up agreements before you start the game so that everyone feels respected. At Journey Camp, I found that the children loved acting this out and were careful with each other.

4. *The Fairy House*

Lyrics

THE FAIRY HOUSE

Words and music by Sarah Pirtle, © Discovery Center Music, BMI, 2009.

1. I know, said the fairy, you have made me a house
by the roots of the tree in the park.
And I truly delight in that soft bed of moss,
and the table of twigs and bark.

You should see me at night bouncing on that bed,
with a lightning bug and a flea.
I pass around those acorn cups
you carved for me for tea.

CHORUS: And do you know, what I give to you?
And do you know, what will last you through and through?
A heart of wonder. A heart of wonder. A heart of wonder I give to you.

2. I found, said the fairy, the hammock you made
where I can take a nap,
And the dress of leaves and that little hat
made from an acorn cap.

You should see me at night trying on that hat,
it looks really silly on me.
The lightning bug laughed so hard
she fell into her tea.

CHORUS: There's a heart of wonder. A heart of wonder.
A heart of wonder I give to you.

3. I hope, said the fairy, you found that stone
that fits right in your hand.
I like to call it a wishing rock.
It's ringed by a white circle band.

You should see me at night talking to the crow
to find a feather for you.
Then I visit the spider's webs
and paint those jewels of dew.

Chorus: For a heart of wonder...

4. If your friends should ask, how do fairies play?
Say we really like to glide.
A dragonfly lands on your house
and offers me a ride.

You should see me at night with the fireflies
bringing light to fields so black.
Or look for me traveling in the grass.
I ride on a ladybug's back.

Chorus: With a heart of wonder...

5. If friends should ask, are fairies real?
We're real just like the moon.
We're as real as the love you feel,
and we keep the oldest tune.

You should see me at night going tree to tree.
I'm singing to the wind.
And I like to whisper in your dreams
-- You carry light within.

CHORUS:

And do you know, what I give to you?
And do you know, what will last you through and through?
A heart of wonder. A heart of wonder. A heart of wonder I give to you.

Activities

WISHING ROCKS

I like to collect gray stones that are encircled by a white band. I have considered them wishing rocks, and I understand that Helen Nearing described them that way as well. Keep an eye out in the woods, in the park, and on the beach, for white ringed-banded rocks. At Tree of Life School, we keep a supply of wishing rocks in a basket near a chart on a table. As children arrive, they select a rock and place it over their name.

FAMILY GAME – DRAWING A FAIRY HOUSE

Share a piece of paper and take turns adding to the drawing. Surprise each other with what you contribute. Agree to accept what the person before you has added.

This is a game that you could play on a paper placemat at a restaurant, or at home or camp.

There are at least three different ways of approaching the drawing:

a. Draw a location like a forest or a park. Take turns hiding little fairy houses throughout the drawing. Disguise them in unexpected places, under mushrooms, behind leaves, at the base of trees, on a roof.

b. Or together draw one large fairy house. Keep adding details like a special landing place on the roof for dragonflies, or various levels of rooms with shelves.

c. Or draw the structure of a house under a tree. Instead of focusing upon the house, focus upon the fairies who find it. Add fairies peeking out during the daytime, visiting the house at night, or riding on a dragonfly.

MAKING FAIRY HOUSES

It's a time-honored tradition to create houses for the little people to visit. Fly in and see with the eyes of a fairy. How big an entrance would they like? What kind of bed? Is the house inconspicuous enough, nestled against a tree?

They like us to use natural materials that we find and not tear off living leaves or branches or disturb flowers or moss. Twigs, acorns, shells, bark, and feathers are all possibilities.

Indoors in the winter, it's fun to take a "cookie," a slab of wood from a fallen tree, and create a structure on top of it. At Tree of Life School, we collect materials in the fall and save them for building in the winter. Then in the spring, the houses go outdoors.

SHARING FAIRY HOUSES

At Journey Camp many fairy houses are created, and sometimes if you walk Pocumtuck Ridge above Woolman Hill, you'll see them year around. On Mackworth Island in Maine, near Portland, there is a grove full of fairy houses.

BOOKS

Fairy Houses and Beyond by Barry and Tracy Kane.

RESPECT FOR THE ELEMENTALS

I look to the work of an internationally known artist and earth healer named Marco Pogacnik from Slovenia who wrote *Nature Spirits and Elemental Beings*. In his book he "describes his encounters with gnomes and fairies and other elemental beings and explains what he believes to be their true purpose and work."

His website has beautiful descriptions of his earth healing. For him the elementals and nature spirits embody the soul consciousness of the Earth. Earth channels, earth fields and energy centers make up the vital energy network of the Earth.

FAIRY SONGS

Try going to a beautiful spot and inventing a song, and maybe a dance as well, in response to what you feel in that place. The song could have words or sounds, vocables, like “ya, nah ya” or “ray kay kay.” Follow your intuition and ladle the earth with sound.

SUPPORTING A CHILD’S CONTACT WITH EARTH

“Your fairy is sitting on your head right now,” a twelve-year old friend told me this week. When children realize that I’m an adult who also believes in fairies, they start to tell me about what they can see and sense. I remember the day at Tree of Life School when a girl asked me, “What’s your fairy’s name?” I also remember a visit to the Bridge of Flowers in Shelburne Falls when a four-year old boy came racing up, calling, “My Mom just saw a blue fairy.” We support our children when we stand with them among the flowers and trees and drop into a place of direct connection with the earth. Agnes Baker Pilgrim (Takelma Siletz), who is one of the thirteen indigenous grandmothers described next, calls it moving 18 inches down from your brain to your heart.

THE THIRTEEN GRANDMOTHERS

As a family, become aware of the International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers who first came together in 2004. You can look them up on the web: www.grandmotherscouncil.com, there is a book and also a DVD about their presence.

We, the International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers, believe that our ancestral ways of prayer, peacemaking and healing are vitally needed today. We come together to nurture, educate and train our children. We come together to uphold the practice of our ceremonies and affirm the right to use our plant medicines free of legal restriction. We come together to protect the lands where our peoples live and upon which our cultures depend, to safeguard the collective heritage of traditional medicines, and to defend the earth Herself. We believe that the teachings of our ancestors will light our way through an uncertain future.

We join with all those who honor the Creator, and to all who work and pray for our children, for world peace, and for the healing of our Mother Earth.

For all our relations.

5. *Kooka Million*

Lyrics

Kooka Million

Words and music by Sarah Pirtle, © Discovery Center Music, BMI, 2009.

Inspiration for the chorus: Sequoia LeBreux and Kai Delorenzo from Tree of Life School, Buckland, MA at Red Gate Farm.

1. How many starfish in the sea? I've counted very carefully.
How many cabbages in the world?
I'm glad you asked. Here's what I've heard.

Chorus: A billion, a trillion.

A tick tock tillion.

Raza raza rillion. Ah-choo. Kerchillion.

I know there's kooka million. I know there's kooka million.

2. How many thoughts are in your brain?
Why that answer's very plain.
As many stars as in the sky,
If this keeps going, I'm gonna cry. Chorus

3. When we walk along the shore,
the grains of sand reach evermore.
How much sand is in my shoes?
I track it in, and that's bad news.

4. Count on your fingers, count on your toes,
How many ways the north wind blows.
How many words in every song?
Who can say? Just sing a long.

Chorus: A billion, a trillion. A tick tock tillion.

Raza raza rillion. Ah-choo. Kerchillion.

I know there's kooka million.

Godzillian. Elephantilian. I know there's kooka million.

SOURCE OF THE SONG

At the Tree of Life School at Red Gate Farm we were laughing about the names for large numbers. Kai Delorenzo, Sequoia LeBreux and I invented new funny names, and Sequoia came up with *kooka million*. Later that evening, I sat down in a café with these jokes ringing in my ears and created the chorus and verses to match the title.

Activities

A THOUSAND BLADES OF GRASS

Bundle in your hand ten blades of grass. Now estimate ten groups of ten and with your hands create a circle around the area that is probably close to hundred. With this as your reference, create a large circle with ten of those circles so that you have a feel for how wide an area would have about a thousand blades of grass.

DEFINE BILLION AND TRILLION

1,000,000 A million

1,000,000,000 billion

1,000,000,000,000 trillion

A trillion is one million millions.

If you have a bucket that holds 10 thousand marbles, you would need 100 thousand of those same buckets to hold a billion marbles.

A quintillion is a 1 followed by 18 zeroes.

FUNNY NUMBER NAMES

Make up your own words for large numbers. Two brothers, Theo and Allen Gabriel, added the additional phrases, “godzillian” and “elephantilian” when they heard the song.

THE WONDER OF VAST

We are part of a Universe that is coherent and unfathomable. The mystery and awe of vast spaces is part of living with awareness in Green Time.

Nicholos Wethington writes, “When you look up into the night sky, it seems like you can see a lot of stars. There are about 2,500 stars visible to the naked eye at any one point at any one time on the Earth, and 5,800-8,000 total visible stars. But this is a very tiny fraction of the stars the Milky Way is thought to have! Astronomers estimate that there are *200 billion to 400 billion* stars contained within the Milky Way.”

NUMBER WONDER WALK

As you take a walk, comment upon what you see in terms of size. Are there kooka million leaves in the woods?

6. *Mama's Weaving*

Lyrics

Mama's Weaving

Music by Sarah Pirtle, © Discovery Center Music, BMI, 2009.

The lyrics of the song were co-authored by Olivia Arthen, Alex Dibrindisi, Emma Kemp, Sarah Pirtle, Sophie Sharp, and Gina Whalen at Journey Camp, Deerfield, MA.

1. Like the corn the yarn is green.
Like the sky the yarn is blue.
Mama, I can't keep my fingers moving.
Teach me to do what you do.

Chorus: And through the strings the shuttle flies
Like the birds up in the skies.
When we weave, we turn again
Like the waves upon the sand.
The weaving grows in our hands.

2. For the sunset purple yarn.
For the sunrise pink and red.
For good luck I hold the yarn
When I'm sleeping in my bed. Chorus

3. Someday my daughter, too, may weave
and make the branches of this tree.
This pattern's passed a thousand years--
Through great-grandmother down to me.

Chorus: And through the strings the shuttle flies
Like the birds up in the skies.
When we weave, we turn again.
Like the waves upon the sand.
The weaving grows in our hands.
The weaving grows in our hands.

SOURCE OF THE SONG

In 2007 I brought a long Guatemalan weaving of the Tree of Life design to Girls Week of Journey Camp so that campers could hold it together and marvel at it. Five girls, ages 8 to 10 years-old, (names above) joined in a songwriting workshop where we imagined what it would be like to learn to weave that pattern and what it meant to the daughters.

Activities

MAYA WEAVING

According to *The Guatemalan Rainbow* by Gianni Vecchiato, “Mayan weaving is a celebration of feelings shared in common by an entire ethnic group.” Pre-Columbian motifs have been repeated year after year, generation after generation, preserving the meaningful symbols and culture.

A display of weaving at the Mariposa Museum in Peterborough, NH directed by David Blair explains, “Mayan Civilization is at least three thousand years old. The Mayan people still living in southern Mexico and Guatemala no longer live in the great temple cities of their ancestors, but they continue an unbroken tradition of superb weaving.”

The weavings on display at the museum took two to three months to complete. Customarily a girl who creates a weaving offers her first one to the Mayan Goddess Ixchel, who is now regarded as a Catholic saint. *Telar de cintura* is backstrap weaving. A warping frame is created using support sticks to make a loom. *Huipils* are blouses embroidered with traditional designs in bright colors.

RESOURCE ON MAYA WEAVING

Send for the *Maya Arts and Crafts of Guatemala Coloring Book* by Marilyn Anderson by contacting Coloring Book, Rights Action, 1830 Connecticut Ave. NW, Wash DC 20009.

MEANINGFUL SYMBOLS

Using the website *mayandesign.com* to study the variety of patterns, look at the ways that weaving designs can indicate the calendar, the universe, ancestors, and flowery flags. Draw a symbol that feels meaningful or invent a symbol where each color has special meaning for you.

PASSING THE POWER ON

Imagine the long line of people in history who have cared about the next generation. Create a poem or drawing honoring them and sensing them present today. You can pick a design pattern that has been passed along, or a skill like knowing the healing properties of herbs. At the Tree of Life School we sing about this: “The people before us learned ...” and then we fill in a skill such as “learned how to make pottery,” or “learned how to fish,” or “learned to make fire,” or “learned how to weave.” We end each verse: “and they passed it on.”

7. *City Cousin, Country Cousin*

Lyrics

City Cousin, Country Cousin

Words and music by Sarah Pirtle, © Discovery Center Music, BMI, 2009.

1. Across the river the blue jays fly.
Jump up, blue jay, jump.
Two cousins hear a lullabye.
Jump up, blue jay, jump.
One from the city, one from the farm.
Jump up, blue jay, jump.
Cousins dancing arm in arm.
Jump up, blue jay, jump.

Refrain: Now dance,
Checka, checka, checka. Chaw, chaw, chaw.

2. One cousin rides a subway train. Jump...
One feeds the chickens in the rain. Jump...
One cousin rides an elevator. Jump...
One names a chicken alligator. Jump... Refrain.

3. One Saturday we go to the farm. Jump...
New baby lambs held in our arms, Jump...
Next Saturday we're in the city. Jump...
Those sparkling lights sure are pretty. Jump... Refrain.

4. Rustle, rustle from the trees. Jump..
Shuffle in the falling leaves. Jump...
Leaves in the garden, leaves in town. Jump...
Lipstick colors falling down. Jump... Refrain

5. The city has food from the whole world round. Jump...
In the country we eat what we grow in the ground. Jump...
The country fair has goats and sheep. Jump...
In the city we dance to the steel drum beat. Jump... Refrain

SOURCE OF THE SONG

This song connects cousins who live in two different places and shows how they grow to appreciate each other's regions. I wanted to emphasize the ways that city dwellers as well

as people who live in the country feel connected to the Earth. Wherever we live, we are part of living in harmony with the Earth.

Activities

DRAWING

Divide a piece of paper in half with a bridge in the middle. Show each cousin mentioned in the song as they are situated in their own home and also show them visiting the other. Add the blue jays flying back and forth.

CONVERSATION: WHAT IS FAMILIAR?

Some children who live in a rural setting may feel uneasy in cities, and conversely some children who live in a city may feel uneasy in the woods. In this song, cousins help each other feel welcome in both settings. Acknowledge these possible feelings and use the lyrics as a point of discussion.

STEEL DRUM BANDS

Seek out a recording of the steel drum, also known as pan, to hear its unique joyful sound. While many instruments were invented thousands of years ago, this is a modern invention. To make a steel drum, a 55-gallon oil drum is hammered carefully. Each flat area can be struck to produce a different note. In Trinidad, the British outlawed hand drums and the pounding of bamboo poles. Without these rhythm sources, people began using garbage can lids, old car parts, and empty oil barrels from the Navy bases in Trinidad. These became known as Iron Bands. Then in the late 1930's, a dented barrel head was found to create a tone. Winston "Spree" Simon invented how to create chromatic notes on a pan. Today this music has spread, and there are children's steel drum groups in the Boston area.

CITY GARDENS & THE LOCAL FOOD MOVEMENT

There is a growing national interest in urban gardens and farming. Lauren Fontana, school principal of PS. 6 in New York's Upper East Side, is turning a third of the school roof area into a roof garden to grown vegetables and herbs. There are a wide variety of ways to create gardens including the use of barrels and raised beds in wooden flats.

Farmer's markets throughout the country are making it possible for people to get fresh food directly. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA's) are a way for families to connect to a specific farm and take part in receiving the harvest; this helps farmers know they can count on this support. Explore local food sources near you.

8. *City Neighbors*

Lyrics

City Neighbors

Music traditional: "The Fox Went Out."

New words by Sarah Pirtle, © Discovery Center Music, BMI, 2009.

1. Go down the block to the bagel shop,
get some cheese with a chop, chop, chop,
Hello, Max, pushing a mop.
Hello, city neighbors.

2. Stop at the fish store near the bank.
They open their awning with a crank.
"Hi," to the lobster in the tank.
Hello, city neighbors.

Refrain: Neighbors, neighbors,
My neighbors greet me with a grin.
They ask me how I've been.

3. I like to visit the olive man.
His store has a whirling ceiling fan.
He gives me an olive and a wave of his hand.
Hello, city neighbors.

4. I know which window has a cat
who sleeps in the sun curled on a mat.
They sell books. They like to chat.
Hello, city neighbors. Refrain

5. Joe's Nana waits on a bench each day.
She saves me a cookie from across the bay.
We tell our jokes – there's so much to say.
Hello, city neighbors.

6. I stop at the playground at the end.
I want to see my playground friend.
And visit the oak tree round the bend.
Hello, city neighbors. Refrain

SOURCE OF THE SONG

The song intends to give focus to the caring people in our daily life who help create a web of cooperation.

It was inspired by learning about the neighborhood experiences of two-year-old Anna. The olive man, the owners of the fish store, and the people in the park who Anna sees regularly all play an important part in helping her as a young person learn about the world. She is the grand-daughter of Jill and Donald Person who direct Gentle Wind. Anna lives in Brooklyn, New York, with her parents Rachel and Steve.

This song builds awareness of the ways that many children are surrounded by friendly people in their neighborhood. Without denying the fact that right now some children live in dangerous neighborhoods and families, the idea is to help all children be able to pick out friendly people in their daily life who help knit together their world.

Another theme of the recording is that nature is part of daily life whether you live in the city, the suburbs, or in a rural area.

Activities

CONVERSATIONS: NEIGHBORS

Talk together about one of your neighbors and discuss the ways you interact. Craft your ideas into a new verse for the song using the same structure.

Here's a verse about a neighbor who caught my son's eye in elementary school. This particular UPS driver had such a sunny disposition that the children looked forward to seeing him and would shout out when they saw him. He waved back to them and stopped to say hello, and his friendliness registered.

We wait each day for the UPS man.
He drives down the street in a big brown van.
We wave to him whenever we can.
Hello, city neighbors.

Write a new verse for someone and give it to them as a gift of song. In your school, you can write about people who work there. At Northfield Elementary School, a first grade class and I talked about how hard the custodian worked mopping up the floors during mud season. Together we wrote a new verse for the song, and sang it for him.

With our muddy boots we slosh right in.
You mop it once, then you're back again.
Do all our footprints make you grin?
Thank you, Mr. Jensen.

TREES AS NEIGHBORS

The child in the song greets the oak tree around the bend. Notice and talk about favorite trees and bushes on your walks. There's a Mayan word, *lil*, which describes the unique suchness of a being. Children are particularly keen at detecting the *lil* of different trees.

Does a sycamore tree with its bark like puzzle pieces call out to you? Does that ten foot barrel cactus where you walk seem to talk to you? Which are the trees in your own bioregion that you particularly love?

SOCIAL STUDIES: WEB OF HELPERS

What made humans successful as a species is that we were able to cooperate for group goals. When we think of community interaction today, we find lots of examples of cooperation. In a hospital, for instance, there are highly coordinated roles of cooperative activities. We can safely negotiate traffic because people agree on rules of the road. We have carrots to eat because farmers planted and nourished the seeds, and a chain of hands brought them to the table.

Make a list of all the types of occupations and social roles that help create a web of helping hands. The founders of an educational method called cooperative learning talk about the unique place of cooperation in the evolution of human society.

One way to make this list in a classroom cooperatively is to sub-divide into pairs or trios. Each small group makes the longest list of social roles that they can.

You can narrow the purpose of the list to focus upon the people in their own lives: School nurse, crossing guards, bus drivers, cooks, teachers, music teacher.

Or you can make a broad list noticing helping people throughout your town or city. Examples: mail carrier, dairy farmer, check-out cashier, chiropractor.

Now put the lists of all the small groups together and compile one list combining everyone's contributions. It's a chance to notice how each person offered ideas and when they were all put together, the list got longer. No one person could think of everything. We need each other.

FARMERS AND COOPERATION

You can also connect this activity with farms and gardens by taking an example like the carrot and tracing the path it traveled to become food for you. A drawing can show the variety of paths: gathering food in baskets, putting it in trucks to arrive at Farmer's Markets and neighborhood stores, while long distance food travels by airplanes.

9. *My Grandmas Love Me*

Lyrics

My Grandmas Love Me

Words and music by Sarah Pirtle, © Discovery Center Music, BMI, 2009.

Chorus: I have three Grandmas. I love them the same.
I love them all different. I love them by name.
Hey, ho, fiddle dee dee. Everyone knows my Grandmas love me.

1. Nana and I both like bus rides the best.
When we're in the city, we never rest.
There's plays and museums and delis with zest.
Nana likes adventures.

Chorus: I have three Grandmas. I love them the same.
I love them all different. I love them by name.
We plan on the phone what we want to see. Everyone knows my Nana loves me.

2. Omi sits on her couch, she calls it her boat.
I comb her cat's hair, smooth that long orange coat.
I teach her my card games. We laugh 'til float.
Omi likes to be cozy.

Chorus: I have three Grandmas. I love them the same.
I love them all different. I love them by name.
Reading and drawing and giggling with glee. Everyone knows my Omi loves me.

3. Near Granny's house there's a barn with hay.
Her friend lifts her fiddle and banjos play.
Then she takes my hand. We're dancing away.
Granny takes me dancing.

Chorus: I have three Grandmas. I love them the same.
I love them all different. I love them by name.
Hey ho, fiddle dee dee.
Everyone knows my Granny loves me.
Yes, everyone knows my Grandmas love me.

SOURCE OF THE SONG

This song was launched when a friend from circle dancing named Ellen Kennedy mentioned that her grandchildren love to go dancing with her.

By Sarah Pirtle: www.sarahpirtle.com. You have permission to photocopy.

Activities

PIGGYBACK SONGWRITING

Use the basic pattern of the song and make up new verses about the people in your own family. Not every child has grandparents who are living or are actively in their lives. You can vary the words to fit so that every person can participate.

Examples: I have two uncles... I have three cousins... I have four grandfathers.
Match the words to fit the people in your family.

CONVERSATION:

MANY WAYS TO MAKE A FAMILY

Talk affirmatively about the differences between your family, the families of your child's friends, and the family of the child in the song. There are many social constellations that can result in a family of three grandmothers – parents remarried after divorce, blended families, partnered Moms or grandmothers. Share the phrase, "Love makes a family."

CONVERSATION: DIFFERENT AND EQUAL, LINKING NOT RANKING

The phrase "ranking" refers to putting people in rank order with some better than others. "Linking" means connecting so that each person is being valued.

Avoid asking, "Who's your favorite grandmother?" or "Who's your favorite cousin?" or any kind of separation that ranks people. There's enough love to go around for everybody in a family that is working together to help the children and grandchildren feel nested and appreciated.

When families – or groups for that matter – focus on valuing the unique connections rather than competing, a relaxation into social safety can result. In families where people try to outdo each other with gifts and excursions, tension and anxiety result. In families where each member is appreciated, there's a strength that links people. Help children develop a habit of not ranking themselves or others.

In the graduate school courses that I teach, students have said that the social agreement that I ask students to follow, which is to link rather than rank, makes a big difference in the classroom community. I pass this phrase "linking" on to you.

AFFIRMATION DRAWING

Either illustrate one of the verses in the song or create a drawing of something that you like to do with a family member. One option is to divide the paper to show scenes with different relatives along with the things unique about each person.

10. *Vegetable Do-se-do*

Lyrics

Vegetable Do-se-do

Music by Sarah Pirtle, © Discovery Center Music, BMI, 2009.

Words by Sarah Pirtle, Zach Arfa, Ivy Noonan and other students of the Tree of Life School, Buckland, MA, at Red Gate Farm.

1. Onions and leeks, peppers and beets,
We start them as seeds, and they grow to be treats.
Bring the sun and rain. Up they go.
When the wind blows, we'll have a salad do-se-do.

Chorus: It's a salad do-se-do, it's a salad do-se-do.
Watch that branch for the hungry crow.
Lettuce is laughing as the vegetables grow
It's a salad do-se-do.

2. See that garlic join in the frolic.
We plant it in the fall to give zip to us all.
Bring the sun and rain. Up they go.
When the wind blows, we'll have a salad do-se-do.

3. Worms and ants join in the dance.
They travel the rows as we wiggle our toes.
Bring the sun and rain. Up they go.
When the wind blows, we'll have a salad do-se-do.

SOURCE OF THE SONG

At Red Gate Farm, gardener Adrienne Shelton involved students in the Tree of Life School in each phase of the garden. For instance, in February the children helped to select which type of beans to plant. She set up grow-lights mentioned in the song above, "A Seed Knows What to Do," and the class watched the seeds climb.

To reinforce and appreciate her work, I asked students to help me write a song. Zach Arfa, Ivy Noonan and other students contribute ideas. All the vegetables mentioned in the song are grown in the Red Gate Farm garden.

Activities

HARVEST AND GARDEN PHOTOS

When you put this CD in the computer, you can see photos that relate to this song.
Click on: SINGING ABOUT FARM LIFE: RED GATE FARM IN PHOTOS AND SONG.

DANCING TO THE SONG: THE DO-SE-DO

In our part of the country, contradance is popular, and I put the phrase “do-se-do” into the song for an engaging way to describe the blending and interactions that are part of the many elements in a garden working together. Here’s how to do that dance move.

Do-se-do in pairs:

Two dancers fold arms and rotate in a circle around each other.

Do-se-do as a group:

Everyone dances carefully around each other, arms folded, being careful not to collide.

CIRCLE DANCE

Here’s a dance pattern that can be done on the choruses and on the verses:

Hold hands together and keep alternating Part A and Part B.

Part A

1. Face forward and step to the right three steps and then give a stomp.

In other words, step: right foot, left foot,
right foot, stomp with the left, or R L R stomp.

2. Three steps to the left and then stomp:

L R L stomp.

3. Three steps into the center:

R L R stomp

4. Three steps back from center:

L R L stomp

Part B

Holding hands, skip four times to the right.

Turn to face the center of the circle and rush into the center, raising hands.
Come on back to begin again.

By Sarah Pirtle: www.sarahpirtle.com. You have permission to photocopy.

LETTUCE TYPES

Buttercrisp, looseleaf, and romaine are different varieties of lettuce. Give a chance to try different types of lettuces and compare flavors.

In general, the types of lettuces fit into two categories – lettuces that bunch up and form into a ball or head and lettuces that grow loosely. Here are examples of each.

Head Lettuce- This category includes romaine, bibb, iceberg, and buttercrunch.

Leaf lettuce – This includes argula, mesclun combinations, endive and black seeded Simpson.

MAKE SOUP

Gather the vegetables mentioned in the song or get them from your garden. Saute onions and garlic first. Cut beets and carrots into cubes and steam. Save the water for the soup. Put everything together, and add spices like basil or dill.

FLOWER BATHS

Herbal medicinal baths have been used around the world to promote health. In New England marigolds are plentiful and have a healing force. Select flowers from your region and put them into the bathtub. Give your child a chance to enjoy playing with the flowers in the bath, like pulling them underwater to see them pop up like umbrellas.

GARLIC PLANTING

In the fall is the time that the garlic bulbs go into the ground. Here's how.

Assemble bulbs and sort them over. You don't want any with blue-green because that means that they are moldy.

Plan a place in the garden where there will be full sun and remove any weeds.

Do the math. You want to put them in six weeks before the ground is completely hard, and they'll need eight months to grow.

Keep the pointy end up of the bulbs as you place them in the ground. They'll need to be about five inches apart, and they go down two inches deep. Tuck them in with compost and add mulch over them.

In the spring, have the fun of removing the mulch. Water them and keep an eye on the growth. When the green tops are turn so that most of them are yellow, it's harvest time.

11. Meadow Waltz

Lyrics

Meadow Waltz

Words and music by Sarah Pirtle, © Discovery Center Music, BMI, 2009.

1. Meadowlark, yellow lark, spreading your wing.
Sending your song over ten thousand things.
When the fox hunts you, you're safe I believe.
Your ground nest is hidden all covered with weeds.

2. Meadow vole, in your hole, hawks watch you pass.
You tunnel your runways through the tall grass.
Tiny eyes, rounded nose, quite like a mouse,
Hiding from hawks down deep in your house.

Refrain: And the rain comes
And the wind blows, and the thick grass grows.
The meadow's our home.

3. Spittlebug, little bug, you like to hop.
You spit out those bubbles like you'll never stop.
Sticky foot, little foot, doing your dance,
Frog hopper dining on juicy sweet plants.

4. Giant moth, soft as cloth, you're called the sphinx.
Fast as a hummingbird fancy wings blink.
In the dusk, flower dust, dusting your feet.
Feeding on nectar, that flowery treat. Refrain

5. Little ant, tiny ant, you help the ground.
You open the garden as you walk around.
Little seed, tiny seed, only the ant
Sees you pop open into a green plant.

SOURCE

This song was inspired by the book called *What's in the Meadow?* by Anne Hunter (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston 2000). Each page of her book describes one of the members of the meadow community and provides their picture. I wanted to turn into poetry a celebration of the meadowlark, the white-lined sphinx and the others of the meadow who are mentioned in this song. Her book has many more such as the woolly bear caterpillar, and the goldfinch. Anne Hunter also has other books in this fine series.

By Sarah Pirtle: www.sarahpirtle.com. You have permission to photocopy.

Activities

BECOMING PART OF THE MEADOW

Lie down on your back in a grassy area and become part of the land. Sink in and feel the earth holding you. Look at the grass from this perspective. Become an ant traveling. Feel the presence of the clouds and any birds overhead. Sense yourself as a welcome part of this community.

MEADOW POEM

Pick one of the insects or birds mentioned in the song and write in the first person, becoming that being. How big are you? How do you travel? What do you see?

What are you needing?

What does it look like from your vantage point to watch a child at play?

Where do you go when the sun goes down?

HABITAT PICTURE QUILT

Cut paper squares of stiff paper of the same size. When the drawings are done, place them together to form a rectangle like pieces of a quilt. Punch the sides with two holes along the edge so that you can use yarn to connect them. Select a habitat—desert, woodlands, grassland, beach. Brainstorm all the beings who live there. Each participant in the drawing project draws one of the insects, birds, fish, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, or plants that live in this habitat. Then assemble them into one quilt.

DRAWING A CARTOON ABOUT THE VOLE

Learn facts about the voles so you can picture them. Express this by drawing a cartoon of voles talking to each other, running in their runways, swimming, or hiding in the winter.

The meadow vole is often called a field mouse. They look like a cross between a hamster and a mouse with short legs, small ears, and a short tail. Meadow voles can live not only in meadows and hayfields, but also in marshes and the grass along roads. They can be found as far north as Alaska and Canada and as far south as Georgia and New Mexico with several hundred per acre, active both day and night. They can run five miles an hour. They dig entrance and exit holes. In between, they create a runway lined with grass, and dash back and forth. Out of their hole they dodge predators like owls, hawks, and snakes, and also swim and dive. According to *Environmental Education for Kids*, “They only live for about a year. During that time, they reproduce, give birth to as many as nine young per litter and have many litters per year... they crave the seeds from pine cones and fresh grass and sedges... In the wintertime, the vole's life changes. They live above ground, but under the snow where it is warmer than the open air... they will gnaw on the bark of bushes for nourishment, leaving behind fine tooth marks. Voles build a nest on the ground made of grass with one entrance through the snow. Look in the snow and you may see it mounded up from snow runways.”

12. *The Fair – La Feria (Spanish)*

Lyrics

The Fair-- La Feria (Spanish)

Traditional song from PUERTO RICO

1. At the fair in San Juan I play the guitar.
Tara, tara, tara, la guitarra. (2x)
You should go, you should go to the fair in San Juan.
Vaya usted, vaya usted, a la feria de San Juan.
2. En la feria de San Juan yo compre las maracas.
Chacas, chacas, chacas, las maracas.
Tara, tara, tara, la guitarra.
Vaya usted, vaya usted, en la feria de San Juan. (2x)
3. At the fair in San Juan, I play the drum.
Bor, bor, el tambor (2x)
Chacas, chacas, chacas, las maracas. (2x)
Tara, tara, tara, la guitarra. (2x)
Vaya usted, vaya usted, en la feria de San Juan. (2x)
4. En la feria de San Juan yo compre el violin.
Lin, lin el violin. (2x)
Bor, bor, el tambor (2x)
Chacas, chacas, chacas, las maracas. (2x)
Tara, tara, tara, la guitarra. (2x)
Vaya usted, vaya usted, en la feria de San Juan. (2x)

SOURCE OF THE SONG

I learned this traditional song from Puerto Rico from teachers at Brightwood Magnet School in Springfield, MA. One first-grade teacher, Marta Rodriguez, rewrote the song to be about a farm and used animals on a flannel board to sing each verse. “En la feria,” as its traditionally called, became “en la finca,” or “At the Farm.”

En la finca de Pepin, you encuentre una ovejita, bee bee una ovejita.

At the farm of Pepin, I meet a sheep, baa baa a sheep.

Coro: A gozar y reir en la finca de Pepin.

Chorus: We have fun and we laugh at the farm of Pepin.

Activities

PANTOMIME

Use motions to teach the song. Pantomime each instrument.

On the chorus, point to other people as you sing, “you should go/ vaya usted.”

Then gesture with your thumb to the location of the fair behind you as you sing, “to the fair, en la feria.”

Children enjoy singing this song faster and faster.

INSTRUMENT NAMES

Add additional names of instruments to the song. Here are more in Spanish.

Nete, nete, nete el clarinete

Lin, lin el violin

Fon, fon el sacofon

Iro, iro, iro el guiro

OUTDOOR XYLOPHONE

Collect sticks of graduated lengths. Dig a small trench so that when the sticks go across it, they don't fall in, but rest on the ground, supported on either side of the hole. The area dug out creates a cavity for resonance.

Assemble the sticks in order with the largest to the left, like a xylophone. Play it with another stick.

I learned this activity from Children's Music Network friend, Purly Gates.

13. *The Spring Singer Legend*

Lyrics

The Spring Singer Legend

Words and music by Sarah Pirtle, © Discovery Center Music, BMI, 2009.

1. I woke up grumpy, the winter must go.
Then I saw a crocus push up through the snow.
And what is it making that crocus to rise?
The singer of spring has hollared--surprise.

Chorus:

When she plays her harp, the flowers grow.
When she plays her harp, she melts the snow.
And the roots and the seeds wake up below.
It must be the singer of spring.
Make way for the singer of spring.

2. She tells the trout lilies -- rise up from the reeds.
She tells the snapdragons -- snap out of your seeds.
She tells all us sleepyheads, don't miss this chance.
The streams are all racing. Come join in the dance.

3. In the old hills of Ireland we call her by name.
We call her *Uaine*, one and the same.
She is the Green Harper, you can feel her call.
Her harp it is bringing springtime to all.

Chorus:

When she plays her harp, the flowers grow.
When she plays her harp, the green leaves show.
And the roots and the seeds wake up below.
It must be the singer of spring.
Make way for the singer of spring.

4. Skunk cabbage rises up in the bogs.
The ponds are all melting, greeting the frogs.
And the jack in the pulpit and trillium shine.
Come eat the first leaves of the wild dandelion.

Last Chorus:

When she plays her harp, the flowers grow.

When she plays her harp, the green leaves show.
And the roots and the seeds wake up below.
It must be the singer of spring.
It must be the singer of spring.
Her harp strings are heard by every tree branch.
The whole earth is calling – come join in the dance.
Make way for the singer of spring.

SOURCE OF THE SONG

Walking in Apple Valley one spring, the force of spring whooshed with an overwhelming vital force. That winter I'd been given a wondrous surprise – a harp as a gift. My friend who gave me the harp told me that in Ireland it's said that a Green Harper playing her harp is what brings spring. I could understand. I love the feeling of plucking harp strings. Imagine, a trill of notes and a flower opens. She said in Ireland in some places the Green Harper is called *Uaine* (ooh-eye-nyuh).

Activities

SPRING AS A FORCE:

CONVERSATION LEADING TO POETRY AND ART

The force of spring has been given many names across time. What does the sensation of spring feel like to you? Remember a moment when spring took your breath away – what was happening?

Draw spring as a force awakening the trees. What colors will you use? Is she a harper or does she have a magic wand or does she beckon to each plant to draw it forth?

SIGNS OF SPRING

A local restaurant and grocery store called the Old Creamery in Cummington, MA, posts a list each year of signs of spring – when bears were first seen, when certain birds appeared, when the forsythia blossomed. Compile your own list.

GODDESS OF SPRING

Throughout the world people have described spring as a sacred feminine force.

Persephone of Greek tradition was rescued by her mother Demeter and brought back from the underworld. When she arose, the flowers returned. In Roman times, she was called **Prosepina**, and her mother was named Ceres, Goddess of the Grain.

In researching Uaine, I learned about **Aine**. According to the website called Angelfire,

Aine is “revered by Irish herbalists and healers and is said to be responsible for the body’s life force.” Aine was also known as the fairy queen.

Two other Celtic Goddesses of spring are:

Blodewedd – She was created from nine spring flowers.

Olwen -- Goddess of sunlight who leaves a trail of white clover.

The central ancient Goddess for the Celtic people is **Brighid**, also spelled Brigit and in Scotland, Bride. An ancient Gaelic text says:

Dark the bitter winter, cutting its sharpness
But Bride’s mantle, brings spring to Ireland.

As guardian of fire and of healing springs, she is also the force that enlivens the seeds, and a perpetual fire was kept burning at Kildare, Ireland in honor of her. After the Romans invaded, the people continued to worship Brighid and she was known as Saint Bridget. The day of the year associated with her is called Imbulc, which is half way in between the first day of winter and the first day of spring, or February 2, a time of stirrings of new life. Along with lighting candles and blessing seeds, this day was a time of looking for badgers and snakes as portents of a fruitful return of life. This is the origin of Ground Hog’s Day.

The worship of **Ostara**, another Celtic Goddess, involved painted eggs and white rabbits, which were ancient customs then transferred to Easter.

Looking at other parts of Europe:

Switzerland – **Artio** is the bear Goddess who comes out of hibernation and brings spring.

Finland – **Beiwe** and her daughter **Beiwe-Neia** in the Saami tradition create green fields so that the reindeer have food.

Eastern Europe – **Dziewanna** is especially celebrated by local farmers.

Freyja, Freya – Major Norse Goddess who as part of the Vanir protected animals and wild places.

The West African Goddess **Hare Ke** is associated with the refreshing spring rains and the return of fertile fields bathed by sweet waters.

In Japan, **Kono-Hana-Sakuya-Hime**, means “Lady who makes the trees bloom.” Cherry blossoms are associated with her, and she protects the sacred site of Mount Fuji.

14. *Pocketful of Wonder*

Lyrics

Pocketful of Wonder

Words and music by Sarah Pirtle, © Discovery Center Music, BMI, 2009.

REFRAIN:

Sunshine and thunder,
pocketful of wonder.
I found a special stick and stone,
that I couldn't leave alone
They fill me full of wonder.

1. Skip and a hop and a 1, 2, 3.
I'm upside down in the old pine tree.
Hanging from the branches from my knee.
Did you say time for dinner?

REFRAIN:

Sunshine and thunder,
pocketful of wonder.
Winding trail with lots of turns,
salamanders and green ferns
fill me full of wonder.

2. Skip and a hop and a 4, 5, 6.
I want you to see my favorite trick.
I can make a house of fallen sticks. Will you help me after dinner?

Refrain:

Sunshine and thunder,
pocketful of wonder.
Stars are shining over me.
Moon is bright as it can be,
They fill me full of wonder.

3. Skip and a hop and a 7, 8, 9.
Three bright stars up in a line.
Orion's Belt shines mighty fine.
Can the moon come over for dinner?

Activities

COLLECTIONS WITH POCKETS FULL

Assemble in your pocket a collection of shells, pebbles, or acorns to share.

At Tree of Life School I sewed each student a medicine pouch of cloth. For a celebration, students bring enough gifts, like feathers or drawings, to put one in each medicine pouch.

CONVERSATION BASKET

Assemble a basket of a variety of wonder-filled things, both handmade and from nature – gemstones, shells, painted spoons, a tiny knitted doll-sized cap, a stuffed toy. Each person picks one and places them in the center of the circle to “stand for them” during your family meeting or represent their presence during the school day. It’s a way to greet each other. Tell why you picked it, and as you do, it helps reveal what is important to you.

WONDER DRAWING

What do you find mysterious and fascinating? Draw your own pocketful of wonder. In the drawing, create the shape of a pocket and put inside it the things you enjoy.

WONDER QUOTES

The theologian and educator Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote extensively about wonder. Here are some of his thoughts.

“One thing which characterizes humans is to be stunned by that which is but which cannot be put into words....Just as no flora has ever fully displayed the hidden vitality of the earth, so has no work of art ever brought to expression the depth of the unutterable, in the sight of which, the souls of saints, poets, and philosophers live....The stirring in our hearts when watching the star-studded sky is something no language can declare.”

Abraham J Heschel

“We may doubt anything, except that we are struck with amazement. When in doubt, we raise questions; when in wonder, we do not even know how to ask a question. Doubts may be resolved, radical amazement can never be erased. There is no answer in the world to [our] radical wonder. Under the running sea of our theories and scientific explanations lies the aboriginal abyss of radical amazement.” -- Abraham J Heschel

“As civilization advances, the sense of wonder declines. Such decline is an alarming symptom of our state of mind. Humankind will not perish for want of information; but only for want of appreciation. The beginning of our happiness lies in the understanding

that life without wonder is not worth living. What we lack is not a will to believe, but a will to wonder.” -- Abraham J Heschel

HAND CLAP GAME

Use a pattern of claps and taps with a partner to accompany this rhythmic song. Just as a pattern of hand claps goes along with the chant “Miss Mary Mack,” use this same sequence or invent your own to match the beats of the song.

PIGGYBACK SONGWRITING

If you put the numbers in a different order, you can make up new rhymes and new verses. Begin your new verses with these revised words and create rhymes to match 1,4, and 7.

Skip and a hop and a 3,2,1

Skip and a hop and a 6,5,4

Skip and a hop and a 9, 8, 7

ABSORBING SCIENCE: ORION’S BELT

The three bright stars in a row in the night sky are known as Orion’s belt. According to Wikipedia, the Orion Molecular Cloud Complex “is located approximately 1,500 light years away and is hundreds of light years across.” Looking in the sky, the bright stars that make up the belt of the constellation of Orion are, like the Big Dipper, something readily located and often the first constellation that a child learns to identify.

We are in a long line of civilizations that have identified these three stars and made up stories about them. Orion the Hunter comes from Greek mythology and the stars outline his belt. Before this, the Giza Pyramid complex in Egypt was said to be a sky-map of the Belt of Orion. In navigation, once Orion is located, it is a ready reference point for other stars and is found in seaman’s guides.

15. *The Courage of the Dandelion*

Lyrics

The Courage of the Dandelion

Words and music by Sarah Pirtle, © Discovery Center Music, BMI, 2009.

1. We have the courage of the dandelion
to push past the stones
when the spring joy is rising.
We have the courage of the dandelion,
We are made of the stuff that never gives up.
2. We have the courage of the butterfly
to leave that small space
and soar into the sky.
We have the courage of the butterfly.
We are made of the stuff that never gives up.
3. We have the courage of the gray squirrel
to hold on tight in a high tree
when the wind gives it a whirl.
We have the courage of the little squirrel.
We are made of the stuff that never gives up.
4. We have the courage of the waterfall
to keep on going forward,
following our call.
We have the courage of the waterfall.
We are made of the stuff that never gives up.
The courage of the dandelion is yours and mine.

SOURCE OF THE SONG

As an Interfaith Peace Chaplain, I give workshops and sermons about spiritual courage called “Holding the Light.” Since I was young, the triumphant rise of the dandelion has represented and embodied for me the vital force of nature.

I first sang the song at Hawlemont Elementary School in a program about the historic underground railway stops in their town of Charlemont, MA and created it as a gift to the students. We sang it standing, acting out the meaning.

Activities

PIGGYBACK SONGWRITING

Invent your own verses. Think of a part of nature that you love and add your thoughts.

Pattern:

We have the courage of the _____
To _____ (it doesn't have to rhyme)
We have the courage of the _____
We are made of the stuff that never gives up.

For example, how does a seed have courage? How does a dog have courage? How does a whale have courage? Depending upon whether a child is primarily a concrete thinker, you can turn this in a poem direction to look at courage non-literally. If courage isn't about being tough, what is it?

DRAW A VERSE

One way to enter the world of this song is to pick one of the verses and illustrate it. In discussing the drawing, your own sense of what courage means can be conveyed.

COURAGE CONVERSATION

Talk as a family about examples of people in your family and in your neighborhood showing courage. Bring the concept home. Courage is not something only famous people show; it is something all of us express.

COURAGE TALK

What words give you encouragement?

COURAGE DANCE

Create movements to the dance to express the qualities of courage that are easier to put into motions than into words.

DANDELION AS AN IMPORTANT HERB

In the spring, the delicate leaves of the new dandelions provide rich nutrients. The Chinese consider dandelions one of the top six herbs. Roots are used for teas and tinctures, and the top parts can be added to salads. Learn more about the value of this familiar plant.

16. *Snow Came Today*

Lyrics:

Snow Came Today

Words and music by Sarah Pirtle, © Discovery Center Music, BMI, 2009.

1) The morning was calling, I lay there in bed.
The cows they need milking, I must raise my head.
Then I saw the white blanket and how the ground lay.
Refrain: Everything's white. Snow came today.

2) I fill the grain bucket and I make my rounds.
The cows they all bellow, and the sheep make their sound.
And the family of ducks keep quacking away.
Everything's white. Snow came today.

3) The cows leave a deep print down in the snow.
And I leave a boot print that shows where I go.
By the red gate by the fence post you can't see the hay.
Everything's white. Snow came today.

4) When you greet a cow, there's a soft curly wall
that rises before you. They are that tall.
And the goats baa, and the sheep baa, and the chickens just play.
Everything's white. Snow came today.

5) The people who farmed here so long ago,
did they feel the same when they saw the first snow?
Did the children go sledding like a holiday?
Everything's white. Snow came today.

6) I go back to the house, over the hill.
The black dog keeps running and nudge me, she will.
All the branches are covered, and I shout hurrah.
Everything's white. Snow came today.

7) I've saved the seeds from the beans that we grew.
I'll plant them in spring when the winter is through.
Our harvest is in, and the food put away.
Everything's white. The farm is all white.
Everything's white. Snow came today.

SOURCE OF THE SONG

One December morning, snow came earlier and thicker than expected. It was too snowy to get to the farm to teach, and instead I wrote this song. In the voice of the main character of the song, we see what the snow is like for the farmers. I wanted to emphasize the generations on the farm and the continuity of seed saving, which is a special program at Red Gate. In reality, the farm has a pair of oxen but no cows!

When you put this CD in the computer, you can see photos that relate to this song. Click on: SINGING ABOUT FARM LIFE: RED GATE FARM IN PHOTOS AND SONG. The photo of the snow-covered sheep can be used in the activities below.

Activities

DRAWING AND LISTENING

Close your eyes as you hear the song, and then create a drawing of one of the scenes that was most vivid for you.

POETRY INVITATIONS

Write about the taste of snow on your tongue, even if you live in a place where there is no snow. What do you imagine?

Sentence starter: Snow, when you land on my tongue...

Write about the enveloping feeling of snow.

Sentence starter: Snow, if you are my blanket...

Go to the place in the menu where you can find the photos and take a look at the snow covered sheep.

Sentence starter: When snow falls on us sheep...

INFORMATION ABOUT RED GATE FARM

Ben Murray looked all over New England for just the right farm where he could create an educational center for families. See the website www.redgatefarm.org. Here's the description.

Red Gate Farm is located on an old New England farm which is rich in history. Once home to the Williams Farm and over three generations of family farming, Red Gate Farm now carries on this tradition as a small, active farm. Red Gate Farm has revitalized the old abandoned farm and is now home to a variety of farm animals, and a wealth of gardens.

By Sarah Pirtle: www.sarahpirtle.com. You have permission to photocopy.

Pond ecology, animal husbandry, composting, timber framing and gardening are different programs now enjoyed by local schools, youth organizations, adults and families. Volunteers collect eggs, feed our sheep, build trails, and learn by doing as they contribute to the hard work of keeping a farm alive. Red Gate Farm is a special place where meaningful work, laughter, fresh air and a renewed sense of commitment all combine to empower and strengthen individuals.

REFLECTIONS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY FARMS

Director, Ben Murray, writes:

Participation in Red Gate Farm's programs enables people to build connections to a farm and the inherent values of stewardship of land and natural resources. Young people are challenged with meaningful work and responsibilities that build character and self-esteem. Their work and accomplishments on the farm, by the garden, in the forest or by the pond, provide experiences, insights and education that cannot be found in other parts of their world.

Today's society is losing touch with farms and the natural world. Fewer children have the ability to recall the sounds, sights, hard work and adventures that a farm provides. Even in rural areas, young people are losing their connections to the land that sustains them, and the natural world that surrounds them. Red Gate Farm re-establishes these experiences, these connections, in a meaningful way which leaves an indelible impression on a person's life.

“DEAR FARMER” LETTER WRITING

In your school class or in your family, write a letter together to a farmer. I find it works best if a circle of people sit down together and everyone writes at once.

The letter could be to farmers who you know. You could send the letter to a CSA farm, bring it to a farm-stand, deliver it to a dairy farm in your region. Or it could be that in your imagination you visualize someone. Sense the reality of all the farmers who create the backbone of our health with the food they grow.

What do you want to say in thanks?

One place to mail your letter is to CISA, Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture, a non-profit organization which supports the sustainability of family farms in Western Massachusetts. CISA, One Sugarloaf St., South Deerfield, MA 01373

In closing, I think of the children Leora and Gabriel at “my farm” where I participate in the CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) and eat delicious vegetables. The rows are plowed open by a draft horse pulling a harrow – no tractor. Ah, the joy of fresh food.

Natural Roots, 888 Shelburne Falls Road, Conway, MA 01341

You could send a hello to Leora and Gabriel and ask them about their farm.

By Sarah Pirtle: www.sarahpirtle.com. You have permission to photocopy.

An Anchoring Theme:

*“The reason we are able to be creative,
to be patient, to be responsive, to be
compassionate,
the reason we are able to think
about the needs of a whole community,
is because we are Earth
and this is how Earth is.*

*Through our caring we express the fundamental
nature of this caring Universe.”*

-- Sarah Pirtle

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