

Rediscovering a Child's Sense of Wonder

Depictions of Nature and Outdoor Play in Historical Children's Literature

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My Bechtel Experience

During July 2011, I received the Louise Seaman Bechtel Fellowship and spent a month at the University of Florida, reading and studying illustrations of children's books at the Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature.

When I applied for the fellowship, I was eager to study how children's literature from the past might reflect how children played in and learned about the natural world. Several questions targeted my research:

- How was the depiction of nature affected by or how did it affect images of children, the education of children, and/or developmental ideas of children?
- How did portrayals of nature in children's books reflect what was happening in society as a whole? (romanticism vs. rationalism, science, modernism, etc.)
- How did children's literature portray green spaces/outdoor play/interactions with nature?
- Did these depictions relate to or reflect movements promoting the health and welfare of children? For example, I am particularly interested in the "fresh air" and playground movements of the Progressive era and how they compare and contrast to similar efforts today, such as those inspired by the work of Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods*.

When I began my survey of literature in the Baldwin Library's collection, I focused on the following:

- Images/illustrations – scenes of children playing outdoors and in nature
- Attitudes toward play presented by adults and authority figures (making note of appropriate references in the text)
- Philosophies of the time period (especially towards children and play)

It was refreshing to be away from my daily work and focus intently on the topic. I enjoyed spending time in the library's beautiful research room. I learned a great deal about how special collections operate, quite differently from most public libraries. There was so much to look at—I easily could have stayed there for another month or more.

Before arriving, I had done some keyword searches and began by creating a stack of call slips. I was set up with my very own book cart immediately, and the staff kept it well supplied with everything I requested.

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While I waited for the first batch of items to arrive, I perused the reference shelves. There were a number of intriguing works there, especially on the history of children's literature, so I decided to take a mini-survey. This proved immensely helpful in giving me more background for my research as well as some new ways to look at the study of children's books and of my topic.

As I read about various authors and illustrators who were important to the history of children's literature, I added some of their works to my request list. I executed subject heading searches as they were pertinent to my topic. Later in the month, I did more specific searches, such as looking through the Golden Books.

I also wanted to spend several days looking at issues of *St. Nicholas* magazine. I had heard of this publication but had not fully realized the importance of its contribution to children's literature and reading habits of young people, especially during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was fascinating for me to see well-known authors and artists "for adults" who published pieces of work in a magazine for young children.}

By the end of my fellowship, I had looked at more than three hundred items and had been able to personally handle everything from *A Little Pretty Pocket Book* (1744) to *The Pink Panther Book* (1976) and much more in between. My research process combined old-school and newfangled techniques—while I created a notecard for each item, I also captured digital images

of more than three thousand illustrations.

The time spent away studying historical children's literature strengthened my passion and resolve to encourage children and caregivers in wholehearted, unreserved enjoyment of children's literature, nature, the out-of-doors, and play. I continue to seek books that incorporate outdoor play and interactions with the natural world. I seek to evaluate these according to the degree they portray children experiencing unfettered joy versus sheer didacticism. I also spend more time asking children to share their thoughts and experiences about the natural world and playing outside.

I continue to think about art and images of outdoor play, looking at the pictures from my experience at the Baldwin Library and finding more examples of children's books from each time period. My interest has not diminished, and I hope to pursue the topic further by looking more closely at some of the authors and illustrators who reappear frequently in works about play and nature study.}

I didn't suppose it was possible, but since visiting the Baldwin Collection, my appreciation for all kinds of children's literature, the history and manner in which it developed, and its preservation and collection for study by future generations has increased. Thanks to the Bechtel Fellowship, my aspiration to continue along the lifelong path of a librarian and student of children's books was reinforced in a very real way.

Is the exploration of the natural world just a pleasant way to pass the golden hours of childhood or is there something deeper?"¹

"Play is the life of a child."²

Before I applied for the Bechtel Fellowship, I had become very interested in the notion of outdoor play and its function in children's development. Several years ago, I read *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* by Richard Louv. In this book, Louv explores "the increasing divide between the young and the natural world" and sets forth "research that reveals the necessity of contact with nature for healthy child—and adult—development."³

He expresses his deep concern at the severe lack of "green time" in the lives of most twenty-first-century children. Green time has been defined as offering children sufficient opportunities "for unstructured play and interaction with the natural world."⁴ There is a growing movement in the United States and worldwide encouraging parents and teachers to get children outside to play and explore nature.

I have continued to pursue my interest in these notions of nature deficit—compiling articles and reading blog posts as the popularity of these ideas becomes more widespread. The movement and its promotion of families spending more time together outdoors has also been shared frequently via social networks such as Facebook and Twitter.

This idea of the value of children spending time outdoors is not a new one. At the Baldwin, I discovered some proponents of very similar philosophies. One from the 1830s declares, "Of all things in the world, health is most important. I fear our little folks do not take sufficient exercise in the open air."⁵

Another book published in the nineteenth century devotes an entire chapter to the "out-door recreations which are so essential to the preservation of health and the proper development of the human frame."⁶

As I began to reflect on my research, I sorted through the images I collected. Five (this is the number/order they appear in article) major categories began to emerge as common threads running across various forms of children's literature I studied.

- Play
- Games and Sports (including playgrounds)
- Nature Study, with the following subcategories
 - Wonders of God's Creation, including care and keeping of the same
 - Conservation/Environmentalism
 - Outdoor Handicraft/Camping
 - Free Exploration/Enjoyment of Nature

Some books contained combinations of several of these categories. Narratives were frequently used to present scientific information, with characters discussing nature and other factual topics as they strolled through the countryside or went about other activities of the day.

Play — Outdoors, General

In books of the past, I found no shortage of images of children playing outdoors. Even in the very earliest illustrated books, there were pictures of children playing, in short, appearing to be having fun and enjoying themselves.

In some of the periods in history when children were treated as “little adults” and their development was perhaps viewed differently from how we do in the twenty-first century, it seems children still found time and places to play. Life was hard for many children (for example, those who were poor, slaves, immigrants, and those forced to labor on farms or in factories), yet in spite of hardships, these children played. Primary sources as well as children's books published during these time periods provide examples of children's play across boundaries of geography, race, and class. One thing became clear to me—throughout the ages and all over the world—children always find a way to play! Many of the books I looked at were written for children of the higher and educated classes in Great Britain and, later, in America, so understandably their play figures prominently in the illustrations I collected.

One of the earliest books known to have been published specifically for children (originally published in 1744 in London by John Newbery) is the *Little Pretty Pocket-Book*. The book's stated purpose is “Instruction with Delight,” that is, to “teach children...by way of diversion.”⁷

The book also promoted exercise and health. It announced itself to young readers as the “*Little Pretty Pocket-book, which will teach you to play at all those innocent games that good Boys and Girls divert themselves with.*”⁸ The version I read had postage-stamp-sized illustrations, which pictured children playing games, nearly all out-of-doors. Each page contained a short rhyme representing a letter of the alphabet. For example, the rhyme for lowercase “a,” “The little a play,” is “Flying the Kite.”⁹

Even though the illustration is very small, it is possible to see two figures preparing to fly a kite. One boy is holding the line, while the other appears ready to launch the kite into the sky. Although

the wood-cut drawing is simple, the ribbons on the side of the kite indicate movement, and it is not hard to imagine a strong breeze blowing to keep the kite aloft. The boy on the right is smiling, but the other child has a more serious expression, perhaps having been instructed by his friend to hold on tightly!

A Peep into the Sports of Youth, published in 1809 in Philadelphia, contained games and activities for children to read about, but these also have serious warnings attached to them. For example, one page shows a girl skipping rope. The caption reads, “This is Miss Playful, amusing herself with the innocent and healthful exercise of skipping.” Then the author warns, “I hope she is cautious not to overheat herself, and never to skip without her shoes.”¹⁰

In the adjacent illustration, a young boy is pictured with a hoop, a popular toy for children in the nineteenth century. Rolling a hoop, the book explains, “affords good exercise in a winter's morning, as it opens the chest, and puts the whole frame in a glow; only little master should be careful not to run it against anyone.”¹¹

While many of these early books were small, the tiniest ones I looked at, around two inches high, were the volumes of the *Infant's Library*. These seem to have been directed at very young children. They are written in descriptive language with shorter, simpler sentences. The wood-cut prints have been hand-colored.

The page depicting “Leap-frog” also urges caution on the part of the child reader: “When you amuse yourselves with this play you should be very careful not to throw each other down.”¹²

One boy is pictured mid-jump over a crouching friend. Another child is in the background of the scene. It is difficult to determine if this other boy is running and playing by himself or waiting nearby as a “spotter” in case someone falls.

A book quoted from previously which contained strong arguments for the health benefits of outdoor play was *The Book of Games & Amusements for Boys & Girls*. It includes fingerplays for little children, riddles, a fun-sounding game called “*Hunt the Squirrel*,” as well as tug-of-war and many other familiar games played by generations of children. However, according to its author, even primitive forms of playground equipment are potentially perilous! “Swinging” is described in the following manner:

This game is dangerous unless used with discretion. Great care should be taken that the ropes are strong and well secured, and the seat fastened firmly. Little girls should never be ambitious to swing higher than any of their companions. It is, at best, a very foolish ambition, and it may lead to dangerous accidents. Any little girl acts unpardonably who pushes another while she is swinging.¹³

In these books and others, there seems to be ambivalence on the part of the adult writers. Tension exists between nostalgia for the innocence and enjoyment of childhood play and the knowledge that play is good for its own sake, combined with the adult's concern for safety and desire to not let the fun get out of hand.

Games and Sports, including Playgrounds

A playground is an emblem of the world; Its gamesome boys are men in miniature; The most important action of the man May find its parody 'mong childhood's sports And life itself when longest, happiest, —In boyhood's brief and jocund holiday.¹⁴

The Baldwin Library contains many instructional books on sports and games, almost like handbooks describing how to play and do various activities. This type of book seems to have been particularly prevalent in the nineteenth century.

These handbooks were marketed to boys, girls, or both. Some were aimed at the entire family. They include descriptions of various games and even some of the more complicated rules of sports, a few of which were unusual or new to me. Most of the books published in England seem to take particular pride in the game of cricket, while some published in the United States describe the exciting new sport of baseball. Illustrations were often very detailed to help the reader understand the game and sometimes quite humorous. I was also interested to see how play spaces and playgrounds were represented in the illustrations.

One I especially enjoyed was *Children's Sports & Pastimes*, published in London circa 1857-1865. It was part of a series called *Dean's Moveable Books* – an early pop-up book. The vivid pictures are hand-colored. "Sports" shown in the book consist of activities like playing "shuttlecock" (badminton), sailing toy boats, and swinging.

One illustration portrays a boy and girl on a seesaw, constructed of a board balancing on a large log. The boy is tipping his hat, and the girl is seated sidesaddle, and both are smiling. There are tiny wires behind the pages and tabs for the reader to move the riders up and down on the seesaw. The writer urges the children playing to be "careful," even instructing them on the best position to take on the board for optimal safety.¹⁵

Outdoor Fun was published approximately one hundred years later in the United States. The book contains suggested games and activities for two or more children. Many of the same games were mentioned in handbooks of the previous century. The games shown in *Outdoor Fun* offer a "balanced diet" of fun, for they have been "approved for primary grades" by Health and Physical Education department, Chicago Public Schools.¹⁶ Games include tag, hopscotch, skipping rope, marbles, and "Follow the Leader." The illustrations depict rosy-cheeked, healthy-looking Caucasian children with exuberant expressions enjoying the outdoors in all four seasons. The language is quite prescriptive, but the young subjects of the pictures look as if they are having a grand time.¹⁷

Another favorite of mine was an illustration from *Vacation Fun*. The book contains lots of illustrations, some quite lovely, of children interacting with the natural world. However, the title and illustrations are a bit misleading, and the writing tone is overtly didactic. Many of the selections are written in verse, and most have unconcealed moral lessons.

One such moralistic example describes the fate that befell a young girl identified as "Skipping Tillie." The illustration of Tillie happily jumping rope gives no clue to the trouble to follow her in the verse printed alongside:

Matilda Isabel Clay
Skipped all through the livelong day
She forgot in her play there were lessons to say
Alas! Poor Isabel Clay!¹⁸

Yet again, a certain degree of ambivalence on the part of adult authority figures seems to emerge. The book is supposed to be about fun, but this passage has the effect of frowning on children when they have too much fun.

The format of many of the nineteenth-century books about games and pastimes similarly consisted of an introduction followed by chapters on various forms of recreation. In the preface or introduction, the author begins by proclaiming the purpose of the book and extolling the great worth of play in the life of a child, but then proceeds almost immediately with the rules. Even those I found having a pleasant tone have a cautious "adult" voice straining to be heard.

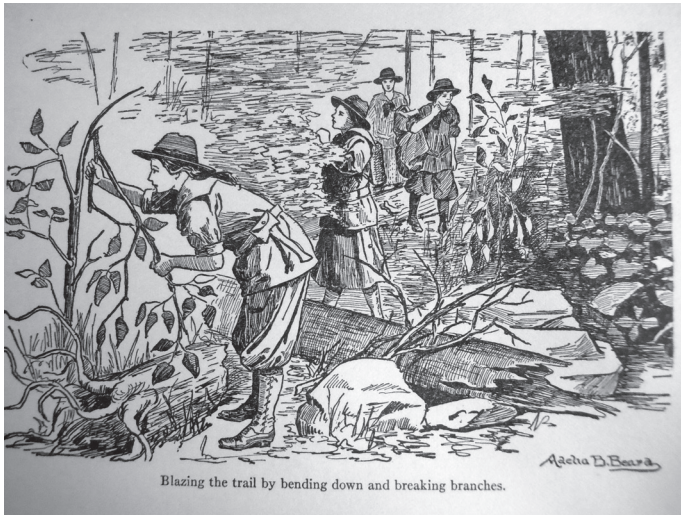
Many of the nineteenth-century books about games and pastimes were not overly harsh or stern, instead advocating restraint. For example, in the preface to one book, the author states, "There is, in this work-a-day world of ours, a time to learn, so there is, or should be, a time to play. Amusement, when properly regulated, is a grand help-mate to study." This particular work was compiled "in order that boys and girls may know how to amuse themselves in a sensible manner."¹⁹

Another book from the nineteenth century seems to decry this mindset. Adults may, "forgetting themselves that they were once young, allow no recreations but those of so grave a character, that play becomes more difficult and fatiguing than study."²⁰ As I read these somewhat innocuous words, I thought to myself: If adults impose so many guidelines to schoolyard fun can it be considered "fun" anymore?

Adult over involvement in children's play may even have the opposite effect. According to British folklorists Peter and Iona Opie, who observed children's games, songs, and rhymes and recorded them in *Children's Games in Street and Playground*, published in 1969, "in the long run, nothing extinguishes self-organized play more effectively than does action to promote it."²¹

Nature Study/Care for Nature

Most natural history books published for children in the nineteenth century presented material with an emphasis on God as creator. Many of these were written in fictional or a blended narrative style. The result is a kind of modified Socratic teaching method – the fictional children ask questions, and the adult figure answers them and then continues by asking questions of the students in order to stimulate further learning.



On the Trail: An Outdoor Book for Girls by Lina Beard and Adelia B. Beard (1922)

In one such book, *Garden Amusements*, the kind young “uncle” in the story teaches the younger children, a boy and a girl. His tone is gentle and loving, though didactic. The development of his character reveals his own love of nature, and he seems happy to answer the constant questions of his inquisitive pupils. The book combines botany and nature study with biblical teaching.

In one illustration, Ann is warned not to harm the butterfly by trying to catch it when it lands on a leaf, but instead to show care for even an insect and simply enjoy looking at it.²²

In a book published in the early part of the twentieth century, *Little Folks Tramping & Camping: A Nature Study Story of Real Children and a Real Camp*, we find another “uncle” who takes a group of children on nature walks. Throughout the seasons, he teaches them about birds, nature, and ecosystems. They even rescue a mother bird and her nest. The use of the word “real” in the title, when the characters are clearly fictional, is puzzling; perhaps it is used in the sense of the opposite of fantasy, or perhaps the story is based on personal experiences of the author.²³

Rachel Carson wrote in *The Sense of Wonder*, “If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in.”²⁴ Several of these early children’s books I read seem to exemplify a similar philosophy.

In addition to providing factual information, most of the natural history books I reviewed generally embraced the idea that the natural world teaches children about God. A number of educators of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were influenced by writings of Friedrich Fröbel, the German originator of the kindergarten, or “children’s garden.” Fröbel viewed the things of nature as a “beautiful ladder between heaven and earth.”²⁵

In this view, natural experiences serve to draw children into the spiritual realm. The author of the children’s book *Aunt Joy’s Nature Talks*, Lida R. Hardy, further rhapsodizes that “nature

beckons us to a world of light and love,” encouraging adult readers to view the natural world “with children’s eyes.”²⁶

Outdoor Friends follows a fictional extended family taking part in day-to-day activities and experiencing the outdoors together. They build a birdhouse, take walks and rides, picnic, and go camping. The adults teach young children about the natural world, usually incorporating Bible stories and lessons. Messages about caring for the earth and its creatures were fairly obvious, including this line from a poem entitled “Kindness to Animals:” “Little children never give, Pain to things that feel and live.”²⁷

In *Outdoor Adventures* by Hal H. Harrison, the illustrations are photos of the author’s own children and their pets. The children are pictured exploring nature in all types of weather and during all seasons. Even though most of the photos look somewhat staged, one may conclude that these young people are comfortable outdoors.

According to Harrison, also an author of field guides,

They have learned a deep appreciation for the wild things with which they must live. They are interested in the lives of birds and insects and flowers and frogs. They love to go to the country, for they find so much to interest them there.²⁸

He continues:

If this book, with its friendly stories and its informal pictures, helps some other boys and girls to understand and love the wild things more, it will have served its purpose. If it shows the way to other parents in the guidance of their own children toward a fuller and happier life, it will be most worth while.²⁹

Harrison’s book advances the notion of stimulating children’s natural curiosity, allowing them to explore and ask questions, with gentle encouragement and guidance from adults.

I came across quite a few examples in earlier children’s books condemning needless cruelty to animals. One frequent prank was stealing birds’ nests, something boys might do on a dare. For example, in the *Little Pretty Pocket-book*, the illustration for the letter “N” pictures one boy in a tree, handing down a nest to his playmate. Underneath are the lines, “Here two naughty Boys, Hard-hearted in Jest, Deprive a poor Bird of her young and her Nest.”³⁰

And, from an essay called “Help Save the Birds,” published in the late nineteenth century:

Do you know that years ago our country was covered with forests and now nearly all of the trees have been cut down? How once buffaloes and all sorts of wild beasts roamed these forests and how they have nearly all disappeared? And now we fear the fate of our song-birds; they too are so rapidly disappearing.³¹

Conservation and You, published in 1964, encouraged young people to be responsible and take action for the environment. It explains the importance of maintaining healthy ecosystems for the good of all living things. The authors discussed issues such as

pollution and erosion and explained the purpose of national parks and refuges. They explain that "lack of conservation in the past stemmed from ignorance,"³² ostensibly leaving the present-day reader with no such excuse. At the end of the book, there is a conservation pledge, in which readers can promise to help take care of the earth, along with a complete list of things for them to do.

One of my favorite illustrations in this book is a photo of two boys fishing in a lake next to a wooded area. The smaller boy is sitting on the dock with his bare feet hanging in the water. The caption reads: "Tall trees, clean water, good fishing. What can we do to see that there will be some of these around for the future?"³³ By depicting real-life children enjoying their surroundings, perhaps the plea to care for the environment becomes more personal to the reader.

American naturalist John Burroughs once wrote, "When people ask me, 'How shall we teach our children to love nature?' I reply: 'Do not try to teach them at all. Just turn them loose in the country and trust to luck.'" He continued, "Knowledge without love does not stick; but if love comes first, knowledge is pretty sure to follow."³⁴

A book that beautifully illustrates the idea of making the love of nature more personal to a child is the 1957 Caldecott Medal winner *A Tree is Nice* by Janice May Udry, illustrated by Marc Simont. The book begins by giving general information about trees, then goes on to describe with text and illustrations why trees are such an enjoyable part of the world. Children are pictured playing, climbing, eating, and resting in or under lovely, tall trees.

The book seems to extol the value of a tree in a child's life and promote environmentalism on a scale to which a child can relate. If a child does not become fond of a specific tree, as an adult he or she may not care about preserving them for future generations to enjoy.

This illustration features a child on a swing that is hanging from the large branch of a tree. There is a bird nearby, and the tree seems to be standing in a meadow, with flowers below. Some ways a tree may be enjoyed and prove useful are matter-of-factly described: "A tree is nice to hang a swing in. Or a basket of flowers. It is a good place to lean your hoe while you rest."³⁵

Outdoor Handicraft/Camping

Many books for young people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries encourage children to participate in outdoor life and camping. This popularity in children's book publishing coincides in a noticeable way with other movements widely embraced at the time, such as the organized summer camp movement, scouting, and the current political and national culture. The first National Parks were established in the United States in the late nineteenth century, and in 1901, the country had as its leader nature lover and wildlife advocate Theodore Roosevelt.

From *Handicraft for Outdoor Boys* by Dan Beard (1906, Boy Scout Edition) comes praise for the groundswell of such move-

ments: "Hence all true and patriotic Americans should rejoice in the fact that each year finds a steady increase in the number of nature lovers, and vacation time fills the woods with enthusiastic campers eagerly studying the rudiments of the gentle art of woodcraft." In the opening of Chapter 17, Beard also comments, "If the President of the United States can go camping with the boys, why should not all American men who can get a week off follow his example?"³⁶ He was referring, of course, to Teddy Roosevelt.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, organized camping "appears to have been developed in the United States," partially as a movement to counteract increased urbanization.³⁷ Summer camps were established around the country in the early years of the twentieth century. Dan Beard wrote a number of books for boys describing all kinds of outdoor pursuits, including making and building everything necessary to participate in a game or activity. Instructions and diagrams are detailed and thorough. His writing has an avuncular tone, as if in attempt to sound more like a friendly guide than an expert teacher.

There also seems to be a more concerted effort to address outdoor experiences by girls and young women. Beard's sisters, no strangers to camping themselves, wrote and illustrated several books about woodcraft and outdoor lore. One of these begins:

The joyous exhilarating call of the wilderness and the forest camp is surely and steadily penetrating through the barriers of brick, stone, and concrete; through the more or less artificial life of town and city; and the American girl is listening eagerly. It is awakening in her longings for free, wholesome, and adventurous outdoor life, for the innocent delights of nature-loving Thoreau and bird-loving Burroughs. Sturdy, independent, and self-reliant, she is now demanding outdoor books that are genuine and filled with practical information."

In the next paragraph:

"The authors' deep desire is to help girls respond to this new, insistent call by pointing out to them the open trail. It is their hope and wish that their girl readers may seek the charm of the wild and may find the same happiness in the life of the open that the American boy has enjoyed since the first settler built his little cabin on the shores of the New World."³⁸

The first section of Chapter I, "Trailing," continues in a similar manner—the very first subheading "What the Outdoor World Can Do for Girls," begins, "There is a something in you...that requires the tonic life of the wild...there is a part of your nature that only the wild can reach, satisfy, and develop." They go on to decry the lives of "most girls" as "artificial," "overdressed," and "over-entertained" and bemoan that young women who don't leave such lives "for a while" will "go through life not knowing the joy, the strength, and the poise that real outdoor life can give."³⁹

The illustrations and photographs used to illustrate the outdoor

experiences show young women in attire which was fairly modern for the time. The illustration pictured here, drawn by Adelia Beard, appears on the cover of the book as well. Four young women are depicted blazing a trail as they hike through the woods. They are dressed in a practical fashion appropriate for the outdoors, wearing knee-length bloomers, boots, and hats. Their matching blouses and ties may mark them as members of a scouting troop. This picture portrays an image of the independent and self-reliant young woman mentioned previously in the text.

Another illustration comes from *Wisdom of the Woods* by Dan Beard. It is a painting in color of several boys cooking over an open fire. The caption below reads, "It was a lovely camp with a bubbling spring nearby."⁴⁰ Behind the boys are majestic trees which soar overhead, and a mountain looms above the trees in the background. The breathtaking scenery calls to mind the landscape of some of America's national parks. The National Park Service was established in 1916, and in 1919, Congress passed the bill which created Grand Canyon National Park. Beard and others creating books for young people at that time seem to be presenting and making these conservation movements accessible to children.

In the middle of the twentieth century, camping was often depicted as a family bonding experience. One of the books in the popular Bobbsey Twins series was *The Bobbsey Twins Camping Out*, published in 1955. The cover illustration shows the entire family—Mom, Dad, and both sets of twins—roasting marshmallows over an open campfire. The campsite in the picture appears rather civilized and clean. Mrs. Bobbsey and the girls are wearing skirts, the grass they are seated on looks short and soft, and no one is venturing too close to the fire.

Published by National Geographic about twenty years later, *Camping Adventure* is another children's book describing a family camping trip. The jacket copy reads,

A family hikes past a pond high in the mountains.
 Dave, Rob, and Cindy are going camping with their parents.
 For a few days, they will live outdoors.
 They are carrying everything they need in their big backpacks.
 They will see no cars or TV.
 But they will see many beautiful things.
 And they will find many things to do.⁴¹

The cover is a photo of children roasting marshmallows in the woods. This camping scene looks more natural, showing dirt, rocks, and thick underbrush in the background. The book contains photographs of the family on their camping trip throughout, and the text describes typical activities such as eating outside, setting up the tent, putting out a fire, using a flashlight, and fishing.

Free Exploration/Enjoyment of Nature/Outdoors

The last category of books and illustrations I would like to mention are those which portray children freely exploring and enjoying nature. These are not as explicitly educational or pre-



Twinkle and Chubbins: Their Astonishing Adventures in Nature-Fairyland written by Laura Bancroft, illustrated by Maginel Wright Enright (1911).

scriptive in tone. They seem to primarily reflect their young protagonists enjoying nature for its own sake, getting lost in the experience of discovery.

Some of the more unusual and lovely illustrations I looked at were the ones in *Twinkle and Chubbins: Their Astonishing Adventures in Nature-Fairyland*. This particular book is a rare edition of a book by L. Frank Baum, the author of the Oz books, writing under a pen name, Laura Bancroft. It is illustrated by Maginel Wright Enright (Frank Lloyd Wright's sister). The pictures are brilliantly colored, with the scenes filling the whole frame.

Twinkle and Chubbins contains a unique blend of reality and fantasy. The children in the story meet talking animals who encourage them to think about such things as the world, society, and nature from a non-human perspective, including a remarkable outlook on cruelty to animals. The story is set in the prairies of the West, specifically the Dakotas.

This illustration shows the little girl Twinkle wading in a brook, standing in the water almost to her knees, attempting to catch a small turtle swimming nearby. Several fish are visible, swimming near her bare toes. Twinkle holds up her skirt with one hand, revealing the edge of her pantaloons. She has a sunbonnet slung over her shoulders. In the corner of the frame, blue sky, clouds,

and some kind of vegetation are visible. Her vision is focused intently on the turtle in order to capture him. Similarly, this picture brings the wildlife habitat of a grassland prairie down to a child's eye view.

As I tried to narrow down all the images I collected, I knew I had to include *Tommy's Camping Adventure*. This unassuming title was a Little Golden Book, published in 1972. The illustrations might be passed off as cartoonish or generic, but they are colorful and rich in details of the natural setting.

The cover shows a rosy-cheeked freckle-faced little boy with a turtle in his hand, looking up at a nearby branch to observe a bird, which appears to be singing. A chipmunk peeks out from a hole, and a butterfly flits on the other side. Tommy seems to be observing his surroundings closely and with a keen sense of wonder.

Other illustrations in the book show enthusiastic young Tommy, who early in the story gets the message that he is incapable of the important jobs around the campsite. But later, when the whole family takes a nature hike, Tommy is the one who helps them find their way back. A budding naturalist, Tommy is very observant of all the aspects of the wildlife along the trail, even when his parents and older siblings keep telling him to hurry up. These powers of observation make it possible for him to lead his family back to the campsite. Unlike the other family members, Tommy was not too rushed to notice and remember the smallest details.

These illustrations seem to represent what Rachel Carson suggested about maintaining a childlike sense of wonder through directly experiencing the natural world. It is up to adults to allow children around us to play and enjoy nature. Children will learn far more when they come into personal contact with the natural world than from lectures. 🐢

References

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