

A Few Good Reads: Suggestions from LSPA Educator Kathleen Stowell

The Love of Learning, the sequestered nooks, And all the sweet serenity of books.” Longfellow

We find so much in the books we read: information, inspiration, joy, humor, beauty. And the reading experience is so much richer when it is shared! Why not start an ecology-minded reading group? Or make special time to read to a child in your life. Even if your current “read aloud partner” is far away, you can connect by sending off a read aloud package. Simply video tape yourself reading a new picture book, send along the tape and the book and you have one happy grandchild on the other end!

Here are a few favorites from a naturalist’s bookshelf to get you started:

For kids (young and old): There is a wealth of great children’s literature! You can recognize a great kid’s book by what I call “the repeat factor”. Quite simply, can you read it over and over (and over) again and not tire of it? My children and I have tested the following over and over and over...

Top of the list: All the Places to Love, Patricia MacLachlan. This book has it all – a sense of place, a sense of family, and a sense of something bigger than yourself with beautiful text and artwork. Makes a great new parent/grandparent gift!

My favorite ABC and counting books: Antler, Bear, Canoe, Betsy Bowen. This book not only takes you through the “northwoods” alphabet but through a year’s worth of seasonal change. **Gathering, A Northwoods Counting Book, also by Betsy Bowen.** A family spends the warm months gathering what is needed for a long cold winter, counting along the way.

For a little New Hampshire history: A River Ran Wild, Lynn Cherry. Follow the Nashua River through the twists and turns of its past. The river’s story is an environmental history with an empowering message.

To inspire you to share outside time with a child: Owl Moon, Jane Yolen. A girl and her dad walk under a winter full moon to search for owls. This book makes you feel the frosty air in your nose, hear the crunch of the snow and tingle at the hoot of the Great Horned Owl.

For a little mystery: Around the Pond, Who’s been Here? Lindsay Barrett George. Follow two children as they find animal signs and clues of who has come before them. Also in this series by George, **In the Woods,** and **In the Snow.**

Just for the beautiful art: Sky Tree, Thomas Locker. This will get you thinking about the beauty of seasonal change. All of Locker’s books (there are many) are stunning!

For a bit of poetry: Song of the Water Boatman and other Pond Poems, Joyce Sidman. From peepers to painted turtles, lovely poems with great tidbits of pond ecology too!

Two for adult/child nature adventures: Talking to Fireflies, Shrinking the Moon, Edward Duensing and Fun with Nature Take Along Guide, Burns, Boring and Dendy. Both books will give you great exploration and activity ideas as well as resource information.

For adults: These selections are just a few of the many! What are some of your favorites?

A great collection of north country essays: Up North, Sam Cook. Also Quiet Magic, Campsights, and Friendship Fires, all by Cook. Perfect to curl up with for a whole rainy afternoon or pick up for quick read here and there. Cook's stories of the natural world will make you laugh out loud as well as pause to think.

A classic (or two or three), The Singing Wilderness, Sigurd F. Olson. "The movement of a canoe is like a reed in the wind..." Olson's words will put you in the middle of the wilderness even if you are in the middle of the city! You can't miss with any of Olson's books – **Listening Point** and **Wilderness Days** are also on my favorite list.

Two for learning something new: Reading the Forested Landscape, Tom Wessels and Water, a Natural History, by Alice Outwater. Reading these two will help you look at your surroundings with a fresh perspective and deep understanding.

For inspiration paired with great photography: Ain't Nature Grand and Meet my Psychiatrist, Les Blacklock. Stunning photos and thoughts on the inspirational and therapeutic side of nature – Blacklock's "psychiatrist" is Old Doc Log!

One to make you think: Material World: A Global Family Portrait, Peter Menzel. Menzel compares the lives of families from many different cultures by photographing an average family with their many (or few) possessions in front of their home. Wow! Talk about perspective. Great to share with everyone!

Just because it's a good book: Northeastern Wilds , Stephen Gorman. Photographs and text describing the striking the beauty and environmental conflicts in the Northeast.

Two to read for the children in your life: Last Child in the Woods, Richard Louv. What happens when a whole generation of children becomes disconnected from the natural world? Louv examines this question and inspires us all to get kids outside! **The Sense of Wonder, Rachel Carson.** Carson's classic is even more valuable today than when first published in 1956. Worth a reread if it is already on your shelf.

One for some practical knowledge: World Changing— A User's Guide for the 21st Century , edited by Alex Steffen.

Happy reading!