

Wonder in the Schoolyard

Mindful Pathways into the
New Science Curriculum

Activities
and Resources

Calgary City Teacher's
Convention, 2026





Thimbleberry Learning

Stephanie Aleksuk

stephanie@thimbleberrylearning.org

www.thimbleberrylearning.org

At-school PD Sessions

4 Grab-and-Go Lesson Plans

Thimbleberry Learning Framework

(includes Time Outside and Sit Spot Guide)

Article in Green Teacher

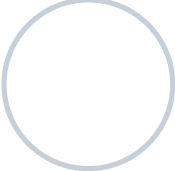
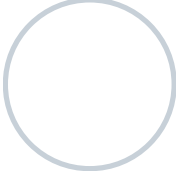
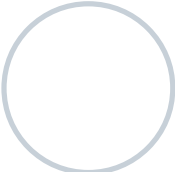
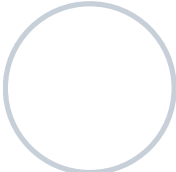
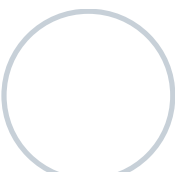
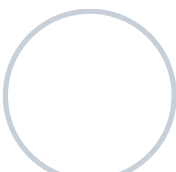
Instagram



At My Sit Spot

Observing Colour

Using your sense of sight, spend a few minutes looking around at the wide array of colours you can see from your sit spot. Using pencil crayons, fill in the circles below with some of the different colours you see. In each corresponding box, describe what you saw with as many juicy, descriptive words as you can come up with!

At My Sit Spot

Observing Colour

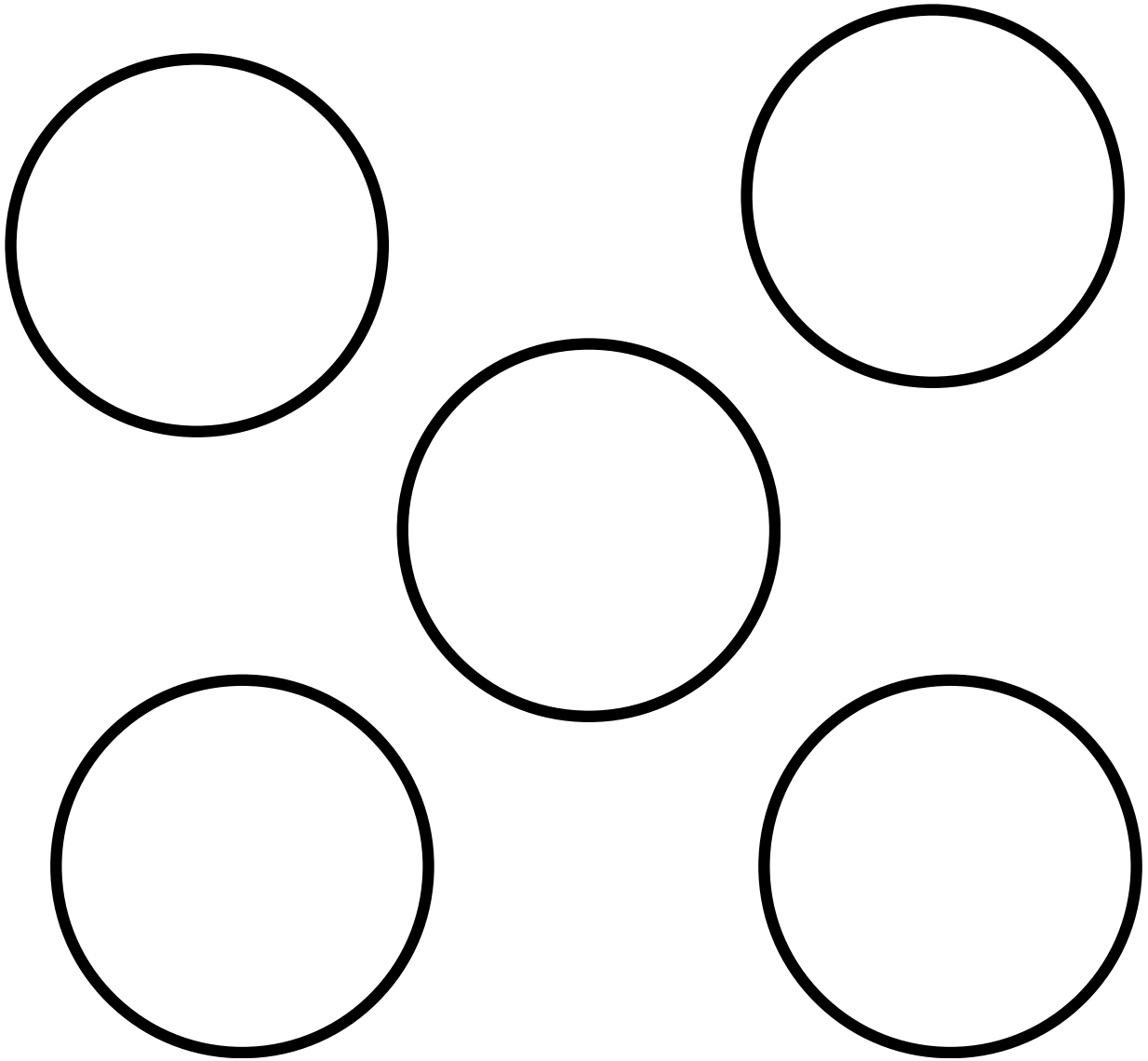
Art and writing prompts:

- Repeat this activity over different seasons. Notice how the colour palette shifts and changes with the seasons.
 - Using only the colours observed, create a mood board collage by cutting up old magazines. Make one mood board for each season and watch how the project changes over time.
- Invite students to choose one thing they observed from this activity, and write a story employing this observation as the main character. For example, if a student observed a cloud, they would then write a story as if they were the cloud. Their other observations can then come into the story as supporting characters.
- In partners, work together to write a poem based on each others' observations. Take turns writing line by line.
- In small groups, gather loose parts in the schoolyard (leaves, twigs, pinecones, rocks, etc.). Use the loose parts to create a setting and characters for a story to tell one another, based on something observed at the sit spot.

At My Sit Spot

Sense: Seeing 

Bring your crayons with you to your sit spot. Look around for different colours. Colour in the circles below with the colours you see.



At My Sit Spot

Sense: Hearing 

Close your eyes and open up your ears. Sitting quietly at your sit spot for a few moments, what do you hear? Draw a picture below of some things that you hear.

At My Sit Spot

Sense: Smelling 

The air smells different depending on the season and the time of day. Even the weather can change what you smell! Sit for a few moments at your sit spot and notice what you can smell. Does it change if you bring your nose closer to the ground? Draw a picture of what you smell.

At My Sit Spot

Sense: Touching 

There are so many different textures around us when we go outside. What can your fingers feel? Be careful! Before touching anything, make sure you don't get hurt! Use this sheet to make pencil rubbings of some of the things you explore.

At My Sit Spot

How do I feel? 

Being out in nature can help us to feel happy and relaxed. Sometimes, though, we may also feel sad, nervous, or even mad. At your sit spot notice how you feel. Here's the best part: there's no right answer! Simply notice how you're feeling and draw some faces below to show it. Then wait a few moments and notice, do I still feel the same? Have my feelings changed?

FLOWER BREATHING



This calming breathing technique works well as a way to transition between activities. It helps students to re-centre and re-focus. Try taking this one outside!

Hold two fists in front of your body, fingers on top. As you breathe in, open your hands, exposing your palms. These are your flowers opening to the sun. As you breathe out, close your hands, the flowers are closing. Repeat as many times as is helpful.

Credit: Thich Nhat Hanh

GRATITUDE ART



Even in the most urban schoolyard, there is something to be grateful for. Practicing gratitude has a soothing effect on our nervous system and helps us feel satisfied. This moment is enough!

Invite your students to gather some loose parts and make an ephemeral piece of gratitude art. Leaves, sticks, rocks, pinecones, dandelions, and grass will all work! Play with symmetry, or just make something that looks lovely to you. Your heart will thank you.

HOW IS A TREE LIKE ME?

Take your students outside into the schoolyard to get to know a tree. How are we like trees? How are we different? Use this as a launchpad for a deepening relationship with and appreciation of one of the trees at your school.



- Head outside and take a few minutes to explore the trees in the schoolyard with all of your senses: what do you feel, hear, see, and smell?
- Invite each student to choose a particular tree to study
- Fill in the table on the following page
- Deepen the relationship with the tree by visiting often and across all of the seasons.
- Take the learning back inside the classroom by researching this type of tree, writing poetry, or creating a visual art project.

HOW IS A TREE LIKE ME?



	Tree	Me
What do I need to survive?		
How do I get food to eat?		
Describe my outer surface.		
Describe my movement.		
What happens inside me?		

HUMAN CAMERA

Take students outside into the schoolyard for this simple and fun activity. It will support them to notice some of the natural beauty visible from the schoolyard. It will also help them to develop gratitude. It feels good to be thankful!

Activity credit: Thich Nhat Hanh, Joanna Macy



Divide students into partners. Have one partner be the photographer, the other the camera.

Have the camera close her eyes*. The photographer will guide her to a “picture perfect” view and tap her shoulder to “take a picture”. These can be done as “close ups” by bringing the camera close to an object, or as “wide angles” by giving the camera a wide view. As the photographer taps on the camera’s shoulder, she opens her eyes, takes in the view for several moments, then closes them again.

The photographer continues to find two additional views for two additional photographs. Partners then switch roles, and the new photographer does the same: guiding the camera to 3 different spots, tapping his shoulder to take 3 different pictures.

Come back together as a class to share what you’ve seen and to express gratitude for the wider natural world around your school.

*It's important to offer students the option to leave their eyes open, with their gaze on the ground in front of them. Not all students will feel safe and comfortable with eyes closed.

LIKE A TREE IN THE WIND

This is a great activity to do on a windy day near a mature tree in the schoolyard. Even on the windiest of days, when the tree's branches are flailing wildly, its trunk stays rooted, calm, and grounded. We, too, can access our own inner "trunk", finding a sense of calm.

Activity credit: Kaira Jewel Lingo

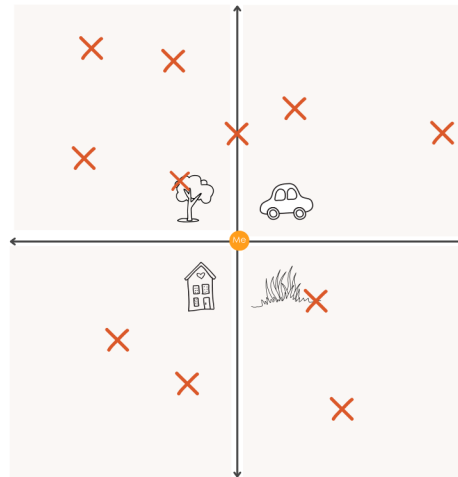


Invite your students to stand, watching a tree blowing around in the wind. Invite each student to "be the tree": feet rooted to the ground, arms stretched wide and swaying wildly in the wind. They can make audible sounds like the wind blowing through the branches. Before continuing, draw their attention to the trunk of the tree. The branches are blowing around, sometimes so much it seems they might break! But the trunk is completely still. Rooted and grounded. Centred in its place on the earth.

Discussion points: Sometimes when we're nervous, scared, distracted, angry, etc. we're like the branches of the tree. A little bit out of control and scattered. There is part of us, though, that we can always come back to, to give us a sense of calm and security. Just like the trunk of the tree. When you're feeling strong emotions, it can be helpful to let them move through you and release them, like the swaying branches. At other times, when those emotions are overwhelming, it can be helpful to find a sense of calm, like the trunk of the tree. It takes practice, but that sense of grounded calm is there for you!

SOUND MAP

Tuning into our sense of hearing brings us into the present moment. It also sharpens our observation skills. As an added bonus - it helps us feel more connected to the natural world!



This activity works great out in the schoolyard! Invite students to find a place to sit with a journal and pencil. Offer these instructions:

- Set up your map (to be done quickly, no perfection needed!):
 - Divide your page into four quadrants
 - Add a circle at the centre - that represents you!
 - Draw something you notice with your eyes in each of the four quadrants: in front, and behind you, to the right, and to the left.
- Take a good look at your map. Now, close your eyes* and open your ears.
 - With eyes closed, mark your map with an "x", each time you hear a sound. Don't worry if you don't get the location just right!
 - Invite students to open their eyes once their ability to pay attention to sounds has diminished.

Come back together as a group to share:

- What did you hear? Did you notice anything new? What sounds did you enjoy hearing?
- Did any of the sounds spark your curiosity? What kinds of things are you wondering about?

*It's important to offer students the option to leave their eyes open, with their gaze on the ground in front of them. Not all students will feel safe and comfortable with eyes closed.

Take 5!

Slow down and savour the season with your students by heading outside for some nature connection time. Start the session with this quick centring activity.



- 5 - Notice 5 things you see
- 4 - Notice 4 things you hear
- 3 - Notice 3 things you feel
- 2 - Notice 2 things you smell or taste
- 1 - Notice 1 thing you are grateful for

TREE FRIENDS



Take a look around! Our school is home to some wonderful tree friends, and we're going to get to know them better.

We often rely mostly on our eyes to make sense of the world. Our brains love shortcuts and when we see a tree we might just glance at it and think, "Oh yeah, that's just a tree".

But to truly get to know a tree, we'll use more than just our sight. In this activity, we'll engage our senses of touch, hearing, and smelling to discover what makes each tree unique.

TREE FRIENDS

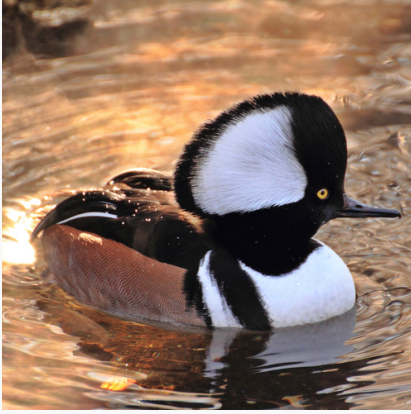
You'll have two choices for this activity:

Option One: Solo Tree Explore

- Let a tree draw you in.
- When you've found a tree friend, close your eyes. Use your hands to explore the tree. Notice: is it smooth? Rough? What shapes can your fingers feel?
- You might also use your senses of smell and hearing. What can you smell? What do you hear?
- Open your eyes a few times and close and explore again.
- Imagine the lifetime of this tree, its new growth, its older parts, etc.
- Just hang out for a few minutes, getting to know your tree.

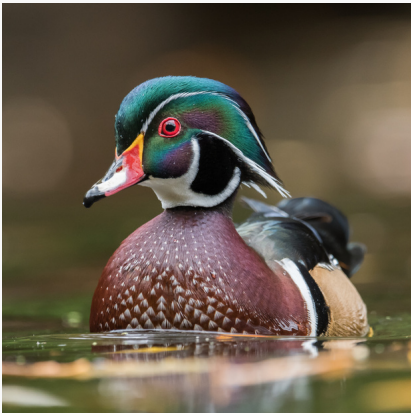
Option Two: Explore in partners

- If you feel comfortable closing your eyes and inviting a partner to guide you to a tree, you can take this option.
- Your partner will ask if you're ok if you take their elbow and guide you while you have your eyes closed.
- Your partner will guide you to a tree and invite you to get to know it with your senses (other than sight).
- Then your partner will guide you away from the tree – and turn you around.
- You'll then have to find your way back to your special tree. Can you find it again with your eyes open this time? Will your other senses help?
- Switch roles so your partner can discover a tree friend.



Sneakers
&
Birds

thimble
berry



d e s i g n y o u r o w n

Spring and Fall are great times to watch for the most colourful birds that call Calgary home. Choose your favourite and use it as inspiration for your sneaker design. Check out this [tweet](#) for some inspiration.



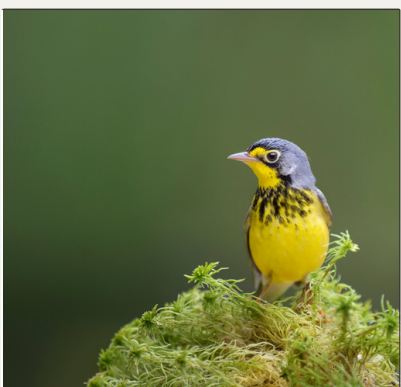
Varied Thrush



Northern Flicker



Violet-green Swallow



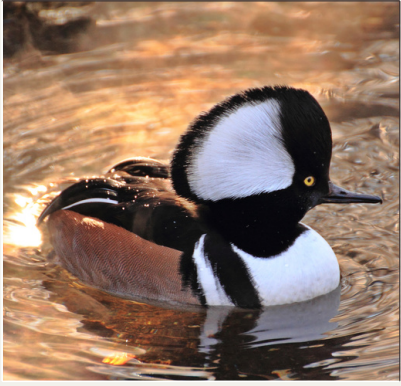
Canada Warbler



Western Bluebird



American Redstart



Hooded Merganser



Blue-headed Vireo



Ruby-throated Hummingbird



Blue Jay



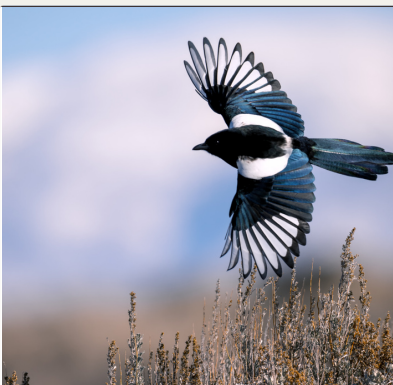
Pileated Woodpecker



Redhead



Cedar Waxwing



Black-billed Magpie



American Kestrel



Evening Grosbeak



White-crowned Sparrow



Harlequin Duck



Wood Duck



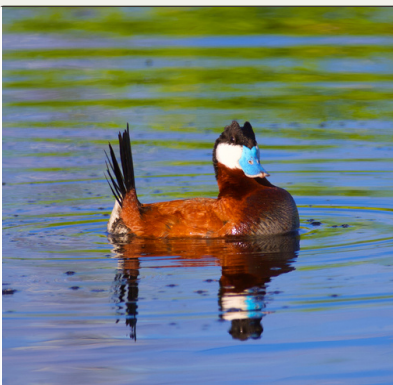
Wilson's Phalarope



Canada Warbler



Rose-breasted Grosbeak



Ruddy Duck



Savannah Sparrow













Caring for the Gulls

Lesson Plan

In the spring, thousands of gulls return to Calgary from where they have spent the winter. Franklin's Gulls spend the winter all the way down in South America! You can watch their migration animation [here](#). Ring-billed Gulls spend the winter along the coast of the Atlantic Ocean in the United States. See their migration animation [here](#). California Gulls come to Calgary from the western United States. You can watch their migration animation [here](#).

To keep the gulls safe, it is important to take care not to leave any garbage on the school field. Gulls and other birds can get sick when they eat wrappers and plastic bags. What are some things you can do to keep Calgary's birds safe?

Some ideas include:

- Make sure all garbage goes securely into the garbage cans or back into your lunch box
- Bring a litterless lunch and snack to school
- Carefully pick up garbage when you notice it in the school field

Caring for the Gulls

Some of Calgary's Gulls

These are three of the most abundant Gull species in Calgary. The differences can be subtle and identifying the species can be tricky! Don't get too caught up in trying to tell them apart. Just enjoy knowing that they're here!



Franklin's Gull

You'll know a Franklin's Gull by their characteristic black head.



Ring-billed Gull

Look for a pale eye and a black ring on the bill.



California Gull

Notice the dark eye and the red spot on the bill.

Caring for the Gulls

Colouring Sheet

Draw a picture of your schoolyard. In your picture, include one thing you can do to keep the birds safe! Don't forget to draw the birds!

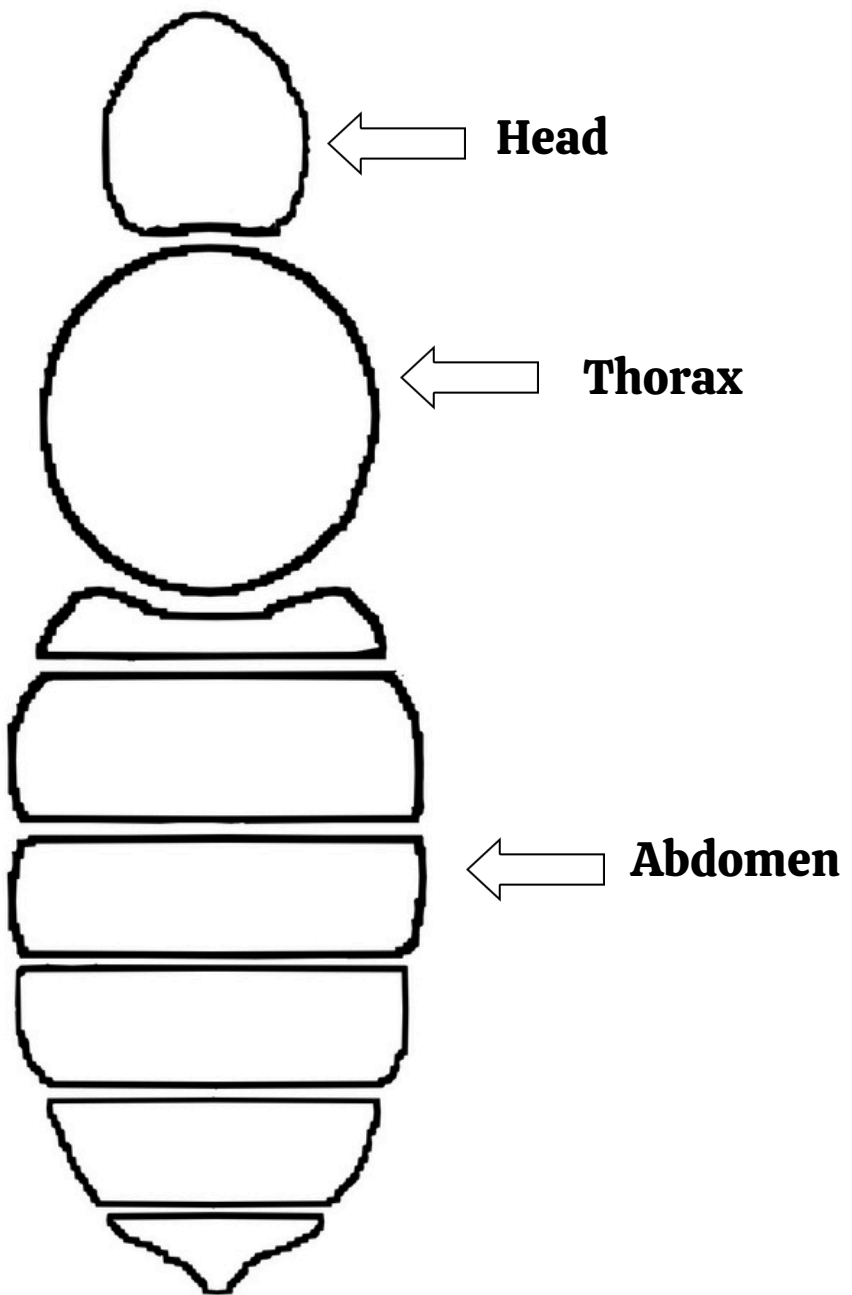


BECOME A BUMBLE BEE EXPERT:

Fill in Your Focus Bumble Bee

Write the common and scientific name of your focus bumble bee. Fill in the head, thorax, and abdomen with the correct colours and patterns.

COMMON NAME	
SCIENTIFIC NAME	



BECOME A BUMBLE BEE EXPERT:

Focus Bumble Bee Facts

To become an expert on your focus bumble bee, you will need to know basic facts about it and how to identify it. Fill in the table below, using a Bumble Bee Field Guide or an internet search to help you.

COMMON NAME	
SCIENTIFIC NAME	
HABITAT eg. Forest, wetland, mountains	
RANGE eg. Western N. America, Eastern United States	
DIET eg. clover (trifolium),	
NEST LOCATION eg. underground, surface	
INTERESTING FACTS	

Other Resources

Books

Nature Journaling

How to Teach Nature Journaling

John Muir Laws and Emilie Lygren (2020)

[Free download here](#)

The Laws Guide to Nature Drawing and Journaling

John Muir Laws (2016)

Sit Spots

Sitting with Nature: An Educator's Guide to Sit Spots

Lauren MacLean (2024)

Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature

Jon Young (2010)

Other

A Walking Curriculum

Gillian Judson (2018)

Put on Your Owl Eyes

Devin Franklin (2019)

Children's Book

Omahkitapiksi Okakinikiwa: *Teachings from our Elders*

Iikiinayookaa or Marlene Yellow Horn (2019)

Biodiversity Learning and Tools

Trees

[Guide to the Common Native Trees & Shrubs of Alberta](#)

Inside Education

[City of Calgary Tree Map](#)

Birds

[Merlin Bird ID](#)

[Project Feederwatch](#)

Wildflowers

[Seek by iNaturalist](#)

[Kainai Plant Database](#)

Bumblebees

[Bumble Bees of Southern Alberta](#)

[Bumblebee Watch](#)

Lichen

[Common Lichens of Edmonton Alberta](#)

[ABMI Lichen Browser](#)

Indigenous Courses

[4 Seasons of Indigenous Learning](#)

[Indigenous Canada – University of Alberta](#)

Outdoor Learning Resources

ACEE: [The Alberta Council for Education & EcoSchools](#)

[CPAWS Southern Alberta](#)

GEOEC: [Global, Environmental & Outdoor Education Council](#)

[Green Calgary](#)

[Outdoor Learning School and Store](#)

[School Gardening Basics, Dr. Megan Zeni](#)

[Take Me Outside](#)

[Teach Outdoors Podcast, Lauren MacLean](#)

[A Walking Curriculum](#)