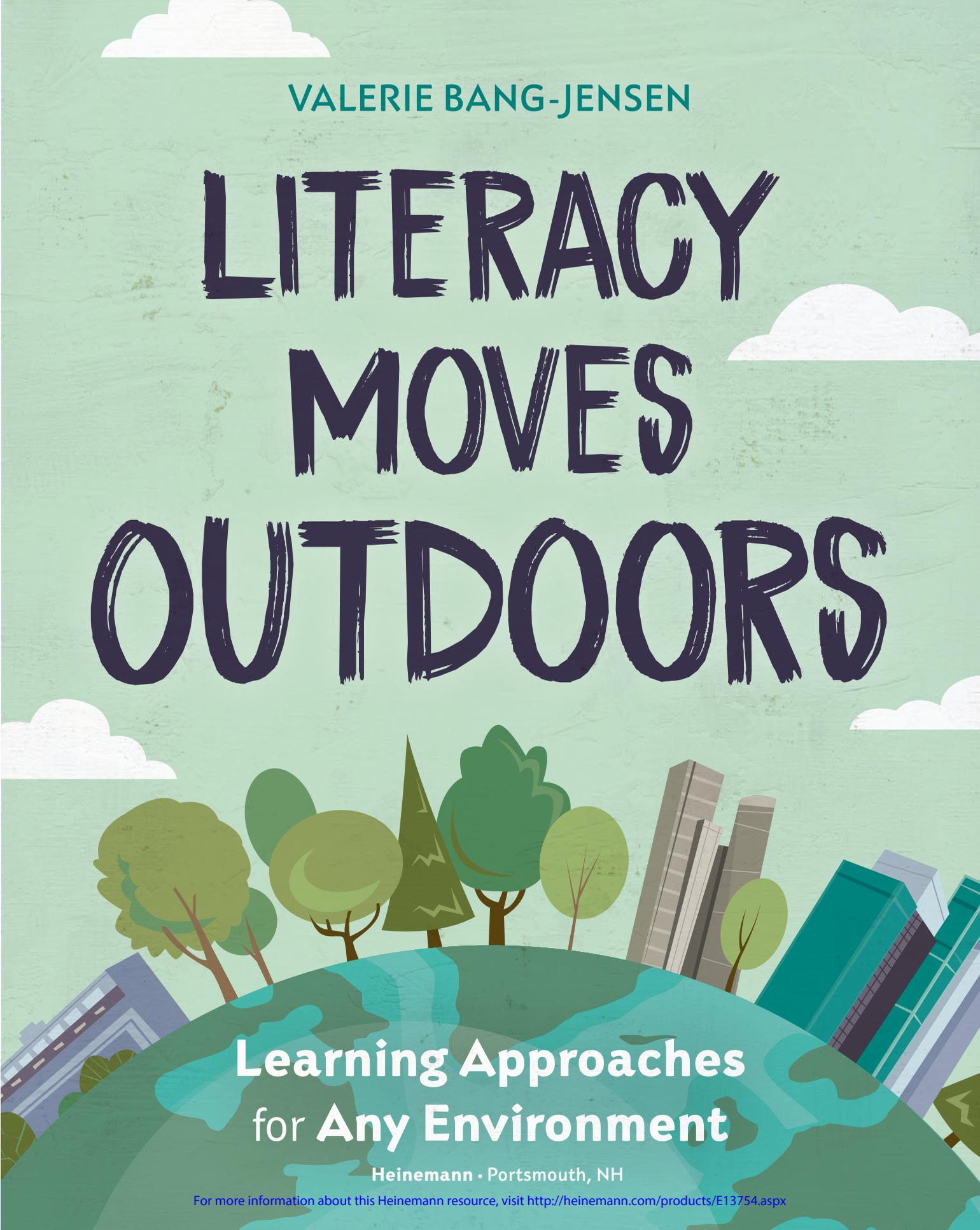


LITERACY
MOVES
OUTDOORS





VALERIE BANG-JENSEN

LITERACY MOVES OUTDOORS

Learning Approaches
for **Any Environment**

Heinemann • Portsmouth, NH

For more information about this Heinemann resource, visit <http://heinemann.com/products/E13754.aspx>

Heinemann

145 Maplewood Avenue, Suite 300

Portsmouth, NH 03801

www.heinemann.com

© 2023 by Valerie Bang-Jensen

All rights reserved, including but not limited to the right to reproduce this book, or portions thereof, in any form or by any means whatsoever, without written permission from the publisher. For information on permission for reproductions or subsidiary rights licensing, please contact Heinemann at permissions@heinemann.com.

Heinemann's authors have devoted their entire careers to developing the unique content in their works, and their written expression is protected by copyright law. We respectfully ask that you do not adapt, reuse, or copy anything on third-party (whether for-profit or not-for-profit) lesson-sharing websites.

—Heinemann Publishers

“Dedicated to Teachers” is a trademark of Greenwood Publishing Group, LLC.

The author and publisher wish to thank those who have generously given permission to reprint borrowed material:

Figs. 1–1, 3–7: © Haile Hamlett / Figs. 2–2, 7–8: © Abigail Bernier / Fig. 2–5: © Faith Horton / Figs. 2–6, 2–19, 4–3: © Patrick Bohan / Fig. 2–7: © Stannard Baker / Fig. 2–8: © Jon Hyde & Kimberly Sultze / Figs. 2–16 to 2–18, 5–3j: © Cat Wright Parrish / Fig. 3–8: © Maura D'Amore / Fig. 3–13: © Aziza Malik; nature images: © Kayla Chaplin / Fig. 4–10: © Diana Geller / Figs. 4–17 to 4–19: © Drena Varghese / Fig. 4–21: © Brian MacDonald Photography / Fig. 5–3: © Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens; ladybug: © Alekss/Adobe Stock/HIP; daisy: © PhotoLink/Photodisc/Getty Images/HIP; potatoes: © Silkstock/Adobe Stock / Figs. 5–3g, 5–11, 6–12: © Morris Arboretum, University of Pennsylvania / Figs. 5–9, 5–10: © Aziza Malik / Figs. 6–8 to 6–10: © Swim Pony Performing Arts, Bri Barton and Meg Lemieur / Fig. 5–10: slide image © Aziza Malik; animal images © Joe Resteghini

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023930868

ISBN: 978-0-325-13754-4

Editor: Zoë Ryder White

Production: Vicki Kasabian

Cover and text designs: Vita Lane

Typesetting: Kim Arney

Manufacturing: Val Cooper

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

1 2 3 4 5 VP 28 27 26 25 24 23

PO 4500868528



**For Eleanor,
Henry, and Orla,
who love reading the outdoors**

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ix

1 Move Literacy Outdoors 1



| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Why Move Literacy Outdoors? | 2 |
| What Will You Find in This Book? | 6 |
| Try One Thing | 7 |

2 Literacy to Go 9



| | |
|--|----|
| Seize the Opportunity: Prepare for Spontaneity! | 9 |
| Ready? Scaling Up from (Almost) Zero Preparation to Mindful Planning | 16 |
| Resources | 32 |

3 StoryWalks® 33



| | |
|--|----|
| What Is a StoryWalk®? | 33 |
| Logistics: How to Make a StoryWalk® | 39 |
| From Reading StoryWalks® to Writing Them: Helping Students Create Their Own Story Experiences | 41 |
| Resources | 48 |

4 Word Gardens 50



| | |
|---|----|
| What Is a Word Garden? | 50 |
| The Power of a Word Garden | 51 |
| Logistics: How to Make a Word Garden | 51 |
| Curricular Explorations in a Word Garden | 56 |
| Last Words | 65 |
| Resources | 67 |

5 Show Us a Sign! 69



Students Use Signs to Solve Problems and Interpret Their World

| | |
|----------------------|----|
| Why Study Signage? | 69 |
| Interpretive Signage | 79 |
| Resources | 89 |

6 Literacy Trails 90



| | |
|------------------------------|-----|
| Trails Take Us Somewhere New | 90 |
| Which Path to Take? | 91 |
| Resources | 107 |

7 Make It Happen 108



Strategies and Resources to Help You Move Literacy Outdoors

| | |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| Inspired and Ready to Get Started? | 108 |
| Resources | 117 |
| Children's Books Cited | 119 |
| Professional Works Cited | 130 |

Acknowledgments

My editor Zoë Ryder White once observed that my colorful Post-it Note outline for a new chapter reminded her of one of my quilts. In fact, writing a book is a lot like making a quilt, and I have pieced this one together with ideas, questions, and resources generously offered by friends, teachers, students, experts in many areas, and of course, kids.

Editors are heroes, too often unsung. I owe many thanks to Katie Wood Ray for shaping me up in my first Heinemann book, tweaking the title for this one, and especially for arranging an editorial blind date with Zoë Ryder White . . . thank you, Zoë, for swiping right. In a book about literacy and the outdoors, I so appreciated the poet in you and your gracious way with words. Your feedback—direct and often tinged with humor—always moved my ideas in a better direction. Your quilt square would, of course, feature a ditch embroidered with *lost words*.

The binding of this quilt is surely threaded by Heinemann. As a clear advocate for and champion of teachers in a climate that is increasingly challenging, Heinemann supports innovative and student-centered teaching and learning. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this work.

A large crew has contributed to this project. I am amazed and humbled by the design and production work by Vita Lane and Vicki Kasabian that makes the book more appealing than I had even hoped or imagined. Sonja Chapman and Catrina Swasey stepped in to make the process as seamless as possible. Elizabeth Silvis, thank you for your enthusiasm for this project and for connecting readers with this book.

Many quilt contributions came from a broadly based school crew, including teachers, an administrative assistant extraordinaire, and a principal who creates his own StoryWalks®! Hilary Hamilton, Aziza Malik, Haile Hamlett, Kayla Chaplin, Betsy Patrick, Joe Resteghini, and Janet Breen—thank you. SMC alums Meghan Feenan, Kristin Funsten, Faith Horton, Elyse Gentile, Callie Goss, Michelle Jacobs, Abbie Bernier, Hanna Lesch, Matt Hajdun, and all of you Zoom focus group participants are represented—of course—by purple and gold squares.

Experts like Melissa Stewart, Shelly Waterman, Adrienne Mackey, Amy Ludwig VanDerwater, Zoe Richards, Ben Rodgers, Maja Smith, Sandra Murphy, and Jim Brangan were generous with their time and patiently answered my questions. I learned so much from all of you and hope that you can recognize some of your wisdom in these pages.

Artists' work inspired and improved the messages in the book. Patrick Bohan and John Hyde—teachers will appreciate the clarity of your contributions in the form of sharp photographs in the Montana snow and of homemade wooden word “stones.” Chris and Kim Cleary, of On the Rocks Carving Studio in Jericho, Vermont—your square would feature the initial



“word salad” that has launched word gardens around the world. Your beautiful stones grace many of the pages of this book.

And the kids! Kids at Champlain, Cambridge, and Underhill ID schools, plus Rufus and Frank D’Amore, Jill Knight, and Will and Reed Haslam and their families filled this book with unique ideas and voice.

Saint Michael’s College might serve as the quilt batting: invisible to the eye but infusing the project with warmth. The support of the Teaching Gardens, and subsequent Word Garden and StoryWalks®, is the genesis of this book, along with the opportunity of a sabbatical to bring it to fruition. I especially appreciate how my departmental colleagues rallied during a challenging year to make it work for me. Amy Knight introduced me to just the right experts in her circle and Rebecca Haslam picked up many of the pieces my absence left.

Librarians rock. Kristen Hindes, Anthony Bassignani, Stacey Knight, and the whole crew at Durick Library provided interlibrary loan, due-date extensions, tech help, and an always-welcoming front desk. Megan Estey Butterfield, children’s librarian at Fletcher Free Library, provided the backstory for STEAM kits and StoryWalks®; I’m so glad to learn about the role that public libraries can play in a pandemic!

Although quilting bees were not an option during the pandemic, friends still offered support, ideas, and advice. Thank you to Olivia and Peter Rukavina for hosting a global Zoom conversation that helped me launch this project early in the process. Alison Blay-Palmer and Maura D’Amore’s squares would feature the colors found on beach and farm walks where they generously listened as I worked through ideas. Diane Anderson, I loved sharing our sabbaticals and look forward to the completion of your project. Somehow Mary Beth Doyle managed to send me timely texts of support just when I needed them. Kristen Hindes seamlessly merged her friend role with super reference librarian help; surely her square would have a Z for Zotero.

My dear friend, colleague, and frequent coauthor, Mark Lubkowitz, offered up direct and caring advice—mostly on his drive home. Writing was not quite as much fun without you and I definitely ate less chocolate. Ready to write the next book?

My sister, daughters, and their families, Judith, Bree, Travis, Nell, Justin, Eleanor, Henry, and Orla, would have the squares representing patience, interest, and enthusiasm. From Amherst to Philadelphia, Seattle, and Prince Edward Island, you supported me by scouting out local book experiences, arboretums, and signage. Thank you for waiting while I took *just one more photo*, for celebrating the book contract, and for cheering me on in general.

And for my husband, Lars, a square smack in the middle of this book quilt, edged with hearts. Your unwavering belief in this project powered me through the newer and rougher ideas. Thank you for the walks and talks, and the constant willingness to help me think something through. Your comments and questions improved every aspect of this project.



1

MOVE LITERACY OUTDOORS

Haile's first graders bundle into their snowsuits and boots, ready for the grand opening of their ABC StoryWalk®. Each student has written a page based on what was growing in the school garden in the fall, prompted by a photograph. Ivy looks for her contribution, *T Is for Trowel*, and Ray for his: *D Is for Dirt*. The class walks from post to post, chanting the words aloud, and during the course of this literacy-based walk they practice alphabetic order, revisit garden curriculum content, and enjoy being outside. Haile has created an outdoor literacy experience that invites her students to consider purpose, audience, and discovery. And she is confident that they will also begin to see that they can take their emerging literacy skills wherever they go.

If you're wondering what literacy might look like outside the classroom, it's everywhere. The first word a young child may learn to read is STOP, a useful directive encountered at crosswalks and streets everywhere. Supermarkets use signage to direct us to items on our shopping lists, and once we find them other signs identify the product and price. At the local museum,

1



Figure 1-1

a docent engages a gathered group with snippets of history stories bulleted on her clipboard. We may encounter poetry chalked on sidewalks or stapled among advertisements on the bulletin board of a local convenience store. Pages of a gorgeous picture book are posted to entice hikers on a story walk up a hill through the woods, alerting them along the path to the way that different birds build their nests. Literacy can be everywhere; like Haile's students, reading and writing outside the classroom enables us to appreciate and connect to our broader community and world. These experiences also offer young writers power and agency in considering audience for literacy in authentic settings.

Why Move Literacy Outdoors?

If there has been a silver lining of any kind to the pandemic, it's that social distancing compelled many teachers to think nimbly, and this meant that when they could, they moved their classes outdoors. A tough challenge at first, but once new routines were established and curricular adaptations made—think sensory paths, nature journals, and phonics treasure hunts—teachers discovered unanticipated benefits. During a recent focus group discussion, anecdotes poured in. Third-grade teacher Abbie noticed that everyone is calm and more settled back in the classroom after being outside for a lesson. Special educator Kristin observed that her students are better able to focus on learning when she balances outdoor and indoor experiences. And Caitlin, an upper-elementary science teacher, described how twice-weekly nature journal writing has been transformative for her students; their ability to make specific observations is transferring into all of their writing.



Figure 1-2 All you need for outdoor journaling is a notebook and pencil.

Outdoors is the new classroom

My thinking about literacy outdoors pays homage to powerful thinking about outdoor learning, learning about nature, and ways of being outside with children. Recent leaders in the field, like Richard

Louv, David Sobel, Juliet Robertson, Herb Broda, and others, have provided compelling arguments about the value of getting children outside. Louv (2008, 7) writes that nature demands “. . . the full use of the senses.” Being outdoors invites us to notice in new ways, to be affected by sound, smell, and tactile experiences that are part of our world yet are different from those available indoors. Juliet Robertson (2014, 2) observes that “outdoor learning is an umbrella term which covers every type of learning experience which happens outdoors,” including playground games, environmental education, and “adventurous activities.” She notes that being outdoors is a key part of physical development, requiring navigation of territory and problem-solving. Much of the current focus is on nature-based education, and the proliferation of Forest Kindergartens, outdoor classrooms, nature centers, and nature-oriented summer programs reflects this. In his accessible and thorough book, *Schoolyard-Enhanced Learning: Using the Outdoors as an Instructional Tool, K–8*, Broda (2007, 20) notes that “language arts concepts seem more immediate and compelling when you are trying to share what you have experienced in the environment.” You will find that many of the ideas in this book lean

Outdoors Is for Every Learner

Just as you do in creating any part of your curriculum, you’ll be thinking about your individual learners and their needs, past experiences, and ways of moving through the world as you plan for outdoor learning. You’ll want to anticipate how you can help each student find their *way into* what you have planned for outdoors. Some students need clear and direct boundaries and directions; others might need help physically navigating outdoor spaces. Anticipating and planning will set up all your students for success. Invite school support teams, families, and the students themselves to offer advice. Among other considerations, you will want to think about:

- Surfaces for students using crutches, wheelchairs, or walkers: gravel, dirt, wood, grass, concrete, and asphalt bring their own strengths and challenges.
- Choices for how to participate: How many different movements could a spiral symbol inspire? Could it be spinning on one’s feet? Twirling oneself or being spun in a wheelchair? Brainstorming possibilities with your class will broaden their interpretations.
- Approaches to safety: Will students need partners? What are the boundaries? How will students express their needs?
- Multimodal directions: What will your students need to understand what to do on the trail? Using a combination of symbols, words, and a combination of audio and visual directions will support your learners.
- Clear routines and boundaries: these are explored explicitly in Chapter 2.

And, just like teaching in any area, observing how things go and checking in with your students will allow for subsequent thoughtful revision of your strategies and approaches that will help you and your students have increasingly successful experiences outdoors.



Figure 1-3 Words and symbols together create a complete message.

heavily on nature-oriented outdoor learning, but this is not my focus. This book invites you specifically and enthusiastically to move literacy outdoors wherever you are.

Finding ways into outdoor literacy learning

For many students, *literacy* means the reading and writing they do in the classroom, yet reading and writing happen everywhere we go. Purpose, audience, and place are compelling reasons to shape writing and reading when literacy moves out of the classroom and into real world settings, both natural and engineered. Your school setting will shape the ways that you might implement the approaches in this book, and I have made suggestions along the way for rural, suburban, and urban schools. You will also find some beginning guidelines related to *universal design*. These include efforts to make learning experiences accessible to all students, enabling them to be independent and participate in a variety of ways. You'll want to consider space, safety, and strategies to support a wide range of literacy and language skills. Specific and expanded guidelines, plus 7 *principles* may be found on the website for the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design.

Ways in for varied settings

There are multiple ways to create experiences outside the classroom that invite students to make discoveries about literacy, particularly about purpose and audience. I've provided a continuum for different levels of investment in terms of your time and materials. You might

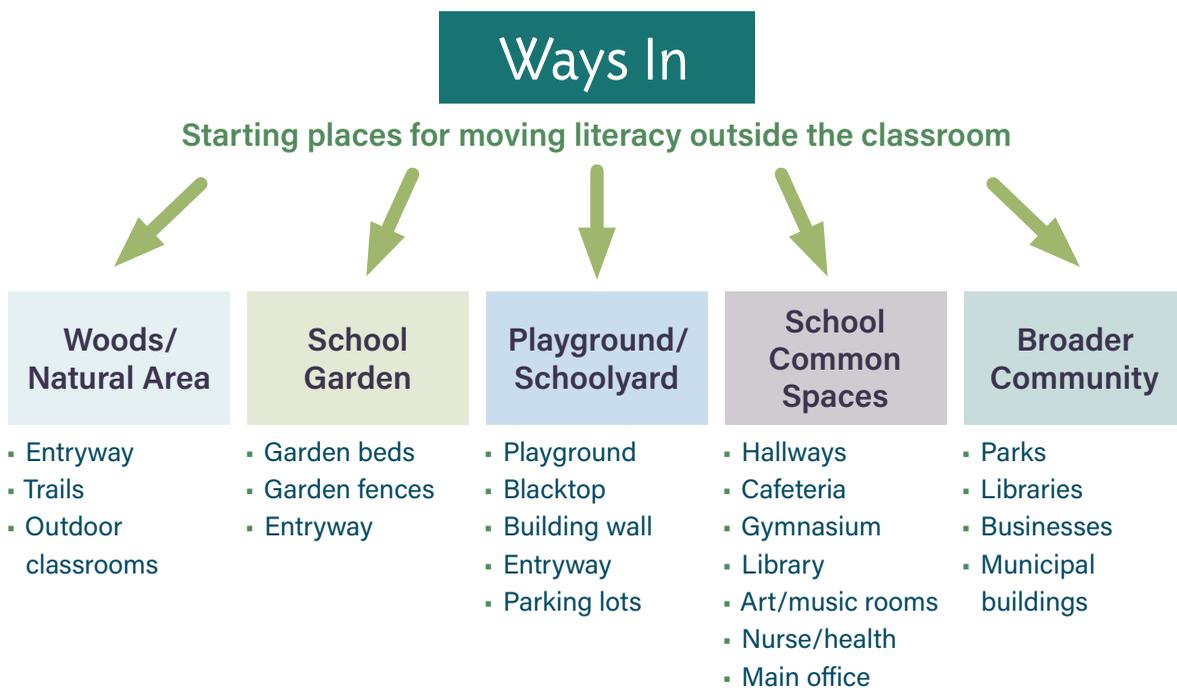


Figure 1-4 Find your starting place for moving literacy outside the classroom.

be ready to dip your toe into literacy outdoors on a beautiful day with the “literacy to go” backpacks. If you’re ready to reshape a whole curricular unit on writing to inform, the chapter on signage might work for you as your starting point. A StoryWalk® might be the perfect way to have a celebration of your poetry unit. Find your way in and move on from there!

Essential terms for moving literacy outdoors

For the purposes of this book, *literacy* means being able to draw, read, or write for one’s own purposes and a specific audience. Haile’s first graders drew their alphabet pages to display their understanding of the alphabet and to inform the school community about the garden. Additionally, to *be literate* in a particular setting means that you have the knowledge you need to serve your purpose. For example, being *garden literate* might mean that you recognize when plants need water or more sunlight. Being *school literate* might mean that you know to go to the nurse if you scrape your knee or to the library when you need a book. Being literate about the outdoors in your setting might include knowing about safety, the weather, and boundaries.

In defining *outdoors*, I have tried to include many settings, from blacktop play yards to neighborhoods and schools lucky enough to have a small patch of woods. Because there may be school situations where it is not possible for students to go outdoors, I have made suggestions about adapting some of the approaches in this book to indoor hallways and communal spaces like libraries, gyms, and cafeterias.

It is my hope that as a society we will find ways to get all children outdoors. Outdoors in your setting beyond your school might include neighborhood sidewalks, playgrounds and fields, parks, gardens, green spaces, and downtowns.

Forming partnerships in the broader school community and beyond

Moving literacy outside the classroom opens up collaborations with teacher specialists in areas such as art, music, and physical education, as well as librarians, administrators, and other staff. For example, StoryWalks® invite students to consider which pieces they write—or books they read—might contribute to the purpose of a nurse’s office, the cafeteria, or library. One music teacher created a “song walk” using stanzas of a favorite song placed throughout the playground. An art teacher developed a unit on shape; posting pages of a Lois Ehlert book could help the school community see

Bringing the Outside In

One clear lesson learned from the recent pandemic is flexibility. Hopefully, our unpredictable moments will be caused by more mundane and seasonal events such as weather as we move forward, but there may be times when switching up to digital or virtual experiences makes the most sense. Firsthand and hands-on experiences allow students to experience and learn in the most immediate way, but resources such as videos and apps may be tapped to help bring the outside in. While “virtual outdoors” may seem like a contrast in ideas, teachers are finding ways to connect the two. Podcasts, QR codes, and videos offer possible modes for sharing the outdoors with both in-person and virtual audiences. After studying these digital modes of sharing and publishing, students could create their own.

how Ehlert uses the elements of shape and color to convey animals and flowers. Community partnerships might be formed around a civic effort such as transportation or urban green spaces. *Last Stop on Market Street* could be posted at bus stops; books from the One Small Square nature series (Silver and Wynne 1995) or *Nature in the Neighborhood* (Morrison 2004) could invite sidewalk observations.

What Will You Find in This Book?

You will find five broad approaches to literacy that you can move outdoors: *Literacy to Go*, *Word Gardens*, *StoryWalks*®, *Interpretive Signage*, and *Literacy Trails*. Each has its own chapter, and I have offered first steps, varied entry points, logistics, literacy connections, and ways that you can level up once you're ready. All these approaches incorporate excellent children's books—relevant beginning lists of both fiction and nonfiction titles are offered, and I am sure you'll add some of your favorites as you try things out.

The various approaches offer a chance to experience different aspects of literacy, but you will find some common elements. All of them use visual literacy to communicate meaning, and encourage student writers to consider audience needs and the relationship of the text to the setting. And each approach invites you to discover platforms for literacy learning that are authentic to specific settings, and offers resources for launching projects.

Chapter 2: Literacy to Go

When the opportunity arises, seize the moment to move literacy outside. Here you'll find suggestions for developing literacy backpacks and kits full of books, guides, and writing implements based on themes like *trees*, *architecture*, and *birds*. This chapter provides a first step for teachers who are new to literacy outdoors, short on time, or need a quick start for any reason. Suggestions are offered for a range of outdoor literacy experiences from read-alouds to phonics. Guidelines for gathering materials, determining routines, and setting the foundation for behavior outdoors are offered. Models will be provided for teachers and students eager to create their own *grab-and-go* opportunities.

Chapter 3: StoryWalks®

StoryWalks® describes a popular practice that invites readers to combine a reading experience with a walk, often providing the opportunity for connecting text with place. You'll find guidelines on how to choose books, set up the walk, and involve your students in writing their own texts for a story experience. Publishing their own writing for a walk experience provides an authentic reason for students to consider audience, topic, and editing.

Chapter 4: Word Gardens

Word Gardens are a lot like magnetic poetry, only bigger so that they are accessible to a whole class and invite movement and wordplay. This chapter shares different ways that schools have

created words by etching or painting stones or pieces of wood. Explore the ways that you can incorporate word gardens into areas of your curriculum; examples include word study, poetry, social studies, science, and guidance.

Chapter 5: Show Us a Sign! Students Use Signs to Solve Problems and Interpret Their World

Signs solve problems. Effective signs, whether for a grocery store, library, or nature trail, require knowing the purpose, audience, type of language, and options for images to convey the message to a viewer. This chapter provides teachers with a model, criteria for different types of signage, and strategies for supporting students in solving the challenges of informing and directing readers in many contexts. Examples include school signage and garden signage, as well as creating signage for curricular celebrations or installations of outdoor learning.

Chapter 6: Literacy Trails

You'll learn about ways to create trails that help your students practice and apply skills and concepts, as well as develop other trails that help them explore natural settings. Building on the interpretive signage explored in Chapter 5, trails may be a perfect way for your students to share what they are learning in history or social studies. Many cities are developing urban trails or walks. Developing your own can be an authentic way to create curriculum relating to visual text, such as symbols, maps, photographs, and interpretive signage to explore community highlights. What might this look like in your urban, suburban, or rural community?

Chapter 7: Make It Happen: Strategies and Resources to Help You Move Literacy Outdoors

Looking for clear and direct tips for administrative support, finding funding, and potential community partners? Here's where you'll find them, along with suggestions for creating space and finding like-minded colleagues to move literacy outdoors. Favorite resources are provided for those who want to dig deeper into nature-oriented learning.

Try One Thing

By the end of the book, you'll be ready to set up poetry walks, paint stones with word families, and create interpretive signage for the school-wide open house. Sitting in on a second-grade professional learning community team meeting recently, I heard one teacher gently encourage colleagues to *just try one thing*. She was acknowledging the exhaustion that many of her peers were feeling and wanted them to take one small step to get their students outdoors. She urged, "We don't need to worry about a budget—the reality is that kids are content sitting on simple towels, yoga mats, stumps—a clipboard is all you need!" Like Haile and the first-grade

ABC walk, this teacher knew that literacy outdoors is motivating and can provide authentic purposes for student readers and writers.

We can use literacy to weave learning together and to build strong school communities. While classrooms are separate and discrete spaces, the outdoors belongs to everyone—a shared space for everyone in the whole school to explore and gather. Outdoor learning initiatives can lead to shared inquiries, problem-solving, and celebration, supporting literacy learning all the while. Pick a chapter and *try one thing*.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

Strategies and Resources to Help You Move Literacy Outdoors



Figure 7-1

Inspired and Ready to Get Started?

Remember, there are lots of ways to move literacy outdoors depending on your setting, opportunities, and energy. One third-grade teacher observed: “At its best, moving literacy outside can involve meaningful integration with nature and place, but at the very least, just bringing a book outside—that’s amazing! You can’t go wrong.” Whatever you are ready for, here is a quick-start list of possible strategies and resources to help you launch your efforts.

Administrative support

Administrators who understand your goals can be your biggest allies. Before meeting with your principal, consider which curricular and social goals moving outside will help your students achieve. These might include:

- ▶ Literacy goals such as practicing skills (word gardens, paths)
- ▶ Writing for an audience (StoryWalks®, signage)
- ▶ Exploring genres (poetry based on senses, signage, StoryWalks®)
- ▶ Independent reading and read-alouds to develop stamina and support enjoyment (themed backpacks)
- ▶ Social goals of partnerships in designing and completing tasks
- ▶ Applying concepts of literacy beyond the classroom.



Figure 7-2

In addition to your literacy goals, you may find that your administrator has some suggestions as well as ways to connect with other school initiatives. One special educator shared that her principal pointed her to a dedicated state grant for special educators to use in their curriculum.

Funding and potential donors

We often face limited budgets for materials. Teachers have reached out successfully to school- and community-based sources to support their outdoor literacy goals. You'll want to be sure that possible donors are aware of the connections to literacy and outdoor learning. Here are some teacher tried-and-true suggestions; approaching several sources might get you closer to what you need or want. Be sure to include how many students will be included, and that some of the funding will go to the materials and *hardware* that will support



Figure 7-3

many years of literacy experiences. They might want your assurance that their donations will be acknowledged in some way, and of course, writing thank-you notes serves several literacy goals.

- ▶ Local hardware and lumber stores
- ▶ Chain hardware and lumber stores
- ▶ Programs like DonorsChoose, GoFundMe, or other school-approved fundraising programs
- ▶ Parent-teacher organizations or associations
- ▶ Partner with a technical high school; one school built the structures for Story-Walks®, another built a wooden shed to store supplies
- ▶ Search online for grants from organizations like KidsGardening, Green Schoolyards America, and others supporting outdoor and nature learning. You may also find that literacy organizations will be interested in supporting your outdoor moves.

Partnerships



Figure 7-4

Many teachers have formed partnerships with local organizations and businesses:

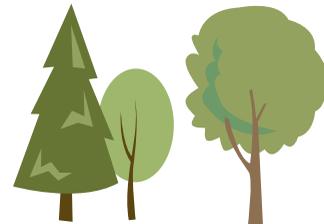
- ▶ City and town departments of parks and recreation have experience with children interacting with the outdoors and with creating and maintaining trails. They are often interested in connecting with school populations.

- ▶ Conservation groups and departments and nature centers often have a goal of developing conservation awareness in young citizens. Together, you might create a project that will serve both your goals and theirs.
 - One conservation group in Traverse City, Michigan, partnered with students to create signage to inform and help protect a watershed.
 - A conservation group in rural Vermont partnered with a local library to sponsor seasonal story hikes.
 - A conservation group in a small city worked with elementary students to develop a tree nursery on the school grounds; the students wrote letters reaching out to possible eventual recipients of the saplings.

- ▶ Museums and historical societies
 - Many museums adapted their exhibits for outdoor display during the recent pandemic. Whether indoors or out, museums offer strong models of interpretive signage. A curator may be tapped as an expert for your signage designers.

- ▶ Libraries
 - Many libraries partner with schools already; librarians may visit classes to promote summer reading programs or notify students about ongoing story hours, reading clubs, and new books. Librarians are all about developing literacy stamina and habits in school populations and beyond.
 - When a library was closed during the pandemic, a wall of windows offered passersby a story experience; pages of a picture book were posted for a walk-along read. Your class might create an illustrated story or work of nonfiction for such a display at a partnering library.
 - Many libraries are developing a bank of StoryWalk® titles for loan; explore these to see whether any of them would appeal to your class and meet your curricular needs.

- ▶ Stores and other businesses
 - In addition to considering a request for donated materials (think paper, cardstock, paint, and other tools you'll need for culminating work), ask about how these partners use literacy in their settings and what expert advice they might share. What might they have to offer your students in terms of signage design? How do they attract attention? Convey information to a busy reader?



- Could this business be a site for a StoryWalk®? Fifth graders loved their own idea about posting a Lois Ehlert book, *Growing Vegetable Soup*, on display in the produce section of a local store. They also were eager to talk with airport officials about books on the walls for those waiting for their flights to be called at their gate.
- Brainstorm with your students about local settings they visit and what would be authentic and entertaining reading. Depending on your students' age, you might either challenge them to write a proposal to a specific business or tackle this communication yourself, with a suggestion for a partner-driven story experience. Your students might suggest an appropriate book or write one themselves.