

TEACHERS' NOTES
NATURE KNOWS

Written by Yvette Farmer and illustrated by Chloe Jasmine Harris
Teachers' notes prepared by Cara Shipp with Yvette Farmer and Duane Byrnes

A vibrant, watercolor-style illustration of a young boy with brown hair, wearing a red t-shirt, blue shorts, white socks, and blue sneakers. He is sitting on a thick, brown tree branch, smiling and looking towards the viewer. The tree is surrounded by lush green foliage in various shades of green and yellow. A small grey and white bird is perched on a branch to the left of the boy. The background shows a clear blue sky through the leaves.

Nature

Knows

Yvette Farmer &
Chloe Jasmine Harris

thames
& hudson

Thames & Hudson Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work. For our head office in Naarm (Melbourne), we respectfully acknowledge the people of the Kulin Nations. We recognise the continuing connection to culture and story passed down through generations of Indigenous Australians that unite people, environment and ways of seeing. We pay respects to elders past and present, and recognise their continuing connection to land, waterways and community. Sovereignty has never been ceded. It always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

Synopsis

When life gets overwhelming, one family sets out from their city apartment to go camping in nature.

Mum, Dad, a young boy and his baby sister sit around a fire, play with dirt, swim in a river and use their senses to slow down and listen to the world around them.

The book also includes scientific facts based on current research into children's wellbeing through nature-based play, based on the author's work at the University of Western Sydney. These facts are based on the events in the story and give concrete actions to take to help readers slow down, boost moods, sleep better and feel happier.



Themes



POSITIVE IMPACT OF
NATURE ON CHILDREN'S
WELLBEING



IMMERSION IN NATURE



FAMILY



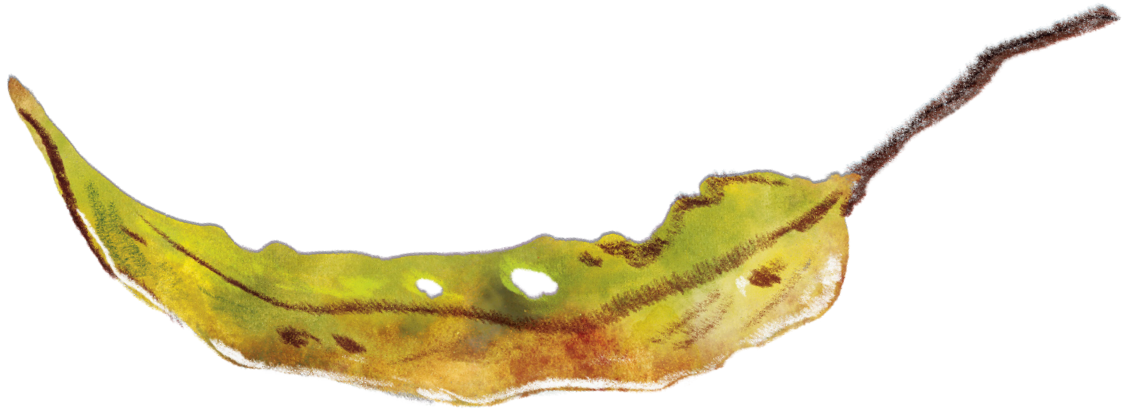
CAMPING

Writing style

This is a lyrical story about a family that goes camping to reconnect with nature and take a break from busy life. It is narrated in first person by the older child in the family and, while fictional, it embeds research on the impact of nature to children's wellbeing, teaching calming strategies that readers can follow.

The illustrations are vivid and packed with details, drawing readers into the scene and encouraging them to notice and appreciate the beauty of the outdoors. The artist creates her own hand-painted textures that she then scans on the computer and adds to her artwork. The images are bold in some illustrations and more muted and soft in others, such as the evening sunset scene.

There is an activity to support interaction with nature in the end matter.



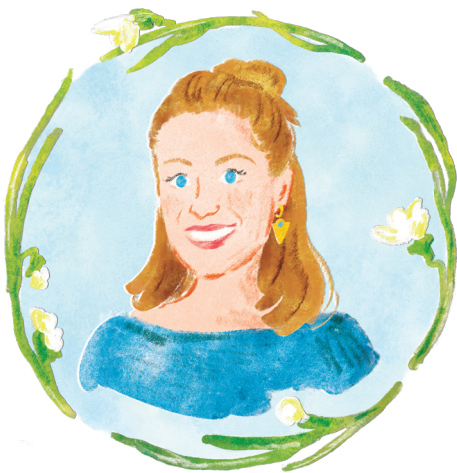
Author motivation

This book arose organically after a camping trip in a national park with my little family and some close friends. We spent a few days cooking on a fire, swimming in a lagoon, sleeping under tall reaching trees and just doing a bit of 'nothing'. When I came home, I was at a friend's place – she lives among big, tall gum trees – and my one-year-old had fallen asleep on the lounge. I sat down for a moment with a cuppa, a pencil, and a scrap piece of paper from a kid's art scrapbook and this story just came out.

I often get overwhelmed by how bright, noisy and chaotic life can be. All the busyness makes me feel 'foofy' (a word my mum made up). Sometimes I feel like I'm doing things a bit 'wrong'. But when I'm in nature, I'm reminded that nothing grows in straight lines (thank goodness). I wanted this book to tell kids that a bit of unruly ridiculousness is okay – that it's good. And that having space to just sit and not do is important.

Through work I've been lucky to be part of, I've seen how powerful nature is for children. Nature connectedness is such a fundamental part of learning and I wish it had a bigger place in schools. This book was written partly for that reason and partly as a thank you to all the teachers who take kids outdoors, plant a tree or grow tomatoes on a classroom windowsill.

Yvette Farmer is a primary school teacher with an academic background in psychology and health science. She has worked with the University of Western Sydney on research exploring how nature-based interventions support children's wellbeing. Yvette is passionate about the connection between nature, creativity, education and wellbeing. She lives an hour south of Sydney between the escarpment and the sea, with her partner and two children.



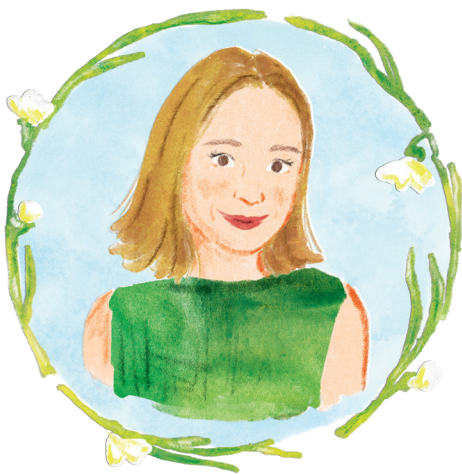
Illustrator motivation

Some of the most beautiful things about nature are all the little details you can see when you look a little closer. When painting this book, I focused on including many small details. See if you can spot swirly patterns on some of the gum tree trunks, lines of ants making patterns and lizards and birds sitting in the foliage or on rocks.

I paint lots of sheets of paper with watercolour and other types of paint. Sometimes I paint with rough, scratchy brushes, sometimes I paint with soft, smooth brushes. I then use a scanner to put these textures onto the computer. Then I cut them out and use them in my illustrations. It's kind of like collaging, but on the computer!

Get a behind-the-scenes look at Chloe's process at thamesandhudson.com.au/blogs/all-news-features

Chloe Jasmine Harris is a Sydney-based illustrator whose work bridges digital and traditional techniques. Drawing on her background in painting and printmaking, she incorporates handmade marks, painterly textures, and playful layering and collage into her illustrations, which she assembles digitally. Chloe has written and illustrated two picture books with Walker Books, *Henry Turnip* and *Maple the Brave*. Her other books include *Art Search*, published by Smith Street Books, and *Find Vincent van Gogh*, a collaboration with Hachette UK and the Van Gogh Museum.



Study notes

Before reading

- Look at the front cover and make predictions about the story. Where is the book set? What might the boy be doing? What might the story be about? Ask the children if they have a favourite outdoor space, if they go camping with their families, if they go walking in nature. Talk about any other relatable experiences such as school camps and local places you have visited as a class.
- Look at the Acknowledgement of Country written by Duane Byrnes in the front matter of the book. Discuss the meaning of the acknowledgement and its message. Observe and appreciate how an [Acknowledgement of Country](#) can be personalised and unique.
- When learning about connection to nature and Country, why is it special and important to connect with Aboriginal people to learn about the way Aboriginal people connect with Country? Discuss and show examples. Explain that an Acknowledgement of Country is a way of showing respect for the Traditional Custodians of the land we are on. It is not a formal ceremony; it is a personal expression of respect. Explain that anyone can say an Acknowledgement of Country. Students can take turns in partners creating and sharing their own Acknowledgement of Country.
- Locate Dharawal Country and Wonnarua Country on the [AIATSIS Map of Indigenous Australia](#). For a visual stimulus, there are a number of YouTube videos by government councils about parts of Dharawal Country, including [Campbelltown](#) and [Wollongong](#). Discuss the Dharawal location in relation to your school and identify or confirm your school's local First Nations Country. Compare the landscape, flora and fauna of your area to what is shown in the Dharawal Country videos – are there similarities? or differences? Are you in a saltwater or freshwater area? Inland or on a coastline? What features heavily, animals of land, sky or waters?



During reading

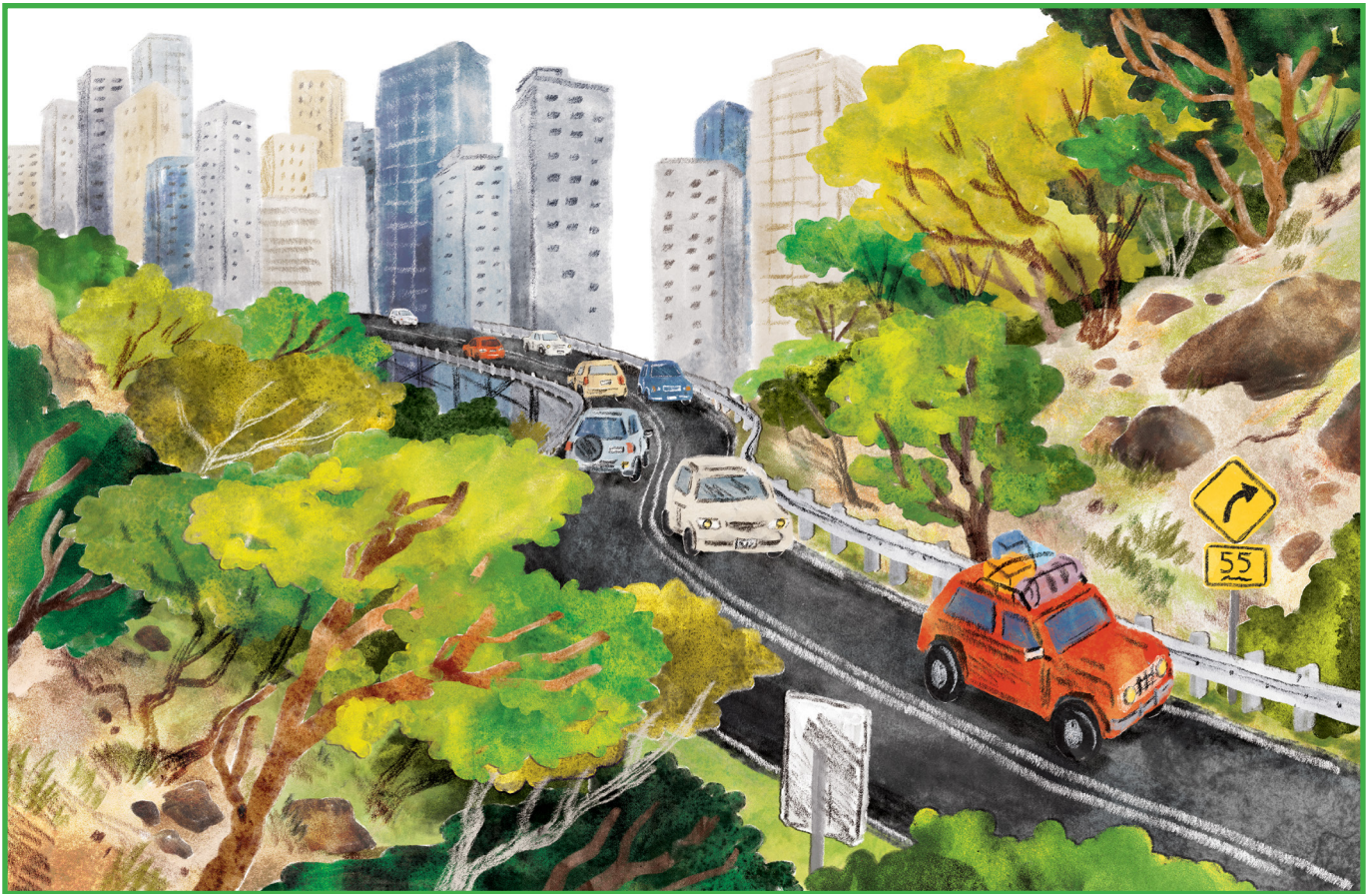
- Look at pages 2 and 3 introducing the busy family home. Invite children to point out all the things they notice and what makes the house look busy. Children can share what they see that is similar in their own homes.



- Look at pages 4 and 5 and ask children to point out any signs that it is getting too busy. Talk about the mum's expression, 'feeling foofy'. Does that help capture the feeling when life is too busy and you need a break? What other words might they use?
 - Make a mind map with the word 'foofy' in the middle. Add synonyms for the word, as well as examples of what your body might do when you feel foofy – maybe you stamp your feet, maybe you cry, maybe you scream or feel like there is lots of buzzing energy inside you. Explain that it is normal and okay to feel foofy/agitated, overtired angry or overwhelmed. It is usually your body telling you that it needs a little rest or some space to let the energy out.
 - Make a second mind map with ideas that can help soothe or release your 'foofiness'. This will be different for everyone, for example they might run around, paint a picture, talk to a friend, be in nature, have a bath, etc.



- Discuss pages 6 and 7 and notice what changes as the family leaves the busy city.



- During the nature pages, pause to discuss the 'nature knows' information. What does it mean? Have children heard this phrase before? Have they experienced this themselves? Develop and create a poster listing and summarising the tips from nature.
- During the nature pages, invite children to notice and identify the animals. Notice the different activities the boy can do: walking, swimming, watching wildlife, climbing a tree, smelling flowers, playing in the dirt.

- Discuss pages 12 and 13, when night falls on the camp. Invite children to point out what they notice: the animals, plants, activities happening, the sun going down, the light and the colours. Notice how the artist creates the night feel with the white/grey gums reflecting the moonlight. Discuss how nature is guiding the family to rest. Ask children to guess how the boy is feeling now. Can they describe how they feel when they look at the picture?



- On the final page, the family returns to busy life but the boy is holding the calm of the bush in his heart. It is particularly striking as the scene is muted and blurred apart from the boy in the foreground. Discuss how the blurring shows the busy life but also how he can move it to the side and stay calm. Ask the children if they notice the little piece of the bush he has brought home with him.



After reading

- Go outside as a class to a calming spot on the school grounds or take an excursion to a local bush site. Perhaps connect with a park ranger or First Nations ranger/ Traditional Custodian. Set up an activity where children can lay quietly and observe and listen, like the boy does on page 21, when he says it doesn't feel like thinking but more like knowing what nature is telling him, through his connection. In this context, discuss the meaning of the boy's statement 'we are nature and nature is us'.
- Engage children in a nature-writing activity:
 - Ask them to draw or paint a scene from your nature walk or excursion. They might do this while out or they could take photos on an iPad and use that as a reference back at school.
 - If appropriate, collect interesting natural materials for a tactile collage – sticks, leaves, flowers, nuts/acorns which can be arranged and glued onto cardboard (ask permission if you're in an Aboriginal conservation area or special site).
 - Using their artworks as inspiration, have children write short poems or narratives about being out in nature. Teachers may scaffold this by brainstorming words as a class to describe: all the things children could see, hear, touch and smell; the texture and temperature of things they touched; and any emotions or physical feelings they felt while outside.
 - Other writing prompts could include:
 - If a tree or a cloud could speak, what would it say?
 - What would it see each day as it looked over the park?
 - Write a story from the perspective of an insect or animal you saw: a bug, a butterfly, a lizard. Tell us about that animal's day.
 - Write a story about your favourite place to play in nature. Make up an adventure that you have there with your friends or family.
 - Write a shape poem describing your favourite thing you noticed on the walk. See prompts for shape and other poem types at [Vibrant Teaching](#).
 - For other nature writing ideas, see the [Writing Mindset](#) blog.

- Compare the night scene in the bush to the busy dinner scene. How do the children feel when they look at each one? What feelings, thoughts and ideas could the family bring home with them from nature to help them keep calm on busy days? For example, could they grow some plants in their kitchen? Could they go for walks in the park together? Could they build a pretend fire and sing songs together in the lounge room?



- Review a list of 'nature knows' facts and discuss how these can help us all, no matter where we live. Ask the children which is their favourite. Do they use any of these strategies currently? Is there something they would like to try? Invite the children to draw a picture of themselves using one of the strategies in their home or the school grounds or another favourite place they like to go.
 - Engage children in a local community project to care for the environment. This may arise from discussions or issues raised when out on excursion. Reflect on how we can all contribute to caring for Country and if we want to enjoy it then we need to look after it.
 - Discuss the quote on page 23: 'It's not neat here, or in order, the trees don't grow in straight lines.' Ask the children to draw a special nature place – this could be a veggie garden, the school playground, the beach, the bush etc. Ask them to compare the 'messy' nature they have drawn to the images we previously compared of the busy home and the sunset in the bush. Can they describe the different kinds of messy? How is it that a messy bush setting can be calming?
 - Look at the [website of the illustrator, Chloe Jasmine Harris](#). She shares some artists she admires, including: Henri de Toulouse Lautrec, Raoul-Dufy and Ludwig Bemelmans. Look at some examples of those artists' work and talk about what ideas she might have got from them for her own artwork. Explain that we might take some ideas about a technique or a colour style but we don't copy an artist's work out of respect to them, as it is their own original work that they have worked very hard on. Invite students to use some ideas from all the artists you have looked at to create their own artwork in response to the book. It can be:
 - Their favourite part of the book
 - An important message of the book
 - Something new they have learned
 - Something from the book they would like to draw differently
- This activity could also be complimented by a trip to a local art gallery or an activity with a local artist.



- Read a complimentary text by a First Nations author and, without comparing texts, discuss the concept of [connection to Country](#) from a First Nations perspective. Encourage the children to recognise and celebrate how the wisdom of First Nations cultures already held all the [knowledge and understanding](#) that more recent scientific research about nature and wellbeing tells us. Some suggestions for texts include:
 - [The Moon Story](#) by Marshia Cook, Walmajarri people, Fitzroy Crossing, Kimberley region, Western Australia. A book about a family going camping and connecting to Country.
 - [Country Tells Us When](#) by Dalisa Pigram-Ross, Sheree Ford, Tsheena Cooper, Mary Dann, Yawuru people, Broome region, Western Australia. A book about the seasons and noticing the signals Country gives us. Purchase a copy from [Indigenous Literacy Foundation](#).
 - Victor Steffensen books, *Animals on Country*, *Looking after Country with Fire* and *The Trees*.



Extra activities by Duane Byrnes

- Create a 'Did You Know' short lesson about how animals play an important role in lore and rules in nature.
 - An example could be our kookaburra: when you're in nature, listen for its call at sunrise and again at sunset. That laugh welcomes the sun each morning and farewells it as the daylight comes to an end.
 - Another example is the googar (goanna): they are a teacher of nature as they know nature best. When a goanna moves slowly or is laying down, it is teaching you to slow down and observe more. When it digs or climbs, it may be showing you where food or water might be found.
- Teach children the following five words beginning with the letter L. These words help shape why First Nations Peoples have a deep understanding and connection to Country. These teachings can be found in the book [*The Dreaming Path*](#) by Paul Callaghan with Uncle Paul Gordan.
 - **Learn:** This means being open to new knowledge, old knowledge, stories and teachings. Learning isn't about being 'told', it's about being humble enough to grow.
 - **Listen:** How we learn is partly through listening deeply, not just with your ears but with your whole self. This can be listening to Country, to people, to stories, to your own spirit. It means slowing down and being present.
 - **Look:** Observation has happened for thousands of years. Observe your environment and the world around you. Pay attention to signs, patterns, actions and impacts, just like how our Old People paid attention to Country.
 - **Love:** Once you learn all these beautiful things and have that knowledge, you build a strong love for nature, self, community, Country and culture. This leads to acting from compassion instead of fear or ego.
 - **Lead:** Once you have learned through looking, listening and have that deep love, always be proud to lead by example. Share your love for nature with others – be a leader and teach them how to look after nature. If you look after Nature, she will look after you!



Nature connection activity by Yvette Farmer

Materials

- Watercolour or art paper
- Drawing implements – crayons or pencils
- Watercolour paints and brushes
- Masking tape

Explore

Go to an outdoor nature space (e.g. the bush, beach, creek, or garden).

- Walk around the space – use your senses to explore.
- What can you see, hear, feel, and smell?

Connect

Find something in nature that you feel drawn to – perhaps a rock, a leaf, or a twig*.

- Pick it up and place it in the palm of your hand.
- Sit quietly with your special object and get to know it.
- What do you notice about it? Its colour, shape, texture, temperature, smell?

**Choose something that is already on the ground, not something picked from a living plant.*

Imagine

What is your object's story

- Where has it been?
- What has it seen, heard, or felt?
- Who has it known?
- Is it a creature's home?
- Does it have a special role in nature?

Play

In small groups, bring your object and place it on a communal piece of paper.

- Move the objects around – how do they interact?
- If they could speak, what would they say to each other?
- How are they similar or different?



Create

Choose a place on the paper where your object feels comfortable to stay for a while.

- Using a pencil or crayon, trace around your object (this won't be perfect – which is a good thing!).
- Move your object to a new spot and repeat the tracing process several times.
- Notice how your tracing changes a little each time.
- Can you overlap your lines and edges with the tracings of other group members?

Collaborate

Join your group's creation with another group's. You (or your teacher) can connect the two pieces of paper using masking tape on the back.

- Add watercolour to your creation – work together with everyone in both groups.
- Play with ways to connect the two artworks. Can you create marks or lines that join them together?

Return

Take your nature object back to where you found it.

- Thank your object for sharing and creating with you and for the special part it plays in nature.

