

Last Child in the Woods

by Richard Louv

Curriculum Guide for "Last Child in the Woods": Guided
Reading Questions and Writing Prompts by
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Back of the book and Introduction

- Read the back of the book and the Introduction section. Answer the following questions after you read. If you need to go back, please do. Answer in complete sentences in your composition notebook or journal as you go through each section of the book.
 - 1. What things stand out to you?
 - 2. What about it relates to you?
- 3. What are your expectations of this book after reading the back summary and the introduction?

Part I: The New Relationship Between Children and Nature

“Here in this vast, savage, howling mother of ours, Nature, lying around, with such beauty, and such affection for her children, as the leopard; and yet we are so early weaned from her breast to society, to that culture which is exclusively an interaction of man on man.”

- Henry David Thoreau

- What does this quote mean to YOU?

1. Gifts of Nature (7-14)

*“When I see birches bend to the left and right...
I like to think some boys’ been swinging them.”*

-Robert Frost

- 1. Make a list of things that stand out to you, or that you would like to comment on. Keep the list in your notebook/journal.
- 2. What are some things that you consider to be ‘gifts’ from nature?

2. The Third Frontier (15-26)

“The frontier is a goner. It died with its boots laced.”
- M.R. Montgomery

- 1. What is the third frontier?
- 2. What does it mean for the current generation that the link to farming is disappearing? What about for the economy?
 - 3. What is a chimera, and what is its purpose?
- 4. Make a list of what things stand out to you, and describe why they do.

3. The Criminalization of Natural Play (27-38)

“For many years I was self-appointed inspector of snowstorms and rainstorms...”

-Henry David Thoreau

- 1. How have we been taught that nature is bad, or dangerous?
- 2. How do you think the changes in view from open space to play in, to having to take down a tree house because it is a “fire hazard” effect how a child sees nature?
- 3. What are some of the benefits to nature that we miss out on by staying inside more often?

3. The Criminalization of Natural Play(27-38)

“For many years I was self-appointed inspector of snowstorms and rainstorms...”

-Henry David Thoreau

- 4. What is nature-deficit disorder?
- 5. What are some of the effects of nature-deficit disorder?
 - 6. How does this section relate to you, and your life?
- 7. What points really stand out? Keep track, and explain why.

Part II: Why the Young (and the Rest of Us) Need Nature

*“Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth
find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts.”*

- Rachel Carson

“From wonder into wonder existence opens.”

- Lao-Tzu

4. Climbing the Tree of Health (39-54)

"I bet I can live to a hundred if only I can get outdoors again."

- Geraldine Page as Carrie Watts, in *The Trip to Beautiful*

1. What stands out to you? Keep track and write it down.
2. What do you think it means when Elaine says that the land shapes us more than we shape the land?
3. From the text, what do you think the word 'graded' means?
4. What is biophilia?
5. What positive effects does nature have on YOU? Tell me about them!
6. Do you think that pet and horticultural (plant) therapy are effective? Why or why not?
7. How does nature help you destress or feel better? Do you have a favorite place outdoors?

5. A Life of the Senses: Nature vs. the Know-It-All State of Mind (55-70)

*“I go to nature to be soothed and healed,
and to have my senses put in tune once more.”*
- John Burroughs

1. What about this chapter stands out to you?
2. How has the human-nature connection changed from when it was direct, to now?
3. Describe the Know-it-All state of mind.
4. What is primary experience?
5. Why may the current generation suffer from a lack of direct experiences?
6. Have you had an experience where you felt connected to nature?

6. The “Eighth Intelligence” (71-85)

1. What stands out to you in this chapter?
2. What are the 7 different intelligences? List them here.
3. Which of the different intelligences do you think apply to you, and why?
4. What is the 8th intelligence? Do you have it?
5. On page 77, it says that “Julia is not as impressed with “stuff”what’s real,....a view from a mountaintop...these things have a lasting impression...” What point do you think the author is making here, about a human connection to nature?
6. Describe something you have learned from nature.

7. The Genius of Childhood: How Nature Nurtures Creativity (86-98)

“I played around our yard some and talked to the fence posts, sung songs and made the weeds sing...”

- Woodie Guthrie

1. What stands out to you?
2. What is a “loose-parts” toy? What is the loose parts theory?
3. How has nature affected influential people like Jane Goodall, John Muir, Mark Twain, T.S. Elliot, E.O. Wilson, and Eleanor Roosevelt?
4. Who is Edith Cobb, and why is she important to this topic?
5. What is the definition of “ecstatic”, both the contemporary and Greek meanings?

8. Nature-Deficit Disorder and the Restorative Environment (99-114)

1. What stands out to you?
2. How has the decline of Physical Education in schools affected children in the United States?
3. What is an Outward Bound Program?
4. What informal information did the University of Illinois give to parents, caregivers, and others? What were their responses?
5. “If it’s true that nature therapy reduces the symptoms of ADHD, then the converse may also be true:...” What do they say about the opposite of this statement?
6. How did Daniel Ybarra help at risk teens? What was the result?

Part III. The Best of Intentions: Why Johnnie and Jeannie Don't Play Outside Anymore

*“Our children no longer learn how to read
the great Book of Nature
from their own direct experience or how to interact creatively
with the seasonal transformations of the planet.
They seldom learn where their water comes from or where it goes.
We no longer coordinate our human celebration with
the great liturgy of the heavens.”*

- Wendell Berry

9. Time and Fear (115-122)

1. What stands out to you?
2. Tell me something good about structured sports as outdoor play, and something bad about it.
3. What are some things that take up your “free” time?
4. How has nature time gone from relaxing and calming, to something that is often forgotten about?
5. This chapter gives some examples of a busy daily schedule of a high school student. List your normal daily schedule, and see how they compare. Are you as busy?

10. The Bogeyman Syndrome Redux (123-132)

“Man’s heart, away from nature, becomes hard; [the Lakota] knew that lack of respect for growing, living things soon led to lack of respect for humans too.”

- Luther Standing Bear (c. 1868-1939)

1. What is something you fear?
2. What are some “fears” that have caused parents to be more protective and concerned about their children?
3. What is the “Bogeyman Syndrome”?
4. This chapter talks about race focused crime reporting. It came out in 2005, about 10 years ago. Has this type of news report changed? Explain your answer, and how it has or hasn’t changed.
5. How has the public view of “danger” in nature changed?

11. Don't Know Much About Natural History: Education as a Barrier to Nature (133-145)

“To a person uninstructed in natural history, his country or sea-side stroll is a walk through a gallery filled with wonderful works of art, nine-tenths of which have their faces turned to the wall.”

- Thomas Huxley

1. What stands out?
2. What is Ecophobia?
3. Why are some students at a disconnect with nature, even though they learn about it in school?
4. How can teachers help to remedy the imbalance of environmental education?
5. Schools have been putting more money into technology, and less into the arts. What affect has this had? What about on you personally?
6. Explain how you feel about the statement that people don't value what they don't have a name for. How does this affect higher education, and training for jobs?

12. Where Will the Future Stewards of Nature Come From? (146-162)

“[What is the] extinction of a condor to a child who has never seen a wren?”

- *Naturalist Robert Michael Pyle*

1. What stands out?
2. How has attendance to National Parks changed recently? Why do you think it is?
3. How does childhood exposure to nature change your adulthood? Use Roosevelt and Morris to help you answer.
4. How have Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts changed?
5. What does the attachment theory say?
6. What is something you are passionate about?

Part IV: The Nature-Child Reunion

*“I am well again, I came to life
in the cool winds and crystal waters of the mountains...”*
- John Muir

*“Each new year is a surprise to us.
We find that we had virtually forgotten the note of each bird,
and when we hear it again, it is remembered like a dream,
reminding us of a previous state of existence....
The voice of nature is always encouraging.”*
- Henry David Thoreau

13. Bringing Nature Home (163-177)

“It is not half so important to know as to feel when introducing a young child to the natural world.”

- Rachel Carson

1. What stands out to you?
2. How were the children and the adults different during their hike? (the author and his friend Schad, and their children)
3. The author states that “There is no such thing as a grown up person.” How is that true to you? What do you hold onto that makes you a kid at heart?
4. How do you battle boredom? Does it fit with anything that was suggested for parents to do?
5. What is something you can do to reconnect to nature?

14. Scared Smart: Facing the Bogeyman (178-188)

1. What stands out to you?
2. How does nature shape confidence?
3. Where do you think the most danger lies in childhood: nature, or organized sports?
4. What is involved in the suggested “five-step program” for curing the fear of the Bogeyman?
5. Describe what “assessing ice” is.
6. The author says that children learn best from experiencing things themselves. Tell me about a time where you learned an important lesson through experiencing it yourself.

15. Telling Turtle Tales: Using Nature as a Moral Teacher (189-202)

“Let nature be your teacher.”

- *William Wordsworth*

1. What stands out?
2. The author mentions that (boys) get in trouble now for collecting turtles. How have the views of nature changed to make it this way?
3. What do you think about hunting and fishing from the ethical standpoint? Do you hunt and fish?
4. What is wildcrafting, and how has it changed?
5. How did Robert Kennedy’s New York City watershed agreement help to conserve and help others appreciate nature?

Part V: The Jungle Blackboard

*“It is not the language of painters
but the language of nature which one should listen to....
The feeling for the things themselves,
for reality, is more important than the feeling for pictures.”*
- Vincent van Gogh

16. Natural School Reform (203-226)

“Teaching children about the natural world should be treated as one of the most important events in their lives.”

- Thomas Berry

1. What stands out?
2. How is education different in Finland than it is here in the U.S.?
3. What are some examples of how environmental based learning helps schools? What do YOU personally think about this?
4. What is Jackie Grobarek’s “butterfly theory”?
5. How did the principal and Torrey Pines Elementary use nature to increase environmental learning?
6. What is one thing YOU would like to see happen for environmental education in your school? (it will probably not happen, but what if it could?)

17. Camp Revival (227-236)

1. What stands out?
2. Why is summer camp such a good thing?
3. Describe the Puget Sound Environmental Learning Center.
4. We've talked about the third frontier before. Describe the "symptoms" of growing up in it.
5. What is something you can do to reconnect to nature, even though you may have some of the symptoms of the third frontier?

Part VI: Wonderland: Opening the Fourth Frontier

“We have not merely escaped from something but also into something....We have joined the greatest of all communities, which is not that of man alone but of everything which shares with us the great adventure of being alive.”

- Joseph Wood Krutch

18. The Education of Judge Thatcher: Decriminalizing Natural Play (237-244)

1. What stands out?
2. How have laws on liability changed for landowners?
3. Do you think insurance coverage should be a part of natural play?
Explain your reason why or why not?
4. What do you think about the changes made in Broward County schools to avoid injuries and lawsuits?
5. What do you think about the shift in financial responsibility in accidents from parents (or individuals), to schools or landowners?

19. Cities Gone Wild (245-270)

1. What stands out?
2. Describe the Zoopolis Movement.
3. What are greenroofs? Why are they beneficial?
4. How did living in the Village Homes affect children differently than living in other places?
5. In what ways does having a rooftop garden help us to reconnect to nature?
6. Why is it important to build with respect to nature?

20. Where the Wild Things Will Be: A New Back-to-the-Land Movement (271-290)

“When going back makes sense, you are going ahead.”

- Wendell Berry

1. What stands out?
2. Why do you think people started to move into more rural areas, away from cities?
3. How did the Homestead Act from 1862 change the way that people used, and viewed, land?
4. The last page in the chapter has a “future” statement, a diary entry from the young girl at the beginning of the chapter, perhaps. Do you think that in your life time, society will make some of the changes talked about in this chapter, and return to nature? Explain.

Part VII: To Be Amazed

*“A child said What is the grass? fetching
it to me with full hands;
How could I answer the child? I do not
know what it is any more than he.”
- Walt Whitman*

21. The Spiritual Necessity of Nature For the Young (291-306)

“To trace the history of a river or a raindrop, as John Muir would have done, is also to trace the history of the soul, the history of the mind descending and arising in the body. In both, we constantly seek and stumble on divinity...”

- Gretel Ehrlich

1. What stands out?
2. There are two opposing views about childhood in this chapter; the one about children being animalistic and basic, and the one about them holding the secrets of the universe. Which one do you think is more accurate? Explain why you think so.
3. The author talks about how getting children to see the Grand Scheme is difficult with kids raised on Disney movies. Why do you think that is?
4. How are nature and religion connected?

22. Fire and Fermentation: Building a Movement (307-314)

1. What stands out?
2. Natural disasters can destroy many things. The author's family was saved from the devastation from the fire, but others were not so lucky. How was the community impacted?
3. What is mountain top removal, and how does it affect the environment? (you may need to google this :)
4. What do you think it will take for a whole-society shift in view of nature, and conservation of our natural resources?

23. While it Lasts (315-316)

1. Congratulations, you finished the book! What stands out from this last chapter?
2. The chapter is titled “While it Lasts”. What does this mean to you, after having read the book and learning about our connection to nature?

Last Child in the Woods Field Guide (345–385)

“It takes a universe to make a child, both in outer form and inner spirit. It takes a universe to educate a child, a universe to fulfill a child.

- Thomas Berry

- Notes from the field
- 100 Actions we can take
 - nature activities for kids and families
 - good books for kids and families
 - suggestions for transforming our communities
 - pursuits for business, attorneys and health care providers
 - ways educators, parent-teacher groups, and students can promote natural school reform
 - goals for government
 - build the movement

Discussion Points/Questions (Adults)

1. Can you recall and describe your favorite childhood place in nature? Where was it, how did you find it, how did you feel when you were there, what became of it?
2. Do your own children, or children of people you know, have fewer experiences in nature than you or your friends did at their age?
3. If children aren't spending as much time outdoors, what are the top five reasons?
4. How do the physical, cultural, political, and legal barriers separating children from nature differ in inner-city, suburban, and rural neighborhoods?

Discussion Points/Questions (Adults)

5. Which of these barriers can be safely reduced by parents? Who can lower the other obstacles?
6. What are some ways that nature “amplifies” or changes the perception of time for children and adults?
7. Can you identify accessible “nearby nature” in your neighborhood or community?
8. When introducing children to nature, where is the balance between imparting information and encouraging joy and wonder?

Discussion Points/Questions (Adults)

9. What is the role of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other members of your family in helping children experience nature?
10. Can you identify institutions and organizations in your community that can help parents and children get outside?
11. What are the health benefits of nature experiences to children and adults?
12. What role should nature experiences play in education?

Discussion Points/Questions (Children and Young People)

13. How would you define nature?

14. When was the last time you went outside into nature near your house? How long were you there? What did you do?

15. How many video games or cartoon characters can you name?

16. What do you fear most about nature?

17. What do you love most about the outdoors?

18. How many kinds of plants and animals in your neighborhood can you name?

Discussion Points/Questions (Children and Young People)

19. When you're in the woods, at a stream, at the beach, or out in a field, how do you feel?
20. Next time you're in one of those places, ask yourself, what do you hear, smell, taste, see?
21. When was the last time your parents or some other adult took you hiking, camping, fishing, or exploring in nature?
22. What could you do to have more time outdoors?
23. What could you do to help your friends and other young people experience more nature?

Discussion Points/Questions (Community Groups)

24. What are the primary causes of nature-deficit disorder in your community?

25. What effects of nature-deficit disorder do you see in your community?

26. Who is working on this issue in your region? Who is able to make a difference?

27. Why are you personally interested in this issue?

28. Why is your organization interested, and how can it help a community campaign to connect children with nature?

Discussion Points/Questions (Community Groups)

29. How do we want to affect the lives of the next generation and the one after that, in terms of physical and emotional health, ability to learn, awareness of environmental issues, and family bonds?
30. What capacities can you build on and what gaps must be filled?
31. What are the clear categories for needed focus (community parks, school curricula, public and personal safety concerns, built environment, access to natural areas, economic barriers, media awareness)?
32. For each area of focus, what are your short- and medium-term goals?

Discussion Points/Questions (Community Groups)

33. What initiatives could you undertake to achieve the goals and objectives you have identified or to enhance other initiatives already under way?

34. Which of the initiatives identified have priority for immediate action and how do they relate to the initiatives identified in other areas of focus?

35. What will the future of your community be like in twenty years if your community acts?