



DISCOVER THE WORLD AROUND YOU

THE LOST WORDS PROJECT

Brought to You By: The Railyard Park Conservancy

Intro: This project is inspired by a book called The Lost Words by Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris, published in the UK by Hamish Hamilton in 2017. The poems and paintings in the book focus on nature words that were removed from the Oxford Children's Dictionary due to their supposed lack of use. The aim of the book is to create some magic with "spells" and gilded images that celebrate the beautiful, strange nature that surrounds us, and ensure that the language and nature survives. The book is, as artist Jackie Morris says, "a beautiful protest".

The purpose of this project is to connect to the natural world found in our own backyards, parks, and trails, by exploring, observing, drawing, photographing, reading and writing about its specific natural elements. Students can select items and words to focus on that inspire and interest them the most and through the process discover ways to express a deeper understanding of their topic. Final projects could be in the form of individual poems and images like in The Lost Words, or in a book form, nature journal, field guide, or zine that is a collection of nature words.

The project is for all ages, and younger children could collaborate with adults on the project.

WWW.RAILYARDPARK.ORG

PROCEDURE:

SUGGESTED MATERIALS -

- paper
- pencil
- The Lost Words book (if you have one) or posters of the spells
- check out paintings at:
<https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/initiatives/the-lost-words>

GOING FURTHER -

- watercolors
- colored pencils
- art papers
- photos
- magazines
- markers
- gold sharpies
- gold leaf



1) Share the book, or individual spells, in indoor and outdoor settings. Take turns reading the spells and looking at the different illustrations. Each item in the Lost Words has 3 pages- one where the plant or creature has disappeared, one that highlights the lost item with a detailed illustration and poem, and a third that shows nature back in its place in the world. Taking time to pay close attention to the words and images of the spells is important.



2) Spend time outdoors around home or school, at a city park like the Railyard Park, or at a place you visit with friends and family to find the words for the nature that surrounds us here in New Mexico. Find quiet time to observe surroundings and use a journal/sketchbook or simple folded paper booklet to write down the names of things observed. Those things can be plants, animals, landforms, rocks and minerals, clouds, weather, stars, the moon, the sunrise, the sunset. The important thing here is to identify the specific name- not just tree, but what kind? People, guide books, and the internet can help with identification. Spend time with each item recorded and watch and observe closely- describe the details with words and sketches. Get close and use senses of touch, hearing and smell also.



3) Choose one natural item to focus on for the project. Choose something to celebrate and tell other people about. More than one element works also! Make sure you know the name of the element — and it can be in English, Spanish, Latin or other languages that have a word for your item.



4) Writing - Write a poem- or spell- that tells about the chosen element. Information and poetic language for the spell can come from many sources- observation and personal experience, research, stories, etymology. Field guides can be useful, especially for plants and birds.

EXAMPLES:

In The Lost Words author Macfarlane uses the acrostic format- the letters in the name are used to begin each line of the poem. This is a very accessible format that students may have experience with.

Here are three examples from the book:

magpie

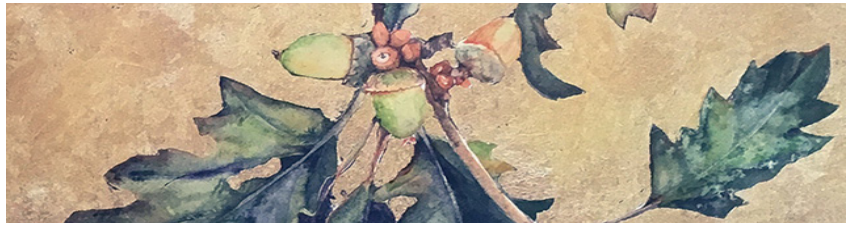
Magpie Manifesto:
Argue Every Toss!
Gossip, Bicker, Yak and Snicker All Day Long!
Pick a Fight in an Empty Room!
Interrupt, Interject, Intercept, Intervene!
Every Magpie for Every Magpie against
Every Other Walking Flying Swimming
Creeping Creature on the Earth!

acorn

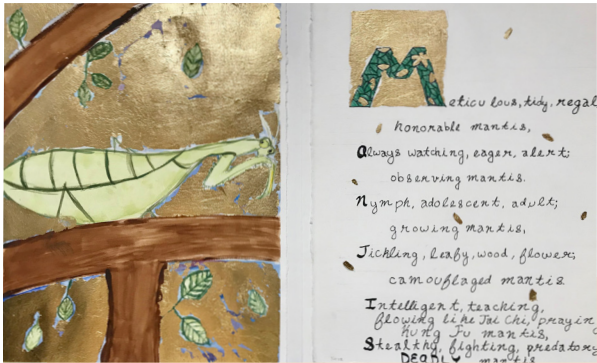
As flake is to blizzard, as
Curve is to sphere, as knot is to net, as
One is to many, as coin is to money, as
bird is to flock, as
Rock is to mountain, as drop is to fountain, as
spring is to river, as glint is to glitter, as
Near is to far, as wind is to weather, as
feather is to flight, as light is to star, as
kindness is to good, so acorn is to wood.

fern

Fern's first form is furled
Each frond fast as a fiddle head
Reach, roll and unfold follows.
Fern flares.
Now fern is fully fanned.



Here are two student examples:

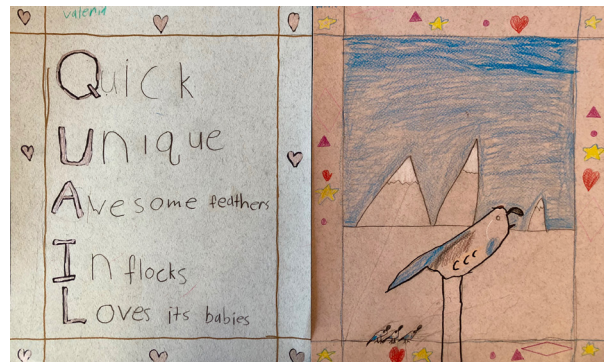


mantis - 7th Grade Student

Meticulous, tidy, regal;
honorable mantis.
Always watching, eager, alert;
observing mantis.
Nymph, adolescent, adult;
growing mantis.
Ticking, leafy, wood, floor;
camouflaged mantis.
Intelligent, teaching,
flowing like Tai Chi, praying;
Kung- Fu mantis.
Stealthy, fighting, predatory;
DEADLY mantis.

quail - 2nd Grade Student

Quick
Unique
Awesome feathers
In flocks
Loves its babies



INFORMATION AND POETIC LANGUAGE FOR THE ACROSTIC CAN COME FROM MANY SOURCES- OBSERVATION, RESEARCH, STORIES, ETYMOLOGY.



ART:

In the *Lost Words*, artist Jackie Morris illustrated plants and creatures with detailed watercolor paintings backed by gold leaf. Her objective is to make the natural thing iconic- to have a strong, important and beautiful presence. Her images are based on observation and knowledge, so behavior and habitat are included in the pictures. Illustrations can be done in lots of different techniques- paintings, drawings, photographs, collage. The main idea is to make the image important, and include details about the appearance, habitat and/or behavior.

A more extensive project would be to make a book of many images and spells.

“ONCE UPON A TIME, WORDS BEGAN TO VANISH FROM THE LANGUAGE OF CHILDREN. THEY DISAPPEARED SO QUIETLY THAT AT FIRST ALMOST NO ONE NOTICED—FADING AWAY LIKE WATER ON A STONE.”

-ROBERT MACFARLANE



SOURCES:

https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/assets/000/002/830/LOST_WORDS_Explorers-Guide_pages_original.pdf

Also: In October 2020 The Lost Spells, a sequel of sorts, will be published

<https://www.amazon.com/Lost-Spells-Robert-MacFarlane/dp/1487007795>

Share your work! Tag us on Instagram @railyardparkconservancy or email photos to izzy@railyardpark.org

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