

RESOURCE GUIDE

Literacy & Nature

JOHN
MUIR
AWARD

wild places:
DISCOVER
EXPLORE
CONSERVE
SHARE

otter

otter

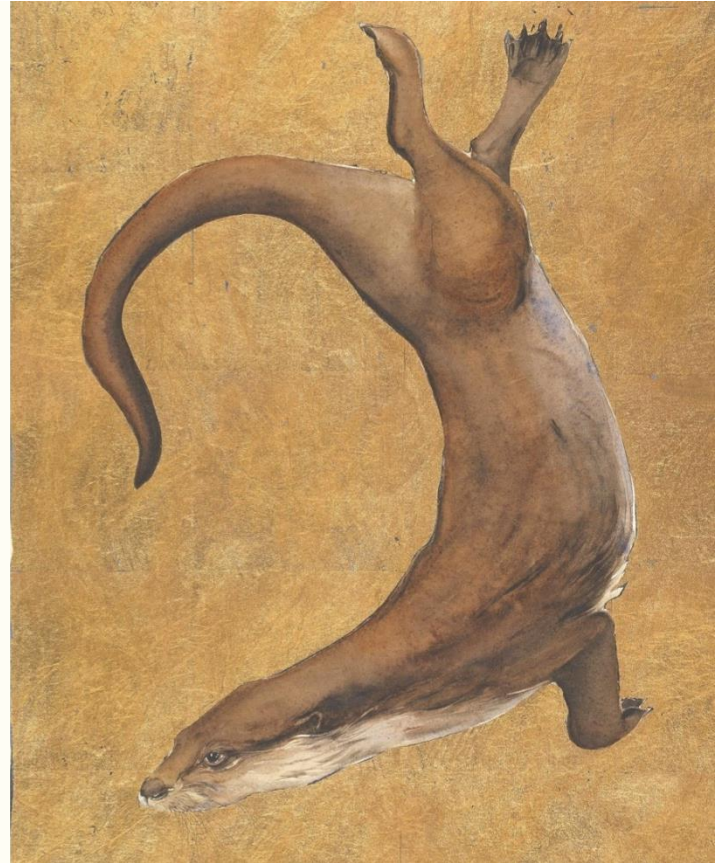
Otter enters river without falter – what a supple slider out of holt and into water!

This shape-shifter's a sheer breath-taker, a sure heart-stopper – but you'll only ever spot a shadow-flutter, bubble-skein, and never (almost never) actual otter.

This swift swimmer's a silver-miner – with trout its ore it bores each black pool deep and deeper, delves up-current steep and steeper, turns the water inside-out, then inside-outer.

Ever dreamed of being otter? That utter underwater thunderbolter, that shimmering twister?

Run to the riverbank, otter-dreamer, slip your skin and change your matter, pour your outer being into otter – and enter now as otter without falter into water.



©Robert Macfarlane & Jackie Morris, The Lost Words

"Language is written deeply and richly into our relationships with landscape and with nature: there as the place-names on our maps, and the many names of species, common and rare, with which we share our lives." Robert Macfarlane

What is Literacy?

Literacy is traditionally understood to be the ability to read and write. In practice, it's a far wider concept based on communication skills, including speaking and listening. The ability to use language effectively lies at the centre of development and expression of our emotions, our thinking, our learning, our wellbeing, and our sense of personal identity. Literacy skills are therefore of great social, emotional and economic importance to each individual as well as to society as a whole.

In an education context, literacy is recognised as a key foundation for learning. It's fundamental to all areas of formal learning as it often unlocks access to the wider curriculum. Being literate increases opportunities in all aspects of life, laying foundations for lifelong learning, employment and social interactions.

"Literacy is about loving life and expressing it in different ways." Juliet Robertson, Creative Star

Literacy, Nature, & the John Muir Award

Opportunities abound for reading and writing in wild places, whether in different locations or using a variety of natural media such as stones, sand, mud etc. The natural world offers inspiration and stimulation. It provides rich, multi-sensory experiences that can be a springboard for creative writing. Learning about the natural world (through Citizen Science activities, for example) can help build new vocabulary and knowledge. This real-life context helps information to be retained. From spending solo time in quiet reflective spaces to engaging in high impact adventurous activities as part of a group, there are opportunities to process and communicate thoughts and feelings.

Writing activities such as planning and reviewing, as well as personal reflections in journals, contributions to school displays, poetry and sharing online can all contribute to achieving a John Muir Award. Celebration events, guided tours of wild places, presentations at school assemblies or community events can help to develop vocabulary and confidence.

John Muir Award Record Books: available in English, Gaelic, Welsh and as an eBook. Participants can record their experiences - writing quotes, stories, songs, names of things, poetry...

Curriculum maps for **Scotland** and **England**: how literacy outcomes can be achieved through the John Muir Award across the curriculum.

John Muir Award Four Challenge Review: a tool to help participants reflect on their experiences.

John Muir, Earth-Planet, Universe graphic novel: based on Muir's life, produced by the Scottish Book Trust - download a free pdf and teachers notes

Larbert High School: a creative writing and values exercise by a whole school year group.

Creating Gaelic names for lichens: Citizen Science & literacy - giving new Gaelic names to lichens that had lost theirs captures the enthusiasm of Breadalbane Academy pupils.

Creativity, Nature and Mental Health: a collection of poems and reflections from Branching Out participants

Growing in the Outdoors: Linda Cracknell's blog on wild places and creative writing, featuring George Watson's College residential activity

Share what you do

By sharing your experiences you can show, inform, and inspire others about your wild places and your John Muir Award experiences.

John Muir shared his passion for wild places through speaking to people and writing books about wild places.

How you do this is up to you. Here are just a few ideas...

- Create an environmental sculpture or art from nature
- Make a display board
- Make a map of your place and what's there
- Make an information leaflet or poster
- Write a poem
- Take photographs
- Perform a play
- Create a website or blog
- Use social media, #JohnMuirAward
- Make music
- Paint or sketch
- Talk about the day around the campfire
- Do a 4 Challenge review
- Take friends on a nature trail or guided walk
- Host a school assembly

John Muir information page

Why was he inspiring?

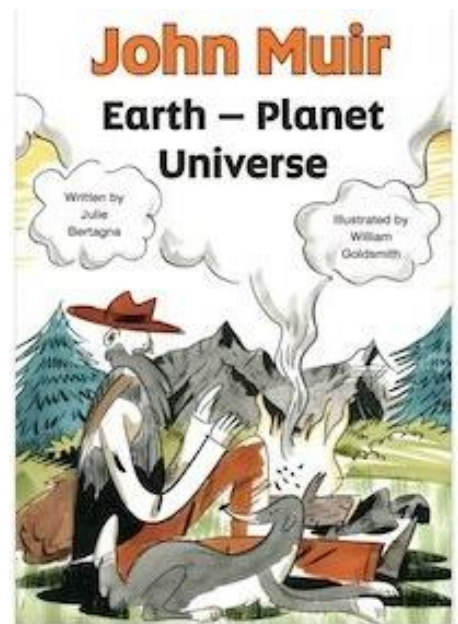
John Muir inspired lots of people because he was very determined to fight for what he believed in and got people to believe in and get people to help him and get them on his side.

John Muir believed that everyone needs and deserves nature in their life and he devoted his life to give that experience to other people. He was a very selfless and he only wanted what he believed was right and would help other people around the world.

Timeline

- 1814 John Muir is born
- 1849 moves to America
- 1854 eye injury from factory, blind for 112 days
- 1879 first trip to Alaska
- 1880 got married to Louie Stewart, gear on 2nd trip to Alaska
- 1890 Yosemite becomes national park
- 1892 makes Smoky club
- 1896 birth of Helen Muir
- 1903 saw Yosemite with President Roosevelt
- 1914 John Muir dies
- 1922 goes to university of Wisconsin
- 1954 eye injury from factory, blind for 112 days

Soft winds' rushing, hushing cry, sets branching fractures dancing in the ice grey sky. Poem extract, inspired by a visit to the wild places of Cairngorms.



“Here’s a question,’ the Geography teacher said. ‘How many words can we think of for the sound a burn makes?’ After five minutes we had captured some of the burn’s many moods and nuances in words: *Rattle roar slither bubble rumble splash clap tinkle lap... and so on.*”

Websites, Books & Teaching Notes

This is by no means an exhaustive list - just a starting point. Create your own! Many classroom-based literacy resources can be adapted for use outdoors. The resources listed below have a natural theme or are specifically adapted for the outdoors.

[Literacy & Nature](#) – Ideas, resources and examples of the John Muir Award in action

[‘I’m a Teacher Get Me Outside of Here’](#) Juliet Robertson’s excellent blog, with everything from ideas on writing, reading, talking and listening outdoors, to letter awareness, nature reference apps, Literacy blogs...See Index.

[Outdoor Learning Pack](#) The Woodland Trust Scotland’s pack for primary teachers with a literacy section.

[Developing Literacy Skills in the Outdoors](#) Natural Connections resource on storytelling.

[Learning on your Doorstep: Ideas for developing writing outdoors](#) 6 topics based on outdoor exploration with example lesson plans, resource lists and writing outcomes.

[Tree Stories](#) 12 trees with a story, one for each month of the year. Includes background facts on each tree and its folklore, plus an introduction to using storytelling for education.

[Putting Walks into Words](#) Linda Cracknell’s blog on using outdoor experiences to generate language and creativity with a sequence of steps from the inspiration of the outdoors to the production of a finished piece.

[John Muir Education Pack](#) Rural Connect Project – encourages a deeper understanding of John Muir’s writing.

[My Life with Nature](#) Joseph Cornell – a unique autobiography of John Muir told in his own words, brimming with spirit and adventure.

[The Lost Words](#) and [The Lost Spells](#), Robert Macfarlane & Jackie Morris - beautifully illustrated books capturing nature words that have been slipping out of common usage with children. A joyful celebration of nature words and the natural world they invoke. [Explorers Guides](#) with resources and ideas are available for each book. See also [Spell Songs](#) – a musical companion to the creatures, art and language of the books.

[The Lorax](#) Dr. Seuss - illustrated children's book offering sustainability messages.

[Skyhawk](#) Gill Lewis - teaching notes on book about caring for an osprey and taking responsibility for nature.

[The Wilderness Wars](#) Jane Green – an adventure story that celebrates the outdoors and the freedom to explore it.

[Wolf Brother’s Wildwoods](#) Designed to support teachers who are reading the novel Wolf Brother by Michelle Paver with their classes, including Curriculum for Excellence links and themed outdoor learning activities.

Visit & search websites such as [The Scottish Book Trust](#) and find [books, activities and resources to help you enjoy reading and writing outdoors](#).

[Literacy at school / at home outdoors](#) – Activities from East Ayrshire’s Learning Outdoors Support Team

Gaelic & Welsh

[Faclan Nàdair](#) - dictionary of Gaelic Nature Words.

[Gaelic Alphabet Poster](#) - illustrates the 18 letters of the Gaelic alphabet and how each letter relates to a tree.

[ABC Gaelic poem poster](#) & [English translation](#) - links tree names and the Gaelic alphabet through prose.

[Journeys through Walsh literary landscapes](#) – Famous Welsh writers and the places that inspired them

