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Experiencing and Sharing the Gift of Nature

Everywhere we see evidence of sin's effects on people and on Planet Earth. Surrounded by the threats of global climate change, terrorism, economic failure, and natural disasters, it can sometimes be hard to see evidence of God, evidence of good. But nature, though tainted by sin, contains hidden treasures the Creator designed for our benefit. In Chapter 6 of *Child Guidance*, Ellen White writes:

"As we observe the things of the natural world, we shall be enabled, under the guiding of the Holy Spirit, more fully to understand the lessons of God's Word.

... Children should be encouraged to search out in nature the objects that illustrate Bible teachings, and to trace in the Bible the similitudes drawn from nature. They should search out, both in nature and in Holy Writ, every object representing Christ, and those also that He employed in illustrating truth. Thus may they learn to see Him in tree and vine, in lily and rose, in sun and star. They may learn to hear His voice in the song of birds, in the sighing of the trees, in the rolling thunder, and in the music of the sea. And every object in nature will repeat to them His precious lessons" (pp. 45, 46).

Many barriers prevent people from realizing the spiritual, physical, and mental blessings God intended them to obtain by immersing themselves in His creation. It is hard for people to enjoy a sunset when they are hungry or sick, afraid of the natural world, or working long hours—or when the sunset is blotted out by pollution. In more developed countries, people don't go outside because they are "plugged in" to the very technologies (televisions, computers, and other electronic media) meant to free up time for *recreation*.

This edition of THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION reminds readers of the benefits of spending time in God's creation, and of the importance of integrating the natural world into the curriculum of Adventist schools.

Section I focuses on the reasons why we must connect our students (and ourselves) with nature, beginning with Rosemary Bailey's summary of research-based reasons for involving and educating students in natural settings. Tom Goodwin suggests ways to help students experience the intellectual stimulation, personal wonder, and transcendent joy that God's creation brings, and offers ideas to improve science teaching. Stephen Bauer discusses the theological lessons that can be gained from nature.

Section II presents practical suggestions for immersing students in nature while still meeting the requirements of the curriculum. Patricia Potts offers a model for planning outdoor learning activities. Kathryn Hickerson explains how creating a natural and creative space, called a schoolyard habitat, can promote nature education. Beverly Robinson-Rumble leaves the editor's chair to provide some useful resources to help teachers create a butterfly garden.

Nature education is not limited to the science classroom. Christy Yingling outlines a unit for a high school English class that derives its theme from nature. Laurel Dovich explores how to connect nature, faith, and learning in the engineering classroom. Keith Nelson reminds us of the usefulness of outdoor school in the Adventist curriculum. And finally, Tammie Burak summarizes key reasons for students to spend time outside and reminds readers of how simple and enjoyable that can be.

In preparing this issue, we have tried to solicit materials that will be relevant to teachers of different levels and disciplines, keeping in mind the diversity of students served by Adventist education. The results of nature education can extend far beyond the classroom, as students embrace a lifelong love of nature and ecological sensitivity, and are led to "worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water" (Revelation 14:7, NKJV). We hope that you will be inspired to teach and live differently as you experience and share the wonderful gift of nature.

Rosemary Bailey, Coordinator for this special issue on Nature, is a middle-school teacher at Ruth Murdoch Adventist School in Berrien Springs, Michigan. The editorial staff wish to express their thanks for her enthusiasm, perseverance, and assistance in preparing the issue.



Rosemary Bailey