

Writing the Land: Youth Write the Land
Edited by Lis McLoughlin, PhD

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Writing the Land: Youth Write the Land

Edited by Lis McLoughlin, PhD
with a foreword by Richard Louv

Published by
NatureCulture LLC
Northfield, MA

Foreword: Connection, Hope, and Wonderment

“Attention without feeling...is only a report,”

—Mary Oliver

A sense of *wonderment*. That is what children and youth often describe when they connect deeply with the natural world. But children seldom are asked to explore or describe the layers and meaning of that wonderment.

Writing the Land: Youth Write the Land, is a testament to the dedication of land trusts to not only preserve land, but to nurture children’s and young people’s connection to the natural world. Across the nation, ten trusts welcomed children and youths to attend poet workshops, to explore protected lands, and then to write about the experience. These poems are collaborative or written by individual children; some are illustrated with drawings or photography.

As I read these poems, I was moved by their eloquence, feeling, and urgency. Water falling “from the relieved clouds.” A rushing river brings the memory of a lost father. Yearning to become a leaf, and to be remembered “as the one that loved to leap.” Seeing “a frog take a dive, and all of a sudden, everything around me was alive!” Learning to see “when you take the time to look.” “Tasting pine needles” and smelling “vanilla bean and lavender ... like I have NEVER smelled.” These young poets express a surprising sense of mortality and recognition of the preciousness of other lives. “Dead trees falling from the sky.” “Mushrooms [...] destroyed, flattened,/Humans make mistakes.” “A tree would grasp the last of the light.” Being humbled yet not alone. “Even under a grave there’s life.” Winding trails waiting for, expecting “a lost walker.” And the “continuing, always continuing, heartbeat.”

Compassion for the Earth flows through these poems like wind sifting through pine needles. Ours is an era in which too many children grow up indoors, missing nature’s gifts, its benefits to mental and physical health, cognition and spirit. Too many children and young people are denied the chance to fall in love with the natural world.

Despair is easy, but hope abides. We see hope in the rising international movement to connect children from every background to the natural world. We see hope in the expanding number of nature-based preschools and green schoolyards, and in the many pediatricians who now prescribe time in nature and efforts across the nation to make our cities nature-rich.

We also see hope in international efforts to declare a child’s connection to nature a human right, and to recognize that nature has a right to be. In August 2023, sixteen young people won a landmark lawsuit against the state of Montana for encouraging fossil fuels without adequately considering the climate crisis — thereby violating all people’s constitutional rights to dignity, health and safety, and to a clean and healthful environment.

Right now, you hold hope in your hands. Hope and wonderment.

—Richard Low

*Author of Last Child in the Woods and
Co-founder of the Children & Nature Network
August 2023*

Preface: A Shared Vision to Lift Up Youth Voices

I have the great privilege of facilitating a national kids and land community of practice within the land conservation work in the United States. All of the land trusts included in this anthology have been active participants in a year-round leadership training hosted by the Feather River Land Trust and its Learning Landscapes program, designed to support each participant to grow high quality, enduring programs that connect kids to the land. These programs vary widely, but the values and commitment my friends and colleagues hold, are deeply shared. My heartfelt appreciation for their hard work and sharing this vision and mission.

When I first encountered Writing the Land, and the work of Lis McLoughlin and local poets, I knew that I wanted to work with her. I greatly appreciate her experience and vision of poetry and land. I appreciate her seeing the value in having young poets be the voice of a national anthology. And am grateful to the work of her various poets who used their voices to lift the voices of our youth.

This anthology honors children by welcoming their feelings, thoughts, and dreams as words claimed, written and spoken. Ten chapters. Each with a land trust, a youth-based program, a protected property, a local poet, a school, a teacher, and a group of kids. Rather than a single voice, the poets worked with an entire class of kids to help them to give voice to themselves and their home-land. Hundreds of children participated during the 2022-2023 school year. From primary grades to high school, children delved in and delivered their best.

The land and the littles are generally allowed small voices that cannot be heard above the din of the industrial, informational and ever accelerating world. What would the land say if it could speak? Children are closer to the source than we who loudly lead with age and experience. They are certainly closer to the ground. Their imagination intact. Their wonder wide open. Their hearts believing in the impossible.

It was 30 years ago, after a poetry reading by Gary Snyder that I determined to shift the course of my life toward kids and land. On that

evening in Truckee, California, Gary recited two poems that made a deep impression and left a trail that I follow still. From “For the Children” he admonished us to “stay together/learn the flowers/go light” From “For/From Lew Welch” he shared a dreamed visit of his late friend who had returned from death and admonished him to “ [...] teach the children about the cycles./The life cycles. All other cycles./That’s what it’s all about, and it’s all forgot.’ ”

And so this anthology is the remembered responsibility to kids and land, the stewardship of each and both. Following that poetry reading, I gave myself to the land through the children. My voice would be used to raise the voices of the mountain kids in my Sierra Nevada homeland. And I came also into the community of colleagues, friends and allies who are committed to the same place-based work throughout this nation. We do this work through local land trusts who believe in the conservation of local land, in perpetuity. That land will endure for all generations who follow us on the wheel of time. We who invite our local communities into a culture of connection and care, extend this vision of enduring relationship to children of this and future generations. Perpetuity, is simply forever. Some speak of the audacity of hope. Here we work for the audacity of eternity. The audacity of unending time, but also worthy cultural qualities to serve every child in every community we serve.

This is a nation worthy of such enduring ambition. It is the nation of Thoreau and Whitman and Muir. The nation of Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry, and Terry Tempest Williams. And most importantly as you will read, this is the nation of millions of children who are rarely, if ever, asked to share their voice and contribute their own verse. Each chapter honors a unique homeland and its youngest stewards. What do they say about this place where they live and learn? Please proceed and explore these places around the United States with our youth. You will discover in the pages that follow, a landscape alive with meaning, resilience, care, and hope. It is the world they inherit and a world they already inhabit.

—Rob Wade
Sierra Nevada
Upper Feather River Watershed
July 2023

WRITING THE LAND: YOUTH WRITE THE LAND
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Photo by Cate Woolner

KENNEBUNKPORT CONSERVATION TRUST

Maine



The Kennebunkport Conservation Trust (KCT) is dedicated to preserving land for use by current and future generations, and to managing properties in a way that reflects the natural and cultural heritage of Kennebunkport, Maine.

- Emmons Preserve
- Poet workshop leader: Kara Douglas
- Poets are members of the classes of Janet Wendle, Kristin Roper, and Erin Christopher at Kennebunkport Consolidated School
- Photos by Tess Johnson; Aerial photos by Isaac Schuschat

Kennebunkport Conservation Trust

The Kennebunkport Conservation Trust (KCT) is dedicated to preserving land for use by current and future generations, and to managing properties in a way that reflects the natural and cultural heritage of Kennebunkport, Maine.

KCT has conserved over 2,800 acres of land from development. While many of those acres are protected purely for the preservation of their ecosystems, numerous properties are open to the public for exploration and recreation. Visitors can explore our various preserves, a dozen islands including Goat Island Lighthouse, the historic Clem Clark Boathouse, as well as gather at our headquarters on Emmons Preserve for community events.

The Trust envisions a day where you can walk from the farthest corner of Kennebunkport's forests right down to the beach along conserved property. We strive to create a greenbelt, piecing together parcels of land bit by bit, year by year to protect for the use of our community now and in the future.



Kennebunkport Conservation Trust's "Trust in Education" Program

Since 2008, the Trust's program called "Trust in Education" has reached the youth in our community to give them a sense of place, love of nature, and knowledge of their surroundings and history. We provide field trips for the students of RSU21 in Kennebunkport, Kennebunk and Arundel, Maine.

In 2019, our programming touched every elementary school in the district, along with a Gulf of Maine Field Studies course in Kennebunk High School and at the University of New England. We work alongside teachers, principals, and superintendents to create programs that provide hands-on, nature-based education while meeting NGSS and other national standards. These half-day and full-day field trips get kids outside on Trust properties and thinking critically about the environments they see today compared to how they once were. While we have an environmental science focus, we love connecting science to history, reading, math, and English skills.

Each year, students from RSU21 adopt a different property at KCT. With visits throughout the school year, students connect with their local landscape while exploring the NGSS curriculum through hands-on, nature-based education. This program also introduces students to numerous community members, business owners, and other groups who come to volunteer each trip.

Trust in Education works alongside The Climate Initiative, founded by KCT's Director of Programs and Outreach Leia Lowery, to bring relevant climate education to students. Through this program, students take on local climate issues and engage with community members to create visible change.

Chickadee Singing
by Fiona Ingwersen

Blue sky
racing clouds
swaying trees
bobbing in the wind
chickadee
cardinal
crow
united as one singing winter to sleep
winter pushing against the sun
relentless
the sun, fighting back
making cattails sprout
and trees bud
the world is coming alive in the palm of the sun
and we are just the watchers.



A Heartbeat
by Francis Fairbanks

Chirping birds,swaying trees,flowing rivers.
Dirt paths,wet leaves,jagged gravestones.wood.branches.
A heartbeat.

Like a stone breaking down by the water.
Smaller and smaller.
Smoother and smoother.
A heartbeat.

Even under a grave there's life.
Living under the ground we walk on.
A life.
A Heartbeat.



The Spring Poem

by Malek Eid, Frida Valerdi, and Dominic

Birds chirping, wet grass, rough trees

Cold flowing water, A shining light

Mushy mud

The smooth flowing wind, moving the rough trees

Dead trees falling from the sky and laying on the ground

Sharp rocks shining in the light, sticky sap dripping from the trees

A smooth hand pushing the sun ready for spring

Kids exploring, teachers showing, marching through march, ready for April.



The Agnes S. Andreae Nature Preserve

The Agnes S. Andreae Nature Preserve and Andreae Cabin are named after Agnes S. Andreae, who donated the cabin and 27 acres of land to the Little Traverse Conservancy in 1983 so that the peaceful wilderness experience that it offers could be protected for future generations.

Today, the preserve's size has grown to 181 acres, and it lies adjacent to the 400-acre Boyd B. Banwell Nature Preserve. Combined the preserves offer nearly 5 miles of hiking. Set along the lower Pigeon River (a blue-ribbon trout stream), this preserve includes pine forests on steep bluffs above the river.



Out
by Maximus Capozzoli

When I go out
I smell
the scent of the pine.

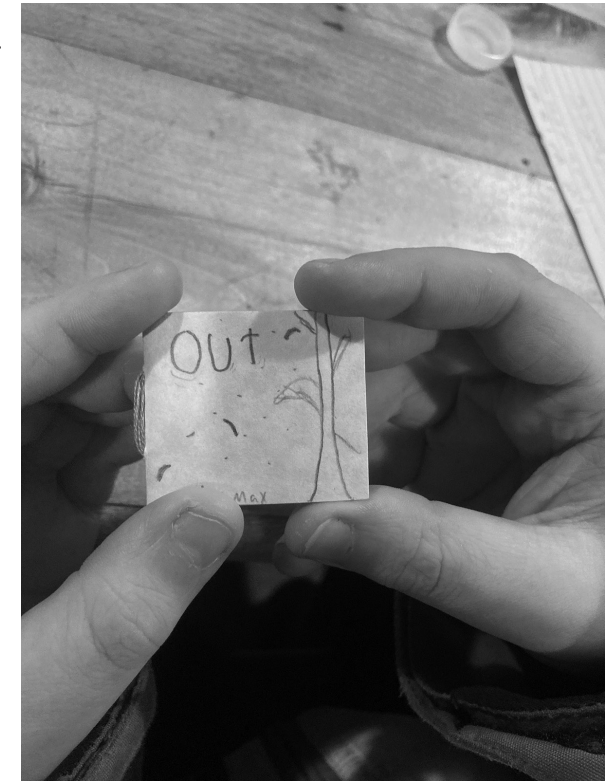
When I go out
I see
the water dancing
in the river.

When I go out
I see
the snow falling
on the cold hard ground.

When I go out
I see
tall sturdy trees
blowing in the wind.

When I go out
I see
the trees, kids,
The leaves falling
And playing
With their
best friend
the snow.

Out
what
a magical
place.
Where dreams
come true.



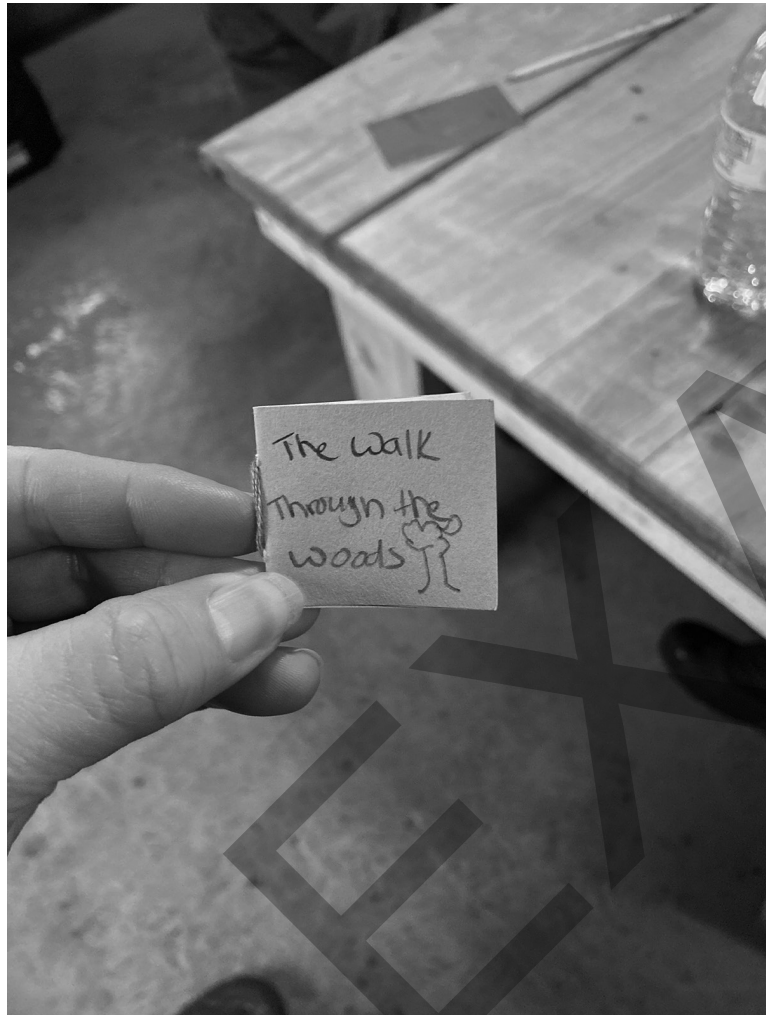
Amazing View
by Havana Previch

We hiked up the river
We went past a gate
Passed a lot of trees
There was the Amazing View
That was the
Amazing View



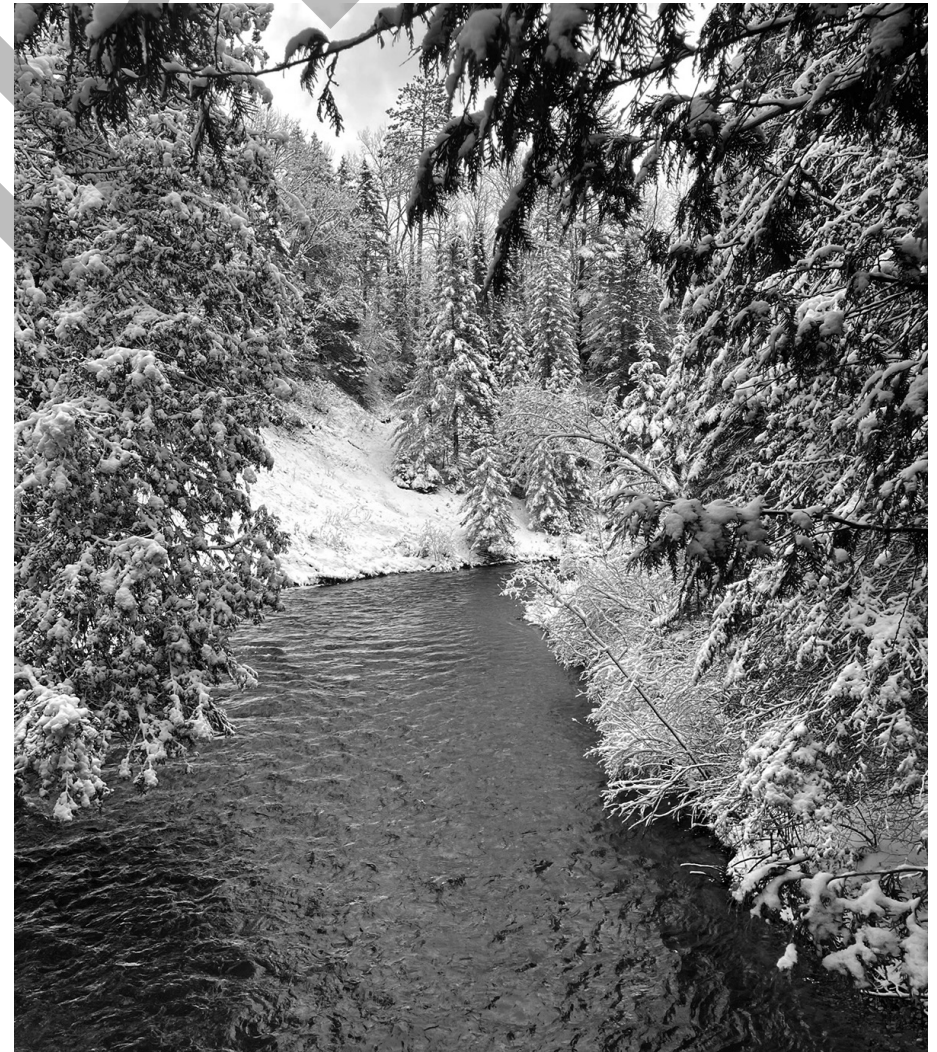
The Walk Through the Woods
by Kameron Furlong

Burnt lumber
I like the Lord
At first I thought the bridge
was going to break and then I knew it was ok.



The Amazing Hillside
by Katelyn T.

While I was on a walk I saw
the beautiful water stream with white snow around it
I saw the snowy trees all around
I walked along the long stairs
I heard the birds chirping
I saw some tiny animal tracks
I tried some pine needles that tasted okay



Lumber
by Liam McGarey

While the
pine trees
rest. The snow
build up heavily
the wind blows
loud and snow
falls.



The Trickling River
by Liam McGarey

As the river flows
the calmness
goes on and
stress goes just
relax and listen
and it will do
the rest.

The river
goes on the
trickling keeps
peace while
the birds
chirp. It relaxes
your brain
stress goes
you'll feel
refreshed
after.

Just relax let
the sound fill
your brain
let the wind the
crackle off wood
and the sound
of the river
fills the air
chirping relaxes
and you'll feel
good.



FEATHER RIVER LAND TRUST



California

The Feather River Land Trust conserves ecologically and culturally important lands and waters in the Feather River Watershed. From Mount Lassen in the north to Sierra Valley in the southeast, the Feather River Watershed spans 2.3 million acres. Even more biodiverse than Yellowstone or Yosemite national parks, the Feather River Watershed is a nationally recognized hotspot for wildlife conservation. The Feather River Watershed provides clean water for 27 million people downstream —for drinking, agriculture, and power.

- Leonhardt Ranch
- Poet workshop leader: Hayli Nicole
- Poets are members of Erica Perdue's class at Quincy High School
- Photos by Hayli Nicole (unless otherwise specified)

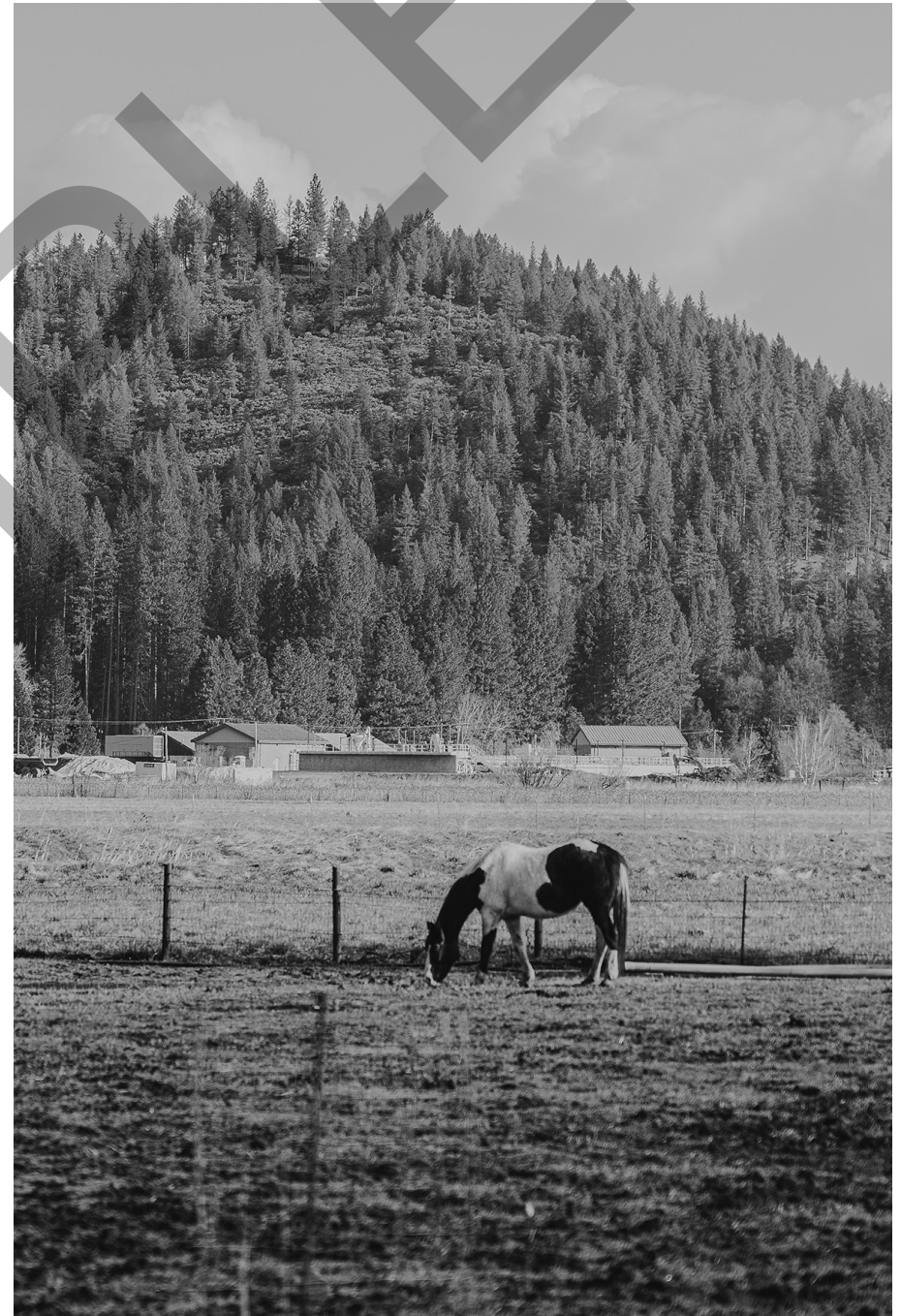
Leonhardt Ranch

The 46-acre property is centrally located in the town of Quincy and extends outdoor education and recreation options for the community. Located across the road from Quincy Jr/Sr High School and a short walk from Quincy Elementary, the Leonhardt Ranch provides a unique, living classroom for hands-on learning and stewardship experiences for Quincy children of all ages.

The land is in constant use by community members, teachers and their students, and the variety of diverse wildlife native to the area. An elevated levy trail follows Boyle Creek, a tributary to Spanish Creek and is a great example of a dynamic landscape. The preserve has wetlands, cattail ponds, willow stands, and big open fields with nearby forest, supporting a diversity of wildlife and birds. Species commonly spotted on the land are beavers, coyotes, frogs, trout, raptors, Sandhill Cranes, Red-winged Blackbirds, waterfowl, and unique songbirds like Bullock's Oriole and Yellow-breasted Chat.

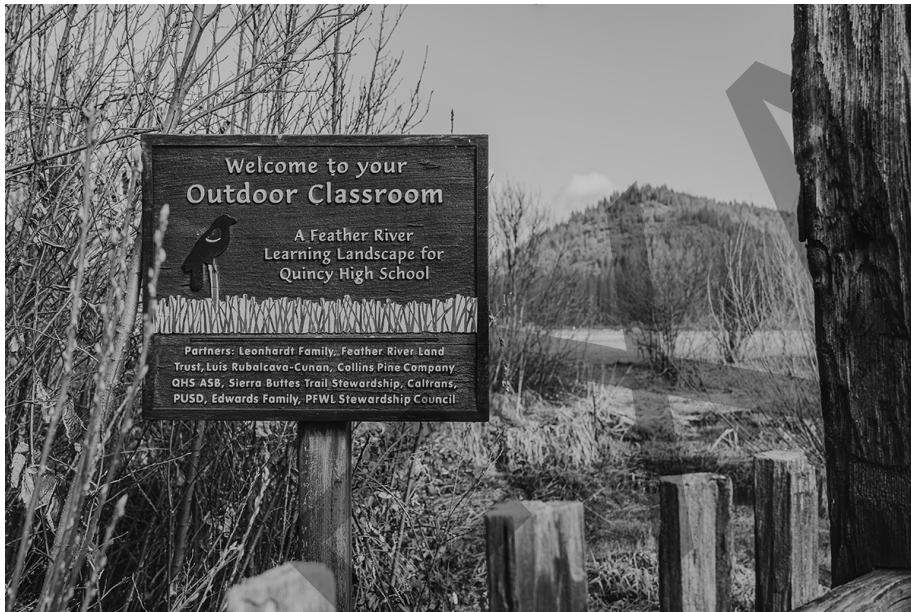
Some outdoor education activities that take place on the land include field journaling, nature observations, and stewardship opportunities. On the west entrance, a structure called Abby's Barn is home to many student projects, including a sign erected by Quincy High School students. The creek on the preserve allows students to take water samples or view wildlife activity and study them in science classes.

In spring of 2022, FRLT staff along with a SNAP AmeriCorps member mentored a local 12th grader completing a senior project at Leonhardt Ranch, training and practicing the use of game trail cameras for environmental science.



Winter Break
by Addison Gay

I go for a walk
Despite the bitter cold
I need a break
From the stress I hold
School
Sports
Work
The fresh air helps
The sun warms me
I need a release
In nature, I find my peace.



Seasons
by Avalynn McColm

Winter brings sorrow
Winter brings death
The cold air hurts my lungs as I take a deep breath
When it gets warmer
Spring arrives with the snow melt
As I look at the flowers I forget the feelings I once felt
Looking at the town I've known my whole life
Its beauty still sticks just like a knife
When summer comes everyone swims
We stay out on the grass as the light grows dim
Soon Fall will come and the leaves will crunch
The cool nights hit hard just like a punch
Soon you remember how you felt in the Winter
The feelings will stick and feel like a splinter
The geese leave in groups of five
The endless cycle will soon revive
Sometimes I feel like the end is near
But then I feel guilt
Because at least I am here.



Untitled
by L.C.

Nature is beautiful,
A place full of life.
Trees and flowers, carpets of clovers,
Underground roots connecting each other,
Reaching out far and touching the stars,
Everything is nature and nature is what you are.

THE ORANGE AND YELLOW LEAVES
by Stephanie

I see the orange and yellow leaves falling
people are walking
hearing the sound of the crunching
below their feet.
I pick one up,
It's the color of an apricot and lemon
It's ruff and fluffy just like a cloud.
I taste the leaves like fresh mint,
what do you think?
I smell the leaves like old oak.
How fresh it is that it's really great.
Where are the leaves?
They live in the Sierra Valley
in the fall season.



Dragon Tree on Sierra Buttes Trail

CHILDREN OF THE VALLEY*By Iain Watson*

Passing beneath
 the railroad tracks
 the surrounding hills subside,
 the flats of faint blonde grass
 neighbor the green pastures
 dry, thirsty and quiet.

Whispering remnants of
 the recent inferno
 circulate on the mountainside.

Trees kissed by copper and cardinal
 will soon enough undress
 and welcome Capricorn.

The crisp and chill air has
 chased away the final dog days
 while the cows uncaged and content
 dot the Sierra Valley.

I wonder what stories lie
 between the barb wire and barns-

this city boy will never
 comprehend rural life
 but will welcome
 the calm
 the complacent
 the simplicity.

To the children of the valley-
 continue to care
 and cultivate this land
 never forgetting to look up
 to the stars,

for they shine
 brighter for you
 than they do for me.



Rocks and Sky off of Sierra Buttes Trail

Workshop Leader-Poet Biographies

Suzanne Bruce holds a B.S. in Education and did graduate work in Behavior Disorders. She taught for over 17 years, and then began writing poetry. Suzanne's poetry is influenced by her years of teaching as well as her experiences as a military wife. Her poems have won several prizes and she has been published in numerous journals. Her books, *Voices Beyond the Canvas* (2007) and *Her Visions Her Voices* (2015), are ekphrastic duets with artist Janet Manalo. She is the current Poet Laureate for Fairfield, CA.

Kara Douglas is a yoga & meditation teacher in Harpswell, Maine. She seeks engagement with nature, where wilderness experiences become a mirror that reflects human complexity and intimacy with our deeper abilities to observe and act. Her work is published in several anthologies including: *Wait, Poems from the Pandemic, A Dangerous New World: Maine Voices on the Climate Crisis* and *From the Mountains to the Sea, The Historic Restoration of the Penobscot River*.

CMarie Fuhrman is a poet, nonfiction writer, educator, and future ancestor. CMarie is Associate Director of the Graduate Program in Creative Writing at Western Colorado University and directs the Elk River Writers Workshop. She lives with dogs and a fish biologist in West Central Idaho where she hikes, camps, and serves as Idaho's Writer in Resident. CMarieFuhrman.com

Lisa Hibl, PhD is the Director of the Russell Scholars Program at the University of Southern Maine. She teaches a variety of courses with an emphasis on arts and the environment. Her poems have appeared in *Black Fly Review, Hayden's Ferry Review, Hawaii Pacific Review, Untidy Candles: A Maine Poetry Anthology*, and the *Spoon River Anthology*, and she contributed a chapter to *River Voices: Perspectives on the Presumpscot* (North Country Press, 2020).

Susan Marsh lives in Jackson, Wyoming. She has combined her interests in poetry and natural science into a body of work that explores the relationship of humans to the wild. Her poems have appeared in journals including *Deep Wild Journal, Clerestory, Manzanita Review, Parks and Points, Dark Matter, Silver Birch* and others. Her poetry collection is *This Earth Has Been Too Generous* (Finishing Line Press, 2022).

Hayli Nicole is a performance poet and award-winning travel writer. Her years in conservation have inspired her international journeys, including studying orangutans in Sumatra. She believes there is always a story to be found, heard, cherished, and told. Her collection of poetry, *Emergence*, was released in November 2019. Instagram (@haylicans) or read what adventures she's up to next at haylinicole.com.

Margaret R. Saraco author of the poetry collection *If There Is No Wind* (Human Error Publishing), is a poet, short story writer, former public school math teacher and avid hiker. She has received Honorable Mentions in the Allen Ginsberg Poetry Contest and was nominated for a Pusheart Prize. Margaret enjoys leading writing workshops and helping to create community. Her second collection is due out in 2023. <https://linktr.ee/margaretsaraco>

Shanley Smith is a poet, storyteller, and budding naturalist. Born in West Michigan, she now calls North Carolina home. Her current work centers around fig trees, cold-nosed dogs, and the benefits of foraging. Shanley's work can be found in *Underground, Mangrove, Collision Literary Magazine*, and *Dimly Lit*. She currently works as the Storyteller & Engagement Liaison at Ox-Bow School of Art and Artists' Residency. You can read more of her writing by subscribing to *Mackerel Skies* on Substack.

Ellen M. Taylor is the author of one chapbook and three collections of poetry: *Humming to Snails, Floating, Compass Rose*, and *Homelands*. Her work has been in the *Café Review, New England Review*, and *North American Review*, among others. She holds a doctorate degree in language, literature, and culture, from Harvard University, and currently teaches literature and writing at the University of Maine at Augusta.

Iain Watson is a 5th generation Nevadan, a third grade teacher, part of the Reno Slam Team, and a founder and director of Spoken Views Collective (SVC), a platform for spoken word poetry and other forms of literary expression. Iain has collaborated with national poetry acts and helped organize a team for the National Poetry Slam and youth teams to Brave New Voices. Iain is a contributor to the Nevada Humanities Heart to Heart series and has been involved in Poetry Out Loud.

About the Editor

Lis McLoughlin holds a BS in Civil Engineering, an MEd in Education, and a PhD in Science and Technology Studies. She founded NatureCulture LLC a green, online media and events company through which she directs the Writing the Land project, and edits and publishes the Writing the Land anthologies, as well as other books. Lis organizes the annual online Authors and Artists Festival. She lives off-grid in Northfield, Massachusetts and part-time in Montréal, Québec.
www.nature-culture.net www.writingtheland.org

About the Foreword Author

Richard Louv is the author of 10 books: *Last Child in the Woods*, *Our Wild Calling*, *Vitamin N*, *The Nature Principle*, *The Web of Life*, *Fly Fishing for Sharks*, *America II*, *Childhood's Future*, *101 Things You Can Do For Our Children's Future*, and *FatherLove*. He co-founded, and is Chairman Emeritus of the Children & Nature Network. Among many other honors, in 2008 he was awarded the Audubon Medal. He is on the editorial board of *Ecopsychology*, and serves on the advisory boards of Biophilic Cities and the International Association of Nature Pedagogy.
www.richardlouv.com

About the Project Initiator and Preface Author

Rob Wade is a place-based educator working in the Upper Feather River region of California's northern Sierra Nevada since 1995. He is a founding board member of the Feather River Land Trust, and in 2004 launched Learning Landscapes a K-12 partnership between the Feather River Land Trust, regional schools, and 32 agencies and organizations that support teachers and over 2000 students annually. In 2017, with support from the Land Trust Alliance, Rob helped establish the national K-12 Community of Practice to support other land trusts to grow enduring and equitable programs for all.

Rob has a BS from the University of California-Berkeley in Conservation & Resource Studies and an MA from the School of Education at the University of San Francisco. Rob is the 2017 recipient of the Excellence in Environmental Education Award, presented by the California Environmental Education Foundation and a 2020 recipient of the Environmental Law Institute's National Wetland Award.