

# Memory and Pedagogy

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ROUTLEDGE 

### 3 Secrets of Play

## Child-Centred Spaces and the Literary Imagination

*Elizabeth N. Goodenough*

We could never have loved the earth so well if we had had no childhood in it.

—George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (1883, p. 40)

Our most memorable experiences occur when we leave our routines for places that attract us. Then, a need to name this kingdom of discovered space can spring into narrative. Like the circle of a flashlight on the printed page under the covers, this private spot illuminates and circumscribes peak moments. “The pursuit of reading,” Virginia Woolf wrote in *The Common Reader* (1925/1984), “is carried on by private people” (p. 1). Yet, talking about stories as portable solitudes is what teachers must do. My curiosity about how narratives portray attachment to place evolved in 1998 when students in “Earth-Centered Children in the Virtual Age”, a seminar at the University of Michigan Residential College, helped me organize a conference and exhibition on remembered forts and hideouts. From picture books to novels, literature is replete with such meaning-laden sites. Classics like Frances Hodgson Burnett’s (1911/1962) *The Secret Garden* and E. B. White’s (1952) *Charlotte’s Web* both centre on idyllic environments. Fantasies engendered by a locked garden or barnyard helped shape both writers’ core identities. Common insights children have in such locales are often the source of inspiration for works of art. Huck and Jim’s raft in Mark Twain’s (1884/1925) *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Faith Ringgold’s (1991) *Tar Beach*, for example, access this theme in widely varied artistic and literary contexts. Both specify an offbeat turf from which to watch a thunderstorm or the Brooklyn Bridge. These uncramped shoals encourage a boy and a girl to reflect on the violence of racism and the simplicity of shared being. Yet, the cultural realities behind how emergent identity is represented deserve careful critical analysis. The geography of where the young hang out, experiment, and imagine a future leads us to consider how childhood spaces have been shaped historically and rhetorically and how the nature inside children’s minds is being colonized as a last frontier.

Ethnobiologist E. O. Wilson (2003) states that the tendency of children to build hideaways is a “fundamental trait of human nature”, a hereditary “regularity in mental development that predisposes us to acquire certain preferences and to undertake practices of ultimate value in survival” (p. 109). When we urbanize and educate, we often ignore this trait—the need to find a nook to hide in or a niche of our own. Secret spaces inspire some children to become escape artists and heroic explorers in invented castles, pirate ships, and space odysseys; other children, growing up without a backyard or park, may camouflage themselves when home or school is too scary. Alone but safe, they find refuges from anxiety, havens in the storm. What happens when these places become harder to find or are located in the virtual realm? What can we learn from a child’s just-for-me place, hidden from others, and about changes made to these places later in life as they become adult ‘retreats’?

Thinking holistically about stories by, for, and about the young leads to a more nuanced political understanding of how all beings gravitate toward and inhabit spaces. Crossover stories read or heard in childhood induce us to become players in a narrative system that extends the range of truth-telling in autobiography. The invisibility cloak in the Harry Potter books, for example, recalls the traumatic backstory of J. R. R. Tolkien’s magic ring or the covert process by which Ralph Ellison (1952) wrote *Invisible Man*. Survival may necessitate not being seen: Frodo and Harry must disappear, as ring and cape allow them to do, and Ellison grounds himself in a haven of his writing. But the significance of something originated in childhood may only be realized in time and with age, as Gandalf exemplifies in the second chapter of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Tolkien claimed that his plot was only resolved when “Bilbo’s ring of mere invisibility became Frodo’s ring of power” (as cited in Heberle, 2008, p. 141). Cross-cultural differences in how we learn to make up stories or build secret spaces are actualized in such narratives. These texts may be used to advocate for children’s freedom to pursue their own dreams and handiwork. Or they may teach us, at any age, to save ourselves when we are the underdogs and are confronted by externally imposed conditions that dictate who we must become.

Power relations implicit in the terms ‘child’ and ‘adult’ took on new meanings as I edited the *Secret Spaces of Childhood* (2003) anthology. Roald Dahl’s advice to grown-ups—“get down on their knees for a week, in order to remember what it’s like to live in a world in which the people with all the power literally loom over you” (as cited in Talbot, 2005, para. 9)—resonated with Margaret Price’s (2003) discussion of ‘point of access’ in her essay “Negotiating Boundaries, Regenerating Ruins: The ‘Secret Spaces of Childhood’ Exhibition”. She emphasizes that magical and dangerous obstacles often impede crossing the threshold to a child’s secret space. From Katherine Paterson’s (1977) *Bridge to Terabithia* to C. S. Lewis’s (1950) *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Price (2003) states, “The entrance to a secret space is guarded, to protect the privacy and sometimes the fragility of what lies inside” (p. 139). In locating the “World-Famous

Watson Pet Hospital” behind the couch in *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*, Christopher Paul Curtis (1995) recounts his own childhood in ways that echo and elaborate on sites like Denver’s boxwood retreat in Toni Morrison’s (1987) *Beloved*. A hideout behind the couch allows Kenny to heal from trauma and allows his brother Byron, who is “officially a teenage juvenile delinquent” (Curtis, 1995, p. 2), to become brilliantly sensitive in his perceptions of self and others.

Compiling *Secret Spaces of Childhood* (2003) also led me to realize how ecologies of play have changed over generations. I saw parallels between children who hide in terror from adult predators and those who shun ready-made playhouses in favour of constructions more their own—whether in Playmobil civilizations, cyberspace, or music. If ‘secret’ is the special meaning children give to a place they own deeply, investments of their being can take many forms. Offerings of contributors showed me how song lyrics, self-portraits, brand names, language coinage, animals, and storytelling might be connected to totems of identity. From these odd bits, we become players in a vast narrative watershed that is fundamental to our sense of self. Verbal or musical enclosures, for example, woven from loose ingredients like a special place, persist in memory like love. In fact, as psychologist Susan Engel (2003) argues in *Secret Spaces of Childhood*, “the wild side” of tales invented by the young reflects “deeply internal ways of organizing experience . . . the process of telling as important to the child as the story itself” (p. 156). Engel elaborates as follows:

Narratives may form the psychological curtain between what is wild and private and what is orderly and public. Children often use narratives to create a boundary between the two. They also use narratives to cross that boundary. This boundary (the narrative curtain) is particularly potent because it is symbolic. This means that creating stories allows children to manipulate the connections between inner and outer, public and private. The child telling a story can actively negotiate the distinctions between what is revealed and what is concealed, between following the conventions of one’s culture and breaking those conventions. (p. 154)

## PLAY AND THE BUILDING OF IDENTITY

Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home—so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any map of the world.

—Eleanor Roosevelt, address to the United Nations, 1958

Not enough has been written about play as represented in art, both what is speakable in its representation and what escapes or defies vocalization.

William Blake, the first English picture-book artist, saw in pastoral frolic the interdependence of children and nature. The gnomic “Auguries of Innocence” (Blake, 1803) radicalizes this relationship by what he leaves unsaid. In *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1794/1986), the author engraved and watercoloured each plate by hand. Blake capitalized “Imagination”, a divine quality that originates inside us. As God’s handiwork, humanity enjoys interplay with that Vision. Blake’s words take root in the ground but dance up like flames. In such textual give and take, the apocalyptic potential of visionary states Blake called “Innocence” liberates us from preconceived notions. Encountering the world in play is less about imitating previous use of materials than it is about bringing given elements into new relationship with each other.

Representations of play—that until recently have been largely ignored—are neither trivial nor marginal. Such memories provide keys to an individual’s life story and express a universal behaviour that inaugurates learning. Authors who assert their own autonomy in communities or cultures with which they might be automatically ‘classed’ are reoriented from this perspective. Many strands of contemporary criticism converge in this thematic area since the entire enterprise deals with the quest to establish meaning. The aim of taking an interest in the arts of play because we take an interest in actual children is to open doors for understanding not available in other disciplines or lines of thought. Tales of remembered play matter; they can and should be bound up with the broader inquiry into childhood and education.

Books written on this subject have retained enchantment over many eras. My selection of works is based on the vibrancy that free play draws from its physical context. I’m curious about how joyful movement arouses emotion, exuberance enhances agency, and spatial memory defines the self. Through my selections, I’d like to suggest how early reading chimes with an outdoor learning and play manifesto—one that is relevant to the arts of citizenship, geography, and spiritual well-being. Stories point to embodied experiences children might recognize. Childhood books store these acts of memory in startling ways. As environmental autobiography, these works serve us like canned feeling. We can pry them open anytime. They take us back to the future.

From past decades and centuries come fresh words and stories, from quirky coinages to outrageous whoppers. These narratives cultivate an intuitive emotional life even as they express the ineffable and inchoate: the excitement of collecting booty or storing intimate attachments. For example, psychiatrist Kay Redfield Jamison (2009) recalls:

As a child, I had constructed worlds around me to contain my bubbling enthusiasm, to keep my dreams out of harm’s way and to set them in order. When very young, I had loved *Katy No-Pocket*, the story of a mother kangaroo who was born without a pouch. Her life changed in

every way when a construction worker gave her a carpenter's apron so that she could carry not only her own baby, but the babies of other animals as well. I was captivated by the idea of having masses of pockets of different shapes and sizes that could hold my ideas and projects. In my mind's eye, I filled them with notebooks and colored pencils, my kaleidoscope and a magnifying glass, books and vials and my rapidly expanding family of pet mice. (pp. 196–197)

In representing lost games, toy making, and the possession that comes from the hands (paws), stories like *Katy No-Pocket* inaugurate our search for authenticity. They recall unique but forgotten ways of shaping elements and inhabiting the world. Just as 'hide and seek' brings our bodies into synchrony with an environment, the quest for secret pockets reverses scale and expands a sense of place.

Children do not usually compose or publish books. Yet, the topic of how they learn has become more and more compelling as modern literature turns to how the young get their bearings and as brain science, linguistics, and cultural studies approach play and place making with more interest. Children act and speak from a realm as yet unappropriated by social and cultural intentionality. They often escape or defy social expectations regarding personhood. The preverbal child is thus on the margin of discourse. But a child is without language only for a short time, and then he or she begins to acquire speech that is constantly changing and becoming more complex. At every point, though, children's words and acts are less than fully informed by the social and verbal codes of adults. They are also still underrepresented in fiction written by adults. The child's lesser sophistication about language puts adult discourse into a new light; the child appropriates and reinterprets adult language and behavior in a way that instigates an insightful critique of society. As Virginia Woolf (1967) remarked of Lewis Carroll's Alice books, these are not "books for children; they are the only books in which we become children" (p. 254).

Writers and artists have sounded 'play' not simply in words but also through constructions of exchange, a give and take between individuals and social structures. In each case, the child's consciousness or sensate being is mediated by an adult voice or a bodily movement, fantasy, game, or refuge represented by pictorial image. Both the repertoire of utterance and the juxtaposition of visual and verbal text pose a series of questions that could profitably be explored by future research:

1. How have children's books interacted with other texts? Adult fiction has absorbed its conventions from juvenile literature in a variety of ways. As Naomi Sokoloff (1994) has shown in "Childhood Lost: Children in Holocaust Literature" (about David Grossman's [1989] *See Under—Love*), a little boy's mind develops through his reinterpretation of Arthur Conan Doyle's mysteries, fairy tales, boys' adventures,

Jewish legends, and biblical stories. The proliferation of writing about childhood in contemporary fiction enjoys a new understanding of the psychological power of early reading.

2. How has the memory of particular youth cultures preserved in adult productions influenced children's writers? William Blake's (1794/1986) *Songs of Innocence and Experience* inspired the sites (and sights) of Nancy Willard's (1981) *A Visit to William Blake's Inn* illustrated by Martin and Alice Provensen, a winner of both the Newbery and Caldecott awards. This interaction among books for children and adults and between generations (reading as a child and writing as an adult) is now established as an issue central to contemporary critical theory and cultural studies.

3. To what extent do children's books tell us more about forces at work in society than canonical texts? In the high literary texts, seeds of memory are sometimes forgotten or obscured. Scholars will be able to better understand the eccentric spaces or emphases of the dominant literature if they are more aware of children's books that developed alongside.

For example, Paula Fox's (1991) young adult novel *Monkey Island* looks back to Daniel Defoe to face the future. Clay Gerrity's dog-eared copy of *Robinson Crusoe* is an ironic totem of survival after first his father and then his pregnant mother abandon him in a welfare hotel. For 5 weeks, Clay lives on the street with two homeless men, one of whom remarks:

When I was young you could make up a life . . . a little work here or there . . . keep yourself decent . . . save a few dollars. If Robinson Crusoe was washed up on the shores of that island nowadays, he'd find a used car lot there, and before he could get a job sweeping the asphalt, he'd be asked for his papers, his degrees and his work background. (Fox, 1991, p. 62)

Reinhabiting Defoe's text, Fox offers an original reading of the forsaken island of 'growing up today'. Read alongside Fox's (2001) *Borrowed Finery*, an elliptical memoir of the author's abandonment by her cruel and feckless parents, *Monkey Island* shows how surprising relationships and copious invention, in the manner of Defoe, enable someone to redefine 'home'. The story of Fox's fictional 11-year-old in *Monkey Island* also raises the question of whether actual children, like the runaway in *Slake's Limbo* by Felice Holman (1974), will find safe domestic space in a subway cave or band together like Ninja Turtles in sewers. In today's juvenile genre of the urban homeless, kids aren't playing Robinson Crusoe in pristine environments. They are scrabbling to subsist in concrete deserts, in shelters, or in airport terminals as in Eve Bunting's (1991) *Fly Away Home* or Mark Harris's (2005) *Come the Morning*. These grim narratives dramatize the demise of

Horatio Alger ideology or what Mark Harris (1989) terms the “cheerful school of poverty” (pp. 11–12). For example, the “boxcar children” in Gertrude Chandler Warner’s (1924/1950) book of the same title have morphed quite literally into ‘box children’—sleeping on city streets in a cardboard box as in Gary Paulsen’s (1987) *The Crossing* or a wooden crate as in Libby Hathorn’s (1994) *Way Home*. In the latter, illustrator Gregory Rogers pictures Shane as he finds a no-name stray cat and takes it through the dangers of a city to his home in an alley. Like the feral child Victor, the Wild Boy of Aveyron, who captivated the European imagination in the 18th century, the drifting forager is our contemporary Crusoe à la Rousseau. At a time when growing inequity is dividing the ecology of the planet, such stories hypothesize the limits of the young, who may be our last sustainable resource.

Eve Bunting, on the other hand, portrays how nature seen by a child revives in the least hospitable settings. Illustrated by Ted Rand, her *Secret Place* (1996) suggests what causes children to gravitate to hidden locales, illuminating an underregarded universal of early life. The deep heart of life in this book resides amid city trash, noise, and convoluted highways. There, a boy discovers a tiny bit of wilderness: ducklings, in a river dark and shallow, swim secluded under the freeway.

Virginia Woolf’s early encounters with child-centred stories by James Barrie and Nathaniel Hawthorne shaped her best work. “The intense success of our life is, I think, that our treasure is hid away; or rather in such common things that nothing can touch it,” Woolf (1980) wrote in *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol. III: 1925–30* (p. 30). Stories and illustrations from childhood affect us anonymously, like buried jewels, but in ways, Woolf (1967) suggested, that are impossible to describe. Discussing Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Woolf (1967) defined a conception of childhood like her own:

To become a child is to be very literal: to find everything so strange that nothing is surprising; to be heartless, to be ruthless, yet to be so passionate that a snub or a shadow drapes the world in gloom. (p. 255)

Her writing illustrates how childhood stories transform over time and enable us to consider what has changed in actual spaces of growing up. I will look at the formation of identity and voice in the work of Virginia Woolf before turning to some pedagogical applications of memory, play, and place making. The work of this modernist writer may help us understand how children in our communities landscape the present by scanning surroundings they inherit as they seek to establish new territories for themselves.

The literary genius of Virginia Woolf matters not only because her novels portray the process of becoming in spatial images like ‘room’, ‘stream’, and ‘envelope’ but also because she played with memories in ways that forged her future. As I argued in *Infant Tongues: The Voice of the Child in*



*Literature* (1994), the silence of her fictional children stakes out enthralling moments in early life that go largely unobserved. She makes a point of not recording childish speech in order to imply the ultimate significance of what arouses the very young to wordless extremes of feeling. James Ramsay's request to go to the lighthouse is never recorded at the beginning of *To the Lighthouse* (Woolf, 1927/1955). Only his mother's reassuring words make it onto the page:

“Yes, of course, if it's fine tomorrow,” said Mrs. Ramsay. “But you'll have to be up with the lark,” she added.

To her son these words conveyed an extraordinary joy, as if it were settled, the expedition were bound to take place, and the wonder to which he had looked forward, for years and years it seemed, was, after a night's darkness and a day's sail, within touch. Since he belonged, even at the age of six, to that great clan which cannot keep feeling separate from that, but must let future prospects, with their joys and sorrows, cloud what is actually at hand, since to such people even in earliest childhood any turn in the wheel of sensation has the power to crystallize and transfix the moment upon which its gloom or radiance rests, James Ramsay, sitting on the floor cutting out pictures from the illustrated catalogue of the Army and Navy Stores, endowed the picture of a refrigerator, as his mother spoke, with heavenly bliss. It was fringed with joy. (Woolf, 1927/1955, p. 9)

James Ramsay's passion to go to the lighthouse motivates the action of the novel. Time ultimately fulfills the dream of a 6-year-old even as his quest is transformed into reality 10 years later. Yet, all Woolf's novels immerse children in such a rich mix of play behaviours that become central. When simple activities are described—making paper cutouts, building sand castles, catching butterflies, collecting shells, finding crabs, climbing rocks, playing games like tag and hide and seek, dressing up, mimicking others, and telling stories—enthusiasm, responsiveness, openness, inventiveness, passion, and freedom are released. By omitting what children say, her ellipses take on a vital narrative role. The speechless incipience of these characters highlights the invisible life of play. She spent her literary career devising strategies to communicate the inchoate, striving to create what Terence Hewitt in *The Voyage Out* (1915/1948) aspires to write: a novel about Silence or the things people don't say (Woolf, 1915/1948, p. 216).

Cocooned in their engrossing worlds, Woolf's child figures explore solo along the borders of her narrative, their intensities disaffiliated from the drama of adults who remain clueless about toddlers' epiphanies. The critical junctures at which these epiphanies occur—the ways in which secret play is situated and disclosed in her fiction—indicate the freshness of receptive, experimental consciousness. Imprinted by some life force, childhood

shocks endure forever. At the same time, the dulling of adults' perception, their conformist chatter, and their confinement in conventional roles emerge in relief. Artists like Lily Briscoe or the psychotic Septimus Smith, a shell-shocked veteran of World War I, share an affinity with Woolf's children as outsiders. These adults are driven to actualize their overabundant impressions—often in trying, traumatic, and even tragic ways. That such solitary men and women triumph at all is a tribute to their acuity. Heroically, they struggle to express themselves in pioneering imaginative acts.

The romantic pessimism of Woolf's view of maturation and her regret at never having children of her own were tempered by her playfulness after she found her own voice at the age of 40 in *Jacob's Room* (1959). With increasing self-confidence, she proclaimed a feminist agenda in *A Room of One's Own* (1929/1957). Yet, secret play never left her. In the only work she wrote specifically for children, *The Widow and the Parrot* (1988), the influence of Nathaniel Hawthorne is secluded in a way that hides the sources from which she developed her own iconoclasm. Although Leslie Stephen read Hawthorne aloud to his children, Woolf never mentions this American writer in her essays, letters, or memoirs. As I have argued elsewhere (Goodenough, 1999), formative experiences often escape registration for critical reasons. Yet 3 years before Woolf died, when she attempted to sum up the year 1938 in her diary, she questioned her lifelong preoccupation:

On the whole the art becomes absorbing—more? No, I think it's been absorbing ever since I was a little creature, scribbling a story in the manner of Hawthorne on the green plush sofa in the drawing room at St. Ives while the grown ups dined. (Woolf, 1953, p. 298)

At the age of 56, believing that humans themselves enact a drama of cosmic art, Woolf was notably less pessimistic about aging than Wordsworth in his "Ode: Intimations of Immortality From Recollections of Early Childhood" (1807/1884) or than Mrs. Ramsay, who laments that children must grow up and "lose it all" (Woolf, 1927/1955, p. 91). Celebrating acts of pretend and make-believe and assuming the supposal stance of 'what if?' in non-competitive modes, Woolf gained the finesse of having mastered her own vision. Stylistically a virtuoso, she allowed her imagination to expand and accelerate without specific goal or expectation. If play is "behavior that [is] freely chosen, personally motivated, and intrinsically directed" (Wilson, 2008, p. 11), Woolf practiced and represented this élan throughout her life. She was enamoured of youth for the tremendous promise its "fierce and potent spirit" (Woolf, 1919/1973, p. 127) engenders. Through her refusal to put the revelations of play into words, she recovered the marvellous secrecy children find inherent in life: "The words we seek hang close to the tree. We come at dawn and find them sweet beneath the leaf" (Woolf, 1927/1955, p. 93).

## PUTTING NARRATIVES TO WORK

Play has probably been the most important factor in the evolution of social behaviour . . . among vertebrates, and . . . probably also of the mental and spiritual life of humankind.

—Ashley Montagu, *Growing Young* (1981, p. 131)

Is art then basically glorified child's play? Artists like Woolf, Calder, and Picasso have espoused this notion, and so have many neuropsychologists, anthropologists, and play theorists. In questions of how to extend creative well-being throughout a lifetime, the study of childhood is where women's studies was a few decades ago. How can this movement in the academy call attention to literary art in education and turn societies to care about play in the natural world? Environmentalists, educators, policymakers, city planners, and architects need to learn from childhood studies—including the history of childhood and juvenile literature—in order to challenge some deep assumptions about what children are 'like'. Too often, as former youngsters, we believe we've been there, and merely relapse into regarding children as less complete versions of ourselves. "When adults seek to learn about and from children," Barrie Thorne (1987) tells us, "the challenge is to take the closely familiar and to render it strange" (p. 2). In this enterprise, secret play continues to hatch the world anew.

Developing the PBS documentary *Where Do the Children Play?* (White & Cook, 2008) and two anthologies, *A Place for Play: A Companion Volume to the Michigan Television Film "Where Do the Children Play?"* (Goodenough, 2008) and *Where Do the Children Play: A Study Guide to the Film* (Goodenough, 2010), suggested to me how film has revolutionized the domain of storytelling. As if around a campfire, groups gathered at screenings to experience media that were both sensuous and arousing. Around this shared moment, I have observed communities hatch new conceptions of their surroundings. Might a deeper understanding of the importance of play also change the physical world? The Michigan Television documentary, which won five Emmys, has sparked a national dialogue around how urban, suburban, and rural inhabitants apprehend the value and use of green spaces and the presence of other living things. Together, we have asked what settings cue spontaneity, exploration, and citizenship. How, we wonder, do children construct narratives in three dimensions?

Post-film action plans include collaborations of parents and schools with park staff, partnerships that ensure access to recreation for youth of all abilities (including those in hospitals), and the enrichment of neighbourhoods with public gardens. To reconnect children with nature, groups have instigated theatrical performances, applied juvenile literature to environmental education, and researched community building that documents cross-generational histories of play. Funding has been given to enable children to publish their work and create mini-documentaries about their special places.<sup>1</sup> Participatory planning (based on the Growing Up in Cities model<sup>2</sup>) can advance the

conversation so children will be heard through deliberative debate, action, and reflection. Young people are not simple receptacles but should be participants in developing their environments. The benefits of child-centred spaces in design communities can be seen in Kaplan's (1995) attention restoration theory. In this work, Kaplan lays out the restorative characteristics of nature: fascination, being away, and the extent and compatibility of environments for diverse activities. Such characteristics allow recovery from directed attention fatigue but also provide the ingredients for creative play.

Child fort and word play, adult memories of them, and the symbiosis between the two enable us to reach full stature. Laura Ingalls Wilder pays close attention in her stories to concrete details that unify these elements. As a young girl trained to describe things for her blind sister Mary, she created in words a shared space of special awareness; ordinary objects like a "boughten" broom trigger her handmade images (Wilder, 1937, p. 126). In the five senses of childhood resides this catalyst for artistic expression. Mark Erik Nielsen, whose artwork "Gathering Apples" appears on the cover of *Secret Spaces of Childhood*, hid in the hollow of a gigantic old apple tree. As children, Mark and his friend Kay told stories there about a time before flintlock rifles or even horse-drawn ploughs:

But our real interest was the magnetism of the beast's absent core, which could be peered into, if we stood on a chair, through one of three large holes left by long-gone limbs. . . . In this child-sized cave I remember the perfume of damp rot, the feeling of our beating hearts, the sound of bees and our breathing. Everything seemed right, like the shape and redness of an apple, where we belonged like the tiny hard seeds at the core. (Nielsen, 1998, n.p.)

With immense care for physical realities, artists like Nielsen alert us to perfection. Young eyes can help us see things grow or decay like a naturalist—up close, down low, not as background to something else but as our core and pith.

## NOTES

1. Examples of these mini-documentaries can be found at [www.wfum.org/childrenplay](http://www.wfum.org/childrenplay).
2. This is a UNESCO initiative. See [www.unesco.org/most/guic](http://www.unesco.org/most/guic)

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