

**Claudette: remember  
Where you come from, girl.  
Sometime in her life a bird  
needs to circle home.**

**Detroit, An American Autopsy  
Charlie LeDuff**



## **OLLEY OLLEY OXEN FREE**

BY ELIZABETH GOODENOUGH

In children's games the catchphrase "olley olley oxen free" invites those still hiding to come out without penalty, to touch home base. Hide and seek, kick the can, rounders, and all manners of tag scatter players. They run away, find hide-aways, whatever it takes to escape. But the universal goal of playground sport—the safety zone we called "gool" in 1960s Michigan—is to circle home. How well rules like these prepared us to find our place in the world. Like a bird flying within a smaller and smaller radius towards home, we fulfill our quest to nest.

Remembering where we came from—the "vast cathedral space of childhood" as Virginia Woolf called it—covers wild places close to home. It also inspired roads taken in the Fall 2012 course, "Reading and Writing Landscapes of Childhood: Play, Place and Personal Story". Originally entitled "Growing Up Near the Great Lakes", this seminar explored, as did British author Roger Deakin, "the undiscovered country of the nearby." In traveling ways to familiar spots, one traditional course follows a close reading of children's books. A newer approach enhanced by technology offers the audio walk.

To chart our route back to the wilderness of home, we combined both.

First we read picture and chapter books by Michigan children's authors and illustrators: *The Legend of Sleeping Bear Dunes* by Kathy-Jo Wargin and Gilbert van Frankenhuyzen, *Paddle to the Sea* by Holling C. Holling, *Copper-Toed Boots* by Marguerite DeAngeli, *To Keep the South Manitou Light* by Anna Egan Smucker, and *January's Sparrow* by Patricia Polacco. We observed 10-year-old Kenny, narrator of *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*, crawl behind the family couch for weeks after witnessing the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing. In the natural affiliation of remembrance, author Christopher Paul Curtis recalls that he had actually been hiding behind his family's couch in Flint, Michigan while his father and mother watched the TV news announcing the explosion. Until that moment this child had never seen his parents cry. These tears resemble what forest ecologists call a "buried seed pool." Scorched by fire, the private woods of early life challenge us to survive and even use trauma to create art.

Close reading of such moments raises the question of how home shapes identity. The genesis of site-driven plots led us to ponder what memory preserves, including relationships between the organic systems of storytelling and

walking. Our tracing of narrative patterns and mapping of childhood secret spaces culminated in each student composing an environmental autobiography to be shared in Readers' Theatre. But these stories could not be separated. In fact they braided together in unexpected ways with the guidance of Anja Bieri, a cultural geographer from Switzerland who lives

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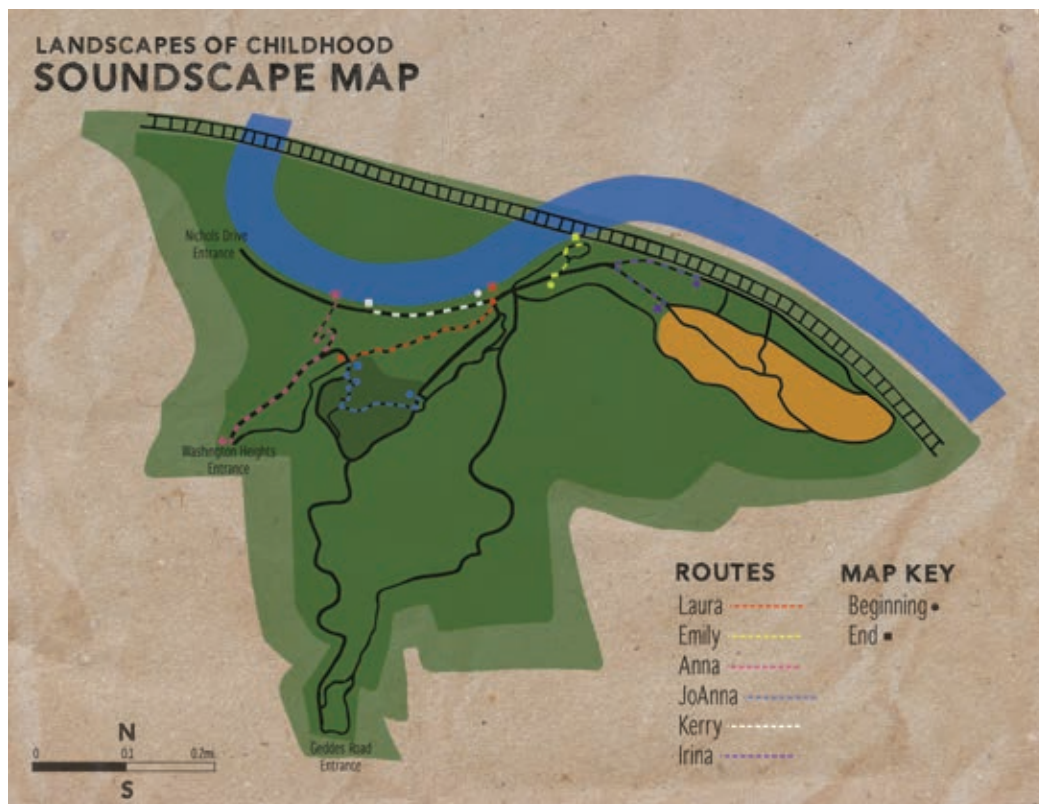
in Ann Arbor. In five workshops including three at Nichols Arboretum, we explored with Anja the cultural dimension of landscape through creating audio-walks—sound and voice compositions that guide the walking listener. Soundscapes open the personal and cultural imagination of both the maker and the receiver of the audio-walk. Students combined

embodied research, social science, aesthetic education, and new media, crossing the borders between art and theory. The production of digital audio walks (mapped below) helped us find paths back “home.”

By auditory imagining we traveled to Beaver Island with the blast of the ferry horn, returned to Romania with the clatter of an approaching and passing train, ordered coffee from a barista in the brandscape of Chicago, and heard mountain streams in Appalachia. Students mastered Garage Band, analyzed each others' audio-walks, and charted paths through remembered stories, both their own and those we read in class.

Thanks to an RC grant, in Fall 2013 we can make this work available to a wider audience by publishing online both acoustics and an interactive map, designed by Laura Amtower, graduate student at School of Art and Design, who enrolled in the course.

An exhibition on the first floor Gallery at Hatcher Library will showcase the project in Fall 2013. ■



Laura Amtower's map of Nichols Arboretum showing routes chosen by six students to compose their audiowalks, Fall 2012. Visit [landscapesofchildhood.wordpress.com](http://landscapesofchildhood.wordpress.com).