

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 otter 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

[Resource Guides](#) on: John Muir, Campaigning, Biodiversity, Wildlife Gardening, Surveys, Outdoor Access, National Parks, AONBs, Outdoor Learning, Sustainability.

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.

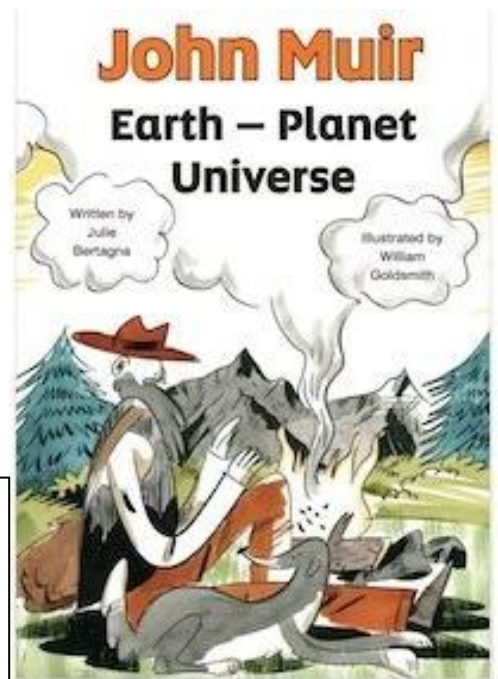
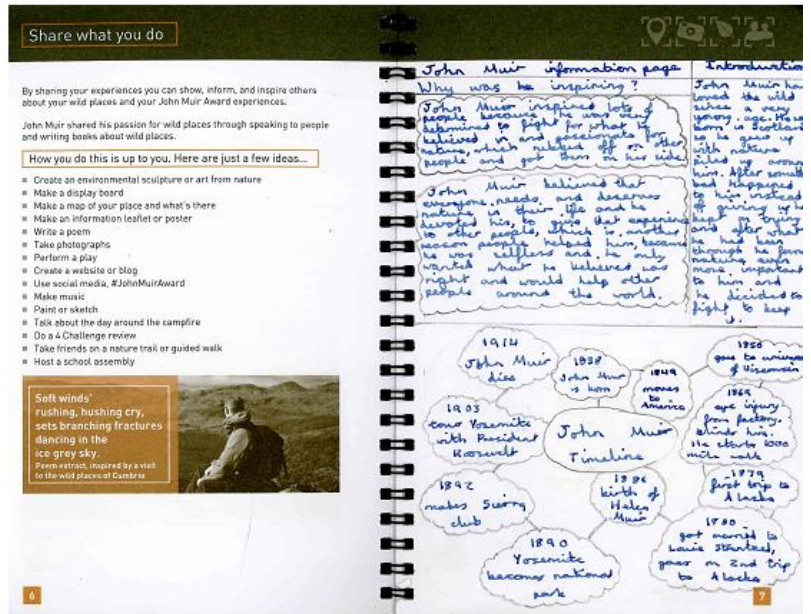
John Muir Graphic Novel: John Muir, Earth-Planet, Universe: based upon the life of John Muir and produced by the Scottish Book Trust – download a free pdf version and teachers notes.

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.

George Watson's College Residentials: Linda Cracknell's '[Growing in the Outdoors](#)' blog on wild places and creative writing:

“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.

['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.

[Dirty Teaching](#) A Beginner's Guide to Learning Outdoors, Juliet Roberson. Tips and tricks to help teachers to kick-start or further develop their outdoor practice.

[Literacy Ideas Outdoors with Curriculum for Excellence](#) Ideas for primary level, trialled by teachers.

[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.

[Biodiversity Stories](#) a collection of stories about (Scottish) nature and the way people see it.

[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.

[John Muir Graphic Novel: John Muir, Earth-Planet, Universe](#) Based upon the life of John Muir and produced by the Scottish Book Trust – download free pdf version and teachers notes.

[The Lost Words](#) Robert Macfarlane & Jackie Morris - a beautifully illustrated book 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.

[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.

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.

[Top 10 Welsh Writers](#) - inspired by Wales' Language and landscape.



Visit & search websites such as [The Scottish Book Trust](#) and find the likes of [10 Books of Scottish Nature Poetry](#), [12 Non-Fiction Books About Nature \(8-11\)](#), [10 Books on Natural History](#)

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