



# Chrysalis

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*In these opening years of the twenty-first century, as the human community experiences a rather difficult situation in its relation with the natural world, we might reflect that a fourfold wisdom is available to guide us into the future: the wisdom of indigenous peoples, the wisdom of women, the wisdom of the classical traditions, and the wisdom of science. We need to consider these wisdom traditions in terms of their distinctive functioning, in the historical periods of their florescence, and in their common support for the emerging age when humans will be a mutually enhancing presence on the Earth.<sup>1</sup>*

~ Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*

Dear Reader,

Since beginning our *Chrysalis* series devoted to this fourfold wisdom in the Spring of 2020, the immediacy of these four wisdoms has never been more apparent. Shortly after I began working on this issue devoted to the wisdom of indigenous peoples, Deb Haaland was confirmed as Secretary of the Interior, the first Native American Cabinet secretary in American history. A Laguna Pueblo, Haaland brings indigenous wisdom to our conversations about the fate of the Earth on the North American continent.

The wisdom of indigenous peoples is a pervasive presence in all of Thomas Berry's writings. In his essay, "The Historical Role of the American Indian," Thomas writes that C. G. Jung, in his psychotherapeutic sessions with American patients, found that a Native American image lived deeply within the American psyche.<sup>2</sup> As we know, the depth psychology of Jung unveiled psychic layers as the living past of the soul— a collective history of the soul's past and a portal of entry to the psychic history of the human being. In this psychic realm, the past lives in the present through layers of the depth of consciousness. It is significant, then, that indigenous wisdom, suppressed so long on the civilizational level, lives so deeply in the unconscious layers of the American psyche.

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999), 176.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1998), 188.



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Thomas speaks of the loss that occurs through a  
forgetting of indigenous wisdom:

*“If the earth does grow inhospitable toward human  
presence, it is primarily because we have lost our sense  
of courtesy toward the earth and its inhabitants, our  
sense of gratitude, our willingness to recognize the sacred  
character of habitat, our capacity for the awesome, for  
the numinous quality of every earthly reality. We have  
even forgotten our primordial capacity for language at  
the elementary level of song and dance, wherein we share  
our existence with the animals and with all natural  
phenomena. Witness how the Pueblo Indians of the Rio  
Grande enter into the eagle dance, the buffalo dance, and  
the deer dance, how the Navajo become intimate with the  
larger community through their dry-paintings and their  
chantway ceremonies, how the peoples of the Northwest  
express their identity through their totem animals, how the  
Hopi enter into communication with desert rattlesnakes in  
their ritual dances. This mutual presence finds expression  
also in poetry and in story form, especially in the trickster  
stories of the Plains Indians in which Coyote performs his  
never-ending magic. Such modes of presence to the living  
world we still carry deep within ourselves, beyond all the  
suppressions and even the antagonism imposed by our  
cultural traditions.”<sup>3</sup>*

This forgetting began when Europeans arrived  
on the shores of a land inhabited by the Original  
People – an arrival that embraced neither the sacred  
ways of the people nor the sacred nature of the  
land. Recognizing that Native Americans, the first  
Americans, lived a sacred relationship with the  
land, depth psychologist Robert Sardello observes  
that they “were/are one with the Soul of this  
land, are one with the Soul of America – before  
it was called America. We have to go here, try to  
follow its resonance deeper and deeper and deeper  
if we are to come to know how this reality can  
speak now.”<sup>4</sup> And he adds, “we are now entering the  
Shadow of America.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Ibid,2.

<sup>4</sup>Robert Sardello, *The Collected Notes of Integral Spiritual Psychology: Foundations  
for a Spirituality of the Future. Volume III, The Spiritual Earth* (Grandbury, TX:  
Goldenstone Press, 2020), 385.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 389.

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Speaking of the “predation” of European presence, Thomas Berry concurs: “The cultural commitments are so deep in the American soul, so imprinted in the unconscious depths of the culture, that until now it has not been possible to critique these areas of human endeavor in any effective manner. We saw ourselves as the envy of the ages, as relieved of superstition and in the highest realms of intellectual enlightenment...Yet after these past few centuries of European presence here, we begin to rethink our situation.”<sup>6</sup>

This is less a rethinking, than a re-imagining, or re-ensouling, of our situation. It is a re-imagining that begins with grieving for what we have lost and a depth awareness of the unconscious dimensions of our destructive actions toward both Native Americans and the Earth. It is particularly significant that this is a work on the soul level. Sardello writes that this “effort to get at the essence of what has occurred at the soul level of America has no intent to excite anger, nor does it attempt at producing guilt. It is more in the nature of uncovering forgetting.”<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, Thomas Berry calls to memory the words of Chief Seattle who spoke “with a profound insight into the enduring trauma being shaped in the psychic depths of the white man. ‘At night, when the streets of your cities and villages are silent and you think them deserted, they will throng with the returning hosts that once filled them and still love this beautiful land. The White Man will never be alone.’ These voices are there in the wind, in the unconscious depths of our minds. These voices are there not primarily to indict us for our cruelties, but to identify the distortions in our relations with the land and its inhabitants.”<sup>8</sup>

This call to “uncover forgetting” brings with it, first of all, support for the existence and integrity of Native American communities in America – support for land, support for the renewal and recovery of language and traditions, support for the “radical abandonment of the policy of assimilation,”<sup>9</sup> so that these cultures might flourish once again. The Kalliopeia Foundation, which has supported the Center for the last twelve years, has brought significant support to Native American initiatives in recent years. The importance of this support cannot be underestimated for, as Thomas Berry writes, “The destinies of the Indian are inseparable from the destinies of the American earth. As we deal with one, so will we deal with the other – and in the end so will we deal with ourselves. The fate of the continent, the fate of the Indian, and our own fate are finally identical. None can be saved except in and through the others.”<sup>10</sup>

On October 12, 2000, when we were first beginning our work with children, we brought Thomas Berry together with a group of educators and asked for his guidance. In his words to us that day, he aligned his own deepest experiences as a child with the wisdom of indigenous peoples:

*“The capacity of presence is so important. When I was eleven, we moved from one side of town to the borders of the other side of the town when Greensboro was 18,000 people. The destiny of the children and planet is going to depend on us to respond to their deeper mode of being. In 1926, just a few years before the Depression, we were building the new house and I went there and there was an incline down to the creek. I was a wanderer and a brooder. I was a solitary in a sense. I knew I couldn’t make it in a commercial world and survive. It was too unacceptable.*

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<sup>6</sup>Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, 46.

<sup>7</sup>Robert Sardello, *The Collected Notes*, 402.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 182.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 193.

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I would have died in some sense...A meadow was there. The grass was growing and the crickets were chirping...an extraordinary view of a meadow and the white lilies. It remained in my mind and it developed into a referent, like this place (gesturing at Timberlake Earth Sanctuary) could be to children. It became normative. Whether the woodland, the meadow, the creek, it was something very sublime. I think when a child sees a butterfly, there's some kind of ecstasy. The natural world is there to present the numinous aspect of existence. Once I was in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine where there was a meeting of people: Lame Deer, a Sioux Indian was there; Zen master Roshi, Edgar Mitchell and myself. We had a meeting on technology. The zen master and Edgar Mitchell argued that technology is indifferent, it is just how we use it. Lame Deer and I argued no. Lame Deer mentioned the Cathedral. As beautiful as all of this was, the Sioux needed the sky above to draw in everything from the four directions, above and below. You establish yourself with the universe before you do anything. Black Elk is a patron saint of mine. His vision was profound. He was ill as a child in a coma and a vision occurred. He came out of the coma and it was six years before he would speak to the medicine man of his vision. The culmination of the vision can be read to establish a community of what we are all about.<sup>11</sup>

This indigenous stream of wisdom, coming to us through Thomas Berry, has had a deep influence on the formation of our work for children. We contemplated our particular situation of offering programs to schoolchildren from a wide range of schools – religious, public and independent schools – within the beauty of a 165-acre earth sanctuary. We asked the question, “How might we create a context where qualities of indigenous wisdom might be awakened in the souls of contemporary schoolchildren?” This was not to be a “teaching about” indigenous wisdom, but rather a depth experience, mirroring Thomas Berry’s words to us: *The destiny of the children and planet is going to depend on us to respond to their deeper mode of being.*

A work began to unfold that called children together in the morning with Native American flute – a call to quiet the mind and to listen with the heart to the sounds of the Earth all around us. Our staff, through their own inner soul development, set a tone of gratitude and reverence at the beginning of each day. The work unfolded through practices, rather than cognitive content, that brought the children into moments of intimacy with the Earth. The work included ceremonies and rituals that moved us from a literal to an imaginal relationship with Earth. Silence supported this way of knowing. What we were bringing to life was poorly understood in a culture focused on environmental education as the transfer of information, but we persevered.

In this issue of *Chrysalis*, we begin with an adaptation of Thomas Berry’s poem, “The North American Continent” – a poem of atonement.

From there, we offer descriptions of the Center’s practices that speak to the souls of contemporary children and to the soul of America in a new wholeness of the human/earth/divine relationship. You will see here all the practicalities involved in creating a day with the children.

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<sup>11</sup>Thomas Berry, recorded in the transcript of “The Primordial Imperative: Nature, Education and Imagination,” a program sponsored by the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World at Timberlake Earth Sanctuary, October 12, 2000.

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Finally, we dedicate this issue of *Chrysalis* to Sandy Bisdee, who led our children's programs from 2005 to 2019. Sandy's deep knowledge of indigenous wisdom, her Native American flute playing, and her presence with living Earth, formed our practices and ways of being with all the Earth's children.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peggy Whalen-Levitt". The script is fluid and cursive, with a prominent flourish at the end of the name.

Peggy Whalen-Levitt,  
Director

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# The North American Continent

by

Thomas Berry<sup>1</sup>

In these opening years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century

...we reflect

in a moment of quiet, on our dwelling place

here on this continent.

...We come

to reflect on how, centuries ago,

we might have joined the community of life here,

we might have established an intimacy

with this continent in all its manifestations.

We might have seen this

as divinely blessed land to be revered

and dwelt in as a light and gracious presence.

We might have felt the divine in every breeze

that blew across the landscape, seen

in every flowering plant, wondered at

in every butterfly dancing

across a meadow in daylight,

in every firefly in the evening.

<sup>1</sup>The poem was adapted for a performance piece, "The Meadow Across the Creek: Words from Thomas Berry" (2014) and used with the kind permission of Margaret Berry.

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But if in the past we have not been sensitive  
to the deeper meaning of this continent,  
we come here today as pilgrims,...

Pilgrims, penitent, we bring with us  
the promise of dedicating ourselves  
to relieving the oppression  
we have imposed in the past  
and beginning a new era  
in our presence here today.

We begin to understand that the way  
to the world of the sacred is through  
the place of our dwelling.

We are finally awakening to the beauty of this land.  
We are finally accepting the discipline of this land.  
We are finally listening to the teaching of this land.  
We are finally absorbed in the delight of this land.

Today we begin to relieve an ancient wrong.  
We wish especially to restore to this continent  
its ancient joy. For while much of what  
we have done is beyond healing, there is  
a resilience throughout the land that only  
awaits its opportunity to flourish once again  
with something of its ancient splendor.

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So far as we are able, we wish to evoke  
these powers to their full expression  
so that the primordial liturgy of divine praise  
that once arose from this continent might again  
burst forth in a new brilliance of expression.

We are concerned for the children,  
the children of every living being  
on this continent, the children  
of the trees and grasses,  
the children of the wolf,  
the bear and the cougar,  
the children of the bluebird  
and the thrush and the great raptors  
that soar through the heavens,

the children of the salmon  
that begin and end their lives  
in the upper reaches  
of the Western rivers,  
the children, too, of human parents  
for all the children are born  
into a single sacred community.

It is increasingly clear that none  
of the children, nor any living being  
on this continent or throughout



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the entire planet has any integral future  
except in alliance with every  
other being that finds its home here.

... we come here as pilgrims to this continent  
to beg a blessing from its mountains and valleys  
and from all their inhabitants. We beg a blessing  
that will heal us of the responsibility  
for what we have done,  
a blessing that will give us the guidance  
and the healing that we need.

For we can never bring a healing  
to this continent until we are first  
blessed and first healed by this continent.

To make ourselves worthy of this blessing  
is the task to which we dedicate ourselves  
in these opening years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century,  
that all the children of Earth  
might walk serenely into the future  
as a single sacred community.

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# Being, Beholding and Belonging: Eco-Contemplative Practices for Children and Young Adults

## Introduction

*At the time I was eleven years old. My family was moving from a more settled part of a small southern town out to the edge of town where the new house was being built. The house, not yet finished, was situated on a slight incline. Down below was a small creek and there across the creek was a meadow. It was an early afternoon in late May when I first wandered down the incline, crossed the creek, and looked out over the scene. The field was covered with white lilies rising above the thick grass. A magic moment, this experience gave to my life something that seems to explain my thinking at a more profound level than almost any other experience I can remember. It was not only the lilies. It was the singing of crickets and the woodlands in the distance and the clouds in a clear sky . . .*

~ Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*

In this “moment of grace,” Thomas Berry entered an inner place of belonging where he was at one with the universe – a place that brings with it a knowing that life is meaningful and whole.

The Center’s programs are designed to provide today’s children and young adults with their own “Meadow Across the Creek” moments that can serve as touchstones for their lives.

Center programs are based in a threefold practice of Being, Beholding and Belonging:

Being: bringing ourselves into stillness, quieting the chatter of our own minds

Beholding: engaging in practices that bring us into relationship with the natural world

Belonging: feeling a sense of oneness with the source of our own being

Through these practices, a feeling of connection with all living things arises within the children. New eyes and ears awaken. The selfhood of the child comes into being within the creative heart of the universe. Words of peace make themselves heard. Seeds of service to the world are sown.

## Awakening to Nature: An Eco-contemplative Program for Children<sup>1</sup>

The Center’s “Awakening to Nature” programs are intended to foster reverence for the natural world, to develop the inner capacity to attend to the world around you, and to create a deep,

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<sup>1</sup> These programs were conducted from 2000-2019 at Timberlake Earth Sanctuary in Whitsett, NC. Our program descriptions are now offered as a gift to the world for others to adapt to their particular situations.

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personal connection with nature. The programs bring the inner lives of children into a new relationship with the beauty, wonder and intimacy of the natural world.

“Awakening to Nature” programs begin in a circle where children are invited to slow down and make themselves at home in nature. Guided earth walks follow, led by experienced Earth Guides, with groups of 8 eight children. The small size of the group and the “beholding” practices of the Center enable the children to enter into a living and loving relationship with the natural world. Throughout the changing seasons, children are invited to enter into silence and experience the fullness of each moment - to take in the sounds, the smells, the feel of the air, the colors and movements of the world around them.

Children then return to the circle where they enjoy a bag lunch together. The day ends with a heartwarming circle of reflection. The rhythm of the day enables the children to assimilate their experiences and to enter into community together as they share what touched them about the day.

## Inner Preparation of the Earth Guide

At the Center, we take great care in our approach to leading children into meaningful experiences with the natural world. Qualities of centeredness, loving attention, wonder, respect and reverence must be embodied by our Earth Guides before they can be imparted to the children.

Center Earth Guides complete our 2-year Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice program and then experience an Earth Guide apprenticeship that includes a consideration of the inner gesture of the Earth Guide, an introduction to the Center’s practices, an opportunity to practice the practices on the trails, and a review of the Rhythm of the Day for our Awakening to Nature Program. In the second phase of the apprenticeship, each new Earth Guide is given one or more opportunities to shadow an experienced Earth Guide before taking a group of children on an Earth Walk.

Throughout the year, the Director of Children’s Programs and our Earth Guides meet together after each Awakening to Nature program to share experiences from the day in order to deepen their understanding of all that is involved in bringing the child into being, beholding and belonging to the natural world.

It is also an expectation that our Earth Guides practice the practices in their daily lives between programs and find ways of making the practices their own so that they can be shared naturally with the group.

For public school programs, we all practice a way of working that speaks the language of love and communion, is not religious and does not alienate anyone. We keep careful notes after each program and refer to them before a repeat visit.

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## Preparing the Teachers

We make every effort to meet with teachers/schools/principals that are new before a program takes place. After our introductory meeting, we work with a combined approach of snail-mail, e-mail and phone calls to contact each teacher. Phone calls preceding each visit include going over the content of our acknowledgement letter and more: rhythm of the day, length of the program, waivers, clothing (we always have back-ups), snacks, adult chaperones (limited to 3), pre-arranged groups of children, name tags and questions about any special needs.

## Preparing the Adults That Join Us

We ask the adults to follow the children's natural curiosity, bring up the tail end of the group and be there for the slower walkers, help us model the practices, help us maintain a focus on the children's discoveries by refraining from everyday conversation on the earth walks and turn off their cell phones (we use ours for emergencies and program each others' numbers at the circle if needed). We ask the adults to take the time to be present with nature themselves and to support the children's sense of wonder.

## Inner Preparation on the Day of the Program

### The Drive to Work

On the way to work: no radio, notice the season of the year, the moon, the weather, the colors and the feeling of the day. Take this time to go through the rhythm of the day in our imaginations, section by section. Do we need a fire? Is it too cold to begin outdoors? What insect friends need protecting that day? (They will need a proper introduction!) What elements will be in the story that prepares the children for the Earth Walk? What names, dwellings, family relationships will be used in the story that will reflect the particular group of children? The story takes a form and a life of its own. What songs might be sung? What activities might we do after lunch?

### Before the Bus Comes

Check the benches and lunch tables in warm weather for webs, check supplies, sit-upons, water and cups ready, trash can, recycle can and compost bucket, nature table put in center of the round room near the bathroom.

### Moment of Shared Silence Before the Bus Comes

The Earth Guides stand together in silence and hold in trust that each child will receive what he or she needs today. Sometimes words are spoken, sometimes not.

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## Welcoming and Beginning

### The Arrival of the Bus

The Director of Children's Programs boards the bus and welcomes the children while the lunches are unloaded. Warm welcome, so good to see them again. Who is new? Welcome! You have all grown so much! Then, one of the Earth Guides boards the bus and drives over with them to the parking place. They walk quietly down a woodland path, back to the fire circle to surprise us! We adults pretend that we do not hear them coming until the very last second. A tone is set.

### Beginning the Day

Once everyone is seated the Director of Children's Programs welcomes them again and introduces our Earth Guides. Then she takes out her Native American flute and plays a welcoming song that she dedicates to everything that lives at the earth sanctuary, both seen and unseen, to them and to the sun, moon and stars. This may be a time for singing, if needed.

She notices how much they have changed and grown, and she might mention that she too has changed and grown in new ways. She asks them if the earth sanctuary is the same as it was the last time they came. She asks them what they remember from their last visit. This really helps the new students to feel more at ease.

Our beginning for newcomers is pretty much the same, except that we do not have the section of memories from past visits, and perhaps a little more time is included for addressing fears and for sharing the idea of a protected property and protecting all forms of life.

Then, our Director introduces the children to the idea of an earth sanctuary. It is a place where everything is safe and protected, including plants and insects. It is a place that will not be turned into a golf course or a housing development. Sanctuaries are found all over the world in all of the continents. She tells them that it is her job to protect everything and that she'll need their help. Will they help her? In conjunction with this subject we talk about what it means to be a guest. How does a guest behave in another's home? Respectfully. We are all guests in the earth sanctuary, including the Director. This is a time that children's fears bubble up and we look for every opportunity to address them. Daddy Long Legs. Moving webs carefully. Walking around ants. Modeling love and compassion at the fire circle.

We engage introductions to each other by introducing ourselves first and then one of our favorite animals (hopefully the teacher has remembered name tags!) We listen intently as each child speaks. There are no wrong answers. For older children, we ask them to tell a little bit about why they admire the animal they spoke about.

Snack and bathroom break (nature table inside by girl's bathroom) Please touch!

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Regroup at the fire circle, settle down and prepare for earth walks with a story or an opportunity for a group mini-experience of some of the practices.

Divide into 3 groups of about 8 children each and two adults. Trails are chosen. It is important to know your trail well beforehand. Who is the leader? The Earth Guide! We will be walking slowly, at nature's pace, and we are very interested in what you notice!

## The Earth Walk\*

### Being: Gathering Silence

The practices themselves bring the children into a more peaceful space that allows them to slow down, turn their attention outside of themselves and come into communion with life.

At the beginning of each earth walk we might gather together and center ourselves by feeling our feet rooted in the earth and becoming aware of the stars that are overhead. We take the time to breathe in and out with the trees. There is a sense of anticipation as we get ready to enter the canopy of forest. We invite the students to walk at nature's pace. We invite the students to walk with silence - to observe silence on the trails. We might ask the group why we walk with silence at the earth sanctuary. The answers serve as an inner guide that comes from the children themselves. If we feel that the word "silence" might be difficult for a particular group, we might simply ask the children to walk quietly and keep their voices down during the Earth Walk.

The Earth Guide role-models silence on the trails. We do not ignore the children when they speak with us, or tell them to be quiet. We might smile, nod, and direct our focus out. We might tell them that we'd love to hear their story later, at lunch. The pace is slow. Earth Guides are at the front.

There are many ways to gather silence on the walk. The practices, especially the listening practice, can bring this about. The stillness of our bodies as we do the practices together is very quieting. Non-verbal communication during the Trail of Beauty and Behold practice foster this peace and silence. Silent Walking between two sticks brings a rowdy group into a quieter space. There is a way of walking back to the Treehouse, in a silent spaced processional, that brings about a profound peace. The ritual of a solo Marsh Bridge crossing can bring students into a quiet space of Being, Beholding, Belonging.

Every group is different, as is every day. The experience of silence is of a different quality with grades K – 2 compared with grades 3 – 8. The natural sense of wonder, joy, mystery and curiosity

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\* We are indebted to Joseph Cornell for the seed thoughts for many of our practices, which we have adapted and made our own over many years with an eye always toward ways of working that cultivate soul capacities in the child.

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brings the children into a focused attention that brings them into periods of deep communion and moments of curiosity, wonder and joy. We strive to maintain a balance of attention to exuberance and quietude with the younger groups.

## Beholding: Deep Noticing, Trail of Beauty, Listening, Beholding

### Deep Noticing

One of the first practices that we present to the children during our Earth Walks is Deep Noticing. We stop along the trail and invite the children to stand very still and to notice the particular place that they are in. We ask them to start by noticing movement, any movement at all, both large and small, high and low. During this brief period of time, the sounds and the smells and the air come to greet us and the moment is enlarged. We might add noticing as many different colors as can be seen and later include shapes of tree trunks and bark. Depending on the age of the group, we invite them to silently count on their fingers as they discover new movements. When this practice is over, we might invite the children to share their Deep Noticing. Noisier and more active groups appreciate this. If the practice has brought silence to us, we continue our journey without a need for speaking at that time.

### Trail of Beauty

This practice is done with partners. We begin by modeling the practice to the children ahead of time during our circle time or on the trail, emphasizing non-verbal communication as a means of directing their partner's attention to something beautiful. It is important to designate a beginning and ending point on your trail and to space the couples out evenly as you begin, so they are not all bunched together and have space to explore. Each child leads his/her partner to something beautiful and the partner notices it deeply, acknowledges when they are done (with a thumbs up or sparkle in the eye!) and then they take turns.

### Listening

Find a place where everyone can sit down comfortably. This could be on the side of a bridge or on a leafy floor. If it is damp or wet, we bring sit mats. We begin by asking the children if anyone has a problem with closing their eyes for a few minutes. This can be hard for younger children, and if it is, we show them how to cover their eyes with their hands. We take out a watch and explain that we will be still as a rock while we are listening, and we practice being rocks for a moment. Then we explain that we will be still and listening for all of the sounds around us, near and far, loud and soft, for one or two whole minutes. When the time is up, they will hear a soft whistle, which signals them to open their eyes. We invite them to open their eyes slowly and softly and to let their sight rest upon the first thing that catches their attention. Once again, if the group needs a little help with focus, they are invited to count on their fingers as they hear each new sound. At the end of this practice we bathe in the silence as long as possible without rushing to break it or going on to the next thing. Sharing is a wonderful way to deepen the Listening Practice.

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## Beholding

We model this practice at circle time and/or during our Earth Walk. In pairs, one person closes her eyes and allows herself to be guided to something to behold. The guiding partner says “Behold!” when just the right subject is discovered and the blind partner opens her eyes and beholds deeply, noticing every detail. Then she closes her eyes and brings the image back into her mind’s/heart’s eye for as long as she can. When she is ready, she opens her eyes and beholds it again. What did she notice the second time? This practice has to be done in a safe location and adapted carefully to the age of your group. The language is carefully chosen for your intended age group.

## Belonging: Expanding Circles

Begin by selecting a site where you can see both close up and far into the distance. A pond or field is a good place to do this. Standing very still, imagine that you have a light in your heart (put your hands over your heart) that you can shine brightly whenever and wherever you want to. Tell the children that they will only see what their light is shining upon. Using a pond in this example, invite them to shine their light on everything between the Earth beneath their feet and the edge of the pond. Do they notice any movement? Then invite them to shine their lights brighter out across the pond. What do they notice? (They answer this silently inside, not out loud!) Their light then shines out farther to the canopy of trees surrounding the pond, on into the sky and then, right through the atmosphere of the earth and out into the universe! Imagine the planets and the stars and the comets and the beautiful galaxies! We tell them that their light meets the light of the stars. And then they are invited to come back to their center, the way that they left, back through the universe, through the atmosphere of earth, over the tops of the trees, across the surface of the pond and into the grass and back into the heart of the traveler. And they are reminded that the light is always there.

## Lunch Time

All three groups converge after the Earth Walk at the fire circle! We practice the poem of gratitude that we will say together before lunch before we sit down to eat.

After lunch we have free play by the dam. There is a lot of energy to run off. We might play animal games like Find Your Partner or Charades in groups. Adults tend to be tired at this time, so our attention is important to manage the group energy. It is important to offer a water source after recess.

## Ending Circle

Closing reflections are led either by the Director for the whole group or by each Earth Guide in smaller groups, depending on the age of the group. For the younger groups, the guide will recreate the earth walk to give the children some help in remembering something that was special for them. For the older groups, the Director will ask each child what was special for them.



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We end with an echo ritual with gestures. Each child is asked to speak a word that captures his or her experience of the day and to accompany that word with a gesture as it is spoken. For example, the word joy might be spoken while the child lifts her hands to the sky. Then, the whole group is invited to echo the word and gesture. When we have come full circle, we go back around with the gesture only, one by one around the circle with the whole group echoing back.

## Waving Goodbye

We stand together and wave and smile and sign I LOVE YOU as the bus pulls away.

## Clean Up

We clean the facility where our programs take place, leaving it as we found it.

## Looking Back on the Day

Our staff meets after every program to share their experiences of the practices and the responses from the children during the small group Earth Walk. This is very illuminating and gives us new ideas to explore and new language to help us in sharing this work with our diverse populations. We also share our perceptions of the adults' participation during the Earth Walks.

Our aim is to make ourselves deeply available to a sacred universe by offering loving attention to the natural world and bringing ourselves into the deeper Presence that surrounds us. Unlike many mindfulness practices in which "attention" is a goal in itself, in our practices the intention is "relationship" and "resonance". We behold the natural world in a deeply listening and receptive way. We behold with a loving eye and an open heart. Our practices might be viewed as "holding at bay" our habitual ways of "knowing about" and accumulating information. Through these practices we are awakening the unitive imagination, that more subtle faculty which unifies and moves us beyond the dualism of an I-It relationship with the world. We are discovering our own inner capacities to open to life in new ways. We are attuning ourselves to the soul of the world.

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## Eco-contemplative Arts & Rituals with Children

*“We are touched by what we touch, shaped by what we shape,  
enhanced by what we enhance.”*

~ Thomas Berry

Inspired by the vision of Thomas Berry, our summer programs for children have provided a unique opportunity for a small group of 12 children to make a deep personal connection to the natural world within the meadows, creeks, gardens and forests of a 165-acre earth sanctuary. Earth walks and creek walking are daily sources of joy and inspiration. Within the peace and beauty of an earth sanctuary, new eyes and ears awaken as the children create expressions out of their experiences with the earth. Mandalas, papermaking, nature journaling, universe flags and Native American flute are some of the eco-contemplative arts that enliven the rhythm of our days. Soul-centered rituals bring the children more deeply into a feeling of communion with each other and the natural world.

### **Contemplative Flute Music**

We begin our programs with music played on a Native American flute. The music sets a tone for the day and is intended to have a peaceful, relaxing and calming effect on the listeners. The music often gives people a chance to come into stillness, presence and to breathe more evenly. The music is not a performance and is always original, unless a particular song is sung. Any instrument, including the human voice can be substituted. The music is offered with a feeling of gratitude, love and appreciation for all of creation. It is dedicated to the sun, moon, earth, clouds, birds, trees, plants, stones and to all of the people who are with us on the day of the program. An image of this “communion of subjects” is held in the heart while the music is played. The musician does not have to be a professional to play this kind of music. The effect of the music comes from the intention and feeling in the heart of the musician.

Children are often very moved by this kind of music and spontaneously share their experiences with us. Some children begin to notice the world around them in concert with the music, like smoke swirling around a log from the fire and leaves dancing on the trees. Some children say that they have felt the presence of God while others say the birds are singing along with the flute. Some children have commented about hearing something ancient in the music. Starting programs in this way creates a space for deeper listening.

### **Nature Mandalas**

During our weeklong summer programs, we begin the day by creating mandalas. While one staff member greets families with a warm and welcoming presence as they arrive at the earth sanctuary treehouse, another staff member is sitting on the back porch waiting for each child to join her at a communal table.

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As the children arrive one by one, they see that she has already begun her nature mandala for the morning. She invites the children to begin their own mandalas in the silence and peace of the earth sanctuary. This is a natural silence, a comfortable silence, and a non self-conscious silence. Silence has a gentle way of entering into what we are doing and suspending time, while giving the children a chance to be in each other's presence. During the mandala creations, silence enlarges the moment as the children become aware of the natural world that enfolds them.

Our staff member shares with the children that she is creating a circular design, and that she has started at the center of the paper. As she creates the mandala, she slowly moves to the outside of the circle. She tells them that images, symbols, or shapes may take form in their minds as they are drawing and that when this happens to her, she tries to draw those images on the paper. She also shares that sometimes feelings may arise in their hearts, and that they can acknowledge them and then let them go. This gives the children the opportunity to create from their own inner knowing. Children are given the chance to let go of their own egos for a moment and enter into an eco-contemplative way of being in the natural world.

This process allows them the space to commune with their own inner sanctuaries and the sounds of the outer sanctuary. The sounds of the birds, frogs, crickets, and sometimes the breeze in the trees surround them. At times, there may be soft flute, sitar, guitar, kalimba, or dulcimer live music to accompany the natural sounds. The presence that the children feel in the earth sanctuary sustains the silence as they create their own authentic nature mandalas.

This process also allows the children to feel a sense of community with the other children in the group and the natural world through the language of imagination. It allows the seed of imagination to be born and nurtured. The children are given the space throughout the week to cultivate their own seeds of imagination. This can be continued and followed into the next morning if the children are still working and need extra time. Some of the children add found objects from the earth walks to their mandalas and glue them to the paper.

### **Papermaking and Journals**

Papermaking in our summer programs takes some preparation from the adults before the children start the process of making. It is ideal to have two adults setting up the screens, making the pulp, and getting materials organized.

Paper from the recycling bin is perfect for making pulp. Also paper from a shredder will work. The shredded paper is placed in a food processor or blender. Water is added and mixed until the paper turns to a pulp. The pulp is poured into a large flat container filled with water. Dried flowers are added to the mixture. Seeds can also be added and the paper can be planted to grow flowers or herbs at home.

The children take a screen and dip their screens into the pulp bath. The screens have wooden frames around them. Once they dip the screen down into the paper pulp, they bring it up and down again and again to get the right thickness. This process is intended to bring the children into the present

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moment and give children the freedom to go at nature's pace. It also allows children the opportunity to commune and form bonds with old and new friends while they are waiting to make paper.

Making the paper outside on the back porch, in the fresh air under a canopy of trees filled with frogs, butterflies and birds, brings us closer to the divine presence surrounding us. Bullfrogs, cricket frogs, wood frogs, and green frogs serenade us in intervals. Peace eagles (black vultures) glide in closer to get a better look. Blue lined skinks with reddish heads rest near our papermaking station. Joy permeates the air.

The water is then pressed out of the sheet of paper through several stages using wood blocks, felt, and a thick fiber paper. Then the paper is dried flat overnight. The next day the dried paper will become the cover of their journals. The children use recycled paper for the signatures, string and natural beads to bind their journals together. Some children take the paper home and enjoy looking at the paper as a work of art. Other children may want to press flower or herb seeds into the piece of paper while it is still wet and then make a card to give to someone special in their life so that he or she can plant it in a flowerpot or in a garden.

### **Universe Flags**

The idea for making universe flags came from our eco-contemplative artist, Marnie Weigel:

*My mother gave me these beautiful batik fabrics. I had no idea at the time what they would become. One day, I was at home creating and thinking of all kinds of ideas for the fabric. I started to think about flags around the world. I am particularly interested in prayer flags from Nepal. I love the idea that as they blow in the wind, they are sending prayers all around the world. I thought how wonderful it would be if children were given the chance to use their imagination and creativity to create a flag to celebrate the connection of their life with a magical moment in the natural world - a flag of gratitude for all life and creation and that is how the idea was born.*

*I thought of three very special moments in my life that I wanted to celebrate and honor. Over several weeks, I made three Universe Flags filled with meaningful symbols, shells, natural materials, and hand-made paper sewn to the batik fabric. I hand stitched the flag around a bamboo stick. Each flag represents a magical moment in my life that I have deep reverence for. All of these moments were connected to the natural world.*

*The first flag celebrated the wonderful Magical Garden at Timberlake Earth Sanctuary. The flag celebrated all the wonderful butterflies in the garden and a magical moment I experienced in the garden when I could hear the breeze beneath the wings of a butterfly flying over my head one morning.*

*The second flag honored the great and glorious ocean. I celebrated two special moments at the ocean with the moon and stars in the cosmos. I also celebrated all the seashells and each tiny life that lives in each one.*

*The third flag expressed my reverence and gratefulness for The Center for Education, Imagination, and the Natural World with a symbol of a spider web I created with vine and string. The web symbolizes life and our connection to all beings in the Universe. I remembered many magical moments noticing all the amazing spider webs at Timberlake Earth Sanctuary with the children in our day programs. There were iridescent, rainbow colors glistening in the web when the sunlight reflected off the web. A gentle breeze breathed through the web and created a*

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*delicate movement that suspended us in time. This moment allowed us to be in the present with our own breath and notice in amazement as the strength of the web changed and transformed into a living being. With deep noticing, we would see the beautiful spider that created her. There is also a beautiful stone sewn onto to the fabric that was the stone I chose on a day of gratitude for The Center for Education, Imagination, and the Natural World and for all that have come together to make the dream real in the world. I traveled with this stone for months before I was called to sew it onto the flag. It represented the stability and grounding that The Center for Education, Imagination, and the Natural World has nurtured inside my own heart.*

Each staff member makes a Universe Flag before the summer program begins. They bring their flags and share them with the children on the first day. After the staff members share the meaning and symbolism in their flags, the children are ready to get started on their own. Pinking shears, batik fabric of all colors, needles and thread, and an assortment of beads and natural materials are placed on the tables on the back porch to begin this communal creation with the natural world. We bring bamboo for them to sew their flags on and encourage them to find their own if they want to. One staff member plays guitar, sitar or a kalimba for us while the children work on creating their own flags. It is a two-and-a-half-day process, culminating in displaying the flags and then sharing them by hearing each child speak of the symbolism behind what he or she has created.

The act of creation can inspire related projects for the children. For example, one boy sewed two pairs of curtains for the Woodland Home, another boy sewed a quiver for hand sharpened arrows that he whittled, and other children created little “medicine bags” that were made out of small three-inch batik fabric circles tied at the top with string and filled with wishes, prayers, and feelings and other intangible substances. Some were filled with tobacco, lavender, flower petals, semi-precious stones, and tiny seashells. Tobacco is a traditional Native American offering symbolizing gratitude to the earth. They were ornately decorated with natural beads and worn around their necks or tied to their flags.

### **Secret Pals and Heart Words**

Secret Pals has been a favorite activity during our weeklong summer programs. For Secret Pals, each child chooses the name of a child or staff member in the group from a bowl during the morning circle time following the contemplative morning arts that begin each day. Each person is invited to observe her secret pal throughout the day and to notice some of the things that make that person special and unique. At the ending circle of the day, each child shares what she has learned about her secret pal, always with help from an earth guide if needed. Grade school age children love this ritual.

We discovered the Heart Words ritual for older children, ages 10 – 14, after being gifted with a bag of Hearthstones from the Sophia Center. Heart Words is a natural extension of our Secret Pals ritual that includes the natural world. The older children and adolescents choose a Heart Word and ponder how that word relates to nature and to humankind. At the end of the day, while we are gathered together for a closing circle, the children share some of the insights that have come to them throughout the day. Sometimes children get stuck, and other children chime in to give their perspective, which is always appreciated and generative. All of these rituals invite a kind of relational thinking and feeling with humankind and an invitation to extend that to the natural world. The

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Hearthstones contain 55 words etched on a natural heart-shaped clay piece: abundance, acceptance, awe, balance, beauty, believe, blessing, bliss, change, compassion, courage, delight, encourage, enjoy, excellence, faith, forgiveness, freedom, friendship, gentleness, grace, gratitude, healing, honesty, honor, hope, humor, imagine, integrity, joy, kindness, light, love, magic, Miracles Happen, openness, passion, patience, peace, play, power, praise, prosperity, recovery, respect, rest, serenity, strength, surrender, tenderness, transform, trust, welcome, wellness, willingness and wisdom. Sometimes questions arise as to the meaning of a word. If that is the case, the question of defining it is put to the group's wisdom. If there are still lingering questions, someone volunteers to look up the word when he/she gets home and to bring the definition back to the group the next day.

### **Mystery Bag Beholding**

We have a large collection of all kinds of found objects from the natural world. We select enough for a group of children to choose from and put them all inside a bag. Some of the things that might be chosen with eyes closed could be a dinosaur tooth, a spear point, the inner ear bone of a whale, a miniature loofa, a crystal, a sea horse, a bit of fur, a seed pod, a feather, a fossilized shark tooth, or a shell. The children choose something and hold it in their hands with their eyes closed as they describe what they feel. After a while, they might take a guess as to what it is and then they open their eyes and see what they have held. Sometimes they know what they are holding, and other times it is a complete mystery! Middle School students especially like this activity.

### **Wishing Rock**

Every landscape has special places that beckon to us to stop and stay awhile. We are always on the lookout for these kinds of places when we are sharing our practices with others. Timberlake Earth Sanctuary has a flat rock located right on the edge of a lake under an old Maple Tree. It was named the Wishing Rock a long time ago and there is a rustic sign in front of it. Hundreds and hundreds of children have made wishes there. This is one of the practices and places that gather silence. While one child is making a wish, the rest of the children wish that that child's wish will come true while they wait quietly for their turn. Wishes can be kept secret or spoken aloud. We are often touched by the spontaneous wishes for peace for people and for the earth.

### **Solo Walking and Processional Walking**

This simple way of walking, in silence and with some distance between the people as they walk in a single file line, is a beautiful way to lead up to something special like a Gratitude Circle in a remote location, or for following a special event like a ceremony or dedication. It can also be used for calming down a rowdy and boisterous group of children on an earth walk.

We have engaged in this kind of walking in a wide range of Center programs. One summer a small group of children created a shrine in a beautiful place in the earth sanctuary amidst three trees. They designed and decorated it over several days. They decided to dedicate it to many of the world's wisdom traditions. They named it "The Three Tree Shrine". It was designed so that each person, no matter what their spiritual path, could kneel in silence on a bed on dried flowers inside of the three trees. After the dedication ceremony that the young teens led was completed, we all left in silence on a processional walk back to the treehouse.



Sometimes during an “Awakening to Nature” program when we have an overly active group of school children, we find a place in the forest that has a bend in the path that the children cannot see beyond or a boardwalk whose end is not in view. The earth guide walks to the end point around the bend and waits as the children walk alone and in silence to where the earth guide is waiting for them. The supporting adult stays behind and taps each child when it is her turn for the solo walk. Those who have completed the walk sit quietly and wait for each person to make the journey.

**Gratitude Circle** (with or without a talking stick or stone)

Any time of the day is a good time for a gratitude circle! We infuse all of our days with gratitude for each other and for all of creation through thought, word and deed. We begin each day with flute music that expresses gratitude and look for opportunities all throughout the day to share our gratitude for all of life, including each other. A gratitude circle is as simple as it sounds. Sitting together in a circle, in the natural world, we take turns going around the circle and expressing something that we are grateful for. With older students in our summer programs, this sharing can go on for a long time.





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