



Letters to Nature Kids

February, 2024 ∞ Number 16
Love, Winter, and Groundhogs



Did the groundhog predict this (from February, 2021)?

Dear Nature Kids,

Here we are in February, deep in winter. Not that we are having snow and ice in my part of Texas, but the days are still short and sometimes cold. How about where you are? Does it feel like winter will keep going on and on, or is spring right around the corner?

That's what Groundhog Day is for, right? On February 2nd, people supposedly find out if the groundhog came out and saw its shadow. If it did see its shadow, winter will keep going for another six weeks. It's really just for fun – the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration says that the groundhog gets it right about 40% of the time, which is a little less accurate than just guessing.

Do we have groundhogs (big, furry rodents also known as woodchucks) in Texas? No, but you might find them in forested areas of eastern Oklahoma and most of Arkansas. From there the groundhog is found in

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much of the eastern U.S. and up into Canada. They can't predict when spring will arrive up there, either. Oh well, they might as well go back to hibernating. Like some other mammals, groundhogs hibernate in their burrows during winter, their bodily activities slowing down while they are curled up below ground.

As I'm writing, Groundhog Day has already passed, but Valentine's Day is next week. And in addition to Valentine's Day on February 14, we celebrate National Send a Card to a Friend Day on February 7. Well, maybe some people celebrated it – I didn't know about it, did you? Both traditions celebrate love, either the romantic kind or the friendship kind of love.

There are a lot of different loves, aren't there? There is the



*Does it count if this squirrel saw his shadow?
After all squirrels and groundhogs are in the same family*



I'm pretty sure these turtles saw their reflection—does that mean more winter?



Winter colors can be bold and bright (oak leaves on left) or subtle and beautiful (dock plant on right)

love of nature and wild places, including plants, animals, and places that have special meaning for us. I talk a lot about that love in these letters. And there is the love between parent and child, or married people, close friends, or others.

Love, in each of those forms, is one of the greatest things we can experience. It makes us care deeply about something outside of ourselves. We become more generous because of love. It leads us to try to understand someone or something, to see how someone else might feel about something. And, because love involves receiving as well as giving, we can feel understood and cared for by the other. When we love, we are more than just ourselves and better than we would be if we did not share love.

So I hope you will celebrate Valentine's Day, whether or not you give flowers or chocolate. Think about who and what you love. Let them know that they are important to you. And don't forget National Send a Card to a



Friend Day – the date may have already passed, but you can send a friendly note, a text, or a caring word any time. Let people know how you feel. It may make a big difference, to them and also to you.

And even if we have not met, I'd like you to know that I care about you, too. I'm sending hearts and I hope Valentines Day and all the other days are good ones.

✍ Michael



Happy Valentine's Day!

© 2024 by Michael Smith. **Letters to Nature Kids** is really a letter to anyone with a connection to nature, regardless of age. I know lots of adults who haven't lost touch with that child that they used to be—and Letters to Nature Kids is for them, too. You can download it from <https://livesinnature.com>. It is free, but your contribution in any amount is gratefully accepted (via www.PayPal.me/MSmithLPA). I welcome questions, suggestions and feedback. Please contact me at masmith.tx@gmail.com.