



Letters to Nature Kids



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Dear Nature Kids,

One of the great powers you and I have is imagination. When you use it, you can be somewhere else or be somebody else. You can create stories of things that might be, or things that will never be in real life. You can close your eyes and create a story using only what your brain can imagine, or you can look at what is around you and add to it with your imagination.



Tiny dragon? Really it's a young skink, seen in the Big Thicket of southeast Texas

I talked with the daughter of a good friend about what it is like for her to be among trees, grasses, and water. She told me about climbing trees and pretending to be in a secret fortress. Or she would go hiking with a friend and imagine that they were characters in their favorite books.

That sounds like another wonderful gift from nature, giving us exciting and beautiful places and letting us build amazing stories that include the insects, birds, trees, water, and fish that we find. Maybe I could imagine that the place where I am walking is miles from anywhere and I am exploring it for the first time. Or, with friends, pretending that the birds can understand everything we say and so we have to communicate with hand gestures.

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Or maybe sitting beside a stream somewhere, imagining that we are far away from the city and this is where we live, year-round.



"A stream, far away from the city." Actually Ten Mile Creek at Ladd Nature Preserve in Duncanville

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Sometimes we use imagination for a specific purpose. For example, if I was anxious, really stressed out and worried or afraid, I could picture myself in the safest, most peaceful place I could imagine. And I would fill in all the details, like whether it was warm or cool, what it would feel like to lay back on the ground, breathing slowly and deeply. Maybe I would picture a bird flying overhead or hear water flowing in a small stream. And so, my imagination would make a refuge for me where it would be easy to become calm and feel safer.



Easy to become calm and feel safe at LBJ National Grasslands in Wise County, Texas

Refuges like that really do exist, don't they? I hope that you have been able to spend some time in those places, or that you visit one in the future. I have been to prairies and meadows with soft green grasses and colorful flowers, with butterflies visiting each flower. And tall forests that enclose you in quiet, shady spaces. And also cool streams of clear water where groups of fish swim so gracefully that it seems like the easiest thing in the world.

You can take those places with you. You carry the memories of your time there, the things you saw and heard and felt. You can bring it back, just for the pleasure of remembering or for a few minutes of refuge on a



"Flowers as tall as a redwood." Actually a thistle flower



"It takes about a half a day to get there – if we travel by dragonfly"

difficult day. Just get as quiet as you can and bring each part back, thinking of how the air felt, how the ground supported you, what each thing looked like, what you heard, and even the smells of that day.

Or when you are in the forest, imagine being an elf. Or be a tiny version of yourself climbing a flower as tall as a redwood. Go wherever your imagination takes you.

It's not like I think that "real life" nature is not enough. Of course it is! I've written to you before about learning the natural history of real plants and

animals. I have talked about mindfulness, in which we purposefully stay in the present moment and experience things just as they are, without adding to it.

Scientific understanding, mindful experiences, and using our imagination in nature – each is different, and all are valuable gifts from nature.

☞ Michael



"Could you be an elf in this forest?" Buffalo National River Wilderness, Arkansas

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