



Nancy at Saguaro National Park in Tucson, Arizona.

Editor's Letter

When I was a child, my five siblings and I spent as much time outdoors as we could, roaming through the woods behind our house. Our father was a scoutmaster, and he made sure we could tell the difference between poisonous and non-poisonous snakes and identify different kinds of birds, plants, and trees.

Our mother made me a small canvas bag in which I used to carry my bird identification book, sketchbook, and pencil. Besides our play in the woods, we would also bring home all kinds of living things—tadpoles, minnows, injured birds, and the like. One of the first things I remember drawing from life was a Carolina wren that had a broken leg. (I also remember how sad I was that I couldn't save him.)

As I grew older and busier with other things, I spent less time outside and lost my focus on the natural world for a long time. When I started teaching elementary art again ten years ago, I found my way back to the world of nature, as I wanted my students to respond to its wonder as I had when I was a child.

Our school was surrounded on three sides by hayfields and we routinely encountered field mice, snakes, insects, migrating geese, and all

kinds of native birds, including my favorite Texas bird, the scissortail flycatcher. Once at midday, I even saw a big coyote lope past the cars in the teacher parking lot.

No matter where you live, you can encourage your students to respond to the natural world around them through art. You can introduce them to both historic and contemporary artists who express their own responses to nature through their art, from John James Audubon to Walton Ford and Beverly Doolittle.

Art can show your students how they are connected to nature's beauty and power through both scientific and fanciful investigations. They can explore, through art, their immediate surroundings and how they relate to the wild animals that live in the area, the natural habitats around them, and the weather and climate. Students can also expand their investigations to global issues concerning nature, ecology, conservation, and climate change.

Now that I have found my way back to nature, I feel like I am coming full circle. I hope you and your students can also find ways to respond to nature through art.

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