

## INTRODUCTION TO STORYWALKING

I began my Story Walking practice by creating an audio recording of stories, Fiddlesticks: Nature and Nonsense, in order to share Nature's magic with my students, their families and teachers. Scripted in the format of a children's radio hour, the CD presents three short stories about walking with Nature. I recorded my telling of the stories in collaboration with two other mothers, voice coach and audio producer, Donna Mac, and local musician and performing artist, Cathy Clasper-Torch.

As Cathy listened, through headphones, to the recording of my voice, she created background music with a variety of instruments. Donna recorded Cathy's compositions onto a second track and blended the two tracks together. Next, we invited three children to participate in the production. As we gathered in a circle in the grass in my front yard, Donna recorded their laughter to blend in as a third track.

The stories can be played on a CD player, on a car system or on a computer. They can be played before nap time or at bed time, to help children “wind down.” They can be played while getting ready to go out for a walk, to raise awareness of Nature's magic, or before meal time to spark a dinner table conversation.

When Fiddlesticks was complete, I presented the audio project to my Business Master Mind group for peer feedback. One mom objected to the fact that the stories alluded to God, which did not fit with her beliefs. This gave me pause. The context in which I mention God is one of *spiritual inquiry* as opposed to *religious belief*. Most people I know embrace a faith tradition of one kind or another as a connection to Spirit.

I myself am open to different expressions of Spirit, even as I continue to examine the faith in which I was raised - Christianity. I have been most strongly influenced by a spiritual movement called *Unity*, which defines itself as “a positive path for spiritual living that provides practical teachings to help people discover and live their spiritual purpose and potential.” As I explore instances of spiritual guidance in my life, I embrace the full variety of forms in which that guidance may come, including chance encounters with new people and ideas or even a message that might arrive through some creative inspiration provided by Nature. Over time, this guidance led me to working with children, and the stories I record are intended to prompt thinking about Nature and Spirit, as well as about individual and collective spirituality.

I have often wondered how one can bring spiritual inquiry into a public school classroom without offending those with differing religious beliefs. In an article published in Berkeley University's *Greater Good Magazine*, “*The Case for Discussing Spirituality in Schools*,” Vicki Zakrzewski states the following:

“Many consider the sole purpose of schools to be cognitive development. Yet, any effective teacher will tell you that every student is a 'whole package' of thoughts, emotions, beliefs, family, culture, economics, etc., (and now, potentially, spirituality)—all of which directly influence a student’s learning. For example, science has clearly determined that a child’s social and emotional skills impact academic success.

So here comes the tricky question: If spirituality is indeed a universal developmental process, how do teachers account for this process in their classroom where separation of church and state is paramount?"

One way to incorporate spiritual inquiry into the classroom is to provide experiences of awe for students through stories, art, music and nature. The first story on the Fiddlesticks CD, *Just Bee*, is that kind of story. An individual mp3 of the story can be downloaded off the Program page of the [storywalking.com](http://storywalking.com) website.

**Stories spark thought.** After listening to the story once, an adult might initiate the process of thought with an open-ended question. I provide a few questions in this guide. For example, "Is there a mysterious creative power behind the creation of this story, *Just Bee*, and what might we call that power? People have many names for it, including Creator, Great Sky Spirit, God, Goddess, Mother Earth, Nature or simply Imagination. What do you think and why?" This kind of inquiry opens young hearts and minds to the many possibilities of spiritual expression, which in turn leads to cross-cultural understanding and a greater curiosity about Nature.

**Music and art promote non-verbal expression.** Playing the story a second time, adults can direct the focus toward the music. The fiddle accompaniment in the background expresses the action and mood of the story, as well as the voices of the bee *and* the spider. I suggest adults and children sit together and do line drawings that express the music they are hearing and then compare their drawings.

**Repetition helps develop literacy.** Playing the now familiar story a third time, adults can guide a child's eyes through the printed text provided on the next three pages. Running a finger along beneath the words, as the story is read aloud, shows young children how the printed word and the spoken are connected. I suggest adults challenge children to hunt for the letter b's hidden in the text and underline them. Just **b**. Then sitting side by side, the adult and the child can read the words with the b's, aloud and together, and emphasize the sound the b's make. Letter forms, letter sounds and letter-sound combinations form a code that children learn to decipher over time, with lots of practice.

**JUST BEE**  
**by Wendy Fachon**

Ouch! My toe...

I am walking the beach and do not see the big rock.

I trip on the big rock and stub my poor little toe.

Owwwch!

I hobble back to the bath house.

I ask for some ice. The ice is cold. It numbs the pain though.

Still, my foot swells. It gets bigger. My sandal doesn't fit on my foot.

So, we leave the beach and drive back to Grumpa's house.

I sit in the car, and I think.

I think about work.... about how busy work is... about how it feels to be stuck on a hamster wheel... Going... going... going... and not able to slow down... and get off.

That is what happens to grownups... We get so busy and do not take the time we need to rest...

I wonder... Did God put that rock there to stop me from walking the beach?

We arrive back at Grumpa's house, and I am told to rest and put my leg up... elevate it...

because that will help me heal... I look for a place to rest... Grumpa's hammock is the perfect place to rest.

So, I grab a magazine to read. I hobble out to the yard. I find the hammock waiting for me under the shade of the old oak tree.

I settle into the hammock so that my foot is up high. As soon as I open the magazine, though, something strange happens...

A bee buzzes in and bites my eye lid. Not a sting, mind you. A bite. Ouch!

Then it bites my other eye lid. Not a sting. Another bite.

When I tell it to go away, it bites my lip.

“Owwwch!” I cry. “Stop that!”

I jump out of the hammock. I bend low to the ground. I look around. Where is that bee?

Hmmm, did God send that bee to stop me from reading?

The bee is nowhere to be seen. In my hand I hold a stick though. Where did that come from?

I must have picked it up without thinking. I must have picked it up to defend myself.

I look at the stick. It has spider webbing. The sticky threads run in the same direction as the length of the stick. The threads run from one nubbin down to another nubbin. WOW!

It looks like a fiddlestick... You know, a fiddlestick is a bow used to play a fiddle, or a violin... How curious...

I straighten up to inspect the stick... A tiny spider hangs in the “V” of a small branching nubbin at the lower end of the stick.

Hmmm, did God send that spider to fiddle around with me?

Or was it Mother Nature perhaps?

I look at the spider... Nonsense!

Just then, the bee comes back in a dive bomb and plunges its stinger right into my bad foot.

OWWWWCH! “Fiddlesticks!” I cry.

I bend back down and pluck the bee away from my foot. I pull the bee away from my skin and sticky goo stretches between the bee and the sting wound. A startling, strange, and sticky situation all the way around.

That bee certainly got its point across. "Wendy, stop reading. Close your eyes. Shut your mouth. Stay off your feet. Just beeee! It's Sunday. (sigh) Rest."

So I lie in the hammock, just resting... swinging... floating... thinking about the rock, the bee and the fiddlestick...

I close my eyes knowing, just knowing, that Our Great Mother Nature went to an awful lot of trouble to get me to take a nap... and to just be. (sigh)

Three days after my encounter with the bee, I came upon a new word **apitherapy**, which means the *treatment of physical ailments using bee products*. Honey is one of the oldest medicines, with a history dating back over 5,000 years. Raw honey is proven to be antibacterial, antiviral, soothing and healing. And, bee venom can be administered to alleviate symptoms of arthritis and reduce inflammation of body tissue. The main compound in the venom, **mellitin**, is a polypeptide containing 62 amino acids. It causes the membranes of cells with excess water to burst, thus relieving swelling. ***It is important to note, however that people with severe allergic reactions to bees should avoid exposure to bee stings and should keep an EpiPen® on hand.***

I got to wondering about the bee that stung me, right where I needed help reducing my inflamed injury, and how it first approached me. Could a bee be that smart? Below are more questions to spark meaningful conversation after listening to the story.

What can happen when a person gets *too* busy?

What can happen when a person moves too quickly?

What does it mean to “just be”?

When bad things happen, are there lessons to be learned?

What lessons were taught in *Just Bee*, besides “Watch where you are walking!”?

Can you tell your own story about a bee or a trip to the doctor?

*Personal stories can be written down on paper or captured on a voice recorder.*

Does your story teach a lesson?

Bees provide medicine. How else do bees help people? *Local libraries provide all kinds of books about bees.*

The more I learn about bees, the more in awe I become. I have since developed experiential curriculum modules about these brilliant little creatures. They play a critical role in the world of Nature. Both honey bees and wild bees are essential to the sustainability of humanity, yet their survival is under threat.

One of the most impactful ways to learn about this issue is to arrange a field trip to a local apiary or to invite a local beekeeper to bring a portable observation hive into a school. I host a radio show, the Story Walking Radio Hour on [dreamvisions7radio.com](http://dreamvisions7radio.com), where I have interviewed a beekeeper. Parents and teachers can learn more about pollinator science and education by downloading my “Saving the Bees” podcast at [tinyurl.com/StorywalkingArchives](http://tinyurl.com/StorywalkingArchives).

**CURRICULUM OVERVIEW**  
**THE CASE OF THE VANISHING BEES**  
**Enhancing Environmental Literacy with Experiential Activity**

Have the students imagine they are crime investigators. They are being given an important assignment. There is a problem: Bees are vanishing. This is a threat to the human species. We need to find out who or what is causing this, why this is critical for our own survival, and how to stop it.

Stories spark thought. Each lesson centers around an illustrated book. Before reading from the book, ask students what they might expect based on the title.

Ask students to listen for answers to a key investigative question. Give them notebooks and pencils to take notes. Award points for good answers. Provide magnifying glasses for outdoor observational activities.

Write the key investigative question and the vocabulary words on a black board or white board, and introduce the first vocabulary word on the list before reading the book. Review the other vocabulary words after the reading. Use words and definitions to guide the discussion.

Follow-up discussion questions are provided to help students think through the problem.

Write students' answers to the key question on the board.

Suggestions are provided for hands-on investigative activities, including outdoor walking field trips.

## **Sample Lesson - Environmentalism**

### Rachel Carson and Her Book That Changed the World

by Laurie Lawlor; illustrated by Laura Beingessner

*Leading question:* Based on the title, what do you think this story is about?

*Listen for information to answer this key question:* How can a book change the world?

*Vocabulary Words:*

**environmentalism:** taking action to protect nature and its surroundings

**biologist:** a scientist who studies plant and animal life

**insecticides:** chemicals used to kill insects

**herbicides:** chemicals that kill weeds

**investigate:** study the facts to figure out the truth

*Follow Up Questions – Think it Through:*

What animals and topics did Rachel Carson investigate and write about?

What is the connection between the spraying of chemical insecticides and herbicides and the decline in bee populations?

How did Rachel Carson's book change the world?

The Epilogue describes what happened after the publication of Silent Spring. Who was unhappy about the book? Why?

### Silent Spring

by Rachel Carson

(teachers and teaching assistants prepare by reading introduction and indexed pages about *bees* and *insects* to enhance the discussion)

*Investigate:*

The ideal habitat for bees includes weeds – like dandelions in the Spring, milkweed and clover in the summer and goldenrod in the fall. Imagine being a honey bee flying out of the darkness of the hive into the world for the first time. Take a walk outside to look for weeds that can provide nectar and pollen. Observe what different kinds of insects are attracted to the flowering weeds.

Interview the school janitor. How does the janitor manage weeds growing around the school grounds?

Record flowering weed and insect observations during different seasons. Write notes and draw sketches.