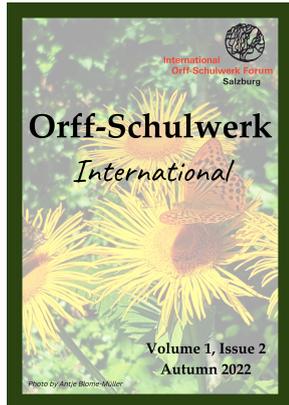




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Inspiring Students to Connect with Nature Through Children's Literature

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Discussion Group from the IOSFS Convention 2022

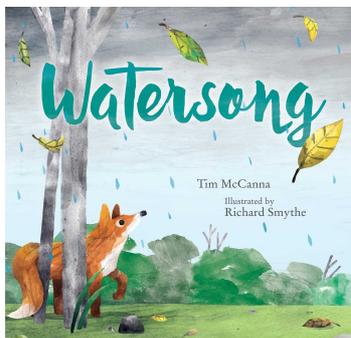
Inspiring Students to Connect with Nature Through Children's Literature

Julia Malafarina, Jennifer Stacey, Petya Stefanova

At this summer's International Orff-Schulwerk Forum Salzburg Convention, our discussion group was inspired by Sofía López-Ibor's presentation on the process of creating a performance with her students using the book *We Are Water Protectors* by Carole Lindstrom. Because of this, we chose to share how we had used children's literature to help our students connect to nature.

Literature provokes the imagination. Through the Orff approach, we can weave music, movement, and drama together to create evocative experiences for our students. Sofia's presentation showed how a book can lead students to empathize with and understand those who have very different lived experiences. This opens a world of possibilities for students to connect with their own feelings, experiences, and beliefs to create art that is deep and meaningful. In this article, we hope to inspire you to explore children's literature, connect to nature, and guide your students in their own creative processes. Each member of the discussion group has contributed ideas related to a book they have used in their own teaching.

Julia Malafarina



Title: Watersong
 Author: Tim McCanna
 Illustrator: Richard Smythe
 Publisher: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers
 Year: 2017

Watersong follows a fox on its journey to seek shelter from a rainstorm and be reunited with its cubs. Richard Smythe's watercolor illustrations show the movement of rain, wind, and swirling leaves through texture. Most of the pages show the fox from the perspective of different animals such as hiding snails and an owl high in a tree. All the words in the book are onomatopoeias. Words like *spitter*, *spatter*, *lash*, *bash*, *shimmer*, and *glimmer* come alive through the expressive scenes and the faces of the animals in the book. My kindergarten students explored dynamics, expressive speech, and heavy and light movements with this book.

We started with a movement exploration using the illustrations as an impulse; breathing like the wind, using our fingers and hands to create light and heavy raindrops on various body parts, exploring large and small movements based on the different perspectives shown in the pictures, and spinning like leaves in the wind. Then we read the book with students echoing the onomatopoeic words. As we read, the students discussed which animal's

perspective we were seeing the fox from and made predictions about where the fox was going and why. The simplicity of the language left a lot of room for students to create their own interpretations about the characters' intentions and feelings.

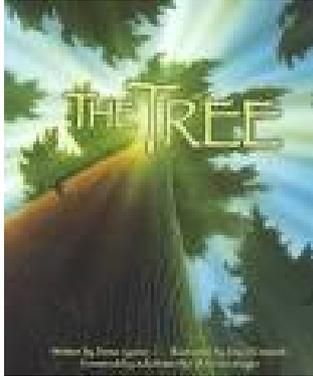
Finally we used a 20 foot (6 meter) long silky fabric to create our own river with teachers holding the fabric from either end, so students were able to focus on moving. Students surrounded the fabric and explored light and heavy movements to match the sounds of words from the book. They made gentle and heavy rain, wind, waves, and a crashing waterfall by moving the fabric with their fingers, hands and arms. Working all together to make the river movements was a big challenge for these students who are mostly five years old.



Kindergarteners at Key School in Annapolis, Maryland, USA, explore light and heavy movements with the words "Swish, Slosh" (L) and "Spitter, Spatter" (R) from Watersong.

In the future, I would like to use this book with older students, having them work in small groups to make their own onomatopoeic speech piece in a form of their choosing, and using a combination of quiet and loud words from the book accompanied by their own light and heavy movements.

My hope is that this sort of multi-sensory exploration will help my students to become more curious about the natural world around them. Perhaps next time they are walking in the rain they'll stop and listen to the sound of the raindrops falling on a puddle or stream and then see what sounds they can make by jumping in like the fox in "Watersong."

Jennifer Stacey

Title: *The Tree*
 Author: Dana Lyons
 Illustrator: David Lane Danioth
 Publisher: Inspire Every Child
 Year: 2002

[A portion of the profits of the book go to the Jane Goodall Institute and the Circle of Life Foundation].

After four days of camping in the Olympic Rain Forest, Dana Lyons was gifted with a song – *The Tree*. Lyons writes, ‘a strange thing happened – a fully formed song came flowing through me’. The song tells the story of an 800-year-old Douglas Fir tree that was by his campsite, and all that has happened to the tree and the forest during its lifetime. The tree had lived through wind, fire, snow, and lightning. It had watched the river flow, young owls learn to fly, and heard the wolf’s howl. Bulldozers were getting closer, and the tree asks who will look after the forest. In the song, children eventually surround the tree protecting it – allowing the tree’s song to continue to be carried by the wind.

The song became the book *The Tree* written by Lyons and illustrated by David Danioth. Danioth’s dramatic and moody illustrations add to the impact of the song and story. Each image uses one colour palette to depict an event in the tree’s history. The effect is very striking.

The book became the inspiration for an Arts project created by Ontario’s York Region District School Board’s Arts Team which consisted of Dance, Visual Arts and Music teachers. Lynnette Charters, Justina So and I were the music teachers on the team. Inspired by Danioth’s illustrations and using Katz and Thomas’ book *Teaching Creatively by Working the Word* (1998) as a guide, we asked the junior-aged students to look at the illustrations and create a senses poem. A senses poem describes how the illustration looks, how it sounds, how it tastes, how it feels, how it smells and what the illustration makes the students feel inside. Working in groups, students were then asked to create soundscapes to go with the illustrations. Students were also asked to choose a couple of words from each of the senses sentences to create movement sequences which were accompanied by the soundscapes.

With the younger children we discussed how the 800-year-old tree looked and how the tree felt. Then we created a class poem. Using words from the poem we created an ostinato that we played on drums.

<p>Grade One Tree Poem:</p> <p>Tree, tree, are you lonely? Tree, tree, do you need a friend? Tree, tree, can we play with you? Tree, tree, yours till the end.</p> <p>Tree, tree, let's have some fun. Tree, tree, you're so tall. Tree, tree, we'll climb your trunk. Tree, tree, we hear your call.</p>	<p>Grade One/Two Tree Poem</p> <p>It will be fine, don't be scared. Stay with us, we need you here. It will be fine, don't be scared. Don't be worried, we're all around you. It will be fine, don't be scared. You've survived so much for 800 years. It will be fine, don't be scared. Fire, snow and wind -you've survived it all. It will be fine, don't be scared. We hear your song.</p>
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A recording of Dana Lyons singing the song can be found at <https://cowswithguns.com/product/books/the-tree-book/>. Lyons sings in a low range not commonly heard today by students. To prepare the students to hear this style of singing, we asked the students to imagine what an 800-year-old tree might sound like. This led to a discussion about timbre and using music to enhance the understanding of a story.

News articles about trees and forests being cut down and/or saved in local neighbourhoods made the students' work current and relevant to their lives.

Petya Stefanova



Title: Концерт в гората. Приказка в ноти
Concert in the Forest. A Fairy Tale in Notes

Author: Atanas Tsankov

Illustrator: Stefka Radkova

Music by: Petya Stefanova

Publisher: FYUT Publishing House

Year: 2017

<https://www.fiut.bg/koncert-v-gorata-prikazka-v-noti.html>

This book inspired me to apply a game-based approach in working with the youngest children. The combination of poetic text, music and illustrations that tell the story of forest characters and their relationships, on the one hand, and the opportunity for writing music provoked by the combination of visual, cognitive, and intellectual stimuli, on the other, have a particularly strong impact.

The book consists of eight songs that introduce a group of instruments in an appealing and humorous way. This stimulates the imagination of the learners and highlights the

relationship between natural and musical sounds. In this way children can follow the way in which sound becomes music.

The level of difficulty of the lyrics and the possibility of performing the songs make the activity suitable for preschool to elementary school learners (aged 6 – 8).

Here I outline my experience with undergraduate students who are studying to become pre-school and primary school teachers and are not majoring in music. The artistic material of *Concert in the Forest. A Fairy Tale in Notes* and the musical activities based on it become a means of:

- Provoking fantasy and imagination,
- Acquiring more comprehensive knowledge of musical instruments and the types of instruments in the classical symphony orchestra, and
- Fostering mutual creativity – encouraging learners through the work of their teacher.

The work process involved the following musical and creative tasks completed by the students:

Stage One: Become familiar with the lyrics and music of each song.

Stage Two: Create a sound image using various acoustic and digital means.

Stage Three: Gather detailed information about each of the instruments involved in the story and present it to the whole group.

Stage Four: Create their own version of the tale that includes one of the instrument groups.

For this purpose they had to use:

- The sound characteristics of each group of instruments
- The natural environment as inspiration
- Appropriate digital sounds
- Sound and musical associations
- Their own creativity to develop a short story.

Learners present the relationships between the characters as they are associated/ identified with the musical instruments. In this way students:

- Clearly understand the characteristics and possibilities of timbre.
- Experience timbre characteristics through the imaginary situations in which they can be involved.

With the help of sound and musical means students may also understand the unity of the different components of the fairy tale:

- The natural environment, illustrated through various images.
- The relationships between the characters, in this case the animals, that have qualities of humans.
- The music which “tells” about their adventures, and which has its own specific characteristics and focuses on the details.

It is the idea of the common source of these different components - NATURE - that is the main goal of this approach – to increase the awareness of the unity between image, sound, characters, characteristics, and relationships.

The other central idea is **encouraging creativity through creativity**, namely the idea that we create together – teachers generate ideas, so do their students - telling their own story based on the one already created. This is a result and a reaction of relationships and interconnected facts of which learners become aware through the process of stimulating their imagination. On the other hand, the creative process is perceived as natural, intrinsic to children and the individuals.



Julia Malafarina is in her 15th year teaching general music and currently teaches Pre-K 3 through 4th grade students at Key School in Annapolis, Maryland, USA. She is level III certified in Orff through AOSA, participated in the Orff-Afrique Master Class in Ghana, and completed the post-graduate course “Advanced Studies in Music and Dance Education” at the Orff Institute in Salzburg, Austria. Julia is Vice President of the Greater Baltimore Orff Chapter.

Jennifer Stacey has been teaching Orff and Preparatory Children’s Music Classes for over 30 years. She has her Orff Post Level III Certificate, Advanced Certificate in Early Childhood Music, Diploma in Child Studies. Jennifer is president of the Ontario Chapter of Carl Orff Canada and has been a clinician for music workshops covering such topics as Music & Literacy, Music in Kindergarten, and Ukulele & Orff.



Petya Stefanova graduated from the National Academy of Music - Sofia with a master's degree in flute, Music Pedagogy and Chamber music. In 2013 Petya Stefanova got her PhD at the Bulgarian Academy of Science. She has won numerous awards from national and international competitions as a soloist and in the chamber music category. At the moment, she is a senior assistant at the University of Ruse "Angel Kanchev." She is also a flute teacher at National school of Arts, Ruse. Petya’s research interests are in the field of music theory and pedagogy, experimental pedagogy, and development of the creative potential of children of preschool and primary school age. As the founder and artistic director of the student group, Music Club "Affect" at the Ruse University "Angel Kanchev," Petya Stefanova organizes a variety of concerts and music and creative workshops.