

Our Two Gardens

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Did Andrea Harrell Moore's article, "Teaching Children the Story of Creation" (pp. 66-71), pique your interest in going outside the ordinary classroom setting for a joyful encounter with the natural world? These recommended resources and activities will help younger children to appreciate God's creation. They are easily adapted for teaching in the church or at home.

The opening lines from Margaret Hebblethwaite's *Our Two Gardens* (Nashville: Oliver-Nelson, 1991) can set the stage for your children's outdoor encounters:

We have two gardens, and I love them very much.
One is quite small, and is behind our house....
The other garden is big....
The world is a garden, planted by God.
God is the best gardener there has ever been.

This story is about a backyard's demise due to neglect and pollution, and its wonderful rescue by its original gardener named Nancy. As the children in the story act to repair each problem in their backyard, they notice that a similar wound plagues God's big garden, the earth. They hope that we will do something about the damage to God's garden so that future children may enjoy the world, too, for "that is the way God meant it to be." Peter Kavanagh's beautiful watercolors illustrate the young reader's (grade 2) text. Though *Our Two Gardens* is currently out of print, look for this gem in church libraries or used bookstores on the Internet.

The illustrated 'recipes' in Kathleen Fry-Miller and Judith Myers-Walls' *Young Peacemakers Project Book* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1988) are wonderful action-oriented lessons. Our favorite is to construct an underwater viewer with a tin can or milk carton and plastic wrap, then put on tennis

shoes to enjoy a creek walk (“Puddles, Streams, and Water Holes,” p. 9). A “Garbage Awareness Collage” helps children to identify and sort garbage (p. 18), with an optional activity for elementary school age kids to learn about decomposition and recycling. These authors put caring for the environment into a broader context of justice and peacemaking. An appendix lists Bible verses about creation to mix and match with the recipes.

Kath Murdoch’s large resource, *Ideas for Environmental Education in the Elementary Classroom* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1993), is adaptable by parents and church teachers. “Getting Out There” (chapter 2) gives an excellent rationale for environmental education and a recommended activity sequence for working with children in the outdoors: in the “warming down” and “response” periods you can guide them to reflect on God’s majesty and their own role as stewards in the creation. Some activities in this book would be terrific for a day-camp program or a creation-care theme camp. For example, “Cunning Compost” describes step-by-step how to construct a compost bin and use the soil that you ‘make’ (pp. 69-70).

Several Web sites feature free environmental-activity lessons for children. SEEDS Foundation, a Canadian non-profit organization that supports environmental education, gathers “170 Action Ideas” at <http://greenschools.ca/Ideas/select.html>.

Children who love trees will enjoy the eleven imaginative activities in *Silent Witnesses: America’s Historic Trees* from American Forests’ Historic Tree Nursery (www.historictrees.org/educate.htm). When your children’s program is ready to attract wildlife to the church’s landscape or a backyard, look at the “WILD Ideas” from Canadian Wildlife Federation (www.cwf-fcf.org/pages/wildideas.htm).

Activity guides from the Church of the Brethren combine environmental education with mission projects that care for the poor. Children can help protect forests in Belize, assist Guatemalan families in building wood-conserving stoves, and provide food-related development assistance in North Korea.

The Church of the Brethren combines environmental education with mission projects that care for the poor. In one activity guide, *If A Tree Falls...*, children study rainforests and then share \$10 to \$30 with Christian organizations that plant fruit or forest trees in Guatemala or purchase and protect forests in Belize. Through the *Fire and Forest* effort of the Global Food Crisis Fund they can assist Guatemalan families in building wood-

conserving stoves and provide food-related development assistance in North Korea, Honduras, the Sudan, and other locations worldwide. *Faith Expeditions* takes children to learn about threats to the environment in Central America and the Arctic. Your class can join an initiative to sell compact florescent light bulbs as a fund-raiser and for energy conservation. For more information or to order these guides free, go to www.brethren.org/genbd/witness/VBS2001.htm.

If the story *Our Two Gardens* has inspired you to garden with children, it is time for you to visit *Kinder Garden* and *KidsGardening.com*. Texas A&M University's *Kinder Garden* Web site (aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/kindergarten/kinder.htm) is a one-stop resource for gardening with children. Three major sections (school gardens, community gardens, and botanic gardens) offer links to gardening organizations around the world. The National Garden Association's www.KidsGardening.com has advice, gardening products, and more links for families and teachers.

Why not vary "the ordinary classroom setting" by inviting youth or older adults to share their environmental concern with the children? Ask them to tell their personal stories, read and comment on Biblical stories about creation, or share a favorite children's story of creation-care. We recommend Sarah Stewart, *The Gardener* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1997). With David Small's imaginative illustrations it tells the story of Lydia Grace, who in the Depression must leave home to live with an uncle who owns a city bakery. Lydia Grace's short letters home recount the joy that she brings to her uncle and his workers through her favorite pastime, gardening. Another favorite is *Morning Has Broken* (Grand Rapids, MI:Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996) with Tim Ladwig's paintings based on the text of Eleanor Farjeon's famous hymn for children. *Francis: The Poor Man of Assisi* by the famous children's artist Tomie dePaola (Holiday House, 1982, reprinted 1990) presents selections from St. Francis of Assisi's writings, including the Cantic of the Sun. St. Francis (c. 1181-1226) had a loving companionship with animals and an enthusiasm for flowers that inspires children. ☪