

Index and links to Stories from Home Surroundings

Home Surroundings is one of the most engaging and satisfying subjects in the early grades. Lessons in Home Surroundings feature imaginative stories of the world of plants, animals, and stones, as well as landscapes, weather and celestial bodies. These stories strengthen children's relationship to the world, and they lay the foundation for the scientific studies that come in later grades.

The stories posted here are examples of the kind of stories and images that I think touch children's souls. You are welcome to use or adapt them, but I encourage you also to compose some of your own stories because whatever you create will touch your students most deeply.

[1. Autumn](#)

This story paints a picture of Autumn by describing different animals' preparations for winter in New England. I chose different animals and environments for contrast and included the refrain "It was late autumn, and the last days of warmth and sunshine had fled" to give the story structure and continuity. This was the first story that I composed for our first Home Surroundings block, and I was still a bit uncomfortable with personifying the characters.

[2. Spring is Coming!](#)

As I became more comfortable with composing my own stories I decided to try experiment with different forms. My first attempt was a prose-poem that celebrated the signs of spring in New England because the approaching season seemed so lyrical. I was inspired to use the refrain "Spring is coming!" because it echoed a song by Elizabeth LeBret that we were singing in morning exercises. To enhance the story's lyricism I used alliteration and assonance as much as I could. I used the present progressive tense to create a sense immediacy and spoke directly to the children to awaken their sense.

[3. A Drop of Water](#)

This story chronicles the miraculous journey of a drop of water. Its descriptions provide an imaginative foundation for study of the water cycle in the upper elementary grades. I used the names 'Mother Ocean,' 'Father Sun,' and 'Brother Wind' to reinforce the idea that the drop of water is a member of a cosmic family. To create a sense of completion (and endlessness), I ended the story by having the drop of water coming back home to where her journey began.

Some parts of the water drop's journey echo Paddle to the Sea by Holling Holling. (Whatever you encounter or read can serve as inspiration!) In retrospect, I think that this story contains more detail than is necessary for first grade, but I couldn't resist including as many pictures as possible.

4. Journey to the Sea

This story takes up the theme of how a river forms from its tributary. It echoes some of the drop of water's journey but from the point of view of the flowing water. In order to make it more direct and engaging, Grandfather River speaks in the first person and his listeners interrupt him with questions, as children will. In the first part of this story, I repeated the refrain "No," he answered three times. This kind of repetition enhances the children's participation in the story because they know what is coming (until they don't.)

5. A Grain of Sand

6. The Stones

7. The Stones - Part 2

8. Down to Earth

9. The Children of the Rain

The first time I taught second grade, I had a very large class. I was worried that some of my students were feeling unrecognized, and I had the idea that if everyone was assigned an essential task, then they would feel more appreciated. I searched around for a situation in nature which might have a family feeling, with a lot of variety in the context of close relationships. I came up with the idea of the many forms of precipitation. I pondered how to characterize them and decided to try matching the forms of precipitation with the temperaments and with the seasons.

Hail – choleric – Summer

Mist – melancholic – Autumn

Frost and Flake – sanguine – Winter

Dew – phlegmatic – Spring

But what would be the conflict? In trying to work all together, each character's temperament was not an asset; rather, it created difficulties. The solution? Have the characters perform tasks suitable to their temperaments. That would give them each a chance to put their temperament to use in the performance of their task and would help them feel successful and appreciated.

My second graders were used to hearing about how Mother Nature was so wise that she always knew what her children and grandchildren needed. I had her appear repeatedly in my stories because I wanted my students to look upon nature as the source of answers to human problems.

10. How the Seeds were Scattered - Part 1

This story describes the many ways that seeds are scattered to find new homes. It was my first attempt at an origin story. What inspired me was the question, "How come there are some places where different types of wildflowers grow all mixed together and other places where they

grow only among their own kind?" Rather than seek a scientific answer to this question, I let my fancy take me where it would, and this story rose up in my soul.

After I had told the first part, I was left with a feeling that there was more to say. What about the seeds of the trees and shrubs? And not all seeds are scattered by the wind. How could I account for that? The second part of the story wasn't too hard to compose, because I had already set the stage with the first part.

A note about the characters: In this story I decided use the temperaments to help me bring the characters to life. Father Sun was portrayed as a phlegmatic who is not easily stirred to action; Mother Earth was portrayed as a melancholic who cares deeply about everyone and everything; and Brother wind was portrayed as a choleric who springs into action and takes charge.

[11. How the Seeds were Scattered - Part 2](#)

[12. The Trees - Part 1](#)

When I saw how the students responded to the previous story, I decided to compose a similar story about trees. I wanted to 'explain' how trees ended up in different vegetative zones where only a few species flourish. How could I account for that in an imaginative way but stay true to my intention of providing a true foundation for Nature Study and Geography in later grades?

I decided to take the opposite approach to the seeds: the trees would initially begin in the tropics, with many types mixed together, a situation which made them unhappy. Mother Nature's solution is to separate them and to give each kind of tree a suitable home.

As in some of the other stories, I used repetition and parallel development as literary devices that would create a sense of symmetry and completion.

[13. The Trees - Part 2](#)

[14. The Light of Men](#)

This story was told to first graders at the beginning of Advent, a time when the darkness threatens to extinguish hope. The idea for the story was inspired by Eugene Schwartz's story "Why the Setting Sun Turns Red."

[15. The Two Kingdoms](#)

One of my classes had many hardworking students as well as some who were reluctant to exert themselves. In this story I tried to characterize the difference between a materialistic existence and one that is dignified by work

In The Kingdom of Childhood (1924) Rudolf Steiner said that one of the reasons that it is good for children to have the same teacher for many years is that they can return to stories and themes that they discuss at different stages of their education. This story laid a foundation for middle

grade Geography lessons about natural resources and for discussions in the upper grades about the unequal distribution of wealth in the world.

16. The Nettle - A Pedagogical Story

I had a student in my first class who was difficult to get along with. She took everything personally. She was defensive and defiant. She struck back at imagined insults. Her classmates and I often tip-toed around her to try to avoid any unpleasantness.

This child had many wonderful qualities—she was intelligent, artistic, and athletic; she was truthful, brave, and determined—but she didn't feel that anyone noticed these qualities. She thought that all that anyone noticed were her faults.

I wrote this story to reassure this child that even a prickly plant can find her place and be valued for her special qualities.

17. Bright Eyes' Journey - A Pedagogical Story

This story was composed for an energetic and distractable boy who often didn't listen and was reluctant to listen to or obey instructions. I had difficulty coming up with an appropriate consequence for his disobedience, but in the end, Bright Eyes suggested what should happen.

18. The Question

I told this story to my students graders during the first week of first grade. I told them that although the story is called "The Question" it doesn't give the answer to the question. Then I told them "I will tell you this story again during the last week of eighth grade, and by then I think that most of you will be able to answer the question.