



The Geography of Childhood: Why Children Need Wild Places (Concord Library)

By Gary Paul Nabhan, Stephen Trimble

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What may happen now that so many more children are denied exposure to wilderness than at any other time in human history?

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

More than half of American children get their environmental information from the media, according to the authors, who find this a disturbing trend. In alternating essays, conservation biologist Nabham (*Gathering the Desert*) and Trimble (*Great Sand Dunes*) examine the needs of children to experience nature firsthand. Each author draws on his childhood experiences: Nabham's among the steel mills and sand dunes of Gary, Ind., and Trimble's travels in the West with his geologist father. They describe how their own children react to the world of nature and look at Southwest Indian cultures that are closely tied to nature. Trimble speaks to three-generations of a ranch family in Nevada; Nabham visits an extended family on a Mexican ranch. Observing social activities on school playgrounds, Trimble discovers more interaction between the sexes on grassy areas than on bare asphalt. This thoughtful presentation, testifying to children's need for direct contact with nature, has value for parents and those who work with children. Photos.

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From [Booklist](#)

Two fathers, both seasoned naturalists, earnestly convey their love of the land and their experiences imparting that love to their young children. They rue the fact so many children lack such opportunities. "When we don't grow up meeting lizards, snakes, and frogs, we have no way to recognize their vitality and dignity, nor the continuity between them and us." Often, the naivet{ , }e of these authors is as moving as their paternal reflections. Theirs is definitely not another how-to-collect-leaves-with-your-toddler book, and it raises questions that are not easily answered. With all their seriousness, however, Nabhan and Trimble still offer many delightful scenes of enjoying the wilderness with their families. *Denise Perry Donavin*

From Kirkus Reviews

Meditations and personal anecdotes from naturalists/hiking buddies/fathers Nabhan (*Gathering the Desert*, 1985) and Trimble. "Children do need wildness," the authors argue: not just trees and grass, but open, unpeopled places, where they can "nibble on icicles and watch ants...lie back and contemplate clouds and chickadees." As parents, we should provide our young with "direct exposure to a variety of wild plants and animals," including the less cuddly types, like snakes and lizards. Instead, we plop them down in front of TV sets and books (which, astonishingly, the authors find equally insidious), exercise them in concrete and plastic playgrounds which provide insufficient opportunities for building "nest-like refuges," and send them to schools which prepare them only "for careers to be spent within buildings." As a result of this alienation from nature, the authors argue, our children are myopic, stunted, haunted by fears of the "lizardness within us." Nabhan and Trimble write seductively of the lures of the Western landscape, but some readers may chafe at their narrow conception of "wilderness." (There are wild places back East, after all, and don't leaf-cutter ants reside in cities, too?) Most of the authors' personal anecdotes are touching and provocative, especially Nabhan's childhood reminiscence of his not-so-innocent role in the murder of a lizard. But occasionally, the authors lose sight of their topic and drift into mawkish self-absorption ("Talking with the woman I love about the places we pass through makes the experiences warmer, simpler..."). Readers are not likely to disagree with the authors' central premise and will probably enjoy the lush writing, but may be turned off by their anti-urban, anti-intellectual prejudices and their preoccupation with their own circumstances. A convincing case for the necessity of exposing children to nature, sometimes marred by the authors' narrow vision and smug tone. (10 pages b&w photographs--not seen) -- *Copyright ©1994, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Users Review

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