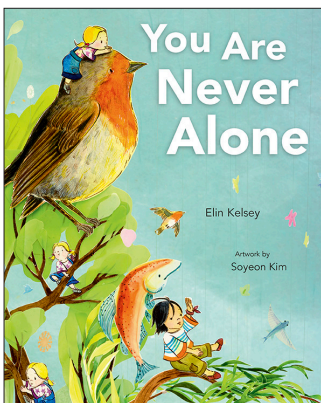


You Are Never Alone

A Guide for Teachers:
Grades 1–4

Guide by Kara Vincent, Elementary Generalist, Rocky View Schools, Alberta



About the Book

You Are Never Alone is the third in a series of related books by Elin Kelsey and illustrated by Soyeon Kim that inspire awe about the natural world in young readers. Too often, in our urgency to engage kids with environmental issues, we end up bombarding them with the message that the planet is wrecked and it is up to them to “save” it. A growing body of research illuminates the unintended consequences of this fear-based approach: Kids feel overwhelmed, worried and powerless to help. In a climate where young people are taught it is their responsibility to “save” or “look after” the planet, *You Are Never Alone* reframes this lopsided narrative, showing children that, at the same time that there are very real issues facing the Earth, kids are a part of a generous and giving planet that is, in fact, looking after them. As stated on the first page of the book, **“Every moment this beautiful planet showers you with gifts.”** *You Are Never Alone* is filled with amazing and thought-provoking scientific facts derived from first-person interviews with scientists doing current research in their fields.

About This Guide

This guide aims to have students dig deeper and understand the ways in which nature is providing for and supporting them in their everyday lives. Understanding how the natural world looks after us may offer children comfort when they feel lonely. They are never really alone, but always in the company of other species of plants and animals, large and small. Recognizing that nature provides for them may also be the beginning of developing a sense of agency for children—an interest in a reciprocal relationship in which they might take child-sized steps to care for the Earth.

Leading education systems across the world have begun to pay attention to student well-being after observing that when the whole student is healthy, they are more available to learn. Encouraging a relationship with nature is the perfect catalyst for developing the whole child. This guide explores how children are cared for by nature by looking at five components of well-being (physical, intellectual, social, emotional and spiritual) and providing guiding questions and activities to try in a school setting.

The guide also provides opportunities to connect to the two preceding books in the series. *You Are Stardust* celebrates humans as a part of nature, and *Wild Ideas* applauds the abundant creativity in nature. Both books provide further learning around how the natural world supports children’s well-being.

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CURRICULUM LINKS:

Language Arts: Skill and Strategies
Science: Life Science; Animals;
Environment; Biology; Life Systems
Health and Wellness/Life Skills:
Promoting Healthy Choices and
Developing Well-being

READING LEVELS:

Fountas & Pinnell: S
Lexile® Measure: 820L
Common Core: W, RL, L, SL, RF

► **Well-being:** A balanced state of the emotional, intellectual, physical, social and spiritual domains that enables students to reach their full potential in the school community.

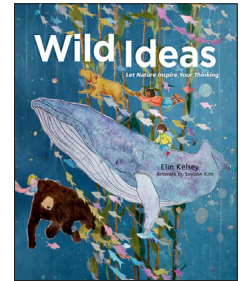
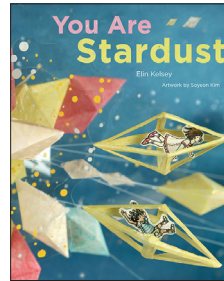


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You Are Never Alone Guide for Teachers
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Discussion Topics & Activities for Students:

After reading *You Are Never Alone* aloud with your class, work through the following prompts. Note: For a deeper reading experience, supplement *You Are Never Alone* with read-alouds of the two related books, *You Are Stardust* and *Wild Ideas*.



Physical Well-being

AIM: Help students recognize how the natural world supports them in keeping physically well. This could include basic needs such as food, shelter, space to move and exercise.

Discussion Questions:

- What examples can you find in this book that demonstrate how the Earth provides for us in order to keep our bodies feeling healthy and strong? This could include:
 - Rain water quenches our thirst
 - Plants create oxygen so that we can breathe
 - Bugs till the ground and bats and bees pollinate flowers and trees
 - Food chains under the sea become what we eat
 - Microorganisms protect us from germs and bacteria, and help us digest our food
 - Aloe vera soothes itchy skin, and ginger settles upset stomachs
- Throughout this book, children are shown running, climbing, swimming, swinging and dancing through natural spaces. Ask students: Where are some of your favourite outdoor spaces to move and play in to help keep your body physically active?

Activity Suggestions:

- **Safety Check:** In this book we learn about ways that nature protects us from physical dangers. Mangrove tree roots keep the ground sturdy in mudslides, poplar trees drink up extra water in flood plains and underwater sea kelp calms ocean waves. Ask students: In the community where you live, can you think of or investigate ways that nature works to keep you physically safe? For example:
 - Maybe there are plants (shrubs or grasses) in your local parks that provide bank stabilization: They keep melting snow from sweeping vegetation down slopes in spring, allowing you to hike or walk into river valleys.
 - Or this could be as simple as large trees providing shade and a cool place to retreat on a hot day, or shelter from a rain or hail storm.
- **Lunchbox Helpers:** During lunch or snack time, have students spend some time discussing where the different foods in their lunch box came from and what kinds of creatures might have been involved in creating their meal. (They could also look at their clothing, supplies around the classroom or at home, or anything helping to satisfy their basic physical needs.) For example:
 - Consider a snack of cheese and apple slices: There are all kinds of creatures involved before that snack is ready for a child to eat. Of course a cow (or maybe a goat) provided the milk to make the cheese; tiny bacteria turned the milk into cheese; and apple trees rely on pollinators such as bees to create fruit.
 - A lunch of sushi rolls would also have many living things involved. The rice is grown in an area with a lot of water in flooded conditions, and sometimes animals such as water buffalo are used to till the land. The nori wrap is a type of seaweed that provides food and shelter for other sea creatures. If the sushi is made with tuna or salmon, those fish would have eaten a number of smaller fish before being caught from the ocean. Even the bamboo chopsticks are made out of comes from a living thing.

Book Series Connection:

- In the book *You Are Stardust*, we learn that humans also play a role when nature works to meet our needs. It tells us **“Each time you blow a kiss to the world, you spread pollen that might grow to be a new plant.”** Share this with students as an example of ways we are a part of the natural world.

Intellectual Well-being

AIM: Have students recognize ways that the natural world supports their intelligence through prompting curiosity, problem solving and critical thinking.

Discussion Questions:

- ***“Wallowing in mud makes you smarter, thanks to a surge of feel-good chemicals triggered by bacteria in the soil.”*** Isn't this fact incredible? Revisit this idea with your students and ask them: Have you ever walked through mud in bare feet? Dug in the soil until you had dirty fingernails? Rolled around outside, covering yourself in earthly things, which stuck to your clothing and hair? What is your favourite way to get close to all that rich bacteria in the soil?
- Ask students if they have ever noticed something in nature that sparked their curiosity and made them want to learn more about it. In partners, have them share what it was and how they investigated further. Have a few students share their curiosities with the large group.

Activity Suggestions:

- **Wallow in the Mud:** Before starting a math lesson or something else that feels intellectually rigorous, bring the class outside to dig in the dirt, walk beneath some big trees, or stroll alongside a flower bed. Return to the classroom to complete the task and have students reflect on whether they feel they have more clarity or are better equipped for what they have to perform after this outdoor time.
- **Mimicking Nature:** Biomimicry is design or ideas that mimic something found in the natural world. In small groups, have students investigate other examples of biomimicry and look for something in nearby nature that inspires them to tackle a problem using a solution or idea that they learned from their observations. Students can create a diagram or model of their design and share it with the class. This might be done as an in-school or take-home project. For further inspiration, check out <https://asknature.org>.

Book Series Connection:

- In *Wild Ideas*, the reader explores the fact that all creatures throughout the natural world seek solutions to problems and use creativity and mimicry to solve them.
- On the note of intellectual well-being, in the book *You Are Stardust* we learn about the work being done inside the human brain: Our thoughts are powered by electricity stronger than lightning!





Social Well-being

AIM: Have students recognize how the natural world contributes to their development as social beings. Social skills such as communication, cooperation, conflict resolution and trust are important in human and non-human company.

Discussion Questions:

- Ask students: Have you ever experienced that “rush of love” feeling like the one described in the book? If so, when was it? Do you think the other creature felt it too?
- When learning about microorganisms that live on our skin, the book tells us **“You always have company.”** Ask students: Can you relate to this statement? Can you share examples of when you feel like you have company in nature, even if there are no other people around?
- In what ways can we communicate and interact with other living things?

Activity Suggestions:

- Noticing Good Company: Go on a walk as a class and explore how nature can be good company. Supervise your class as they interact carefully with plants and animals. Ask students: What do you notice about them? What do you think they notice about you?
- Have students research how animals interact with each other. Ask them to try out some bird calls and coyote howls.

Let’s Communicate:

- Do animals use other forms of communication that don’t involve sounds? Can your students mimic some of them?
- Class Picnic: Nature also provides endless settings to socialize with other human company. Rather than eating in your lunchroom or classroom, have your class bring their lunches outside to eat. Ask students to notice if eating outside offers things to chat about or laugh about with friends that might be different than during social times in the school building.

Book Series Connection:

- In *Wild Ideas* we discover that, just as we turn to friends and family for support, so do other animals. Point this out to students. Ask them to remember examples from this book.
- Ask students to recall examples of animals helping one another from *You Are Stardust*: For instance, bats and sperm whales babysit each others’ young and elephants keep up lifelong friendships.

Emotional Well-being:

AIM: Have students recognize how the natural world supports their emotional well-being by elevating their mood and encouraging participation.

Discussion Questions:

- Ask students: Can you relate to the statement *"Sunshine fills you with hope"*? Can you feel a difference in your mood when you are outside versus inside? Does the weather, sunlight, or view of a tree, for example, change how you feel?
- Remind students about the line *"Branches stretch across streets, creating peaceful neighbourhoods."* Ask: Is there a spot outside that makes you feel peaceful? Safe? Calm? Why do you think this is?

Activity Suggestions:

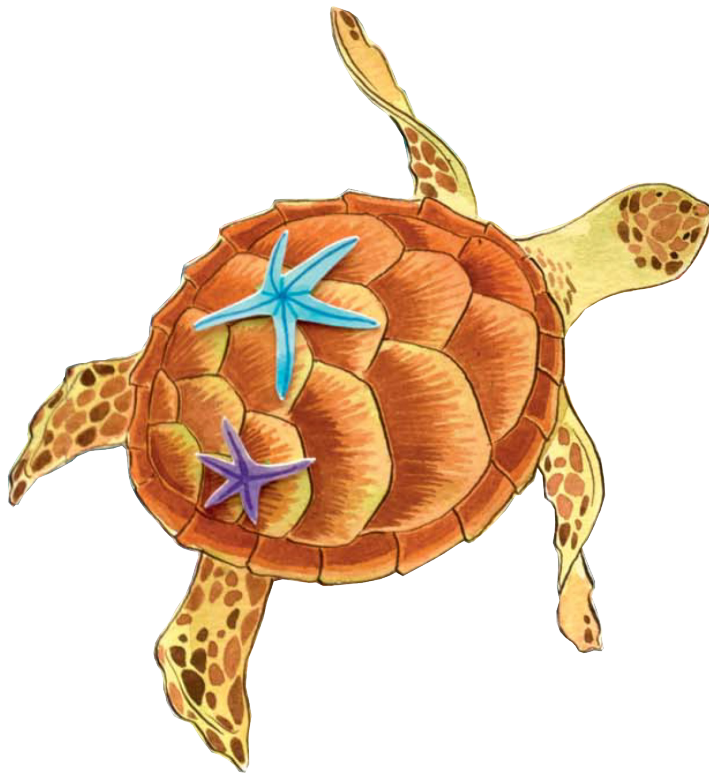
- **Feel and Reflect:** Ask students to find a natural space outside, somewhere in walking distance; this could simply be your schoolyard. Have them spend time in their own space to journal, sketch or write about how it makes them feel to sit quietly in nature. Suggest that they look closely at a favourite tree, bird or cloud in the sky. Even a weed breaking through a crack in concrete can be amazing and encouraging.

Mapping the Sun:

- Create a "Sun map" of your classroom by having students take turns marking the position of the Sun on the wall at specific times each day over the span of a few months. As you collectively chart the movement of the Earth as it twirls around the Sun through the seasons, take time to discuss how good it feels to have winter sunshine on your face, the pleasure of seeing new spring blossoms, etc.

Book Series Connection:

- Remind students that in *Wild Ideas*, they learned that just like humans, when animals want to make something happen, they try. They get frustrated. They try again. Frustration is a part of life. It can be inspiring to look to our non-human friends for a lesson in persistence and creativity.



Spiritual Well-being:

AIM: Have students recognize how the natural world can support mindfulness and meaning, and demonstrate the interconnectedness of all things.

Discussion Questions:

- To feel grounded is to be aware of yourself in your body, and how your body is connected to the Earth. At the end of this book readers are encouraged to **"Feel gravity hug you tight."** Ask the class: Have you ever thought about gravity literally keeping your feet on the ground? Everyone has days when it feels like his or her world is a little bit out of control. Encourage students to try standing still for a moment when they go outside. Perhaps thinking of gravity as steady roots can help them feel protected and in control. Ask students to think of examples in their lives when this might be helpful.
- This book is full of connections—examples of how nature is interdependent and complex. We are so much more interesting than just a bunch of individuals! Ask the class: What ideas did you notice that demonstrate a connection to something bigger? Answers may include the following:
 - Bugs and bats tilling and pollinating
 - Fish who eat plankton fertilized by poop
 - Whales splashing phytoplankton
 - Krill gobbling plants and becoming food for salmon
 - Bears dragging salmon onto shore, fertilizing plants
 - Forests maintaining the Earth's climate

Activity Suggestions:

- **Mindfulness Sit Spot:** To be mindful is to be conscious or aware and to pay close attention to what is happening in that moment. The intention of this activity is to have students spend time in a space outside, using their senses and observing what is going on around them. Prompt them to begin by isolating their sense of hearing. Guide them through with instructions such as the following: *Close your eyes, get comfortable and spend a couple minutes just focusing on what you hear. Next, spend a minute or two on what you can see. Finally, try lying down on the grass or in the dirt and pay close attention to what you feel through the sense of touch.* Afterward, have students—either with a journal entry or aloud with a partner or with the group—reflect on what they noticed when isolating their senses that they may not have noticed previous to this mindfulness practice.
- **Connections to Thrive:** Consider the quote from the book, **"You thrive through connections to the land and the sea."** Our personal connections help make up who we are. Have students begin with a blank piece of paper and draw themselves or a symbol that represents them. Then have them draw lines to connect themselves to as many other living things as they can think of. Consider the land and sea, consider the plant and animal kingdoms, consider creatures seen and unseen, and human and non-human communities. To "thrive" is to prosper and flourish. After the activity, reflect as a class on all the support we each have in our lives to be our best possible, most powerful selves.



Book Series Connection:

- Remind students that *You Are Stardust* has a number of awe-inspiring examples to make us think about how connected we are to something bigger. The title of the book might even make you sit in awe. One line reads **"Every tiny atom in your body came from a star that exploded long before you were born."** We also learn about drinking the same water dinosaurs drank and that every creature on Planet Earth started as a single cell! It is hard not to be humbled by the feeling of being connected in one way or another to so many things on this incredible planet.

About Kara Vincent

Kara Vincent is an elementary school teacher in Cochrane, Alberta. She holds a masters degree in environmental education and communication, and she has a passion for getting children outside, learning in and from nature. Her master's thesis focused on the ways that time spent in nature influences well-being, and she was supervised by *You Are Never Alone* author Dr. Elin Kelsey! Kara believes that time spent learning and playing in nature helps children thrive and grow. She loves spending time outside with her own two young children, playing and adventuring in the Rocky Mountains.

▶ **Watch the videos:** OwlkidsBooks.com/YouAreNeverAlone

- Behind the Science with author Elin Kelsey
- Behind the Art with illustrator Soyeon Kim



NOTES:

