Jeannie Baker Belonging Education Kit

The Belonging Education Kit is for primary age students and takes an integrated approach across the curriculum. It endeavors to implement teaching strategies that encourage play, exploration, discovery learning, use of the imagination and sensory awareness to research and communicate ideas. It is intended to compliment the book Belonging by Jeannie Baker, 2004.

Integrated Units
This section of the Belonging education kit is divided into the following integrated units and provides opportunities for children to explore Belonging through a ‘Hand Heart Head’ approach to learning*.

Belonging, Community, Home
What is home? Our neighborhood? What do they mean to us? By exploring how our own community functions we can understand how others do. (Civics education, SOSE)

Biodiversity in Cities
By understanding plants and animals and living systems we appreciate and care for our living environment. (SOSE, Science)

Growing Healthy Gardens
We can grow our own food sustainably and learn about healthy living. (SOSE, Science, Health and Physical Education)

*Cornell, J.B. Sharing Nature with Children, Exley Publications, UK, 1979
Belonging, Community, Home

The window can be a contemplative device through which we examine our feelings about the land immediately surrounding our home and how we connect to it or belong to it. Jeannie Baker invites us to explore the concepts of ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ from this viewpoint.

Go outside to a peaceful part of the school garden to read Jason Tamiru’s poem and invite responses from the group. Ask what the idea of belonging means to them? Draw or list words that reflect your ideas.

Laying your hands on the earth is one way of expressing your belonging to the earth. Look at how handprints and other symbols are used by Indigenous Australians and other indigenous peoples in their art to express their sense of belonging. Ask the children to brainstorm ways to express their belonging to their school as a part of the community. Brainstorm a way of creating a permanent symbol of belonging for your school.

Home by Jason Tamiru (2003)

My home is my past, my present, my future
My land, my home
Every tree earth water animals air
Everything that has been created is my tradition
Home is powerful (NOT UNDERLINED)
Home is comfortable
Home is Yorta Yorta land
My life.

Do people from different cultures see a difference between the concepts of ‘home’ or ‘belonging’? Consider the concept of ownership of land versus belonging to land. Collect responses to ideas of belonging/home from cultures locally and around the world. Set up an email chat room with a school overseas and pose the question ‘What is home?’

Or keep it within your local community and ask members of the community from different cultural backgrounds to respond to the question. The results could be published on the school website or developed into a book.

Identify the things in the beginning of the story Belonging that take away the ‘power’ and ‘comfort’ that Jason Tamiru refers to in his poem. What happens when this has been taken from Tracy’s neighborhood in Belonging? How could this situation have come about? (Has the power been taken away from them or have people let it go?)

In Belonging how do the people get back their ‘power’ and ‘comfort’? What happens when people begin to get it back? Make a list of as many changes as you can under these different headings: - Changes to the landscape; Changes in Social Interactions; Changes to People’s Health; Changes to Biodiversity. From the changes listed draw lines between them to highlight their interconnectedness. Give reasons. For example: ‘The air is cleaner because there are more plants’ ‘I think the air being cleaner would make people healthier’.

Walking excursion. Walk together around the neighborhood to collect ideas about what makes life in a city good for children. Brainstorm ideas before you go about what
places should be visited. Include park, playground, reserve, and shops. Collect natural materials from parks/gardens for an art activity.

Discuss the levels of power and comfort that the young people have in their own community. Working outdoors on large sheets of paper create a map of their community, including the features that are significant to them. They could draw where they walk, where they like to play, where their homes are.

Brainstorm elements that are positive and negative about your community. What makes you feel powerful in your community? What makes you feel comfortable? What makes you afraid or worried? Brainstorm changes you would like to see and research who on the local council can make these decisions.

In Belonging Tracy’s neighbours decide to close their road. Why do they do this? Eventually the road is officially closed. Who is the body that makes such decisions in our own community?

Children can write letters to council requesting a desire to be involved in planning for child-friendly spaces. Alternatively they can decide on a change they would like to see. This can include an invitation to the relevant council representative to visit their classroom.

Ask the children to imagine the perfect neighborhood to live in. Children can build a 3D neighborhood or a ‘space for children’ using their own ideas. Use recycled materials and the natural materials collected on their walking excursion. Children can take an approach that uses fantasy.

**Further Reading for Teachers**


Appendix includes useful guidelines for increasing children’s participation in effective decision-making in the community.


**Further Reading for Children**


Chief Seattle’s Reply, *The Earth is Precious*, 1854
Biodiversity in Cities

*Window* (1991) and *Belonging* explore similar themes; the effects of cities and urbanization on the natural systems of our planet, species extinction and the effects of our changing landscape on the people who live in and near cities. With 12 years between the two publications and perhaps reflecting some changes in societal thinking, further themes have been introduced in *Belonging*. *Belonging* explores the role of community, the empowerment of people, the significance of children, family and the neighbourhood in cities. The approach is optimistic, offering people who live in cities inspiration through connecting to the beauty of living things and the power of initiating change through connecting to community. Whereas *Window* raises the alarm, *Belonging* empowers us with hope that we can sow the seeds of effective community participation.

In pairs explore *Window* and then compare *Window* with *Belonging*. How are the stories related? How do they differ? Encourage the children’s opinions, preferences, observations and insights. Compare the Author’s Notes in each book. Imagine what Jeannie Baker’s voice might be as the ‘peaceful activist’ in each book. Encourage the children to tell the story to one another with their own ‘voice’.

Find The Hidden Creatures

Jeannie Baker bases her images of living things on direct observations from nature. See if you can find the following animals in *Belonging*:

- an introduced dove
- a currawong
- pigeons
- ants
- a magpie
- an eastern spinebill
- rainbow lorikeets
- pelicans
- noisy miners
- flying foxes
- crimson rosellas

(all animals are lowercase)

Choose one animal identified from *Belonging* and research the food, habitat, status, and distribution. Create 3d models of the animals to hang in your room. How does each animal use and need plants for their survival? Can you illustrate this in your models?

Catalyst for Change.

Find the experiences that lead to change in Tracy’s thinking. When Tracy is six she is given an indigenous plant as a gift. How does she respond to this gift? How does it change her life and the lives of others?

The animals in *Belonging* are affected by changes to their environment. Choose an animal and look at the ways change to their environment effects them. It could be an animal facing extinction. Tell stories or use role-play of your animals in the first person, include the risks to your survival, your everyday challenges and how you overcome them.

Our school might be home to many creatures and provide food and shelter to many others. Use the following questions to encourage observation and exploration. What creatures live here at school? Are they native or introduced?

- Which parts of the school do/don’t they like to be? Why/why not?
- How do they use plants to survive? How do plants rely on animals for their survival?
What else do they need to survive? Make a map of the school marking in where different animals are found including the children’s observations.

‘By discovering what the animals need to survive we can find out how to improve our school ground for them’. Brainstorm and research ways to improve the school for indigenous animals. You may wish to focus on one group eg. frogs, butterflies, birds or mammals.

Write to or invite the environmental planner from the local council or representatives from local environment groups to assist your research into identifying animals that might be at risk in your area. Design a poster to invite other interested community members to a planning meeting to gain support for your project. Introduce meeting procedures to the children beforehand such as adding items to the agenda, the role of the chairperson, recording actions and minutes.

In Belonging once the community begin to plant indigenous plants more indigenous animals move into the city to live. Compile a list of the indigenous plants of the area, where to buy them or how to propagate them. Try your local native plant nursery, the botanic gardens, zoos and National Parks and other environmental education groups such as the Gould League and Schools for a Sustainable Future.

Life in the Soil.
Discover the tiny animals that live in the soil. Find them by looking under leaf-litter, in cool damp places, in the worm farm, in a compost heap. Use microscopes or hand lenses. The role these small animals play is vital to life on earth. They break down (chew and poo) plant litter, which in turn provides nutrients for plants. Note: If live minibeasts are collected, encourage collection of some of the vegetation or soil where the animal was found also and then return the animals to their homes at the end of the same day.

Walk to a reserve or park or visit the education service of a botanic garden, museum in your capital city to learn about the role and importance of green spaces in cities. Brainstorm all the advantages of having green spaces in cities for our own survival and for the survival of other living things.

Backyard Biodiversity.
Over a period of one term ask students to observe the animals they see visiting their garden. Make a diary ‘Visitors to My Backyard’. (One year would reveal seasonal changes and cycles). They could list animals, animal behaviour or activity, draw pictures, stick in ‘treasures’ such as a leaf, feather or flower. Encourage them to make discoveries about their backyard diversity eg. ‘spinebills only come when the pineapple sage is flowering’. What could they change to improve habitat for a certain animal?

Further Reading for Teachers
Try the following Gould League Publications:

Australian Backyard Wildlife, student reader 1997 Melbourne.


Parks and Gardens, an activity-based curriculum guide, Gould League & VAEE Plants, Gould League & VAEE

Compost Activities for Schools, Teacher’s Guide

Compost Creatures Poster

The Nest Box Book, Jim Grant, Gould League, Melbourne, 1997

Trees, an activity-based curriculum guide, Gould League & VAEE
Contact Gould League Melbourne at www.gould.edu.au

**Children's fiction**
The Paradise Garden, Colin Thompson, Red Fox, 1998
Growing Healthy Gardens

Tracy is given a vegetable seedling, which is the beginning of her garden and a catalyst for change in her community.

Growing edible organic gardens is good for you; they provide physical activity, healthy delicious food and most of all, fun. They provide exciting learning opportunities across the curriculum. This section cannot provide you with a complete gardening guide but it is designed to provide you with some ideas to get your green thumbs twitching. Start simply with a mushroom kit or a parsley box in the classroom. Cook the mushrooms with the parsley to get children inspired!

**Plant bean seeds**

Construct a bamboo tipi and when the beans climb up enjoy it as a cubby house. Explore the other legumes; dried beans/lentils/peas and compare them. Germinate some to compare their growth rates and start a seed bank with the others. Make musical instruments using the dried legumes. Contact Diggers for a seed catalogue or visit [www.diggers.com.au](http://www.diggers.com.au).

Plant sunflower seeds. To make a sunflower house plant the seedlings in a circle (1.5 diameter). When they have grown, tie the mature sunflowers together at the tops to make the roof of the sunflower house. Ask children to focus on their senses and feelings in their houses and write a poem about it or try eating (hulled) sunflower seeds.

**Cultural Garden**

Work with your Language Other Than English (LOTE) teacher to investigate plants grown and eaten by the people of that culture. Invite members of your community to help you explore cultural traditions for using and preparing the plants and the festivals associated with them. eg. Hold your own Italian tomato bottling party using oregano. Or make a delicious Chinese vegetable soup (see the book *The Ugly Vegetables* listed below for a recipe).

**Potato stack**

Use a stack of tyres or an old drum to grow your own potatoes. Half fill it with compost or good garden soil, place 6 or 7 sprouting potatoes inside and cover them with a layer of soil and mulch. Keep covering them so that the growing potatoes are covered up. Keep the soil moist. When the plants start to die off enjoy pushing the drum or tyre stack over and let the children go searching for their potatoes.

**Play!**

Leave space and loose materials in your garden for the children for creative play and to make their own discoveries. Plots with soil/mud, sand, water, pots, construction materials, pebbles are perfect for making mini landscapes, mudpies, works of art, cubbies, garden constructions, a fruit & vegie stall...

**Keep a worm farm**

Feed lunch scraps to the worms and use the worm castings to feed your plants. Worms are a great minibeast to study. Your worm farm supplier will give you the do’s and don’ts of worm farming.

**Tracy’s first vegetable garden**

What vegetables can you identify? What is happening on the vacant land across the road? Make a large chart describing the changes to Tracy’s garden alongside the changes in the neighbourhood, as Tracy grows older. Compare them; are the changes related? Highlight the catalysts (or powerful initiators) of change.

In the final pages Tracy no longer has a vegetable garden. Is it possible that Tracy and...
her family might still eat some of the plants growing in their garden? Who else will be finding their food there? Research and brainstorm ideas for a school bush food garden using indigenous plants. Invite an indigenous Australian to your school to talk about bush foods.

**Design your own dream garden**

Brainstorm possible shapes e.g. spiral, mandala, rainbow, flower-shaped. What vegetables, fruit, herbs and flowers would you choose? Send for a collection of catalogues to select plants from. Research organic gardening methods such as No Dig Gardens and Permaculture to find out how these methods work with the environment rather than against it.

Keep in touch with your community by sharing your garden news. Hold a garden party where the children can treat visitors with a taste of their own harvest, with their own flowers decorating the table and a performance of their garden song.

Invite families to celebrate the cycles of the garden, the seasons and the children’s work e.g. Scarecrow Day at planting time, or a summer evening in the garden with garden stories and sampling the fresh produce.

**More ideas for the garden:**

Weather measuring and recording; Develop a tactile sign posted walking trail with signs for people with a sight impairment; focus on creating a scented garden; saving water & recycling how to use a minimum of water in your garden.

**Further Reading for Teachers**


*The Environmental Workshop; Valuable Learning Outcomes in School Gardens*, C Nutall, Dellasta, Burwood, 1999


**Further Reading for Kids**


*The Ugly Vegetables*, G Lin, Talewinds, Watertown, USA


FOCUS TOPICS: Extension Activities

Focus topics will provide you with questions and direction for group discussion and initiate further exploration and interpretation of the text/illustrations by the ‘readers’ independently.

Voice of the artist

How does Jeannie Baker communicate through her imagery? How does she use literary methods such as narration, symbolism, and visual metaphors?

Look for evidence in the artworks of political action and discuss what issue it is referring to. eg. The word "Sorry" has been written by a skywriter referring to the issue of Aboriginal Reconciliation.

Change

What are the catalysts for change in the story? What is the interplay between change in Tracy’s garden and the wider community?

Our role

What are our feelings? Suggestions? Ideas for action in our own school, community or garden? As a group could we support a particular movement or local charity?

Exhibition as political action

Consider staging a hypothetical/virtual or real exhibition around a political/environmental theme of importance to your group or community. The exhibition may include artwork as well as oral histories gathered from local people, or documentation of the results of your community garden, or photographs from a particular project. Consider the placement of the text panels for maximum impact. Survey visitors to find out their thoughts on your exhibition.
*Belonging - Visual Arts*

The Visual Arts Content of the kit has activities and questions that explore the following topics. It is not intended to be read chronologically but can be entered at any point through these topics.

- subject matter
- narrative/story telling
- techniques
- materials
- texture
- colour
- describing artworks through the senses
- critical analysis & art appreciation
- personal, political & social connections

**Subject matter**

The cover of belonging as depicted here shows a very urban environment gradually being greened with flora and fauna aplenty. Choose a building in your local area that you could draw from memory then use your imagination to add a new blooming garden. Use watercolours or acrylics to paint the background and build up with collage.

Jeannie Baker’s subject matter is the urban and natural environment. Create two small lino or scratch plate prints. On one, use lines and shapes which suggest an Industrial setting on the second use lines and shapes found in nature. Create a design with the two prints overlapping your prints in sections and using contrasting colours. Give your work a title when you complete it.

**Narrative/story telling**

Look out your window and write down and describe what you see. Keep a journal of descriptions for one week. What has changed since the first day? Has there been any repetition over the days? Did you see people/animals or insects in that time?

Has a story begun to take shape with a main character? In groups students could try to write a story from their observations. Their main character could be human or a talking insect, see if they can find a climax to their story and decide on a happy/ or tragic ending.

Retell the story of “Belonging” in your own words (individually or as a class). You could extend this by presenting the story through performance or dance.

A Zine is between a book and a magazine. Zines allow an individual to put their thoughts, drawings, comics, stories, out into the world without relying on a publisher, as it is all Do It Yourself. Jeannie Baker deals with political and environmental issues in her works. Create your own Zine based on an environmental or political theme in your community which has a series of different words/stories/images/comics contributed to by each student. The different sections can be photocopied, stapled together and made into one DIY Zine self-published by the students.

Ask students to write or draw from memory what they see from a window at home. As homework ask them to take another look and see if they have missed anything. They could photograph their view to use later as an activity in manipulating the image on the computer.
Show examples of Jeannie Bakers windows from Belonging. Discuss how Baker uses objects in and around the window, which alters the meaning in the story eg. rain drops on the glass signal a change in the weather, birthday cards on the sill indicate her changing age. Students could paint their own window imagined or real. They should think about building up a story as Jeannie Baker does by the things they portray both outside the window and inside the window. Use sketches to begin and finish by using paint and coloured pencils.

**Techniques**
When Jeannie Baker begins her works she starts with the sky. Try to create your own series of washes on paper capturing the changing sky. Select one day each week over several weeks or choose different times of day when you recreate the sky - compare how different each painting is. As a group the skies could be glued together in a concertina book with the name “The book of skies” or a new name of your invention.

Jeannie Baker sources her materials from many different places for each collage sometimes she uses clay or card and paint or found objects. Seaweed because of its already small scale can become a tree or a shrub in one of her works. Each part is developed in intricate detail. Choose just one thing that you could eat - like a piece of fruit, a bowl of noodles, and try to recreate it in relief giving it as much texture and colour as possible. You might start by cutting the shape out of cardboard and then see what materials you can find to apply to your cardboard base to make it seem enticing. As a group combine the foods to make a large collage of a feast! Somebody might paint the background as a setting for your feast. As an extension research the exhibition Eat! held at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney 1998.

Use plants from your local environment to create your own artworks. Jeannie Bakers technique is very realistic - try the opposite and create a more abstract artwork based on your local plants. You could experiment by distorting the plants using a photocopying machine and/or enlarging on an overhead projector or drawing the plant with your eyes closed, using continuous line drawings.

Collage is Jeannie Bakers main medium. Try using the computer to create a collage. A landscape image could be scanned and then added to in Photoshop to become an imaginary landscape or a landscape of the future. Extension activity: Students could find some examples of artists using computerised collages or photomontages in the newspaper, discuss how these are often used for humorous purposes, to give a real event a new meaning or a politician a whole new look.

**Materials**
Among the great variety of materials that Jeannie Baker uses are natural grasses, tin and earth. Continue this list by examining Bakers work closely. Consider the source of her materials. The list could be divided into known and unknown sources.

The materials that artists use can add to the meaning in the artwork. Jeannie Baker gathers materials from her local area to create works, which reflect themes in her local environment. Consider other artists who use materials in their artworks, which connect to place such as John Wolesley or weavings by Yvonne Koolmatrie.

Among other artists using unusual materials for their works is Tatsumi Orimoto, known as the bread man. He uses French bread sticks wrapped around his head in performances. Janine Antoni creates self-portrait busts made from chocolate and soap. Compile a list of some of the unexpected materials that artists may have used? Consider how does the message in the artwork relate to the material used? Search the Internet for further information about Tatsumi Orimoto and Janine Antoni.
**Colour**
Collect fabric off cuts, threads, magazine images that capture the sense of a wet or a dry environment. Layer these materials onto a piece of clear acetate thinking about using harmonious colours (warm or cool). Build on the work by painting in the spaces. Give the work a poetic title responding to the theme.

**Describing artworks - through the senses**
Imagine you are a musical composer and think about what sounds are pertinent to the images by Jeannie Baker. Split your group in two and describe and make the sounds you might hear looking at one of the images - from the start of the book and from the end. Think about what musical instruments could be used to make each of the separate sounds and what other methods you could use. Then create two soundscapes of the images.

Research the Australian Modernist artist Roy de Maistre and the European Expressionist Wassily Kandinsky who were influenced by sound and music when creating their artworks, look at their abstract styles and use of colour and shape. From the soundscapes developed earlier create paintings using colour and shape to symbolise the different sounds. Compare the difference between the works developed, relating to the first part of the book and the last.

Create a table with each of the five senses listed at the top. Describe the key parts of the artwork by Jeannie Baker using each of the different senses. For example: If you had to describe the artwork just through your sense of smell - How would you describe the difference between the first works through to the last works?

Imagine you were to describe Baker’s work to a sight-impaired group. Develop a tactile description of her work by finding objects or materials that could be touched which feel like elements of the artwork for e.g. a sprig of basil could describe the vegetable garden, the cool surface of an orange might convey the feeling of the rain on the glass...etc.

**Texture**
The textures in Jeannie Bakers artwork are very important creating the tactile quality of the artwork. Create a ceramic tile, using impressions of objects to create different designs. Give the surface as many different textures as possible. Finish by glazing in a range of colours. The tiles could then be assembled as a group artwork or be a feature in a school garden.

**After viewing the exhibition**
Bring to school a number of examples of different textures found in nature e.g. Feathers, fur, bark. Let students feel the texture of each and talk about texture, pattern and colour of the different materials. Try to represent the textures using a number of different drawing media and frottage. e.g. charcoal, pencil, oil pastel. Look closely at Baker’s work to see how she has created different textures. From the drawings and frottage develop a glossary of textures.

**Personal, political & social connections**
Jeannie Bakers artwork presents a very hopeful view of the future. Create two different views of the future 50 years from now - one in a positive way and the other in a negative way. As a group discuss your views of the future. Think about how the future is represented in popular culture.

Consider staging an exhibition of the students work in response to their viewing the exhibition by Jeannie Baker. They could ask visitors for their interpretations of works and compare this with their own intentions.
Do you know of any community schemes working to bring back native plants, bush regeneration or restoring old buildings? Consider documenting these schemes and having students respond by creating posters or artwork inspired by the project.

In her artwork Jeannie Baker refers to the political movement "Reclaim the Streets”. Research this group and find out what the motivation behind the movement is? Extend this by researching what local political action groups exist in your area. You could focus on social justice groups, environmental groups, urban renewal groups etc.

**Critical analysis & art appreciation**

Choose either the animals found in belonging or the ones you discovered in your school environment and create a 3d sculpture of the animal using reused and recycled materials. Think about the texture and shape of the animal. Look at artists who have created animal inspired sculptures such as Louise Weaver, John Davis, early work by Christopher Langton, James Angus and Jeff Koons Puppy. Compare and contrast the materials they have used and how these materials relate to the message in their works. Use the Internet to extend your search.

Refer to artworks representing the environment, by Australian artists eg. Colin Lanceley, Louise Hearman, Brett Whiteley, Michael Johnson and Jeannie Baker.

Identify what type of Australian environment is shown in each artwork.

Group them under the following pairs of headings:

1. Present – Past
2. Realistic - Abstract
3. Textured – Smooth
4. Bright/colourful - dark/moody
5. Detailed - Simple

Discuss the different media, and size of each. Which one appeals to you most and why?

Does any example remind you of your own environment or one that you know?
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