

Martin & Sylvia's Nature School

All Story Descriptions by Season

Every Thursday Martin goes to the Goose-eye Wilderness School, while Sylvia and her friend Sophia create a Nature Home-school. From wild craft cooking to outdoor games to building projects to tree identification, Nature School will be a year of unfolding learning and fun.

Autumn Season:



This is a collection of 12 autumn stories, plus the 4 stories that introduce the series.

What to Do on Thursdays

Momma, brother and sister decide they want to dedicate one day a week for outside 'nature' school and they set intentions about it. By the next day, Martin is enrolled in the Goose-eye Wilderness school and Momma has formed a homeschool nature day with Sylvia's friend Sophia. "Wow!", they think, "Making intentions really works!"

The Deer Mice

On the first day of Nature school, brother and sister wake to a very rainy day. When Martin arrives at Goose-eye Wilderness School, he is surprised to see a bus has come from the city, bringing children who have never before visited the forest. Sylvia, meanwhile, is disappointed that her friend Sophia doesn't like playing in the rain.

Out in the Elements

The children in Martin's group are undeterred by the rain and have a great time playing together. That is, until Alexander — a boy who arrives late — brings an uncomfortable layer of competition to the games. Sylvia, meanwhile, manages to entice Sophia outside by falling into an empty garden bed filled with mud.

The Great Gift

Troy, one of the apprentices, helps the deer mice group work together by telling them a story about the 'great gift' — or paper birch bark. They make a fire and simmer some pine needle tea together to celebrate the year ahead. Sylvia and Sophia also have a great afternoon playing and working outside in the mud and rain. Both brother and sister end the day exhausted and very satisfied — it looks like Thursday Nature School Day is going to be a huge success!

What is Underneath

Martin is getting to know his fellow Deermice but worries that Alexander doesn't like him. He is delighted however, to be paired with Alexander for a nature drawing project where he learns that what you see doesn't always show what is underneath.

I Feel Orange

While Sylvia is feeling very energetic on one Nature School morning, her friend Sofia is feeling very tired. "I feel blue" she says. This inspires a long conversation, and then a project around what it is to "feel" different colors.

Change Fairies

Martin loves making fires. He loves to watch fires burn and finds the crackling sounds soothing. Eva, one of the apprentices, has a very different picture of the true nature of fire — one that is poetic and understood as a part of the fairy world. This helps Martin see not only fire in a different light, but all things that change.

Camouflage

Brother and sister's favorite game — no matter the time of day or time of year — is a game where you blend into your surroundings and try not to be seen. Martin is usually the master of this game, but when Sylvia learns a trick at Nature School, she becomes "The Invisible Girl."

The Sword Inside

Martin wants to be a real knight for Halloween — and real knights, he says, have horses, metal helmets, and iron swords. Daddy wonders about this. Is a knight still a knight without horses, helmets, and swords? Martin doesn't know — but he gets a surprising answer in Wilderness School that morning. He learns that knights, as well as everyone else, have swords...on the inside.

They Were Here

After attending a concert in the town hall, brother and sister learn that some famous people had visited their town in the past and had a big impact on the town's identity. Later in the week, during Wilderness School, Martin learns that a forest is impacted every day by visiting animals, though their impact may be very subtle. This leads him to a remarkable discovery — one that makes him wonder if some of those famous people had actually made an impact on the forest as well.

Painting the In Between

One late Autumn morning, everyone is sleepy and slow moving except Daddy. He is excited because it is his favorite time of the year — a time that is in between Autumn and Winter, filled with colors that are in between other colors. This doesn't make any sense to Sylvia and her friend Sofia — until they actually paint them. And they find that in-between colors are beautiful in a magical way.

The Color is Always There

While Sylvia and Sofia make their own colorful leaves out of paper and paint, Daneesha teaches Martin's Wilderness class how to find color even in a late autumn gray-brown New England forest. Martin also gets to know Sam better and learns that she is missing Arizona, the colorful state where she used to live.

Out in the Sticks

Sylvia learns that Sofia won't be coming to Nature school this week and resists Momma's plan to go on a hike. But when Momma explains that they are going 'out in the sticks' she is intrigued as to what that could mean. Martin, meanwhile, is frustrated with Griffin's interruptions during Troy's story. But during a 'seeking' exercise, it turns out Griffin has exactly what Martin needs.

Birds and Squirrels

Sylvia spends most of this week's Nature School day annoyed with Sofia because her friend won't do the same amount of work. Momma reminds Sylvia that everyone has their own way of helping out, but Sylvia doesn't fully appreciate this until a pair of squirrels demonstrates this lesson in their backyard.

Touch of Nature

This week's Goose-Eye school is focused on all the senses other than sight — and Martin feels a little nervous about this. What will it be like to walk around the forest without seeing? But Eva, this week's apprentice gently helps him appreciate the sounds, the smells and the touch that the natural world offers.

Wrappings

Brother and sister wake to an ice storm and wonder if Goose-eye Wilderness School will be cancelled. Sylvia hopes so because she loves the idea of having her brother experience her school. But when Martin does end of going to Wilderness school, he has mixed feelings about it. Luckily Helmut, the substitute apprentice for this week, offers a picture of feelings that is exactly how Martin feels - and he realizes he is missing his sister.

Winter Season:



This is a collection of 13 winter stories, for the 13 weeks of winter.

Gentle Tracking

It is the second Thursday with no Goose-eye Wilderness School and Martin is wanting some "seven-year-old time" with his friends. When Momma invites Griffin, one of the Goose-eye children, to join them on a hike, Martin is frustrated and disappointed that his younger sister Sylvia has to be included. But then, as they quietly and gently follow deer tracks through the snow, Martin's mood transforms from one of tightness and resentment...into something gentler.

The Bud's Story

The winter holiday vacation has been busy for Martin and he is looking forward to starting the new year with some quiet time in the woods with his Goose-Eye Wilderness School friends. Sylvia, however, starts her first Nature School day with a bad cold — consequently, Martin arrives at Goose-eye late. This is frustrating for him until he hears a story from Troy about a tree bud's life and its anticipation of the future year ahead — with its beautiful growth as well as its inevitable challenges. This is the perfect story for setting intentions for the new year, as well as making room for the disappointing surprises.

Nature Medicine

Martin adores his weekly time at Goose-eye Wilderness School. When he wakes one morning with some ominous cold symptoms, his instinctive response is to pretend he is fine. During Wilderness School that day, Eva teaches a little lesson on how the elders of old used to discover wisdom in the natural world, and Martin begins to receive some wisdom of his own.

Impressions

Sylvia and her friend Sofia make a powerful connection between important figures such as Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Eleanor Roosevelt, Gandhi and Malala — and the fallen leaves that make an physical impression in the ice.

Evergreen Brushes

When Daddy realizes that he left the paint brushes in his studio in town, he is not sure how to do his planned lesson for Nature School. Luckily Sylvia's friend Sofia comes up with an idea: why don't we make some? What happens next is not only fun, but beautiful.

Winter Wonder

At Goose-eye Wilderness Camp, Martin notices that his friend Sam is feeling tired of winter and missing her home in Arizona. He hesitates to tell her that there are still several weeks of winter left, but luckily Helmut, the apprentice from Germany, knows exactly how to show Sam the way to appreciate the gifts of Winter.

Nature Notes

For the first time this year, Martin does not want to go to Goose-eye Wilderness School on Thursday — and it is simply because they are going to be working with journals. In conversation with Momma, Martin admits his worry that others will be way ahead of him in reading and writing. What if they make fun of him? But between Momma's advice and a wise short story told by Troy, the apprentice, Martin learns that when it comes to reading and writing, everyone is ready...when they are ready.

A Geometry of Hearts

Martin is curious about math and how it will play out in his future. When Momma explains that math shows up in all parts of life, Martin wants examples. Momma talks about several different ways to use

math, but when she lands on geometry, Martin's interest is primed for an exploration of shapes at Goose-eye Wilderness School.

Pretend Poetry

There has been a string of warm days where brother and sister live, and Sylvia wonders if Spring has arrived. Daddy — and then Sofia — assure her that Winter would return, but it isn't until Mrs. Brown explores the "pretend Spring" through Haiku poetry that Sylvia truly understands.

Talking Stick

Martin is full of energy and can't wait to play games, build bridges, and generally be active during Goose-eye Wilderness School. His friend Alexander, however, is excited about a quieter day of scientific study. Daneesha, their apprentice for the week, decides that the best course of action is to start with a conversation, employing the respectful Native American practice of using a "talking stick."

Sugaring Together

Maple sugaring time has finally arrived, but Martin is upset when he learns he'll miss the first day of sugaring at home — a disappointment made worse by the notion that Sofia will be taking his place. But when he arrives at his wilderness school that morning, he learns that not only will they be sugaring, but HE will be teaching the others how it's done!

Bittersweet

It's Martin's final Thursday of Goose-eye Wilderness School before the holiday break — the Thursday where the 'deermice' are going to give home-made natural gifts to each other — and he is puzzling over what to give Jayla. He wants something surprising, something fun, something sparkly, and something quietly adventurous to give his friend — but it is his little sister Sylvia that comes up with just the right thing.

Snow Candles

As there is no Goose-eye Wilderness School this week, Martin invites his friend Jojo to join Sylvia and Sofia to make snow candles. When Jojo shares that she lives only with her dad, Sofia is delighted to share that she, too, has only one parent - her mom. For the rest of the afternoon, all four children work together, making candles, building a fort and enjoying their magical time together.

Spring Season:



This is a collection of 14 spring stories.

The Perfect Mix

Sylvia and Sofia go next door to the Browns' Farm with eager anticipation of working with the animals or plants. Instead, Mr. Brown wants them to help him

make dirt. Make dirt? Mr. Brown explains how dirt is a miraculous combination of Life and Death and is the foundation of everything that happens at the farm.

Parent Note: This story contains a reference to the death of a pet rabbit.

All the Pretty Voices

From the moment Martin got up in the morning, he found himself thinking about voices: how much he enjoyed Helmut's voice and how he sometimes found his sisters voice to be irritating. When he gets to Wilderness School, Eva teaches them another place where they can enjoy all the wonderful voices in nature: in birdsong.

Tender Seedlings

When Sylvia wakes up one morning and smells the oatmeal porridge for breakfast, she wonders, "Why do we always have the same foods for breakfast?" While working on a nature school project of planting kale seeds in egg carton pots, Sylvia and Momma discuss this question and consider the idea that people — as well as garden seedlings — feel tender in the morning and don't want lots of change.

Bugged by Bugs

Martin is inspired by Karl, Daddy's woodsman friend, who does not use bug spray when working in the woods. What's his trick for keeping the bugs at bay? Karl simply ignores them. Martin tries this at Goose-Eye Wilderness School and finds that not being bugged is a lot more challenging than he imagined.

Setting the Table

"Sylvia and Sofia are excited about drawing new spring forest flowers — but when they encounter lots of spring black flies, Daddy suggests they carefully gather some of the forest and bring it back home to draw inside. But what happens next is a surprise to all!"

Measuring the World

When Sylvia declares that she knows everything there is to know about her best friend, Sofia, Momma suggests that she use the scientific method to test her theory. And what is the scientific method? Momma explains that it involves measuring, collecting data and then studying the data. Sylvia and Sofia then learn the difference between using the scientific method on rocks, plants, animals and then... best friends.

Kings and Queens of the Forest

When, in this Martin & Sylvia's Nature School story, "Kings and Queens of the Forest", Martin leaves for Wilderness School, he can't help but feel envious for Sylvia's project with Daddy: preparing for May Day by building a huge bonfire and cooking Beltane Bannock Bread. This has his attention all morning until Eva gives his group an inspiring May Day question: What kind of King or Queen of the Forest do you want to be? And his answer helps Martin understand not only a gift of May Day but of leadership itself.

Mother Earth Art

In this Martin & Sylvia's Nature School story, "Mother Earth Art", while searching for just the right words to write in his Mother's Day card for Momma, Martin is given several great options from his friends at Wilderness School. The project for that day, however, is not focused so much on their own human mothers, but on the mother we all share: Mother Earth.

Nature School Apprentice

When Goose-eye Wilderness school has a week off for apprentice training, Martin responds unenthusiastically to the idea of participating in Sylvia's Nature School — that is, until Momma asks if he might be able to be this week's "Nature School Apprentice," inspiring him to share his own knowledge with his little sister and Sofia.

Brave Salad

After having a recurring bad dream, Sylvia expresses her fear of going to bed at night. Momma has several ideas on how to soothe and prepare her for bed, but it is her friend Sofia who comes up with the most effective way to deal with any fear: making brave salad!

Guardians of the Garden

When Momma wakes up to see that some wild rabbits have eaten her garden greens again, she asks Mr. Brown to teach her some ways to keep the rabbits away. Mr. Brown proposes a workshop not only for Momma, but for Sylvia and Sofia as well. In the workshop, they learn about rabbits, but also imagine what it is like to be a deer, a blackbird, a mole, and Sylvia's favorite — a porcupine!

Trusting the Forest

When Martin's friend Alexander tells him he doesn't want his father to come to the Goose-eye Wilderness School evening program, Martin is curious: why not? But that evening, Martin can see that Alexander's father is very protective and nervous. Luckily, Troy, one of the apprentices, has the perfect story to help.

Song of the Hermit Thrush - Part One

This is part one of the last day of Goose-eye Wilderness school before Summer Vacation begins. In this part, Martin learns that he will be a part of a new group of children – one formed not by age, but by "who he is." He learns that there is a Mockingbird group, a Hermit thrush group, a Crow group and a Hummingbird group – and when he hears Chick describe them – he thinks that he belongs to them all! Which will be his group?

Song of the Hermit Thrush - Part Two

In Part Two of the Song of the Hermit Thrush, Martin and his group bring their song to the closing ceremony of Goose-eye Wilderness School. He sees the altar that the Hummingbird Clan built, tastes the tea that the Crow Clan concocted, listens to the story that the Mockingbird Clan tells — and then

leads the entire group in the closing song. It is a sweet, emotional, and deeply gratifying event — and when he has some time with his Deermice friends, he comes to realize that though he learned a great deal about the natural world throughout the year at Goose-eye, he learned even more about himself.