

A GUIDE TO PROTECT OUR PLANET



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WELCOME

from the Reading by 9 Team

The best way to care for the earth is to fall in love with nature. Encouraging a child to learn about the environment allows them to appreciate nature's beauty. For young nature explorers, feeling the grass under their feet and watching the wind blow through the trees is a wondrous joy and a meaningful way to engage the senses. With tactile learning and a curiosity for the world around them, children can become nature experts through everyday play.

In the pages ahead, you'll find activities, tips and book recommendations to help your family become planet protectors. Caring for the earth doesn't have to be daunting. It can be an adventure beginning with small steps to make sustainability part of your daily routine.

At the Los Angeles Times, we remain committed to serving the youngest learners in our community and encouraging them to explore new ideas through reading and writing. Reading by 9, a program of the Los Angeles Times, aims to support youth and family literacy. Established in 1998, we continue our work to aid parents, guardians and educators to meet child literacy goals.

The Reading by 9 annual parent reading guide was developed in partnership with the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power.

Our 2026 guide includes a diversity of child authors and main characters in stories. Educational nature-focused activities and diverse book recommendations allow children to learn from their environment and the experiences of others. The guide is available in both English and Spanish, and offers resources to promote literacy as a routine in a child's life.

As we look ahead, we aim to provide year-round opportunities for our community to engage with literacy. If you are interested in supporting our efforts, please consider making a tax-deductible donation to the Los Angeles Times Community Fund as we strive to expand literacy resources for families.

WELCOME FROM THE LOS ANGELES DEPARTMENT OF WATER AND POWER

by Sarah Viramontes, Manager of Water Conservation Policy

The City of Los Angeles has long recognized that water conservation is the cornerstone of multiple strategies to improve water supply reliability for its residents. The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power has taken a leadership role in managing its demand for water by creating a robust program to reduce water waste, educate its customers in water conservation and efficient water use, incentivize the adoption of water saving devices in homes and businesses, and transform long-term water use behaviors.

Water conservation and water use efficiency are the two main objectives LADWP aims to advance for managing water use demands. Water conservation reduces demand through improving water use behaviors (e.g., shorter showers). Water use efficiency reduces demand through upgrading water fixtures to use less water, while not changing functionality (e.g., replacing 2.0 gallon per minute (gpm) showerhead to a 1.5 gpm showerhead).

The benefits of water conservation and water use efficiency include improved water supply reliability, monetary savings for customers that reduce their water use and help keep water bills low, and reduced energy use and greenhouse gas emissions from water treatment, water pumping, and conveyance. Ultimately, the primary beneficiaries are LADWP's water customers and the natural environment.

By teaching children to save water through simple daily habits, we help them understand the importance of protecting one of our most valuable resources. LADWP encourages families and educators to make water conservation and water use efficiency part of everyday routines. Small actions today can create a lasting impact for tomorrow.

This Reading By 9 Guide is designed to help both teachers and parents explain water conservation to kids in a simple, engaging, and meaningful way.

HOW PLANTING NATIVE SEEDS HELPS CHILDREN LEARN TO CARE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

by Reading by 9 Team

Connecting with nature is one way children learn to care about the environment and how to protect the earth. When children learn to appreciate nature, they exercise their senses as they touch plants and smell flowers. Spending time outdoors allows children to learn how to self-soothe and find a place of solace.

At nonprofits like the California Native Plant Society, young people can find resources to learn about plant science, conservation and environmental education.

“When you see children notice plants and the natural world around them, it really unlocks a whole dimension in the world for them,” said Amina Sharma, CNPS Communications Manager.

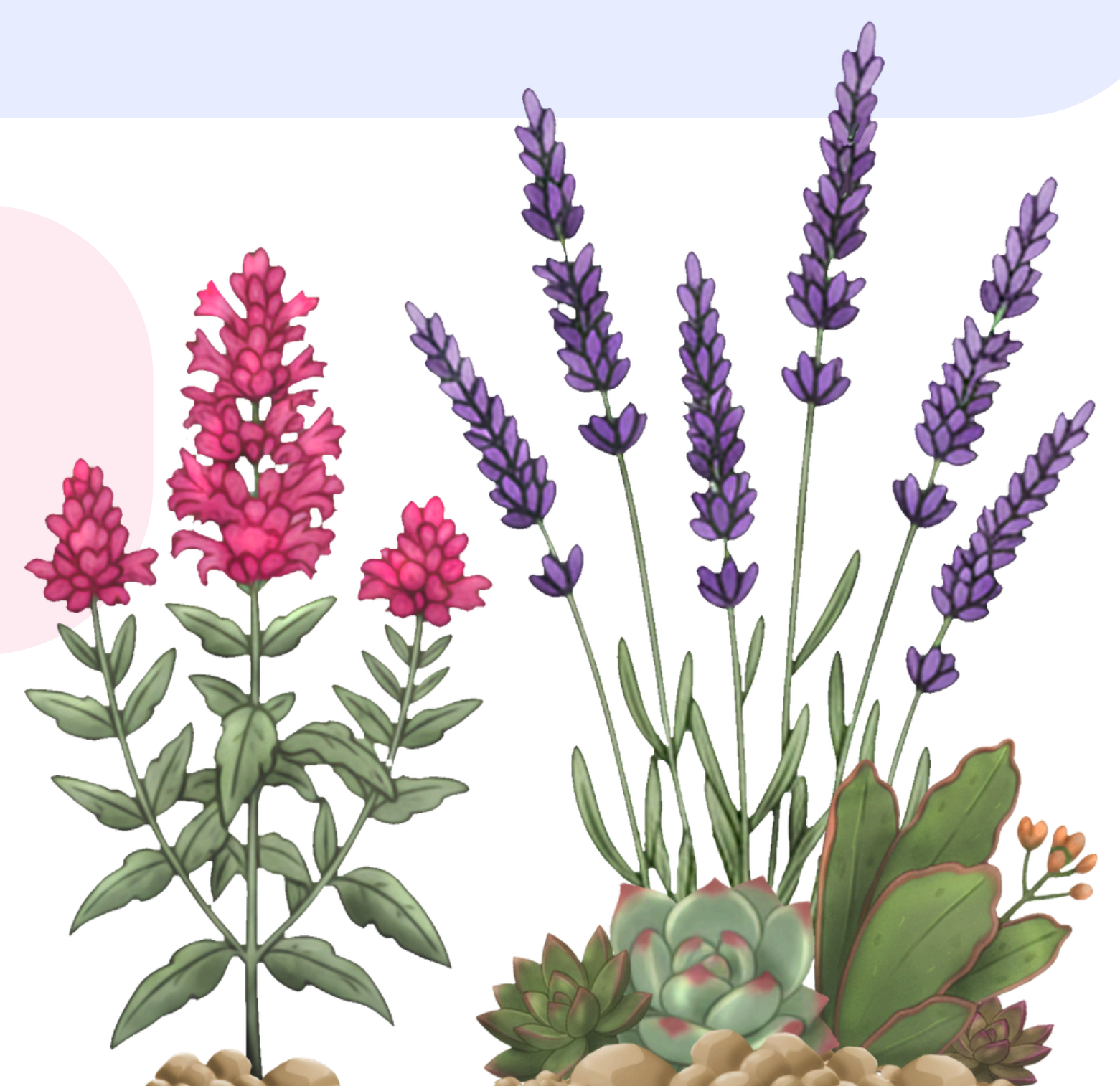
Parents often think they need a grass lawn for their young kids to play, but native grass alternatives can both reduce water usage and encourage children to engage their senses.

“When you switch over to plant a native garden or a native plant yard, you invite all that sensory information to your life,” Sharma said. “Suddenly, you have different heights, different textures, colors and sound – all kinds of things for kids to notice and interact with, more so than a blank slate of a yard.”

Through CNPS, families can enjoy wildlife at [garden tours](#) in cities across California. To plant native seeds, visit your local plant nursery or get free seeds at nine L.A. County Library locations.

**Ready to plant seeds and learn about nature?
See pages 6 and 8 to get started with activities.**

Check out more from CNPS [here](#).



SCATTER SEEDS, WATCH THEM GROW! MAKE A SEED SHAKER

Planting seeds is one way to get your child interested in learning more about nature while engaging their senses. Planting seeds doesn't have to be complicated. **Toss some seeds in the dirt, let nature do the work, and watch them grow!**

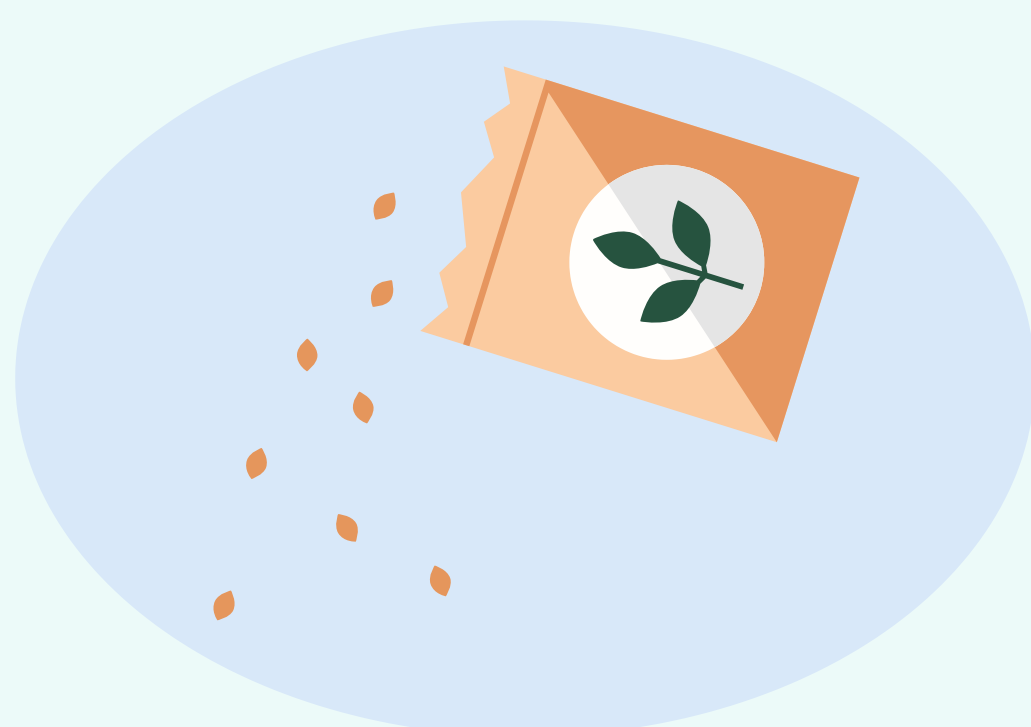
What you'll need

- An empty salt shaker
- or an old seasoning container
- or a recycled plastic water bottle

Tip: If you use a recycled plastic bottle, you'll need scissors and the help of an adult to puncture holes around the top of the bottle before step 1.



- One packet of seeds
 - Find seeds at your local plant nursery or find free seeds at nine LA County Library locations. Visit lacountylibrary.org/seeds



Step 1:

Pour a packet of seeds into your shaker or bottle.

Step 2:

Find where you will plant your seeds. Whether it's your backyard or around your neighborhood, choose a spot where sunlight shines, and water regularly.

Step 3:

Check on the seeds in about 2-3 weeks and watch them grow!



Encourage sensory play: Shake the container and listen to the seeds rhythmically rattle around.

Wildflower seeds are easy to plant, especially before it rains. Shake seeds onto the dirt and the rain will wash them into the ground.

For more gardening tips, visit
Calscape's Garden Planner:
calscape.org/garden-planner:



GET OUTSIDE AND LEARN ABOUT NATURE IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

activity by California Native Plant Society

As we make efforts, big or small, to better the environment around us, understanding and appreciating it leads to meaningful learning. Stepping into the shoes of a botanist is an opportunity for young learners to examine the components of nature right outside the classroom door!

Explore local nature:

Find plants and flowers in your area — around the block, in your neighborhood park, or even at school!

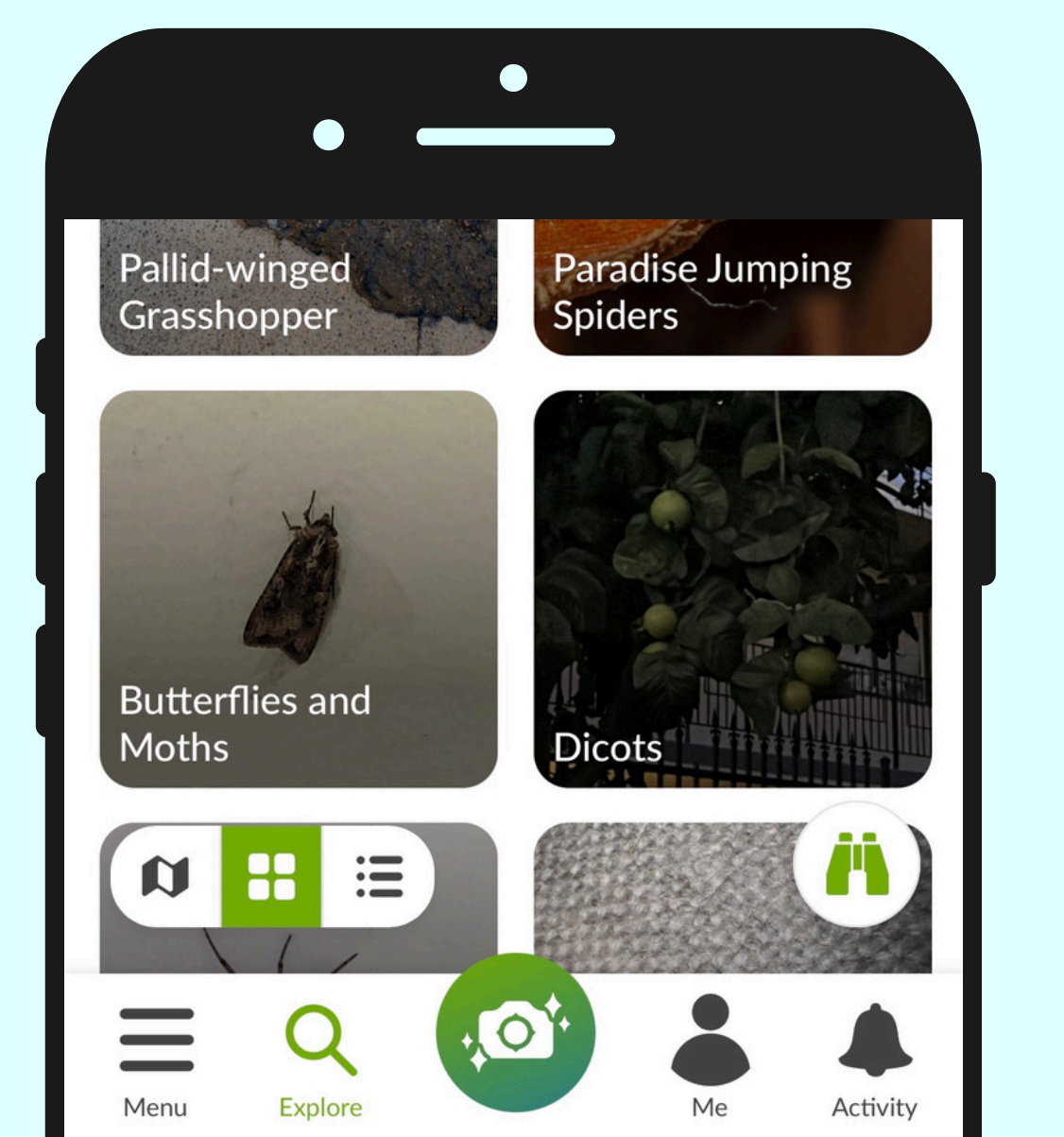
What to do:

1. Take a look at the plants around, focus on one that catches your eye.
2. On your notepad, write down what you see (colors, height, and more) and questions you have, like “how can tell if it is a California native plant?”
3. Snap photos to upload to the iNaturalist app and learn more about the plants outside your door!



What you'll need:

Notepad
Pen or pencil
Smartphone camera
(with adult supervision)
Lots of curiosity!



Snap photos of nature and upload to iNaturalist to learn more about your local biodiversity.

Download the app for [Android](#) or [IOS](#).

SMALL STEPS, BIG CHANGE: THREE EASY WAYS TO HELP THE EARTH

With small changes to our daily routines, we can collectively make a meaningful impact. Teaching children how their small efforts can lead to big change is a meaningful lesson in learning how to care for the environment. Here are some steps you can take:

#1 REDUCE YOUR WATER USAGE.

Turn off the faucet while brushing teeth in the morning and at bedtime.

You can save up to eight gallons of water a day, which adds up to more than 200 gallons a month!

Source: [EPA](#)



#2 AVOID SINGLE-USE PLASTICS

Invest in reusable water bottles, cups, silverware and food containers.

More than 60 million plastic water bottles are thrown away in the United States every day.

Source: [Container Recycling Institute](#)



#3 RECYCLE THE RIGHT WAY

Rinse out any food or drink residue when collecting cans and recyclables.

Scientists estimate only around 9% of all plastic waste is recycled. Rinsing out cans and bottles allows a higher chance of being recycled.

Source: [OECD](#)



CELEBRATE THE EARTH YEAR-ROUND WITH LOS ANGELES PUBLIC LIBRARY



by L.A. Public Library

The Los Angeles Public Library's Neighborhood Science initiative aims to educate children and families about how the environment, human health, and community well-being are interconnected within a shared ecosystem.

Across 40 Neighborhood Science branches, we offer programs that connect science to everyday life, foster curiosity and observation skills, and demonstrate that science can be accessible, hands-on, and relevant to personal experiences. Through participation, children and families gain a deeper appreciation for their relationship to the world around them and discover how their actions can make a difference, starting right in their own neighborhoods.

Our programs cover topics including sustainability, gardening, urban agriculture, farm-to-table cooking, biodiversity and conservation, climate resilience, kelp forests, and more. Families can participate in hands-on sustainable living workshops, such as canning, pickling, sourdough making, upcycling, mending and sewing, as well as nature hiking and journaling. In the spring, we also offer seed giveaways to encourage families to grow their own food and connect with the cycles of nature. Programs are listed on the Library's online calendar at lapl.org/events.



One of the most meaningful aspects of Neighborhood Science is participatory science, more commonly known as citizen science. This approach gives children, families and Angelenos of all ages the chance to contribute real observations and data that help scientists better understand issues affecting our communities. At the same time, participants build science and data literacy, strengthen observation skills and engage with scientific methods through hands-on experiences.

Beyond programs, families can borrow Neighborhood Science Kits for three weeks at a time. These kits support exploration of environmental changes in and around their homes, with a focus on local biodiversity, water and air quality, light pollution, mosquito habitats, urban heat islands and the effects of extreme heat, trees and land cover change, and the role of clouds in climate.

Designed for curious minds of all ages, the kits bring science into everyday spaces and experiences. Patrons can visit lapl.org/neisci/kits to find participating locations and learn more.

WATER CONSERVATION FOR KIDS: 10 WHY IT MATTERS

by Kristin Tsumura Tsai, Environmental Supervisor,
LADWP Water Conservation Policy

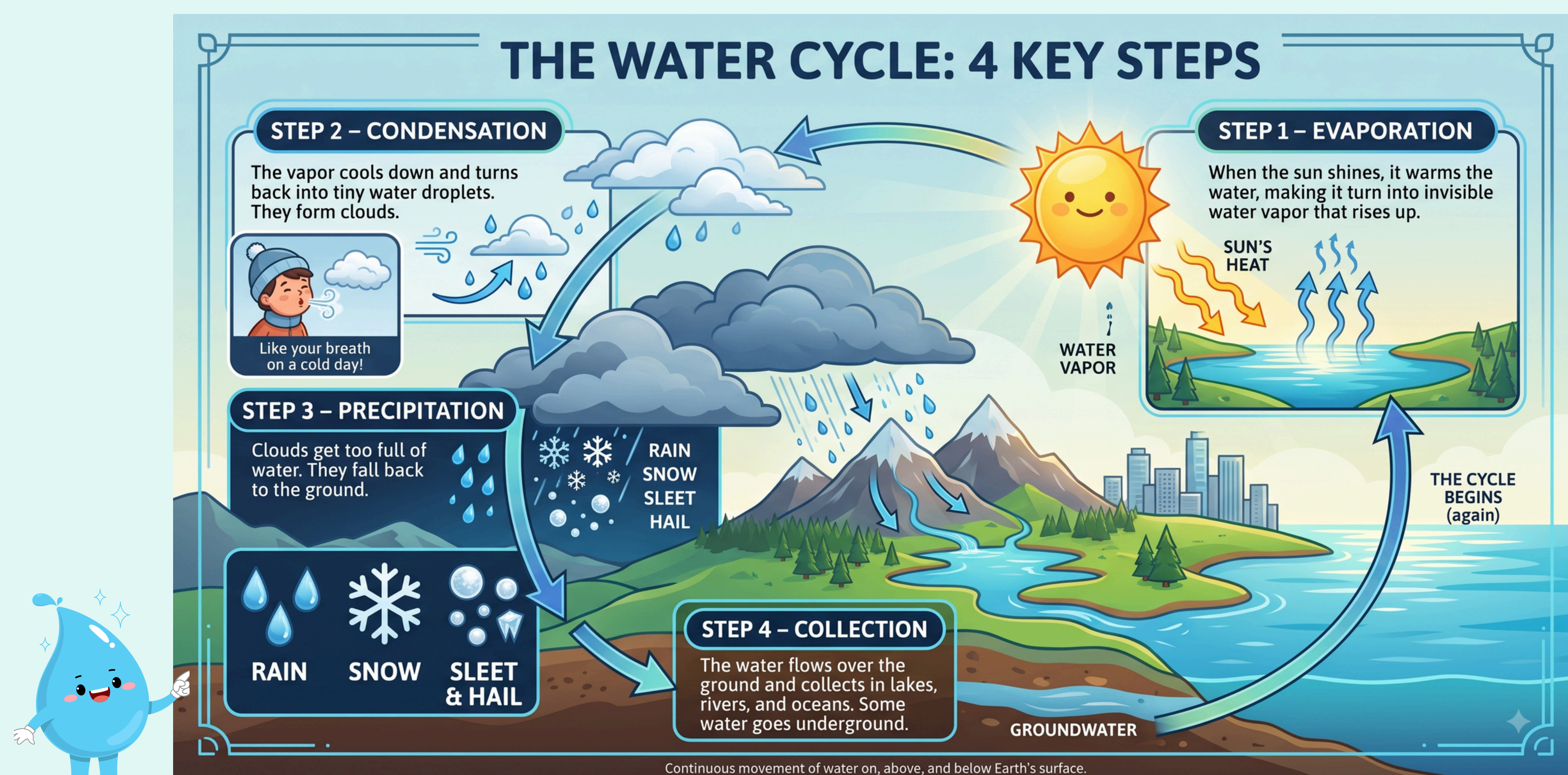


Water is something children and adults use every single day from brushing teeth, taking showers, washing hands, to drinking water after playing outside. Despite frequent use, many children don't realize that clean and usable water is a limited resource and using it wisely is one of the most important ways we can care for our planet.



Fresh Water is Limited

Even though the Earth looks like it has a lot of water, most of it is saltwater in the oceans. Other water is trapped as ice in glaciers or stored underground. Only about 3% of Earth's total water is freshwater that is useable for drinking. This means we must be careful not to waste it and use it wisely. The Earth's water supply is limited, and it does not gain any new water; the same water is used over and over again through a process called the water cycle. The water cycle explains how water moves around our planet. Below are the steps to the water cycle:

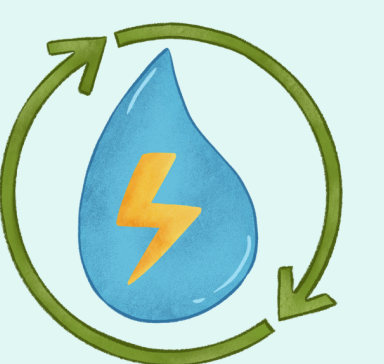


Water Supports All Life

Plants, animals and people all need water to survive. When we use water wastefully, we limit the water available to support our world through activities such as growing food and providing clean drinking water for everyone. Saving water today and using it wisely helps make it available for tomorrow.

It Takes Energy to Deliver Water

Water doesn't just appear in our homes! It must be collected, cleaned, and transported. Water can be transported from hundreds of miles away through aqueducts, or man-made concrete channels to deliver water. For the City of Los Angeles, water comes from the snow in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. When that snow melts, it makes its way to the Los Angeles Aqueduct, where it travels over 200 miles by gravity to make its way down to Los Angeles. However, some water is also supplied from the California Aqueduct and the Colorado River Aqueduct. The water must be cleaned, pumped, and transported. Energy is also used at your home to heat water – such as when you shower, wash dishes, and wash your clothes. Saving water also saves energy.



WATER CONSERVATION FOR KIDS

(CONTINUED)

11



Climate Change

In many places, including Los Angeles, we are experiencing climate change. Climate change is a change in a region's climate patterns; climate looks at long-term patterns like how hot summers usually are or how much it rains in a year. Due to climate change, there have been more extreme weather events in Los Angeles like frequent droughts.

Droughts are prolonged periods of low precipitation and can lead to a shortage of water. This means there isn't enough rain and snow to meet our water needs. Saving water becomes even more important during drought years. If we waste water today and don't use it wisely, there might not be enough water during periods of drought.

Using water wisely is important even when it rains. Extra water can be stored in our reservoirs and used during periods of drought, when we need it most. Saving water is a way to help our planet and other people. Everyone can take small actions to make a big difference.

Ways You Can Save Water

The easiest way to save water is to make it part of your daily routine. Below are some simple habits you can implement today for both your indoor and outdoor water use practices.

For indoors, simple habits like:

- ✓ Turning off the water while brushing your teeth.
This can save 3 gallons of water every time you brush.
- ✓ Taking shorter showers. Reducing showers from 10 minutes to 5 minutes can save 10 gallons of water. It also saves energy since less water needs to be heated by a water heater.
- ✓ Only running the dishwasher or washing machine with a full load. Washing a full load of laundry vs half load can save 20 gallons of water.



For outdoors, you can save water by:

- ✓ Using a rain barrel to collect rainwater to water plants.
- ✓ Removing grass and planting California Native and California Friendly plants that use much less water.
- ✓ Using a spray nozzle with an automatic water hose shutoff.
- ✓ Using a broom instead of water to flush a sidewalk or driveway.

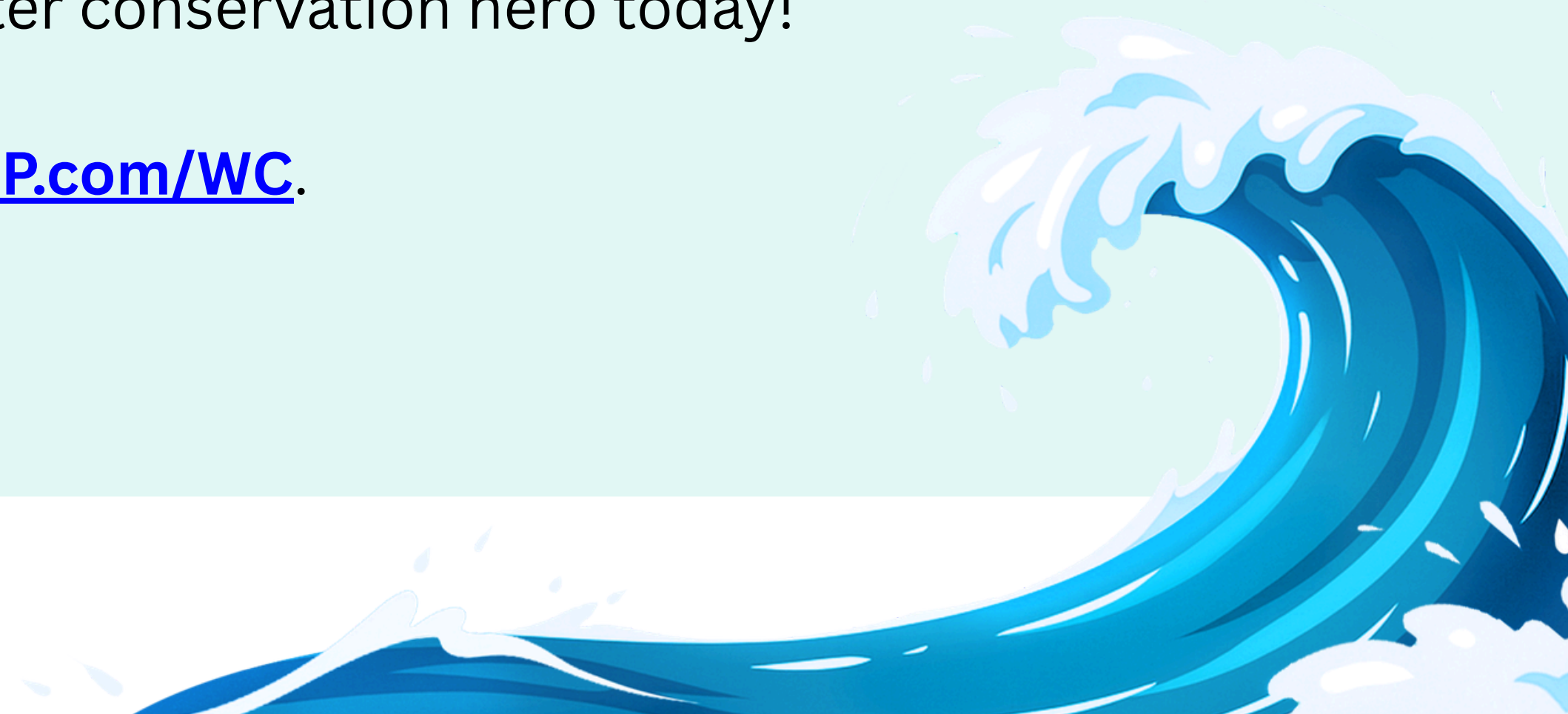


For both indoors and out, make sure to report leaks to adults.

Be a Water Conservation Hero!

Water conservation is easy and important. When kids understand that water is precious and that their actions matter, kids feel empowered to help. By building these water saving habits, we can help shape a generation that values and protects one of our most important resources. Small changes today can make a big difference tomorrow. Take the pledge to be a water conservation hero today!

For more water conservation resources and tips, visit [LADWP.com/WC](https://ladwp.com/WC).



LEARNING ABOUT THE EARTH IS FUN WITH GAMES AND APPS



Earth Cubs

Earth Cubs aims to support children's mental well-being, and make planet-saving exciting, entertaining and achievable.

Find free educational games, videos and activities at earthcubs.com or download the app at earthcubs.com/app.



Science for Kids by Tappity

Multi-topic exploration, learning modules, interactive features and activities and more in one convenient package on IOS.

View sample lessons for free. In-app purchases start at \$6.24 per month with access to over 500 lessons, new monthly lessons, unlimited device use and zero ads.



LingoKids: Games & Shows

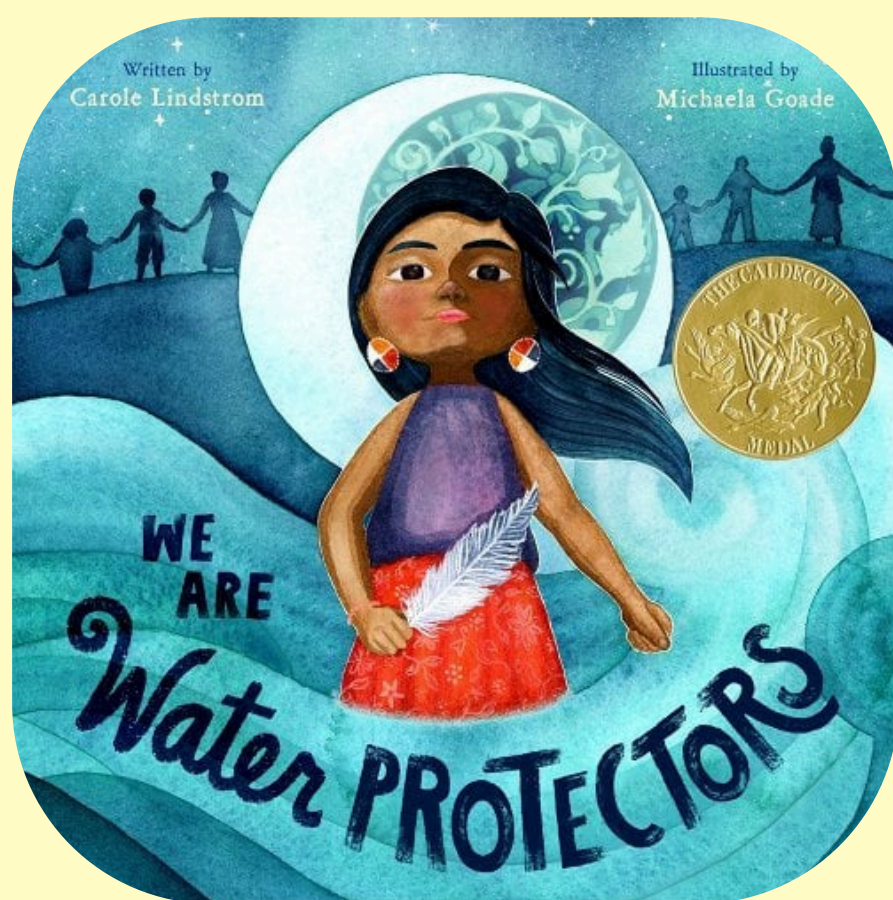
With a broad range of educational lessons and tools, LingoKids features a fun and well-structured section on wildlife science! Available on Android and IOS with an in-app special starting at \$6.25 per month.



BOOK

RECOMMENDATIONS

PRESCHOOL - 1ST GRADE



We Are Water Protectors

Through a powerful picturebook experience echoing Indigenous history, this Caldecott Medal winner teaches young children about the safeguarding of the Earth's water.

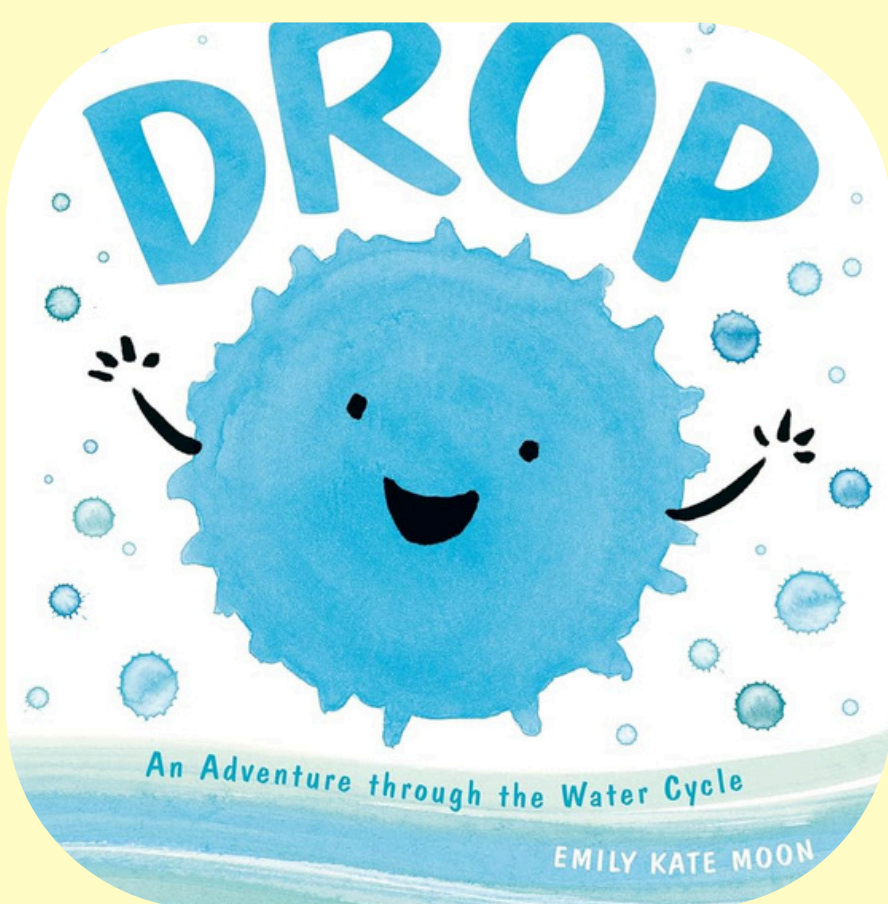
Carole Lindstrom



My Friend Earth

Celebrate Earth's nurturing role through seasons — tending to animals, bringing rain and snow, protecting seeds. Explore nature's wonders with this interactive book.

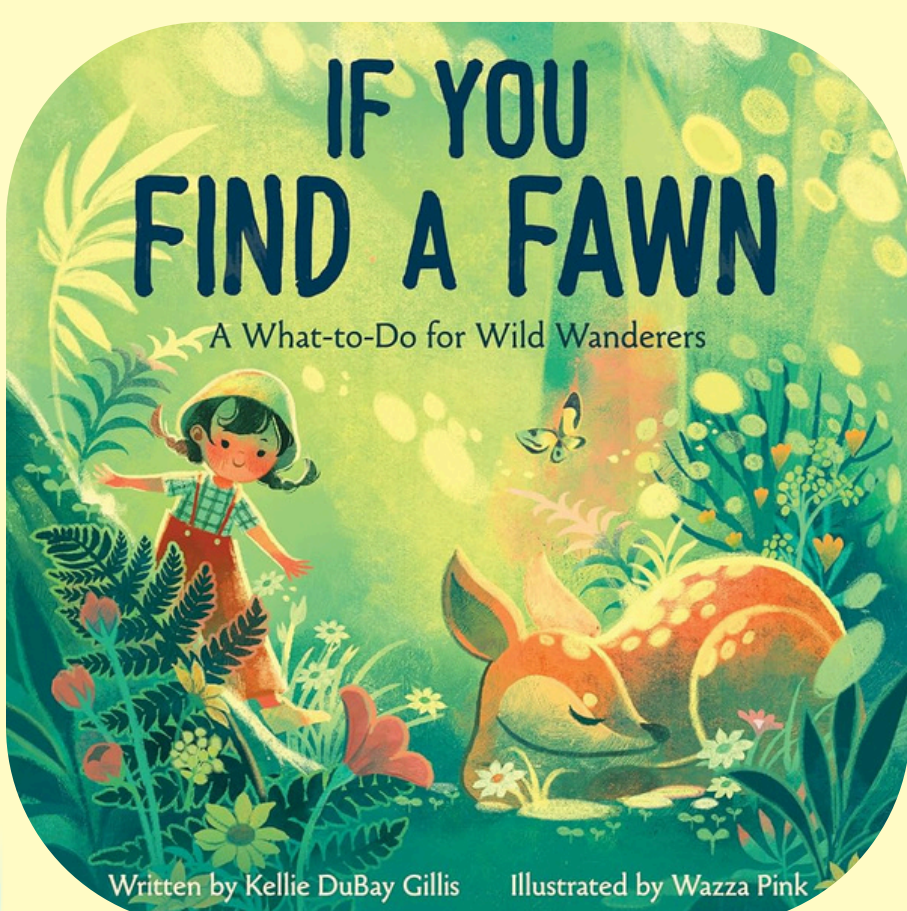
Patricia MacLachlan, Francesca Sanna



Drop: An Adventure Through the Water Cycle

Drop is a pretty big deal around here in the water cycle. In impeccably playful fashion, she is eager to tell new readers about her journey through laughter and essential water facts.

Emily Kate Moon



If You Find a Fawn: A What-to-Do for Wild Wanderers

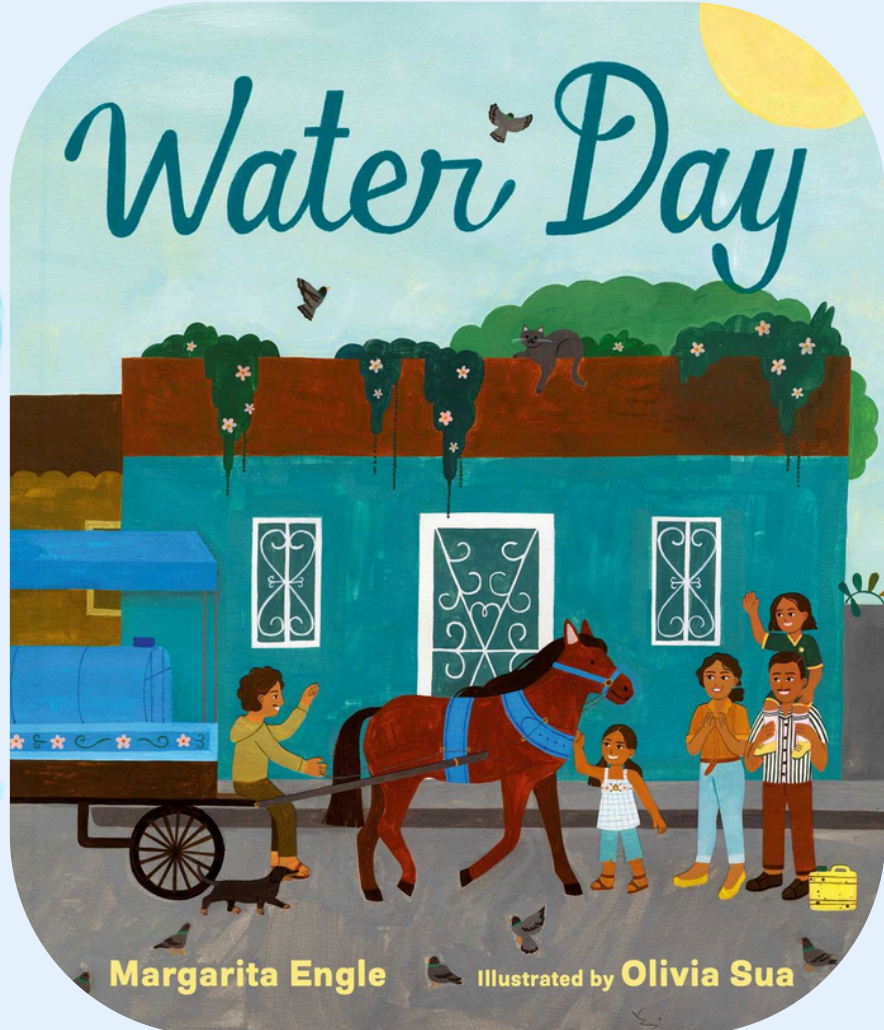
For the curious and the nature-driven, this guide for all wild wanderers provides insight and a how-to educational approach to young wildlife encounters.

Kellie DuBay Gillis

BOOK

RECOMMENDATIONS

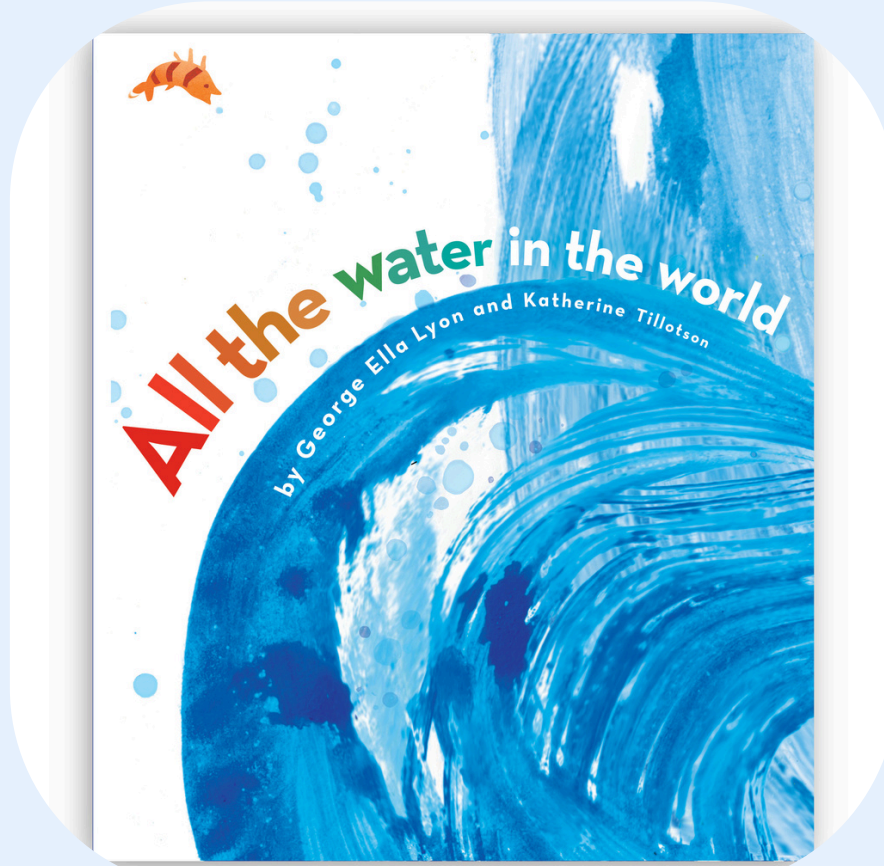
1ST GRADE – 2ND GRADE



Water Day

A young girl describes the excitement of water day, when a man comes to her Cuban neighborhood to deliver water.

Margarita Engle



All the Water in the World

Poetic flow and thoughtful illustration, Lyon's work provides your child with an enjoyable literary experience while introducing them to the process of the water cycle.

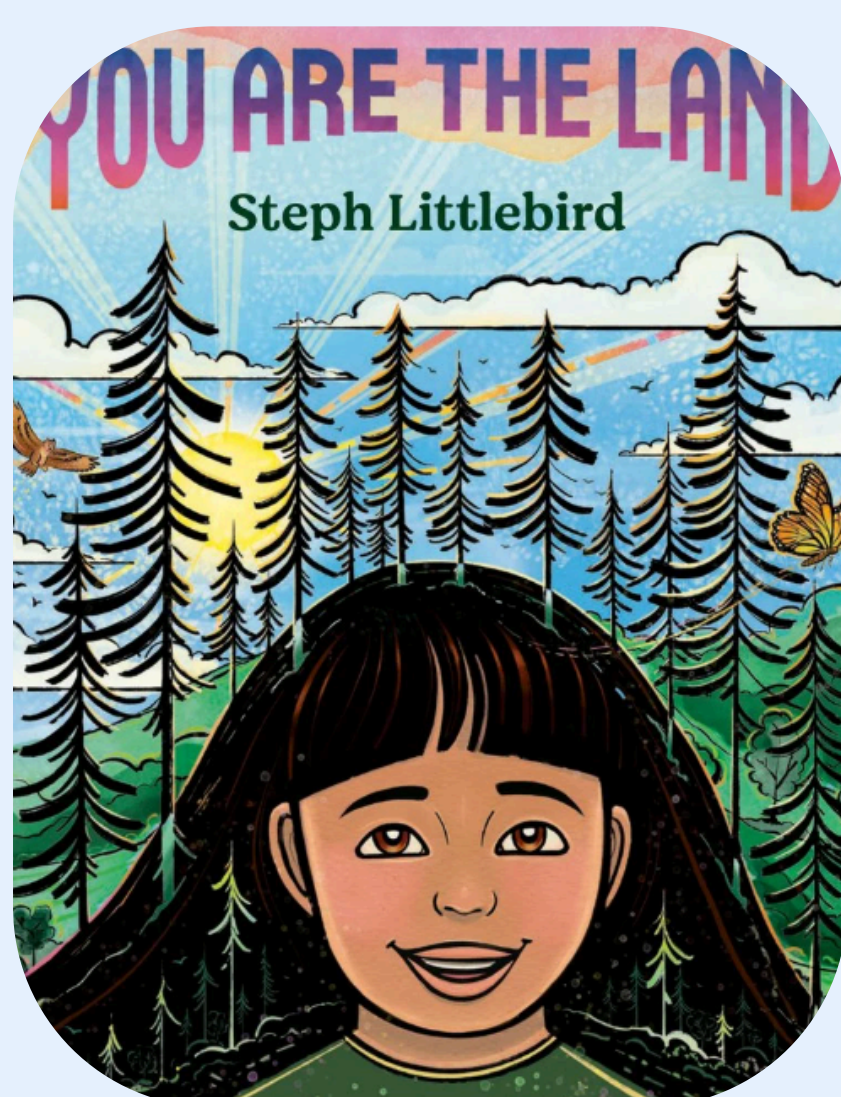
George Ella Lyon



The Great Lakes: Our Freshwater Treasure

Learn how the five largest lakes in North America were formed, the importance of their abundant freshwater, and how they've become a national treasure.

Barb Rosenstock



You Are the Land

A joyful exploration of Indigenous culture following a child's loving relationship with the land that supports and nurtures her as she grows.

Steph Littlebird

BOOK

RECOMMENDATIONS

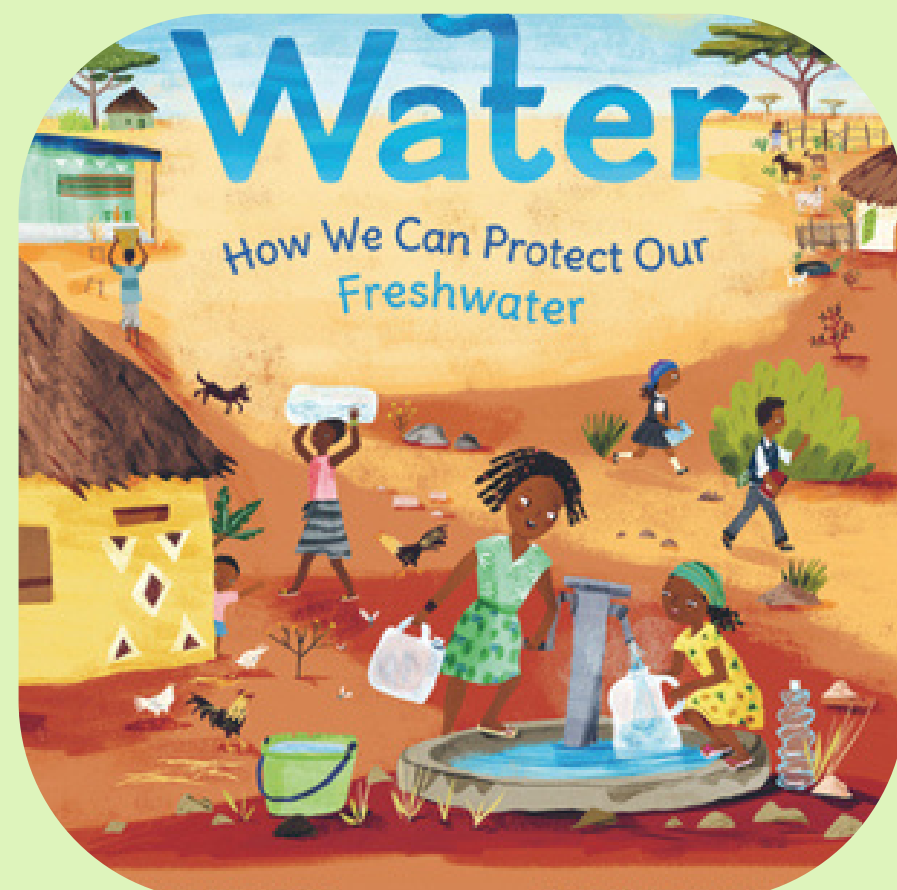
3RD GRADE - 4TH GRADE



Fresh Air, Clean Water: Our Right to a Healthy Environment

Stories of children around the globe taking action to protect their environment and their right to live a sustainable and healthy life with the foundations of safe soil, water and air.

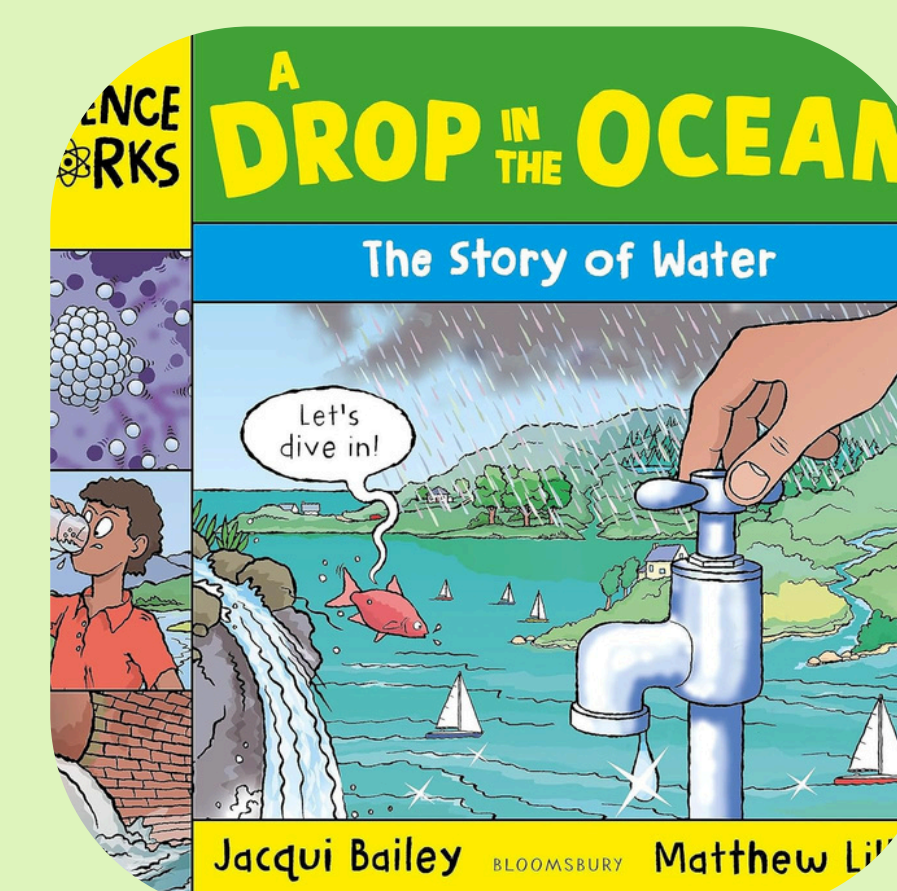
Megan Clendenan



Water: How We Can Protect Our Freshwater

Learn how water provides to the planet from impactful visuals, facts and tips to encourage young readers to take action in their water usage and conservation.

Catherine Barr



A Drop In The Ocean: The Story of Water

Follow the humorous adventure of a water droplet to provide children with an understanding of the water cycle.

Jacqui Bailey



Why Does Plastic Hurt the Planet?: How our stuff is harming the Earth, and what you can do to reduce your use

Find easy ways to reduce plastic use in your household in this informative book. Make a big impact with small steps.

Clive Gifford

COMMUNITY PROGRAMS AND ORGANIZATIONS



Literacy Services

Common Sense Media
1100 Glendon Ave. 17th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90024
commonsense.org

CSUN LA Times Literacy Center
18111 Nordhoff Street,
Northridge, CA 91330
(818) 677-7394
<https://www.csun.edu/teaching-learning-counseling-consortium/services/la-times-literacy-center>

Children's Institute
2121 West Temple Street Los Angeles, CA 90026
(213) 260-7600
<https://www.childrensinstitute.org/>

Raising a Reader
Sobrato Center for Nonprofits
489 Valley Way
Milpitas, CA 95035
(650) 489-0550
Raisingareader.org

Reach Out and Read
119 providers in LA County
(617) 455-0600
reachoutandread.org

Reading Is Fundamental of Southern California
7250 Bandini Blvd., Suite 209
Commerce, CA 90040
(323) 890-0876
Rifsocal.org

Reading Partners
5350 Wilshire Blvd., #36216
Los Angeles, CA 90036
(213) 399-8599
readingpartners.org/location/los-angeles

Reading to Kids
1600 Sawtelle Boulevard,
Suite 210 Los Angeles,
California 90025
(310) 479-7455
readingtokids.org

The Book Foundation
5429 W. Washington Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90016
(323) 746-5800
<https://www.makegoodinc.org/the-book-foundation>

Quality Start Los Angeles
(855) 507-4443
info@qualitystartla.org
<https://qualitystartla.org/family-resources/early-literacy/>

Access Books
(310) 284-3452
accessbooks.net

COMMUNITY PROGRAMS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Support Services

Abriendo Puertas | Opening Doors

1000 N. Alameda St., No.
240
Los Angeles, CA 90012
(213) 346-3216
ap-od.org

Families Forward Learning Center

980 N. Fair Oaks Ave.
Pasadena, CA 91103
(626) 792-2687
Familiesforwardlc.org

First 5 LA

750 N. Alameda Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012
(213) 482-5902
www.first5la.org

Hands Together

201 Civic Center Drive
Santa Ana, CA 92701
(714) 479-0294
handstogether-sa.org

Little by Little

12 sites across Southern
California
lblreaders.org

Mexican American Opportunity Foundation

27 locations across Southern
California
(323) 890-1555
maof.org

Pathways LA

3325 Wilshire Blvd., Suite
1100
Los Angeles, CA 90010
(213) 427-2700
pathwaysla.org

Plaza de la Raza

3540 North Mission Road
Los Angeles, CA 90031
(323) 223-2475
www.plazadelaraza.org

Proyecto Pastoral Centro de Alegria

420 N. Soto St.
Los Angeles, CA 90033
(323) 685-8501
Proyectopastoral.org

Proyecto Pastoral Centro la Guardería

157 S. Gless St., Los Angeles,
CA 90033
(323) 881-0010
Proyectopastoral.org

Quality Start Los Angeles

815 Colorado Blvd 4th Floor,
Los Angeles, CA 90041
(855) 507-4443
qualitystartla.org

South Central LAMP

892 E. 48th St.
Los Angeles, CA 90011
(323) 234-1471
Southcentrallamp.org

Literally Healing

4650 Sunset Blvd. Los
Angeles, CA 90027
(323) 660-2450
<https://www.chla.org/literally-healing>

No Limits For Deaf Children

9801 Washington Blvd., 2nd
Floor, Culver City, CA 90232
(310) 280-0878
<https://www.nolimitsfordeafchildren.org/literacy.html>



COMMUNITY PROGRAMS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Libraries

Little Free Library

150,000 pop-ups throughout the U.S.

715-690-2488

littlefreelibrary.org

Los Angeles Public Library

72 branches

(213) 228-7000

lapl.org/branches

Los Angeles County Library

86 branches

(323) 264-7715

lacountylibrary.org/library-locator

Orange County Public Libraries

29 branches

(714) 566-3000

<http://ocpl.org/libraries>

Ventura County Public Library

13 branches

(641) 829-4410

<https://www.vencolibrary.org/>



The 2026 reading guide was created through the generous support of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power.

Check out our previous guides that spotlight articles, activities, book recommendations and more for parents and educators of children ages 0-5.



A guide to early learning:

Back to school edition

Help young kids prepare for school with expert advice. Find literacy tips and tricks along with book recommendations for parents and educators in the reading guide.

A guide to early learning:

What to know for reading readiness

Reading can set the foundation for all sorts of development and early learning. Find literacy tips from experts along with book recommendations and local resources.



A guide to early learning

In addition to book recommendations, this guide has been expanded to include multimedia resources, a Q&A section and featured articles from numerous early education experts.