

## You Are You, Arbutus

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Hannah Cottingham

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As part of Vancouver Island University's ECEC Program Planning: Discovering Our World course, students engaged in a plant inquiry project. They studied an indigenous tree or plant in depth and then created a story about it. This is a story about the arbutus tree by student Hannah Cottingham.

In a coastal forest on Vancouver Island stood an arbutus tree. It was a beautiful tree with luscious leaves and fresh green bark. As Arbutus sat atop a rocky bluff, it felt gloomy and filled with sorrow. Arbutus swayed in the wind to see its neighbour, a Douglas fir tree. "Oh, Douglas Fir," said Arbutus, "What thick and strong bark you have. I wish I had tree bark like yours."

"But Arbutus! Your bark is so healing. The First Peoples of our land used your peeled bark to treat illness." Arbutus stretched up from its trunk. Then Douglas Fir said, "You are you, Arbutus," as it rustled its branches in the breeze.

The days passed and in the blink of an eye, it was spring! Slowly but surely the stems of Arbutus's leaves blossomed into beautiful white flowers. "Aaa-choo!" a hiker sneezed and looked up at Arbutus. "Oh my! These flowers are making me sneeze. I can't even enjoy my hike" the hiker said with frustration. This was very upsetting to Arbutus.

Suddenly a buzzing sound approached Arbutus. It was a honey bee. "Buzz. Good afternoon, Arbutus, buzz buzz, why so glum?"

"Oh hello, Honey Bee" replied Arbutus, "I'm afraid I have upset a hiker trying to enjoy the forest. My flowers are making him sneeze. I wish I didn't have these flowers."

"But Arbutus," Honey Bee said with concern, "Your flowers provide me with sweet nectar that feeds me. Buzz. I need your flowers to pollinate the Earth!" Arbutus hugged Honey Bee with the petals of its flowers. Honey Bee sighed, "You are you, Arbutus."

Then summer arrived and the white flowers formed into red berries. Arbutus noticed this change of appearance and then swayed in the wind to see its neighbour, a red cedar tree.

"Oh, Red Cedar, what full and covered branches of green you have. You are so simply beautiful. Look at me, I am littered with these red berries. I wished I looked like you, Red Cedar."

Red Cedar was confused. "But Arbutus, what about the waxwings, the thrushes, the band-tailed pigeons, the woodpeckers,



and the robins that eat your berries? They would be hungry without them." Arbutus had forgotten how many animals needed its berries. "You are you, Arbutus," said Red Cedar.

Summer welcomed fall to the Earth. Arbutus looked around its home to see a fellow neighbour, the big leaf maple tree. Big Leaf Maple had shed its leaves. Its leaves of yellow, orange, and brown covered the ground. Children began to rake and carry the dry maple leaves and pile them on the path. Arbutus watched the children play, laugh, and jump in the leaves of Big Leaf Maple. "Oh, Big Leaf Maple," said Arbutus, "what joy your leaves bring. I keep my leaves for winter, fall, and spring. I wished I lost them so children could play in mine too."

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method—comprise a complex act of knowledge, experience, and art” (p. 17). What pedagogical course do you intend to attend to and activate in this new school year? How will you co-create with children, families, colleagues, and interdisciplinary professionals in ways that align with and deepen your commitments and intentions? I invite you to share the pedagogical intentions and beginnings you are initiating within your programs and communities on ECEBC’s various social media platforms. We will be creating opportunities for our community to come together in dialogue during the fall and look forward to being collectively challenged, inspired, and activated.

## References

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“But Arbutus,” exclaimed Big Leaf Maple, “Your leaves protect the soil in which you grow. Without your leaves all year long, the bluffs could crumble and severe floods could occur from all the rain.” Big Leaf Maple thought for a moment then said, “Arbutus, you must remember you are different for

so many reasons. Differences bring beauty throughout every season. You are a giver of medicine, nectar, food, and protection. You are you, Arbutus.”

From that day on, Arbutus was reminded of the good its unique differences bring.

## An Interview with Natalie Lucas, Continued from page 25

### What motivated you to write and illustrate this book?

Assimilation in Canada took its toll on the Doukhobors, and young families wanted a way to learn about and share their history with their children. Doukhobor educators knew there were little resources available, especially to use with children. There were also a lot of negative and inaccurate perceptions of who Doukhobors are. That all needed to change.

Ernie Verigin and I created this book about local and Doukhobor family histories for educators, grandparents, and parents to share with children. Ernie, who is a Doukhobor, teacher, researcher, and historian, and I thought it was imperative that the book have illustrations to show our history so the stories could be shared with very young children. That’s where I came in, to create the illustrations. We wanted to ensure that whatever the age of the child, they would be able to look at the picture and see our history before them: how children dressed, lived together, and shared their days with others of their community home. As an early childhood educator since 1987, I have seen over and over

how children respond to stories they are told. As a child, I was fascinated by the stories told by my elders and I wanted this book to share those stories, with words and illustrations.

### How did you go about publishing and printing?

With funding from Columbia Basin Trust as a Royal BC Museum Living Landscapes project, we approached Okanagan University College Print Services for our first printing and the book became a reality. But none of this would be a reality without the collective energy and wisdom of a group of West Kootenay educators determined to provide cultural resources for children, families, educators about the Doukhobor historical experience. We call ourselves the West Kootenay Early Childhood Educators Diversity Group.

### How can people get a copy of the book?

We have a limited number of books from our first printing available for purchase. We look forward to our second printing in the near future. You can contact me at [weeones1987@gmail.com](mailto:weeones1987@gmail.com) if you are interested.