Dr. Joanie, our senior teacher-naturalist here at ONSC, writes,

“When I was young, my very favorite books were about animals and nature. Although these stories were make-believe, the images of forests and fields they awakened in my mind rang true. It was through these books that I fell in love with nature. Here are some wonderful books that I hope you, too, are lucky enough to get to read. The House at Pooh Corner, by A. A. Milne, a sequel to Winnie the Pooh, is even better than the original. Probably all of you have seen cartoons of Winne-the-Pooh on television, on clothes and in many other places. The actual storybook is very different. Don’t assume you know all about Winnie-the-Pooh until you have read the books. Whenever I read these books they take me right to the Hundred Acre Wood where Pooh and his friends had so many adventures. Pay a visit to this wonderful wood yourself.

Another favorite of mine is Mother West Wind’s Animal Stories. The author, Thornton W. Burgess, loved nature and the animals that lived there. To share his love with others, he wrote children’s books about the adventures of all sorts of animals living in the forests and fields. He wrote about Peter Rabbit, Granny Fox, Reddy Fox, Grandfather Frog, Paddy the Beaver, Jerry Muskrat, Little Joe Otter and many many more. Although these animals spoke and wore clothes, they still behaved like real wild animals. Paddy the Beaver built a pond, Little Joe Otter loved to play in water and was good at catching fish, Grandfather Frog gobbled up flies with his long tongue and wide mouth. These books were a fun way to learn about nature.

Felix Salten, the author of Bambi, wrote other good books about nature. Bambi’s Children, the sequel to Bambi, tells the story of Bambi’s twin fawns and their animal friends. Of all the books Felix Salten wrote, Perri is my favorite. I read it over and over. This book is about Perri, a squirrel, and her life growing up in a forest. She even makes friends with a human child. Salten’s books are very true to life and show a deep connection with nature. The creatures living in his books face many hardships and tragedies as well as excitement and fun. His books show nature from the animals’ viewpoint, and how human activities affect our fellow beings.

Perhaps best of all is The Wind in the Willows, by Kenneth Grahame. This book is a wonderful portrayal of nature, even though the animals speak and wear clothes. The Wind in the Willows takes you on a visit with Mole and Rat, where you take a row boat onto the river. You also meet Toad, a fun-loving mischief maker, and Badger, a gruff but kindly individual. Toad gets into a terrible predicament but is helped by his friends. I feel like I’m right on the river, or in the forest, whenever I read this book, and I also laugh at the very human behaviors of its characters.

These books are all childhood classics, written long ago. They are as much fun in modern times as they were then. What are some good books about animals and nature that you have read? Who are your favorite authors? Share your suggestions here at ONSC. Since, for awhile, we are having to spend more time indoors, now is the perfect time to curl up with a good book. Believe it or not, the more you read, the better a writer you will be.”