

The Signs Of Spring

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This week, after warm winds and bright sun
had melted the snow and ice
from driveways and sidewalks,
and we had begun to wonder if it was time
to put away the boots
and the heavy coats
and the warm gloves
and get ready to enjoy spring,
the east wind came roaring in
and brought us snow
and ice
and sleet
and freezing rain.
February reminded us
that winter has still a month to run,
even by our caldendar.

**But despite the snow
and the ice
and the freezing rain,
something is happening out there.
Beneath the snow bank
and along the horizon
are the unmistakable signs that
something is happening out there,
something ordinary and common
and wonderful.
Spring is coming!
It really is, you know!
Spring is coming!**

"Set your watch," the weather said.
"See those doings up ahead--
stirrings in the crocus bed,
bluebirds on the wing,
sun a ball of golden thread,
maple tips a-swelling red.
"Set your watch," the weather said,

"half a tick to spring!"

Spring doesn't come all at once,
as if someone somewhere turned on a switch.
Spring comes a little at a time,
sneaking up on us, day by day,
changing the world, little by little,
until a miracle has occurred.
Spring takes a cold, dark world
where few things grow,
a gray and white world
where ice and snow cover the ground,
and changes it, bit by bit,
into a green and tender place
where everything is alive and buzzing.

Spring sneaks up on us,
but if we know where to look,
what to watch for,
we discover the signs of spring are everywhere,
for spring, sneaky spring,
hiding behind every bush and tree,
likes to be found.

**The winds of March were sleeping.
I hardly felt a thing.
The trees were standing quietly.
It didn't seem like spring.
Then suddenly the winds awoke
And raced across the sky.
They bumped right into April
Splashing springtime in my eye.**

**Last week, we asked the children
what are the signs of spring,
how can you tell that spring is coming.
This is what they told us:**

**You can tell that spring is coming,
by the light.
The days grow longer,
the air is warmer.
The sun rises further to the north;
there is more sunlight everywhere.**

And they are right.
Sitting at breakfast, one morning
Suddenly the sun was shining in my eyes.
It had not been shining in my eyes like that
for many months.
The sun has moved north,
and I have adjusted my window shade,
and that is a sign of spring.

There is another sign of spring at my house.
My little, black dog,
who spent winter mornings sleeping
on a couch in the weak rays of the winter sun,
now sleeps in the sun in a chair on the other side of the room.
The sun has moved north;
and he has moved with it.
Watch the dog: he knows the signs of spring.
(place sun-bursts on the tree)
**We asked the children,
how can you tell that spring is coming?
and this is what they told us.**

**Watch the snow:
it turns black and sooty
and slowly slips away,
down gutters
and into storm sewers,
melting into water
and making puddles everywhere.**

Watch your step across the field,
hop from stone to stone.
The only crop these acres yield
is mud, and mud alone.

Now that frost is in retreat,
not a spot is dry.
March wears wet and muddy feet . . .
and (squish, squish!) so do I.

Watch for rain:
more and more it rains
and the cold rains become warmer
and there is water everywhere,
even, sometimes, where you don't want it:
in basements,

and leaking through roofs,
and flooding fields and towns,
and in your eyes
and in your shoes
and down your neck,
water everywhere.

**I opened my eyes
And looked up at the rain,
And it dripped in head
And flowed into my brain,
And all that I hear as I lie in my bed
Is the slishity-slosh of the rain in my head.**

**I step very softly,
I walk very slow,
I can't do a handstand--
I might overflow,
So pardon the wild crazy thing I just said--
I'm just not the same since there's rain in my head.**

(place rain-symbols on the tree)
**Water everywhere
melting snow and falling rain
sink into the ground,
making the earth soft,
touching seeds dropped to the ground last autumn,
waking roots of trees and shrubs and grass,
seeping into nuts burried and forgotten by squirrels,
and things begin to respond
to the touch of water and sun.**

One of these windy mornings
Janie and I will go
Over the dingy meadow,
Over the crusty snow,
Down to the woods where the pines grow tall
And the rabbits hide by the old stone wall.
We'll look for a sheltered hollow
Under some spreading tree,
And there, in the leaf-brown darkness,
The deep, soft-breathing darkness,
What do you think we'll see!

The slender blade of a jonquil
Thrusting out of the mold--

Though ice is still on the river
And the clear, bright air is cold--
But Janie and I are both aware
Of why it's standing so boldly there:
For it's a promise of April
The Lady of Spring designed
And planted there on purpose,
On special, special purpose,
On most particular purpose
For Janie and me to find!"

(place some flowers on the tree)

**What are the signs of spring?
Watch for colors, said the children,
watch for green and yellow and red.
Here and there,
as the snow retreats,
the grass begins to show through
and it is green!
Off in the distance, the willow tree
has a yellow-green shadow around it,
and the maple tree has a red halo,
a clear sign that leaves are ready
to break open to the sun.
The forsythia is all knobby,
and each little knob is a place
where a yellow flower is waiting.
The pussy-willow is fuzzy with little, soft kittens.
Watch for the colors!**

(place leaves on the tree)

What are the signs of spring, we asked.
Spring, said the children, smells different,
a soft, rich smell,
the smell of earth cracking open
and green things reaching up toward the sun,
all kinds of things--
flowers and skunk cabbage
and poison ivy and violets and dandelions
and crocuses and snowdrops.
Spring, said the children,
is the green smell of the earth
becoming alive.

(place flowers on the tree)

**What are the signs of spring, we asked.
Spring, said the children, is a sound:
the sound of birds gathering
and singing,
of geese high overhead
and crows in the tops of trees,
and robins and cardinals and blue jays
sparrows and wrens and woodpeckers
all calling to each other,
singing the news
that spring is coming.**

A meadow lark came back one day
and searched beneath the faded hay
out in the rocks, beside a cleft,
to find a song that he had left.

He found it. And he tried it out.
He tossed the melody about,
and not a note was hurt a bit
by winter drifting over it.
(place birds on the tree)

**What are the signs of spring?
Things begin to stir, said the children.
The sun and the rain and the warm breezes
stir things to new life.
In sunny windows
wasps slowly stretch their wings
and walk about like sleep walkers in the new light.
Flies begin to stir and to buzz,
creatures trapped by the winter cold
break out of the ground.
Ants appear, scurrying across the path
and pink earthworms squirm on the damp earth,
Butterflies who went to sleep as caterpillars
wake up and shake out their wings
and float away on the spring breeze
like a beautiful dream.
Mites and midges and mayflies and mosquitos
dance in the sunlight.
And someplaces, the sound of tree frogs are heard
singing in the night the coming of spring.**

(place butterflys, etc. on the tree)

**How do you know that spring is coming.
We can tell, said the children, in our own beings.
The jackets we wore because of the morning chill,
we discard in the afternoon sun.
We look through our closets for short-sleeved shirts,
and wonder if last year's shorts will still fit us.
Now we can be out doors
to play baseball
to jump rope,
to skateboard and roller skate,
to play soccer,
to ride bikes,
to fly kites
to watch them dance and sway and dip
in the March breezes.**

How bright on the blue
Is a kite when it's new!

With a dive and a dip
It snaps its tail

Then soars like a ship
With only a sail

As over tides
Of wind it rides,

Climbs to the crest
Of a gust and pulls,

Then seems to rest
As wind falls.

When string goes slack
You wind it back

And run until
A new breeze blows

And its wings fill
And up it goes!

How bright on the blue

Is a kite when it's new!

But a raggeder thing
You never will see

When it flaps on a string
In the top of a tree.
(place kites, bikes, etc on tree)

How can you tell that spring is coming?
What are the signs of spring?
Our children said,
The dog begins to shed its winter coat,
leaving spare parts all over the house,
and we begin to think of vacation,
and the opening of the swimming pool
and surfing in California.

**Something wonderful is happening
out there, in the world,
and in here, in our own minds,
something wonderful
than snow and ice and freezing rain
cannot stop.**

**The signs are all there
if you know where to look,
if you know how to pay attention.
The signs are all there,
and the signs all say,
"Spring is coming.
And all the world--
ourselves included--
is getting ready
for a little spring cleaning!**

SERVICE OF COMMUNION:

To help you get ready for spring, to put you in the right mood, the ushers are now going to give each of you a small packet. In that packet are several small, miracles. They don't look like much, but inside each of them is all the knowledge, all the information it takes to build a green and living plant. If these small miracles are planted at the right time and in the right place, and if they are watered and receive sunlight, they will split and send roots down into the earth and send leaves up into the air. And the leaves will combine sunlight and carbon dioxide and grow and give off oxygen and in time, if everything works right, out of this tiny seed will come a flower.

Think about that miracle. In your hands you hold small bits of life. They don't look alive, but they are. In those little seeds is all the information needed to make a flower.

How does it know,
this little seed,
if its to grow
to a flower or weed,
if it is to be
a vine or shoot,
or grow to a tree
with a long deep root?
A seed is so small
Where do you suppose
it stores up all
of the things it knows?
--Aileen Fisher

How it knows what it knows, I cannot say. But this is what it knows. It knows how to make out of water and sunlight and earth and time, this flower. Take the seeds home with, plant them, care for them, and watch the miracle happen.

CLOSING WORDS:
Something is happening, out there.
Something ordinary and common
and wonderful.
A miracle is happening
in the world around
and deep inside us!
The miracle is spring!