

**LEARNING TO BE BETTER LOVERS**  
**Katie Holten for the Helsinki Biennial**  
June 8 – September 21, 2025  
Vallisaari, Helsinki









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# INTRODUCTION

Nobody knows what's going to happen next. So, we need to experiment, play, work alone on things we love, and join together. We need to rest, sleep, and dream.

I'm dreaming of a world where the word for world is forest. What world are you dreaming of?

Welcome to the Forest School. Let's take a few minutes to slow down and rest. Remember, the word *rest* is contained in Forest.

We are in a special place. There are as many as 400 plant species here on the island of Vallisaari. When researchers surveyed the biodiversity on more than 200 islands off Helsinki, Vallisaari had the richest flora of all the islands. The rich history of people on the island has shaped its nature. People and nature are entangled. Several rare species grow in the fortress meadows and on the crumbling walls. The calcareous soil of the embankments and the crumbling concrete structures help maintain

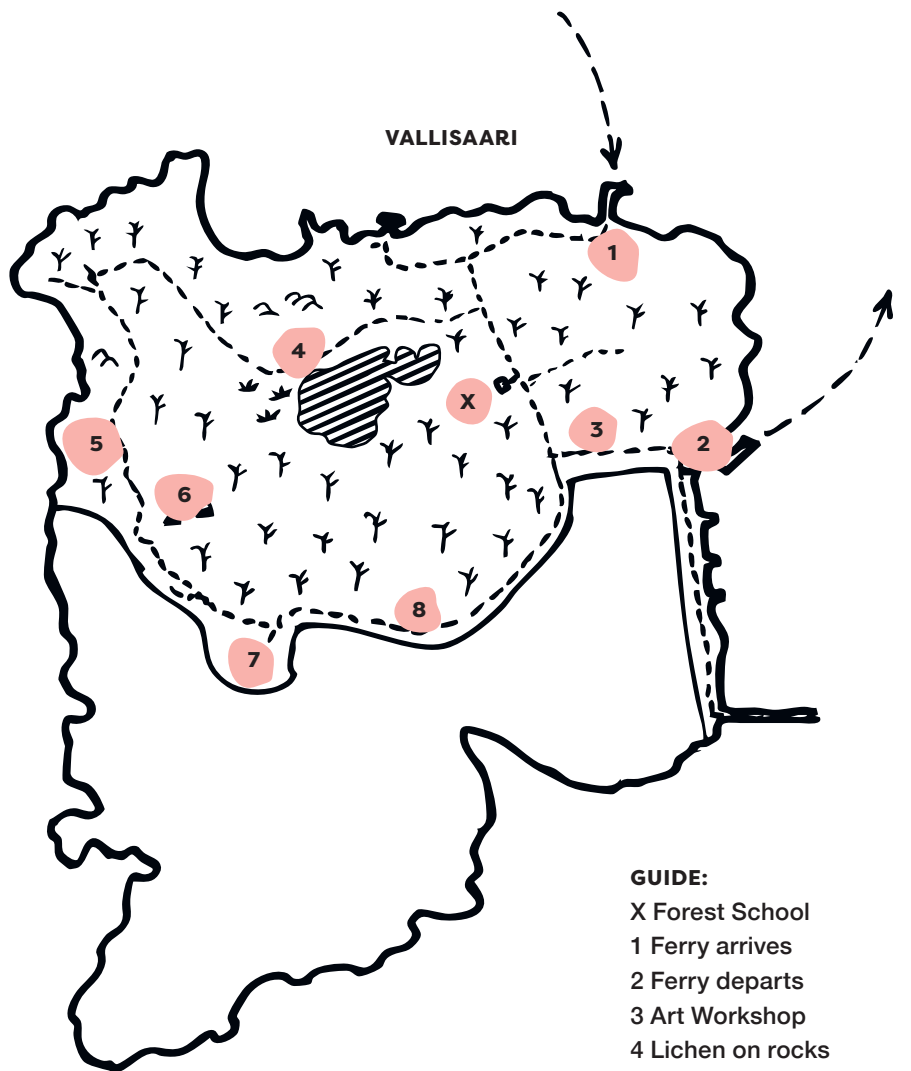
communities of rare moss and lichen species. In our ruins, precious communities bloom!

If you're someone who pays attention to the world and cares about other people, plants and creatures, it's only natural to feel overwhelmed, scared or adrift right now. You're not alone! That's one reason I wanted to make a Forest Alphabet and a Forest School.

The Forest School is a space to slow down and meet some of our non-human neighbours, through the community of the Forest Alphabet. Collective action helps. Of course, this "collective" usually means working with other people, but what if we can take a few minutes to listen to others and invite them into our conversations? The Forest School invites you to explore beyond-the-human. Welcome to Forest Thinking.

What is the language we need to live right now? How can we learn to be better lovers of the world? There are no wrong answers. We need to try everything!

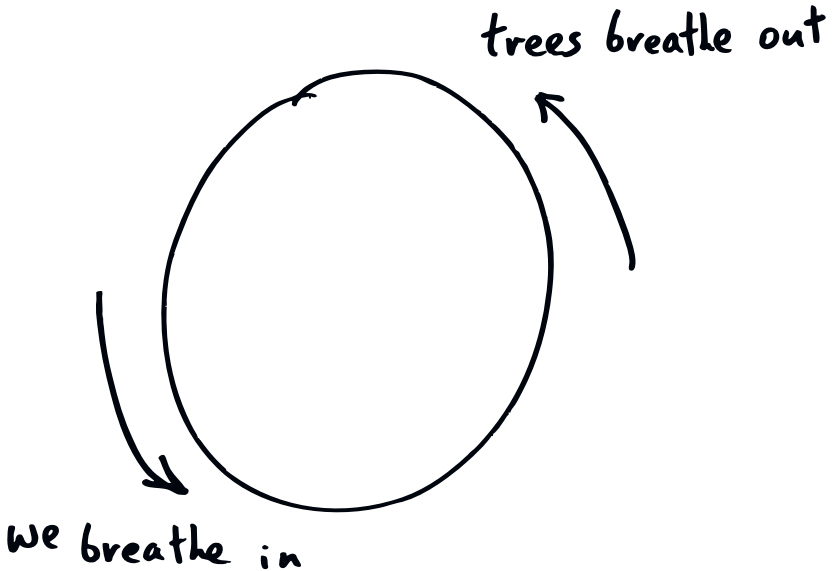
# WELCOME TO THE FOREST SCHOOL



## GUIDE:

- X Forest School
- 1 Ferry arrives
- 2 Ferry departs
- 3 Art Workshop
- 4 Lichen on rocks
- 5 Tide pools
- 6 Moss on roofs
- 7 Forest canopy & swifts
- 8 Lime Tree Avenue

# BREATHE



## 4-6 BREATHING

Find a comfortable seated position or lie down. Focus on your breath for a few minutes. Breathe in for four seconds. Breathe out for six seconds. Repeat. This is 4-6 breathing.

4-6 breathing calms your autonomic nervous system. What's that? The autonomic nervous system is a network of nerves that controls unconscious processes in your body such as breathing, heartbeat and digestion. I first learnt about all of this when I was diagnosed with Dysautonomia, caused by Long COVID, which means that my

autonomic nervous system is broken. This 4-6 breathing technique is very important in my recovery, helping my body relearn how to breathe.

## THE BREATHING FOREST

Trees breathe and the forest breathes. Just like us! Place your hand on a tree trunk and close your eyes. Try to synchronize your breath with the subtle movements of the tree. Imagine you're breathing together with the forest. If you're barefoot, you might feel the Earth breathing beneath you. We are one body, breathing.

# FO/REST-FORESTING-REFORESTING

“I wish that everyone who said they believed in angels would actually believe in insects.” Jay Griffiths

**Fairy:** A type of mythical being or legendary creature, found in the folklore of multiple European cultures, a form of spirit, often with metaphysical, supernatural or preternatural qualities.

**Forest:** Complex ecological system in which trees and plants are the dominant life form.

**Lichen:** A hybrid colony of algae or cyanobacteria living symbiotically among filaments of multiple fungi species, along with yeasts and bacteria embedded in the cortex or “skin,” in a mutualistic relationship.

**Metsäliike:** Finland’s Forest Movement. [www.metsaliike.info](http://www.metsaliike.info)

**Moss:** Oldest plants in the world, first appearing on Earth about 470 million years ago.

**Mycelium:** A root-like structure of a fungus consisting of a mass of branching, thread-like hyphae. Colloquially called a wood-wide-web.

**Reforest:** Convert previously forested land back to forest. Reforestation is an essential part of the ecological restoration of wild forests and is also used for heavily managed lands, such as those used for paper production or timber.

**Rest:** The part of something that remains. A period of time when you relax or sleep. To put something on or against a surface for support.

**Rewilding:** Offers hope. Restoration of ecosystems aimed at increasing biodiversity and restoring natural processes to the point where nature is allowed to take care of itself.

**Rights of Nature:** The recognition and honoring that Nature and our ecosystems — including trees, forests, rivers, oceans, animals, mountains — have rights just as human beings have rights.

**Tree:** A perennial woody plant with a tall stem supporting branches.

**Tree-in-bud:** An image on a CT scan that indicates some degree of airway obstruction that implies impaction within bronchioles, the smallest airway passages in the lung, caused by fungal infections, mycobacterial infections, or something else.

# FOREST SCHOOL

**FOREST SCHOOL IS  
A FREE SCHOOL. FOREST SCHOOL IS ROOTED  
IN VALLISAARI. FOREST SCHOOL IS A SCHOOL WITHOUT  
CLASSES. FOREST SCHOOL HAS NO HOMEWORK, ONLY LOVE  
WORK. FOREST SCHOOL HAS NO TEACHERS; WE ARE ALL STUDENTS.  
FOREST SCHOOL ENCOURAGES RADICAL LISTENING AND RADICAL  
INACTION. FOREST SCHOOL INVITES VISITORS OF ALL SIZES, NO ONE'S  
TOO YOUNG OR TOO OLD. FOREST SCHOOL OFFERS A NEW ABC: A FOREST  
ALPHABET FOR FINLAND. FOREST SCHOOL EXPLORES ALL THAT IS POLITICAL  
AND POETICAL ABOUT FORESTS. FOREST SCHOOL WELCOMES WRITERS  
OF ALL AGES TO COMPOSE LOVE LETTERS WITH THE FOREST FONT.  
FOREST SCHOOL DISPUTES THE MYTHS OF SCARCITY. NATURE IS  
ABUNDANT. FOREST SCHOOL WANTS EVERY CHILD TO HAVE  
ACCESS TO A TREE TO CLIMB AND PICK FRUIT FROM.  
FOREST SCHOOL CURRICULUM IS GERMINATING...**

**THERE IS NO  
BEGINNING  
AND NO  
END...  
TREE  
HUGGING IS  
ENCOURAGED.**





# FOREST THINKING



**FOREST SCHOOL IS A COMMUNITY OF HUMANS LEARNING FROM OTHER SPECIES HOW TO BE BETTER LOVERS OF THE EARTH.**

*Aino Mielikki Maa / Johansson* is a multidisciplinary visual- and performing artist, a forest activist, curator and environmental educator, who is inspired by love, lichens, fairness (and fairies), interconnectedness and the indescribable. They convene, hold space, move, communicate and create. In their work she explores the relations of intimate experience, planetary states of our ecosystems, over generational trauma, practices of healing and different ways to connect with the nature that we are - through materiality, corporality and their immaterial, energetic and spiritual resonances. With their roots still deep in painting, she works mostly with performance and collective processes these days, and nerds enthusiastically on forest ecology and species.

*Jouko Rikkinen* is a professor of botany at the University of Helsinki. Rikkinen has published numerous scientific papers in various fields of plant and fungal science. He is particularly known for his research on symbioses between algae and fungi. He has also written textbooks and non-fiction books, and is a distinguished nature photographer.

*Katie Holten* is an artist, activist and author whose work investigates the entangled relationships between humans and the natural world. She represented Ireland at the 50th Venice Biennale. She has created several Tree Alphabets, a Stone Alphabet, and a Wildflower Alphabet, to explore possibilities for storytelling while sharing the joy she finds in the more-than-human world. She is a visiting lecturer at the New School of the Anthropocene. If she could be a tree, she would be an Oak.

**KATIE HOLTEN IN CONVERSATION  
WITH JOUKO RIKKINEN:**

**Katie Holten:** What's your favourite lichen on Vallisaari?

**Jouko Rikkinen:** Difficult to pick as there are so many, maybe *Rhizocarpon geographicum* - not least because of its beautiful name.

**KH:** What do they look like?

**JR:** It grows closely appressed to rock and its flat surface is composed of small angular yellow patches bordered by narrow black zones of fungal hyphae, leading to the general appearance of a map or patchwork.

**KH:** Where can people find them on Vallisaari?

**JR:** It grows on smooth rock surfaces, especially on steep cliff faces and exposed boulders.\*

**KH:** This is a ridiculously big question, but why lichens? Why do you love them?

**JR:** Symbiosis is a source of evolutionary innovation and lichens are one beautiful example of that!

**\*LOOK FOR JOUKO'S FAVOURITE LICHEN,  
*RHIZOCARPON GEOGRAPHICUM*,  
AT SITE #4 ON THE MAP.**



**KATIE HOLTEN IN CONVERSATION  
WITH AINO MIELIKKI MAA /  
JOHANSSON:**

**Katie Holten:** Have you visited Vallisaari?

**Aino Mielikki Maa / Johansson:** I have to admit to not (yet) visiting Vallisaari! Although I have worked and shot a video together with the Earth Forces collective in Suomenlinna next to Vallisaari. Both of the islands have history with a military context, as fortresses. Suomenlinna still has a naval academy, but it used to be a very central military area of the Finnish defence forces, now it is an ancient monument area and a public attraction. We wanted to work there with Earth Forces (Maan puolustusvoimat) as our work is based on endeavoring nonviolent principles, regarding the concept of defence from an ecological and somatic point of view; as protection, taking care, caring for the whole of the Earth, where all parts are connected and not split by the lines drawn on maps. In Earth Forces art and activism merge together nurtured by permacultural principles and methods that meet microbial sociology through our researcher-artist members, as well as deeply body-based practices incorporating the nervous system and ecosomatical way of experiencing in dance and performance. All of these are parts of learning and creating alternatives and

remedies for consumer capitalist societies and systems controlled and violated by wars, money-based power, colonialism and violence in its many forms.

**KH:** I like that your bio says you are inspired by love, lichens, fairness (and fairies). That makes a lot of sense to me! I didn't include a fairy in the Forest Alphabet. Are fairies part of Finnish folklore?

**AJ:** Yes, I have quite recently learned to say it out loud: that I am inspired by love! It seems so simple, romantic, typical - and might seem too hippie or unrealistic for some of us, but phrasing it out was very meaningful to me, as I do believe that the basic and strongest streams of feelings that are connected to meanings, symbols, values, basic needs and higher goals and satisfaction and also to power are very remarkable forces and tools in creating the ways we live here. I have found inspiration for these thoughts also from Buddhist philosophy and environmentalists that are drawn to holistic views and understanding the connectedness of all. But the focus on love doesn't map out critical thinking, sharpness, specifically in revealing and seeing and taking action in our common world - in its political systems. It is so important to see and acknowledge the way power is used, by who it is used and where it is used - for example in the

question of nature loss and forest species extinction and the sixth mass extinction going on here in Finland and in our world. It is important for us as individuals, groups and societies to be very aware of the power-relations behind industries and decision making and to take action in relation to them.

Maybe I deviated far from lichens...but not so far! I've been mesmerized by so many of the species of old growth and natural forests since I started getting closer to them and learning forest inventory in the context of forest activism. I've always been mesmerized in forests, since a child, but a new level of knowing combined with the motive of protecting felt very precious and opened up the world of diversity and richness of beings that forests have. Lichens, fungi, and moss have been ones that have spoken to me vividly. I wrote the word mesmerized, but I'm trying to find the right word in English and I realize maybe the word doesn't exist as such...'*haltioitua*' is an old Finnish word meaning something like to be mesmerized or to be under a charm or "possessed" - but in a positive way - or maybe I would describe it to be deeply entangled in a beautiful experience of a mystical presence or a feeling of the connectedness of everything, "spirited away" perhaps...In Finnish, this word includes the word '*haltija*' - which means a spirit (of the forest) or a fairy. So yes, the old folklore and beliefs of

the peoples in the area of Finland and areas nearby and the predecessor-ing (can one say so?) languages of the modern Finnish and also the relative cultures around and in these areas have a lot of spirits of the natural places '*haltija*', which are also called *emo/emuu* - a kind of origin or mother of the being, like the origin or spirit of the water or of the forest. The folklore and the history and context of these spirits is diverse, including different cultures: carealians, the sápmi and those tribes that formed "the Finnish" population. It is also partially quite unknown, as the ancient culture and beliefs of the ancestors of Finnish people didn't survive very well of the coming of Christianity and the industrial world and its ways.



But when I was a child, I felt these beings present in forests, whether it was imaginary or spiritual, and forests have always been places of both excitement and also of peace at the same time. That might be one definition for love, actually.

**KH:** Do you have a favourite tree, or a favourite forest?

**AJ:** Since I walked so many different forests during the last 3-4 years it's harder to name one! I love many different forests, the diversity of forests and that's why I love many trees and forests. One of my personal original magical forests is in Pirkanmaa in Rapolanharju, where my mother's



family roots come from and where I experienced boreal groves with hazelnut trees, strawberries, old oaks and such beings as a child. In the pre-Christian cultures there used to be especially sacred groves, they were small, often separately fenced groves, sacred places dedicated to the spirits and were also known as '*hiisi*'. Although I love groves, and there are very few of them left in Finland, I've been especially drawn to the boreal spruce tree, and felt it as a very protective and strong motherlike tree. Spruce does also grow in Finnish groves, and I connect it with the inland Finland lake-world, deep and dark forests. I've also had a very old and tall spruce friend living just outside my home in Helsinki, where I no longer live, but where I also lived for a little while since I was a newborn and then again in my thirties. I feel attachment to that tree definitely and I've documented the way it dances in the wind many times. I've met many old trees that I've appreciated on many levels.

**KH:** We have fairy trees in Ireland, do you have them in Finland?

**AJ:** Yes, I think in the context of pre-Christian culture there have been some fairy trees or sacred trees, that have been connected to the house and its yard, not so much in the forest, but close to where humans live. There is a rich and diverse culture related to this around and in the relative cultures

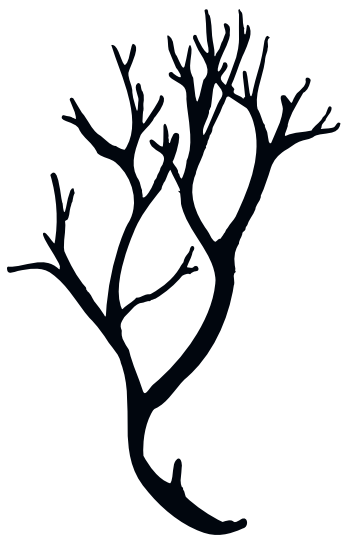


that live in Russia, like Mari, Komi and Udmurts. Also of course the Sápmi cultures and Carelians have their own rich world of spirits or fairies of nature.

**KH:** I was inspired to learn about the Metsäliike movement in Finland. When did you get involved with them? and what do you do with them? Maybe you can share a little bit about your recent forest protection/defence symposium?

**AJ:** My passion for forest activism lit up once more from going on a course of forest inventory (forest mapping, metsäkartoitus). I had been doing nature protecting activism related to mining before that and felt overwhelmed by the disappointing situation of the laws and regulations towards big international corporations that want to

have a piece of earth anywhere they want. Meeting the activist forest inventory people - many of whom are professional ecologists and biologist, or students or self-learned enthusiasts and experts of many fields, I felt like there was still a chance to do something for the protection of these forests and lands. Forest inventory is very tangible, actual down to earth work and it allows one to roam in the forest and learn. There is the presence of curiosity - towards life in this work, it swept my feet away and I started learning. I have come to the conclusion that one of the most important embodiments of love is curiosity - the will to see, hear, sense. There is also a presence of claiming power back, just by going out there and actually making the forest visible on the maps.



The same year 2021 I travelled to Kainuu to meet other forest activists in a beautiful old growth forest in Karttimonjoki - a state owned unprotected natural forest that was under threat of logging. This forest had been under negotiations between NGO's and the state administration of forestry and was an object of dispute. Now different types of groups and NGO's met and a collaboration soon to be named Metsäliike was formed, an independent people's movement for the forests. The logging was successfully stopped through nonviolent direct action and the forest still remains alive. I have been doing

many kinds of work in Metsäliike and close by. I've had the chance to connect art and activism during this last year, as we got a grant for a project, so I've coordinated and supported artistic interventions in forest activism and organized events and demonstrations. Behind the scenes, there's a lot of thinking, strategising, meeting and talking, sharing information, doing social media, educating, etc. I have been involved in some of the nonviolent direct action which Metsäliike is known for, where people protect the natural forests from getting logged away for good, through climbing trees or stopping the machine relying on laws and regulations. I've climbed a tree but I haven't been deeply involved in these actions, apart from supportive roles. My dearest work still is forest inventory, which I am learning. In environmental education work that I do, I try to bring presence, feelings, knowledge, action and reflection in suitable proportions and in experimental forms to different kinds of groups of people from different backgrounds and ages.

**KH:** I think if we could, as individuals and as a society, learn to think more like a forest we would be in a better relationship with the world. Do you have tips on how we could think like a forest?

**AJ:** Based on what I've learned and sense from the forest, I think humans could learn and really embody the

inevitable interconnectedness from the forest. In the forest - the architecture that protects and nourishes the species living there is also living - the trees, roots and all kinds of forms the forest shapes are all connected - most of which could not live, or at least will be severely impacted if the other is taken away or killed. I think the body of a forest - a collective that compromises of individuals is something we could really learn from, in terms of diversity, care, resilience. It's not so simple, a forest is not only a paradise where everything always goes smoothly though, but it is a living collective where interconnectedness is maybe easier to observe than in our human systems. Diversity - the more different living beings a forest carries - the more resilient it is for the ones living there.



# A NEW ABC



Aa



Bb



Cc



Dd



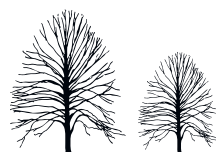
Ii



Jj



Kk



Ll



Pp



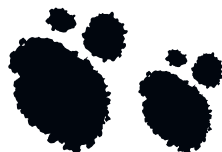
Qq



Rr



Ss



Xx



Yy



Zz

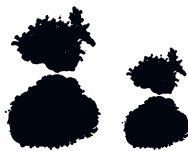
# FOREST ALPHABET FOR FINLAND



Ee



Ff



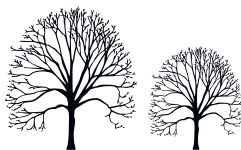
Gg



Hh



Mm



Nn



Oo



Tt



Uu



Vv



Ww



Åå



Ää



Öö

# FOREST ALPHABET: SPECIES

	<i>English name</i>	<i>Finnish name</i>	<i>Scientific name</i>
A	Aspen	Haapa	<i>Populus tremula</i>
B	Birch (Silver)	Rauduskoivu	<i>Betula pendula</i>
C	Climacium Tree Moss	Palmusammal	<i>Climacium dendroides</i>
D	<i>Ditrichum flexicaule</i>	Kalkkikarvasammal	<i>Ditrichum flexicaule</i>
E	European Ash	Lehtosaarni	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>
F	Fern	Saniainen	<i>Filicophyta</i>
G	Gold Dust Lichen	Varjorikkijäkälä	<i>Chrysothrix chlorina</i>
H	Human (vagus nerve)	Ihminen (vagushermo)	<i>Homo sapiens</i>
I	<i>Inosperma adaequatum</i>	Viinirisakas	<i>Inosperma adaequatum</i>
J	Juniper	Kataja	<i>Juniperus communis</i>
K	Witch's Hair Lichen	Korpiluppo	<i>Alectoria sarmentosa</i>
L	Linden	Lehmus	<i>Tilia</i>
M	Mycelium	Rihmasto	<i>Mycelium</i>
N	Norway Maple	Metsävaahtera	<i>Acer platanoides</i>
O	Oakmoss	Valkohankajäkälä	<i>Evernia prunastri</i>
P	Pine	Mänty	<i>Pinus sylvestris</i>
Q	Queen Bee	Mehiläiskuningatar	<i>Apis mellifera</i>
R	Reindeer Cup Lichen	Valkoporonjäkälä	<i>Cladonia arbuscula</i>
S	Swift	Tervapääsky	<i>Apus apus</i>
T	Grooved Bonnet	Tinahippo	<i>Mycena polygramma</i>
U	Map Lichen	Keltakarttajäkälä	<i>Rhizocarpon geographicum</i>
V	Vetch	Aitovirna	<i>Vicia sepium</i>
W	Willow	Raita	<i>Salix caprea</i>
X	Sunburst Lichen	Haavankeltajäkälä	<i>Xanthoria parietina</i>
Y	Warty Cabbage	Idänukonpalko	<i>Bunias orientalis</i>
Z	Beetle	Kovakuoriainen	<i>Coleoptera</i>
Å	Swift + Aspen	Tervapääsky + Haapa	
Ä	Aspen + Swift	Haapa + Tervapääsky	
Ö	Oakmoss + Swift	Valkohankajäkälkä + Tervapääsky	



# FOREST FONT



A



B



C



D



E



F



G



H



I



J



K



L



M



S



N



O



P



Q



R



T



U



V



W



X



Y



Z



Å



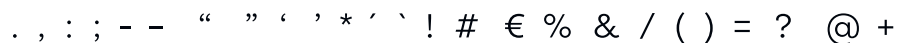
Ä



Ö



0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9



# LOVE LETTERS



## SOME WRITING PROMPTS:

### *Love Letters*

Write a love letter to someone you care about. They could be another human, or planet Earth, or a pet, a plant, or another beautiful being.

### *Tree Stories*

Choose a tree that calls to you. Spend a few minutes with them, observing the unique features. Gently place your hand on the trunk and imagine what stories the tree could tell if they could speak. What do you hear?

### *Conversation Partner*

Find a conversation partner – it could be a tree, a rock, or a plant. Spend a few minutes in silent dialogue with them. What might they tell you if they could speak? What questions would you ask?

### *Mycelial Messages*

Close your eyes and visualize the vast network of mycelium beneath your feet, connecting trees and plants. Imagine being part of this underground communication network. What messages might be passing through?

## DOWNLOAD THE FOREST FONT:



### *Write a love letter in Forest.*

It works best on a computer, so try it when you get home.

Unfortunately, it probably won't work on your phone!





A full-page photograph of a forest. Two large, light-colored tree trunks are prominent in the foreground, framing the scene. The forest is filled with vibrant green leaves and branches, with sunlight filtering through the canopy. The ground is covered in ferns and mossy rocks.

## BREATHING FOREST

Find a comfortable spot to sit or lie down. Close your eyes and focus on your breath for a few minutes. Let the forest sounds and smells wash over you. Notice how your body feels. The forest breathes out, you breathe in.

# FOREST WALKING

## **SOME WALKING PROMPTS:**

### ***Earth Touch***

Remove your shoes and socks.\* Feel the Earth beneath your feet. Walk slowly. Notice the different textures and temperatures. How does this direct contact with the Earth affect you?

### ***Air Kiss***

Walk for a few minutes very slowly, feeling every step. Notice how your feet connect with the Earth, the shift of your body, the movement of air around you. Breathe slowly in time with each step. How does the air on your skin feel?

### ***Sound Symphony***

Close your eyes and listen closely for a few minutes. Try to identify as many distinct sounds as possible – from the rustle of leaves to the chirping of birds. Notice how the forest's soundtrack changes and evolves.

### ***Textural Touch***

Find different textures in the forest. Gently touch tree bark, moss, leaves, stones, and soil. Notice the differences in temperature, moisture, and texture. How does each surface feel against your skin?

### ***Plant Perspectives***

Choose a plant that lives in the forest (they could be a character in the Forest Alphabet). Spend a few minutes imagining how this plant might experience the forest. How would they move? What would they notice? How might they perceive you?

### ***Time Machine***

Choose an old tree or rock. Place your hand on them and imagine all the changes they have witnessed over time. Reflect on your own place in the grand timeline of nature.

### ***Interconnected Web***

Choose a plant or tree. Observe them closely, then expand your awareness to see what they're connected to – the soil, other plants, insects, etc. Keep expanding your view, noticing how everything in the forest is interconnected.

### ***Tree Rings Meditation***

Find a comfortable spot. Imagine you're a tree, adding a new growth ring each year. With each deep breath, visualize a new ring forming, representing your experiences and growth. How does this connect you to the forest's sense of time and growth?

**\*REMEMBER TO CHECK FOR TICKS LATER,  
BUT FOR NOW PLEASE DON'T WORRY. ENJOY!**



# FOREST DRAWING

## **SOME DRAWING PROMPTS:**

### ***Forest Time Capsule***

Imagine you're creating a time capsule to capture this moment in the forest's life. What would you put in it? How would you describe the current state of the forest to future generations?

### ***Root Connection***

Sit at the base of a large tree. Close your eyes and imagine your own roots growing from the base of your spine, intertwining with the tree's roots deep into the Earth. Feel the stability and groundedness this connection provides.

### ***Shadow Play***

Find a sunny spot where tree shadows fall. Observe how the shadows move and dance with the breeze. Notice the patterns they create on the ground. Can you draw a shadow, capture a moment in time?

### ***Colour Wheel***

Slowly look around and notice all the different shades of green. How many

can you see? Then, look for unexpected colours hidden in the forest. Can you find glimpses of red, blue, or yellow? What other colours can you see?

### ***Cloud Watching***

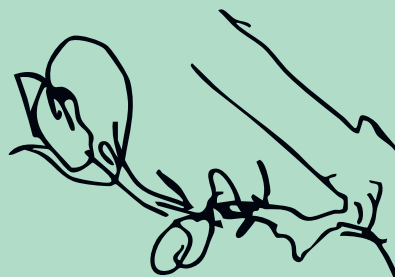
Find a comfortable spot to lie down and look up at the sky through the trees. Watch the clouds moving. Let your imagination wander – what shapes or stories do you see in the clouds?

### ***Tree Silhouette***

Find a spot where you can see trees silhouetted against the sky. Watch how the leaves and branches frame the sky, creating ever-changing patterns as they move in the breeze. Observe their shapes and how they move in the wind. Draw them in your mind, or on paper.

### ***Blind Drawing***

Look closely at a tree or plant. As your eyes take everything in, draw what you see without looking at the paper. The end result doesn't matter, what's important is the caress.



# LEARNING TO BE BETTER LOVERS

These colours represent the spectrum Cosmic Latte to Cosmic Turquoise, the average colour of the universe as perceived by a typical human

observer from the Earth. Pink represents the oldest pigment on Earth, from fossilized 1.1 billion-year-old chlorophyll.



**THE FLAGS ARE INSTALLED IN ESPLANADE PARK: GO FIND THEM!**

# ISLAND EARTH



aamu *morning*



rakas *dear*



metsä *forest*



branch



like



atoms



kiitos *thank you*



saari *island*



maa *earth*



plant



wild



love

# BROWSING LIBRARY

***Braiding Sweetgrass***

by Robin Wall Kimmerer

***Den stora galenskapen***

by Amitav Ghosh

***Det sjätte utdöendet***

by Elizabeth Kolbert

***Dispersals***

by Jessica J. Lee

***Entangled Life***

***(Illustrated Edition)***

by Merlin Sheldrake

***Ett sammanvävt liv***

by Merlin Sheldrake

***Finding the Mother Tree***

by Suzanne Simard

***H is For Hope***

by Elizabeth Kolbert

***How Forests Think***

by Eduardo Kohn

***Landmarks***

by Robert Macfarlane

***Not Too Late***

by Rebecca Solnit

***Sienet ja metsien luontoarvot***

edited by Tea von Bonsdorff

***The Book of Delights***

by Ross Gay

***The Great Derangement***

by Amitav Ghosh

***The Guardians of the Trees***

by Kinari Webb

***The Language of Trees***

by Katie Holten

***The Overstory***

by Richard Powers

***The Serviceberry***

by Robin Wall Kimmerer

***The Sixth Extinction***

***(Young Readers Adaptation)***

by Elizabeth Kolbert

***The Word for World is Forest***

by Ursula K. Le Guin

***Two Trees Make a Forest***

by Jessica J. Lee

***We Are the ARK***

by Mary Reynolds

**PLEASE ENJOY BROWSING THE BOOKS IN THE FOREST SCHOOL LIBRARY.**

**YOU CAN FIND MANY MORE BOOKS AND ESSAYS ON KATIE'S WEBSITE:**

**[WWW.KATIEHOLTEN.COM/READINGLIST](http://WWW.KATIEHOLTEN.COM/READINGLIST)**



# EVENTS

## FOREST SCHOOL WALKS:

Please sign up here:  
[www.helsinki.fi](http://www.helsinki.fi)

## SCHEDULE:

Sunday, June 8, 1-3pm  
**LEARNING TO BE BETTER LOVERS**  
A forest walk with Katie Holten

Friday, July 18, 1-3pm  
**LOOKING FOR LICHEN**  
A walk with Jouko Rikkinen

Friday, August 8, 1-3pm  
**FOREST AS A TEACHER**  
A forest walk with  
Aino Mielikki Maa / Johansson

Friday, September 5, 1-3pm  
**FOREST AS A TEACHER**  
A forest walk with  
Aino Mielikki Maa / Johansson

## FOREST SCHOOL ACTIVITIES:

Join us to write love letters  
Meet at the HB Art Workshop  
Schedule: Saturdays, 12-3pm  
Supplies provided

## OFFSITE:

Flags in Esplanade Park  
Please see pages 26-27 for more info

## DOWNLOAD THE FOREST FONT:



*Write your own love letters and share with us!*

#ForestSchool #HelsinkiBiennial

#ForestThinking #LearningToBeBetterLovers

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Helsinki Biennial team, especially the curators Blanca de la Torre and Kati Kivinen for the invitation to create a new non-human alphabet and Petronella Grönroos, Hanna Nyman, and Aino Mäntyvaara for research and tech support. Thanks to Jenni Salminen and Antti Honka for transforming my drawings into the Forest font. Gratitude for the behind-the-scenes studio support from Candy Holten and Dillon Cohen, as well as the ongoing Long COVID recovery support from the CoRE clinic at Mount Sinai in New York City, with breathwork and walking exercises led by Myranda Oettel.

Special thanks to our Forest School advisors; Jouko Rikkinen, Tea von Bonsdorff, and Xiaolan He for introducing me to the non-human inhabitants of Vallisaari and Helsinki.

My book *The Language of Trees* was printed in the US on recycled paper. When I tried to find out about the paper used in the UK edition I discovered it was printed on paper from Finland. I tried to get more details. The Helsinki Biennial team helped me. But we could get no answers. I can only assume that the paper in the UK edition of my book is from trees that have been aggressively “harvested” from forests in Finland. So, despite my best efforts, my book is part of the problem—another product produced from pulp of trees that were once part of a thriving forest, now clearcut. It makes me feel sick. I’m compelled to compost a book, return it to the land, and say *Sorry*.

# COLOPHON

## **LEARNING TO BE BETTER LOVERS**

Katie Holten for the Helsinki Biennial  
June 8 – September 21, 2025  
Vallisaari, Helsinki

Limited edition guide printed in  
three languages: English,  
Finnish, Swedish

*Typeset in Helvetica Neue,  
Filson Pro and Forest*

The Forest font was created by  
Katie Holten, with design work by  
Jenni Salminen and Antti Honka

*Printed by Grano, Helsinki  
on MultiDesign Natural paper*

Cover: 300g

Interior: 130g

*Translated by*

Elävä Kieli Oy

*Designed by*

Jenni Salminen and Antti Honka

*Quote on the back cover*

“We all have forests in our minds.”

By Ursula K. Le Guin. From the  
introduction to “Vaster Than  
Empires and More Slow” in  
*The Wind’s Twelve Quarters*.

*Learning to be Better Lovers*  
was commissioned for the  
Helsinki Biennial 2025

[www.helsinkibiennaali.fi](http://www.helsinkibiennaali.fi)

[www.katieholten.com](http://www.katieholten.com)

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**HELSINKI  
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