

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











- 4 Introduction
- 5 Map
- 6 Breathe
- 7 Fo/REST – Foresting – Reforesting
- 8 Forest School
- 9 Forest Thinking
- 16 A New ABC: Forest Alphabet for Finland
- 18 Forest Alphabet: Species
- 19 Forest Font
- 20 Love Letters
- 22 Breathing Forest
- 23 Forest Walking
- 24 Forest Drawing
- 26 Learning to be Better Lovers
- 27 Island Earth
- 28 Browsing Library
- 29 Events
- 30 Acknowledgements
- 31 Colophon

# 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

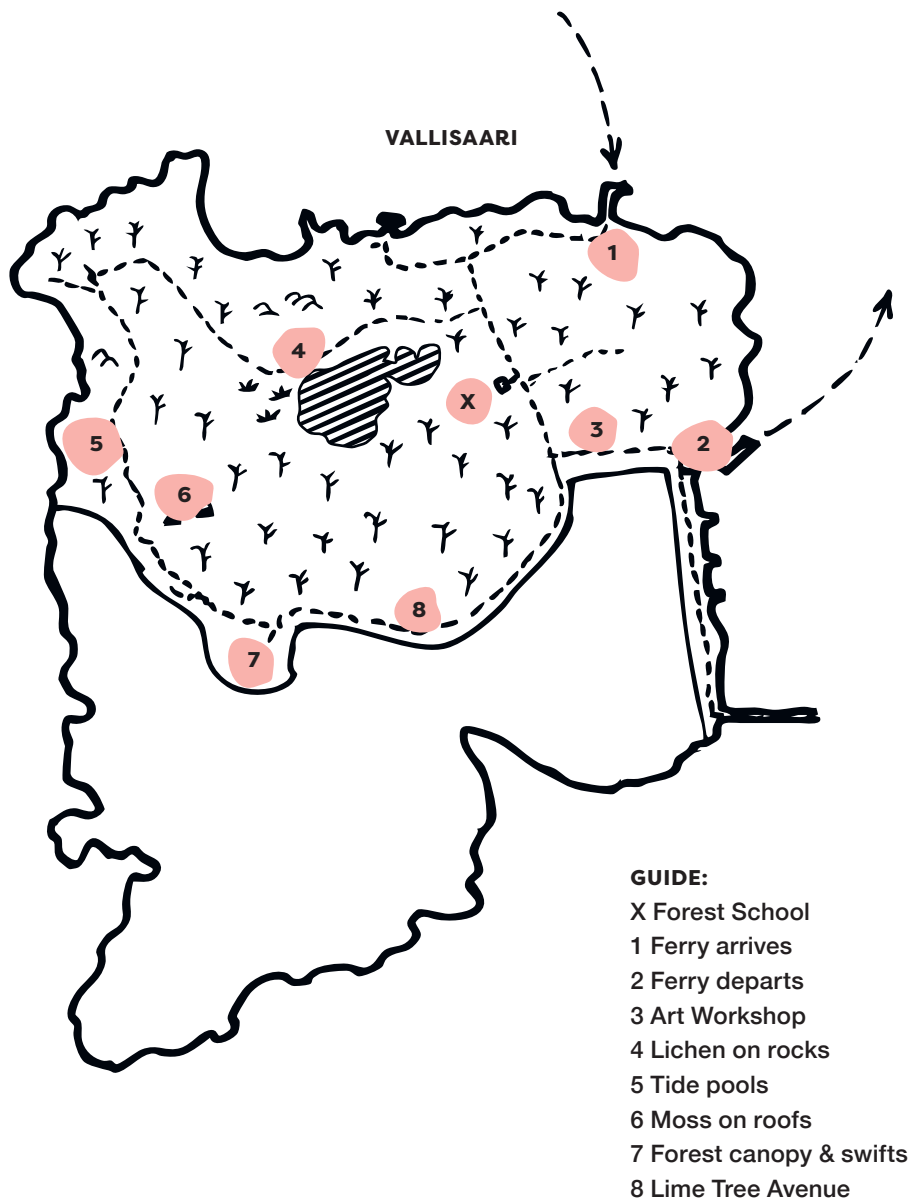
communities of rare moss and lichen species. In our ruins, precious communities bloom!

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.

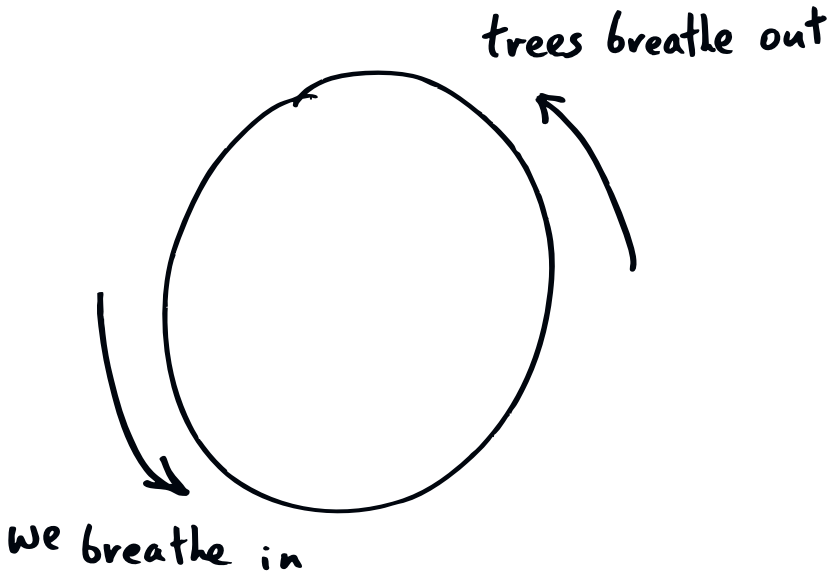
The Forest School is a space to slow down and meet some of our non-human neighbours, through the community of the Forest Alphabet. Collective action helps. Of course, this "collective" usually means working with other people, but what if we can take a few minutes to listen to others and invite them into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



# 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 that I only visited Vallisaari for the first time this year! But I have filmed a video with the Earth Forces collective (Maan puolustusvoimat) at Suomenlinna next to Vallisaari. Both islands have served as fortresses and have a military history. We wanted to work there with the Earth Forces because in our work we approach the issue of defence and security holistically from the perspective of planet Earth. From an ecological perspective and from a bodily experience, security is connection, protection, non-violence, nurturing and care for the whole Earth, all parts of which are interconnected, and lines drawn on maps cannot separate them from each other. Earth Forces borrows its name from the Finnish Defence Forces, asking: what should we [humanity as part of nature] actually defend and protect? Through a word-play, we examine the concepts of societal, human, supra-species, systemic, national and global security - referring to different ways of perceiving than what a culture based on overconsumption and warfare that exploits the planet offers.

In the Earth Forces, art and active multi-disciplinary agency merge: members include artists, conservationists and

researchers who combine the principles of permaculture, the sociology of microbes and, among other things, ecosomatic, nervous system-affecting physical exercises through dance and performances. We also organize Con-scriptions, through which we collaborate with various parties. We learn, network, create visions, alternatives and remedies for consumerist capitalist systems and practices that are dominated by wars, money-based power, colonialism and violence and that harm those who live in these systems.

**KH:** I liked it when you said that you are inspired by love, lichens, fairness (and fairies). I think that really makes sense! A fairy is not included in the Forest alphabet. Are fairies part of Finnish folklore?

**AJ:** Yes, I have recently learned to say it out loud: first of all: love inspires me! It may seem simple, romantic or unrealistic, but for me it is important, and clear to say it. Love is a powerful feeling, but also it's a choice, a way of relating, a value, a verb, a creator of meaning, a symbol, and it's true. Love is a goal and a tool with which to create different realities and ways of living, quite concretely. I have also been inspired by Buddhist philosophy and nature conservationists who have a holistic systemic view and understanding in the interconnectedness of all. Focusing on love does not mean abandoning critical thinking and sharpness, especially in terms of how we see and act in our

shared world and its political systems. It is very important to understand and pay attention to how values, images and meanings are created, how power is used, who uses it and what it is used for – for example, when it comes to nature loss, forest species extinction and the ongoing sixth mass extinction in Finland and elsewhere in the world. We as individuals, groups and societies must be very aware and take action to protect our lives and our planet. It is for the best of everyone.

Maybe I strayed a bit too far from lichens and fairies/elves... but not too far! I have been fascinated by many forest species since I started to interact more closely with them after starting to learn forest mapping as a means of active conservation. I have always been enchanted by forests, ever since I was a child, but the new level of knowledge combined with the desire to protect felt very valuable and opened a new door for me to the diversity and abundance of forest creatures. Lichens, fungi and mosses have all spoken to me. What fascinates me about lichens is their symbiotic nature and diversity, as well as their beauty; they are like paintings of fungi and algae on different forest surfaces. '*Haltioitua*' is an old Finnish word that means to be enchanted, charmed or to be captivated by something – in a good way – or perhaps it could be described as being immersed in a presence, a feeling that everything is connected, "spirited

away" – or revealed by the existence of a mystical entity, perhaps..

*Haltioitua* includes the word *haltia*, which means (forest) a spirit or fairy(elf). Yes, in Finnish folklore there are spirits of natural places, or elves, in the forest particularly. They also remind me of the concept of '*emo*' or '*emuu*' in Karelian folklore, which means a kind of mother or source, birth or spirit of a creature such as a plant or water, a stone. The folklore of the present-day Finnish region and the peoples of the surrounding areas, such as the Karelians and the Sápmi, is rich in elves or beings comparable to them. Much of the folklore of Finnish tribes related to forests has also been lost, because the old culture did not survive the arrival of Christianity and the industrial world-view very well. When I was a child, I felt the presence of *haltia*'s in the forest – whether the experience was spiritual or a product of the imagination – forests have always been for me sources of endless curiosity, exciting and, on the other hand, calming places of rest. In fact, the previous expression is perhaps a pretty good definition of love. I feel that one of the significant features of love is curiosity – the desire to see, hear, sense. Love nourishes and you can rest in it.

**KH:** Do you have a favorite tree or forest?

**AJ:** It's hard to name just one! I love many kinds of forests and the diversity

of forests, and that's why I love many trees and forests. One of my original personal magic forests is in Rapolanharju in Pirkanmaa, where my mother's father's family comes from. There, as a child, I experienced the northern groves and their walnut trees, strawberries, old oaks, dragonflies and other creatures. In pre-Christian times, Finland had sacred groves; sacred places dedicated to nature spirits, also known as 'hiisi'. I love groves, of which there are very few left in Finland, but I especially like spruce trees, which feel protective and strong, like mother trees. Spruce also grows in Finnish groves, and it reminds me of the deep, dark forests of the interior land. I also have a very old and tall spruce friend from my former home in Helsinki, where I lived for a short time as a newborn and again in my thirties. I am attached to that tree and it has wonderful dance movements in the wind. I have met many old, young and middle-aged trees that I respect.

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

**AJ:** Yes, I think that in ancient Finnish belief there were elf trees or sacred trees that grew in connection with houses and yards, i.e. instead of forests, sacred trees were more likely to be found near dwellings. The peoples living in Russia, such as the Mari, Komi and Udmurts, have a rich and diverse old culture related to trees. In addition, of course, the Sápmi and Karelians have their own worlds of nature spirits.

**KH:** The Finnish Forest Movement (Metsäliike) interests me. How did you end up getting involved? And what does metsäliike do? Could you tell us a little more about the recently organized Metsienpuolustus Symposium?

**AJ:** My passion for forest activism was rekindled when I attended a forest mapping (inventory) course organized by the Finnish Nature Association's Forest Group. I had already been involved in nature conservation activism related to mining before that and was shocked by how bad the situation was regarding the laws and regulations binding large corporations. Large international corporations have the opportunity to covet almost any land, forest and water bodies, regardless of protection and local communities.

76% of Finnish forest habitats are endangered and 21% are under consideration. Forest species, even common ones, are becoming endangered and forests have significantly lost their natural ecological characteristics, mainly due to intensive forest industry. Logging has turned forest lands as a whole into sources of emissions instead of carbon sinks. When I met forest mapping activists - many of whom are ecologists, biologists, students, self-taught enthusiasts and experts in many fields - my faith was restored that it was still possible to do something to protect these forests and lands. Forest mapping is concrete and down-



to-earth work, through which you can wander in the forests and learn things. The work involves curiosity about life and taking back power over the forests; by going into the forest and making its values visible on maps. The activity fascinated me and gave me the opportunity to learn something new.

In the same year 2021, I traveled to Ka-inuu to meet other forest activists in the beautiful old natural forest of Kartimonjoki. The state-owned, unprotected natural forest was threatened by logging. The forest had been the subject of negotiations between NGOs and Metsähallitus, and it was a controversial subject. The logging was successfully stopped through citizen activism through non-violent direct action, and the forest is still standing. At that time, various groups and NGOs formed the Forest Movement, which became an independent people's movement for forests. The Forest Movement monitors, guards and communicates about endangered natural forests on state lands, exposes environmental crimes in forests and brings together people from forest owners to hunters and berry pickers, from scientists and artists to social activists and ordinary citizens who want to defend forest ecosystems and help ensure that the Finnish state complies with its own laws and goals regarding forests. Responsibility for nature and its well-being is already enshrined in our constitution.

The Forest Movement campaigns and works in cooperation with many environmental organizations. However, it is an independent coalition formed by citizens, one of the main methods of action of which is to stop the logging of natural forests and other ecologically important forests through direct action, if nothing else helps. You can climb a tree and stop a forestry machine if they do something that goes against our constitutional duty. I have personally coordinated and supported artistic interventions related to forest activism and been involved in organizing events and demonstrations. I have also been involved in some of the Forest Movement's well-known non-violent direct action actions, mainly in the role of a supporter and communicator. In April, we organized the Forest Protection Symposium and, in conjunction with it, the Invitations, where citizens were able to learn about different ways and roles in the protection and defense of forests. The event featured researchers and forest surveyors, media representatives, psychologists, artists and forest activists, as well as new choral music composed for the Forest Movement and its newborn choir. The event was interspersed with a joint exhibition of the Earth Forces and the Forest Movement, which I convened.

**KH:** I believe that if we could learn to think more like the forest as individuals and as a society, we would have a

better relationship with the world. Do you have any tips on how we could think this way?

**AJ:** We can learn and adopt from the forest an understanding of the interconnectedness of everything. The sprouting and decaying architecture of the forest, which protects and nourishes the species living there, is also a living organism, built by many different individuals through their own actions. Slow and gentle decomposition is also important work. Trees, fungi, mycorrhiza, roots and all forms of growth are interconnected in ways that sustain life. The soil layer is an intertwining of death and life, a continuous process. Most individuals in a forest could not live or at least would suffer severely if another were taken away.

The body of the forest offers an opportunity to learn about diversity, care and resilience. The strength of natural forests is best maintained when it is just allowed to be, and to be itself. However, a forest can also be helped to recover. Of course, a forest is not a paradise where no one ever suffers, but it is a living collective where cohesion and self-repair are perhaps more easily observed than in our human systems. The more diverse and more generations of life and creatures a forest supports, the more resilient it is to changes and crises, and this could be understood to be the case in human communities as well. To live a good life, no forest species builds weapons of mass destruction, commits genocide, pollutes their own or others' habitats, or heats up the planet.



**AINO MIELIKKI MAA AND KATIE HOLTEN, FOREST WALK, JUNE 8, 2025.  
PHOTO CREDIT: HAM/HELSINKI BIENNIAL/HENNI HYVÄRINEN**

# A NEW ABC



Aa



Bb



Cc



Dd



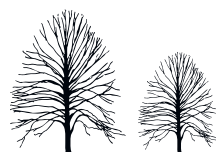
Ii



Jj



Kk



Ll



Pp



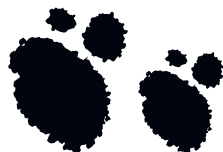
Qq



Rr



Ss



Xx



Yy



Zz

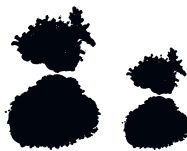
# FOREST ALPHABET FOR FINLAND



Ee



Ff



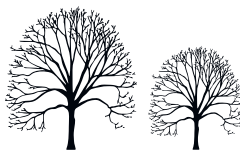
Gg



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	Valkohankajäkälä + 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



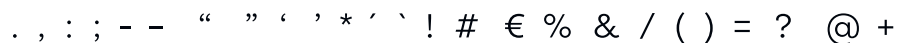
Ä



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 photograph of a dense forest. Two large, light-colored tree trunks are prominent in the foreground, framing the scene. The ground is covered in green ferns and mossy rocks. The background shows a steep, sunlit hillside with more trees. The sky is visible through the canopy.

## 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***

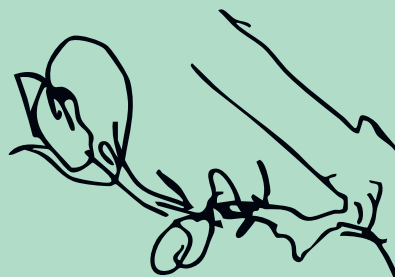
Find a comfortable spot to lie down and look up at the sky through the trees. Watch the clouds moving. Let your imagination wander – what shapes or stories do you see in the clouds?

### ***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  
BIENNIAL**



**Cultúr Éireann  
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