



WORLDWIDE HAND IN HAND

# KIDS OF NATURE

MAY 2026

**Petra Jäger:**  
“When the  
forest guides  
your hands to  
paint”

Where  
roots  
provide a  
foothold  
and hands  
learn to  
write

**Interview**  
with Wiebke  
Schomaker  
Bestselling  
author

**Nadja Hillgruber:**  
A-Z colouring  
rhymes in  
5 languages  
available for  
**DOWNLOAD**

# EDITORIAL

## Where roots grow – and the future takes shape

It begins quietly.

With a step into the forest. With hands touching the earth. With a child who discovers a trail and sees a story in it.

This magazine is an invitation to look closely at exactly that.

**Kids of Nature** is more than a collection of articles. It is a space – a living, breathing space where education, relationships and nature come together in a way that touches us deeply. Between roots and the world, an attitude unfolds here that could hardly be more relevant: children do not need to be rushed. They need connection.

**Connection to themselves.**

**Connection to nature.**

**Connection to one another.**

The articles in this issue demonstrate just how powerful this connection can be. **Petra Jäger's pioneering work** reminds us that learning does not begin in the classroom, but through experience. That writing does not start with a pen, but with movement, with touching, with wonder. The forest becomes the first writing book – and every child the author of their own development.

At the same time, this magazine spans a wide arc across national borders. The '**Children of Nature worldwide Hand in Hand**' movement highlights what becomes possible when people share a common vision: bringing children closer to nature again – and thus closer to themselves. A song in 27 languages. Children in over 25 countries. An idea that connects.

The voices of **Wiebke Schomaker and Nadja Hillgruber** also show that it is not a question of either/or – not nature or education, not feeling or knowledge. It is about both/and. About an educational approach that is scientifically grounded whilst leaving room for intuition, creativity and genuine experience.

This magazine represents a quiet yet powerful movement.

A movement that doesn't need to raise its voice to be heard.

A movement that is growing – like a forest.

Slowly. Organically. Sustainably.

Perhaps now is precisely the time to pause. To shift our perspective.

And to ask ourselves: **what do children really need to find their way?**

The answer may be closer than we think.

Outdoors.

In the forest.

In life.

**Welcome to Kids of Nature.**

**Petra Jäger und Nadja Hillgruber**

# THE MOVEMENT INTRODUCES ITSELF

The “Children of Nature Worldwide Hand in Hand” movement (also known as “Naturkinder weltweit Hand in Hand”) is a global initiative that aims to bring together forest kindergartens, nature playgroups and nature-based educational institutions worldwide, with the aim of connecting children with nature through joint activities and a unifying song.

## Key objectives & activities

- **Networking:** It brings together forest children from over 25 countries to foster a sense of global community.
- **The Forest Children’s Song:** At the heart of the movement is the song “I am a Forest Child”, composed by the Swiss musician and nature educator Marius Tschirky. It has now been translated into over 26 languages and is intended to be sung by children in forests around the world.
- **International Day of the Forest Kindergarten:** The movement plays a leading role in organising the annual “International Day of the Forest Kindergarten” on 3 May, when events are held by forest kindergartens and nature education centres around the world.
- **International meetings:** In cooperation with the movement, meetings for nature educators are held, such as the one organised in Zurich in 2019 by the Flensburg Forest Kindergarten and the Swiss cooperative Feuervogel für Naturpädagogik, which was attended by 250 participants from 24 countries. The International Summer School for Nature Educators in Louti (Czech Republic), held in 2024 and organised by the Czech Forest Kindergarten Association ASOCIACE LESNÍCH MATEŘSKÝCH ŠKOL, was attended by 200 participants from 16 countries.

## Background

The initiative, led by [Petra Jäger und Nadja Hillgruber](#), grew out of the annual event celebrated on 3 May as ‘International Forest Kindergarten Day’. This was the date on which the Flensburg Forest Kindergarten Association was founded in 1993.

It sees itself as a grassroots movement that aims to pave a sustainable path into the future for children – guided by the wisdom of nature.

[Petra Jäger und Nadja Hillgruber](#)

If you work in nature education yourself or attend a forest kindergarten, you could take part on 3 May by singing the song with your group, organising nature-based activities on the day, and adding your name to the [world map](#).







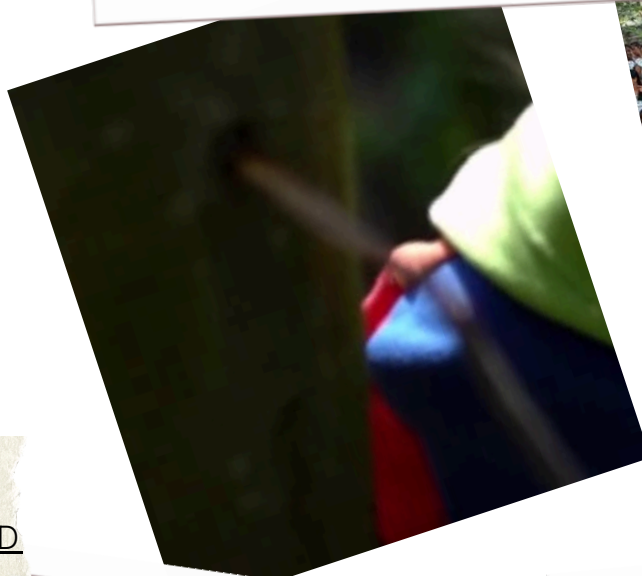
CONNECTION



CHILDREN OF NATURE  
WORLDWIDE HAND IN HAND



FRIENDSHIP



FUTURE

SONG IN 27  
LANGUAGES

VOM SONGWRITER  
MARIUS TSCHIRKY



NETWORK



WORLDWIDE

The movement supports all nature groups worldwide involved in forest, nature and wilderness education in establishing a global network. The forest children's song "**I am a woodkid**", which exists in 27 languages, brings children of nature together across the globe.





# Petra Jäger

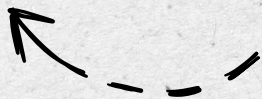


Early years  
educator &  
systemic  
counsellor

Co-founder  
Flensburg Forest  
Kindergarten



national &  
international



Attitude &  
Mindfulness



pioneering  
work since  
1993

shaper of mindsets





## Petra Jäger – a pioneer in forest education and a shaper of mindset in child-centred education

**Petra Jäger**, co-founder of Waldkindergarten Flensburg e.V., has played a pivotal role in shaping nature-based, child-centred education in Germany through her long-standing commitment. Together with Kerstin Jeben, she established the first state-recognised forest kindergarten in Flensburg's Marienhölzung in 1993 – a revolutionary idea at the time: to accompany children outdoors in nature all year round.

The Flensburg Forest Kindergarten is much more than a place without walls. It is a space of trust, freedom and personal development. Petra Jäger has shaped it with an approach underpinned by deep attentiveness to the children's needs. She meets them on equal terms, with warmth, clarity and a keen sense of connection and relationship.



There, children are free to learn with all their senses, to get muddy, to marvel, to feel the cold, to run, to climb, to listen – and above all: they are free to be themselves.

At a time when many childhoods are characterised by a fast-paced lifestyle and sensory overload, Petra creates spaces for connection, for roots and wings. She trusts in the power of nature and in each child's natural pace of development – and supports them with a loving, attachment-oriented approach.

Petra is not only a pioneer of nature-based education, but also a quiet hero in the everyday lives of many families. Her work extends far beyond Flensburg – through lectures, exchange projects and international contacts (including as far afield as South Korea), she shares her experience and inspires educators worldwide.





# When the forest guides the hands to paint

## -Expert insight by Petra Jäger [[Video](#)]-



When the forest guides children's hands as they draw, something truly special emerges. Here we have a hand-carved pencil that the children love using to draw on the forest floor. We are often asked whether forest and nature-based nurseries adequately prepare children for pencil grip and for what is required later on at school. We now know that the foundations for holding a pencil are laid much earlier – precisely where children can practise it naturally. Core muscles play just as important a role as the opportunity to decide and do things for themselves. This intrinsic motivation is a key driver of learning. Here, the children have the space to use and further develop both their fine and gross motor skills.

We have the world's largest sheet of drawing paper – the forest floor – and the children love using it to capture their ideas and pictures.

Wiebke has given us a wonderful rhyming poem about a snail to go with it.

The children usually don't draw whilst sitting; they like to lie on their stomachs or crouch down. This alone shows how individually children move and also develop their own way of holding a pencil.

Children sit far too much anyway – yet growing up is all about movement. And whilst we leave our marks on our large sheet of drawing paper, nature also shows us its own works of art every day: traces, signs and little wonders.

When children discover, for example, the delicate trail of a tiny snail, they kneel down to look at it, gaze at it in wonder and discuss it. Or they find a beetle that has left mysterious marks in the rotten wood – like a hidden script. The forest is full of traces and secrets.

And every child who later learns to write at school brings their very own way of making marks. I hope that this discovery, this creative expression and this learning may take place in nature as often as possible.

# Where roots provide a foothold and hands learn to write – when the forest guides the hands to draw



In the forest kindergarten, the foundations for future writing are laid almost unnoticed – in the midst of play, in the midst of forest life. The forest becomes a vast, living learning space that invites children anew every day to discover their hands, their bodies and their senses.

As early as the morning, little hands reach for sticks, pick up pine cones or let fine soil trickle through their fingers. Some children stroke the rough bark of a tree, others sort colourful leaves by shape and size.



A child is kneeling on the forest floor, using a stick to draw long lines, spirals and waves in the ground. Another is arranging small stones into a pattern – circle after circle, stone after stone.

All these seemingly simple activities help to strengthen the muscles in the fingers and hands in a playful way. It is precisely these muscles that children will need later on to hold a pen confidently and comfortably.



Hand-eye coordination also develops quite naturally in the forest. When children stack pine cones on a tree stump, arrange small sticks to build a hut, or try to place a particularly round stone in just the right spot, their eyes and hands work closely together.



Many children particularly enjoy drawing in the soft earth with sticks: they draw paths for imaginary animals, write their first mysterious symbols, or follow the trail of a beetle. Sometimes whole pictures emerge – a sun, a house, or the winding trail of a snail.

## The whole body needs stability to learn to write

Cooking and helping out in the open-fire kitchen is a particularly sensory experience. Children pick fragrant herbs, rub them between their fingers and breathe in the aromatic scent. They cut leaves with a small knife, stir the pots, peel, mix and taste. Their hands are busy, the scent of herbs fills the air, the wood crackles in the fire – and, almost without realising it, they practise movements that will later be important for writing: grasping, turning, cutting, measuring.

Their whole body is constantly in motion. Children climb trees, balance on tree trunks or carefully step over tangled roots. Sometimes they drag a long branch along behind them with great seriousness – as if it were a treasure, a sailing ship or a street sweeper.

These movements strengthen the core and shoulder muscles. It is precisely this stability that the body needs later on to sit still and guide the hand with precision whilst writing.

So, through free play in nature, children naturally develop what they need to learn to write:

strong hands, coordinated movements and the joy of trying things out.

The forest provides new inspiration for this every day. Sometimes dry leaves rustle underfoot, sometimes dew glistens on the moss, sometimes a child discovers a mysterious trail in the mud.

# How do you develop beautiful handwriting?



By slowing things down and allowing plenty of time for development, every child is free to decide for themselves when to discover and build on their skills. There is no pressure, no 'too early' and no 'too late'. Everything is allowed to grow – just like a young tree.

After all, beautiful handwriting isn't just the result of practice. It also stems from inner calm, balance and good body awareness.

## The signs of nature tell stories

When children are allowed to learn without pressure, in harmony with their bodies and feelings, their writing hand begins to flow too – light and supple, like a slender birch twig swaying gently in the wind.

And the forest itself reveals its very own handwriting to the children:

the winding trails of a snail in the sand,

the delicate lines of a beetle in rotten wood,



the footprints of a fawn in the soft ground.

Children discover these marks with great curiosity. They bend down to look at them, compare them, puzzle over them and make up stories about them.

This is how they learn from an early age: the world is full of tracks, patterns and signs – and they all tell a story. Just like the letters they will one day write.



# The Learning Triangle

Handwriting is not a "hand thing," but a complex interplay of multiple sensory and motor systems.



## Auditory (Hearing)

Handwriting works well:

- Attention can be held when
- the eye guides movement
- the body is stable yet flexible
- Difficulties with handwriting are often not "practice problems," but a sign that one of the systems needs support



## Importance for Writing:

- supports attention & focus
- helps with the rhythm of movements (e.g. flow lines, letters)
- links Speech ↔ Movement (sounds ↔ letters)
- important for writing rhythm & pace



## Motor Skills (Movement)

### Importance for Writing:

- stable seating posture
- Shoulders & core give support → Hand can work relaxed
- Strength control while writing
- Spatial orientation (starting point, movement direction)



Without stable motor skills, handwriting can often be:

- cramped
- too firm or too light
- quickly tiring



## Visual (Seeing)

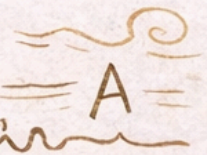
### Importance for Writing:

- Keep lines (top-bottom, left-right)
- Spacing between letters & words
- Distinguish & recognize letters
- Visual feedback: "How does my letter look - does it match?"



Handwriting challenges can often show up:

- Letter or number rotations
- "Wandering" in the line
- very uneven letter size





# ABOUT

## Wiebke Schomaker



### Wiebke Schomaker

is a German speech and language therapist, author and founder of the parenting blog “Starke Sprache”, which is dedicated to providing sound language support for children.

She grew up in northern Germany. Wiebke studied speech and language therapy from 2001 to 2005 at Fresenius University of Applied Sciences in Idstein and at Hogeschool van Utrecht (Netherlands), where she obtained her Bachelor of Health.

Her interest in the profession began in childhood, when she herself received speech therapy treatment for a lisp, and was cemented during a period of voluntary service in New Mexico.

*We spoke to the speech therapist, author and founder of the parenting blog “Starke Sprache”*

### Mission & Values

Wiebke's main priorities are equality of opportunity and evidence-based practice: she wants all children – regardless of their initial language skills – to receive the support they need to communicate with confidence. To this end, she makes her expertise available free of charge online and combines it with her second passion: writing. Her blog and courses are aimed at parents who are concerned about their child's language development and are looking for practical, playful support for use at home.

### Publications & Projects

- 2024: Book “Play, Speak, Have Fun!” featuring over 100 game ideas to support language development
- 2025: Children's non-fiction book “Ida and the Miracle of Breathing” (HappyWu Verlag)
- 2025: “Rhyming, Drawing, Learning to Speak!” – 80 ideas for speech-drawing and creative rhyming activities





# INTERVIEW

## *Wiebke Schomaker*



*You've been working with children for many years:  
in your view, what has changed during that time  
in terms of language and communication?*

[\[Video\]](#)

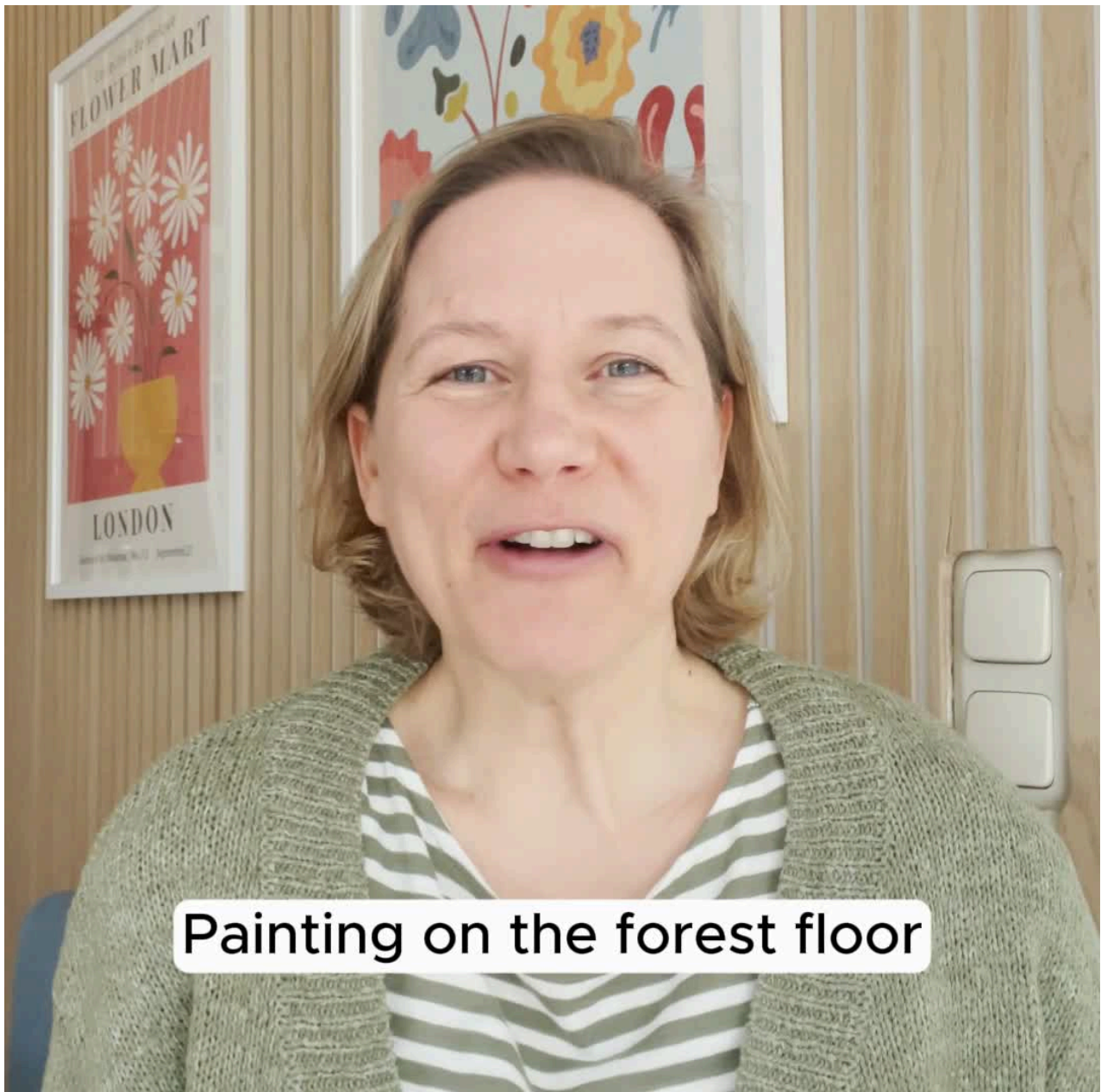


**and a speech therapist  
for twenty years**

# Wiebke Schomaker



*Writing and drawing only on paper? This year, you're supporting the 'Children of Nature Worldwide Hand in Hand' movement with your specialist expertise. The forest children draw on the forest floor. How vibrant do you find this approach? [[Video](#)]*



**Painting on the forest floor**

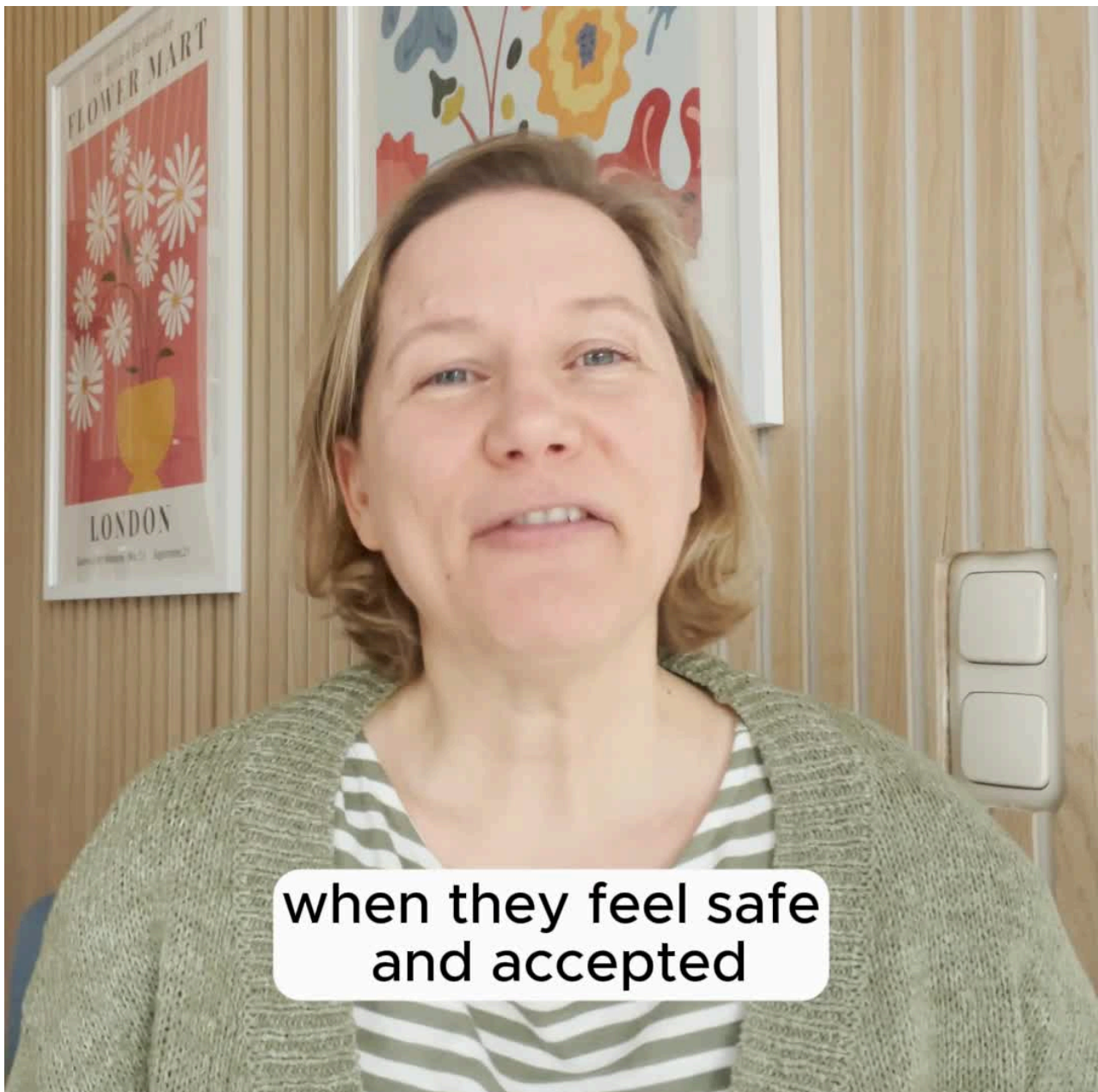


*Wiebke Schomaker*



*How important is physical activity  
for language development?*

[Video]

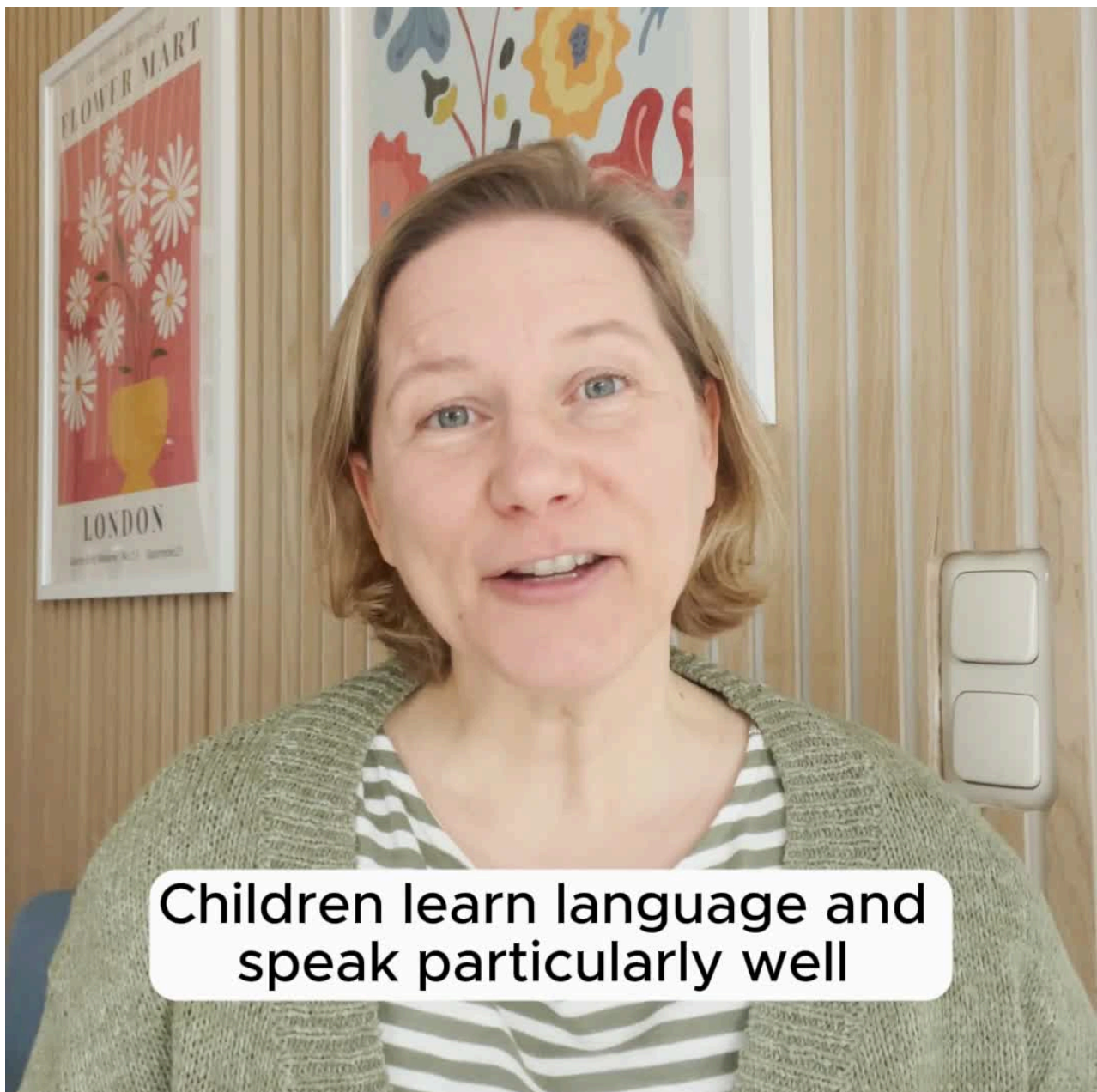


*Wiebke Schomaker*



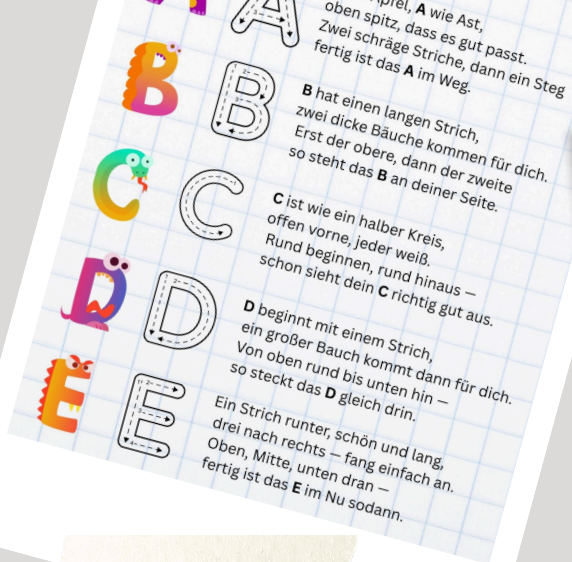
*What role do emotions and relationships  
play in learning to speak and write?*

[\[Video\]](#)

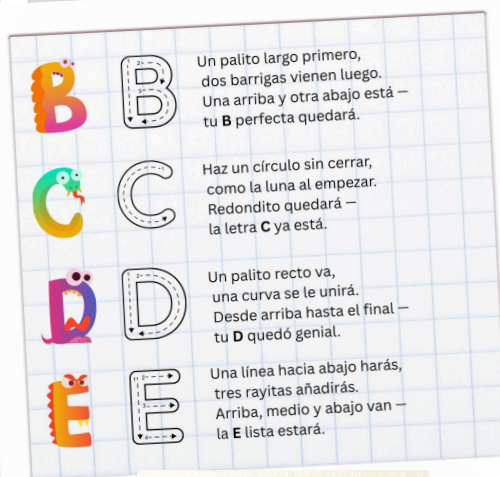


**Children learn language and  
speak particularly well**

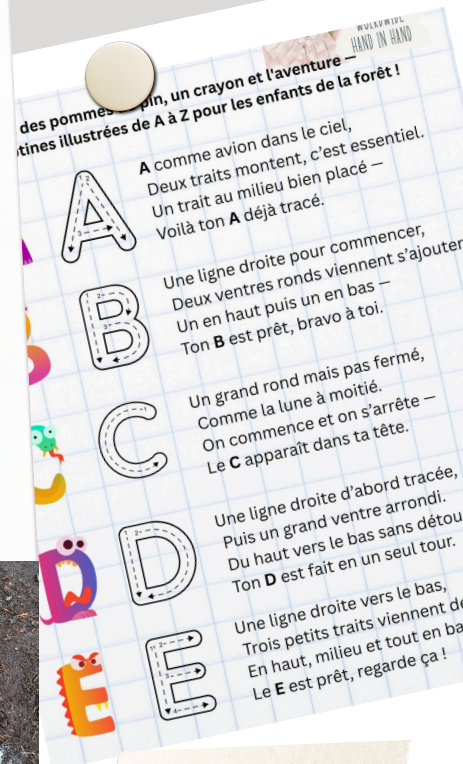




GERMAN



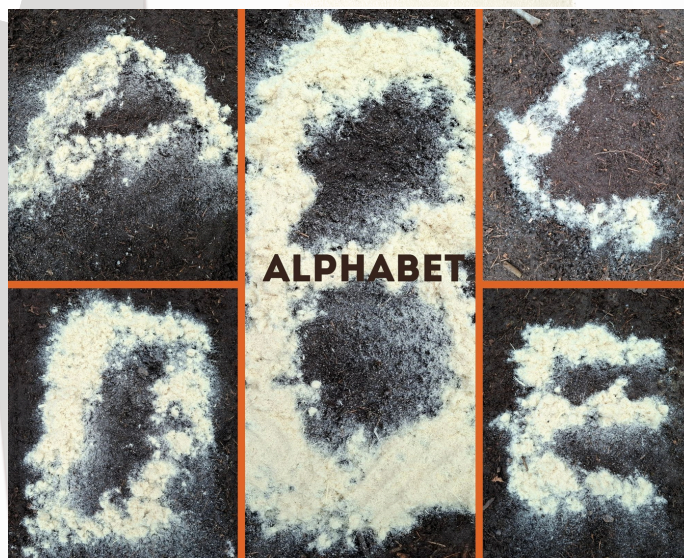
ITALIAN



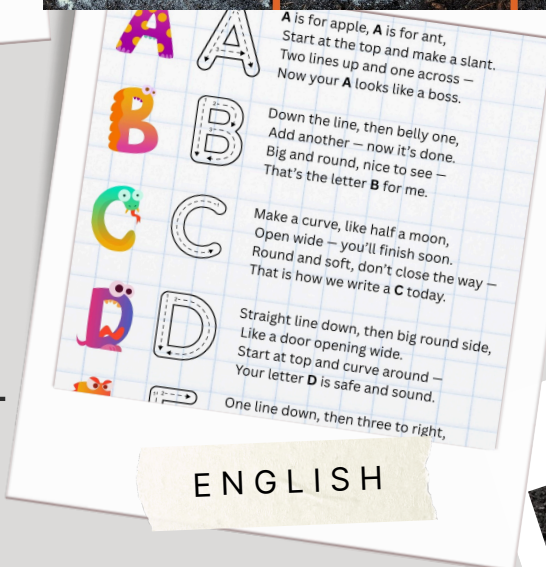
FRANZÖSISCH



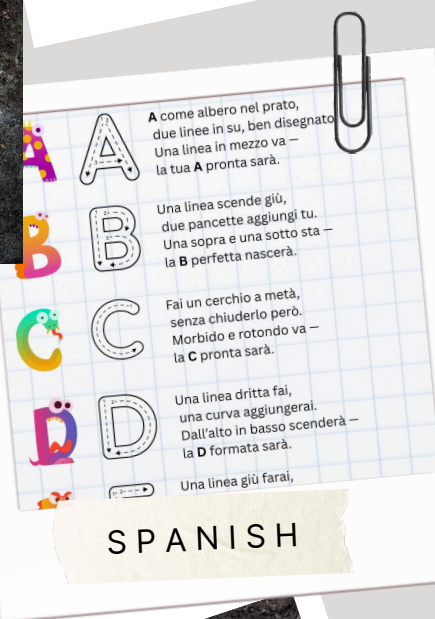
CHILDREN OF  
NATURE  
WORLDWIDE  
HAND IN HAND



COLOURING  
RHYMES  
THE ALPHABET  
FROM A TO Z



ENGLISH



SPANISH

We have rhymes for the alphabet  
from A to Z in German, English,  
French, Italian and  
Spanish, as [Download](#)

from Nadja Hillgruber



SONG



## Between Roots and the World – Nadja Hillgruber and the Living Web of Connection with Nature

**Nadja Hillgruber** seems to be a quiet bridge-builder between people and nature – someone who not only tells us about the earth, but understands its language. With keen eyes, skilled hands and the ears of a squirrel, she roams through woods and meadows, gathering, observing and creating. Using simple materials – bark, fibres, leaves and colours – she creates little wonders and shows others how much beauty and knowledge lies hidden in the unassuming.

Her approach combines the clarity of an engineer with the depth of a nature educator. What she creates is not a lesson in the traditional sense, but an experience: under her guidance, children and adults immerse themselves in the living world outside, feel the rhythm of the seasons, and learn to interpret the rustling of leaves and the scent of damp earth in a new way.



In this way, she not only weaves, links and stitches together natural materials, but also spins fine, invisible threads between people, places and countries: with care and foresight, she connects information and her ideas for the **‘Children of Nature Worldwide Hand in hand’** movement, carrying them out into the digital and international world. Like a growing network, this forms a vibrant web of friendship in which forest kindergartens, nature playgroups and nature-based educational institutions around the globe can feel connected.

Through her work, which she carries out under the name “**Ferox Natura Artis – Wild Nature Crafts**”, she creates spaces where people can reconnect – with nature and with themselves. Her work is characterised by mindfulness, respect for living things, and the quiet conviction that true learning begins where we can marvel once more.



United in a spirit of togetherness: since 2018, the movement has been bringing together nature-loving humans worldwide

Join our network



Add yourself and your organisation to our **world map**  
Click on the map and you will be redirected

