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Child's Play: Nature-Deficit Disorder and Mark Twain's Mississippi River Youth

[Barbara Eckstein](#) ✉

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Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods* (2006), believes that a majority of children—he means children in the US—suffer from nature-deficit disorder.¹ “The (second) frontier—which existed in the family farm,

the woods at the end of the road, the national parks and in our hearts—is itself disappearing or changing beyond recognition” (4). Structured games and circumscribed play have replaced the freedom, fantasy, privacy, and healing that Louv believes children earlier found in their outdoor explorations. He fears that these constructs will teach children that in unruly nature risks abound, ghosts reside, while in chalked and manicured outdoor play, a medical or legal remedy exists for every mistake (131). “The urge to affiliate with other forms of life” that E. O. Wilson calls biophilia (qtd. in Louv 43), when absent or...

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