Acting Outside
Encouraging Environmental Connectedness in Children through Role-play

Emma Ausford, BSc, MA Enviro. Ed.
Devonian Botanic Garden
University of Alberta, Canada
Challenge
How to enrich environmental education?
Lecture-based Programs
Strengths

- Information rich
- Placed-based
- Experiential learning
“Wow, I’ve never seen so many trees!”

“I’m scared of ants and lady bugs.”

“Ewww! Grass is gross”

“But the forest is full of bears!”
Limitations

- Overloaded programs
- Negative messaging
- Anthropocentric perspective
What is role play?
How Role-Play Works

1. Know your character
How Role-Play Works

1. Know your character
2. Create a safe place
How Role-Play Works

1. Know your character
2. Create a safe place
3. Go with the flow
How Role-Play Works

1. Know your character
2. Create a safe place
3. Go with the flow
4. Time to debrief
Results

- Increased engagement
Meet David
Results

- Increased engagement
- Deeper insights into ecosystem complexity
- Increased respect towards the environment
So we began to supplement our programs with Role-Play
Survival of the Fittest

- Interactive role-play examining adaptation
- Based on the concept of Darwin’s Finches
Challenges