

Institution: University of Cambridge		
Unit of Assessment: 27 English Literature and Language		
Title of case study: Lost Words: Building and Inspiring Nature Connection, Outdoor Learning and Nature Literacy		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2015–2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Dr Robert Macfarlane	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Reader in Literature and the Geohumanities	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: October 2003–Present Day
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015–2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>Dr Macfarlane's research on rediscovering the connection between language and nature influenced the ways in which children and adults connect to the natural world through language. The publication of <i>Landmarks</i> (2015), which then inspired <i>The Lost Words</i> (2017), led to mass participation of primary and secondary schools in learning 'nature literacy'. The adoption of <i>The Lost Words</i> in care contexts (hospitals, dementia treatment, abuse survivor therapy and programmes for refugees) supported the health and wellbeing of adults. International and UK-based adaptations of <i>The Lost Words</i> in many artistic forms supported creativity, culture, and society and (through sales) the economy, especially the publishing and creative industries.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>Dr Macfarlane researches the complex issues surrounding the connections between language, landscape, nature, memory, and travel. Macfarlane addresses these both in his scholarship and creative practice. Inspired by research published in <i>Science</i> by Cambridge conservationists, Macfarlane studies the 'loss of knowledge about the natural world to growing isolation from it', and argues for efforts 'to re-establish children's links with nature if we are to win over the hearts and minds of the next generation' [R1]. The award in 2011 of a Philip Leverhulme Prize made it possible for Dr Macfarlane to research and write <i>Landmarks</i> [R2], a book of cultural history and literary criticism about the relations of language and the natural world. <i>Landmarks</i> was published by Penguin in March 2015 and was shortlisted for the Samuel Johnson Non-Fiction Award and the Wainwright Prize for Nature Writing.</p> <p>Through the writings of JA Baker, Nan Shepherd, Roger Deakin, Jacquetta Hawes and others, Macfarlane analyses words and their culture with a keen interest in the lexicography of the natural world. <i>Landmarks</i> shows that the impoverishment of precise referential landscape-lexis has occurred across the linguistic terrains of Britain and Ireland, and makes the case for a need (ethical, even political) for its replenishment, or 're-wilding'. It argues for the importance of certain practices of nature writing in reactivating place-sense and place-responsibility in readers. <i>Landmarks</i> seeks to provide a means for such 're-wilding', by rebuilding confidence in 'lost words' by means of eleven glossaries, featuring two thousand terms of 'landscape-language' from more than 33 languages, dialects and sub-dialects of Britain and Ireland [R3].</p> <p>This research into the loss of connectivity with nature then prompted reflection on how children connect with nature. How might practices of 'naming' and 'story-telling' enable not only increases in 'nature literacy', but also drive positive change in individuals and communities?</p>		

Might a common language for nature be 're-wilded' in a manner comparable to large-scale landscape or ecosystem regeneration, leading to positive outcomes for nature connection and environmental amelioration? To answer these questions, in 2017 Macfarlane initiated a collaboration with artist Jackie Morris on *The Lost Words: A Spell Book* [R2]. In this large-format book, Macfarlane wrote 'spell' poems on the names of twenty species from everyday nature which have been falling from use in the texts read and written by British primary-school-age children. *The Lost Words* was published in October 2017 and won the CILIP Kate Greenaway Medal for Children's Illustration and the Children's Book of the Year at the British Book Awards.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[R1] Robert Macfarlane, 'From Badger to Bulbasaur: Have Children Lost Touch With Nature?', *Guardian*, 30 September 2017
<<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/sep/30/robert-macfarlane-lost-words-children-nature>>

[R2] Robert Macfarlane, *Landmarks* (Penguin: London, 2015), ISBN: 9780241146538.

[R3] Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris, *The Lost Words* (Penguin: London, 2017), ISBN: 9780241253588.

[R4] Robert Macfarlane, 'The Word-Hoard: On Rewilding Our Language For Landscape', *Guardian*, 27 February 2015 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/feb/27/robert-macfarlane-word-hoard-rewilding-landscape>>

Robert Macfarlane, Philip Leverhulme Prize, August 2012- July 2015, RG66215, GBP70,000, <https://www.leverhulme.ac.uk/philip-leverhulme-prizes-2011>

R2 is a peer-reviewed book of scholarship (448pp.) which is being submitted as a REF 2021 double-weighted output. R3 is an original work of creative writing aimed primarily at children and families. The substance and achievement of both works is recognised in the prize awards and shortlistings noted above. R1 and R4 resulted directly from the research and promoted its findings and proposals to large readerships.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Landmarks and *The Lost Words* have helped redress the loss of both 'nature literacy' and nature itself in Britain and beyond, especially in relation to childhood. [text removed for publication] [E1]. *The Lost Words* has been translated into Welsh, Dutch, Swedish, German, and French. A Publishing Director of Penguin Books notes 'The success of both books has been extraordinary – and *The Lost Words* is an ongoing phenomenon unlike any other in the last decade', [text removed for publication] [E1].

Economic and creative impact

The books have made a cultural and creative impact, with adaptations of *The Lost Words* generating income for artists, organisations, individuals and institutions involved. These include: a flagship BBC Prom concert at the Albert Hall, broadcast live on Radio 3; *Seek Find Speak*, an Arts Council England (ACE)-funded 'outdoor spoken-word performance', performed for over two years; and *Spell Songs*, also ACE-funded, a folk-music touring concert and 112 page CD book (shortlisted for the Beautiful Book Award) involving 8 artists. In February 2019, four initial performances (including Birmingham Town Hall, and Queen Elizabeth Hall at the Southbank Centre) sold out, with an audience of 3,165 [E2]. The Project Manager notes: 'Thanks to *Spell Songs*, the artists have taken their music to new audiences...their income has increased due to playing bigger venues... as a result [they] are free to create new artistic outputs' [E2]. [text removed for publication] [E2]. An exhibition, created in collaboration with Compton Verney Art Gallery for venues across the UK, including the Foundling Museum in London and Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh (in partnership with the John Muir Trust), had visitor numbers exceeding 57,000. 'Essential, gorgeous,

thought provoking, full of precious reminders of nature's treasures', a visitor noted [E3]. A *Newsnight* film about *The Lost Words* and nature literacy has since been viewed more than 3,800,000 times across social media platforms [E4]. *The Lost Words* was described as a 'cultural phenomenon' by *The Guardian* (p 1) and a 'revolution' (p 27) by the broadcaster Chris Packham [E5].

Impact on education, NGOs and childhood

The Lost Words has become a catalyst for the outdoor learning and outdoor classrooms movement in the UK, and a turning point in the 're-greening' of education (especially in the early years). In autumn 2017 Jane Beaton, a bus driver from Midlothian, Scotland, read *The Lost Words* and was inspired to raise money to donate a copy to every primary, secondary and special school in Scotland, in order to create greater nature literacy and environmental responsibility in Scotland's children [E5] (pp1-3). Beaton raised GBP25,000 'to give the book to all 2,681 schools in Scotland' [E5] (p 20), and within eighteen months completed the distribution, helped by local councils, individual volunteers and NGOs. Her example inspired more than 20 similar campaigns, covering all of Greater London (c.2,500 schools), 21 English counties, 3 Welsh counties [E5] (pp 5-24). A teacher notes: 'It's increased confidence and engagement, particularly in reading and speaking in a class setting' [E5] (p 27).

Wild places charity the John Muir Trust has 'adopted a UK-wide ambassador-type role' for *The Lost Words*, which inspired the Trust to 'take a fresh look at literacy and nature' [E6]. The Trust has built many new initiatives around *The Lost Words* as part of their work, including running training sessions for education practitioners, and working in partnerships with local councils in Scotland to benefit 3,500 pupils in deprived areas. Through collaboration between the John Muir Trust and the Scottish Book Trust, in June 2018, Scotland's First Minister selected *The Lost Words* as part of her 'First Minister's Reading Challenge' [E6]. In May 2019 the Department for Education, England, made a video about the impact of *The Lost Words* upon one teacher and her teaching, in order to increase teacher recruitment, part of 'The Teacher Effect' campaign [E7] (pp 7-8). A user notes: 'I am also working with the library service to promote #thelostwords through a multi-agency project as a vehicle to connect families & nature to improve health, well-being & literacy' [E8] (p 9).

The Lost Words was adopted in numerous literacy projects and literacy trails around the country, including Bodnant Gardens, Lyme House, and Dunham Massey [E6]. The National Literacy Trust created *Lost Words* trails in Swindon and Hastings as part of a campaign to 'tackle intergenerational low literacy in areas of high deprivation'. All primary schools in Swindon were also offered resources to create their own Word Walk. In Swindon (Summer 2018 and Summer 2019) 550 families took part, and in Hastings (Summer 2019) 290 families participated. In December 2018 the National Literacy Trust invited all Key Stage 2 pupils in Swindon to participate in a *Lost Words* poetry competition [E7] (p 8). The hashtag TheLostWords generated 520,464 Twitter impressions [E6] (p 2), and 3,504 Instagram posts (data captured Nov 2019) [E6] (p 2). Dr Macfarlane's Twitter feed (@RobGMacfarlane) has received on average 9.5 million twitter impressions per month (data captured May to December 2019) [E8] (pp 24-30).

Contributions to well-being, especially in health-care contexts.

The Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital opened a major new building in 2018; four storeys were decorated with art and poetry from *The Lost Words*, running floor to ceiling as murals / wallpaper, following a major commission by the Hospital Trust. The art was designed in consultation with physical therapists, to help patients move up and down the corridors using balance-rails as part of their healing work [E9]. Copies of *The Lost Words* have been donated to publicly managed care homes and 'Shared Reading Groups' [E9] (p 6). The book has also been used therapeutically with survivors of domestic abuse, refugee communities, with childhood cancer patients and in Memory Cafes for those living with dementia and related

illnesses [E9] (p 7-8). In 2018 a successful campaign raised money to place a copy of *The Lost Words* in every hospice in Britain (220 hospices). A palliative care doctor and author, who organised the campaign, notes: 'Together, these hospices treat over 100,000 patients a year, meaning *The Lost Words* now has the potential to bring meaning and beauty to thousands of seriously ill patients' [E10].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[E1] Emails from publisher 21.10.2020 and 22.01.2020

[E2] Creative performances: testimonial from Spell Songs project manager 15.10.2020; BBC proms 25.08.2019 [link](#); Wild rumpus announcement of *Seek Find Speak* premiere at 2018 Timber festival [link](#).

[E3] Compton Verney Art Gallery and Park, *The Lost Words*, visitor figures, exhibition details and visitor comments.

[E4] Email regarding BBC *Newsnight* viewing figures 19.09.2019; social media screenshot with viewing figures.

[E5] Crowdfunding evidence pack: Barkham & Flood, The Guardian, *The Lost Words campaign delivers nature 'spellbook' to Scottish schools* 20.02.2018 [link](#), crowdfunder.co.uk Lost Words website detailing all campaigns [link](#); CBC News *B.C students send letters to Oxford telling dictionary to bring back lost nature words* 24.01.2019; Friends of the Ashe County Public Library, North Carolina, USA, press release regarding young poets award 18.04.2019; Bushby, Penguin blogs, *The Lost Words, one year on*, 5.10.2018 [link](#)

[E6] John Muir Trust testimonial 01.11.2019; National Trust trails information Dunham Massey, Lyme Park, Bodnant Garden

[E7] Wider literacy initiative: Trail report from National Literacy Trust 2019, The Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall website, *The Duchess of Cornwall carries out literacy engagements in Swindon*, 24.01.2019 [link](#); Gov.Uk Teaching blog and DFE video, *Discovering poetry through nature: the Teacher Effect* 02.05.2019 [link](#); The Scottish Book Trust, *Outdoor reading journeys with the Lost Words*; Twitter evidence of First Minister's Reading Challenge, 20.06.2018

[E8] Twitter figures and feed highlights

[E9] NHS news: *The Stanmore Building opens: architecture, technology and art* 10.12.2018

[E10] Testimonial letter from palliative care doctor 09.01.2020; evidence of therapeutic uses: Hawkins, ehospice, *The uplifting power of nature at the end of life*, 23.11.2018 [link](#); Blaxland, Reading Friends, *Reading the Lost Words back to life*, 02.10.2018; crowdfunder campaign for care homes and reading groups; The lost words in Dorset website [link](#); Booth, Doncaster Free Press, *The Lost Words never to be forgotten*, 30.03.2019