

## A Walking Approach to Reading

In the late twentieth century, the potential of walking to animate the spatial and sensory dynamics of our perception and experience began to be appreciated as a research method. The activity of walking is seen not only as movement across space, but also as a relational mode of expression grounded in the materiality of bodies, the environment and our sensory experiences, especially non-visual ones (Springgay and Truman, 2018). Walking together is about a shared rhythm of movement; it encourages conversation, companionability and the exchange of understandings (Malone 2018). I would like to propose that, viewed in such terms, walking in a group may accompany collective reading for pleasure and sharing insights about texts.



Below I briefly discuss walking and reading for pleasure using the example of “Ecopoetic Entanglements: Children’s Poetry Mobilizing John Clare’s Artistic Legacy”. This is my research project concerning the corpus of ecopoetry written since 2012 by pupils of John Clare Primary school in Helpston, the birthplace of Clare, a Romantic proto-ecocritical poet. Every year, all children write poems inspired by Clare’s poetry. The project relies on child-adult collaborations to explore Clare’s poems and the pupils’ poetry to show that his poetry may be relevant to the lives of contemporary children. This relevance is articulated through Clare’s works being a subject of collective knowing, doing and making. Unfortunately, the pandemic has so far prevented our child-adult collaboration. Nevertheless, the proposed practice may prove useful in reshaping and reimagining reading.

In the project, I planned to form an intergenerational mobile focus group consisting of children and adults engaging in joint reading of Clare’s poems and sharing their responses to them when walking together near Helpston. The group would experience Clare’s poems individually and through companionship, at their own pace and in connection with the world here and now, perhaps sitting by a stream or under a tree, spotting a bird or collecting flowers on a meadow. Importantly, this experience was intended to go beyond the traditionally privileged focus on language, towards multi-sensual thinking with one another and with nature. Routes would not be pre-determined but decided among all the participants, with the only proviso that they have been accepted by the children’s parents/carers and the school. I believe that the walking-reading approach would make it possible to document in unprecedented ways



the affective and material relevance of John Clare's works as a force generating relational experiences that transcend age divides and professional hierarchies.

**The walking-reading practice can take place anywhere and with all literary genres,** depending on the participants' interests or on the texts' contents. It may be an alternative to individual and autonomous reading and enhance the pleasure of engaging with a text with the joy of reconnecting with other readers—regardless of age—and with the world around. It may also result in a two-directional flow of learning about a place through reading or through engaging in reading prompted by the experience of a particular surroundings. In both cases, it is an encounter with a text and other readers that moves away from a focus on understanding some coded message towards the emergence the unanticipated, dialogical and mutually empowering meaning-making that brings us closer to one another and the spaces we share.

**Acknowledgement:** Justyna's project was funded by the Polish Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA), the M. Bekker Programme.

### References

Malone, Karen. *Children in the Anthropocene: Rethinking Sustainability and Child Friendliness in Cities*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Springgay, Stephanie and Sarah E. Truman. *Walking Methodologies in a More-than-Human World: WalkingLab*. Routledge, 2019.



Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak is Associate Professor of Literature and Director of the Center for Young People's Literature and Culture at the Institute of English Studies, University of Wrocław, Poland. She is the author of *Yes to Solidarity, No to Oppression: Radical Fantasy Fiction and Its Young Readers* (2016). She is a Kosciuszko, Fulbright and Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellow.