

OUT TO PLAY

RESOURCE PACK

**Outdoor Drama and Storytelling
In Primary Schools**



**Ben Mali Macfadyen
& Eco Drama**

"Wisdom begins in wonder"~ Socrates

"I have in my hand some magical seeds. They are so small you can hardly see them, but if you find somewhere to plant them on the concrete they will grow into whatever tree you wish for. Let's go together and make the forest of our dreams. Who knows what wonders we will discover there."

The journey of childhood comes alive with a touch of magic. It takes very little to transform concrete school landscapes into mystical mountains, enchanted lochs, forgotten forests and deserts of dreams; imaginative worlds where exploration, collaboration and learning are possible. We see children doing this naturally during play time, but what can this teach us about how we learn?

As a young child I often gazed out of school windows longing to explore, and most of my fondest memories are from the playground, school trips or other adventures in nature. In the years since then there seem to be fewer opportunities for outdoor play, when it is clear how many benefits this has for the development of children's co-ordination, confidence, health, wellbeing, creativity and learning.

As access to outdoor play areas shrinks, the indoor world has enlarged in importance. Meanwhile, forests are being felled for farming and logging at an alarming rate, many beautiful animals are on the brink of extinction, plastic fills our oceans and climate change is a very real threat to our future. Now more than ever children need the opportunity to learn from nature in the context of the school environment. How can the next generation protect something that they have no relationship with?

The *Out to Play* project was an exciting and rare opportunity to take children outside and explore the wonders of the natural world through play and storytelling in their own school playground. When researching activities for the project I was surprised by the lack of existing material for nature-based drama in primary schools. It seemed that without a wild place to explore, nature was somehow inaccessible, and drama activities were all too often disconnected from places.

On beginning my journey in Glasgow primary schools however, I began to realise the endless possibilities for bringing nature into this work. You don't need a forest to do it, just an active imagination, a curiosity for different teaching methods and a willing troupe of explorers to come with you!

This unique resource pack is an attempt to bring the outdoors to the centre of learning in schools.

I hope it can support you to bring nature into your teaching and inspire a future where the natural world is treated with respect and wonder once more.

Happy Adventuring!

Ben Mali Macfadyen
Drama Artist



Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| How to Use This Pack | 1 |
| Reflections | 3 |
| Session Plans and Stories | |
| Session 1 Story | 4 |
| Session Plan 1- To the End of the World and Back Again (<i>Exploration and Wonder</i>) | 7 |
| Session 2 Story | 12 |
| Session Plan 2 - Awongalema (<i>Trees</i>) | 14 |
| Session 3 Story | 20 |
| Session Plan 3 - The Magical World Under Our Feet (<i>Seasons & Under the Ground</i>) | 22 |
| Session 4 Story | 29 |
| Session Plan 4 - Water Worlds (<i>The Hydrological Cycle</i>) | 31 |
| Session 5 Story | 38 |
| Session Plan 5 - Animal Stories (<i>Animals</i>) | 40 |
| Session 6 Story | 45 |
| Session Plan 6 - Soundscapes (<i>Music in Nature</i>) | 48 |
| Session 7 Story | 53 |
| Session Plan 7- The Story of Stuff (<i>Plastic, Production & Consumption</i>) | 55 |
| Session 8 Story | 60 |
| Session Plan 8- The Web of Life (<i>Interconnectedness</i>) | 61 |
| Further Resources | 67 |



How To Use This Pack

This resource pack is an introduction to your outdoor learning journey through the mediums of **drama, games, storytelling** and **song**.

The Story

Each session begins with a story on the subject to be read aloud to your class (or even better to be read and then told in your own words!). This could be before the 1 Hour Session Plan or during. Each story should take about 10 to 15 minutes to tell so just allow for the extra time out-with the session plan.

Remember, there is a storyteller within us all, no matter how little experience we may have with this medium!

Below you will find some useful tips and guidance on engaging the children with your storytelling. There are some important skills to storytelling, which you can read all about in books (some of which are in the resources section). Here are five tips specific to the contexts experienced in outdoor learning

1. **PARTICIPATION IS KEY:** Invite the class to offer their own movement and voices, for example *“...suddenly she was surrounded by snakes. Can I see your best snake movements and sounds?”* Participation also involves the class and engages their own moral compass. For example *“Then he broke into the giant’s house. Do you think that was a good idea?”* In this way the children are adding to the stories, bringing them alive together and even affecting their outcome.
2. **USE WORDS TO ENGAGE AND INSPIRE:** Stories are best when each child can see the significance to their own lives. If there are issues that need addressing, why not find a story that can tell it for them? Stories are full of wisdom. It is very important, however, that the story isn’t ended with the words *“so what was the moral of that story?”* Allow the children to take their own learning from the tale, which will be what is significant to them at that time. It may well return to them in years to come.
3. **MAKE THE PLACE SIGNIFICANT:** If you are storytelling about trees, it is just like the very tree they are sat under. Making the place you are in significant to the story brings the landscape to life through their imagination, and supports children to make connections between themselves and nature.
4. **BRING WORLDS TO LIFE USING THE SENSES:** Props can be a wonderful way to engage classes with the story. You could say that Jack gave you one of his magical beans. Pass it around and let the children sense its weight, texture, colour, smell. Tell the story as it is passed from child to child and the words will come alive even more. There are endless possibilities for the use of smells and tastes within stories too.
5. **DON’T BREAK THE FLOW:** There can be moments when telling stories (often about half way through before the story gets really exciting, or when it starts getting windy) when the class may start to lose focus. 10-25 minutes is a long time for anyone to sit still. At this point it’s important not to stop the story but to find ways to bring the focus back as a storyteller: *“Then the giant said ‘I will eat you whole Jack, along with any P3 child that dares to poke Rhiannon with a stick!’*

Each chapter will start with a story, then a brief introduction to the session plan. It will also contain the following sections:

Storytelling Tips



Just like the story tips on page 1, this section will detail some useful ways to engage the class with the specific story chosen for that chapter.

Journey from the Classroom



The journey from the classroom was a central part of the *Out to Play* sessions. Transitioning from an indoor space of learning to the playground is a fantastic opportunity for creativity. By taking children on a journey, phrasing it as “**who would like to come on an adventure with me?!**” and then journeying as explorers, animals or elements, a tone can be set for playful focus and creative learning. These ‘Journey from the Classroom’ sections are filled with ideas for you to use.

Session Plans

The remainder of each session plan is a detailed description of exercises for Early, First or Second Level. These work as standalone 1 hour sessions, or can form an 8 week programme of sessions that cover a wide spectrum of topics relating to the natural world. These can lead on to all manner of possible lessons within the classroom on the stories, subjects and environments explored outdoors. The subjects are also endlessly adaptable to any other learning context. A treasure hunt could become a maths journey, or performances about animals could become pieces about bullying or even Ancient Egypt!

The lesson plans are tailored for each age group and exercises are marked with the following symbols for clarity:



Appropriate for **Early & First** levels. (P1-4, early or later for some)



Appropriate for **Second** level. (P5-7, early or later for some)



Appropriate for all **Early, First & Second Levels** (P1-7)

Curriculum for Excellence Links

The sessions contained in this resource book are by nature very **cross curricular** and lend well to **interdisciplinary learning**. The pack links with **Early, First and Second** levels of the Curriculum and in particular with the following subjects: **Expressive Arts, Sciences, Health and Wellbeing, Social Studies, Technology, Numeracy and Mathematics**.

There is also a wealth of resources for nature-based learning in the resources section at the end of this pack.

Reflections

On Nature

Concrete playgrounds may seem like the last place to teach about the natural world, but traces of nature can be found anywhere. Go outdoors and see what is there; birds, weeds, hiding insects, distant trees, wind, rain, sunshine. It takes very little to draw children's attention to the natural world. Even if your school does not have access to woods, allotments, fields or water, you'll find that games, story & imagination do that work for you.

If your classes are lucky enough to have an outdoor natural space, set aside time to explore that environment with them. **What trees can they identify? What insects can they see? Can they copy their movements? What stories does this environment have to tell?**

On Weather

You may find yourself setting up treasure hunts in the sun only to find the class battling through blizzards 20 minutes later! The most important thing to remember about the weather when 'Out to Play' is to model an appreciation for 'different' weather rather than 'good' or 'bad'. Rain is just water after all and Scotland wouldn't be green without it!

Wind is also something to be mindful of. Journey to a sheltered area in these moments if possible and practice a focusing game to bring the class back again. It is important that your class come prepared for all weathers. **Gloves, scarves, hats and warm shoes are essential in winter, as well as a good raincoat with a hood and outdoor shoes.**

On Creativity and Wonder

The combination of story, play, games and songs are the perfect ingredients for developing each child's creativity as well as their sense of wonder for the natural world. If there is a game where the class are embodying different animals, be curious of their creative process: "**What are you? A shark? Oh no please don't eat me!**" Even better is to participate yourself. Why not try teacher in role? Children love seeing an adult playacting.

There are always times when discipline is necessary, however with outdoor play it is essential that a different approach is used, one that encourages silliness and lively activity in its appropriate place and time. Creating a safe space to 'fool about' will open a doorway into the realm of creative play.

Offer out invisible insects to populate a meadow, tell a story about how the natural world came to be the way it is, ask the class what they think birds are saying or create homes for magical creatures. They may not exist, but they allow children to develop imagination as well as care, compassion, curiosity and connection.

On Discipline

In large outdoor spaces it's good to have a playful animal call to gather the class quickly. Try calling "**Cakaw Cakaw**" which the class can mimic. Practice this by asking them to walk about, and then to repeat and come straight to you when you make the call.





The Awongalema Tree (Zimbabwe)

Once upon a time... deep in the rainforests of Zimbabwe there was a tree, and her name was *Awongalema*.

Now this was no ordinary tree, oh no, *Awongalema* was full of magic. The bark on her trunk glittered in every colour of the rainbow. Her branches reached up so high that from the ground they seemed to disappear into the stars. Her leaves danced in the wind making the most beautiful song you had ever heard.

And her fruit? Well! Her fruit was big and round and orange and delicious, and it tasted of all the finest flavours in the world put together. All the animals of the rainforest came from far and wide to enjoy the magic of *Awongalema*.

Ant climbed up her branches and cut leaves for his queen. Monkey came to swing from her canopy and feast on her delicious fruit. Parrot gathered her branches to make his nest. Leopard came to sharpen her claws on *Awongalema's* trunk. All the animals loved *Awongalema* and as they took from her to make their lives they called out "thank you *Awongalema* for all that you give to us!"

Now as time went by the animals kept taking from *Awongalema*, and slowly slowly her bark lost its rainbow colour and turned grey. Her leaves stopped singing. Her branches began to droop down to the Earth. And her fruit went from being big and delicious to being shrivelled and brown and bitter.

"What has happened to our tree?!" The animals cried. "Now we cannot eat, we cannot nest, we cannot swing or sharpen our claws."

The animals turned to the wisest of the animals in the tree, great Hornbill bird. "What shall we do hornbill? We need this tree to live."

"You must remember its name," Hornbill squarked. If you can shout its name into the branches then it will come back to life."

"Of course we can remember its name" called the animals, "It's Awooo... Anooogaaa ... Amoooweelaaa..." But they couldn't remember its name.

So the animals decided they must send their fastest animal to Kilimanjaro, the sacred mountain, which was far away. The mountain had been there longer than anyone and was very wise. The spirits there would know the name of the tree. The animals chose Cheetah first and so off she bounded, *haraka haraka haraka* - quickly quickly quickly to the top of the sacred mountain. When she got there she called out to the mountain "What's the name of the tree?"

The mountain echoed back "*Awongalema!*"

"*Awongalema!*" shouted cheetah, and off she ran, *haraka haraka haraka*, down the mountain and back across the land. But she was running so quickly that she didn't see a great big termites nest and so she ran straight in to it.





The termites started biting her so much that by the time she had managed to shake off all the termites she had forgotten the name of the tree. She made her way sadly back with her tail between her legs until she returned to *Awongalema* and the animals.

“What’s the name of the tree?” the animals called. “I forgot!” said Cheetah sadly.

And so the animals chose Lion to go to the sacred mountain. Off Lion went, *haraka haraka haraka* to the top of the sacred mountain. There he called out “what’s the name of the tree?”

The mountain echoed back “*Awongalema!*”

“*Awongalema!*” Lion called joyfully, and off he ran, *haraka haraka haraka* back to the bottom of the mountain. But he was running so fast that he wasn’t halfway home when he fell down down down into a ravine. He managed to scramble up the side but by the time he got to the top he had forgotten the name of the tree! And so he slumped his way back feeling very sorry for himself.

“What’s the name of the tree?” the animals called when they saw Lion return.

“I forgot!” Lion exclaimed, and all the animals cried out in frustration.

Just then they all looked up to see the final leaf hanging from *Awongalema*’s branches fall to the Earth. They didn’t have much time. “It’s hopeless,” cried Monkey. “We will never learn the name of the tree.”

Then from behind them the animals heard a small voice. “I will go.” It was Tortoise. All the animals laughed. “Don’t be ridiculous!” they cried. “It will take you years to get to the top of the mountain.”

But Tortoise was wise, and she was determined, and so off she went anyway, off on the long long journey to the top of the sacred mountain. But she couldn’t go *haraka haraka haraka*, she had to go *pole pole* - slowly slowly. When Tortoise finally made it to the top of the mountain she called out in the loudest voice she could “what’s the name of the tree?” and the tree echoed back “*Awongalema!*”

“*Awongalema!* Of course!” said Tortoise joyfully, and off she plodded, *pole pole pole* back down the mountain. She saw the termite mound, but she didn’t crash into it. She saw the ravine, but she didn’t fall down it. She kept on walking, *pole pole*, all the way back to *Awongalema* and the animals. The animals were all sat looking sad and hungry when they heard from far below a tiny voice call out. “I’m back... and I know the name of the tree! It’s *Awongalema!*”

“*Awongalema!*” The animals sang. “*Awongalema Awongalema Awongalema!* Thank you Tortoise.”

As the animals called the tree’s name, she began to change. Her bark went from being grey to shining in every colour. Her leaves grew again and began to sing the most beautiful song with the leaves. Her branches went from drooping down to the ground to reaching up to the sky again. And delicious fruit began to grow once more.

The animals had brought the tree back to life by remembering its name. From then on, no matter how much they took from *Awongalema*, they never forgot to say thank you for all the life that she gave them.





Awongalema

Session 2



Trees and stories have gone together as long as humans have sat in their shade and told each other tales. This *Out to Play* session is all about the magic of trees and uses a variety of storytelling, drama and art exercises to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of trees, whilst developing skills in collaboration and creativity. This session can lead to further writing, science and art projects within the classroom.

Did You Know?

The tallest trees in the world are the Californian Redwoods. The tallest recorded is 'Hyperion', at a whopping 115.7 metres tall... that's taller than the Forth Road Bridge!



Storytelling Tips

This is a great story for participation. It can easily be acted out as you read/tell it. Choose a place to use as Awongalema (this could even be on the chalk tree from the lesson plan) and also place the mountain, and then take the class on a journey using the story. This can be added to with masks, costumes and songs.

P6-7 A gruesome and very popular tree story for older classes is the Greek tale of Erysichthon. He was a cruel King of Thessaly who ordered that a sacred tree be cut down. As punishment, he was cursed by Demeter to always be hungry and never satisfied, which results in the loss of his rule, his wealth and his family, until finally, when he is alone and homeless, he eats himself until there is nothing left!

Focusing Technique

Bob the Fish!



This is a wonderful little game for P1-3 which gets even the wildest children entranced and focused. Mimicking the movement of a fish with one hand, say "**this is Bob. He's a fish... and he lives under the water**". Lift your other arm to create a horizontal water surface above Bob, keeping him 'swimming' all the time. "**Shall we say hello to Bob? We say hello by clapping our hands together, but he can only hear us when he jumps out of the water. Shall we say hello together?**" Now, make Bob jump above the surface so the class claps in unison. Doing this a few times is amazingly effective at engaging the class.



Journey from the Classroom

Be a leaf in the wind! Fly like a leaf in the wind from the classroom to the meeting place, jumping and waving and moving.

Session Plan 2 [1 Hour]

Early & First

Introduction - Beanbag Categories [10 minutes]
Journey of a Tree [10 minutes]
The Great Chalk Tree [15 minutes]
Awongalema Story and Role Play [25 minutes]

Second

Introduction - Beanbag categories [10 minutes]
The Squirrel Game [10 minutes]
Meet a Tree [15 minutes]
Performances [25 minutes]



Introduction - Beanbag Categories (Level: Early/First/Second)

OVERVIEW: This is an opportunity to get a sense of existing knowledge the class has about trees, before starting the other exercises. It is also an opportunity to get to know the trees already living around the school playground.

Beanbag Categories is a good introductory game for focus. It can easily be adapted for any subject or used as a name game. (*Take it up a level by adding another bean bag at the same time!*)

Stand in a large circle and pass the beanbag asking the catcher to think of something within a category. Tailor these to the age group. Some examples could include colours, animals and countries. Then see if they can come up with any **different types of tree**. This is most suitable for P4-7 and you will be surprised at how many they can name!

Next, have a discussion about trees with the following questions as guidelines:

P1-3 Why do you like trees? What else in nature likes trees and why? How do trees change at different times in the year?

P4-7 Why are trees important? What do humans use trees for?

Now ask the class to get into pairs and hand out a sheet of paper with the outline of different leaf shapes and their names that are around the school playground. You might need to spend some time identifying these before you start. Ask the class to find as many of the trees and their names as they can in 5 minutes. At the end of the session you could visit some of trees and see if they remember what they are called.





Journey of a Tree (Level: Early/First)

OVERVIEW: A simple drama and movement nature role-play exercise to explore the life cycle of a tree. You can follow the story below, or you could make up your own. This is a great framework for taking young primary classes on learning journeys about almost anything.

Read the following words to take the class on a tree journey:

[Crouching down in a ball]

- It was a dark, cold winter, and all the tiny seeds were deep underground, so small and still and quiet. Then the Winter ended, and what came next? Spring! The sun began to shine, and the soil warmed up, and the rain came from above. The tiny seeds slowly started to grow, up and up until they burst through the soil. Can I see you bursting out of the soil?

[Unfolding and growing slowly]

- The plants kept growing. bigger and bigger. They grew leaves which were big and green. Can I see you wiggle your leaves?

[Wiggling fingers and still growing]

- The years went by and the plants still grew and grew into great big magical trees. Can I see you reaching up as high as you can for the sunshine?

[Stretching up high]

- One day it was the end of Summer, and what comes after summer? Autumn! The trees had all made many many seeds. The wind blew stronger and stronger until the seeds flew off into the sky. Shall we all be seeds? Follow me!

[Becoming seeds and flying around]

- The seeds were carried by the wind this way... and that way... and up... and down...

[Journeying across the playground]

- Finally the wind stopped and the seeds fell to the ground, ready for the Winter. Ready for another year. Ready for another adventure.

[End lying on the ground]

At the end you could ask the class which was their favourite part of the journey. What else in nature goes on journeys?



The Squirrel Game (Level: Second)

OVERVIEW: A simple fun game which is great for mixing up the class and getting active.

- Group the class into 3's spread out in the playing area.
- Ask two to link hands facing each other to make an arch. They are trees. The third child crouches inside the arch. They are squirrels, and can act out eating nuts!
- When you call '**hunter**', the squirrels must leave their tree and find another one as quickly as possible but the trees stay where they were.
- When you call '**logger**', the trees must move and find a new partner, and a new squirrel to make an arch over. Try both of these a few times.
- When you call '**forest fire**', squirrels and trees all jump up and find a new three.



The Great Chalk Tree (Level: Early/First)

OVERVIEW: This is a simple creative exercise and good practice in creating alongside each other.

YOU WILL NEED: Chalks and a concrete area big enough for the whole class to draw on.

Using chalks mark the outline of a big tree - trunk and branches.

Then hand out coloured chalks and ask the class to draw all the life they can think of that would live in the tree; **insects, birds, mammals.**

Are there nests? Who lives there?

Make sure they don't forget lots of leaves!

They will be tempted to run off and draw elsewhere so encourage them to stay within the area of the tree.



With older classes the finished drawing is a good starting point to talk about the different areas of trees and what creatures might live there:

- **underground**
- **forest floor**
- **understory**
- **canopy**
- **emergent layer**

You could even ask them to act out these creatures in their appropriate layer.





Meet a Tree (Level: Second)

OVERVIEW: This is an amazing exercise to connect with nature. It also builds sensory perception, sensitivity and trust. You might want to do a trust exercise beforehand to ensure the class take good care of one another. Most children spend very little time in the company of trees, so this is a great introduction to building an interaction with them. Sadly, for it to work you do need actual trees... most primary schools don't seem to have all that many!



YOU WILL NEED: Blindfolds for half the class.

A collection of large trees, known as a 'copse', enough for one per pair: these need to be relatively close together and accessible from different sides (i.e. not in a hedge).

Ask the class to get into pairs with someone roughly the same height as them. Ask them to choose who is A and who is B. A's go first, asking B's to carefully blindfold them and then lead them to stand in a long line with A's in front of B's. Give all the following instructions before you begin so the exercise can be carried out in focused silence.

B's are to carefully spin A's around 3 times so they lose their sense of direction, before leading A's to a tree slowly and carefully, avoiding possible hazards such as low branches and airborne roots.

When they get there, A's will examine the tree using all their senses apart from sight. Encourage them to find unique qualities of their tree such as scratches and holes, textures and smells, strange shaped branches and different leaves. B's can help by guiding their hands to particularly memorable places, but encourage them to allow A's to meet their tree in their own way. No peeking!

When they feel they have a really good sense of their tree, ask B's to lead them back to the starting line and spin them around 3 times again. When the entire group have returned A's can remove their blindfolds and go to search for their tree.



This is always amazing to watch. Almost every time the children will walk straight to their tree without hesitation.

Now repeat with B's blindfolded.

Each child now has a tree to take care of, so when the class return to this place you can tell them to go and say hello to their special tree and see what has changed with the seasons. You could even give them some water to give it, or some decorations to hang in its branches.



Awongalema Story and Role Play (Level: Early/First)

OVERVIEW: The story of Awongalema is perfect for acting out with younger groups. See 'Storytelling Tips' at the beginning of this session plan for more details.



Performances (Level: Second)

OVERVIEW: Creating performances is a wonderful way of embedding learning from outdoor sessions. It also creates space for creativity, as well as building skills in collaboration, listening and storytelling.

- ✿ Ask the class to get into groups of 3 - 5. Ask them to make up a short story about a tree in their groups. Maybe it's about a lonely tree that makes a friend? Maybe it's about some animals that need it for protection? Maybe it's about some people who try to cut it down and the tree gets its revenge?
- ✿ Give them 5 minutes to come up with a story and then ask them to create 3 frozen images that tell the story, like photographs. One for the beginning, one for the middle, and one for the end. The three images need to each be different and clear with lots of good facial expressions and gestures.
- ✿ When they have done that you can call out "first image" and they quickly get into the first, "second image"... and so on. Then they can weave the three pictures together and add movement, sound and narration.

Gather the class around each group at a time to see their fantastic tree story creations!

