

LET'S GO...

OUT TO PLAY!

FIRST EDITION



AN OUTDOOR DRAMA AND STORYTELLING RESOURCE PACK
FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

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"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



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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 Chestnut Tree at the Edge of the World (Russia)

There was once a young boy who lived with his grandmother in the woods. Now this grandmother was wise, she was loving and she was courageous.

Every day she would leave the cottage, and journey to the woods to hunt with her bow and arrow, fill her basket with mushrooms and gather firewood on her back. When she returned she would make dinner and they would eat together, before sitting beside the fire telling each other stories late into the night.

One day the grandmother grew very ill. Her eyes went grey. Her skin grew cold. Her voice went rough. She could no longer take care of her grandson and she lay down in her bed and went very still. The boy was so worried, and so he whispered to her “grandmother, what can I do to make you better?”

“There is nothing you can do, dear boy. Leave me in peace.”

On the second day he returned. “Grandmother, what can I do to make you better?”

Again his grandmother replied “There is nothing you can do. Leave me in peace.”

On the third day the boy returned and asked his grandmother the same question. This time, she replied, “There is only one thing that could cure me. There is a tree. The chestnuts that hang from its branches are magic and can heal any illness.”

“I will go there and get you one, grandmother”, the boy replied bravely.

“It’s impossible, my boy”, she replied. “The tree stands beyond the deep forests, beyond grasslands, even past deserts. It stands at the very edge of the world. The tree is guarded by seven evil witches who dance around its roots, and on its highest branch sits an eagle that can see everything in the world. You will never be able to get a chestnut from the tree, and so there is nothing you can do.”

The boy stood up from beside his grandmother. He took his cloak and enough food for a long journey. Without another word, he left his grandmother in the cottage, and began his journey to the end of the world.

First, he came to a deep forest, where the trees bent low and it grew dark. Suddenly, from behind, he heard growling, and turned to see two huge wolves with bared teeth standing over him.

“Where are you going little boy?” they snarled.

“I’ve got to get to the tree at the end of the world to save my grandmother” he replied, terrified.

“You’re going no further than deep in our bellies!” They howled. Suddenly the boy felt courage surging through him. He stood up tall and shouted “No. No. Let me pass!” And the wolves ran away in fear.





The boy continued his journey and leaving the forest he came to open grasslands.

The sun shone and he grew hungry, but he had just stopped to eat when he heard a hissing sound getting louder and he saw the grass around him was shaking although there was no wind. Suddenly he saw around him thousands of snakes that started snapping at his ankles and crawling up his legs.

“Where are you going, boy?” the snakes hissed cruelly.

“I’ve got to get to the tree at the end of the world to save my grandmother” he replied, even more terrified than with the wolves.

“You’re going no further into our bellies!” they whispered cruelly.

Suddenly the boy felt courage inside him again. He stood up tall and shouted “No. No. Let me pass!” And the snakes slithered off into the grass. They knew he had an important mission.

The boy continued walking. The sun rose and set over and over until he came to a desert. There, crossing his path like a great mouth was a canyon, a great hole in the ground. There was no way to cross. Then he heard from the depths a whisper on the wind, “Where are you going boy?”

“I’ve got to get to the tree at the end of the world to save my grandmother” he called down into the darkness.

“You’re going no further than my belly!” replied the hole in the ground.

Again, the boy felt courage rise in his blood and he shouted down into the hole

“No. No. Let me pass!” No sooner had he said this than the two sides of the canyon started moving together and with an almighty “crash” the darkness was gone. The boy hopped over the gap and continued his journey.

Finally he came to the edge of the world, and there on the top of a hill stood the chestnut tree. The boy saw the eagle perched on the highest branch, and around the roots he saw the seven witches dancing. He crouched down behind a rock and started to cry.

“I’ve come all this way and now I will never make it to the tree to save grandmother.”

He stayed there until night fell, and then a small rustling began not far away. He looked down and there was a tiny mouse.

The mouse looked up at him and whispered “Pick me up”, and so the boy did.

Then the mouse said “Breathe into my mouth” so the boy did, and then where there had been a boy and a mouse there was only a mouse.

The mouse scurried up the hill, between the legs of the witches, up the trunk and branches, and picked a single chestnut from the tree, which it carried in its mouth all the way back to the rock.





Then it went up again to gather another chestnut, and another, and another... until there were seven chestnuts behind the rock. The mouse, who was now exhausted, took a deep breath out, and where there had just been a mouse there was a mouse and a boy.

The boy thanked the mouse, and quickly started to run away from the chestnut tree, from the witches and the eagle and the end of the world.

No sooner had he started to run, when the eagle saw there were chestnuts missing and began to wail from the canopy. The witches below screamed and began racing down the hill after him, their hair straggling behind them in the wind.

He ran and ran until he came to the canyon which he leapt over and as he did he threw one, two chestnuts down into the darkness. He kept running and saw two of the witches topple down to the depths of the canyon.

He kept running, but the remaining witches were catching up with him now. He reached the grasslands and the snakes returned, but he threw one, two chestnuts down on the ground for them and he kept running, and looked back to see three of the witches being tangled in the snakes who ate them all up.

He was growing tired, but he kept on running. The witches were so close they were scratching at his back.

Finally he came to the forest. There the wolves leaped out in front of the boy but he threw one, two chestnuts into their mouths and they pounced on the final two witches instead.

The boy had done it. He had got the chestnut. He had outrun the witches, and he was nearly home. He walked through the forest until finally he came to the house where he grew up. He walked through the door and found his grandmother still lying where he left her. He ran to her side.

“Grandmother!” he whispered. But she didn’t wake up.

“I’ve returned from the edge of the world. I’ve got you a chestnut.” But still she didn’t respond.

He took the chestnut and cut off a small piece, placing it inside her mouth. Suddenly the grandmother took a deep breath and opened her eyes. She saw her grandson then, and smiled.

“My, my”, she whispered. “When you left you were a boy... and now you are a man.”

The grandmother recovered, growing stronger by the day. Every morning the grandson would leave her in the cottage to hunt with his bow and arrow, fill his basket with mushrooms and gather firewood on his back.

When he returned he would make dinner and they would eat together and on that day and every day since they sat beside the fire telling each other stories late into the night.



To the Edge of the World and Back Again

Session 1



This first outdoor drama session is about exploring a familiar environment in a new way and instilling a sense of wonder for the natural world. By encouraging a deep curiosity for their playground environment, you will be able to bring the place alive with the magic of the natural world and encourage deeper play during school break times.

This session is a good introduction to outdoor learning as it introduces imaginary habitats in the playground which can be returned to in subsequent outdoor sessions.



Storytelling Tips

This story is a hero's quest tale to the end of the world and back again. It is therefore well suited to being told on the move. You could journey across the playground meeting each of the challenges along the way.



Journey from the Classroom

Imagine you are explorers! Using imaginary telescopes and magnifying glasses explore the path to the outdoor space - can you see any animals?

What is the current season? Can you identify species of trees, birds and insects?

Take an imaginary photo and describe it to the rest of the group when you arrive.



Session Plan 1 [1 Hour]

Early & First

Name Game [10 minutes]

Treasure Map Adventures [50 minutes]

Second

Name Game [10 minutes]

Treasure Map Adventures [50 minutes]



Name Game (Level: Early/First/Second)

OVERVIEW: It is important to hear the voice of every child in outdoor learning sessions. Having the whole group repeat the movement of individuals affirms their offering, gives a sense of their existing awareness of the subject and is a lot of fun!

Stand in a circle and go around with each child offering something.

P1-2: Each child says their own name accompanied by a movement. The rest of the class mimic.

P3-4: “My name is ___ and I like ___ (something they like doing in nature)”. Everyone copies their name and movement.

P5-7: Packing our bags for adventure! Pass around an invisible backpack. Each child mimes taking out a useful object for an adventure from the bag, saying “My name is ___ and I’m going to take ___”, then miming using the object e.g. a torch, a coat, a compass. The rest of the class have to try to guess what it is. The mimer then puts the object back in the bag and passes it around the circle.

Notes: *It’s a good idea for you to do the movements too, thereby encouraging their offering. You can add to this by going around again and seeing if everyone can remember the names and movements of each person in turn by copying them in unison. With younger ones it’s sometimes a good idea to say “we will copy the movement and I will count to 3. When I get to 3 we all need to be back into the circle and listening really well to the next person.”*



Treasure Map Adventures (Level: Early/First/Second)

OVERVIEW: Treasure maps are magical objects for children. They are a fantastic way to get classes to explore familiar environments in new ways, teach any subject through physical tasks and problem solving, and to support collaboration and good communication skills whilst keeping active outdoors. This exercise can be extended into a proper treasure hunt with clues, challenges and treasure at the end. It is also a great session to begin a programme of outdoor learning.

You will need: A large sheet of thick paper, scrunched up and tea stained. You could even burn the edges for extra effect!

Go on a journey with the class to different areas on the treasure map, bringing an imaginary natural world to life. They will love having the opportunity to hold the map and compass as they travel. On the following pages are some ideas of **habitats** you could write on the map and journey to, as well as some possible **exercises** to do in each area...

The areas can be visited in any order but start with **'The Meeting Place'** and end in **'The Meadow of Memory'**. You can also make the journey itself exciting by asking them to walk as if they were **moving through different terrains** e.g. mud, long grass, deep water (swimming or rowing), flying through the air, in strong winds, tied together like they are climbing a mountain.



The Meeting Place



This is the place to make a circle and gather at the beginning of sessions, to remember what was done in the previous session and give an overview of the outdoor adventures ahead. Going outdoors can often be very exciting and overwhelming for classes so it helps to always start in the same place so the children know where they begin and what the routine is.

Gather sticks and stones to build a 'campfire' then form a circle. This creates an equal space for everyone to be witnessed by the group whilst setting the stage for many different games and activities. Becoming aware of the circle brings children's awareness beyond their own experience to encompass the whole class in a way that often leads to better teamwork and greater care of one another.

Once the circle is formed all strike an invisible match three times saying together, **'light the fire'** and warm your cold hands in the centre. This unifies the class and brings focus and you can explain what is going to happen in the session to come.

The Forgotten Forest



This is an environment to explore diversity and the seasons. It's also a good space for free play/devising theatre and telling stories. You don't need any trees for it to feel like a forest! This is also a good place to play collaborative 'foraging' games. For example; the class have to run around the area finding paper on which pictures, symbols, letters or words are drawn. By rearranging all of these they will be able to find a word, sentence or picture which teaches them something they are already learning about.



Growing a Forest (Level: Early/First)

Give each child an imaginary seed. Tell them they are magic seeds because they can be whatever tree you want them to be and grow so quickly you only need to count to 10.

Ask them to find a place nearby and 'grow' the forest starting with everyone being tiny seeds and slowly transforming into huge trees with their bodies as you count from 1-10. Then explore the forest as whatever animals they want to be. With P3/4's it might be more suitable to watch the tree grow rather than embodying it.



Making a Compass (Level: Second)

Get pupils into groups of 4-6, ask the class to find 'North'.

YOU WILL NEED: A blunted needle (you can also use paper clips, hair clips or safety pins), a shallow dish filled with water, a cut circle of cork (you can also use a bottle top or even a leaf) and a magnet (or you can actually just use leather so most shoes will be fine!)

Rub the needle on the magnet for 1 minute (or on the shoe for 3 minutes), stick it through the cork objects and put both in the water away from wind. The needle will then turn to align with the magnetic field of the earth! If they work out where the sun is (rises in the East, midday in the South, sets in the West) they will be able to tell which way is North.

The Desert of Dreams



The desert is a place where anything can happen, the land of the imagination. It is a great space for developing improvisation skills and also the perfect place for drawing, sculpting, writing and singing.



Magic Sand Play (Level: Early/First)

The desert is made of magic sand which you can sculpt into anything you like e.g. a castle, an elephant, a hat... anything! Ask them to play creating whatever they want to make and encourage them to show each other their creations. Be curious about their sculptures and explore with them as much as possible.



Body Sculptures (Level: Second)

Begin with the group walking around neutrally i.e. not running or talking. Then call out a number which they have to get into groups of, as quickly as possible. Give them 15 seconds to create one sculpture per group using only their bodies.

Some examples could include an elephant, a toilet, a clock, a Scottish breakfast, a face, a washing machine. When their time is up you can go round the groups and press the 'animate' button and they have to bring the sculpture alive.

When they have made the sculpture they must walk neutrally again and get into a new group. This game is great for getting classes out of sticking with their usual groups of friends and trying out collaborating with new people.



The Enchanted Loch



The Loch is a special place as there are three environments to explore. They can swim underwater as creatures or divers, discovering secrets from the depths in the form of clues or numbers. They can stand on the shore and 'fish' for answers. Or they can float on a boat as pirates and explore the rest of the landscape in this way.



'Tongo' (Level: Early/First)

This is a lovely simple call and response song from Polynesia. You could get them to mime paddling in canoes as they sing as this is how the song would traditionally have been sung. **You can find the tune easily online.**

*Tongo, tongo,
Chimné bahé, bahé,oh,
Chimné bahé, bahé,oh,
Oo away, Oo away,
Balay kalow away*



Captain's Orders (Level: Second)

This is a fun energetic game. You need an open space with no danger of tripping over low walls or obstacles. The space will also need two opposite walls and markings on the floor to be a boat big enough for all of the class to fit inside.

Your role is to be the captain giving commands. You can play with this role as much as you feel comfortable. Below are commands which you shout to the class which they have to respond to.



It's best to start by teaching them a few and slowly add more by saying "When I say (command), you (action)."

- ☠ **Port:** Run to a wall on one side of the space.
- ☠ **Starboard:** Run to the other side.
- ☠ **Captain's coming:** All salute and call 'aye aye capt'n'.
- ☠ **Scrub the decks:** Get down on hands and knees miming scrubbing the floor.
- ☠ **Climb the rigging:** Mime climbing up rope ladder.
- ☠ **To the crow's nest:** Look through a telescope and shout "land ahoy".
- ☠ **(Say a number) in a boat:** Sit in groups of a chosen number one behind the other miming rowing.
- ☠ **SHARK ATTACK!** You become a shark and chase them back onto the boat.

Feel free to make up your own additional commands!

“Dear Ben, thank you for teaching us. This program has made me aware of nature and more confident and happy.”

P6 Pupil, St Vincent’s Primary



“I loved it because nature is what is inside me. Thank you for everything. It has been a delight.” P4 Pupil, Balornock Primary



“Ben has inspired me with lots of activities and stories – he has planted a seed and I look forward to implementing projects next season... I have loved being a part of Out to Play and the children have absolutely loved it also!”

Jilly Moffat, Teacher, Aultmore Park Primary



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