LET'S GO... OUT TO PLAY!

An outdoor drama and storytelling resource for ASN educators

Featuring tried and tested ideas from Eco Drama's Out to Play project in Scottish schools

By Alice Donnelly & Eco Drama

eco drama

About Eco Drama

Eco Drama makes inventive theatre and creative learning experiences that nurture a sense of curiosity, wonder and care for our natural world and remind us we are part of an amazing living planet. Our vision is that the arts, in particular drama, storytelling and theatre, become increasingly recognised as powerful tools through which we can explore and re-imagine our relationship to the natural world. We make work for children, young people, their families and wider communities and deliver work locally in Glasgow and across Scotland.



The Out to Play Project

Out to Play is an award-winning creative learning project delivered in primary, nursery, and additional support needs (ASN) playgrounds. Using an arts-based approach, it excites learners about nature and deepens their connection to it. Drama Artists deliver 5-week residencies, providing strong CPD that supports teachers to develop creative, playful outdoor teaching methods.

Established in 2015, the project has reached thousands of pupils and educators across Scotland. Since 2018, Out to Play has tailored its residencies for ASN schools, including East Park, Hampden, Eastmuir, Langlands, and St Oswald's Schools. Through drama, interactive storytelling, arts activities and sensory props, the programme engages learners of all abilities with nature and the environment.

Developed directly from our experiences and learning working in ASN schools, this resource contains a selection of our best, tried-and-tested drama games, nature connection activities and stories, alongside tips and suggestions for creative outdoor learning and play. We recognise that ASN is a broad term that describes a diverse range of needs and abilities, meaning not every activity will be suitable for all learners. We hope the pack provides a source of inspiration and a bank of approaches that you can tailor specifically to the young people you work with.

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The Out to Play Structure

This structure sets out how an Out to Play workshop for young people who have additional support needs could be planned.
The following pages offer ideas and tips on how to design each part of the suggested structure.
However, please feel free to experiment with your own ideas, and play about with different structures to suit your learners' interests and needs.



Setting the Scene



Time to Explore



Storytime



Bringing the Story to Life / Playtime



Until Next Time

'Teachers have gained so much! Ideas, confidence, knowledge. Ways to use easily accessible resources, how to structure play where appropriate, and how to have fun.'

Catriona Campbell, East Park School

Setting the Scene



Welcome learners to the outdoor space and get them excited for their adventure. It is important that everyone feels comfortable, so take plenty of time to settle in.

Song: Nature Detectives

Sing or play a song to signify the beginning of your outdoor session. Songs can also be a helpful way to signal to learners that the session is different from playtime, if you are using your school's playground space.

♫ **Nature detectives, nature detectives**
Let's all work together, okay!
Nature detectives, nature detectives
Learning while we play outside! ♫

For the melody, search 'Nature Detectives Song' by One Tree Adventures on YouTube.

Getting Ready

Invite learners to suggest what someone might wear or need to go exploring - first name the object, then use mime to act it out!

If your session has a theme, you could be more specific and ask them to mime what would be needed for the area you are exploring, e.g. scarf and gloves for somewhere cold, wellies for somewhere wet. Try to remember everything you've pretended to put on - it is important to take it all back off again at the end of the session! This technique can be used to signify the start and end of your time outdoors.

Deer Ears

Cup hands behind ears to amplify nature sounds, mimicking how deer listen for predators. Fun fact: deer can swivel their ears nearly 180 degrees to detect sound!

- **Step 1: Cup hands behind ears** to catch and amplify distant, subtle sounds.
- **Step 2: Cup hands in front** to amplify sounds coming from behind.
- **Variation: Close eyes** to deepen focus, or use a **bell/other instrument** to highlight volume changes.
- **Inclusion: Assist learners** unable to cup their own hands by placing yours for them.

Benefits: Calms learners, settles them in the space, deepens nature connection, and builds empathy by experiencing the environment from an animal's perspective.

Time to Explore

Explore your setting's outside space and connect with nature.





Treasure Hunt

This is a classic activity to explore your outdoor space. You can either pre-set items to find, such as fairy doors or a treasure chest, or invite learners to find natural materials - for example, sticks to build a nest or something they find exciting or beautiful.

To develop this further, you could ask learners to find a certain number of items and/or sort what they have found. For example, gather leaves during autumn and sort them according to size, colour or any appropriate metric.

Meet a Tree

An outdoor sensory game where a blindfolded player uses their senses of touch, smell, and hearing to find a specific tree.
Ask learners if they are happy to be blindfolded; if not, they can simply close their eyes. Spin them around slowly, guide them towards a tree, and give them time to explore it by touch. Guide them back to the start and remove their blindfolds, or ask them to open their eyes.
Ask learners if they can identify the tree they just met. If your outdoor space lacks trees or is inaccessible, adapt the activity by using sticks, shells, or other natural objects. You can create a communication board to help learners who are non-verbal describe or identify their object.

What Is, What If

Discover the hidden magic of the playground through your senses.
This activity invites learners to explore their outdoor space and use their imagination to redefine what they see, hear and touch. A simple railing might become a musical instrument, a puddle an ocean, or a patch of grass becomes a soft jungle. Extend this by having learners map out their reimagined space. For learners tracking towards Milestones, capture these experiences in a dedicated sensory map, focusing on accessible, tactile, and auditory exploration of the environment.



Storytime

Stories have been an important part of communication and learning for thousands of years. They are how we make meaning of our lives and they help us understand the world around us. Tales in and about nature have engaged humans throughout history: they are relatable and beneficial for children and adults alike.

Bare Bones Storytelling

When learning a story to tell, boil it down to the bones. Ask yourself: what are the points I need to get across for the story to be understood? Challenge yourself to tell the story in 30 seconds and time it. From there, build up and add the meat to the bones.







Storytelling Tips

Small changes in voice and body language can have a big impact on storytelling:

- Repetition can help ASN learners to engage with storytelling.
- Using music to bookend stories creates a regular structure for learners to understand. For example, try a handheld kalimba, ukulele, triangle or any other instrument you have in your setting.
- The Forgetful Storyteller - purposely 'forget' names, animals, etc in your story and ask learners to fill in the gaps to give them more of an investment in the story.
- We encourage you to find moments for audience participation wherever possible - ask learners to make sound effects or act out sections of your story.
- Find ways for your story to have sensory elements: If the wind is blowing in your story, why not bring a fan? If there are apples, bring some for learners to taste. Go through your story and highlight all the sensory possibilities, then get creative!

The Lucky Seed

***The Lucky Seed* is an engaging story about a small seed's journey to grow with the help of its friends. Filled with opportunities for interactive, sensory learning, it introduces children to planting and nurturing growth. The narrative connects perfectly with the Eco Schools topic 'School Grounds' and compliments school gardening initiatives. To help you get started, we have included a detailed guide on how to bring this story to life using sensory methods.**

Once upon a time, there was a little seed.
Show a seed and invite learners to feel its shape and texture. For Milestones learners, we recommend using an acorn, and letting them hear the sound it makes when you shake it.

A farmer came along.
Might learners be able to give the farmer a name? This will help them connect to the story and its characters.

The farmer was collecting seeds. He picked up our little seed and put it in his wheelbarrow. The wheelbarrow moved with a squeak, squeak, squeak.
Act out being the farmer with the wheelbarrow and make the squeak sound effect. If learners struggle to stay seated, you could break up the story with a scavenger style hunt to find all the seeds.

Once he had picked up all the seeds, the farmer started making his way home, but his wheelbarrow hit a big rock and the little seed went weeeeeeeee plop and landed on the dry, dry ground.
Use your finger to trace the journey of the little seed, from the wheelbarrow to the ground.

The little seed landed and started to cry. 'Oh no! I'm on the dry, dry ground and I can't grow here!'.
Use a character voice for the seed and an expressive face while pretending to cry. Invite learners to copy you.

Luckily a friend came along.
Give learners 3 clues to help them guess what animal is coming to help. For example, 'this animal lives on the farm, makes milk and makes a moo sound'.

Daisy the cow saw that the little seed was crying and asked 'Little seed, why are you crying?'.
Using a different character voice for Daisy the cow will help to engage learners and signal a new character. Even a small change in speed or pitch can be very effective.

The little seed said 'I'm crying because I can't grow on the dry, dry ground'. 'Well' said Daisy 'that's noooo bother, I can help you' and started to stomp her hooves.
Ask learners to stomp their feet like Daisy. For learners who are unable to stomp their feet, you could provide a drum or ask them to clap their hands.

Slowly the little seed sank into the ground. 'Thank you Daisy' said the little seed. 'That's noooooo bother' Daisy replied and went on her way. The little seed was happy...until it started to feel very, very thirsty. 'Oh, I'm so thirsty and if I don't have any water to drink, I won't grow!'
Repeat the voice and facial expressions from earlier in the story and invite learners to copy.

Luckily another friend came along.
Invite learners to guess the animal again, by giving them some clues; for example, this animal lives underground, is the colour pink and is wriggly and wiggly. If you like, make a little paper hat for your finger and draw a face, to create a puppet worm.

Little Wilma the worm saw the little seed crying and said 'Little seed, why are you crying?'.
Use a different character voice for Wilma. At Eco Drama, we often mimic the voice of an elderly woman for this character to show she is old and wise.

And the seed cried 'Because I'm so thirsty and if I don't drink, I won't be able to grow!'.

'Don't worry little seed, I am a wise old worm and I know that it's going to rain soon!'. And sure enough, the rain started to fall.
Use a spray bottle to offer learners the chance to feel the rain.

The rain soaked into the ground and the little seed took a great big drink.
Make a sipping sound effect with an 'Ah' at the end and ask learners to copy you.

'Thank you Wilma!' said the little seed. Wilma smiled and wiggled off.

Then something happened to the little seed. Now that it was underground and it had a big drink of water, it began to grow and grow until it grew roots deep into the soil and one little green leaf poked up out of the ground. The little seed was very happy, until its little green leaf started to tremble.
Mime the roots growing and the little green leaf coming up out of the ground. Shake your hand to show the trembling leaf. You may also ask learners why the leaf is trembling; guide them towards the answer that it is cold and then ask them to act out being cold.

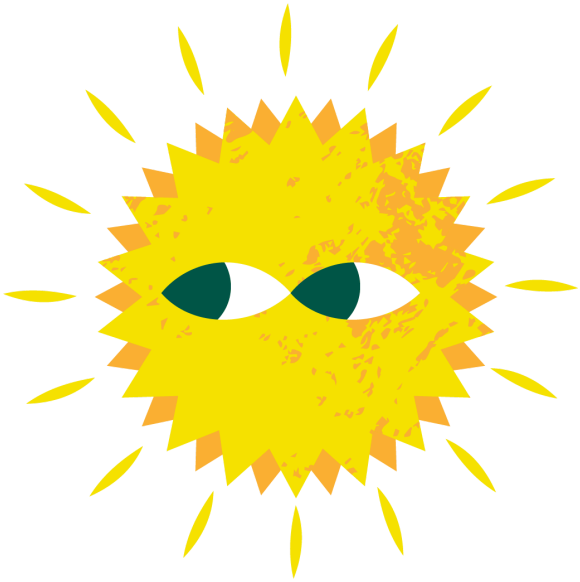
Luckily another friend came along.
Possible clues; this animal makes a home underground, has long ears and likes to jump!

Bouncy the bunny saw the seed's little green leaf shaking and said 'What is wrong little seed?'.
The little seed said 'I'm shaking because I'm so cold and if I don't warm up, I won't be able to grow!'.
Bouncy said 'Don't you worry, I know that the sun will shine soon'.
And sure enough, the sun broke through the clouds.
Use a rechargeable heat pack so that learners can feel the heat of the sun. As a development, you could ask them to describe how it feels.



The little seed said 'Thank you bunny' and soaked up all the lovely warm sunlight. The seed continued to grow and grow until it became a great, big, strong...tree!
Ask learners to suggest what they think the seed will grow into before revealing the answer.

The little seed was able to find soil, water and sunlight so it could grow - what a lucky seed!



Story Tips

- These sensory ideas for *The Lucky Seed* are a flexible guide - feel free to use all, some, or none of them. We invite you to **be creative** and adapt them to best suit your young people.

- Encourage learners to **act out the story** to develop their drama skills.

- Use the '**Forgetful Storyteller**' technique throughout the story: 'What was the farmer's name again?' 'I've forgotten which animal helped the little seed to sink into the soil.' Can the young people remember?

Follow-Up Activity Suggestions

- **Planting:** To practically advance the learning from the story, you could do some planting afterwards. We recommend growing pea shoots from dried peas as they are simple and effective. As a development, learners could measure the height of the shoots, and record it to see how they change over time.
- **Drama:** Invite the young people to act as little seeds. Ask what they need to grow, act out those stages of growth, and conclude with each person choosing the specific plant or tree they want to become.
- **Movement:** Invite learners to make a conga line and move around the outdoor space like one big worm. Young people can take turns stepping out of the line to see the worm wiggling around.
- **Visual Art/Class Display:** Draw around learners' hands, cut out the drawings and ask them to write or draw something that makes them feel lucky/happy, or helps them to grow. Add the paper hands to a group tree display.

Bringing the Story to Life / Playtime

Storytime plants the seed of curiosity and wonder into young people's imaginations. To support this seed to grow, bring the story to life through dramatic play and creative activities.

Freeze Frame Stories

In small groups, ask learners to show their understanding of the story you told by creating a frozen or moving image of one part of it, and ask the rest of the group to guess which part of the story it is. This can be adapted by asking the young people to create an image of, or to move around like a particular character. You could invite learners who struggle with movement to say a line a character of their choice might say, or choose a piece of costume their character might wear.

Dramatic Play

Invite learners to act out the characters from your story. We recommend demonstrating the movements as big and as bold as you can, to encourage your young people to give it a go.

Visual Art

Not all learners will engage with drama, so visual art can be another method of bringing a story to life. From clay crafts to tree rubbings - there are lots of options and we encourage you to explore!



Tree/Nature Dressing

To celebrate nature and the joy it brings us, decorate a natural object in your outdoor space. Use colourful ribbons to hang from tree branches, or decorate tree trunks with clay faces. We would discourage the use of plastic materials and remember to gather materials in afterwards.

Until Next Time

It is important to provide closure and bring the adventure to an end in a positive way. To finish your session, come back together for a moment of calm and to say goodbye to the outdoors.



Meditation

Drawing on nature for guided meditation and breathing gently brings a session to a peaceful close. There are lots of examples online, but if you are thinking of creating your own exercise, we recommend starting by tuning into your breathing, moving to feel in harmony with your body, then using your storytelling skills to guide learners on the journey you want to take them on. Afterwards, you can ask learners to share with each other what they saw, felt, or imagined.

Take Off Explorer Gear

If you've mimed putting on explorer gear with your learners at the start of your session, it is important to take it off before heading back indoors. This gives another signal that the session is coming to a close.

Songs: Now It's Time To... and Thank You

Sing or play a song to signify the end of your outdoor session.

The first song below is to the tune of 'London Bridge is Falling Down'. You can fill in the blanks by taking suggestions from learners for different ways of saying goodbye, for example by waving, stomping, clapping, jumping, etc. Finish up with a gentle goodbye movement to cool down.

♫ **Now it's time to ... goodbye,**
... goodbye, ... goodbye,
Now it's time to ... goodbye,
We've had so much fun! ♫

Alternatively, you could say thank you and goodbye to things you have explored and played with during the session by singing this song (make up a simple melody):

♫ **Thank you [rain],**
Thank you rain,
Thank you rain,
We will see you soon ♫



About the Author

Alice Donnelly is an arts practitioner and facilitator who joined the Eco Drama team in 2023. She studied at the University of Glasgow before training with The Lyceum Theatre and Scottish Youth Theatre. Alice has worked with several organisations across Scotland including the Citizen's Theatre, Cumbernauld Theatre, National Theatre of Scotland, Tron Theatre and North Lanarkshire Council. Having personally experienced the life-changing impact of the arts on personal growth, education and learning, Alice feels deeply privileged to share this opportunity. She anchors her creative practice in joyful, playful collaboration, driven by a mission to make artistic expression accessible and transformative for all.

Specialising in ASN settings on the Out to Play project, Alice uses a collaborative, adaptive approach to engage learners through sensory storytelling, visual arts, drama, song and arts-based play. Dedicated to ensuring all ASN pupils access tailored creative opportunities, she has drawn closely on her experience working in ASN schools to inform this resource. Alice is very grateful to the previous Out to Play artists for their inspiration, and to the participating ASN schools and learners whose vital engagement shaped this pack. Alice would like to thank Emily Reid, Suzanne Prak-Sandilands, and the entire Eco Drama team for their unwavering support, plus all of the children and educators who have come Out to Play for their creativity, curiosity, and courage!

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