








# Children's Activities

## General Nature Walk - Key Stage 1 & 2

Many schools making visits do not ask for a specific theme, in which case a series of linked activities should do the trick. Find a short walk with stopping areas where the activities will work. The walk does not have to be very long, with enough activities half a mile will be more than enough! Many of these activities can be added into a more structured session as well.

Most activities have been colour coded to indicate which senses/skills they use.

sight  sound  touch  smell  memory 

Those activities best suited to nursery, reception and year one classes have been marked \*.

A general format of introduction, energise, link, calm and end game is a good rule of thumb with as many linking, energising and calming activities as needed in the time you have.

### Introduction Activities

Introduce yourself, any colleagues and the forest before starting off with one of the following introductory activities. This is the time to find out what the children might be expecting from their visit - usually to see anacondas and bears. You might use these activities to disabuse them of these fantasies!

#### **\*Animal Halves**

Pictures of animals that live in the forest on pieces of card. Each picture cut in half. Children are given a picture each and must find the other half. Once the pictures are matched they place them on the ground as indicated by you. Continue until all the pictures are matched. This leads to a discussion of what the animals are, whether the children will see or hear them or what their 'signs' may be. You might at this point bring out signs that you have collected - owl pellets, otter spraints and other poo!

**Materials** - Pictures of woodland animals cut in half

#### **\*Squirrels**

Collect about 50 small pebbles and paint numbers on them (1-50!). Put them in a non-see-through bag. Before setting out on the walk or at the very start of it let each child take a pebble from the bag. Ask them what they think squirrels do with their food - nuts. Once they have the idea that squirrels often hide their food tell them that their pebble represents a nut. They have to remember their number and go and hide it. Once they have done this, continue the walk. Only asking them to find their 'nuts' at the end of the visit. Not all the children will be able to find them and point out that this is great because forgetful squirrels help to plant more trees!

**Materials** - bag, numbered pebbles or conkers

## **Stealth Walk**

You may also want to initially encourage children to be as quiet as possible when first entering the wood so as not to disturb the wildlife – they might choose to imitate one of the animals discussed in the animal halves activity and walk quietly as that animal might.

## Safety

With all groups these activities should be followed up with a brief safety talk before taking the group into the wood:

- Stay together/behind the leader
- Look where they are walking
- Don't push each other
- Tell them who the first aider is
- Look after the adults!

## Energising Activities

Once in the forest most groups will want to let off a bit of steam.

### Scavenger Hunts

Scavenger Hunts are a great way for allowing all age groups to simply explore the woodland environment a little without being too restricted in what they are to do. There are unlimited variations but here are a few ideas:

- **\*Shapes**

Give pairs or groups a card with different shapes on and ask them to find as many items as possible that are the same shapes. These can either be simple shapes or exact leaf and pattern matching. Talk about some of the discoveries at the end.

Materials – laminated cards with shapes on.

- **Textures**

As above, but write different textures on the sheet.

- **Woodland Rainbow**

Make some sticky cards by putting double-sided sticky tape on pieces of card. Explain to the children that you were out walking this morning when you saw a beautiful rainbow. It was really lovely – you could check here to see what colours they think are in a rainbow – but suddenly it exploded and all the colours fell out of the sky and into the wood. Ask the children if they can find the pieces of the rainbow and stick it back together on these special cards.

Alternatively use coloured card and give each child two or three pieces each. They should then find colours in the wood that match their cards.

Materials – card, double-sided sticky tape, coloured card

- **\*Potions**

Young groups like more imaginative games, so tell them that they are going to make a smelly potion from things that they can find in the forest. Give them a pot each (littlies are not good at sharing!) and tell them to find lots of smelly things to put in their potion. You can have a bottle of 'magic' (i.e. empty) to add to their pots. When they have done this, tell them to show each other their potions and to smell them. Ask them what their potion is for – you might make your own and say it's a

special changing potion – anyone who sniffs it changes into one of the woodland animals... for example!

Materials – old bottle (of 'magic'), plastic cups

- **Kim's Game**

For some groups, this may be a good way of preventing them simply picking up handfuls of leaves! Find about ten items prior to the visit and take them up with you, for example an acorn, a pebble, a twig, a fungus, some litter, a dead leaf, a piece of rotten wood, some bark.... Lie the items out on a tray or sheet for the children to see. You may need to explain what some items are. Tell them to memorise them then cover the items (you'll need another sheet/tea towel) and take 1 away. They then have to tell you which item is missing. Don't do this with every item, maybe only the slightly less familiar ones. They'll be very familiar with this activity so it shouldn't need much explaining. Then put them into pairs or small groups and give each group a pot. Tell them to find the same things as you as quickly as possible. If you're feeling generous you might give a prize to the quickest team. Remember to tell them not to pick anything that's alive. When they've finished, some may have found other items that they'll want to ask you about. Allow time for this.

Materials – trays/pots, tray containing about 10 items, cloth to cover tray.

- **Extension**

With some groups a good extension is to then provide each pair or group with a blindfold and ask them to take it in turn to blindfold each other. The person who is blindfolded is then given an item from the scavenger hunt and has to describe it and guess what it is. This is a good way to encourage use of senses other than sight.

Materials – enough blindfolds for 1 between 2

### **Bat and Moth**

Explain how bats find their food by echolocation. Ask the group to stand in a circle and choose one child to be a bat and another to be a moth. The bat is blindfolded. As the bat searches for the moth it calls out 'bat, bat, bat' and the moth returns the call by calling 'moth, moth, moth'. The bat must use this call and response to catch its food. Once the bat has caught the moth, the moth can become a bat and a new moth put in the circle. The other group members must make sure that the bat does not go outside the circle.

Materials – two or three blindfolds

### **Hug a Tree**

Find an area that is fairly clear of undergrowth and has a number of accessible trees. This activity is a good way to encourage children to really think about trees as well as developing trust and teamwork between them. Use an adult member of the group (usually the teacher) to demonstrate the activity. Blindfold your 'volunteer' and turn them around three times. Explain to the children that now that this person is blind, they are totally dependent on you for their safety, therefore you have to be very careful with them. Ask your volunteer to put their hands out in front of them while you guide them around a small area, going over (imaginary) logs, under branches and around obstacles. Lead them to a tree and ask them to get to know this tree by feeling up and

done the trunk, by smelly it, looking for distinguishing features and by giving it a big hug. When they have had a few minutes getting to know the tree, lead them back to their starting point. Tell the children to say nothing, then remove the blindfold. Ask the volunteer to find their tree. Once this has been done the children can repeat the activity in pairs. Keep your eyes open for abandoned blind people and for any disappearing into the undergrowth!

Materials – enough blindfolds for 1 between 2

### **Bird Calls**

Ask the children how they think birds communicate. Explain that they use different calls for different situations. Give each of the children a card with the name of a bird and its call written on. Explain that this call is for finding a friend. They should remember the call, then start making the correct noise to find their mate. This is a good activity to use after the sound map or sound fists.

Materials – cards with bird names and call descriptions on, there should be at least 3 of each.

## **Linking Activities**

Use the following activities while moving from one part of the wood to another.

### **Unnatural Trail**

Instead of walking through the forest looking for everything that you might expect to see, place a number of 'unnatural' objects (for example, a coke can, a ball, some litter, a key...) along a section of path. Tell the group that there are X unusual objects for them to find and see if they can spot all the 'unnatural' items along the way. When you arrive at the next stopping place ask them to tell you what they found. You might mix up natural and unnatural items and ask children to tell you which items would be in the forest and which wouldn't. Alternatively, allow a different child to lead and tell them to stop when they find something that they think is unnatural. You can discuss ideas of what is natural in this way.

Materials – 10-12 'unnatural' objects, string/pins to attach them around area

### **Mirror Walk**

Put the children into pairs and tell them that they are going to get a new view of the forest. Tell them to imagine that they are badgers (or other animal that lives on the ground). Ask them what they think a badger sees as it walks through the forest.

Materials – enough mirrors for 1 between 2

### **Micro Hike**

Give children a magnifying glass each and encourage them to imagine what kind of path a minibeast might follow – would it be the same as the paths that we use? What would it look and feel like to be a spider walking through long grass? Now give them a piece of string each and tell them to use it to mark out a mini-path (you might need to provide pins on a windy day). Now tell them to get down near the ground and follow that path at the same speed as a minibeast, observing everything and imagining it from a beastie's eye view. When they have had a good look they can swap with partners.

Materials – 1 magnifying glass for each child, a piece of string about 1m long for each child

### **Centipede Walk**

This is a good follow up to a minibeast hunt and a good organising/focusing activity for a lively group. Ask the children to line up either in pairs or single file. If they are single file, they are a centipede, in pairs they are a millipede. Give them some maths to work out – ‘Each of you is a segment of a centi/milli-pede. You’ve got one (two) leg(s) on the left and one (two) leg(s) on the right. There are x segments. How many legs have you got?’ Someone will get there! ‘How many pairs of shoes do you need?’ They always get this wrong! Then tell them that they need to stick together to stop the beastie falling apart – you might like to ask them to put their hands on the shoulders of the person in front of them. Now lead them on to the next spot on their visit, weaving in and out of the trees and making sure they remain in beastie mode.

### **\*Traffic Lights**

An Autumn activity that is good for younger groups that need something to occupy them as they start walking. Tell the children that you are now going to look for some traffic lights in the forest – puzzled looks – then show them with three leaves you’ve already found – red, orange/yellow, green.

### **\*Find a Friend**

This is also a good end activity. Gather the group in a circle – sitting down or standing up. Ask them if they’ve had a good time and then tell them that on the way back they’re going to find a friend who might like to go home with them. It can be any friend that they spot on the way back and there’ll something special about this friend. They might smell nice or be an interesting colour. The friend might have a spiky coat. Once they’ve found their friend, you’re going to gather together and they can introduce their friend to some other people in the group. Head off and let the children find their ‘friends’. Once you have arrived back at base (or wherever you choose) encourage them to tell a neighbour about their friend. If the group is there all day, they can even take their friend to lunch.

### **Calming Activities**

Most groups need a little calming between activities, especially if you want them to really take in their surroundings. The next couple of activities are variations on a theme.

### **\*Sound Fists**

This is a good one for groups that find it difficult to concentrate for long and for groups waiting for others to return – orienteers, for example. It’s also an easy one to pull out of the bag whenever you like, as no props are needed. Tell the group that you’d like to see how good they are – maybe allude to other groups finding this activity difficult. Ask if they think the forest is a noisy place or not? Have they heard much? Probably not as they’ve been making so much noise! Explain that they need to raise their fists in the air – show them. Then tell them that when you say, they are to close their eyes and be as quiet as possible. They are going to listen and each time they hear a new noise they should raise a finger. Start them off – make sure the staff do it too – and keep it going for as long as possible – hopefully until some of them have ten fingers up.

### **Sound Map**

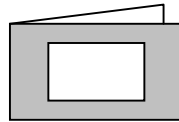
This is very similar to the above activity but children are provided with a ‘map’ or a piece of paper. It also requires some spatial awareness, so is better for older groups from about 8 years old upwards. Tell them to find somewhere comfortable to sit down (you

might need to take mats if it's damp). Once the group has sat down, explain that you are going to see how quiet they can be for two minutes. They are to listen to the forest. Every time they hear something they are going to draw it on a map. Hand out the paper and a crayon each and tell the group to put a dot in the middle. That is them and around that dot is the forest. Let them choose whether to draw or write what they hear. Count them down and then time about four minutes – longer than you've told them! When the time is up, have the group lie the pictures down in a line and walk along looking at each others' maps.

**Materials** – clipboards and paper – 1 between 2, crayons

### Slide Show

Make some slide viewers by folding an A5 piece of card in half and then cutting a square out of the middle.



Tell the children that they are going to a slide show but they first have to find a ticket. This needs to be something from the forest floor, that is thin and flat like a ticket (i.e. a leaf!). Once they have one they can come and get a viewer from you. They then put their 'ticket' inside the 'viewer' and all stand in a circle. They hold the viewer up to the sky and look through it. Talk the group through looking closely at their slide, following veins and looking for patterns and different colours. Once they have done this for a while, check that they all have their slide in their right hand (or left). They should then give it to the person on their right (or left). Lots of opportunity for confusion here! Keep looking and passing until each child has their own slide back.

**Materials** – 1 slide viewer for each child

### \*Be a Tree

Young children are great at pretending. Explain that trees come from seeds and that seeds fall on the ground. Ask the children to crouch down on the ground, pretending to be seeds. Tell them that they wait quietly all through the winter until the days get longer and warmer in the springtime. Then they start to send their roots into the ground. Get children to twist from side to side, imagining their feet going deep into the ground. Then they start to put up a little shoot, looking for the sun – slowly raise one arm in the air over your head. Continue in this fashion until they've grown into trees with branches and leaves. They can sway in the wind and they can bunch fists to show that their leaves and seeds have fallen off. Then you can start again!

### Picture Gallery

There are two versions of this activity here, the first is best for younger children.

Ask if any of the children have been to a picture gallery. Ask about what's in one and what the children think about them. Tell them that they are really in a gallery now and that they are the artists. Give each child a picture frame from laminated card and a peg or piece of string. Ask them to find a view through their frame that they think should be in the gallery. It can be a long view or something more close-up. Fix their frame to a tree or other vegetation so that the 'picture' can be seen through it. Then pair the children up and ask them to show their partner their 'picture'. You can do this a couple of times if they are enjoying it so that they see several 'pictures'.

Alternatively, give each child a frame and a piece of paper. Ask them to find a good close up view, for example a stick, leaf, root that they think is interesting and frame it. Then ask the children to draw their picture. Again they can show their pictures to each other.

Materials – picture frames, paper, pencils – enough for 1 each

## End Games

You might want a final end game for the children to leave on a high or to sum up what you've been doing. Below are a couple of suggestions.

### **Chainsaw Game**

Ask four or five of the adults with the group (+ a couple of children if you don't have enough adults) to be trees and spread them out in an open area. Then ask the rest of the group to think about the animals they've seen or discussed on their visit. Ask them how important trees and forests are to these animals. Then tell the children to imagine that they are one of those animals that lives in the forest and that they have to have trees to breathe. Ask them to choose a tree to go and live in (i.e. they must go over to one of your 'trees'). Tell them that they must be touching the tree to be alive and demonstrate that if they are not touching it, they have to hold their breath. If they move from one tree to another then they must also hold their breath. Again, demonstrate this yourself. Tell them to stay in their tree for now, as it is their home. Then tell them that you are the forester and you've come in today to cut a tree down (think of a product you wish to make from it). Start your (imaginary) chainsaw and 'cut down' one of the trees. As soon as this tree has been cut down, the 'animals' have to find a new tree to live in. Remind them to hold their breath. Repeat until you only have one very full tree left, then cut it down. Gather the children back to you and ask them why you're not a very good forester – because you haven't replaced the trees. You can then reverse the game by replacing the trees.

### **Owls and Crows**

Either before the visit or as you go around, think of some true or false statements to ask the children at the end of their trip.

Put the group into two teams (not boys and girls as they'll try to get caught), and line them up opposite each other about 2m apart. Each team must also have a 'safe' area about 5m behind it, mark it out in some way. One team is the owls and the other the crows (or any other animals you wish to use). Explain that you're going to give them some statements and they have to decide whether they are true or false. If the statement is true, the owls chase the crows, if it is false the crows chase the owls. The aim is to get to the safe area before the chasing team catches anyone. Play for as long as you have or until you run out of statements.

Finally...

# **DON'T FORGET TO FIND THE NUTS!!**

### **Acknowledgements**

Many of the ideas are taken directly or expanded from Steve Van Matre's *Earth Education* work and from Joseph Cornell's *Sharing Nature with Children* series.