



Learning in your forest

Free downloadable lesson plan: Exploring natural materials – forest art

For more learning resources from the Forestry Commission, visit www.forestry.gov.uk/england-learning

The Forestry Commission (FC) looks after more than 1500 woods and forests in England – together they make up the public forest estate. Forests provide endless learning opportunities, and are great places to inspire creativity. Take your class for a visit to your local FC woodland, and collect forest materials to make wonderful pieces of natural art.

Curriculum links:

Art: Using a range of materials creatively; Using sculpture to develop and share ideas and imagination; Using colour, pattern, texture, shape and form in the development of artworks.

Science: Plants and animals; Everyday materials; Seasonal changes.

Before your visit:

Ask the children to draw a picture of what they think the forest will be like. With older children, invite them to add a sentence about the different kinds of natural materials that they would expect to find in the forest. How would this vary according to the time of year?

For a great introduction to the forest and how it is cared for by the Forestry Commission, visit www.forestry.gov.uk/england-learning and look at the downloads page, where you will find an informative, child-friendly photo show, with notes and discussion questions. You will also find some useful health and safety advice for your visit.

You will need to bring:

- Selection of pictures of animals you would expect to find in a UK woodland
- Laminated scavenger hunt cards – prepared in advance
- Collecting bags
- Tree ID guides or 'Trees in your Forest' explorer sheet – from the FC downloads page
- Clipboards
- Plain paper and wax crayons



Forest Lesson Plan

Starter activity

Find an area in the forest to sit or stand in a circle. Give out the pictures and descriptions of the forest that they completed at school.

What things are the same?

What is different?

What natural materials did the children include in their original picture of a forest?

Can they see anything extra, or unexpected?

Explain that they are going to explore the forest to discover what materials can be found, and how they can be used to create pieces of natural art and sculpture.

How to 'Collect with Respect'

- Collect from the forest floor wherever possible
- Spread your load – carefully collect only a few leaves or petals from any particular plant or tree
- Do not disturb wildlife habitats e.g. log piles
- Do not pick berries or fungi as they may be poisonous

Scavenger Hunt

Divide the children into small groups and give each one a laminated scavenger hunt card and a collecting bag. The card should contain a list of at least five items for the children to find. See box for examples.

When they have found everything on their list the children should return to show everyone their treasures.

Extension - get the children to look at all of the things that they have collected. In what other ways could they sort them according to their characteristics, for example, shape (regular or irregular), colour, species e.g. a type of seed, part of an animal, plant or tree, dead/alive or never alive?

Forest scavenger hunt

Can you find:

- Something prickly
- Something soft
- Something smooth
- Something shiny
- Something hard
- Something waxy
- Something yellow
- Something round
- Something heart-shaped
- Something bendy





Forest Animal Art Gallery

Forestry Commission woodlands are great places for wildlife to live. They provide a range of different habitats (places where animals and birds can make their homes), as well as supplying the food that they need to eat.

Can the children name any woodland animals or birds that they might find in a UK forest?

Show the animal pictures you have brought, as a visual reminder if needed. They are now going to select one of these animals as inspiration for a piece of artwork.

Ask the children to work in pairs or individually, to collect four (or more) sticks to make a picture frame and then choose a spot where they would like to make their picture. The children should prepare the ground by gently sweeping the leaf litter to one side to clear it. This will form the background to their art work.

The sticks should be laid on the ground to make a square or rectangular frame. Then, using natural materials collected from the forest floor, the children should choose a forest animal from the ones that you have discussed, and make a picture inside the frame. Encourage the children to look carefully at the properties of the different materials that they have collected, and think how they can use them to create an interesting and detailed image.

Older children should try to select materials that capture the characteristics of the animal that they have chosen, for example, which materials would work well to express a fox's bushy tail or a hedgehog's prickly spines? Can the children introduce a sense of energy and movement into their animal picture?

Take photos for a lasting record of the children's works of art.

Extension: Can you find any evidence of woodland animals? Look for clues such as droppings, feathers or fur, nests, holes or nibbled nuts and cones.

Exploring Leaf Shape

Find an area where there are conifers and broadleaves (see box). Ask the children to look for three different tree leaf shapes.



Count how many different leaf shapes they manage to find altogether.

Do the children know the names of any of them?

Have they found any leaves from evergreen trees, such as fir, pine or holly?

Discuss the difference between coniferous, broadleaf, evergreen and deciduous trees.

Use simple reference guides to identify the different leaves. Alternatively use the 'Trees in the Forest' explorer sheet from the FC's downloads page.

Extensions:

- **Leaf rubbing** – record different leaf shapes by making leaf rubbings. Place leaves with the veins uppermost between a piece of a paper and a clipboard. Hold a wax crayon flat on its side and rub it over the leaf. Cover the whole piece of paper with colourful rubbings. You could try bark rubbings as well. (If wet, take leaves back to school to do the rubbings there).



- **Leaf Lacing** – for this you will need fresh leaves and small twigs. Overlap two leaves at either end and pin together using a small, fine twig. Make sure that the twig is strong enough to pierce both leaves. Push the twig through both leaves at one end where they overlap, and then push back through at the other side. The twig will now hold them both together. Repeat with lots of leaves. Encourage the children to try different ways of arranging the leaves; in size order or varying colours. Point out that the front and back of leaves are different colours. When the children have made a string of leaves, hang them from a tree for others to enjoy.

- **Importance of trees** – although each tree species is different, with its own distinct leaf shape, bark and twigs, all trees are important to us for a variety of reasons. Discuss what trees do for us e.g. helping to reduce climate change by taking in CO₂, releasing oxygen and purifying the air, providing a renewable fuel source and building material, acting as wind breaks and giving us shade.

Tree words:

Coniferous – trees with cones and needles e.g. Scots pine, Douglas fir; usually evergreen

Broadleaf – trees with broad flat leaves e.g. oak, silver birch; usually deciduous

Evergreen – trees which keep their leaves all year round; mostly conifers (but not all e.g. holly is evergreen, but not a conifer)

Deciduous – trees which lose their leaves in autumn; mostly broadleaves (but not all e.g. larch is a deciduous conifer)

Celtic Circle

Can the children think of any reasons why people visit forests, e.g. dogwalking, playing, horse or bike riding?

Explain that forests have inspired people all over the world for thousands of years. Some artists use natural materials to make pieces of ephemeral (temporary) art.

Tell the children that you are all going to work together to make a beautiful piece of art, in the style of Andy Goldsworthy, made entirely from things you can collect, and without harming the forest!

Ask the children to stand in a fairly wide circle. Clear the area in the centre of the circle of any leaf litter by gently brushing away to the sides with your feet.

Find an attractive tree section or object to sit in the circle centre.

Encourage the children to think about all of the natural materials they have found today, focusing on their colour, shape and texture.

Can they suggest something to make the first concentric ring around the object that you have placed in the circle centre? Send the children to find several of the chosen material and then return to place them down.

Remind the children that they are creating a piece of art and that they should arrange things carefully, making sure that things are placed in the same direction and the right way up.

Once they have placed their objects down, they should stand back in the circle ready to discuss the next layer.

Think about using scarce materials for the first few rings and more readily available materials for the larger outer rings.

Build up contrasting rings for maximum effect. After creating about 8 to 9 different rings stand back to admire your work. Take a photo as a permanent record to display back at school!



Follow up work - back at school

Research how artists use forests and trees in their artwork. There are a number of sculpture trails in Forestry Commission woods that you could investigate further, e.g. Grizedale in Cumbria and the Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire.



As well as sculpture trails, the Forestry Commission provides many other facilities to help people to enjoy the public forest estate.

In order to encourage people to visit and enjoy forests, the Forestry Commission offers:

- picnic tables
- parking
- cafes
- Go Ape
- walking trails
- biking trails
- family events
- concerts
- and much more

Some simple questions to discuss:

If you were managing a forest, what sorts of things would you provide?

Consider where people would park, whether they would want to eat or drink during their visit, and what sorts of activities they would like to do while they were in the forest.



You have already discussed how important trees and forests are – for timber, people and wildlife – what can we all do to ensure they are protected and cared for?

Find out who the FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) is and what they do. What does the logo mean?



For more information about the FC's sustainable management of the nation's forests, and further activities to learn more about the timber cycle, please look at our learning downloads www.forestry.gov.uk/england-learning.

Tell us what you think...

We'd like to know what you thought of this Forestry Commission learning resource.

Please visit www.forestry.gov.uk/learning and follow the link to our online questionnaire.

Many thanks for your help.