



Free downloadable lesson plan: Forest Story Study and Performance

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The Forestry Commission (FC) looks after more than 1500 woods and forests in England – together they make up the public forest estate. Forests play an important role in all sorts of literature, providing symbols and settings in classic texts, fairy tales, modern children's stories and poems. A visit to the forest with your class can inspire creative writing, imaginative language and vocabulary, as well as providing the backdrop for role play and performance.

Curriculum links: Year 1 and Year 2 – English

Children will develop:

- pleasure in reading, motivation to read, vocabulary and understanding;
- understanding of the books that they can already read accurately and fluently, and those that they listen to;
- opportunities for role-play, which can help pupils to identify with and explore characters, and to try out the language they have listened to.

Before your visit:

The aim of this lesson plan is to study a story in depth and finish with a performance of it. You will need to choose a story to work with – one that is set in a woodland or forest. It could be a traditional fairy tale, such as Little Red Riding Hood or Hansel and Gretel, or a modern story such as Percy the Park Keeper or the Gruffalo.

The lesson plan should work with whichever forest-based story you choose – you will be reading it aloud four times during the visit, so make sure it isn't too long! Begin by reading the story to the children in the classroom.



The children will need to be organised into groups of 4 or 5 in advance of your forest visit, each group with an adult. Share the scenes out between the groups. Ideally each group will have one or two scenes from the book to perform. If a group has two scenes, make sure they are consecutive.

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:

- One copy of the book for each group with their scenes marked.
- Hotseating character question cards – one per group.
- Collecting bags for props.

Forest Lesson Plan

Starter activity

Find a place to sit and read the story.

- **Does it feel different hearing the story in the forest instead of in the classroom?**
- **Would the forest make a good setting for a stage if you were acting out the story?**

Explain that you will be working towards acting out the story later in the day.

1. Storyboarding

Allocate each scene from the story to a group and hand out the books with their scene marked. This will be their scene for the final performance.

Ask each group to use natural materials (sticks, stones, leaves etc) to create a picture of their scene on the ground.

Gather the class together and walk to each scene in the correct order, reading the story as you go.

Extension

Instead of a static picture of the story, older groups could make a story map of their scene with moving "characters" made of natural objects. They could use these like puppets to act out their scene as the story is read.



2. Characters (hotseating)

Give each group the name of a character from the book, then discuss:

- **How would your character walk around?**
- **What voice would they use?**
- **What would they enjoy doing?**

Now try hotseating:

Ask the children to take it in turns to pretend to be their character – they are ‘in the hotseat’ while the other children in their group ask them questions. Discuss how this will help them get to know all about their character.

Hint: You may want to demonstrate hotseating with another adult to show the children what they are going to do. You can also provide groups with a copy of the ‘hotseating character question card’ to start them off.

When you bring them back together, discuss:

- **What did they learn about their characters?**
- **How did it feel to answer questions on the spot in the role of the character?**

Extension

Look around you. If one of the trees was a character, which character would they be? Ask each group to choose a tree to be their character and explain why they have chosen it.

Explain that trees are all different just like people are.

- Can they see any differences between the trees in the forest today?
- Some may be evergreen and some deciduous, some tall and some small, some with rough bark and others with smooth bark.
- Different tree species provide habitats for different sorts of birds and animals.
- Trees produce timber with varying properties, this means that different tree species can be used for making different products.

Forests are managed by the Forestry Commission for timber, wildlife and people.

Think about the characters in the story

- **Are there any animals? If so, where do they make their homes? What do they eat?**
- **Are there any people in the story? Do they live in the forest? Or work there? Or are they just visiting?**



3. The Lying Game (Props)

Sit in a circle and show the children a leaf and ask the question 'Whatever is that?' Take some ideas from the group before telling them what it 'really' is! For example:

"This may look like an oak leaf but it's actually the flying carpet of the King of the Slugs. He twiddles this part to steer the carpet to fly high into the trees where he has his magical palace."

Give the children half a minute to pick up an object from the area and then come back to the circle. They should tell an unusual story about their object to the person they are sitting next to.

Hint: Some children will question the difference between "lying" and "storytelling". Explain that storytelling and lying both involve making things up but storytelling is when people know you are playing pretend.

Discuss how ideas about everyday woodland objects can develop into imaginative woodland stories.

Then explain that they are going to use the same technique to create props for the performance of your story. Ask each group to discuss a list of the props needed for their scene and to gather them.

Hint: Avoid really heavy objects, e.g if you are re-enacting Goldilocks, the chairs and beds will need to be in the set, not props. The props might include the bowl of porridge and the spoon – a leaf and a stick for example.

Many of the props are likely to come from trees (twigs, leaves etc). Ask the children if they can think of anything that they use at home or at school that is made from trees (e.g. paper, cardboard, tables, pencils).



4. Sound Effects

Take a moment to stop and listen to the forest around you...

- Ask the children to describe the sounds they can hear.
- Perhaps they can hear wildlife scurrying, leaves rustling, people walking or even trees being cut down (see box).

Explain that each group is going to create the sound effects to accompany their scene from the story.

Discuss how they could make the sounds:

- Loud footsteps or a door slamming could be made by knocking pieces of wood together.
- Scraping sticks on bark might sound like a bear growling.
- Dropping small stones onto a large stone could sound like raindrops falling.

Allow time to discuss ideas, gather natural materials, experiment and practise.

Bring the group back together. Read the story again asking the children to add in the sound effects in the appropriate places.

Discuss the impact and effectiveness of the sound effects in creating the mood of the story.



It's ok to cut down trees...

...as long as it is part of a long-term, sustainable plan.

Many people think of tropical rainforests being cleared and not replaced, which is definitely a bad thing.

BUT the Forestry Commission looks after all of its forests very carefully – ensuring that new trees are planted to replace any that are felled.

5. Setting the Stage

Find a space where you can act out the story. Give each group a few minutes to come up with a list of 'places' in the story, then make a complete list together. Agree where the different places are going to be so that everyone knows, for example, where the "doorway" or "pond" is. Decorate the stage – you could add a tree stump to be a seat or a pile of sticks as a fireplace.

Give each group some time to put everything from their scene together. They need to decide who is going to play each character and who is making sound effects. The adult with each group can read the scene aloud as they practise each of their roles and lines, incorporating props as necessary. If it helps, number the groups so that you can give them a call or hand signal when it's their turn to perform.

Hint: For a final performance with young children an adult can narrate the story, whereas older children may read the story aloud themselves.

Each group sits quietly watching the others perform until it is their turn to act out their scene.

This way of performing gives more children a chance at a leading role but with fewer lines to learn. They all get involved in the different elements of organising a play and can view each other's performances.

There should be a round of applause for everyone at the end.



Plenary

What do the children feel they have learnt about the story from studying it in depth?
Have they learnt anything about the forest during their visit?

Follow up work - back at school

- Perform the play for another class.
- Write forest-based stories, using inspiration from your visit.
- **If there were animals in your story, find out about other animals and birds that live in the forest.** Make a poster to illustrate some of them.
- **Were there people in your story – what do people use the forest for?** Make a leaflet to advertise the forest as a great place to visit.



- **What are trees used for? Go for a walk around your school and grounds – how many things can you find that are made from wood?**

The Forestry Commission provides lots of free, downloadable activities and resources, many of which relate to forest stories such as Stick Man and the Gruffalo – visit www.forestry.gov.uk/learning to find more inspirational ideas.

**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.

Hotseating character question card

Put someone in the hotseat – they will be the character from the story. The rest of you need to get to know all about the character by asking lots of questions.

Here are some to get you started:

- How are you feeling today?
- Why? What's happened?
- Do you always feel like this?
- What have you seen in your lifetime?
- Who are your friends?
- What makes you happy?
- What makes you sad or afraid?

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