

Into The Woods

A Dementia Friendly Woodland Resource



BASED ON THE STORYBOX PROJECT

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and City of Trees*

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The Storybox Project

HELLO!

We are Small Things Creative Projects. We are delighted to have been invited to create this resource for City of Trees, based on *The Storybox Project*, our creative storytelling project for people living with dementia problems and the people that support them.

Our sessions and activities are themed, sensory, fun experiences where games are played and stories are made up to encourage togetherness, improve concentration and lift mood. Each one uses imagination, stories and poetry as a starting point to inspire a range of creative activities that are accessible for all including music, creative writing, drama and art. Central to our philosophy is the belief that creative participation can improve wellbeing and reduce social isolation for people living with dementia, and that everyone should have the opportunity to try new things and be culturally active throughout their lives. Alongside that is the desire to explore the way that creative engagement can empower people living with a dementia to take the lead and express their own ideas and personality.

In this pack, we want to share with you some simple ways that you might be able to
In-corporate our ways or working into the support that you give to people living with dementia on a daily basis.

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE PACK

Included in this resource are a range of activity ideas, suggestions of resources that you may need and some tips on how to run a successful creative activities in a woodland setting.

The ideas included are simple and use the woodland to stimulate creative conversation and activity. All of the ideas are easy to elaborate and adapt, and take their inspiration from the outdoors, a theme

accessible to lots of different people. Although they have been designed to take place within a woodland setting many of them could also take place indoors with simple modification.

We like to think of the ideas we provide as a guide, rather than something that you must stick to rigidly. You might find that different groups take to particular exercises more than others. If this is the case, do feel free to allow that exercise time to run its course, or to expand, or to evolve into something else entirely. Don't feel pressured to do things exactly the way that we suggest. If the people in your group are engaging in creative activity and conversation, then that is a success!

There are some top tips at the end of this resource, but there is one point that feels crucial to the STORYBOX philosophy: we never focus on memory or reminiscence in our work, as we've found that this can be difficult and frustrating for people living with memory loss. Instead, we use imagination, and being in the present moment, and therefore allowing everyone to respond in their own way. You might find that the exercises in this pack do prompt memories and personal stories, and if so, that's fine. But the aim of the ideas here are to allow everyone a way in to engage.

Good luck!

Liz Postlethwaite
Small Things Creative Projects

CREATING A JOURNEY STICK

A journey stick is a simple way of documenting a walk that you take in a woodland space. It can be done as an activity in its own right, or can be added as you move through the woodland for another activity / other activities.

You will need:

- A long twig, or light branch
- A ball of string
- Scissors

To begin:

The first thing that you will need to when you arrive at the woodland is to pick up a stick that you are going to use to record your journey. This can be a twig or a light branch – it needs to be long enough to attach things to and to carry around. We find between 50cm and 75cm ideal.

As you and move through the woodland you are going to pick up interesting things that you find and tie them to your stick in the order that you find them. For example, if you find a nice leaf first you will join this to one end of a stick, then if you find a feather that is added next. You can either do this on your own, in a pair, or in a small group.

By the end of your walk you should have a stick that has a range of different items from the woodland attached to it. This is a great starting point to remember and talk about the journey that you have just made. This could happen at the end of your walk before you go home, or when you get back from your walk.

To share your journey stick go along it item by item talking about each different item: What is it? Why did you join it to your stick? What is it? Where in the woods did you find it? How does the item look, feel, smell...etc...?

BARK RUBBINGS

Making bark rubbings is a simple activity to do, but can be a lovely way of observing different trees and environments within a woodland. It is something that you can do at any time of year, and which can also be used to identify the species of tree by comparing your rubbings to an identification guide,

You will need:

- Some trees
- Paper
- Charcoal, pencils, or crayons

Head out into the woodland and choose a spot where you are surrounded by trees. Look around and choose one that you think looks like it had interesting textures on its bark. Take your paper and pencil / crayon or charcoal over to the tree. Then hold your paper against the trunk and rub your pencil against it applying gentle pressure.

Once your image has formed and it is as dark as you want it to be take the paper away and have a look at it. What are the features of the bark? Have any things been revealed that you didn't notice prior to the rubbing? If you are working with somebody else compare the rubbings that you have each made. What are the differences? What are the similarities? What do you like about the techniques that they have used?

Now that you know the technique for doing a bark rubbing it is something that can be used in many different ways. For example, you could take rubbings from different tree species to observe differences and similarities from tree to tree, or you could experiment using different colours and materials to create bark collages. You could do this out in the field, or you could create a range of rubbings on your walk then cut them and stick them to make your collage when you get back indoors.

SOUNDS OF THE WOODLAND

This lovely, calming activity encourages you to observe the woodland in a different way by concentrating on the things that you hear. It can be a very relaxing experience, especially if you can find a bench to sit on, or if you take a camping chair with you.

You will need:

- A bench or camping chair
- Paper and a pen to record the things that you hear

To begin you will need to find a quiet place to work – it helps if this is away from background noise such as roads, though this may not be possible. This will need to be a place where you are able to sit down either on a bench, or on a camping chair.

Sit down in your chair and try to relax. Some people may find it helps to close their eyes, but this is not comfortable for everybody. If you don't want to close your eyes you may want to find a point of focus like a spot on the floor for example, as this will really help you concentrate on listening rather than looking. Once you are relaxed really start to focus on the things that you can hear.

As you are doing this it can be nice to write a record of all the different sounds. You can do this in two different ways:

1. By writing a simple list and adding sounds to it as you hear them
2. By trying to create a sound map of the space around you. To do this draw a cross at the centre of your piece of paper. As you hear a sound write it down on the paper based upon its location, so if you hear a bird behind you and close by the place you right it on your paper should reflect this.

Whilst you are listening you may notice that you begin by hearing lots of sounds then it gets harder to identify new and different things. Try to continue past the point where you think that you have heard everything that there is to hear as this is often when the most interesting and unusual sounds will reveal themselves.

LOOKING AT LEAVES

This activity encourages everyone to enjoy the creative process, drawing and painting each in response to the beauty of the natural world. And to develop their own creative interests & encourage participants to become aware of artists' work and art experiences that are available every day.

You will need:

- Paper – a sketchbook is ideal if you want to work outdoors
- Crayons
- Pencils
- Leaves

To begin you will need to head out into the woods to collect a range of different leaves. Early autumn is an idea time to do this as the leaves will be starting to drop from the trees but will not have dried out too much. As you are walking in the woodland collect a selection of leaves. Try to pick a selection that you think are varied and interesting and that offer a range of different colours and textures.

When you have found a small selection (5 to 10 is ideal) you are going to have a go of drawing them. This can be an activity that takes place in the woodland on a bench or camping chair, or back indoors if you prefer.

Firstly look at the leaves that you have collected taking note of all the different shapes & tones of green. Then play a quick drawing games drawing 2 minute leaf sketches. Try not to think too much! Just sketch what you see, looking more at your leaf than at your paper if you can. Then choose a leaf, put it under the paper and rub the wax candle on top leaving a pattern of the leaf in wax on the paper. If you have watercolours at this point you could use them over the top which the wax resists leaving a leaf skeleton on the paper. Finally pick your favourite leaf and use the different materials to represent it. Try to work freely and don't worry too much about the accuracy of your final painting! It is your response to the leaf that is most important.

WOODLAND POETRY

Reading poetry inspired by woodland and natural spaces can be a simple and creative way of exploring and experiencing a woodland environment from a different perspective. You can of course do this indoors, but it is even nicer to take your poem out into the woods and to see out it resonates when you are surrounded by trees.

You will need:

- A piece of poetry inspired by the woodland. We find that *I Know A Bank Where The Wild Thyme Grows* from *A Midsummer Nights Dream* works really well.
- Somewhere comfortable to stand or sit.

Head out into the woodland and find a comfortable space where you can stand or sit without being disturbed. Begin by reading the poem that you have chosen, you can do this in your head if you want to, or if you are working with somebody else or in a small group you can read it together. Share the poetry in a way that you feel comfortable.

Begin thinking about your initial reaction to the poem. What do you like about it? And how does it make you feel? What is the tone of the poem?

Then think about which words stick out in the poem. Are there any unusual words in the poem and if so do you think those words mean? What images from the poem do you like? And which do you not like? How would you describe the mood of the poem?

Are there any rhymes in the poem? Which rhymes do you like? What is your overall response to the poem? Do you like it or not like it? What do you like / not like about it? How do you think it relates to the woodland that you are in? How is it different and similar?

And by reading the poem back again one final time

WOODLAND INSPIRED CREATIVE WRITING

Forage for natural items in your local woodland and use them as inspiration to create your own writing inspired by the natural world. You can do this activity at any time of you, and the materials that you find will vary depending upon the season. Why not try writing a new poem at the start of each season to reflect how the woodland changes during the year?

You will need:

- A selection of natural materials from the woods such as leaves, conkers, flowers, acorns...etc... The range will change depending upon the season
- A pen and paper to write down your ideas.

Begin by going for a walk to gather inspiration for your creative writing. Try to find a range of different materials that spark your imagination, or that seem particularly tactile. Pick things that stick out for you or that feel unusual or distinctive. When you have made your selection it is up to you if you want to write your poetry outdoors, or if you want to go back inside to do it. This may depend on the weather, but if you do decide to work outside make sure that you have a comfortable place to sit as you are writing.

When you are ready to write begin by looking at the resources that you have gathered. What can you see? Pick things up and look at them more closely then decide which item you would like to use to inspire your poem. Look at that item in more detail asking questions about it. Ask you answer the questions write down all the ideas that you come up with.

How does it looks? What is it called? Does it have any other names? What colour is it? Is it heavy or light? What does it feel like? Where did it come from? What could it be used for? Any other questions that you come up with...

When you have finished your poem read it back. Then see if you can come up with a name for it. Once the poem has been named read it back one more time.

TIPS FOR WORKING IN WOODLANDS

- Try not to let the weather put you off – if you can stay warm and dry with the correct clothing it is possible to work outdoors most days.
- Don't try to do too much or walk too far. For most people a single creative activity added to a gentle stroll is enough.
- For many activities you may prefer to sit down. If a bench is not available it can be good to take a camping chair with you.
- If you are working on an activity outdoors with another person or a group, work in a place where you can see and hear each other.
- When you are doing an activity try to find a quiet, peaceful space if possible.

TIPS FOR RUNNING ACTIVITIES

- If you are going to try an activity with a small group work with someone else to lead it if possible. It can help to take turns leading the activity, giving space to bounce ideas back and forth. It also means that whilst there is someone leading the group, there is someone else on hand to offer any one-to-one support that might be needed.
- Allow space for memory and reminiscence, but focus on the present and on imagination.
- Take time to fully explore each activity. Allow time for people to respond in their own way, some people may need more time than others, whilst others may need more specific prompts.
- Encourage group conversation as you go along, asking questions of specific individuals if you are working with a group can help to get this started.
- Try to be aware of where the focus is if you are working with a group, who is talking, who we are listening to now (this can be important if you are working with people with hearing problems). This can help to create a sense of group activity.
- See the activities as a prompt or a starting point for conversations and storytelling. The more that everyone is able to elaborate on the initial task, the more ownership the participants are likely to feel over the session and its material.
- Feel free to mix up the content of the activities in this resource, or to discard/ draw out for longer if something is going well/ not so

well. Don't be afraid of veering off the plan. You can always return to it later.

- If your participants are enjoying themselves, then the session is going well! This is the main aim of the work, nothing more complicated. So have fun, relax, enjoy!

CREDITS

City of Trees

<http://www.cityoftrees.org.uk/>

City of Trees is an innovative and exciting movement set to re-invigorate Greater Manchester's landscape by transforming underused, unloved woodland and planting a tree for every man, woman and child who lives there, within a generation.

A City of Trees will mean great things for Greater Manchester and you can help to make it happen.

Small Things Creative Projects

<https://smallthings.org.uk/>

Small Things Creative Projects is a social enterprise using creativity and creative engagement to fuel learning, change and development. They do this by developing projects that create space for thinking and togetherness in a wide range of settings.

