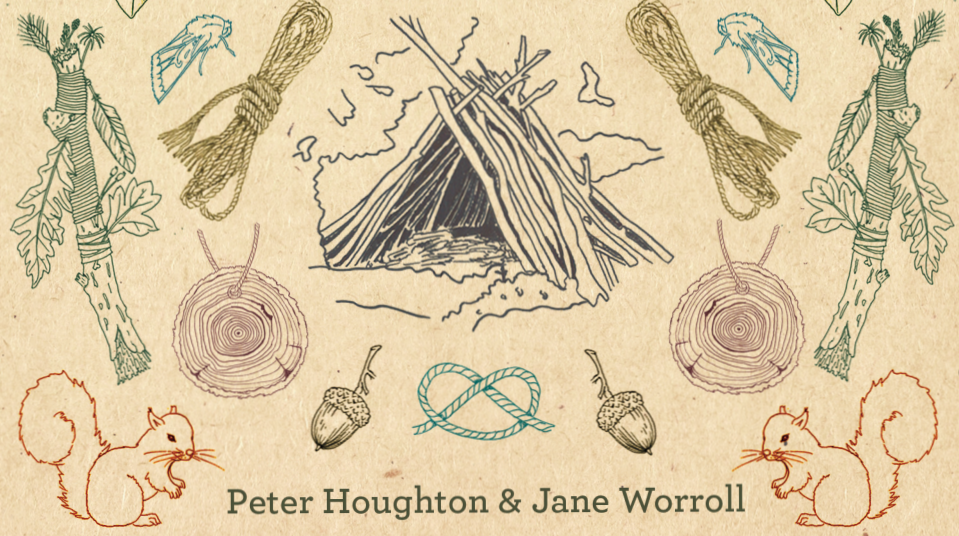
Play the Forest School Way

Woodland Games, Crafts and Skills for Adventurous Kids



Peter Houghton & Jane Worroll

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Sharing Wisdom Since 1893



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enquiries@watkinspublishing.co.uk

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Development Editor: Fiona Robertson
Head of Design: Viki Ottewill
Designer: Manisha Patel
Production: Uzma Taj
Commissioned artwork: Peter Houghton

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Some activities in this book, for example those involving fire or cutting tools, may be dangerous if instructions are not followed precisely. Always follow manufacturers' instructions when using tools. Wild foods such as berries can be poisonous, so eat only what you can identify as safe. Adults need to assess each child's capabilities and supervise any potentially dangerous activity at all times. Watkins Media Limited, or any other persons who have been involved in working on this publication, cannot accept responsibility for any injury, illness or damages that result from participating in the activities in this book.

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Introduction

Nature offers us a sanctuary, a place where we can find peace and wonder. It is not limited by time or confined by walls, and even today we cannot control it completely. It is much larger and older than we are, and its rhythms resonate deep within us. Nature is where we are from and where we belong, and our survival is intricately linked to its existence. For children it is the greatest playground of all, with all its diverse structures, smells, textures, its creatures of all shapes and sizes, its abundant plants, some edible, others toxic. Nature offers a myriad of opportunities for risk taking, for a wealth of learning and amazement, and for freedom, separate from the adult world.

So why has our society become so disconnected from nature? Along with strangers, increasing traffic and other hazards of the modern world, nature itself is often seen as something alien, a threat to our children. Changes in the way we live, including a rise in risk-adverse parenting, as well as an increasing dependence on technology, contribute to an ever-more sedentary, indoor culture that counts increasing childhood obesity as only one of its negative impacts. While some fears may be justified, it's important to try to readdress these issues.

Forest School is one of many grassroots movements around the world that are currently aiming to connect children with nature once more. Now a global phenomenon, Forest School developed

in the UK in the 1990s as both an approach to early years learning, initially inspired by the play-based, nature-centred pedagogy of Scandinavia known in Denmark as *friluftsliv* ('free open-air life'), and as an ever-growing collection of individual Forest Schools. These range from educational play schemes held in local parks and in mainstream schools to specialist programmes to help with addiction recovery and social inclusion. The Forest School Association, the independent body representing Forest School in the UK, has provided the following definition:

> **'Forest School is an inspirational process, that offers *all* learners regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland or natural environment with trees.'**

This approach draws on, in addition to the Scandinavian outdoor model, the learning theories and playful child-centred pedagogy of thinkers such as Rudolf Steiner and Maria Montessori, and on the nature-based education activities of Kurt Hahn and the British Scouting and Woodcraft Folk movements, among other influences. These views have relevance for Forest School today, with its ethos of therapeutic educational learning that aims to maximize social, emotional and developmental potential by allowing children to manage risk, have more independence in guiding their own learning, achieve goals, be active, play and learn through direct experience within nature. Within this context, a Forest School leader assesses each child's interests and learning styles and engages with them to facilitate their full learning ability. Outside the confines of four walls, without the distractions of







electronic devices and excessive supervision, children can move, explore and discover at their own pace, connecting to the natural world – a place not created by man, that had deep spiritual meaning for our ancestors.

This book offers some fantastic games, crafts and skill-building activities from the Forest School sessions we hold in London and elsewhere, giving children who have not yet had a chance to attend Forest School a taste of what goes on there. And for children who have already discovered Forest School, this is a way of bringing those activities into their outdoor play and learning with you. Of course a book can never be a replacement for the full Forest School experience, which requires repeated sessions with an appropriately trained leader (for more about the principles of Forest School, visit the FSA website at www.forestschoolassociation.org). So we urge children who haven't already been to Forest School to try it out for themselves!

Above all, this book is about having fun in nature, especially in woodland. However, a Forest School programme aims to stimulate a child's holistic development – and for this reason we explain the learning benefits of each activity in the book. For example, using a fire steel (under adult supervision of course) is a skill that takes time, focus, patience, persistence and resilience to master. Success can truly empower a child, raising confidence to try new skills and encouraging a healthy approach to managing risk. We never tire of seeing the sheer joy flash across the face of a child who has persevered and finally triumphed in lighting a fire using just a fire steel!

Children are immensely curious and have a strong desire to play and explore the world around them, and by making choices in this way they actively drive their own learning and development. Research suggests that young children learn best from experience, by using their senses actively rather than passively, and it is via these experiences that the learning remains with us into adulthood. Providing varied outdoor experiences can help with this development. Free play gives children space and independence, and a chance to imagine and learn social skills, while adult-guided activities such as tool use build new skills, vocabulary and the ability to manage risk, creating a positive self-identity and laying foundations to be a successful lifelong learner.

HOW TO PLAY THE FOREST SCHOOL WAY!

We've written this book for parents, teachers and guardians who will take the role of the Forest School leader in being present (so put your phone away!), encouraging, inspiring and helping the activity to be achieved, at the same time letting the child lead the experience. The activities are suitable for a wide age range, from pre-school children up to about age 11, so obviously adults will need to assess the individual capabilities of each child.

We've suggested kit for each activity. In addition, bring a first-aid kit, and a supply of water, soap and paper towels for cleaning hands. Getting dirty without having to worrying about it is part of playing outdoors and activities can take place in all weathers (apart from high winds in woods), so make sure everyone is dressed appropriately in clothes that don't need to be kept clean.

Each Forest School session has a beginning and an ending, and its own flow; this framing and rhythm can provide inspiration for your own woodland activities. At Forest School, beginnings establish safety rules and the physical boundaries of the play area, and how to treat each other and the environment with respect (if you are in a protected area, check with the landowner about rare plants that should not be picked, and animals not to disturb). We also discuss issues such as where food will be kept and where to wash hands. This reflects psychologist Abraham Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs, in which basic needs, such as those for food, shelter, safety and community, must be met first to allow children to achieve their full potential for personal development.

One key aspect to establish before deciding on the first activity is mood and level of energy. You can ask older children to rate their feelings on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being no good and 10 being great. Ask small groups directly or get large groups sitting in a circle and use a talking stick (see page 10) to encourage them to share their thoughts and feelings. Let the words come from them, and use these and your observations as clues as you plan your session or day.

For example, if you have a group (such as a birthday party) in which some children are new to each other and the energy is high, the Wildlife Team Games (see pages 124–59) are always a fantastic way to start, channelling high spirits into working together, empathy and having plenty of fun. Any of the Nature Explorers activities (see pages 12–37) will help deepen the children's connection with nature, and are perfect if they are interested in finding out more

about their surroundings. The crafts in Forest Arts (see pages 38–79) are great when the energy level is focused, perhaps following a round of games – or after lunch on a hot day! There is also a whole chapter on Survival Skills (see pages 80–123) – training in any of these can be transformational in raising self-esteem. The more familiar you become with the activities, the easier it will be to switch between them as needed to respond to the natural flow of the day and the feelings of those involved.

TRY THIS!
With a large group, diffuse possible arguments by pulling names out of a bag to choose roles in a game.

As we do at Forest School, make sure there are enough adults present to allow children to play and undertake achievable, challenging activities in a safe, nurturing space. This also provides an opportunity to observe each child's interests and learning styles, useful for when you are planning future play sessions. Some activities require more than one child to take part; if that's the case, the ideal number of players is suggested.

At the start of each activity, read through the instructions, demonstrate any tricky techniques, and then let the child as far as possible attempt each step, offering positive encouragement, and only assist if required. Knowing that kids love to work things out for themselves, we've designed the step-by-step instructions and diagrams to be as simple and easily grasped as possible. As the activity progresses, let the child lead and be mindful not to impose your own views. If someone wants to tie an old sweet wrapper

onto a wand, for example, let them do that rather than seeing it as rubbish! Only if something is harmful or dangerous is intervention required, but in an explanatory, empowering way.

At Forest School, at the end of a session we ask the children to say how they now feel. To consolidate learning, facilitate deeper thinking and encourage them to play an active part in their own learning, children are also given the opportunity to reflect on their experiences. What did they learn? What did they like and what did they find challenging? We have made some suggestions for ending discussions to close each activity. As well as helping the children's learning, these discussions are a fantastic way of gaining insight into learning styles and into what worked and what could possibly be changed, providing a guide for future sessions. Rounding up in this way also allows everyone to let go of the play and move into a different space, within themselves as well as physically.

TRY THIS!
To give everyone a chance to make their voice heard, sit in a circle and use a 'talking stick'. This can be any chosen stick but it empowers the holder to speak and have respect from others, who must be quiet and listen until they themselves have a turn. Magic!

We know more now about nature than ever before: how ecosystems work, how species can become extinct. This knowledge is incredibly important for the future wellbeing of the planet and its people, but if generations to come are to have the desire to put this knowledge into practice then they must feel a connection to nature, which can only be achieved through meaningful experience in the natural world. And what could be more memorable than learning joyfully through outdoor play? The fully immersed experience of being in the elements, with trusted adults and friends, is just one part of what Forest School aims to achieve.



Nature Explorers



All the activities in this chapter offer children an opportunity to encounter the natural world through new imaginative experiences, to become fully immersed in an outdoor environment.

These fun, active games get the kids using all their abilities and senses. They inspire them to investigate their surroundings and also to explore their thoughts and feelings, whether these are their own or those of different species. Sometimes this means imagining the behaviour of different animals or comparing like with like; sometimes it involves taking away one sense to open up new ways of perceiving. Blindfolded and face to face with a tree, a child will be struck by the feel of the damp moss, by the smell of the wood … all these sensory experiences helping them get to know what a tree is all about. The activities create a space for a child's own unique experience to be valid and right, and sharing those experiences with others develops trust and empathy.

From play comes real knowledge about the environment and a direct connection with nature, a sense of belonging, of wonder and of respect for life. Cherished memories form, along with an enthusiasm to return and experience more, and through this a lasting sense of stewardship for our amazing, unique natural world is born.

JOURNEY STICK

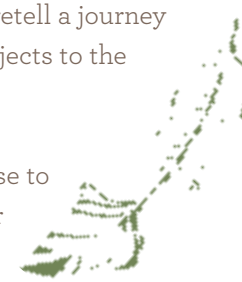
Tradition says the Aboriginal people of Australia once created journey sticks to record their travels and help them retell their stories to others. On each journey stick they would tie different objects that represented the places they visited, as well as the feelings, thoughts and experiences they had along the way.



What's magical about a journey stick is that each one is unique. There is no right or wrong way of making it. All our journeys are different, and so are the ways we remember and represent them. A leaf may be a reminder of a sunbeam breaking through the woodland canopy, warming the skin. A feather may call to mind a burst of bird song; a pebble, a feeling. An acorn may summon up the image of an old oak tree passed on the journey. Even the different colours of the rubber bands or lengths of wool used in this activity to tie on items can represent places, thoughts and feelings.

This walk activity allows children to run around and feel free, picking up whatever captures their interest. It's creative and imaginative. It focuses the attention on being truly present, on looking, hearing and feeling what's around, and what this means to them. It develops curiosity in the natural world, as well as the

communication skills and empathy needed to retell a journey and listen to the stories of others. Attaching objects to the stick also helps to develop fine motor skills.



I'm always surprised to see what children choose to tie on their journey sticks. My own son went for an old red tennis ball that a dog had chewed in half! My knee-jerk reaction was, 'Don't touch, that's dirty!' but I reminded myself that it posed no threat and that his journey stick belonged to him. The discarded ball was then transformed into an interesting, colourful object with a fuzzy texture, and stood out brightly on the stick. Discarded sweet wrappers, lost balls, bird feathers … all have their creative value!

LOCATION	**Woodland is ideal, as this offers lots of sticks, as well as great biodiversity and varied terrain, but any natural environment is suitable.**
AGE GROUP	**4 years +**
LEARNING ABOUT …	**Imagination ❁ creativity ❁ focus ❁ curiosity ❁ using fine motor skills ❁ empathy ❁ connecting with nature ❁ communication**
KIT	**→ Sticks (if fallen ones are not available on the ground)** **→ Lengths of string/wool in different colours** **→ Rubber bands in different colours**



Get ready

Have a route in mind for your walk, with a beginning and an end point. Tell everyone they're about to go on a journey that they might want to tell their friends and family about afterwards. Their journey stick will help them remember it. Then gather your journey sticks. Everyone should find and choose their own stick – one that is easy to handle and stands out for them.

Younger children may have trouble tying string, so it can be helpful to wind rubber bands round the stick to tuck things into. If you have a selection of colours, they can pick their favourites. Let older children choose handfuls of differently coloured string, as well as the bands. These can be used to attach things to the sticks and the colours may also help with remembering different experiences.

Get set

Tell the children they're going to be gathering natural objects and things that they like on their journey, to become part of their sticks. As they are walking they can think about the sounds they hear, any feelings and thoughts, the landscapes, trees and animals that catch their attention, the smells, the route they are following. The things they collect will help them remember these experiences.

Remind everyone what is OK to pick up and what is not, such as rare or poisonous plants, or dangerous items such as broken glass.

Go!

Head off on your journey! Put the first thing found at the top of the stick to represent the beginning and the last thing found near the



Each leaf, feather, seedhead or piece of coloured string on a journey stick links to a personal memory.

Every journey stick is as unique as a child's experience of that journey. Let the sticks evolve naturally and you'll be amazed by each child's creativity!

middle or bottom of the stick. This will help with retelling the story of the journey.

Endings

First take time to admire each journey stick, talking about how colourful, interesting, beautiful and unique the stick has become. Encourage each child to tell the others about their journey, using the various objects as prompts to remind them of the story. If anyone struggles, ask why they chose those things, which one is their favourite and why, and where it was found. Talk about the chosen items. Where do they come from? What do the plants or animals use them for? And what can we do to ensure these plants and animals are still around in the future?

WOODLAND MAPPING

Imagine actually living in a forest … this is your home, the place that provides you with food and shelter. You may have to find a stream for water, a bush with edible berries or a fallen tree for firewood and sticks to build a shelter. But in a wood it can be difficult to see what's around you, with leafy trees, dense bushes and uneven ground blocking the view. This fantastic game is all about really getting to know a natural place. Working as a team like ants, the children will be a search party, combing an area for what it provides and using their finds to create a map of the surroundings.

This activity provides an opportunity to teach survival skills (see pages 80–123), showing that human survival has always been linked to the land and an understanding of it, and to co-operating in a community with other people. It creates a strong bond with the environment and develops curiosity and focus, as the children collect objects and look at their potential uses. It's also a good opportunity to introduce children to the naming of plants, enhancing memory and language skills as they discuss where they found them and their possible benefits. Through pacing out the area to be mapped and visually representing it, children can also develop an understanding of distance, scale and location.

And, best of all, imagination unfolds whether the children see themselves as birds scanning for food as they soar above the trees, or as scouting ants searching the ground or as a nomadic tribe exploring a new territory for what they need.

Get ready

Set up a base camp for the time you are in the woods – this is your forest home. Everyone will be exploring the area around this home, looking for natural items that catch their attention (avoiding rare or poisonous plants) and using these things to map out on the ground exactly what can be found in the surroundings.

LOCATION	**Woodland**
AGE GROUP	**6 years +**
NUMBER OF PLAYERS	**Ideally 4 +, to cover all the directions, but this is not essential**
LEARNING ABOUT ...	**Connecting with nature ❁ curiosity ❁ focus ❁ teamwork ❁ identification skills ❁ memory ❁ language ❁ imagination ❁ distance, location and scale ❁ sustainability**
KIT	**→ Sticks (if fallen ones are not available on the ground)** **→ Pencils/pens and small sticky notes (for younger children, optional)**



Get set

All members of the team need to find a stick that's as long as their arm and another that's roughly half this size. Arrange the long sticks on the ground like the spokes of a wheel, and then put the shorter sticks around the outside to create the edge of the wheel.

Once the wheel is made, stand in front of your small stick. Behind you on the ground should be a triangle formed by two long sticks and one short one. This triangle is where you will place five things that you find as you walk forward for around 50m (165ft) (less if space is limited or with younger children).

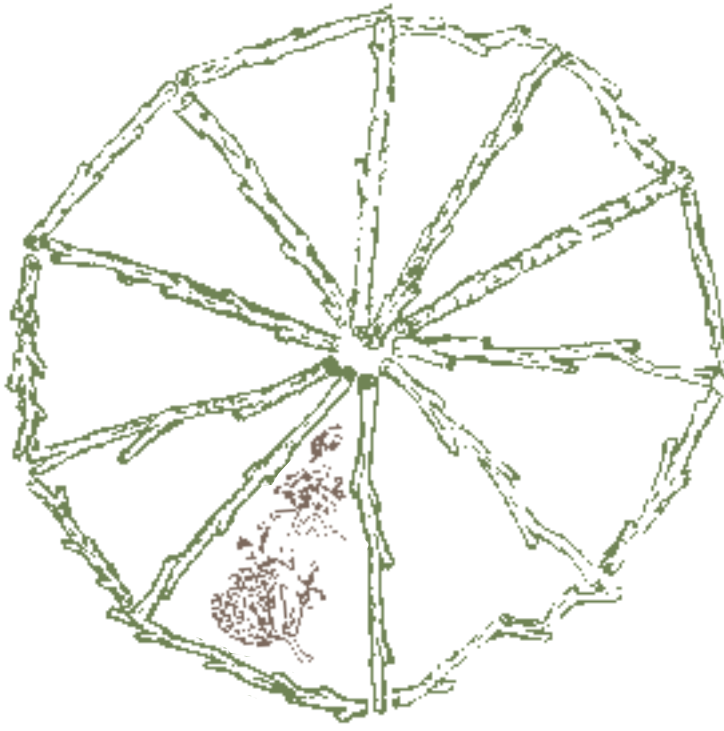
Go!

Walk forward in a straight line for about 10m (33ft) – try measuring this in paces – and stop. Pick up something you can see, perhaps a leaf, a stick, a rock, a nutshell or a pine cone. Now walk straight onward for another 10m (33ft) and repeat. Continue until you have walked 50m (165ft) and collected five things. Remember their order. If you spot water, remember which item was closest to it.

Once you have collected your five objects, walk back to the stick wheel. Place the first thing you found closest to the centre of the wheel, then the second a bit further out and so on until you put the fifth object near the outer short stick. If you saw water, draw a wiggly snake line in the soil next to whatever you collected near it. You now have a fantastic map showing

TRY THIS!
Use small sticky notes to number the objects if younger children find it difficult to remember the order of their finds.





the position of the plants, rocks, water and other natural things in a 50m (165ft) circle around the camp!

Endings

Now that you have completed the map, ask the children how they think it can be used. Discuss the objects they found – what uses do they have in nature? How they might benefit humans and other animals? Does anyone have a favourite object? Why? You could also talk about what we humans need to survive in a forest. What materials do we require to build a shelter, for example? (For ideas about shelters, see pages 91–101.) What plants are safe for us to eat? (For more on wild food, see pages 114–23.) Finally, you could talk together about how a forest can be managed in a sustainable way, for example by not overlogging and by controlling invasive non-native species, such as rhododendron in native British woodlands.

ACORN HIDE-AND-SEEK

Have you ever wondered why a squirrel's cheeks are full when it's digging up the ground? It's probably hiding acorns! Like some other woodland animals, including chipmunks and jays, squirrels collect food in autumn to eat in the winter months when supplies are scarce. Wary of onlookers who may steal their stash, they roam far and wide to bury their hoards in lots of different places. As they do, they have even been known to fool potential thieves by turning their backs on these spies and making dummy caches, containing no acorns at all. When the squirrels return months later to find their food hoards, they rely on their memory and keen senses, smelling these buried treasures underground!





Who can survive as a squirrel? Let's find out!

This physically active game is also about using memory, focus and self-control to achieve a specific goal – finding the hidden acorns. It's a fun activity that raises self-esteem, teaching players that persistence brings success, and a great opportunity to explore and connect with nature. And as the children take on the role of a squirrel, the world of animal make-believe comes to life!

Get ready



Imagine yourselves as squirrels in autumn, gathering acorns and hiding them so you can dig them up and eat them in the winter months when there's not much food around. Think about choosing a good hiding place that other squirrels and anything else interested in your hoard (such as birds) won't find.

LOCATION	**Any woodland or park where there are squirrels and acorns in autumn is ideal. If you can't find any acorns, you could use hazelnuts or beech mast instead.**
AGE GROUP	**3 years +**
LEARNING ABOUT ...	**Focus ❁ self-control ❁ memory ❁ self-esteem ❁ being active ❁ imagination ❁ forest ecology**
KIT	**A small bag or container for each child (for collecting acorns)**

With this in mind each squirrel finds an oak tree and collects five to ten acorns from the forest floor beneath it, putting them in the bag or container. For the younger ones five acorns will do.

Get set

Now you have your acorns, look around and find a good place to hide them. Make sure that no one else sees where you stash them. A good hiding spot might be behind or under a rock, buried next to a puddle, in a tree hole or near a fallen log. Remember these and other details of the surroundings – whatever will help you find your hiding place again.

Once this is done, everyone goes for a walk in the surrounding area. (To limit potential frustration, keep the walk short for younger children.) Then it's time to head back to where those tasty acorns were hidden.

Go!

Now find your acorns! Are they still there? Can the squirrels discover them all?

TRY THIS!
To bury acorns, use a stick to dig a small, shallow hole, put them in and cover them with earth or fallen leaves.

Offer hints and praise, particularly if anyone is struggling, but let the squirrels find their stash themselves.



Endings

Ask the children to describe how it felt to be a squirrel. What skills do they think a squirrel needs to survive? Why did they choose their particular hiding places? Was it easy to find their acorns again? What helped them to find them? What did they find difficult and why?

Explain that squirrels can recognize each other, as well as food, by smell. Tell them about other foods that squirrels like to eat, such as hazelnuts, beech mast, tree bark, fungi, buds, leaves and flowers. Older children may be intrigued to learn that squirrels sometimes raid birds' nests for their eggs and young. (See page 28 for more information about squirrels and oak trees.)

Acorns have even been consumed by humans! During World War II, when food was in short supply, people drank a coffee substitute made from processed acorns, which were just as easy to gather then as they are now. (Just in case anyone is thinking of trying to eat an acorn, it might be an idea to point out that the nuts taste very bitter, so it's best not to eat them raw!)





SCAVENGER HUNT

Children have a natural urge to explore. A scavenger hunt is a fun, structured way of focusing this curiosity on all the shapes, sounds, plants, animals and other elements of their surroundings, opening the door to identification and deepening their bond with the landscape around them. This activity creates a sense of knowing, of familiarity, which in turn leads to a feeling of belonging, of being at home in the natural world.

By making connections between what is sought and what is found, children learn how one thing relates to another and hone the use of their senses. This can lay the building blocks for recognizing themes in other areas, such as reading and mathematics, helping children to sort, process and use information in a variety of settings. They also learn to make connections between their inner experiences and the external world. And all this through play!

Get ready

Coming up with ideas for a scavenger hunt is easy: just think of outdoor objects that are common in your chosen area. (Obviously, avoid anything rare or poisonous!) You can also include experiences – for example, hearing a specific sound or feeling the wind on your face. Before you play, design a clue card with 9–16 things to find (adjust the number according to the age of the children and time available). Your clues could be pictures or just words or both pictures and words – see the example on page 29, which you can photocopy and use if it works for your area. You

could cut pictures from a magazine or download them from the Internet and print them out, then mount the pieces of paper onto sturdy cards. Alternatively, draw and write your clues straight onto the cards.

To protect the clue cards, especially if you suspect it might be rainy, slot them into plastic sleeves. To allow the hunters to keep their hands free, string thread (enough to loop around the head and shoulders and allow the clues to be easily viewed) through holes in the card or through the protective sleeve.

LOCATION	**Any woodland or other natural area (such as a beach) that offers a good selection of animals, birds, plants and trees is ideal. However, with some planning you can make this game work in any environment.**
AGE GROUP	**3 years +**
LEARNING ABOUT ...	**Using the senses ❁ being active ❁ focus ❁ recognizing themes ❁ connecting with nature ❁ ecology**
KIT	**→ A scavenger clue card for each child/team** **→ Clear plastic sleeves to protect clue cards (optional – depends on weather/terrain)** **→ String for wearing the cards around the neck (optional)** **→ Pencils**

Get set

Check in with all the hunters to make sure they understand the clues. You can make the hunt more challenging for older kids by adding a time limit, but keep any targets achievable so the children stay interested and don't get frustrated. Bigger groups can, if they wish, be divided into teams but bear in mind that some kids may prefer to hunt alone.



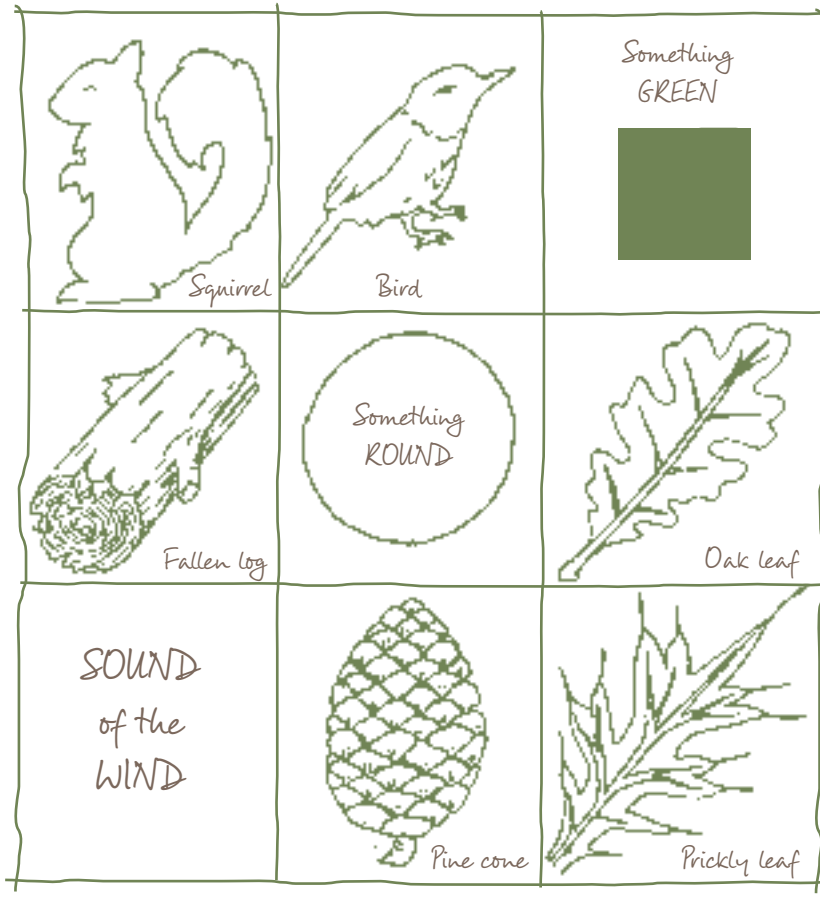
Go!

Off the hunters go! Get them to put crosses through the clues as they find them. Don't be afraid to join in as a helper to liven things up and provide encouragement and hints. For example, you could ask, 'Was that a squirrel up there?' or 'Where do you think you might find an acorn?'. But always let the kids take the initiative and do the hunting themselves!

Endings

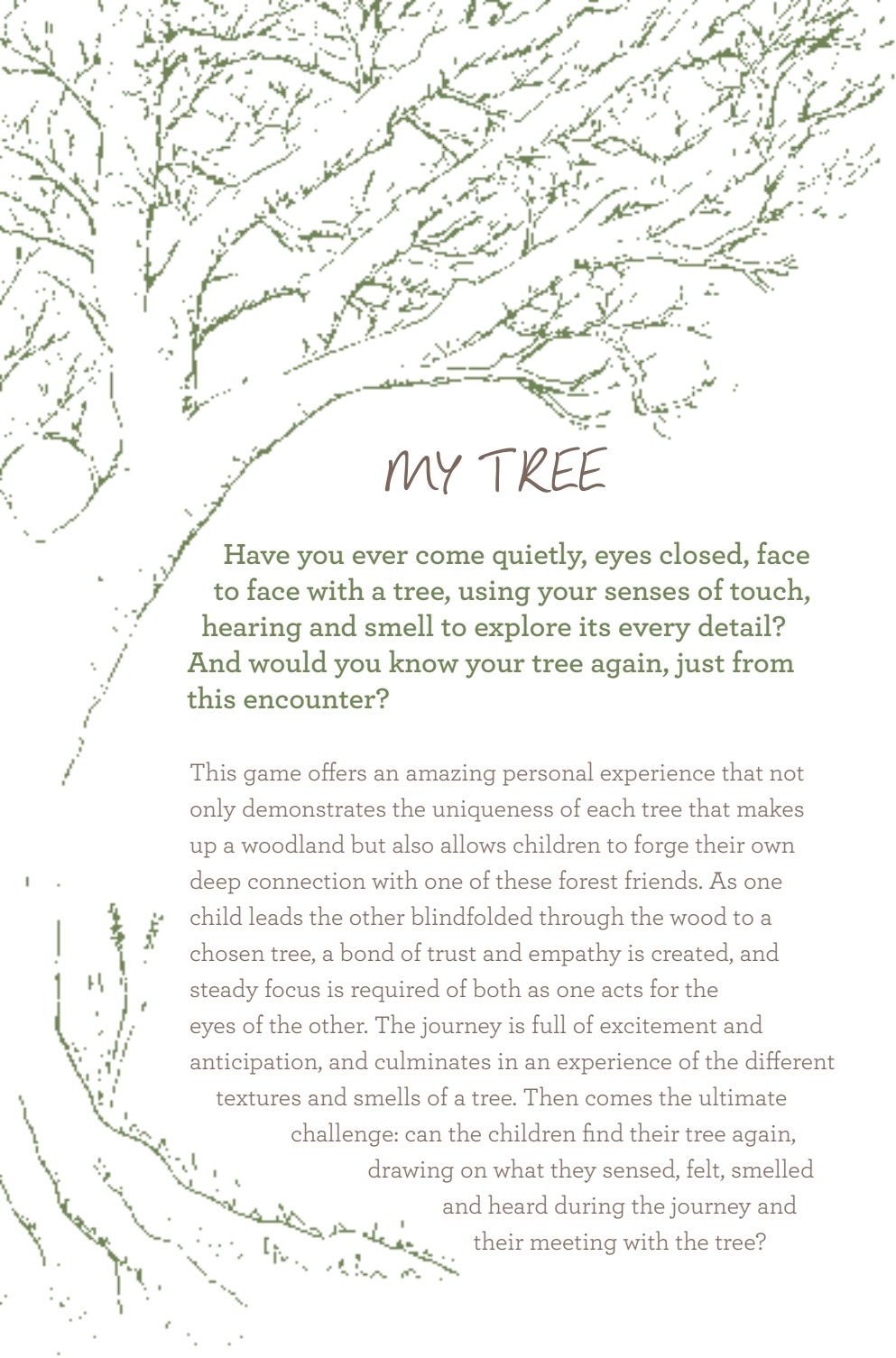
When you have finished, talk through the hunt with the children. What was the hardest thing to find? What was each child's favourite? Was there anything they couldn't track down and why? How did hunting and finding the items make them feel? You can provide some interesting facts about the clues to add to the enthusiasm and enhance the children's connection with nature. Here are a few to get you started:

- English oaks live on average for 500 years, but there's an oak in Bulgaria that's 1,700 years old.
- Grey squirrels can jump 3m (10ft) from one tree to the next. (For more information on squirrels and acorns, see page 25.)



- Prickly leaves can protect plants from some grazing animals.
- A decaying log is a home for many insects, mosses, lichens and fungi, which in turn can provide food for other species such as birds, who love to eat insects.

Allow the children to fully express their thoughts and continue the discussion until it runs its natural course.



MY TREE

Have you ever come quietly, eyes closed, face to face with a tree, using your senses of touch, hearing and smell to explore its every detail? And would you know your tree again, just from this encounter?

This game offers an amazing personal experience that not only demonstrates the uniqueness of each tree that makes up a woodland but also allows children to forge their own deep connection with one of these forest friends. As one child leads the other blindfolded through the wood to a chosen tree, a bond of trust and empathy is created, and steady focus is required of both as one acts for the eyes of the other. The journey is full of excitement and anticipation, and culminates in an experience of the different textures and smells of a tree. Then comes the ultimate challenge: can the children find their tree again, drawing on what they sensed, felt, smelled and heard during the journey and their meeting with the tree?

For us, the highlights are watching the guide giggle and jump around as their partner tries to find their tree, the children's delight in their achievement when it's located and their wonder at seeing the forest in a new light. Unforgettable!

Get ready

Choose an area that is as free as possible from low-lying branches, prickly bushes, trip hazards and so on. Before you start, decide how far the children will walk through woodland. A distance of about 20m (65ft) is about right for younger players, but older children can try going further.

LOCATION	**Trees are the key ingredient! Broadleaf woodland with a variety of tree species is best, but other areas with a good number and variety of trees, such as parks and fields, are also suitable.**
AGE GROUP	**4 years +**
NUMBER OF PLAYERS	**2 + (ideally an even number to make up pairs)**
LEARNING ABOUT ...	**Being active ❁ using the senses ❁ deduction ❁ focus ❁ self-reliance ❁ connecting with nature ❁ significant personal experience ❁ empathy ❁ teamwork ❁ forest habitat**
KIT	**A cotton scarf or other blindfold per team**



Get set

Everyone pairs up and decides who will be blindfolded first and who will act as the guide. The guide is going to choose a tree and lead their blindfolded partner to it. Everyone can play at the same time or you can all watch as each pair has a turn. Remind the guides to be kind to their blindfolded partners – they will be next!

Go!

Guides now lead their partners through the forest at a slow, steady pace, helping them to avoid all obstacles along the way. Each guide chooses a tree, one that stands out to them from all the rest, and places their blindfolded partner's hands on the trunk to start exploring it.

To help their partner really get to know the tree, a guide can ask questions such as: 'Does the bark feel smooth, rough or bumpy?', 'Does the tree feel like it's living?', 'Does it smell of anything?', 'Can you feel or smell any plants growing on it?', 'Does it seem big or small?', 'Can you find any leaves or branches?', 'Do the roots stick out above ground?'

After the tree exploration is finished, guides take their partners back to the start point, following a roundabout route to make finding the tree again a little more difficult. (To make it easier for younger children, take them back along the same route.) Once back, the children take off their blindfolds ... now let them try to find that special tree! When the tree is found, each pair swaps roles. It's now the guide's turn to be blindfolded!

TRY THIS!
If anyone finds it hard to locate their tree, help by saying 'hotter' when they get closer and 'colder' when they are moving further away!

Endings

Encourage the children to discuss their experience and think about what helped them find their tree. How did they link their sense of touch to their sense of sight? You could ask questions such as: 'Did anything you walked across help guide you back to your tree?' 'What was the most difficult part?' 'Why?' 'What feature of your tree aided you most in identifying it?' 'When you finally saw your tree, what did you notice first?' 'Did you see anything that you'd expected to be different?' Explain that our sense of smell is closely linked to memory – so did this help in locating their tree?

Identifying all the trees the guides chose will help create a sense of knowing and familiarity with these amazing forms of life. When you leave the woodland, see if you can spot similar species along the way. Talk about all the things trees give us – dry, dead branches are great for fire making; some trees produce edible nuts and fruits; trees provide shade on a hot day; wood pulp is used to make paper and timber for building. Most importantly, trees create oxygen and their leaves trap pollution, keeping our air clean; their roots also prevent soil erosion and they can reduce noise pollution. Trees also provide a home for numerous other species – beetles, mosses, birds and dormice, to name but a few. They are not only beautiful but crucial for our survival!



PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORY

This game has its lively aspect, encouraging children to dash about trying to locate the objects they've 'photographed'. But it also harnesses their energy, quietens distracting thoughts and creates space to become mindful of and interested in the natural world around them. And of course it offers them an opportunity to test out and improve their memory, too!

Each player takes on the role of a camera, fixing in their mind a picture of some natural objects that they are shown. By looking closely at the items, identifying what they are and then tracking down similar specimens in their environment, the children gain direct experience of these objects and feel a real sense of connection with them, which in turn can lead to truly valuing and caring for nature. The ability to observe similarities and differences and associate one thing with another is a skill that can be helpful in other areas, such as when learning the alphabet in the early years and later on in writing and mathematics.



And as with other challenges, completing this one helps children to develop self-reliance and confidence. We have found this game creates great camaraderie, the players laughing and yelling to each other whenever they find what they're looking for!

Get ready

Without the children seeing what you are collecting, gather five to ten common natural objects from the area, such as a rock, a pine cone, a stick, a nutshell, a blade of grass and so on (nothing rare or poisonous). For younger kids, choose five objects as this amount will be easier to remember and find, helping to prevent frustration.

Arrange the objects on one of the cloths and cover them with the other cloth. Now ask the players to imagine they are a camera. When you remove the cloth they are going to keep their eyes focused like a lens on the objects under the cloth for 30 seconds. They will then shut their eyes tight (as if pressing the shutter button!) and take a mental picture of all the things they have seen.



LOCATION	**Any natural space offering a diverse range of plants, trees, birds and animals**
AGE GROUP	**5 years +**
NUMBER OF PLAYERS	**2 + (including 1 adult)**
LEARNING ABOUT ...	**Memory ❁ making connections/categorizing ❁ focus ❁ being active ❁ connecting with the natural world ❁ teamwork**
KIT	**→ 2 cloths, big enough to display/cover 10 objects** **→ 1 small bag per player/team (or objects can just be carried)**

When the cloth
is drawn back,
the treasures the
hunters must find
are revealed …



Really focusing on natural
objects helps children begin
to identify species and so
gain a sense of belonging in
the natural world.

Get set

Whisk away the cloth so the children can get a good look at the objects. After 30 seconds cover up the objects again while the children shut their eyes to take a 'photograph'. Ask them to hold this picture in their mind.

Go!

Looking at their mental picture, the children head off to find an example of each of the objects they 'photographed', placing them in the bag if they have one. After 10–20 minutes of searching, call the players back with the things they've found so they can lay them out in front of the covered objects. Now, take out one object at a time from under the cloth, hold it up and ask if anyone found something similar.

Endings

Talk about each item – what it is and where it came from. Discuss its uniqueness, its possible uses and benefits for humans and for other species and, if relevant, its sustainable management. For example, if you have included any grasses, you can talk about how a grassland habitat could be maintained to help the species who live there survive, such as by regular cutting to prevent it turning into woodland.

If anyone wants to find something they missed, encourage them to look again. Repeating the whole game helps players to develop their memory and ability to focus.