



10 Inspiring Nature Games & Session Plans

...seasonal ideas to take your groups
outdoors

THE
OUTDOOR
TEACHER 

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Introduction



Laughing and playing with your group is essential to learning and well-being.

Almost all my outdoor sessions involve offering a nature-based game. We develop new rules to an old game and adapt them to our needs.

When we think about the flow of a session, we often start with inspiration and movement. This brings the group together, is inclusive, often higher energy and will provide a focus for the theme of the day. Games build community, social skills, listening, observation, excitement, discussion and create a shared responsibility for the process and possible outcomes!

The best games foster a cooperative quality that demands the involvement and attributes of all the players. This does not mean that we lose the energy to strive for improvement, but that we value the others contribution to our success. Your role is key in setting the tone and enthusiasm of these activities. There are no mistakes only opportunities to be curious and learn as we go.

In this guide, I have offered 5 introductory games that you can adapt to different spaces and ages. Each of these have been followed by a step-by-step session plan with animal, bird, plant or tree themes.

My intention was to extend the opportunity to explore, by encouraging you all to perhaps leave the school grounds and discover a park or wilder area in your surroundings. However, these sessions can be adapted to deliver in more urban settings, but as always this would require a little more preparation and creativity (for example tracking, may involve you creating sign/tracks for your group to follow using stencils or photos).

Teachers and practitioners all over the world are taking their practice outdoors. Start small. You already have the competence and ability to bring these experiences to your groups. There are so many ways a game or activity can support your teaching in tiny concrete playgrounds, fields, parks, the beach and woods.

Having fun together, re-finding your playfulness is a worthwhile undertaking!

Go play a game!

Martha Robb

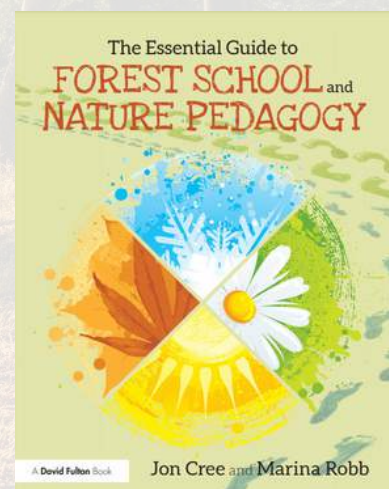
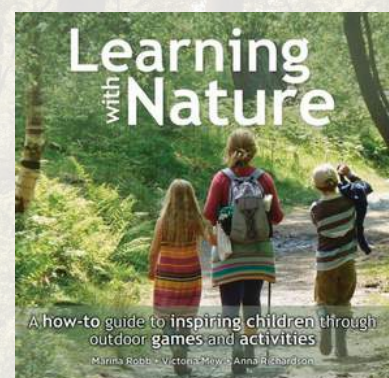
Hi, my name is Marina Robb



I'm an educator with more than 30 years of experience in outdoor learning, and co author 'The Essential Guide to Forest School and Nature Pedagogy' and 'Learning with Nature'.

I'm also a leading Forest School endorsed trainer and practitioner (both UK and International) on a mission to transform education and health through nature.

In this 'how to guide,' I'm going to share 10 ideas that can be adapted and played, in local and wilder places!



So, without further ado:



1 **Game: Name Game with Animal Forms**

Stand in a circle. Use “magnetic feet” to get everyone in the circle by imagining there are magnets or glue on each person’s feet sticking them to the next person. This should get you into a circle! Then stand normally.

Each person is invited to share their name and an animal beginning with the same sound as the start of their name, e.g. Monkey Marina or Marina the Millipede are both using the same sound for the first letter.

Each person in turn says their name and what animal they are (they might need some help) and then they act out the movement of the animal. The rest of the group then says the name and mirrors back the movement. A great group warm up and stretch in the morning.



2 Session: Tracking the Big (British) 5



Differentiation:

Level of detail and size of area can be tailored to fit group.
If younger, use photos and pre-cut tracks or sheets to tick!

Learning Outcomes:

- Learn about 5 common British animals – homes, food, habits and signs
- Practice recording findings on a map
- Experience working as small team

Age Group

Key Stage 2 upwards

Duration

1 hour +

Aims:

- Connect with an area through tracking and applying observation and awareness of your surroundings.
- Bond as a group

Location suggestions:

Well defined area with good access and paths and diverse habitats. Large enough for groups to separate in different directions

Resources/ Preparation

- Site check the area in advance to define boundaries and rough sense of routes.
- Tracking kits for each group (collecting pots, tape measure, map/ paper, pencil, tweezers, magnifying glass, camera), field guides/Track charts (Field Studies Council), water and snacks, large master map on flip chart.

Timings:	Activity Details:
5 Minutes:	Introduce the concept of the Big 5 in Africa – the most difficult animals to hunt on foot. The ones that everyone wants to see on Safari. (Lion, Elephant, Rhino, buffalo, and leopard) If we had a big 5, what would they be? My British big 5 suggestion would be Deer, Fox, Badger, Squirrel, and Rabbit as the most widespread and easiest to track. We're going to go on a tracking mission to look for signs of the Big 5, and then come together to make a map of our findings.
10 Minutes:	Divide into small groups, ideally not more than 6 per adult. Define area and boundaries. Suggest defining roles within group – eg. mapper/ recorder, forward detective/scout, listener, side detective/scout. Eg group carries tracking kit – camera, collecting pots, paper/map of area, track charts/ guides, tape measure, compass, magnifier, tweezers.
20 - 60 Minutes:	Each group to go off in set direction and look for signs of the big 5 (and any other interesting finds). Record them in way appropriate to abilities of group and make map. Each group try to find signs of all 5 (Eg. homes, hair, scat, footprints, feeding signs, trails) Off we go! Facilitator facilitates according to ages and abilities.
10 Minutes:	Return – Time for snack, drink, rest, look at field guides...
20 Minutes:	Feedback – Each group tells brief story of what they found and marks on a large map. As a group – discuss what we learned about the animals – where they live, where they look for food and what this is, where they spend day and night, where they find water, the routes they use... Can we learn anything by looking at the big picture on the master map?



3 Game: Eagle Eyes

Sneaking & Hiding game. One person is the eagle in the nest (you can get the kids to build a nest with branches and twigs around you) or use a bush or tree.

Everyone else is a predator trying to sneak in to steal an egg from the eagle's nest without getting seen.

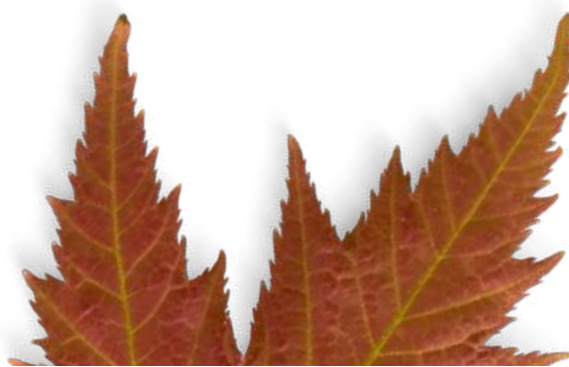


The eagle closes their eyes - saying 'eagle eyes are closing' - everyone else runs out towards the boundary of the FS site/area where game is being played (it's good to set the boundary) and hides.

Players must always keep 1 eye on the eagle, they can't just hide. The eagle opens their eyes and tries to spot the prey, without moving off their nest. Repeat this - eagle eyes close again for 15 - 10 - 5 counts, whatever the eagle chooses, and they try to hide closer to the eagle each round.

Pick a few rounds, so the prey aim to get to the nest by round 4. The idea is to get as close as possible without being seen and they must move each round!

With younger children, let the adult be the Eagle and simple don't 'spot' them so that you can give them the experience of being alone and hidden in nature.



4 Session: Bird Observation Hunt



Differentiation:

Level of detail and size of area can be tailored to fit group.
Use camera or sound recorder in each group to try to get picture or record song of bird.

Learning Outcomes:

- Learn about 4 local birds – ID, habitat, behaviour, song/call, and food
- Work as team towards a shared goal.
- Deliver information in a multi-sensory way to others

Age Group

Key Stage 1, 2 upwards

Duration

Upto 90 Minutes

Aims:

- Connect with an area through searching for and observing a bird and applying observation and awareness.
- Bond as a group

Location suggestions:

Well defined area with good access and paths and diverse habitats. Large enough for groups to separate in different directions

Resources/ Preparation

- Search area in advance to define boundaries and what birds may be present. Keep it simple to common birds e.g. great tit, house sparrow, robin etc. RSPB have great resources.
- I have some books that have the picture and corresponding sound of the birds!.

Timings:

Activity Details:

10 Minutes:

Introduce the concept Bird language and that observing/ listening to birds can give us useful survival information. Tell Bird language story.

20 Minutes:

Have bag containing folded bits of paper each with name of a bird present within the woodland (Eg. blackbird, robin, wren, blue tit, chaffinch, great tit, tree creeper, nuthatch, greater spotted woodpecker, wood pigeon). You could create photos of the birds if supportive.

Divide into 4 groups, a person from each group picks a bird. The group research what it looks like, what it eats and where it might be found (habitat) from field guides and instructors.

20 Minutes:

Present the mission of finding and observing the bird, hearing its song or call and noting its alarm behaviour. Can you draw the shape of the sounds you hear? How many sounds did you hear and in what direction? The groups could compare notes.
Groups go off, with practitioner.

20 Minutes:

Return to camp Each group prepares a short skit to tell the story of their adventure

20 Minutes:

Come together and share findings and learnings.

What can we learn – draw out reasons for the birds colouring, size and shape and behaviour. Also, what kind of things each bird can tell us about.



5 Game: Sleeping Fawn



The fawn protects itself when its mother is away feeding by being completely still and emits no scent so predators can't detect them. They go so deeply asleep you could make noise right by them and they won't move a muscle. They are often curled up in long grass and you can easily stumble across one as they are so still.

One person is a wolf or fox, and all the children are baby deer, or fawns. They curl up on the grass or ground and the predator crawls around them trying to make them laugh or move but you can't touch them. Let's settle down and be very quiet as we sleep.

If the fawn giggles, moves or opens their eyes they are caught. The caught fawns can become predators too. It's a great way to help children remain still.



6 Session: Wolves in the Long Grass



Differentiation:

Teach fox walk/ owl eyes beforehand or afterwards.
Vary the terrain and distance stalked

Learning Outcomes:

- Understand stalking skills needed to approach animals.
- Develop quietness and awareness

Age Group
Younger Children

Duration
40 Minutes

Aims:

- Engage and enliven group.
- Get into bodies/ senses.

Location suggestions:

Clear playing area – a field.

Resources/ Preparation

- Define start line for wolves and deer grazing ground

Timings:	Activity Details:
5 Minutes:	Set scene by describing how Wolves hunt deer in the long grass. Mention how the deer can detect movement, but when still, the wolves are hidden. They move slowly, stealthily as they approach. Introduce rules and boundaries: Define boundary clearly.
5 Minutes:	Choose 1 deer per 6 – 12 wolves, set them at one end of the playing area. Tell them to browse and look up/ round at lions occasionally. (Useful if this is adult, at least at first) Take wolves to start line at other end of playing area. Monitor and be the 'judge' of disputed calls.
20 Minutes:	Play, and swap deer occasionally. Try to encourage quiet stalking, rather than running up.
10 Minutes:	Brief feedback on what it was like to be a deer, what did the wolves learn.



7 Game: Fire in the Forest

Mark out the boundaries with backpacks or ropes, kids can't run outside the boundaries, or they are caught.

There are 2-3 wolves (high energy kids who are good runners) and the rest are the creatures of the forest.

The players form a line at one end and the group picks three animals e.g., 3 insects, 3 mammals, 3 fish, 3 birds.

Each player quietly picks one of the three and keeps it secret.

For example, if it were insects they might come up with spider, fly & beetle.

The adult calls out one of the species and the players need to run across to the other side. If you get caught you become a 'Tree', with your arms out and you can catch the players with your arms, but you can't move your feet.

If they call out "Fire in the Forest" all the creatures must run from one end to the other. The object of the game is to catch all the creatures.

You can get more sophisticated with different animals.





8 Session: The Silver Birch – Tea and tinder

Differentiation:

Combine with gathering walk or other activities.

Learning Outcomes:

- Learn how to make birch tea and tinder from silver birch.
- Learn ID and properties of Silver birch.

Age Group

Key stage 2 & Upwards

Duration

120 Minutes

Aims:

- Connect with birch trees in hands on way.
- Value and appreciate this tree.

Location suggestions:

Stand of birch trees or other tree species

Resources/ Preparation

- Gathering bags, kettle, trivet, cups, chopping board, knife, other tinder materials, fire steels.
- Fire safety equipment.

Timings:	Activity Details:
5 Minutes:	Introduce concept trees and their many uses. Play build a tree!
5 Minutes:	Introduce the birch tree – key features, properties and uses.
20 Minutes:	In partners, walk to area of birch trees. Spend time observing the tree Encourage to look at bark colour and pattern, needle size and clustering, branching pattern overall size and shape, habitat, etc. In partners close your eyes and feel the tree with your hands – does it have a particular smell or temperature? What kind of person would the plant be like?
10 Minutes:	Feed back from this activity
10 Minutes:	Demonstrate how to gather bark for tinder and leaves for tea. Spend time gathering a little of each so we enough of both.
30 Minutes:	Return to main site. Facilitate group in pairs to prepare a tinder bundle using the birch tinder and Light using fire-steels. Use to light main fire and boil kettle of water. Make birch tea – pour and let steep for 10 mins. In meantime, look at examples of birch bark pots, crafts etc. Drink tea and feedback

9 Game: You're Only Safe If...



Game for use with all ages, pre-school and up, good as an ice breaker, for keeping warm, rising the energy.

One person is ON – they say “you’re only safe if you’re...”

- Touching a beech tree
- Standing elbow to elbow
- Touching something green
- Something man-made
- If you’re feet aren’t touching the ground
- If you are in groups of 4

The person who is ON tries to catch people before they complete the task. Those caught join the person who is ON and join in to come up with prompts.

Can be used to for plant ID, textures/ patterns/ colours/ numbers etc.



10

Session: Plant Sensing Game



Differentiation:

Choose easier objects (eg. pinecones) or harder ones (nondescript leaves) according to abilities.

In pairs - Each person can go and gather 3 objects/ leaves and hand to blindfolded partner - can they tell what they are?

Age Group

Any Age

Duration

45 Minutes

Learning Outcomes:

- Get to know a number of plants of the area through the senses.
- Be able to ID plants more carefully.

Aims:

- Build multi-sensory search images for plants.
- Utilize all your senses

Location suggestions:

Sitting area

Resources/ Preparation

- Gather a different leaf or plant part for each person.
- Blindfolds for all group.

Timings:	Activity Details:
5 Minutes:	Set scene - With minimal explanation, sit group down and invite them to be blindfolded, or close their eyes.
30 Minutes:	Give them each a leaf or other plant part. Get them to feel it and smell it. Gather leaves back and place randomly on ground in circle. Remove blindfolds - can they find own leaf? Repeat once or twice.
10 Minutes:	Feedback - go round group and discuss how easy/ difficult it was, the kinds of things they noticed etc.

SESSION RISK ASSESSMENTS



You are responsible to carry out your own Risk (Benefit) Assessments for all the games and session ideas – we have given you some key areas to consider.

RF = Risk Factor

LK = Likelihood

SV = Severity

L = Low

M = Medium

H = High

Session 1:

Activity	Define hazard				Hazard severity	Action
Tracking the Big 5	Getting lost/ moving outside boundaries, accident on walk	L	H	M	Medium	Define area allowed to be in. Each sub-group to stay together and with an instructor. Facilitators to carry first aid kit, mobile phones/ and OS map. Each group to arrive back at allotted time. Facilitators aware of emergency procedures and plan.
	Ticks – Lyme disease	M	H	M	High	Run through tick checking routines and removal procedures. Have tick removers available. Avoid high risk areas and times of year – know the signs (red bullet marking on skin – seek anti-biotics).
	Bacterial hazards from collecting sample	L	H	M	Medium	Avoid handling or collecting scat or droppings Wash hands before eating

Session 2:

Activity	Define hazard				Hazard severity	Action
Bird Observation Hunt	Getting lost/ moving outside boundaries, accident on walk	L	H	M	Medium	Define area allowed to be in. Each sub-group to stay together and with an adult. Facilitators to carry first aid kit, mobile phones and OS map. Each group to arrive back at allotted time. Facilitators aware of emergency procedures and plan.
Wolves in the Long Grass	Tripping on sticks /dips underfoot	M	L	M	Medium	Emphasise moving with stealth and care. Choose clear area
	Getting lost/ moving outside boundaries	L	M	M	Medium	Clearly define our boundaries for game
	Conflicts between wolves and deer	M	L	M	Medium-Low	Ensure rules are clearly defined and appoint adult judge
	Contact with litter, dog poo, barbed wire etc.	M	M	M	Medium	Do safety sweep of area, either cordon off or bring awareness to any hazards

SESSION RISK ASSESSMENTS



Session 4:

Activity	Define hazard				Hazard severity	Action
Birch Tea	Getting lost/ moving outside boundaries	L	M	M	Medium	Define area and stay together as group
	Gathering poisonous plants	L	M	M	Medium	Check for poisonous plants within locality. Point out if appropriate. Sort and check harvested plants. All plants go through the adult before ANY ingestion.
	Burns from fire, kettle or whilst pouring hot liquid	L	H	M	Medium	Adult to handle kettle. Kettle securely supported over fire. Fire and kettle always supervised. Fire gloves for handling kettle. Pour tea and allow to cool before serving. Fresh water bucket nearby for burns.
Lighting Tinder Sticks	Burns from fire making	L	M	M	Medium	Give safe working area between groups. Demonstrate safe use and handling of tinder bundles. Monitor group, especially when blowing tinder bundles into flame. Awareness of tying back hair and loose clothing. All fires leave no trace policy.

Session 5:

Activity	Define hazard				Hazard severity	Action
Plant Sensing Game	Gathering poisonous plants	L	M	M	Medium	Check that the plants gathered are not poisonous. All plants go through the adult before ANY ingestion. Wash hands before eating.
	Misidentification due to poisonous lookalikes	M	H	H	Medium	Using plants that are included in the 'safe food plants' category e.g hawthorn, nettles, elder, onions, lemons, sweet chestnut, daisy, dandelion, plantain, blackberry.
	Individual sensitivity to plants	L	H	H	Medium	Check with parents and students prior to activity about allergies
	Hazard to flora and fauna: Over harvesting threatening plant life, food supply of animals (including birds and insects)	L	H	H	Medium	Only use abundant species. Use caretaking approach e.g scatter the seeds of plants to encourage regeneration. Forage in more abundant areas and bring to site in certain cases. Consider local wildlife and take measures to protect their well being.



Next Steps

Thank you for taking the time
to read this document

For further insights into the
work we do and the methods
we teach, check out our
[website](#), or follow us on Social
Media by clicking the icons
below.

If you're looking for more help
with engaging children through
play, then see the next pages
for information on our 'Nature
Awareness Games' online
course.

Until next time,

Marina & The Outdoor
Teacher Team

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Lessons include making animal tracks, deer ears, fox walking, bat and moth, nursery animal sounds and lots more.



Help the children to become aware of the nature around them by getting them to walk silently like a fox or to cup their hands around their ears to be able to listen like the deer.

Encourage them to use all their senses through play to be alert for predators or prey.

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I've consolidated my comprehensive tool kit of tried and tested outdoor learning activities together with up to date health and safety information.

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- ✓ Plan and organise engaging and age-appropriate outdoor sessions
 - ✓ Plan activities according to your available space
 - ✓ Adhere to health and safety requirements
- ✓ Get the insurance you need to take groups outdoors

"These courses and videos have been a huge support and have helped refresh our teachers to ensure our pupils get first class provision."

George Hounsell
Director of Primary Sport & Community,
The Marches Academy Trust

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