



Forest School Wild Play





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Outdoor Fun with Nature's Elements
Earth, Air, Fire & Water

Jane Worroll - *Illustrated by Peter Houghton*



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1893

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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

It was once believed that all creation, including ourselves, was formed from the four elements: earth, air, fire and water. For everyone at Forest School, these four elements are tangibly all around us in the earth underfoot, the patter of rain on a shelter, the warmth of campfire flames and the wind on our faces. In our outdoor activities we can connect with the elements by mixing natural dyes in water (page 138), gathering wood for a Dakota fire pit (page 99), moulding clay dug from the earth (page 22) and blowing air through handmade wooden whistles (page 71).

The four elements have been embedded in the human psyche for thousands of years and became deeply rooted in many cultures around the world, including those of ancient Greece, India and Tibet. The elements have formed the basis of ancient calendars, medicine, astrology and myths, and lie at the foundations of many spiritual traditions. Modern science, of course, does not support the view that these classical elements are the material basis of the physical world. Science did, however, grow in its understanding from this fundamental four.

The elements do not exist in isolation, but are influenced by and connected to one another and ourselves. We have come to realize globally how our actions can damage the earth, the oceans and the air. Equally, we understand how we can harness the power of the sun and wind to generate cleaner energy - and how we can all

contribute to maintaining a healthy planet for all species to share and benefit from.

With so much negative news around about the result of our human impact on the planet, during our Forest School sessions, we feel it is truly empowering and beneficial to share knowledge and skills with children about how they can make a positive difference to this world through even the smallest of actions. We aim to share some of these ideas throughout this book, which has a core message of sustainability and focuses on the amazing web of life.

In each chapter, activities link to one of the four elements and there is a special focus on storytelling and imagination, helping kids to form an emotional and moral connection to the natural world and build a sense of belonging and community. We believe it's through developing a connection, an awareness and an understanding of our common bond to the natural world that our actions can become more harmonious and empathetic for all creatures. And what better way to bond with the natural world than to spend amazing fun days immersed within it, as we do at Forest School.

WHY NATURE?

If you're an adult, you can probably remember spending many hours each week playing outdoors as a child, heading off first thing after breakfast and not coming back home until tea time. There wouldn't be a grown-up in sight while you explored woodlands, building sites and parks, playing games with friends in the street, climbing trees, testing boundaries and taking risks all for the sheer fun of it.



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Many of us now live in societies where, compared to those of previous generations, people spend more and more time indoors, and where parents unfortunately feel deterred from allowing their children to play outside. This is, in part, due to the ever-increasing loss of green space, particularly in urban environments. There is also a greater fear of strangers, traffic and accidents, and a lack of time due to our busy, overscheduled lives – along with ubiquitous technology designed to constantly pull our attention, especially that of children.



While technology has its valid place, it's the imbalance of its use in many of our children's lives that is the issue. One study found that children today spend twice as long looking at screens than playing outside, and more than half of this time for some will be solitary screen-based activities without their family or friends, often continuing late into the night. Not only has this sort of sedentary lifestyle contributed to the obesity epidemic for adults and children in the developed world, but many scientists believe our brains are simply not designed for this complex 24/7 world, with its constant bombardment of information. There has been, sadly, a stark rise in children and teenagers suffering from mental health disorders. Whilst more research is needed, negative social media use and lack of sleep have been cited as contributing factors, alongside another key change: the increasing amount of time we spend indoors.



As most of us will know, research shows that physical activity has a positive effect in keeping us healthy. If this physical activity takes place outside in a natural setting, there are further benefits: sunlight and soil microorganisms can boost the body's levels of serotonin, a

chemical linked to feelings of wellbeing, while vitamin D, essential for bone and muscle health, is also provided by the sun's rays. More recently, however, studies have concluded that there's something about simply being in nature that has a beneficial effect on reducing stress and mental fatigue, and increasing our attention capacity, critical thinking and resilience. It also promotes self-motivation and the ability to connect with other people and nature itself, leading to improved feelings of wellbeing, creativity and environmental stewardship. These are all skills that are vitally important for kids to thrive in the 21st century, and indeed are key to sustaining a healthy future for us all on this magnificent planet, our home.



Forest School always takes place in a natural setting and as such has the potential to provide participants with an opportunity to spend time in nature with all the resulting benefits – particularly for those who may often feel estranged from the natural world.

WHAT IS FOREST SCHOOL?

Forest School is defined by the Forest School Association as “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”. Forest School sessions are now offered in a huge range of settings – from city parks, private land and rural forests to beaches and indeed jungles. These sessions are organized by many different providers, including mainstream schools, specialist outdoor kindergartens, private businesses running term-time, holiday and after-school clubs, and agencies countering addiction, health issues





and social exclusion. However, they all have this in common: they take place in a natural environment where a qualified leader aims to provide a nurturing space that supports every learners' wellbeing.

Through close observation of each individual child's learning process and the innate way that child interacts with the world and mentoring, a Forest School leader can provide opportunities for different experiences that can help each child to learn more effectively. These experiences can also foster traits such as resilience, independence, confidence and emotional intelligence that will support the learner throughout their lives. Within this framework the participants are given ownership over their journey to follow their interests and cultivate their learning at their own pace. To fully embed learning and develop a sense of community and a greater sense of connection with nature, Forest School sessions have a high adult-to-child (or participant) ratio and take place with the same group on a regular, long-term basis.

We use a variety of locations for our own Forest School sessions and repeated visits make each of these sites familiar to our groups. This helps children feel a sense of belonging and gain confidence by allowing them to get to know each other and the boundaries (both physical and behavioural), as well as where their basic needs can be met - where they will eat and where they can shelter (in dens or under tarps, for example), and the location of the toilets and hand-washing facilities. From this basis, interests can be freely followed and deeper learning of practised skills explored and mastered. Unlike tightly regulated and confined school classrooms, the open surroundings of Forest School sites allow children greater personal control over social interactions, as there is freedom for

all to move around and consciously choose the space they occupy, which helps relationships build in a more relaxed atmosphere. The opportunity and freedom to make their own independent choices within play also gives children the space to be themselves.

In developing a sense of community, the leader will facilitate effective communication, collaboration, empathy and teamwork. Forest School is based on the process of learning rather than on the content of the sessions, encouraging a spontaneous engagement with nature and venturing into the world of the unplanned with all its unlimited and unexpected discoveries. This combination of factors and of actual experiences in nature are key to creating a collaborative community, building self-esteem and developing learning that lasts over time, as well as encouraging a greater sense of connection to nature and an understanding of a shared sustainable future – all of which make Forest School so effective.

THE FOREST SCHOOL SESSION

In Forest School, each session has a clear beginning and ending. Before we start, to help every child (especially anyone new) feel confident and at ease, the boundaries of the play area and the rules regarding safety and care for each other and the environment are established. We also point out where the toilets are, where food will be kept and where we can wash our hands and shelter.

In groups, it can be helpful to sit in a circle during this opening time, taking it in turns to share thoughts and feelings. This can help to gauge the children's mood and energy levels, and be used as



INTRODUCTION

an indication to look at or offer an activity that may be appropriate for children seeking particular guidance. You can either ask them directly how they feel (especially if you are looking after young children, just one child or a relatively small group) or, with larger numbers (and especially older children), you could suggest they rate their mood on a scale of one to ten. This often encourages children to share their feelings.

The same technique can be used at the end of the session, when we like to round off the day by inviting the children to share how they now feel and provide an opportunity for them to reflect on their experiences. As well as helping the children to process the day, this encourages them to play an active role in their own learning. And these discussions are a fantastic way to gain insight into what worked and what could be adjusted about each activity, providing a valuable guide for future sessions. Remember, however, that these are only invitations to share and some children may be too shy at first.



NATURE'S ELEMENTS AND FOREST SCHOOL

In this book, we offer a wide range of Forest School activities to tie in with the natural elements of earth, air, fire and water. In choosing these activities, we have been inspired by the children that we meet and what nature offers, such as digging in the earth to find clay and letting creativity run loose to mould all manner of things; listening to the low drone of a bullroarer as it's whirled through the air; building a Dakota fire pit to gather around for storytelling and to drink birch twig tea; or constructing wonderful watertight dens.

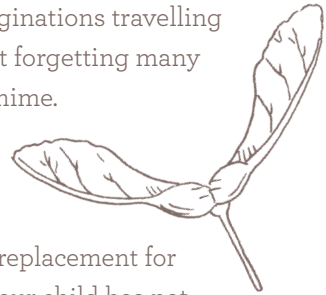


We have also supplied a story for each element to inspire a love for the ancient art of oral storytelling and to share knowledge, laugh and journey together, and to build a sense of community and an emotional connection to the natural world. Two of the stories are Jane's retellings of old myths and two are Jane's own creation. We have found that, despite these modern times with high-tech games and instant access to media, children love to listen to spoken stories – often joining in with actions, adding to them and making them their own. We have had many amazing story sessions where the atmosphere becomes focused and calm, our imaginations travelling together through the story as it unfolds – and not forgetting many hilarious moments, especially with impromptu mime.



GUIDING A SESSION

It's important to point out that this book is not a replacement for the full experience of going to Forest School (if your child has not done this already, please consider trying it out!), but it does offer a taster of some of the wonderful Forest School activities we use. We've written it for anyone who wants to spend more time outdoors with the children in their care, whether you are a parent, guardian, teacher or youth worker; we also hope it will be a handy resource for Forest School leaders. Whoever you are, the aim is to emulate a Forest School leader by being fully present, enthusiastic, encouraging, inspiring and observant. To create a safe space whereby children have the opportunity to engage with their peers, have the freedom to be themselves within play, assess risks and be creative with what nature offers. Be there to help out with an activity and demonstrate new skills when needed, but allow the learning to be led by the child.



INTRODUCTION

A Forest School leader will also reflect on how each session went for every child individually and encourage children to reflect on their own experiences, too. This information is used to shape future sessions with the aim of providing opportunities for each child to grow and develop as a whole – physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and socially. Learning outcomes (which are not an exhaustive list) are provided within this book for each activity and may be useful for planning.

Each elemental chapter offers a range of different activities – some high energy and some requiring more focused participation. The more familiar you become with the activities, the easier it will be to switch between them as needed. For example, you may have a group where not all the children know each other. It is a warm day and the energy levels are high, so a team game, such as the Screaming Game (see page 56) or Feed the Fire (see page 126), would be a fantastic ice breaker and way to start. Once some of that initial energy has been released, the children’s attention can then be turned to crafts, such as carving a log cup (see page 164) or playing with clay (see page 22).



A BRIEF GUIDE

Before you try an activity, bear the following points in mind:


- These activities are suitable for a wide age range (from pre-school children up to teens and even beyond), with a different level of adult guidance needed for different age groups. Assess the individual capabilities of each child before you start and adjust accordingly.
- For each activity we've suggested a kit list, but we also recommend you bring a first-aid kit, a bag for litter and hand-cleaning supplies if they're not available nearby.
- If an activity requires more than one child to take part, the ideal number is always stated in the activity.
- Activities can take place in all weathers (except high winds in woods), so make sure children have suitable clothes for the weather – waterproof clothing and suitable boots can make the difference between a fun day out and a miserable one!
- Make sure there are enough adults present to allow children to engage in achievable, challenging activities in a safe space.
- Demonstrate any tricky techniques at the start of each activity, then let the children attempt each step, offering positive encouragement, and only assisting if required.
- Let kids work things out for themselves if they want to. We've designed the step-by-step instructions and diagrams to be as simple and easily grasped as possible.


Play Safe

Any activity that involves foraging for wild food, tool use or fire does contain an element of risk, but by referring back to the guidelines below as you work through this book and implementing the basic safety procedures outlined, you will be more than ably equipped to avoid any potential mishaps. Above all, the activities in this book are designed to be interactive, educational, inspirational – and fun.

TOOL USE

Whether an adult is using tools alone or children are handling them under adult supervision, follow manufacturers' guidelines and the safety procedures outlined below.

The age at which children are able to use tools under adult supervision varies, so assess each child individually. If you are confident that the child is capable, allow tool use. However, close adult supervision is still required. As a general rule (apart from knife work when one-on-one is advisable), have one adult watching a maximum of four capable older kids and a higher adult-to-child ratio with younger ones for safety. 

For extra protection when using tools, a gardening glove can be worn on helper (non-working) hands (i.e. the hand stabilizing the item or both hands of children whose role is simply to hold the item), but not on the working hand (the hand holding the tool) as this can lessen 

the grip. Stress that all tools must go back to an adult when they're no longer in use, at which point they should be stored out of the way with all security catches on.



Before embarking on using any tool, demonstrate its use in full to every member of your group following the guide below:



- Tell everyone the name of the tool that they will be using and what it is used for.
- Show everyone the cover (if it has one), how to take it off and put it on or how to open and close it.
- Show them the handle and the cutting edge of the tool.
- Demonstrate how each tool works.
- Show how best to position their hands in order to use it safely and cleanly, and how to carry it safely: covered or closed at your side, with the blade pointing toward the floor, and no running!
- Explain about the safe working zone: this is a circle the diameter of the tool and the user's outstretched arms. If anyone (apart from your partner) enters this circle, the tool user should stop until the zone is empty again.

How to Use a Sheath Knife

For extra safety, it's worth going over the instructions for a sheath knife in detail. Show the knife to everyone, pointing out the blade, cover and handle. Show how, by placing one gloved hand at the tip end of the blade, you are able to pull the cover off and then clip it back on. Once off again, point to the blade's cutting edge. Explain that it is a great tool for carving wood. If possible, sit off the ground, on a stump for example, and with a gloved hand





PLAY SAFE

put the wood you are carving to one side of your body. With the knife in the other ungloved hand, carve the wood away from your body. Point out that you always carve away from your body and have no limbs underneath or hands in front of the blade. If sitting cross-legged on the floor, either carve to one side of your body or place elbows on knees and carve away from your body – again, making sure there are no limbs underneath or in front of the blade. (Use this technique with potato peelers as good practice for knife work.)

FORAGING

Being able to positively identify edible wild foods is vital as many plants are poisonous. Always take a field guide with you or use your smartphone to access pictures and information on edible plants, and choose to forage wild foods that can be easily identified. Always check if any of your group have any allergies before foraging for wild food, particularly nuts. Make sure to pick wild food away from pollution sources such as roads, dog-walking spots and sprayed farm margins.



CONSERVATION

We share this planet with many species who rely on the natural larder as their only source of food. With this in mind, think sustainably, spread your foraging over as large an area as possible, and never over-harvest or uproot any plant. Follow local regulations about what you can and cannot pick and, if necessary, check with the landowner first.



FIRE SAFETY

The following fire safety rules are applicable to all types of Forest School fire:



- Before lighting a fire, check the ground conditions: never light a fire on peaty soil (it is flammable), and remember that porous rocks can also explode. Push any flammable material away from the fire area, and douse this area with water in very dry weather. Check for and remove any trip hazards.
- Keep the fire small and usable.
- Do not burn woods that give off toxic fumes such as elder or painted timbers. (If you are unsure, do a search online before building your fire.)
- Before using the fire, tie back all long hair and secure any dangling jewellery and clothing.
- An adult must supervise lit fires at all times.
- To contain the fire site and mark out the fire boundary that should not be crossed, place a 1m (3ft) square frame of logs/branches around the fire site.
- No running, pushing or games should occur around the fire site.

FIRE SAFETY KIT

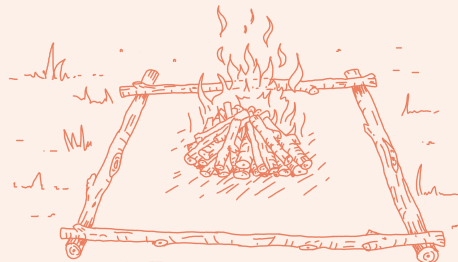
Always have the following items close by when working with fire:

- an open container of water
- a fire blanket (*for first aid and to put out fire*)
- welding gloves

(*or equivalent fire-resistant material for handling hot items*)

- first-aid box

- Only those cooking or sitting should be around the fire site. To limit accidents and increase balance and stability, have anyone cooking on or tending the fire kneel on one knee.
- Extinguish the fire properly before leaving. Let it die down and then spread the ashes out and douse with water until cool to touch. For temporary fire sites, either spread the cold ash around, bury it or take it off site so that you leave no trace.





EARTH



Earth, soil, dirt, mud ... the words used to describe this element don't tend to conjure up glorious images. It can be overlooked or even seen as a nuisance when we have to sweep it up and scrape it off our shoes. But this wonderful material is where our food is grown and where our water is stored. It is home to billions of organisms, not least the earthworms, fungi and bacteria that recycle nutrients, and provides the mycelium that connect plants, like nature's internet, allowing them to communicate with each other and providing a host of benefits to us humans too. All of which is pretty amazing for a clump of mud!

At Forest School, we decorate trees with mud faces, giving the forest a whole new character. We dig deep into its darkness to find treasures such as smooth stones ideal for painting and clay for moulding. We cast animal prints left in the wet soil and we whoosh down exhilarating slippery mud slides. The hours pass by unnoticed while we play and experiment with gooey mud and all sorts of creativity and fun are unleashed. If that still isn't enough reason to love earth, research has shown that playing with soil is good for our health.

Our planet is called Earth, a word meaning ground, the place from which all life springs. So what's not to love about earth? This chapter provides some of our favourite earth activities, so go on – get muddy!



CLAY PLAY

Clay has such a wonderful texture. When wet, it feels slightly sticky and dense. Its surface becomes shiny when rubbed, yet when pinched between fingers it feels smooth. It can be squeezed, stretched and moulded into many shapes. By making a 3D model of an object with clay, you get a chance to connect more deeply with it, what it looks like and what the real thing may feel like. If it doesn't work out, it's not a problem: just squidge it back down into a ball and start again. Then – like magic – clay becomes firm to the touch when it dries, and when it's fired in a kiln, it changes into pottery. It can be used to make many things, such as bowls, bricks, tiles and even musical instruments such as clay flutes.

This wonderful activity unleashes the imagination and clears away any doubts about getting our hands muddy. Making clay requires focus, the need to follow instructions and patience – all while learning about the properties of soil, connecting us more deeply to nature. Working with clay is one of our favourite Forest School activities, especially when it comes to sharing and admiring all the marvellous creations afterwards. What will you make?



TRY THIS!

If anyone is nervous about getting muddy hands, we have found it helps if adults get fully involved, so roll up your sleeves and dig in.

LOCATION Any natural area with mud

AGE GROUP 2 years +

LEARNING ABOUT ... ↘ Sensory experiences ↘ physics ↘ soil science
 ↘ creativity ↘ focus ↘ patience ↘ independence
 ↘ nature connections ↘ freedom ↘ tool use
 ↘ fine and gross motor skills ↘ communication

KIT

- Spade to share, or one spade each
- Water (*if digging for clay, enough to dampen the clay if it's a hot, dry day; if making clay, enough to cover half a bucketful of soil and a little extra for sieving and cleaning*)
- Tupperware or similar container
- Clothes that can get muddy



If making clay from soil (can take at least a day):

- Two buckets
- Large stick for mixing mud
- Fine-mesh sieve
- Empty clear glass/plastic container such as a 5l (1 gallon) water bottle or wide neck jar
- Old cotton t-shirt, pillow case or other tightly woven material large enough to cover your buckets
- String

OPTIONAL → Blanket or floor tarp to sit on, funnel, trowel if no spade is available

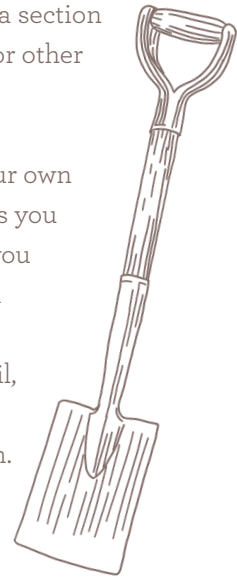




Get ready

Although gardeners would disagree, we are lucky that our Forest School sites in London sit on top of a lot of clay soil, which is made visible by water logging in wet weather and cracking in hot, dry weather. When the soil is wet, the suction created is so great it can pull your shoe clean off – we have seen many boots get stuck this way! If the soil in your local area is also clay rich, go out and find a suitable spot to set up your clay-digging station. Choose a section of bare earth or somewhere that is only covered in grass or other common species.

If your local area is not heavy with clay, you can make your own clay from soil. It is useful to have a water source nearby as you will need it for covering the soil and sieving it. Whether you are digging for clay or making it from soil, make sure you have the landowner's permission to dig, if necessary. To make sure you do not harm any creatures living in the soil, always check through it and remove them if necessary, then return them to the location where the soil came from.



Get set

Digging For Clay

Lift off the topsoil with a spade or similar tool. Push the spade into the ground to a depth of about 10cm (4in) using the ball of your foot. If the ground is covered in grass, cut a circle into the soil to the same depth and then use the spade to lift off your cut section. You will see that this topsoil is a darker, more crumbly soil which will have plant matter in it. Beneath this layer (you may have to dig slightly deeper), you will find clay, which is usually more orange in colour.

To check if you have found clay, dig out a small amount and touch it: it should feel sticky and smooth, not gritty. Roll this little lump into a ball and then into a sausage shape. If it doesn't crack, you have clay.

Making Clay From Soil

Hunt around for a sturdy stick to use later when mixing the mud. Use the spade to dig up enough soil to fill half a bucket. Once done, pour enough water over the soil to cover it (keeping some back for flushing the sieve clean). Now take the stick and mix the mud, making sure that any clumps are broken down. If you know the soil is free from sharp stones, you can always sink your hands in and squeeze out any lumps.

Next, place the fine-mesh sieve over the second bucket and strain the mud mixture through it. It's best to use a fine-meshed sieve as, while clay particles are very small, grains of sand are slightly larger and can make the clay gritty. Use the remaining water to flush as much soil as possible through the sieve. All the stones and plant material left in the sieve can be placed back in the ground from where they came. You can repeat the sieving stage if you feel it will clear out any remaining sand, etc.

Pour the mud mixture into the clear container. If filling a 5l (1 gallon) water bottle, use the funnel when pouring the mixture. There will be fine clay particles in the water; these need time to sink to the bottom of the container, leaving clear water sitting on top of the layer of sediment. This process can take an hour or two – you will see it happening.



Once the clay has separated out, carefully pour off the clear water. Then place your piece of material over a clean bucket and pour the mud mixture into the cloth. Once the mud mixture is lifted in the cloth, the remaining water will drain off underneath into the bucket. The bundle of mud can be squeezed gently to aid draining. When the liquid has been drained off, the clay will be left in the cloth.



Gather up the ends of the cloth and tie them together with string. (Be careful not to let the mixture fall into the bucket.) The bundle now needs to be hung out to dry.

Depending on the water content and the heat of the day, drying can take between three hours to a day. While you're waiting, it could


be fun to play a few games, tell stories or have a picnic.

When your bundle is finally dry, take it down from where it was being hung so you can use it while it still feels moist.



Go!

Grab a chunk of clay and mould it into your chosen shape. You might want to make an animal that's found in your local area. At our Forest School sessions, we see many wonderful clay animals, including snakes, mice with big ears and hedgehogs with sticks for spines. Or you may want to make a bowl, or clay beads to string together (for this to work well, remember to make a hole in the middle of each bead using a stick). The choice is entirely up to the maker! Once complete, leave your creation to dry if you have enough time, or place it in a container to take home.



TRY THIS!
River banks are good places to find clay.

Endings

Now everyone has unleashed their inner potter, talk through all the amazing creations and why they chose these designs. Did everyone like the feel of clay; if yes, why? Did they know that clay has been used by humans since prehistoric times? Can they think of any other uses for it? Clay is really good at retaining fluids, so it is used as a natural barrier in places such as ponds, to keep water in, or around landfill rubbish sites to stop toxins seeping out. Clay tablets were the first known writing medium and were used long before the invention of paper. One of the earliest pieces of pottery to be found is a figure discovered in the Czech Republic that dates back to approximately 29,000 BC – astonishing! Just like us, our prehistoric ancestors also liked to make things with clay.



MUD TROLLS FOREST GAME

Deep in the wood dwells a band of noisy Mud Trolls, who love to live deep underground in burrows like badgers and paint themselves with sticky, cool, wet mud. They like to crash about the woods just for fun and, like most trolls, they have an insatiable appetite and will generally eat anything they can get their hands on. However, they are not the fastest or brightest in the land and pose no harm to humans – but they are very competitive and, like bears, can smell food from far, far away!

This high-energy game will chase distractions away as players must focus on their strategies to make it through the forest. It will bring the forest alive in a fun, new way, bonding groups to each other and to the natural space around them. Role play will unleash a new-found confidence and make for many amusing, lasting memories for both trolls and adventurers.



Get ready

Choose an area of woodland with a lot of cover that can provide many hiding places. Mark the boundary of this area with your flags, cones, ribbon or string.

LOCATION	Woodland
AGE GROUP	5 years +
LEARNING ABOUT ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Independence ✦ being active ✦ strategic thinking ✦ role play ✦ team building ✦ imagination ✦ nature connections ✦ confidence ✦ focus ✦ self-regulation
NUMBER OF PLAYERS	6 +
KIT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Small boundary flags, cones or brightly coloured ribbon or string → A sturdy stick → Water to make mud face paint and to wash after → Dried beans (like chickpeas/garbanzos), acorns or something of your choice that represents food

The size of the area will depend on how big your group is and how thick the woods or bushes are: a larger group or sparser area will need a bigger boundary. Remember to check the play area for any hazards such as broken glass, trip hazards and poisonous plants.

Get set

Choose who will play the Mud Trolls. Ideally they should include adults or older children who are willing to create a fun atmosphere, for example by providing close escapes for the players and acting the part. It's good to have a few Mud Trolls crashing about the area



for dramatic effect but the players should always outnumber the trolls, so a group of 13 could have five trolls and eight players.

When everyone understands the boundary and how to play, the trolls can head off and get dressed for the part. Find a sturdy stick and use it to dig a shallow hole in a patch of bare ground. Pour in the water and mix up some glorious mud. Then the Mud Trolls dip their fingers in it and paint on their troll faces with one or two swipes - or smear mud over their whole face if they want! They may even wish to put some sticks and vegetation in their hair.



Go!

The Mud Trolls can scatter through the forest. Meanwhile, the brave woodland explorers are given four beans as they assemble at the designated starting point. When the game starts, they call out, “Mud Trolls, here we come!” The Mud Trolls can then start to moan and groan and clamber about the woods.

The players should aim to make their way through Mud Troll Forest safely to a chosen exit point. Each time a player is caught by a Mud Troll, they must duly hand over one bean to the troll, then return to the starting point. To avoid confusing the trolls, it’s best for caught players to walk outside the boundary to get back to the start.





How much fun is had will depend on the behaviour of the trolls. Instead of simply trying to collect as many beans as they can, the trolls should aim to give the players a hilarious time. Working together to catch the faster players while letting the more cautious through, or reaching out to catch a player, only to fall over at the last point with a loud cry always work well. Children love chasing and a good light-hearted scare. By keeping it cheerful and lively, not only will the children want to return to the forest soon but you'll also have lots of funny stories to tell.

TRY THIS!

If players (especially younger ones) lose all of their beans quickly, they can always be given more to keep the fun going.

Endings

You will need no prompting to talk about how everyone did in the game and what happened. Allow time for this as it's a great team-building opportunity. Ask what they liked about the game and if there was anything they would do differently. When things have calmed down, you could ask everyone if they know what a troll is. Trolls originally came from Nordic mythology and Scandinavian folklore and come in many different forms – some giant and strong yet dim-witted, some small like faeries – but all dwell in natural places. Today, trolls appear in many different stories; can they think of any? *Shrek*, *The Lord of the Rings*, the tale “Three Billy Goats Gruff” and the *Moomins* are just a few. Whether they are friends or foes, trolls seem here to stay.





MUD SLING

Mud Sling is one of those games for when you just want to lark about and have some silly fun. But this simple game also requires skills that, through play, become a joy to master rather than a chore or worry to learn. Throwing muddy missiles at a moving target involves the whole body, including the skills of balance, hand-eye coordination and gauging distance to a target and the power needed to reach it. Knot tying requires patience, focus and memory skill. It's a great ice breaker for new groups and can help those who are nervous about dirt and muddy hands to forget about their doubts and join in!

Get ready

Look around for a fallen log or branch roughly 10cm (4in) in diameter and 25cm (10in) long to act as your target. You can increase the size of the target for younger children, while you can decrease it for older children to make the game more challenging after a few rounds. Use the folding saw if necessary to cut your log or branch to the desired size, or simply use the log as you find it.

If cutting with a saw, an adult should first demonstrate its use. Then, if appropriate, allow capable children to have a go under supervision. Prop the log up against another larger log, branch or tree stump. Kneel down in front of the log (this is a steady position that ensures all limbs are out of harm's way), put a gardening glove on your free (non-cutting) hand and use this hand (and if necessary your knee) to hold the log still. To protect your free (non-cutting)



LOCATION Any natural outdoor space with clean soil and trees

AGE GROUP 3 years +

NUMBER OF PLAYERS 2 +

LEARNING ABOUT ...

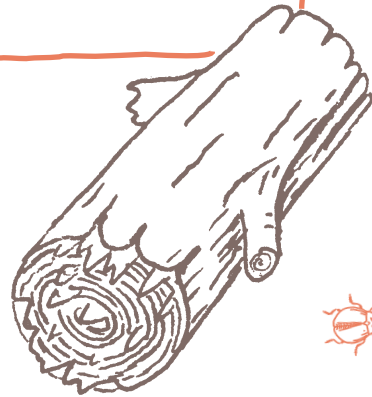
- ✦ Teamwork ✦ gross motor skills ✦ knot tying
- ✦ focus ✦ self-regulation ✦ sensory experiences
- ✦ freedom ✦ communication ✦ nature connections
- ✦ being active ✦ independence ✦ confidence
- ✦ patience ✦ memory skills

KIT

- Fallen log (approx. 10cm/4in diameter and 25cm/10in length)
- Folding saw
- Gardening gloves
- String or paracord (approx. 6m/20ft long)
- Trowel or similar tool
- Bucket for mixing mud
- Water



hand, place it roughly 15cm (6in) away from the cutting edge. Saw off the end of the log to create the length you want. It's fine for the log to have small side branches, as these will help to keep the log in place once it's tied up.



Now look around for a fairly low-lying tree branch with enough height that the log can hang from it just above the children's heads. Make sure the limb (and tree) is healthy and strong without any signs of rot such as peeling bark, loss of leaves in the growing seasons or fungi. Check that the ground around your chosen tree is free of trip hazards and that the children can move around under the branch freely.



Get set

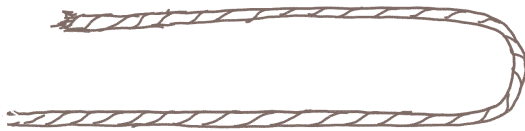
You now want to hang your log from the branch to create a swinging target for the mud missiles. The string or cord will need to be long enough to tie around the log using a hangman's noose knot, go over the chosen branch and, using a timber hitch knot, be tied around the tree trunk. (You'll need approx. 90cm/35in of cord to tie this timber hitch knot.) Adults can assist younger children by tying the knots for them if needed, while older capable children may wish to attempt the knots themselves once you've demonstrated what to do, with guidance when necessary.



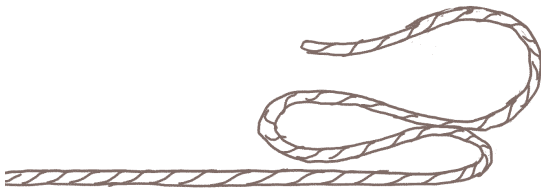
Use a Hangman's Noose Knot

Tie your string around the log using a hangman's noose knot (which the Elizabethans called a "collar").

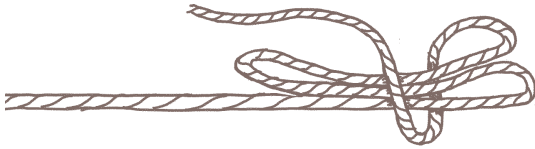
First, lay your string or cord horizontally on the floor, with one end of the cord within easy reach (this will be your "working end", the end that you move to make the knot). Hold the working end and



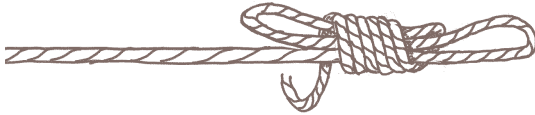
turn it back along the length of the cord to make a U shape that has fallen to the left. This is called a "bight".



By bending the working end in the opposite direction, create another bight on top of your first one; the cord should now make an S shape.



Pinch these bights together and move the working end underneath and over them all: this is one turn.



Keep wrapping the cord around the bights, making approximately six more turns, and coiling upward along the length of cord.



Once you have finished coiling, there should be a little bit of cord left on your working end. Pass this short working end through the top of the loop near your left hand.



To tighten, pull down on the top of the loop near your right hand. It's this final right-hand loop that you will hang your log from.

Before you place the log in the loop, throw your string or cord over your chosen branch. Once over, thread your log through the loop and tighten the loop by pulling down on the coils. (To untie, simply pull the short working end back through the loop, then pull on both ends of the cord or string to uncoil it.)

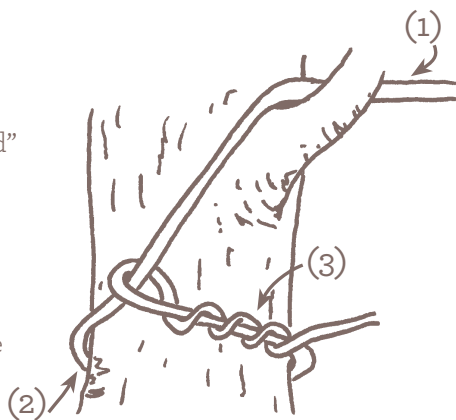
Now pull on the free end of the string or cord to hoist the log in the air. Once it is at your chosen height, use the version of the timber hitch knot described below to secure the cord in place around the tree.

Use a Timber Hitch Knot

We will call the section of cord attached to the log and dangling over the branch the “standing end” (1) and the section of cord we will be moving the “working end” (2).

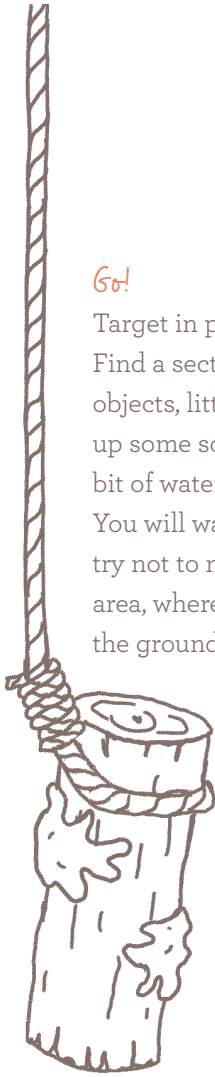
Pull on the working end (2), bringing it down to a comfortable height to work with, and wrap it around the back of the tree.

Once around the tree, throw the loose working end over the standing end (1) toward the trunk (this standing end will now be coming down at an angle from the branch to the tree). Now loop the working end (that is around the trunk) three to four times around itself (3). Pull and tighten the knot against the tree. (To release it, slacken the line and unloop the knot.)



Go!

Target in place, it's time to mix those mud missiles. Find a section of earth that's free from any sharp objects, litter and wildlife. Use your trowel to dig up some soil and place this in your bucket with a bit of water. Then mix it to make sticky mud. You will want the mud to form a rough ball so try not to make it too wet. If you are in a clay-rich area, where water doesn't quickly seep away into the ground, you can simply dig a hole to mix your mud.



Roll as many mud missiles as you want; a minimum of five per player is a good starting point. Missiles at the ready, draw a line on the ground that the players must stand behind. Player One now takes their muddy missile in hand. The referee (who is usually an adult, but can be anyone who wishes to perform this role) swings the log. Player One: take aim and launch away! It makes a great splatting sound if you hit

the log and feels great. Once Player One has had their go, it's time for Player Two to take aim ... Continue until everyone has used up all their missiles. Oh, and remember - stand clear, Ref!

TRY THIS!

If younger children are struggling to hit the target, try lowering the log, keeping it stationary and moving the start line closer. To make it more challenging, move the start line further away!



Endings

There will no doubt be lots of comments from each player on their slinging techniques, target triumphs and muddy mishaps. You may want to talk about the best mud concoctions for making the muddy balls, or the best throwing techniques. How did it feel to hit or miss the swinging target?



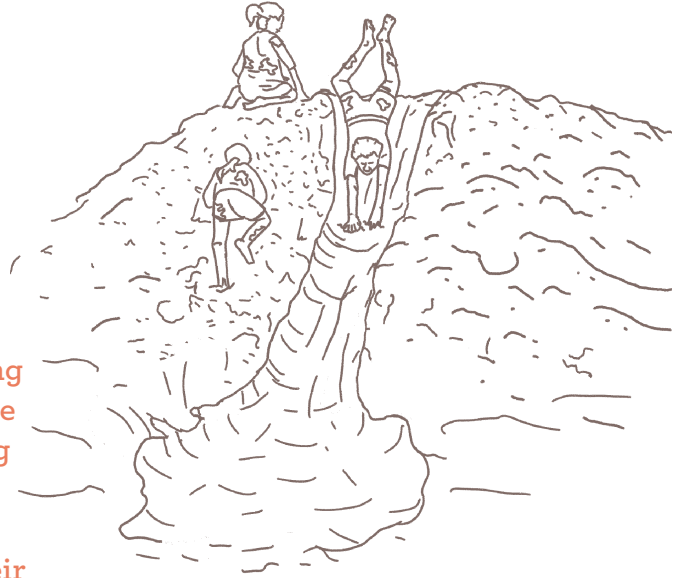
What does everyone think about soil? It may not be the most exciting thing to look at, but it's actually teeming with life. It is often said that a handful of soil has more living organisms in it than there are people on planet Earth. For example, 1g of fertile soil can contain up to one billion bacteria. Can anyone think of any animals that live in the soil? One example is earthworms, which are vital in maintaining soil structure and soil health. As they burrow they aerate the soil and improve drainage. They eat plant material and by doing so release nutrients back into the soil for plants and other organisms to use. Worm castings (or worm poop) excreted in the soil are considered a slow-release fertilizer packed full of nutrients. When underground they eat small microorganisms like bacteria and fungi. They themselves are food for many animals, such as birds. It's safe to say, worms, in their natural environment, perform a great service for their local ecosystem.





MUDSLIDE

Mudslide has to be one of the all-time favourite activities at our Forest School groups. After donning their waterproofs, the kids get busy making slippy, slithery mud and are soon hurling themselves down their very own mudslide. It's hilarious to witness everyone trying to clamber back up, feet skidding around, and even funnier to join in. Hours of simple, good, free fun. This activity is a full-on body experience and workout – from feeling the mud on your hands (and face!), to the effort and balance needed to climb back up. It connects you directly to the ground and the shapes of the landscape. It also encourages great teamwork, as you help each other create and traverse the slide, sharing silly, joyous memories. Don't be afraid to get muddy and dive in ... literally!



Get ready



Find the perfect spot. You are looking for a sloping earth embankment that mimics the shape of a playground slide (roughly a 30–40° angle, with the length of the slide approximately twice its height). Make sure there are no ant nests, plants or tree roots

LOCATION	A natural outside space with unvegetated sloping embankments
AGE GROUP	2 years +
LEARNING ABOUT ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↳ Sensory experiences ↳ physics ↳ creativity ↳ nature connections ↳ being active ↳ gross motor skills ↳ team building ↳ enthusiasm ↳ confidence ↳ risk assessing ↳ sustainability ↳ communication
KIT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Clothes that can get muddy → Waterproof jacket/trousers and shoes → Bucket or equivalent container → Water (at least 3 bucketfuls in dry weather) → Bag to carry muddy waterproofs home
OPTIONAL	→ Trowel, spare clothes

that would be damaged from sliding, and, if needed, seek the landowner's permission first.



Get set

Now it's time to inspect the embankment. Check that there are no trip hazards, sharp stones or sharp litter protruding. If you find any objects that need removing, use a stick or trowel (if you have one) to get them out of the way. Next, it's time to put on your waterproofs if you haven't done so already.



Go!

Pour enough of the water down the slope to make a slippy, muddy slide – and then take a ride! Most kids will start by going down the traditional way, sitting on the slope, but those that are more daring can end up sliding head first – along with a friend. The fun is infectious for both the kids and the adults, so don't be afraid to join in. Our Forest School children love it when we do.

Endings

There will be endless conversations about different sliding techniques and tricks to get back up, as well as exciting tales about the daredevils who went down head first. Once cleaned up, you could ask the sliders if there is anything they would do to change the slide, such as more water or less, or a change of angle or height? How did it feel to whoosh down the slide without a care about getting muddy? Can they think of any animals that like to wallow in mud? Why do they think they do it? Domestic pigs and their wild ancestors warthogs, rhinos and elephants are a few examples of animals that enjoy getting muddy. It seems to be comfort behaviour, helping to regulate the animals' body temperature on hot days, warding off biting insects and acting as a natural sunscreen.

TRY THIS!
Save some water to add to the slide later, when the mud can start to get tacky.



BOGOLAN MUD CLOTH PAINTING

Bogolan mud cloth painting is such a creative and fun activity – from mixing the elements and transforming them into ooey, gooey mud, through to designing unique pieces of art. Bogolan is a beautiful handwoven cloth originating in Mali, Africa. It is dyed yellow using the leaves from a tree called n’gallama and painted with bold geometric patterns and symbols using natural dyes. These dyes include a special river mud that is aged and fermented for up to one year in clay pots, which stains the cloth black. The cloth-dyeing skills can take years to learn and no two fabrics are the same. This simple version is a joy to explore and you, too, will find that each pattern is unique!

By placing earth in a new context, this is a great activity to push past any fears of mud. With no defined outcomes, there is freedom to explore and create different colours, designs and uses. Being up close to and considering other creatures that live in the mud before it’s used helps to develop empathy, curiosity, sustainable thinking



and a deeper relationship with nature. Displaying and sharing pieces of work encourages communication, confidence and independence, while learning about the origins of Bogolan cloth creates connections to its design and the culture it comes from. Painting is also simply

LOCATION Any natural outdoor space with access to fresh soil and ideally a watercourse

AGE GROUP 2 years +

LEARNING ABOUT ...

- Focus → calm → independence → confidence
- empathy → sustainability → communication
- freedom → curiosity → nature connections
- creativity → cultural connections
- soil science → sensory experiences
- fine and gross motor skills

KIT

- A sturdy stick, trowel or similar tool for digging and mixing mud
- Two small containers (approx. 0.5l/1 pint) per artist, or to share
- A tarp or similar ground covering to sit on
- Different sized paint brushes and sticks
- Another jar or container for cleaning the brushes
- Water
- Black and yellow food colouring
- An old white t-shirt or cotton cloth (A3-size)

OPTIONAL → Printouts of Bogolan patterns, string



relaxing and creates a fun, focused atmosphere.

So dig in and enjoy!

Get ready

Time to gather some soil ready to mix into mud. Find a spot that is free from any litter, vegetation, bug nests and leaves, and dig up enough soil to half fill a container. We have used sturdy sticks for this stage – and in some cases just hands – but if you prefer, use a trowel or similar tool. To make sure we do not harm our little friends, we always check through the soil and remove them by placing them back in the location from where the soil was taken.

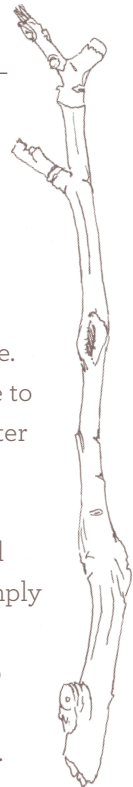
Get set

Lay down your tarp and place out the paintbrushes, ready for use. Search the area to look for differently sized sticks you might like to use for painting, too. Fill a jar or similar container with clean water so the artists can clean their brushes.

Now to mix up the mud. Add enough water to make a thick mud paste that can be painted onto cloth but will not run. You can simply use a stick for the mixing. Once mixed, divide the mud between your two containers. You might like to experiment by mixing up different consistencies and then exploring the different qualities these have when painted. If it is too watery, the paint will be faint.

TRY THIS!

You could collect your mud from a watercourse if there is one nearby on your chosen site. Look for dark soil ready to use and mixed by nature.



Add black food colouring to one of the mud containers to mimic that rich fermented mud used in Mali. In the other container, add yellow colouring, which will mimic the special solution of leaves used to dye the cloth yellow. In our Forest Schools, some artists have used approximately 1 tbsp of food colouring to one 0.5l (1 pint) container, although some halve that amount while some might use a little more, each giving different effects. There's no right or wrong here, so feel free to experiment with different amounts of food colouring.



Go!



Grab a brush, some sticks and a cloth – it's time to make your very own unique design. If you have brought some Bogolan printouts with you, these can be used for inspiration. Or simply unleash your creativity, remembering that in the Bogolan tradition the artists paint the background onto the cloth, leaving the design to be the unpainted areas. But this is just a suggestion, so feel free to be creative and follow your instincts.

Once finished, you can hang your designs across a string line to dry if you have one, or leave them to dry in a sunny spot on the ground. The dried mud will fall away, leaving your designed cloth to be displayed wherever and however you choose. A Forest School favourite is to punch holes along the top and bottom of the cloth, then hang it using string from a stick at the top, before attaching a second stick to the bottom of the cloth for weight. It is then ready to be displayed at home or given as a gift. As one boy said, holding up a very muddy colourful cloth, "My grandma's coming to visit from America and she's gonna love this." It was pretty impressive!

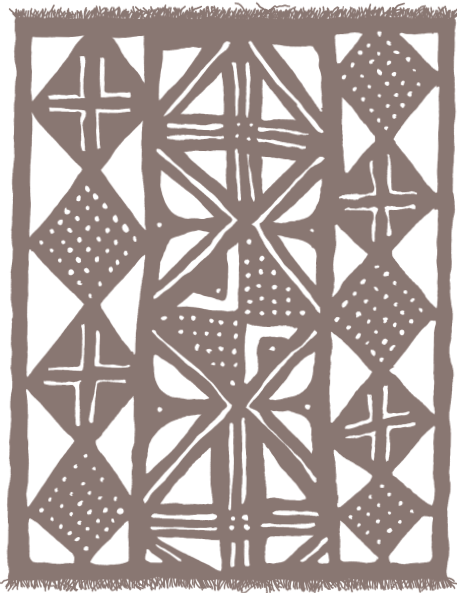
TRY THIS!

You can gently rinse off the mud from the cloth once it's dried, but this will fade the colour. On the other hand, repeating the process by painting over the same design, like they do in Mali, can add deeper colours.

*Endings*

Allow the artists to display and share their artwork if they wish to, celebrating all the unique pieces. Ask whether they would like to try something different next time, such as a different pattern or different

colours for the mud and cloth. Does their patterned cloth have any special meaning for them? In Mali, Bogolan cloth has deep cultural meaning. Hunters of the Bamana tribe, for example, wear Bogolan tunics for camouflage and protection. Some of the painted symbols link to historical events, myths and proverbs. The wonderful skill and tradition of Bogolan cloth painting is usually passed down from mother to daughter.





The Golden Acorn

As morning rose over the village of Pucklehurst, the majority of folk were busy getting ready for breakfast, but not Emory Addison. He was busy tying his shoelaces, getting ready to venture into Wychwood Forest. Emory loved the forest, but the other children couldn't understand why. "You'll be eaten by wolves!" they'd tease. "And there's nothing to see there but mud. Why don't you play football like us?"

Emory was always confused by this; he didn't like football and whenever he did make an effort to play with the other kids, they made him feel like the odd one out. And wolves, well, they had been chased away by farmers years ago.

As he entered the forest, Emory was looking forward to another day of feeding the animals with seeds and nuts, climbing trees, lying back on soft moss-covered trunks and learning about the woodland world. He climbed over twisted roots and pushed past bramble bushes until he reached his favourite spot: an ancient oak tree, the tallest in the forest.

Nestled against the oak's gnarled old trunk, he watched as the leaves fell from the surrounding trees, covering the forest floor with a bright carpet of scarlet, orange and bronze. "What if I was a leaf?" he thought, and he jumped up and dived into the fallen leaves, grabbing handfuls of leaves until they covered him and only his nose poked out.

Bugs crawled across his body but he didn't care. He shifted from side to side, trying to scratch an itch without squishing his forest friends. Something hard pressed into his back. "What's that?" he said out loud. "Doesn't feel like a bug." Finally, he sat up and felt around for the hard lump. "Ah, gotcha!" he said, as his hand landed right on top of it.

He lifted it up and couldn't believe his eyes - a golden acorn glittered in his hand! His heart pounded. Was it real gold? Eagerly checking all

THE GOLDEN ACORN

sides of his find, he realized it was a living acorn. But how? Shaking with excitement, he raced home to plant it in a pot on his windowsill.

Emory stared at the pot every evening before bed, but no matter how much he stared, nothing grew. Maybe he had been stupid to think the golden acorn would grow.

One day, as Emory wandered as usual toward the forest, his daydreaming was interrupted by the sound of screeching chainsaws. There was a sickening crack that made the ground shake. Emory's stomach churned and he ran as fast as he could to find out what had happened. "No!" he screamed as his eyes fell on the destruction: a whole swathe of trees had been cleared and his favourite tree, the mighty oak, lay smashed on the ground. No one heard Emory wailing over the sound of all the machines.

The villagers told Emory that the landowner next to the forest had been given permission to extend his farm. To Emory, the huge fields where only wheat grew looked like a desert – nothing like the forest that had been home to so many different plants and creatures.

Emory did not leave his bed for the next two weeks. The days grew shorter and winter arrived, bringing with it more rain than ever before – as if the whole world, like him, was crying.

More than anything, he wanted the golden acorn to grow. He held a cup outside his bedroom window to collect some rain, and poured it over the acorn's pot. Still no sign of a tree. He sighed, climbed back into bed and fell asleep.

A strange, gentle, creaking sound woke Emory in the middle of the night. Squinting and rubbing his eyes, he caught sight of a small shape darting through the shadows. "What on earth is that?"





EARTH

he thought nervously. Turning on the light, he had a terrible shock! Right in front of him was a tiny tree – and it was alive. The tree had deep green eyes and was jumping up and down, waving at Emory with a branch that had a single golden leaf at the end.

“I’ve *got* to be dreaming!” Emory pinched himself.

“You’re not,” said the tree in a high-pitched voice.

Emory gasped. “You can talk?” Still not believing his eyes, he crept slowly toward the little tree.

The tree smiled. “It’s me – the golden acorn. Thank you so much for planting me. I’ll never forget your kindness.”

Emory couldn’t stop beaming with joy. His acorn had grown!

“My name is Magus,” continued the little tree, smiling with a light that seemed to radiate from his eyes.

In the days that passed, Emory and Magus became great friends. Magus told Emory how trees communicate through their roots and the scent of their leaves. “We share food and sunlight, and we send warnings about nibbling insects. Once warned, we make our leaves taste bitter to repel the nibblers” said Magus, waving his tiny branches around as if sweeping insects to one side.

He told Emory how the whole forest can talk using a sort of “tree internet” made of the tangled, web-like roots of trees and fungus, which can spread far and wide and deep underground. “One teaspoon of forest soil contains several miles of fungal roots or filaments,” Magus explained. “Through this underground web,” Magus continued, “trees share food and water. And high in the canopy, they give each other space to share sunlight, helping each other survive – especially the mother and baby trees.” As if lost in a wonderful dream, Magus hugged himself and began swaying from side to side.

But one morning they both woke to the sound of sirens.

“What’s that sound?” asked Magus.

“Trouble,” replied Emory, as he made his way to the window.

He pulled back the curtains and pushed open the window.

The villagers were frantically throwing their belongings into their cars. Mrs Dimble, who owned the bakery shop next door, was standing in the torrential rain and shaking her head in disbelief as she watched fire engines rush past.

“What’s happened, Mrs Dimble?” asked Emory loudly, trying to make his voice reach her over the sound of the sirens and the downpour of rain.

“It’s the farm, dear – the one near Wychwood forest,” she began in a fluster. “Oh dear, oh dear!” she continued, shaking her head.

“What’s wrong with the farm?” Emory asked, slightly annoyed at Mrs Dimbles’ dithering.

“With all the rain we’ve had, the farm has been swept away by a huge flood. All the machines, the house and the crops are all gone – and the landslide is heading toward the village!” she yelled rushing away.

Just then Mr Pinkerton the policeman started banging on Emory’s door and hollered, “Grab what you can, we’re evacuating the village.”

Emory leapt up and frantically started throwing clothes into a bag. It was only when Magus said his name for a third time that Emory paused.

“Emory, stop – I know how I can help!” Magus’s eyes seemed to shine with happiness and sadness at the same time. “My roots can hold the soil together and stop landslides. You have to take me to the forest.”

Emory scooped his friend up. “That’s amazing, Magus!” he exclaimed. Emptying his bag, he carefully placed Magus inside. Then he stopped abruptly and frowned. “But that means you won’t be able to walk or talk anymore, right?”



EARTH

“That’s right,” said Magus gently. “Once I am rooted, I will join the forest. I will become a tree like all the other trees in the forest.”

Emory’s vision became blurred with tears. He sniffed and wiped his nose with the back of his hands and rose shakily to his feet. “No, I won’t do it!” he exclaimed, and began to pace around the room.

“I can help the village, Emory. I can stop this flood.”

Emory swung round angrily. “Why should you?” he yelled. “They tore down the forest – they tore down your family, Magus – they made this happen. They ruined everything.”

Magus looked deep into Emory’s eyes. “They do not understand what they are doing, their eyes are only half open. It’s easy to stay asleep in a nice cosy dream – it’s the nightmares that shake us awake. And maybe, just maybe, the nightmare that threatens them now will wake them up.”

It was a tricky climb in the heavy rain up to Wychwood Forest, wading through deep, sticky mud and the flood water rushing down the hillside, but Emory finally made it to the spot where the mighty oak had been felled. Here, he gently placed Magus on the ground.

Magus looked at the majestic oak lying smashed on the ground. He picked up a leaf and pressed it to his face and sadness filled his voice. “My roots to your roots,” he whispered. Turning to Emory he tried to smile but Emory could see the deep sorrow in Magus’s eyes.

“I’m so sorry my people did this,” said Emory, a lump in his throat.

Magus’s face lit up. “You give hope, Emory. Remember, this is not goodbye, I will be here in the forest waiting for you to visit whenever you can. I will know it’s you, just place your hand onto my roots. Now, let’s clear this debris away.” Magus pointed to where the roots had upturned at the base of the mighty oak.

Emory’s legs felt heavy as he reluctantly pushed the leaves, sticks and branches away. Then Magus climbed slowly into the hole left by the

THE GOLDEN ACORN

old oak. “Stand back!” he commanded. Emory stumbled backward.

Magus reached his branches wide open and a bright golden light shone out. Emory felt its warmth fill his body. Then, as if thunder were erupting underground, the earth shook and wind began to whirl around. Magus grew bigger and bigger, and the golden light grew stronger and stronger, until it burst in all directions – until bang! It was gone.

As the wind died down, Emory stumbled to his feet, not believing his eyes. There before him stood the most magnificent ancient oak tree. “Magus ...” he said in awe. The roots of the tree spread out far and wide, twisting and turning through the ground, fixing the soil in place and breaking the rivers of rain into small trickles that posed no threat.

“You’ve done it, Magus!” Emory yelled. “You’ve fixed the landslide!”

The villagers came to learn all about the magical Magus and how the roots of the mighty oak fixed the soil. They learned to share the land with the forest and animals, restoring harmony and balance.

And what of Emory? He never stopped visiting his friend. He would later bring his daughter to the woods and tell her the tale of Magus.

When he grew too old to climb to Wychwood Forest, his daughter came instead, promising to put her hands on the ancient oak’s trunk and pass along Emory’s love. It was on her first visit alone, as she sat leaning against the trunk of the mighty oak, that she felt a pebble digging into her beneath the soil. Leaning round, she ran her hand over the ground to remove it. “Ah, gotcha!” she said. As she lifted it up, she couldn’t believe her eyes – a golden acorn glittered in her hand!

