

We are lucky enough to have 'West Wood' behind the school which is managed by the Wildlife Trust. With their permission we take the children for regular nature walks and forest schooling sessions into the wood.

With each visit to the forest school children will learn a new skill linked to survival of man and caring for the environment, the activities will also reinforce knowledge learned in the classroom. In the Montessori primary curriculum children learn about the fundamental needs of man, the need for food and water to grow and develop, the need of oxygen to breath and the need to have the ability to reproduce and produce off-spring. With all this in mind we teach them where to find food and water, they get concrete impression of how plants produce oxygen and why we need to care for them and they learn first hand about plant and animal re-production.

When the children arrive the first thing they do is help put out flags around the edge of the area to create a boundary that the children are allowed to work in, we limit the working area to help protect the wood, ensuring we do not over use it. We then all come together in the main camp area, sitting around the camp fire, we use this time to remind the children to only pick up things that are fallen, in West Wood there are protected Orchids, so the children have to be very aware of what they pick and use. One of the first activities the children embarked on during our first session is creating an identity tag. The children saw their own small piece of wood from a fallen branch, drill a hole through it, decorated it and created a necklace, the children then wear these for the duration of the forest school session. Real tools are always used in a traditional woodland manner and are introduced gradually with a structured safety base that the children will become familiar with. The use of tools in the wood promotes trust and self-confidence within those taking part; their use develops both gross and fine motor skills.

We run a variety of different activities, all are planned in a way to meet the development needs of the children involved in the session. Listed here are just some of the activities we do :

Art Hunt

The children make a collection of objects and materials found in the wood, they then use these materials to create pictures or make sculptures, the children are given the choice as to whether they would like to work on their art individually or as a group.

Mud Men

We start by collecting mud, the children then create mud men and mud faces on the trees.

Colour matching

The children do colour matching activities using tablets from the colour boxes they find as many objects as they can in a defined area matching their chosen colour tablet or they have a peice of card with 4/5 colour blocks on cut out from paint sample cards and then the children find a variety of objects to match the colours on the their cardsand made fly catcher webs.

Ourselves

The children take Earth Walks, in which we reinforce their sensorial learning as they use all their senses to help them discover more about themselves and how they can use their senses in the forest to learn more about the world around them.

Camp Fires

They learn to building camp fires using a variety of materials, both natural and man made, discovering which materials burn best and the reasons for this and identifying products of from the wood that burn well. They learn to identify berries and fungi that they can cook to eat, they also love to warm marshmallows.

Fungi Walk

Studying fungi is interesting for the children, finding out about these mysterious and highly successful life forms, how to identify them, folklore surrounding them and how they appear from no-where.

Tree Trail

The children create 'Tree Scrapbooks', by collecting leaves, buds, blossom, bark and making bark rubbings. They then use terminology cards, identification cards and the leaf cabinet to make identification notes on their trees.

Plants and Animals in the Local Environment

The children examine animal' habitats, plant life-cycles and seeds. They record data and discuss and compare plants and animals.

Lots of the work that comes back from the forest helps create a nature table in the classrooms and the learning continues in class.

Alphabet Trail

WE pin the sandpaper letters around the wood in interesting locations, the children then either write down and talk about things they can see or hear in that location beginning with the letter in the location.

Map Stick

Every so often the children take a journey around the wood, collecting natural objects, these are tied to a stick with wool. The stick then makes a lovely reminder of their forest school experience and using the map stick as a reminder they can recount their journey either verbally or in writing when they get back to class.

Shelter Building

If you ask any of the children they would tell you the session they enjoy the most is shelter building, the last time we ran this session I was lucky enough to be the observer, listening to the children, observing their team work, interaction with other children, critical thinking skills and independence. We began by splitting the children into small groups each group working with an adult, this situation I found the most interesting to observe. The groups of children who were accompanied by an adult who directly followed the instructions of assisting the children only on request, but the rest of the time staying in the background built very successful shelters, using their imagination and creating seats inside and in some cases separate rooms. The groups who were assisted by an adult who couldn't resist helping! struggled and their shelters were not only as creative but also would not have been as efficient at keeping its occupants dry. This exercise really proved that children are more productive if allowed to develop their own creativeness. The children learned by experimenting and exploration when developing their shelters, they worked out for themselves how to make their shelters stand up, some using trees to lean fallen branches on, others creating wigwams. The freedom they feel was apparent as all the children move with confidence and with every visit to the forest school their confidence grows in this outdoor environment.

In this age of health and safety all precautions are taken, we write risk assessments for every session ensuring that the children are safe at all time. Before the children arrive in the wood we do an area and safety check ensuring that there are no fatally dangerous objects or plants in the area we are using.

It is amazing to watch the children work, using their hands and their minds. Having the opportunity to be involved in this positive outdoor experience inspires all the children, by participating in the engaging, motivating and achievable tasks in a woodland environment, they encompass the philosophy of learning and caring about the natural world that we endeavour to teach in our Montessori schools.