

# National Outdoor Learning Toolkit (Primary Science Education)

Erasmus+ Programme



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## Introduction

Outdoor learning enhances curiosity, improves wellbeing and supports inquiry-based pedagogy across subjects in the primary. This toolkit provides practical guidance for safe, structured and meaningful outdoor learning experiences within school grounds and local environments.

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### 1. General Risk Assessment Guidelines

Outdoor learning requires a dynamic risk assessment approach, where teachers continuously evaluate conditions before and during activities.

#### Key Principles

- **Identify hazards:** terrain, weather, water hazards, plants, insects, equipment, public access areas.
- **Assess risks:** likelihood as opposed to severity of harm.
- **Control measures:** reduce risks to an acceptable level.
- **Review continuously:** adjust plans as conditions change.

## Before the Activity

- Conduct a site walk-through (same day if possible).
- Check weather forecasts and wind conditions.
- Ensure appropriate adult-to-student ratio.
- Ensure that students and educators are wearing appropriate clothing.
- Identify boundaries and out-of-bounds areas.
- Prepare first aid kit and emergency contact details.
- Check allergies, medical needs and safeguarding notes.

## During the Activity

- Always maintain visual supervision.
- Reassess conditions (e.g. sudden rain, heat, wind).
- Ensure safe use of tools (clipboards, magnifiers, simple fieldwork equipment).
- Enforce clear boundaries - physical or implied.

## After the Activity

- Review any incidents or potential situations where an incident may have arisen.
- Reflect on effectiveness of controls.
- Update risk assessment if activity is repeated.

## 2. Outdoor Classroom Management Tips

### Establish Clear Routines

- Identify pathways and preferably produce a map of the outdoor space, clearly defining area that will be used.
- Assign group roles (who will lead the activity, who is responsible of equipment, who will be the first aider etc.)
- Set expectations before leaving the school.

### Behaviour Management Strategies

- Use clear visual/auditory signals (hand claps, whistle, raised hand).
- Define physical boundaries using cones, ropes or natural markers.

### Organisation of Learning

- Work in small, structured groups.
- Provide task cards or inquiry prompts.
- Use time checkpoints for regrouping.

### Equipment Management

- Assign responsibility for distribution and return of equipment and resources.
  - Minimise unnecessary materials outdoors.
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### 3. Suggested Outdoor Activities

#### *A) Stories in the sky*



Students are given laminated photographs of the sky, each capturing a different moment, such as variations in cloud formations, weather conditions, and lighting (for example, bright blue skies, stormy grey clouds, sunsets, or scattered cloud patterns).

Each child is encouraged to observe their photograph closely and use it as a stimulus to create a story inspired by what they see. They are asked to draw their story using a marker on the laminated picture.

The focus is not just on describing the sky, but on imagining what could be happening beneath or within that sky.

This activity supports language development, creative thinking, and emotional expression, as children often link sky conditions to moods and events. It also encourages observational skills, as they notice how different skies can suggest different feelings or story ideas.



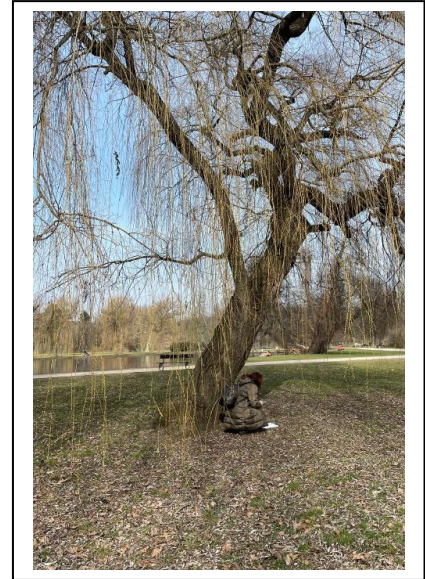
Click on the Padlet link for photographs of the sky - [LINK](#)

### *B) Tree Interview Activity*

Children choose a tree and then “interview” it by asking questions about its life, such as how long it has been growing, what it sees around it, how its roots feel, and how it changes through the seasons.

This activity helps children develop imagination, observational skills and an understanding of nature through role-play and questioning.

Click on the Padlet link for tree interview questions – [LINK](#)

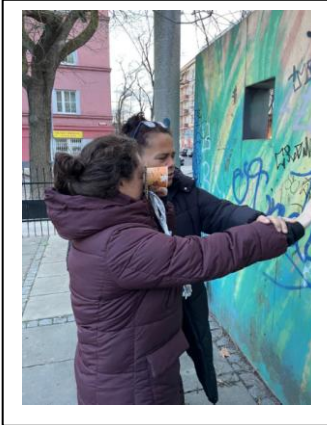


### *C) Paper Camera “Wildlife Documentary” Activity*



In this activity, children work in pairs to create a simple cardboard camera using recyclable materials. Once the camera model is made, they go outdoors in an open space, such as a garden, school yard, or park, to explore nature like a wildlife documentary team.

One child becomes the “photographer,” while the partner acts as the “director.” The director gently guides the photographer to a specific natural spot

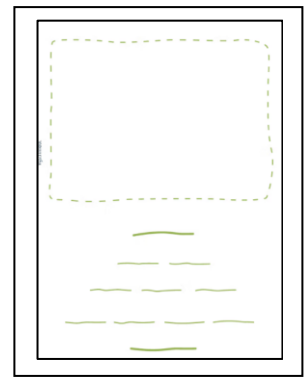


(for example, tree bark, a flower, moss, or small insects). The photographer keeps their eyes closed while being guided.

When they arrive, the photographer holds up their handmade camera. On the count of three, they open their eyes and “take a shot” of what they see for the first time. This moment is designed to create surprise, curiosity and close observation of small natural details.

After exploring several “shots,” the children return and use their experiences to create a short poem describing what they saw, how it felt, and what surprised them in nature.

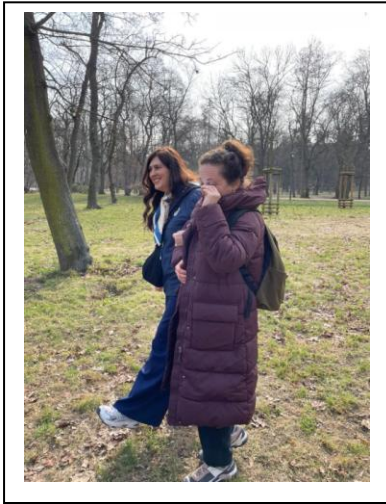
Click on the Padlet link for the paper camera template – [LINK](#) and windows for the story or poem – [LINK](#)



### *D) Mirror Walk Activity*

In this paired outdoor activity, students explore a park or open green space while experiencing nature from a completely new and surprising perspective.

Children work in pairs, with one child acting as the guide and the other as the explorer. The explorer holds a small mirror above their nose, angled upward so



they can see the world above them like for example tree canopies, branches, clouds, and open sky, rather than the path in front.

As they walk slowly, the guide carefully leads them to different natural spots, ensuring they are safe and supported. The explorer sees an unusual, inverted view of the world, creating a magical feeling, as if they are walking through clouds or floating beneath a forest canopy.

At the end of the activity, students reflect on what they saw and share their experiences with the rest of the group.

### Closing Note

Outdoor learning is most effective when it is frequent, structured, and inquiry-driven. Small, regular outdoor experiences can have a significant impact on engagement, conceptual understanding, and student wellbeing.

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