

Music from Forests



Stages: All (EY-S6)



Time: Full day

Purpose: Pupils will connect to nature by listening to the different sounds from the natural world. They will then use their creativity to make instruments using natural materials and compose their own forest inspired music.

Curricular links

EXA 0-4-01a, 0-4-16a-19a

SCN 0-1-11a, 0-1-15a

Preparation for activity – finding inspiration

1. Forests are not quiet places. They are full of lots of different sounds, produced by both animals and plants. To learn more about the music produced by the natural world, the first step is to simply stop and listen.

Find a spot where you can hear natural sounds. This could be in a woodland, park, beach, or your school grounds. Ideally find somewhere with minimal man-made sounds, but don't worry if this is not possible. Invite pupils to stand, sit, or lie down in your chosen spot. Then ask them to close their eyes (if they are comfortable doing so) and listen to everything they can hear. Once they have had a bit of time, ask them to try and identify which sounds are coming from natural sources. Ask them to estimate which direction the sounds are coming from and what might be making them (still with their eyes closed). Ask them to choose one sound they like and describe it to describe to the rest of the class. For older pupils you can ask them to describe the pitch and tone of the sound. As a group, make a list of which sounds you all liked and how they sounded.

2. There are many sounds in the forest that we are not able to hear. One of these sounds is tree sap moving up through the trunk of a tree. Inside a tree, water is taken up by the roots and then pulled through thin tubes up to the leaves. The sap makes a very quiet sound as it moves.

To hear sap moving up through a tree, you will need a stethoscope. It may be possible to borrow one from parents or carers. If you can get a stethoscope, the best time to listen to a tree is in spring, when there is a lot of sap moving up through the tree trunk as new leaves grow, making it easier to hear. Choose a medium to large tree (at least 15 cm diameter) with smooth bark. Beech and birch trees are a good choice. Place the stethoscope on the tree and let each pupil listen to the sound of sap as it moves up through the tree. Does it sound like anything they have heard before?



Don't worry if you don't have a stethoscope. You can listen to a [recording of sap moving in a tree](#) instead.

The amazing sounds made by sap moving through trees inspired environmental sound artist Cheryl Beer to compose tree-led music. Cheryl has a hearing impairment and has used hearing aid technology to record internal sounds from trees, then set them to music. Visit cherylbeer.com to hear her interpretation of an oak sapling growing (scroll down the page and look on the left-hand side for a picture of an oak sapling then click play on the media player just below it). You can find out more about Cheryl's story and how she makes tree music on her [Conduit Composter page](#).

Activity – making music

Having listened to the sounds of nature and heard the internal sounds of a tree, it is time to make some music.

First, you need some instruments. Head outside with pupils and challenge them to find any natural materials that they think will make good musical sounds.

Next, ask pupils to play around with their natural materials to try and create different sound patterns. They could even try to build their own instruments from their natural materials.

Once pupils have made their instruments, they need to compose their music. This can be done individually, or in groups. Pupils can add man-made instruments to their compositions if they wish, but encourage them to use as many natural materials as possible. Pupils could try to recreate the sounds of a forest, or take inspiration from Cheryl Beer and create music using natural rhythms and tunes.

Get pupils to practice their musical compositions, then record them or perform them for an audience.

Follow up - reflection

After pupils have performed their forest music, take time for them to reflect on how performances went. Some points for discussion could include:

- How did performing the music make you feel?
- Do you think there were any limitations to using natural materials as instruments?
- Is there anything you would do differently next time?

