

ACTIVITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Churchyards can be valuable and inspirational places for young people

Why are they a valuable resource?

- provide a space for exploring nature
- provide a space for exploring the built environment
- can stimulate motivation, curiosity and encourage creativity
- normally have a well defined physical boundary to work within
- are a constant resource for learning so children can build on previous experience
- are local and often within walking distance
- can cater for different ages and children at different stages
- have a porch/church for sheltering from rain or cold wind!

What groups may enjoy using churchyards?

Cubs, scouts, brownies, guides, families at fetes, school children, pre school groups, after school clubs, Sunday schools, holiday clubs.

What activities can we do?

Exploring nature

Hang up pictures of the animals likely to use the churchyard – e.g. mice, foxes, worms, ladybirds, spiders, hedgehogs, squirrels, butterflies. Children can go and find the picture and talk about what each animal needs for food/shelter etc.

Alternatively hide plastic animals around the churchyard and explore camouflage. Or use different colours of wool to explore camouflage.

Rainbow Colours. Cut up colours from the paint charts you get in DIY stores and put them in a bag. Children choose a colour and go and hunt for it in the churchyard. It can be nice to weave a story in about colours for this activity. Colours can also be printed on a sheet for children to take away and find for themselves.

Collect things on 'sticky bracelets' – put masking tape around wrist, sticky side out and stick petals/feathers /grasses /leaves /seeds on. Can also use piece of card with double-sided sticky tape on –

children can stick onto it things found on the journey to or around the churchyard. Or they could collect specific things e.g. that are soft/ spiky/rough/green/brown etc. Older children could be asked to stick on as many species of grass/plants etc and discuss biodiversity.

Do a mini beast safari. A non-capture way to explore the insect world is to just look under stones and shake branches onto white cloth and watch what scurries off! With smaller children you could ask them to close their eyes and imagine they are an insect – 'you may have wings, lots of legs...' then give them a bag each and they go and collect the type of things they would like if they were their imagined insect (e.g. stone to hide under/leaf to eat).

If you do capture them use a pot and encourage mini beasts in with a small soft paintbrush.

Remember to discuss with children

- 1) not to leave them in the pot too long (especially in the sun),
- 2) to replace the mini beast where they found it as it is their home, and
- 3) not to run around with beasts in the pots!



Explore touch – give an egg box to children, inside each box is a word – hard, smooth, solid, prickly, stiff, rough, soft etc. Read the word on the card and collect items that demonstrate the word. Put them in the box. All come together and explore what's been collected.

Explore smell – make nature cocktails! Each child has a cup with water in it, goes and collects petals, grass etc, mixes it up and makes a smelly cocktail.

Explore vision – use mirrors to look at the tree canopy and sky above. This is a lovely one. Work in pairs! Make sure the mirrors used can not pose a risk due to breakage (e.g. some people put mirrors in old CD cases).

Hunt the treasures of the churchyard e.g. make list of things they can go and find – purple flower, grey stone, carved cross, feather, plant on a wall, a compost heap, a spiders web, rough bark, a green leaf, a snail etc.

Explore the leaves on trees – collect different shaped leaves, spread on a white sheet and discuss the different shapes, colours and sizes.

You could talk about what may have made the holes in some of them (caterpillars, insects) or why the leaves drop off in autumn.

Tree bingo – draw/photocopy the outline of leaf shapes onto card, children go and find the leaves and put these onto the card. Double-sided sticky tape can help keep leaves on while children are running around! Including a bit of folklore and uses for the different types of wood can make this activity appropriate for older children.

Collect fallen autumn leaves by threading them on shoe-string while walking along. You can hang them all from a tree like a nature 'shower curtain'. Other objects can also be collected by tying on string and hanging them up – pieces of wood, grasses, even rubbish to stimulate a 'looking after the planet' session.

Make an environmental sculpture – often it is useful to take along some hazel or willow sticks and wool/rope then the group can make a frame and collect things to hang off it – rubbings from gravestones, feathers, leaves, twigs etc.

Make masks – cut out cardboard into mask shape, stick double sided sticky tape on and cover with natural materials found. The group could then make up and act out a story. Also you can make masks purely out of natural materials using willow or hazel for the circle and hanging and weaving twigs in the circle to make face features. Children could find inspiration from the church carvings.



Map sticks – each child has a stick and some string – encourage them to wander around the churchyard collecting small items that reflect the different areas e.g. long grasses, cones, leaves, stones etc. As items are collected, bind or tie each one to the stick with the string or wool. By the end of the walk each stick tells the story of the journey through the churchyard. If there are a few children, each can tell the others about their journey by using the stick as a memory prompt.



Crowns – use willow or other bendy wood to make a crown and decorate by sticking leaves, grasses/flowers in it.

Take finds back into the church and use for sorting, art, mobiles etc.

Seed socks – put socks over shoes – run through grass, stop and look at socks. Compare the amount of seeds they collect in long grass as opposed to short. Explore type and shape of seeds. Ask how are socks like animal fur? How do animals help carry seeds from place to place? What other ways do seeds travel?

Visit the churchyard in different seasons – explore changes.

Magic spot – talk about what makes places special and give children time to go and sit or stand or lie in a spot that they like. Ask them to think about why they like it – what they can smell/hear/see. They may want to leave something in their magic spot (snail shell/stone/leaf etc). A nice activity to end a visit on.

Questions –

e.g. Why do you think birds like churchyards? (provide food – seed/berries/insects/provide nesting sites – trees/boxes/moss and long grass for nest material etc).

Exploring the Built environment

Questions –

e.g. How did they get that bell up there? What different colours can you see in the stained glass windows?

Build a church structure/collage

Hunt the treasures of the church – find features (cross, pattern, carved flower) draw favourite features

Draw different shapes of stones, windows, doors etc.

Make stained glass windows out of tissue paper/coloured plastics etc.

Do rubbings of stonework/memorials. Children could try and make their own word or sentence out of letters.

Look for patterns

For more information refer to 'Exploring Churches' booklet, www.visitchurches.org.uk

Exploring the sense of time and place, cultures and beliefs

What are churches used for?

What were churches used for? Churches were once a hive of activity, a place where the religious and non religious met – a meeting place for the local community. Churchyards were places where markets, festivals and parties were held, men did archery practice, games such as wrestling, fives, nine pins and quoits were played, sheep and goats grazed there and people used churches as a place to meet friends and hide from enemies.

Children can make contact with the wider community – talk to vicar, churchwarden.

Ceremonies – e.g. harvest festival linked to the work of farmers and is a time of sharing and thanks.

Make your own tree dressing ceremony up.

Children can cut their own piece of material and hang up on the tree to make a prayer/wish/have a special thought. Or they could tie ribbons, cones, tissue paper etc onto the tree. Go to the common ground website for ideas on tree dressing, www.commonground.org.uk. You could do this activity around a well or other special place.

Explore ceremonies that other cultures have.

How long ago was the church built? – explore what they wouldn't have had to help them in those days!

How did we get to the church? – draw maps and talk about what can be seen on the journey. Stick things found onto map. Mark favourite place, write thoughts, poems.

Reading:

Play Lightly on the Earth –
nature activities for children 3 to 9 years old
Jacqueline Horsfall ISBN: 1-883220-68-8

Sharing the Joy of Nature –
nature activities for all ages
Joseph Cornell ISBN 0-916124-52-5

Exploring Churches
The Churches Conservation Trust
ISBN: 1-903649-14-5

Beyond Ourselves –
contact Caring for God's Acre – 01568 611154



“The most important reason for going from one place to another is to see what’s in between”
native American saying



NOTES FOR GROUPS

'Planning your Churchyard Visit'

- Check the policy regarding outside visits for your organisation.
- Make sure you undertake the appropriate risk assessment. Pay particular attention to gravestones – remember to allow children access only to the gravestones that you know are stable and safe.
- Before planning any fieldwork in your local churchyard seek permission from the clergy or churchwarden. They will be able to give you information about the particular site that will enhance your visit, help you avoid any inappropriate activities and avoid areas that may be hazardous – particularly gravestones or steep steps. Check with them to see if the time is convenient (no services planned for that day etc). Contact details can be found on outdoor notice boards or inside the church.
- The primary purpose of a churchyard is as a burial place. Any work/ activities undertaken should be sensitive to this. Before your visit, depending on the age of the children, you could explore with them why the site is important to people.
- Be particularly sensitive to children who may have relations buried there or have had a recent bereavement.
- Remind everyone that some plants (in gardens, in the wild and in churchyards) are poisonous and that no plants should be put in the mouth. Seeds in the berries from Yew trees are particularly toxic.

