

Giants in the Forest – Teacher’s Pack.

A do-it-yourself guide to using the ‘Giants in the Forest’ on ‘The Tarka Trail’ to support creative literacy and storytelling for KS2 children.



**North Devon's
Biosphere Reserve**
world class by nature



Northern Devon Nature Improvement Area
Linking Life on the Torridge

wordquestdevon



GIANTS
IN THE FOREST
grow with us

Giants in the Forest

Giants in the Forest is a national project that uses art to engage people with their changing natural environment; acting as a stimulus for thought as well as creative activities.

Giants in the Forest was developed by 'Vision Mechanics', a group of artists from Scotland. They created and seeded giant wicker heads that were installed at a number of forest locations in North Wales and Scotland to change with the seasons. The North Devon Biosphere Service installed three of the heads on the Tarka Trail near Torrington to support our work to engage people with the natural environment around.

As part of the Northern Devon Nature Improvement Area project taking place in the River Torridge catchment, the Biosphere Service chose to involve schools in a "Giant story making" project.

This guide has been put together by professional storyteller, Sara Hurley who led the Giant story making workshops during October and November 2012. It is a collection of the activities and ideas from the workshops for teachers to use as part of a visit to the Giants or to support environmental story telling more generally.



Giant Story Making

Story making in the environment presents an opportunity to experience the environment around you and to make informed, personal and creative interpretations based upon it.

The natural world provides many layers of information to use in education. Story work can easily accommodate science, ecology, history and geography alongside literacy, creativity and imagination. Because the layers of information we receive from the landscape are rarely prescriptive, children can be supported to make informed and imaginative choices based on their personal experience and learning style.



Base camp



Walking along the Trail



Inspired by the River

Plus, there are considerable educational, health and social benefits of learning in a group outside the classroom. Having memorable times in nature helps connect children (and all of us) to where we live and increases a sense of belonging and ownership. Making stories in the environment adds to each child's store house of nature memories and observations, which is valuable to them, and can also be drawn upon to support future use across the curriculum.

The 'Giant Story Making' project inspired oral and written stories about the natural environment. It supported out of the classroom learning objectives and cross curricular learning. It helped the children with confidence building, creative thinking and relationship building.

There was no need to pull ideas out of thin air. The work was in keeping emerging stories rooted in the place and believable, whilst allowing room for flights of fancy.

Do some research - It helps the story making process if you know a bit about the environment you are visiting.

Each Giant Story Making workshop began and ended at base camp; 'The Biosphere Dome, sourced for free from the North Devon Biosphere Foundation. Each included a walk along the Tarka Trail across and beside the River Torridge, until at the third bridge over the River heading north from Torrington, the children 'met' the Giants. The walk is about 2 miles in total and there and back took between 1½ to 2 hours.

As well as providing a place to start from, a base camp provides a space for the children to work up their stories from the day whilst they are still fresh in their minds and they are still 'in the environment'. Stories can often disappear and imagination dissipate once the children return their normal classroom environment.



Bridges cross the River Torridge



Writing up stories

Warming up - Story and language 'circle games'

Circle games can be inclusive but are also sometimes a bit intimidating but the more you work in a circle with your group, the more likely you are to create an atmosphere where all voices are equal; where the quiet, thoughtful or reluctant child takes their moment along with the louder, boisterous or assertive child.

Circle time is well used in Key Stage 1 (KS1) and, I think, still has its place within Key Stage 2 because circles are an excellent way of developing speaking and listening skills.

Each time you run a circle game it's different – last time you weren't so happy with what you did but today you are – but you are more likely to achieve successful outcomes by encouraging simple behaviours in the children and following a few simple techniques.

Encourage an atmosphere where:

- we're all just giving it a go
- it's alright to copy in your own way
- no need to be clever, go with the first thing that comes into your head
- it's your idea so it can't be wrong
- one person talks at a time, everyone else listens and gives them quality attention.

Useful techniques:

- come back to the child at the end if they get stuck. Take the attention away
- try to involve everyone present, including teachers, teaching assistants and parents as this helps them to witness individual responses and gauge individual needs. Do make sure that you brief people so that they know what to expect

Circle game 1 - Everybody Who

The group move around and loosen up

The leader says 'everybody who.....had toast for breakfast/ rides a bike/ etc. If the answer is Yes for the participant then they cross the circle to the other side.

This is a good way of introducing themes. As this is an environmental project we wanted to introduce aspects of the environment that might be familiar to people and provide a gentle introduction to some of the ways we benefit from it. We asked questions like 'who likes swimming in the river' or 'who drank clean water this morning', 'who has seen an otter play, a kingfisher dive, a salmon leap...?' 'Who picks up their rubbish?' Who feeds birds in the garden?

You can ask more fantastical questions. 'Who has tickled a giant's beard....?'

Circle game 2 – The Shortest Story

A call and response story

This game helps the Group to work together, to look and to listen and to get them into a story frame of mind. The leader says one line at a time (with feeling!) with a simple action (make it up). The group copy.

Once a poor man dug the ground / And what he found was nothing
Again the poor man dug the ground / And what he found was a box
Again the poor man dug the ground / And what he found was a key
With the key he opened the box / In the box was a mouse's tail
If that tail was longer / This tale would be longer.

This is the original. I changed it for this project to:

Once a poor man fished for fish...../ In the box was a fish's tail.....

Develop things further – we asked our groups what kind of net the fisherman used and took the first answer from the first of the children to put their hand up. Ask other questions as this embeds the idea in the children of going with the first idea that comes into their heads, and builds confidence that their ideas are valued. It is a good way to begin a creative journey.

Circle game 3 - Sound and Movement

The group make 'music' together by observing individual contributions and copying them.

1. One person makes a sound with a movement and everyone copies closely- go round the circle.
2. Say your name with an action – everyone copies – go round the circle
3. Say your name, an animal or adjective that begins with the same letter. Do a clear movement as you say it – everyone copies – go round.

This game can be used in many ways with any question. Using the above examples can lead to responses like “Sara the slippery snake” or the “saddened snail”. “Matt the moody mouse” or “massive moose”. I’ve begun to ask children to think of an animal, bird or insect from the county they live in, or from the UK, that begins with the same letter as their name. They may need help before the game starts but it makes them think about the environment they live in.

Keep the flow - discourage over thinking. Encourage clear shapes and use the space inside the circle. If the first time round is hesitant and floppy then do the same again with vigour, enjoying the flow and musicality now it's known by the group.

Circle game 4 - A memorable time in nature

Using personal memories and looking around mind pictures.

Think to yourself (in your own mind – you can close your eyes) about a time that you really enjoyed being in nature; a moment that you clearly remember. Which season was it in? Where were you? – in your garden, school playground, on holiday, a beach, river, mountain or wood? Ask the group to do the same.

Check that everyone has a moment they are recalling (they mostly do). If not prompt further. Encourage the group to think of something usual or close to home. I find they may be overthinking for fantastic, holiday moments they have maybe never had.

Now that you have a picture in your mind, take a look around and choose one thing that you can see or hear. Make a short sentence from your recollection and what you can see around you. E.g. A heron standing tall by the rushing weir. A sticky slug on my doorstep.

Each person says their sentence with their action and everyone else in the circle copies. Together the group paints pictures using words and actions (storytelling) about the wonder of nature.

Circle game 4b - Here and Now

Heightening perception – enlivening the place through detail.

A variation on the above is to focus on the environment you are in. Find something that catches your attention and describe it through one of the five senses. You can choose just two senses (sight and sound) to simplify the task.

e.g. grey clouds racing across the sky, cold wet stones, annoying seagulls crying.

Go round the group a couple of times - add in nouns, emotion or adjectives and try to encourage improvements to voice or gesture to build confidence and clarity.

Circle game 5 - Describe the Object

Developing language, observation and creative thinking.

Find a natural object. A stick, stone, plant, leaf etc.

Pass the object round the group. Each person describes the object in a sentence or talks for 30 seconds about it and try to encourage each person to think of something new to say.

Look for more than just description - Is it factual? Is it imagined? What is the object's past or future? Where has it been or who's used it? Talk about a detail or give a broad view. Give a statement of the obvious or be surreal.

You could use several objects between small groups.

Developing Games 4 and 5 into poetry

These games generate phrases and sentences.

Games 4 and 5 can be developed further at 'base camp' or back in the classroom.

Group Poem Making

Write down the sentences. Cut them out and ask the group (or smaller groups) to choose a poetic order for them and arrange them accordingly. Some of the sentences might be left out whilst some might be slightly re-worded but the end result is a new group poem. Glue the poem onto large paper and decorate the page to combine text and art.

Creative writing

Use a sentence as a first line for a story (a perspective to view the world from) and work individually or in groups to develop that story using the other sentences.



The Walking Workshop and Creative Literacy

The journey to the Giants is as important to the story making workshop as the Giants themselves.

Being 'in a place' brings language to life and gives ideas a context. It helps encourage genuine responses; authentic, personal associations and observations that make a story more distinctive. The layers of information influence story themes and ideas.



Healthy human beings are bound to make connections and always try to make narrative sense of the world around them so literacy confidence can improve as new ideas become validated.

These simple tips can help you make the most of the journey to the Giants as a foundation to story making.

- Walk freely as a group but stop for focused activities, information giving or discoveries.
- Relax into being outside. Get used to listening and looking.
- Take note books but be careful to avoid focussing on the notes at the expense of observation, talking and experiencing.
- Use the momentum of the walk to build and structure the story. Guide the children further into the experience.
- Before and during the walk bring in local myths and legends, scientific facts, ecological and wildlife knowledge or historical anecdotes. Link them to your theme.
- Stop at places where you can develop an idea of theme. We stopped at bridges to ask questions like what is the human influence here? What wildlife lives here? We also stopped where we could see a stand of Himalayan balsam, a non-native invasive species. This was a prompt to ask about 'belonging' and to stimulate the group to think about whether the Giants are aliens. Do they belong?
- This is a creative research task. Draw, sketch, collect and note without thinking too much about where it's heading. Gather ingredients to make sense of later.

The following describes a series of activities that can be undertaken on the journey to and from the Giants and at the Giants themselves. They help stimulate and develop creative 'story thinking' in the children and are grouped under sub-headings that might be described as 'building blocks' for story development.

1. Setting. Where the story happens

These exercises prepare the group for writing about place.

Word Collecting. Ask the group to collect words in their notebooks and to write the one sentence about a detail. We focused on words for the river whose mood changed daily.



Our school groups wrote their words on bits of Wood and tied them to the Giants' bridge.

NOW! Notice what is around you NOW!

Weather, time of day, animal behaviour, something floating in the river, colour, texture... Reading the opening of the book 'Tarka the Otter' beautifully illustrated writing that used good techniques to describe the environment. We saw what Henry Williamson saw.

5 Senses – Ask the group to note down a phrase for each sense. I see, I hear, I smell, I taste and I feel.

Smell and taste can be tricky, but they do give emotive responses. Feel can be interpreted as emotional feeling about the place as well as physical touch. Asking 'How do you feel here today?' helps make the child part of the place rather than an outsider.

Free writing – timed note taking for 3-5 minutes about the place or other given specific. This exercise helps with critical self-editing and often throws up unexpected responses if you set the right framework and expectations.

- Keep the pen moving. Don't worry about grammar and style.
- Write everything you observe. Keep going even when you've dried up.
- Is it OK to make a list, repeat words?
- It's private, they are not for reading out loud.
- Start and stop at the given time
- The children should have a look at the writing back in the class room or 'at base camp', either individually or in a pair. They should highlight out the their favourite words or sentences and note them on separate paper
- The favourite gems can be used as opening lines in the story or be included at other points later on in the story.

2. True or False

These exercises use real objects to develop improvised thinking, story plot and creative language

What is it really? Set up the game by demonstrating it to the group. Choose a natural object that has attracted you; let's say you choose a small twig.

"This looks like a small twig, but what is it really?"

Ask open questions about it. What is it doing here? Who dropped it? What is it for?

"Perhaps its a giants used toothpick thrown down after a feast"

Develop the theme further. What did they eat at the feast? Where was the feast? Who else came....?

Perhaps you choose a fallen leaf

"This looks like an autumn leaf, but what is it really?"

Its a vole's umbrella or perhaps a giant's eyelash.....



Ask the children to form pairs and choose objects around which they can make stories. Give them a limited time and then ask them to swap objects with other pairs and repeat as many times as you wish.

This exercise could give the story a magic moment, a turning point or provide a character with a tool or extra information. It also gives an opportunity to discover more facts about the object like what kind of leaf it is and to talk about what we already know about the natural object.

Metaphors and similes Looking closely at natural objects helps to build imagery and follows on neatly after the flights of fancy in the 'what is it really?' game. This exercise is based on the question, *"what is it like?"*

The trees are standing tall like soldiers on parade

The water is flowing slowly like jam off a spoon

3. Character

By the time the group reach the three giant heads over-looking the river Torridge they have had their linguistic muscles stretched and have populated their world with the essence of stories. The Giants are ready made characters to put flesh on the bones of their story ideas and help pull the looser experience into focus.

Although we want the stories to be creative and original, we need to set expectations to help shape them, for example that your story must have:

- between one and three giants as main characters
- feature a river
- include another character from the landscape.*

*Cite Williamson's 'Tarka the Otter' as an example of animals becoming characters. Suggest that plants, and trees can also become characters. Introduce the word Anthropomorphism! - the attribution of human characteristics to non-humans, e.g. 'Wind in the Willows' and 'Winnie the Pooh'.

You might also wish to develop the idea of giants further. What other giants can the group think of? Jack and the Beanstalk and Jack the Giant Killer. Dahls' BFG. David and Goliath. Hughes' Iron Man. The Cyclops, Titans and Colossus from Greek myth (associated words – titanic, colossal.) Note the different types of giants in stories and their different characters and plot lines

Use those examples to develop the idea of a character's personality and attributes. What kind of personality can a giant have? For example are they nice or nasty?

Character development

We know now what our characters are, e.g. Giants or a frog, but for a good story we need to know more about them. For example:

- What's are their moods and main emotions at the start of the story. (How will that change through the story?)
- What do they look like – male, female, adult, child?
- What do they like or dis-like?
- What is their relationship with other characters?
- Where have they come from, why are they here?
- How old are they?
- Who are they? What are their names?
- How big are they?
- Do they have a special skill?
- If they could speak what would they say?

Open questions

To help make sense of the world human beings are creatures in search of connections and narratives. The children are already making connections. Asking **non-judgmental, open questions** in a conversational style brings focus to their ideas. Avoid the temptation to give suggestions. Guide their thinking toward a plot and character outline through open questions using your knowledge of story structure. Trust that an answer will come out.



Avoiding banana moments

Keith Johnstone's book 'Impro' is a classic. In it he talks about 'banana' being a stock answer during improvisation games and how people think they are being original and funny by giving it. Giving a character the name 'Bob' or default story ideas about fairies or aliens are what I call 'banana moments'.

Being outside and using what is available around them helps the children push beyond those 'banana' moments. It inspires their imagination, supports spontaneity and helps them trust new ideas and new ways of thinking.

4. Drama. What's the story?

What do the characters want? Why can't they have it? Does a character change during the story and if so why, where and how? Who or what helps them? Who or what is against them? Is there a back story that helps explain the story? What are the relationships? Where's the tension?

These questions and others like them help show what is different at the beginning of the story from the end. They highlight the turning points and in short, define the drama.

How far will the children push reality and play with the readers mind? How far can they go without losing the essence of the story and going outside the boundaries you have set?

5. Planning. Structures. Endings

Organisation and decision making to shape stories.

Vivid memories have been made and ideas are buzzing about like happy bees. It's all gone in to the group's head but the question is, what's the most effective way of getting it out and giving it form? How can we keep the stories alive when the children begin the slow process of writing them down to make enough sense for a reader? Stories are big entities and they take time to make well.

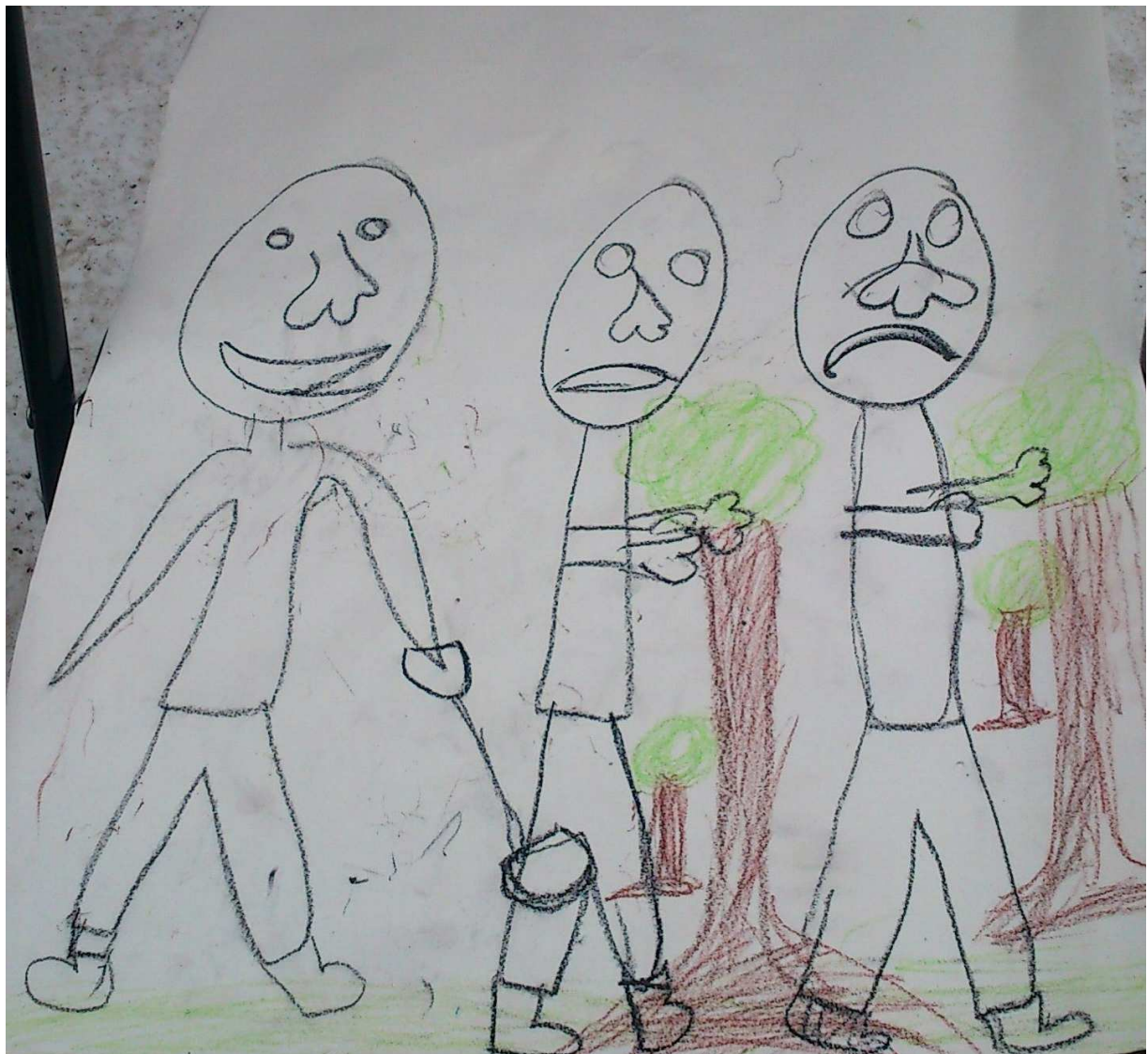
Verbal storytelling

Telling the stories at 'base camp' was a useful way of embedding them in the mind, highlighting and addressing areas that needed attention and providing the well spring for the written work. Allow for talking time before writing.

The group can share ideas in pairs or small groups. The teacher should note interesting and vibrant language and manage the shift between spoken and written word. The children need to try to keep the vibrancy of the spoken word in the writing.

Exploring the Story

Pictures, maps, made objects associated with the story are all non-verbal ways of exploring and developing it. Poems, sections of prose are written ways of delving deeper into character development, the plot and points of view.



Story structure

As teachers you are familiar with storyboards, story maps and story mountains as tools to help structure stories, together with the pros and cons of each relative to each other relative to free style going for it .All help embed the story in the child's mind and sustain them through the decision making and writing process. The pros and cons of some structures are set out here.

- **6 part story structure.** (See appendix 1)

Pros - A useful structure to guide stories along, which highlights the real scaffolding that helps support a story. I keep it in mind to help me formulate questions I ask in a story shaping conversation in order to drive the plot forwards.

Cons – Stories can go off at tangents too easily or break down as children dissect them to fit into the structure. It can be too complicated for younger children and those that struggle with making narratives. Endings can be abrupt.

- **3 part story structure.** This is based around the concept of beginning, middle and end. Using objects to represent those elements of the story or to provide clues about setting, drama and resolution can help the children use the structure effectively.

Pros – Useful as a starting point especially with younger children or when you have pressing time issues.

Cons – It is simplistic and isn't ideal for fleshing out characters and relationships.

- **Free style.** This gives the children time and flexibility to make their own connections and come up with a structured story bearing in mind what they have learnt to date.

Pros – the story flows well and makes sense to the writer. It allows the writer to really digest the story and tease out and resolve inconsistencies and problems with the narrative.

Cons – The stories can have a tendency to ramble, be quite complicated and not reach an end.



A note about endings. What's changed?

The child's finished story becomes their personal contribution to the story of the place. Forever in their memory, it anchors them to the landscape in which they live. We hope the Giant Story Project improves literacy and enjoyment of both language and the environment. Spending a creative day outside helps us all to care about the natural world.



Appendix 1.

6 Part Story Planner

PLACE	CHARACTER
PROBLEM/ DILEMMA/ MISSION	WHO or WHAT HELPS and HOW?
OBSTACLE in the way of the character	OUTCOME

- Sometimes a 7th called CELEBRATION is needed.
- Often character is put first. Try location as a starting point. Think about the landscape of the story and how the character fits into it.
- Draw a **quick** picture in each box OR mix the rough pictures with key words of text.

This is a simpler version for younger children or if you have less contact time.

WHERE?	WHO?
WHAT DO THEY WANT?	WHY CAN'T THEY HAVE IT?
WHO OR WHAT HELPS?	IN THE END...

Written by Sara Hurley based on her model of story making.
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Text and photographs by Sara Hurley. Games are in the public domain.

Suggested further reading on storytelling for teachers.

Telling Tales. Storytelling as Emotional Literacy. Steve Killick and Taffy Thomas. (Educational printing Services Ltd. 2007)

Storymaking in Education and Therapy. Alida Gersie and Nancy King. (Jessica Kingsley Publishers 1990)

Tell It: a practical guide to storytelling with children across the Primary age-range. Mary Medlicott. (a storyworks publication 2006)

Stories for Thinking. Professor Robert Fisher. (Nash Pollack Publishing 1996)

Classroom Tales - using Storytelling to build Emotional, Social and Academic Skills across the Primary Curriculum. Jenny Fox Eades. (Jessica Kingsley Publishers 1995)

The Art of Storytelling for Teachers and Pupils. E. Grugeon and P. Gardner. (David Fulton Publishers 2000)

Talking to the Earth. Gordon MacLennan. (Capall Bann Publishing 1995)
(a practical guide to environmental art activities for school groups.)

Useful websites

<http://www.verbalartscentre.co.uk/T3/masterclasses.html>
relevant downloads available.

www.improvenyclopedia.org
drama and story games

