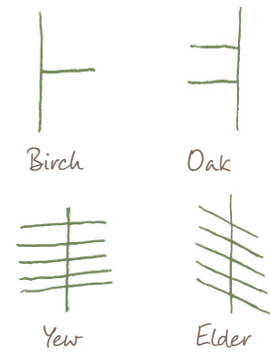




MAGIC WANDS

What could be more magical than a wand? Deeply rooted in ancient symbolism, wands are an essential accessory for many of the fantastical beings of myth and folktale, with unrivalled status as an instrument of powerful magic. Stories abound of wands being used to transform people into animals and make objects move or vanish, among a myriad of other tricks. Whether you are a fairy-in-waiting, a witch with a mission or a wizard with a grudge, a world of spells, conjuring and transformation awaits!

Some wands are made from crystal and others from metal, but at Forest School the wands are wood – a material that itself is deeply imbued with symbolism. The Ogham alphabet (see examples below) of the ancient Celts associated letters with native trees, with each tree linked to various energies and qualities. The silver birch, for example, symbolized transformation and new beginnings. One of the first trees to colonize a grassland, its sparse foliage permits other plants to grow beneath it. Its leaves and twigs fall to the ground and nourish the soil, so that seeds from other plants and longer-living trees, such as oak, begin to grow and an empty grassland becomes a majestic forest. The stately and long-lived oak, on the other hand, is a symbol of



strength, endurance and courage. The yew has a lifespan that exceeds even that of the oak, and represents death and rebirth. This tree has a remarkable strategy for regeneration, rotting away from within its trunk at around 800 years old but living on as its branches grow downward to form new roots. Elder was believed, in Scandinavia, to protect against witchcraft, while elsewhere it was a means to see faery folk! Some knowledge of the Ogham alphabet and other tree folklore can add an exciting extra level of meaning to wand creation, imbuing a wand made of birch, for example, with the power of transformation.



Talking about the choice of stick for the wand builds identification skills, deepening a child's sense of connection with the natural world. Designing and decorating a wand is a wonderfully creative activity that develops communication and fine motor skills, builds confidence and, above all, fires the imagination.

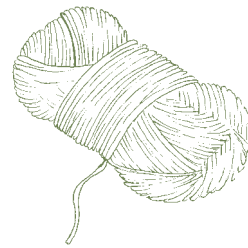


Get ready

Tell everyone how ancient peoples all over the world believed that trees have special powers. A wand made from wood captures the tree's powers and transfers the magic to the wand-bearer. How will they use their wands and who will they be when they use them?

Get set

Everyone heads off to find a stick that's perfect for their wand. It could have fallen from a tree that has special powers in folklore or perhaps it's just a stick they like, leaving them free to dream up its powers for themselves. (If there is a chance anyone will create a wand from the magical yew, remind them that yew is poisonous for humans to eat.) Nobbles and gnarly knots on the stick all add to the character of the finished wand. Also search for natural decorations to adorn the wands. The children can pick up anything they like from the forest floor, such as feathers, leaves and seeds, only avoiding poisonous or rare plants.

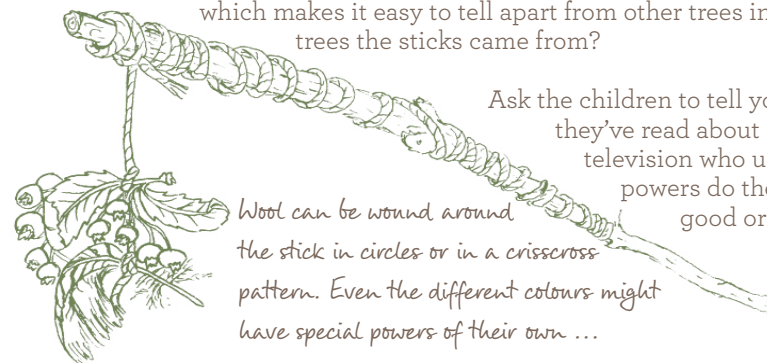


Go!

When they are happy with the materials for their wands, the wand-makers can choose some coloured wool to attach decorative objects. Tie these on with a double overhand knot. Winding on wool is another way to make the wand unique. Again, tie one end to the stick with a double overhand knot (younger children may need help with this). The wool can then be wound around the stick until the loose end is of the desired length. Secure at the other end with another double overhand knot. How all this is done is up to the wand maker. Now it's time to cast some spells. Let the magic begin!

Endings

Encourage the children in turn to describe their wand. What are its magical powers? What features of the wand provide these powers? How does holding the wand make them feel? Looking at the different sticks used to make the wands, you could discuss how every tree has its own distinctive features. A birch tree, for example, has white bark, which makes it easy to tell apart from other trees in a forest. Can you spot the trees the sticks came from?



Ask the children to tell you about the characters they've read about or seen in movies or on television who use wands – what magical powers do they have? Are these used for good or for mischief?

Wool can be wound around the stick in circles or in a crisscross pattern. Even the different colours might have special powers of their own ...

LOCATION Any natural space with a variety of tree species – woodland is ideal, but parks and gardens with fallen sticks to play with will work, too.

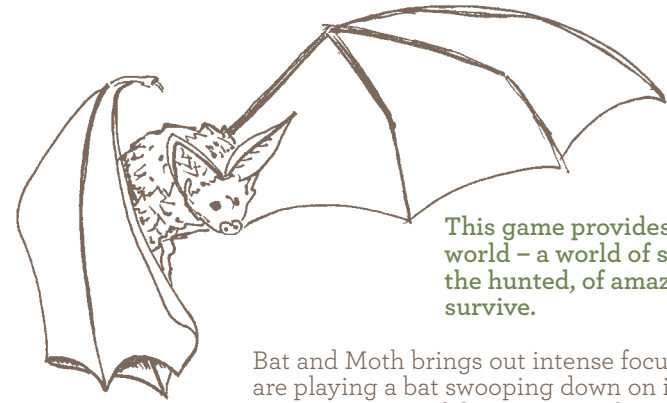
AGE GROUP 4 years +

LEARNING ABOUT ... Tree identification * fine motor skills * being creative * using the imagination * myth and folklore * connecting with nature * self-confidence * communication

KIT

- Sticks (if fallen ones are not available on the ground)
- Coloured wool, ideally in four or five different colours
- Scissors (optional)

Taken from *Play the Forest School Way* by Peter Houghton and Jane Worroll – Available in all good book stores and online, priced £12.99



BAT AND MOTH

This game provides a window straight into another world – a world of sound, of darkness, of the hunter and the hunted, of amazing adaptations that animals make to survive.

Bat and Moth brings out intense focus and real joy in children, whether they are playing a bat swooping down on its prey, or a moth craftily eluding capture, or one of the trees, wiggling with excitement on the spot. The

children connect with each other, transcend shyness and become fully present. Afterwards they are always full of questions about these clever creatures!

A key skill in Bat and Moth is listening, vital in absorbing verbal information as well as in building friendships. The game's different roles also provide opportunities to be active, to fine-tune the senses, to learn self-control and focus, to trust others and work with them, and to be self-reliant. The bat must listen carefully for the moth's reply, blocking out all distractions. Bats must also trust the boundary created by the trees and their own blind movements. It's only by drawing on this focus and self-sufficiency that they will succeed in capturing their prey.

Moths have to listen carefully for the bat's call and stay alert to its approaching movements. They must be stealthy, staying silent while actively avoiding capture. Trees on the other hand have to be self-controlled and work as a team to form a boundary, staying alert to the action but keeping still and only speaking if they're actually touched by a bat or moth. All in all, a truly wonderful experience!

Get ready

Tell the children all about the amazing natural phenomenon known as echolocation. Bats are supposed to be blind, but actually they can see almost as well as we can. To spot food such as moths and other insects at night, they need to use their ears rather than their eyes. Bats build up a picture of the world around them by making calls as they fly about and listening for the returning echo. This is called echolocation. By making these calls, bats can tell how far away something is, how big it is, its shape and where it's going.

Get set

Choose one player to be the bat and another to be the moth. Everyone else is the trees. (Everyone can take a turn at being either bat or moth.) All the trees hold hands and spread out to make a circle around the bat and moth. Tie a scarf around the bat's eyes as a blindfold. Now the bat is going to try to catch the moth!

Go!

The bat claps hands and the moth claps back. Clapping hands is the bat sending out a sound wave. The moth clapping in return is the sound bouncing back to the bat. That's echolocation! The bat now knows where the



LOCATION	A woodland clearing is ideal, as woods are the habitat of many bat and moth species. However, this game can be played in any open space
AGE GROUP	4 years +
NUMBER OF PLAYERS	6 + For very big groups: → Try increasing the number of moths to 3-5. → If it's proving difficult to capture moths, the trees can take a step closer to tighten the circle.
LEARNING ABOUT ...	Being active ☺ using the senses, especially hearing ☺ focus ☺ self-reliance/control ☺ natural selection/species adaptation
KIT	A cotton scarf or other blindfold

moth is and is ready to catch and eat its prey. The moth must avoid capture to survive. If the bat grabs one of the trees as it tries to track down the moth, the tree calls out 'TREE!', and the hunt continues. When the bat catches a moth, the moth can consider itself eaten! The bat carries on hunting until all the moths have been caught.



Endings

Encourage the children to talk about bats and moths. Which traits, such as moving fast, listening well and being confident, are best for catching moths? And which skills, such as moving quietly, staying low to the ground and being quick, helped the moths to survive?

In nature, the traits that help each animal species survive are passed on from parent to baby in a process called natural selection. A fantastic example of this is the night-flying peppered moth (*Biston betularia*), found across the world. In Britain until the 19th century these had usually been pale in colour, which helped them stay camouflaged against the light-coloured birch trees which they rested on. Any peppered moths that mutated into a darker colour were more easily seen and eaten by birds. But during the Industrial Revolution, smoke and other pollution from factories blackened the trees. Then the pale moths were no longer well-camouflaged and began to be eaten in greater numbers, leaving any darker peppered moths to take over. And there's a twist to the tale. Now we are taking more care of the environment, and our trees are no longer so polluted, the pale peppered moths have returned. The way animals adapt to their environment is one of the wonders of nature!



TRY THIS!

Clapping several times in quick succession may make tracking down moths easier.