



on the outdoor environment itself – a wide range of exciting stimuli. Appreciating what the outdoors has to offer will help you think big.

### Get messy and work on a large scale

Think about using materials and techniques that wouldn't be suitable for indoor use. Mud, for example, can be used to draw with and mould. With more space you can create giant junk art sculptures. Spray paints are easy and fun to use – try creating huge pictures on sheets draped over fences. Outdoors children can enjoy painting with their hands and feet – roll out lengths of lining wallpaper and provide trays of different coloured paint for the children to step into.

### Work collaboratively

Big art projects that involve groups or even whole setting participation naturally require collaboration, and not only help to develop children's skills of negotiation and participation but also – especially with less gifted children – inspire confidence and a sense of belonging. Projects that everyone can work on together and that enhance your outdoors – such as murals and/or mosaic-tile paths – will also add long-lasting value to your setting.

## Exhibition mission!

Art offers children a vital opportunity to express their creativity and communicate ideas to others. It can build self-confidence and help develop a strong sense of individuality, as well as develop children's practical knowledge, help them learn how to use their judgement and imagination and connect with others.

Exploring art outdoors adds an extra and special dimension – offering height and space to experiment with, and far more stimuli. But why stop here? Why not celebrate your children's work by turning your outdoors into an art gallery so their work can be shared with the whole setting, parents and even the wider community?

An event such as this can be as simple or sophisticated as you like – a small presentation of finger painting (perhaps using paints made from berries) mounted at your entrance for an afternoon, or sculptures made from large scale materials which visitors can enjoy over a week.

To help you, this Playnotes looks at:

- why art works outdoors
- why hold an outdoor art exhibition
- getting started
- making the exhibition a success.

### Why art works outdoors

Art and the outdoors are natural partners. Your outdoors offers children a unique space to experiment in and – by drawing



### Make use of the natural world

Natural materials found outdoors that readily lend themselves to artistic creations include willow withies (flexible, and can be used to construct large and small shapes), seed heads, pebbles and composted bark, leaves and clay (the soil in your grounds may contain enough clay to be used not just to shape and mould but also hold other materials together). You can also use earth, soil and stones for creating pictures, and earth and berries to make pigments for painting with. Even the sand in your sand area can be used for drawing, sculpting or embellishing.

Natural features can provide inspiration





too. Decorate trees for example, with ribbons, flowers or streamers; hang lanterns, pictures, sculpture or old kitchen implements as wind chimes from the branches.

#### Make use of man-made features

Look at what your buildings and hard landscaping have to offer. Children can explore the textures of walls and pavements by making rubbings of the different types of surfaces. They could take photos of found objects – close up and out of context – then try and discover the subject of each others' photos. Even boring chain link fences can be turned into colourful works of art by weaving crepe paper, fabric or plastic (using colourful plastic bags) through the spaces in the fence.



### Why hold an outdoor art exhibition

An art exhibition is a fun event that everyone will enjoy. Spending time outdoors together is always sociable, and the art will help provide a focused event that introduces everyone to the possibilities of outdoor activities while promoting outdoor learning for all. In addition:

- for the **children** there will be opportunities for creative problem solving, and trying new skills as the artwork is created. Sharing their achievements will also bolster their self-esteem.
- **staff** will be able to demonstrate the work they do with children. They may even learn new skills themselves by working with a local artist or sculptor. And as an exhibition will also provide opportunities for much needed fundraising, they may be inspired to explore contacts in the wider community for help.
- bringing **parents** into the outdoors – perhaps by inviting them to take part in outdoor art activities – is a chance to show them the benefits of the outdoor environment and the impact it has on children's learning. Parents may also be happy to get involved by helping with the organisation of a launch party – printing flyers and invitations and perhaps visiting local shopping areas to publicise the event.
- if you invite local artists to take part, the local and wider **community** will come to know of the work taking place in the

setting and the benefits of outdoor play for young children. Local businesses may be able to donate materials for the project. And if you open the exhibition to the general public, the community will see the work taking place within the setting which will help build links and may provide children with the chance to meet other public figures, or perhaps members of the teaching staff from the local school they will be moving on to in the future.

### Getting started

Now it's time to start thinking about the practicalities of having a gallery outdoors, and the theme of your exhibition.

#### Location and timing

Getting the location of your gallery right will enhance the artwork you have on display. With the children, take a walk around your outdoors and identify spaces that might work. Look at the features you have outdoors. Trees, for example, can be used not only for hanging artwork from but also forming the basis of your artwork – creating tree faces, for example, using clay and other natural resources such as feathers, leaves, twigs, petals and moss.



Fencing is always good to use, either within your exhibition – by weaving through the spaces – or to hang art works from. Alternatively, sandwich boards are great for moving into ideal locations.

A sheltered space is ideal as you wouldn't have to worry about the weather. If space is limited find out if you can use the setting's car park for an afternoon – mount artwork on large pieces of white card, or weigh down individual pieces with pebbles. Bear in mind, however, that if you are in a shared space or rented accommodation then you may need to seek permission first before you are able to use this kind of space for a length of time.

Decide too whether your exhibition will be for one day or one week, and whether you want to involve small groups of children or the whole setting. Remember some children are only in on certain days and it would be best if all the children at your setting could take part.



## Working with a professional artist

Partnerships with professional artists can create new opportunities for children. Community artists are especially skilled at involving children of different ages and abilities, and are used to project working and running workshops. Projects with artists can often access specific funding too – contact your local arts education officer for advice. If you don't have a specific artist in mind, you can find details of artists experienced in working with settings through your local authority arts officer or databases such as [www.artistsinschools.co.uk](http://www.artistsinschools.co.uk). Find the right artist for your project by:

- approaching two or three professionals with your project brief – which should set out the aims of your project, the roles and responsibilities of all those involved, timetables and budgets and any practical requirements.
- inviting them to tender for the work.
- asking them for examples of their previous work, the names of any schools they have worked with before whom you could contact and details of their professional indemnity and public liability insurances.



Photograph © Chris Pearsall

### Theme

Artwork can take many forms, but an underlying theme will help bring the exhibition together. You may want to link your idea with a topic you are already covering in the curriculum such as May Day, spring, new life, colours, any religious festivals, or an event that is already happening in the community such as a celebration. For more ideas see 'Looking for inspiration' over page.



### Planning

Think about the type and amount of resources you will need. Besides art resources, you will also need appropriate clothing, facilities for washing hands, drying wet aprons, and clearing up spillages. Consider too the possibility of a change in the weather, and have a

contingency plan in case the opening of the gallery needs to be postponed. Make sure too that you have enough help – you may wish to ask parents to come and join in with the project, or if you have had a student on work experience, you could see if they would like to come and help.

## Making the exhibition a success

Make the day a success with careful preparation.

- Create with the children invites, flyers and posters to publicise the event. If you are opening your doors to the local community you could take small groups of children out to post flyers through letterboxes and ask local shop keepers to put a poster up in their window.
- Before the opening, tour the exhibition with small groups of children from your setting – give those who produced work cameras to record their achievements. If appropriate, offer magnifying glasses so the children can examine details. If you are part of a school, invite older children to come along for a preview too.
- Encourage the older children to act as tour guides – let them practice first by showing practitioners and other children around the outdoor gallery.
- Prepare refreshments for visitors with the children. This could be simple cold

drinks and cakes (ask parents to send in donations) or more sophisticated – a strawberries and cream picnic, for example, or a barbecue (for more ideas on outdoors feasts see 'Further resources').

- Invite special guests – this could be a local artist to open the exhibition, the headteacher from your attached school, religious leader, local police, librarian, cub/rainbows leader, gardener etc, or even your local newspaper (don't forget this is a great opportunity for publicity –





## Looking for inspiration?

Before starting a piece of art work, encourage the children to look at the art work of established artists.

- Sculptures – use photos, pictures or books of sculptures to inspire sculptures made from small and large-scale materials such as clay, lego, junk, play equipment, fabric, string etc. Look at work by Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore and Paul McCarthy. Talk about the form, shape, colours and materials. Explain how the outside is going to be used for the sculptures. If possible arrange to visit places with sculptures – a sculpture park is ideal. Let the children enjoy the space, talk about the sculptures, and their/your preferences and feelings.
- Working with colour and shapes – use posters, postcards or pictures of the artist Kandinsky's work, including



Photograph © Ian Jackson

Swinging, Homage A Grohmann, Balancement, Gelb Rot Blau. Talk about the artist's work, shapes, colours and accent marks. Provide objects (junk, crockery, jigsaw inset pieces) the children can draw around and fill in with colour. Show them how to make marks using the side of the pastel, and how to blend the colour gently by rubbing with their fingers. Roll out sheets of wallpaper. Ask the children to choose colours to work with, and together decide where to place their shapes (they could do these on separate pieces of paper, and then cut them out

and glue them on to the large sheet. They can make accents with black pastels.

- Abstract art – Jackson Pollack is a great artist to explore. Talk about his paintings – and then about what the children enjoy doing with paint. Concentrate on actions and effects such as splashing, flicking, rolling, squashing and dribbling and using thick and thin paint. Provide ready-mixed paints or washing up bottles full of liquid paint plus rollers, brushes, wheels etc. Hang or lay out a white sheet and start the fun.

for more about contacting the press see 'Further resources' below).

- Make sure you record the event by taking photos and providing a visitors' book for comments. After the event you can make a photo album and reflect together on what everyone did.

## Further resources

- Playnotes *Outdoor art* (May 2006), Curriculum support *Outdoor feasts* (January 2010), Profiles *Working with an artist* (November 2009), *Out and About Contact the Press*. All available to download from the member services pages of our [www.ltl.org.uk](http://www.ltl.org.uk).
- *Arts in the school grounds* by Brian Keaney for Learning through Landscapes (Southgate Publishers). Visit [www.southgatepublishers.co.uk](http://www.southgatepublishers.co.uk).
- For information on key artists and movements visit [www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk).
- For contact details of your local authority arts office visit

[www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk),  
[www.scottisharts.org.uk](http://www.scottisharts.org.uk),  
[www.artswales.org.uk](http://www.artswales.org.uk) or  
[www.artscouncil-ni.org](http://www.artscouncil-ni.org).

- For details of artists experienced in working with schools visit our website [www.ltl.org.uk](http://www.ltl.org.uk) and/or [www.artistsinschools.co.uk](http://www.artistsinschools.co.uk).

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To find out more about membership call 01962 845811 or visit [www.ltl.org.uk](http://www.ltl.org.uk)

