



Arbor Day

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# Teacher Resource Pack

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Letchworth  
Garden City  
Heritage Foundation



PETER  
SOWERBY  
FOUNDATION



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**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**



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Find out more: [www.discoverlethworth.co.uk/arbor-day](http://www.discoverlethworth.co.uk/arbor-day)



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# Arbor Day Introduction

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**In 1908 Arbor Day occurred for the first time in Letchworth Garden City, inspired by the event of the same name which originated in Nebraska, USA. Arbor Day is an annual festival that celebrates the planting and care of trees.**

In the early days of Letchworth many children were involved from local schools. The children would join a procession with the wider Letchworth community, marching through the town carrying their trees.

In the [Garden City Collection](#) there are a number of images showing early Letchworth residents carrying fir trees down Leys Avenue, in the town centre.

The event was filled with excitement as Ebenezer Howard, the town's founder, invited famous guests for the day including horticulturists, writers, artists and more. These included adventure novel author, H Rider Haggard, and Arbor Day founder, John Cockburn.

Children would be awarded certificates for their participation, and there was even a Letchworth-specific 'Tree Planting Song'. Children would perform the song alongside a series of poems, wearing leafy wreaths.

As the tradition began in the years following the towns founding in 1903, the event contributed to the lush green spaces the first Garden City is known for. It is thought that over 100,000 trees were planted in the first few years. This came to an end at the start of the First World War.



In the [Garden City Collection](#) there are fond memories in local news articles and there have been several attempts at revivals including **Plant a Tree in '73**. However, over time the town has slowly forgotten this early tradition.

In the Spring Term 2024, Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation partnered with St Thomas More Catholic Primary School and two local creatives to reintroduce Arbor Day.

Across the term, two classes from St. Thomas More joined workshops exploring local history, music and design. Working together, the groups wrote a new tree-planting song, prayers, and created banners and headdresses. On Wednesday 13th March 2024, the classes led a procession to Hillbrow Community Orchard to plant twelve fruit trees and perform their song, '[Trees Are Life](#)'.

This project has been co-designed by Musical Director Robert Hyman, Artist Chantelle Stephenson, class teachers Mrs Newton and Mr Flatley and Mollie Mclellan, from the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation.

This project has been supported with generous funding from Peter Sowerby Foundation and Museum Development South East.

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**Now, we invite Letchworth schools to help us bring back Arbor Day, supporting children to access nature, experience arts, culture, and heritage opportunities at school and to make Letchworth a great place to grow up.**

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## Before you start the project

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- Check out the Simple Tree Planting Guide to help you prepare for this event. You will need to choose your tree planting site, making sure to gain the right permissions, select the tree species you will be planting, and ensure you have the right set up in place. It is recommended to plant between 2-5 trees per class to ensure all involved can get quality hands on experience.
- It is recommended to have some tree planting volunteers on the day. They should be experienced and enthusiastic to demonstrate how to plant a tree at the celebration event and support students to join in.
- Send invitations home for the children's family to attend the Arbor Day celebration event, a template letter is included in the downloadable resource pack.
- You may wish to hand out certificates at the end of the project as a keepsake, where possible please use the replica of the original Arbor Day Certificates.
- In the spirit of Arbor Day, why not become part of our wider school's community by sharing a recording of your classes Arbor Day song on the [Discover Letchworth website](#).

To get involved, email: [mollie.mclellan@lethworth.com](mailto:mollie.mclellan@lethworth.com)



## Introducing Arbor Day

### Learning Objective:

1. Today we are going to investigate and discover what is Arbor Day.

**Time:** 1 Hour

### Resources:

#### Digital resources:

- Lsn 1 PowerPoint

#### Printed material:

- Lsn 1 Worksheet
- Newspaper clippings for detective trays

#### Objects to prepare:

- 1x Tray per table filled with tree related natural materials and printed newspaper clippings

#### Key-words:

- Arbor
- Citizen
- Ceremony
- Banners
- Verse



## Key Tasks

## Arbor Day

### Detectives activity:

Using the PowerPoint slides present the clues to answer the question:

#### What is Arbor Day?

- Clue 1: 1x Tray per table filled with tree related nature and print outs of newspaper clippings
- Clue 2: 'Garden City' map image and Ebenezer Howard image
- Clue 3: 2023 Arbor Day Song (on PPT with no visuals)

For each clue discuss or write down ideas of what Arbor Day might be. Ask them to write down their final guess after all of clues are revealed.

Continue slides to help you tell the class about the history of Arbor Day, including:

- Significance to Letchworth
- Tree planting
- Procession
- Famous guests
- Banners and Costume

Then reveal that the class are going to bring back Arbor Day.

### Assess:

Complete questions on Lsn 1 Worksheet to record current level of understanding.

#### Build knowledge:

Review the original Tree Planting Song, what do the lyrics mean? What do the class think was important to the 1900's participants about Arbor Day. Ask students to complete the worksheet sharing what they like and dislike about the song.

#### Share that over the coming weeks we will:

- Write our own song
- Make banners and costume
- Plant trees
- Perform our song to our community



## Understanding Climate Change

### Learning Objective:

1. To understand how we can campaign for change.

**Time:** 1 Hour

*N.B. Pair with science lessons focused on the life cycle of a tree.*

### Resources:

#### You may wish to prepare:

- Lsn 2 PowerPoint

#### Printed material:

- Lsn 2 Worksheet
- Tree planting sequence print out (cut out for 1x row per student)

### Video links:

- [What is Climate Change?](#)
- [Rang-Tan: the story of dirty palm oil](#)

### Key-words:

- Campaign
- Protest
- Climate Change



## Key Tasks

## Arbor Day

### What is a campaign:

Explain using PowerPoint 'What is a campaign?'

Watch '[What is Climate Change?](#)' video.

Either collectively on screen/whiteboard or individually\*, sort the suggested phrases in categories of 'Good for the Planet' or 'Bad for the planet'.

*\*Included on Lsn 2 Worksheet and PPT slides.*

### Discuss:

Explore 'How does planting trees help the planet?' with the support of the PPT diagrams to describing the Carbon Cycle. It may help to refer to the '[What is Climate Change?](#)' video.

### Sorting and sticking activity:

Describe the life cycle of the tree to the class. Using the Tree Planting Sequence print out, ask children to sort images to show the correct sequence of planting a tree. This can be stuck onto their Lsn 2 Worksheets.

### Inspire action:

- Watch '[Rang-Tan: the story of dirty palm oil](#)'
- Discuss Climate activists and the change they can make; i.e. Greta Thunberg's story
- Ask children to write their own ideas of how we can help stop Climate Change

End the session, discussing how the class is collectively going to take action through the Arbor Day project.

## Co-Writing Song Lyrics

### Learning Objective:

1. Work together to write song lyrics for Arbor Day.

**Time:** 1 - 2 Hours

### Resources:

#### You may wish to prepare:

- Song sentence starters to assist lyric writing

#### Video links:

- [What is Climate Change?](#)
- [Rang-Tan: the story of dirty palm oil](#)

#### Equipment:

- Laptop/iPad/Recording equipment

#### Key-words:

- Verse
- Chorus
- Rhyming couplets
- Melody
- Rhythm
- Beat

#### For Optional lesson 3b, you may wish to prepare:

- A PowerPoint with a typed copy of their lyrics



## Key Tasks

## Arbor Day

### Discussion:

Discuss how to write a song; what is a song made of, do we need rhyming words? You might listen to examples of songs relating to Earth Day.

Create a mind map of words that rhyme relating to tree planting, Climate Change and/or Arbor Day.

### Recall:

Remind students of their ideas for how to take action through Arbor Day. Explore themes of how they can support the planet.

### Group lyric writing:

In pairs or small groups, ask students write 1-2 lines of a song to go into a whole group Arbor Day song. Take a line from each group and start to bring them together as a class into verses.

If the children are finding this challenging, you may start them off or listen to past Arbor Day songs. You may also wish to use a backing track from the internet to give them a beat to write to.

**Music Lead:** begin to collectively pull together their ideas into verses and a chorus.

**Teaching Assistant:** Write down ideas on white board or flip chart. As this is finalised type up the lyrics so class can see it clearly on the projector.

Once each verse is finished, ask the class to sing it back to you. Use a voice recorder on a laptop or tablet to capture their singing.

**Music Lead:** You may need to develop the lyrics or melody, where possible this should be done with student input to ensure youth voice is kept at the heart of the project.

### Optional lesson 3 (b):

*Continue co-write song lyrics as above until the song is complete. Try to ensure all students contribute and feel heard.*

*Discuss how their song will be completed with backing music; this can be done with students working on music apps (i.e. Garage Band) or you may wish to lead a session using instruments to be played live for the melody of the song.*

### Recording:

*Prepare children to sing their song all the way through multiple times, discuss with them how to perform so that their voices carry and words are clear. Record singing multiple times: you may use this to layer on song mixing apps or software or to share with your school's community.*

*Continue to rehearse this song at least once each day and send home a copy of their lyrics.*

# Lesson 4

## Tree Percussion

### Learning Objective:

1. Recall what we know about Arbor Day.
2. Use percussion to create the background music for our lyrics.

**Time:** 1 Hour

### Resources:

#### Digital resources:

- Lsn 4 PowerPoint

### Equipment:

- Wooden drumsticks
- Forest area - ideally fallen trees/logs (if raining could also use tables, wooden percussion instruments or furniture in classroom)
- Laptop/iPad/Recording equipment



# Lesson 4



## Key Tasks

## Arbor Day

### Recap:

Discuss with class to remind them, what is Arbor Day?

Share their song lyrics and sing through at least one.

### What sounds can we use:

Discuss 'what is sound?' with support of the Lsn 4 PowerPoint. Ask the children to suggest what other sounds we might use for the song.

Watch clips from videos on sounds in nature including a woodpecker and people using trees as drums.

Explain what percussion is.

Introduce the idea of making a drum kit from nature with the support of the Lsn 4 PowerPoint.

Use videos to explain how we get a high or low pitch. Discuss how they might make varying pitches like a bass drum, snare, or hi-hat?

### Outdoor activity:

Prepare students with rules for tree drumming and then head outside for 30 minutes of drumming.

1. Allow them to explore, asking questions about how to get different pitches. Use hollow tree trunks, branches of different thickness and mossy trees to demonstrate.
2. Set them a task of drumming a beat for your song. You may wish to do this as a group with a play and repeat process.
3. Drumming should be recorded to remind the class and potentially mix the song together digitally later.



## Song and Event Rehearsal

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### Learning Objective:

1. Learn, rehearse and record our song for Arbor Day.
2. Discuss and rehearse the order of events.

**Time:** 1 Hour

### Resources:

#### Digital resources:

- Lsn 5 PowerPoint

#### Equipment:

- Laptop/iPad/Recording equipment



## Key Tasks

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## Arbor Day

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### Recall:

Remind the class that the song will be performed at their Arbor Day event.

Use Lsn 5 PowerPoint to discuss the importance of a procession in the old Letchworth Arbor Day's and the idea of sharing their song with others.

Share the order of events for their Arbor Day event, remember to include:

- Where will the tree be planted and the kind of tree it will be?
- Who will be in attendance?
- When will this happen? What happens if the weather is not good?

### Rehearse:

Rehearse song and practice performance skills.

Try using outdoor space to rehearse singing outside to demonstrate the need for voice projection if it is windy.

On the final rehearsal, indoors record the song again.



## Banners and Costume

### Learning Objective:

1. To make a class banner.
2. To design headdress to wear for our procession.

Time: 1 - 2 Hours

### Resources:

#### Digital resources:

- Lsn 6 PowerPoint

#### Equipment:

- Laptop/iPad/Recording equipment

#### Materials for banners:

- 20cm x 20cm of canvas fabric or card per student
- Fabric pens/paint
- Printmaking inks and ink rollers
- Re-useable stamps
- Banner poles

#### Materials for headdress:

- Sugar paper cut into strips: hole-punched along the width to poke through leaves
- Raffia/ribbon
- Leaves (gathered from forest floor)
- Stapler



## Key Tasks

## Arbor Day

### Discussion:

Ask them to consider if there are any other ways they can campaign during the event? How can they gather an audience, or communicate their message better? Would they like to chant during the procession with their key message?

### Banners:

Remind them of banners used in the early Arbor Days and Greta's protest sign. Discuss whether to make a large banner, like the Garden City Collections' 'Foursquare Our Town' or individual protest boards.

Discuss the importance of using recycled materials and reducing our use of resources when making artwork.

What messages do they want to share?

### Costume:

Inspired by the wreathes worn in old Arbor Days, demonstrate how to use sugar paper templates to create headdresses that they can wear for their procession.

Rehearse song and procession in costume with banners and backing track.



# Lesson 7

## Arbor Day Celebration Event

### Learning Objective:

1. Take part in a celebration event for Arbor Day.

**Time:** 2 - 3 Hours

### Resources:

#### Digital resources:

Lsn 7 Simple Tree Planting Guide

#### Set up at tree planting site:

- Trees
- Shovels
- Tree stake or guard for support
- Tree planting supporters

#### You may wish to prepare:

- Arbor Day Certificates
- Windflower seeds to hand out

#### Items to bring outdoors:

- Portable speaker (for backing track or instruments)
- Costume
- Banners
- Certificates



# Lesson 7



## Key Tasks

## Arbor Day

### Arbor day:

Ask your tree planting volunteers to mark out the planting sites to ensure they stay in the approved zones. You may ask them to set up with the items in listed in the resources column.

Prepare the children with a final rehearsal before you go outdoors for the event. Ask them to get ready with their outdoor-wear and get their banners and costume in place.

Greet parents and other attendees outside and ask them to follow the children's procession to the tree planting site.

Start the procession to the tree planting location with children carrying banners, costume. You may wish to organise a chant for while the student's march; this creates momentum and a sense of activism and occasion.

### Celebrate achievements:

Headteacher/Music Lead: Talk to parents about the importance of Arbor Day in Letchworth and the significance of the project for your students. Take this chance to celebrate them and their achievements throughout the lessons.

Lead the students in performing their song for Arbor Day; you may need a music speaker to play the backing track or instruments for any live playing.

### Tree planting:

Split into two groups and in each, ask the children to take turns digging up the soil. Once deep and wide enough, with assistance they can insert the tree. It may need a stake put in with it to support the tree while it grows. Once it is in, pat down the soil on top and water the tree.

*Optional: For those who finish early or to involve family, hand out windflower seeds to spread around the site.*

### Certificates:

To celebrate each child's achievements, hand out Arbor Day Certificate.

Thank all attendees for coming.

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**We hope you have enjoyed using our learning resources.**

All our resources are co-created with local schools but we are always looking to improve them.

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**Please share feedback of your experience using the digital resources.**

Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation will use your feedback to improve the services we provide for schools.

<https://forms.office.com/e/QRmDKjk6Lt>

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