

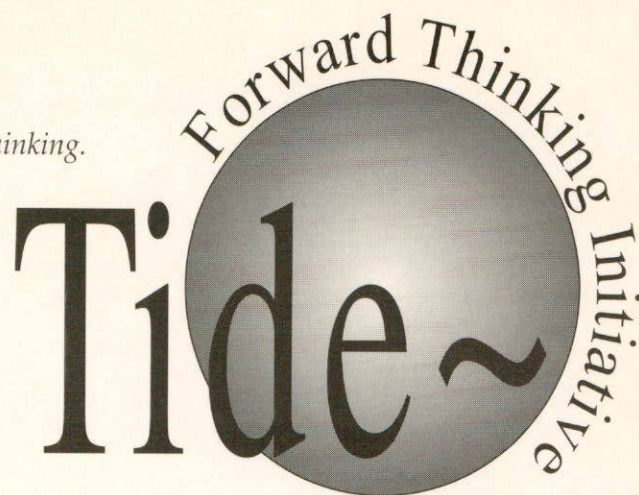
Writing from the oasis



Using environments creatively in
key stage 3 English

This publication is a contribution to *Forward Thinking*.

The *Forward Thinking* initiative provides a variety of opportunities for teachers to work together to plan, implement and evaluate work which responds to the challenges facing us as we seek to meet the educational needs of young people growing up in an increasingly global context.



In partnership with the Botanical Gardens Base,
Birmingham LEA

For information about Tide~ initiatives contact
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Writing from the Oasis

- using environments creatively in English

One of the challenges facing English teachers is the constant need to search for new and exciting stimuli to inspire students' creative writing. **Writing from the Oasis** explores how plants and their environments can meet this need.

This handbook draws together the creative work of a group of English teachers. They used the setting of the Birmingham Botanical Gardens, with plants from around the world, to fire the imagination of their students. The materials have been designed for use at KS3, however the ideas and techniques are widely applicable across the curriculum, and will also serve as a valuable resource at KS2.

The activities explore ways of raising development issues with young people, in both a local and global context. Examples of students' work and teachers' comments clearly illustrate the approaches, and suggest further ideas and resources to extend their creative writing.

Writing from the Oasis offers

- practical classroom activities
- ideas for using your school grounds or local environment
- photocopyable stimulus sheets
- resource information.

The ideas are easily adaptable to suit differing needs. They offer wide scope for challenging students to examine their own values, and to express their views both through discussion and their writing.

*Sue Bird, Iona Burbidge, Bella Coiffard,
Caroline Gilmour-White, Bill Graham, Nina Harvey,
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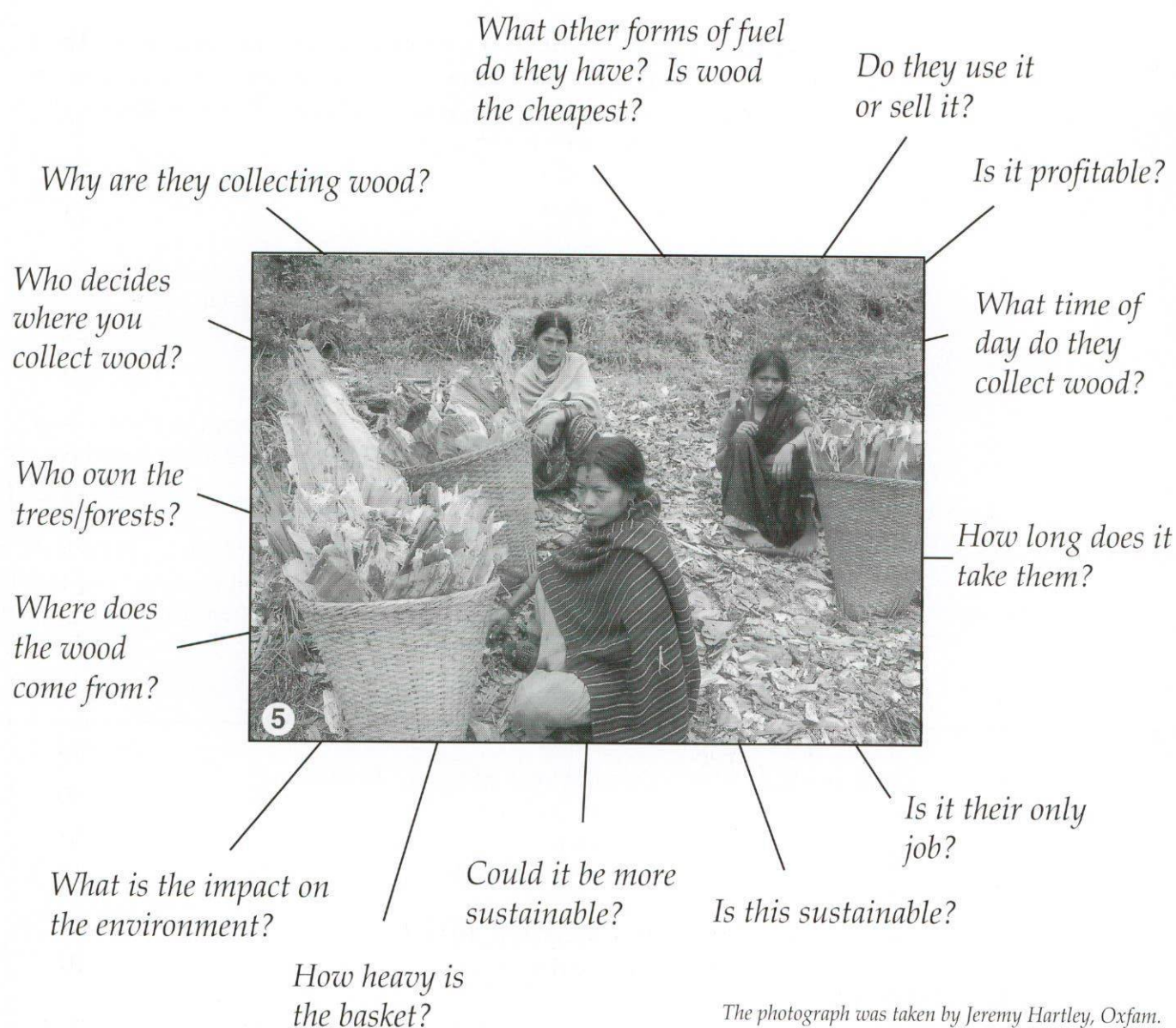
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Introduction

This book has resulted from a project involving a group of English teachers working with the Development Education Centre and the Botanical Gardens Base. The group spent some time together exploring issues raised by plants and environments. Each then planned a scheme of work which took place over a term. There was an initial pupils' visit to the Gardens [see accounts on pages 5-9]. The pupils responded very enthusiastically. Back in the classroom they used a range of stimuli such as photos or poems to explore some of the issues raised by them, before writing their stories. At the end of term they returned to the Gardens to tell their stories [see page 29].

One of the aims of the project was to use the environment as a starting point for exploring issues about people, economics, politics and how they are connected. The questions raised by this photograph of women collecting wood in Nepal give an example of the potential possible.



The photograph was taken by Jeremy Hartley, Oxfam. It is included in the *Development Compass Rose Pack*, DEC [Birmingham]

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Section 1

Our own projects - seizing an opportunity



This section presents the personal experiences of the five KS3 English teachers who engaged in the project with DEC and the Botanical Gardens. The process involved a series of planning meetings, preparation work in the classroom, visits to the Gardens with the children and follow up work back at school.

They used the opportunity provided by the 'oasis of plants' to stimulate some exciting story-writing ... it was fun and produced some amazing results!

The ideas in this handbook have been designed for use at KS3, but are equally applicable at KS2. They promote an enquiry based approach, and have relevance in curriculum areas such as history, geography and science as well as English.

The English curriculum

The activities in this book offer a wide range of opportunities for language use across the attainment targets for English. There are activities which provide the chance for children to talk in groups or as individuals with a range of audiences, to use both formal and informal spoken styles and to listen in a range of different situations.

In terms of reading, pupils are able to access a variety of stimulating fiction and non-fiction texts. They are given the opportunities to read for pleasure, by sharing stories and poems from many different cultures, as well as to read for 'real world' information retrieval.

Writing is undertaken for many different purposes and audiences - the outcomes ranging from work to be published to notes for the child's own information, again focusing on suitability of style for purpose. There are opportunities to write collaboratively or alone, to plan, to draft and to work with real purpose on technical accuracy and presentational skills.

Amongst the plants

I took two Year Seven classes to the Gardens for a joint English/Geography day out, looking, learning and writing in the glasshouses in the morning and orienteering in the gardens in the afternoon. The exotic plants and hothouse culture were completely new to them so a couple of months before the visits we began building up our understanding of the different cultures and countries represented there. This involved empathy work with characters and situations seen in overseas posters I'd collected and building vocabulary for describing the atmosphere and plants. We also researched the meanings of some specific terms that we would encounter, since words like tropical, carnivorous, succulent and verdant need a little explanation.

My aim was to let the boys explore the new surroundings as much as possible with one or two bursts of creative writing built in. We started with an initial tour of the hothouses led by Bill Graham, who described some of the myths, legends and weird stories relating to the plants. There were frequent 'Ooohs!', 'Ahs!' and comments in the way of 'This is a Garden Centre gone mad' and 'Here's the plant in our bathroom' from the boys. They went off in pairs to identify more closely ones they liked. The early preparation meant they already had the know-how they needed and were delighted to share some of their strange discoveries with the rest of the class during break.

Next I set the more able group a tall order, to write a story set in a country represented by one of the tropical, succulent or desert areas, which featured a character going on a journey and one of the exotic artefacts, a bamboo box, a string of seed beads, a woven bag and other intriguing things kept in the gardens' Education Centre. A surprising fourteen boys chose to work in the 'desert' while the others chose warmer, wetter areas to write in. Some sat round the fishpond overhung with creepers and seemed quite happy to be dripped on. Most worked very enthusiastically for a full half hour and their efforts, given the demanding ingredients, were superb. It took one or two drafts in class to get the story features, exotic details and verb tenses straightened out, but what the boys produced was remarkably fresh and creative. All included

some 'living' feature in the shape of a strange or magic plant or an interesting character going on an inventive search or journey. Reading them round the class meant re-living the visit too, which everyone enjoyed. I discovered my local library to be a rich and ready resource for stories about plants and information on habitat, animal life and possible lifestyles of people in some of the climates. Three or four books gave us everything we needed for background for the boys' stories.

To round off their English work for the day each boy produced an individual postcard, designing a plant or picture of their choice and drawing from their observations for the message. The artwork produced for these told a story in itself and the writing was detailed and sensitive. The finished work looked stunning displayed in school and was a popular talking point.

I was surprised and pleased with the boys' appreciation of this extraordinary rich environment as I and they were with the work they produced. Their English work for the term was lifted into another, very refreshing dimension.

**Caroline Gilmour-White, English Teacher
Wheeler Lane Boys School**

A walkabout

My year 8 group was a small special needs group of boys, some with behavioural problems, most finding writing and reading quite a chore. Our work at the Botanical Gardens was to fit in with the Environment as part of a Year 8 scheme of work on Issues. I decided to base our work loosely around the Aborigines of Australia, whose culture is very closely tied to their landscape - not only in terms of food and shelter but also in terms of their creation myth and personal development.

I started by telling the group the Dreamtime story of Australia's creation. We talked about the idea of a Walkabout and looked at photographs of the Australian landscape - stories sprang from many of the rock forms at this very early stage! We went on to read and re-enact stories based on plants from different parts of the world, as well as learning about some native British plants, before we visited the Botanical Gardens for our information gathering.

The group used viewers and tape-recorders in pairs to gather information. Creeping round to watch them at work, I found several tackling the [Latin!] words on labels and signs around the gardens to make detailed recordings and one said more than once that he would like to do his work experience here when he got into Year 11!

Back at school we looked at photographs I had taken and made notes from their recordings. Each member of the group chose the plant which most interested them and wrote a story based upon it using the word-processor. During the drafting process we held discussion sessions to see that each person's story would fit in with the rest and often they talked about the bit they were working on, asking each other if it would work. We eventually created our own Walkabout of the Gardens - a story of Vik the Viking's adventures which not only spanned space but also time! [Of his own volition one boy researched the Vikings to make sure he got details of the boat just right!]



Once our work was completed we returned to the Gardens with some trepidation - on all our parts - because the plan was for the group to take students from Plantsbrook School on our Walkabout, and for each to read his story by the appropriate tree as we went. The boys were brilliant! One of my proudest moments as a teacher! - and it is not many an English lesson which goes by now, a year later, without some mention of Vik in his oak boak [their decision on spelling], the Agave Octopus or the Super Dragon Tree.

Iona Burbidge
The Arthur Terry School

Fruity ideas

When I embarked upon the storytelling project at Birmingham Botanical Gardens I was teaching at Park View School, I had a class of year eight pupils, from a predominantly Asian Muslim background, who were very bright, but lacked creative writing skills. The storytelling project seemed an ideal way to encourage an oral tradition of storytelling, working from a very real and tangible stimulus.

I was both enthused and confused by the teacher day, held at the Botanical Gardens. I was interested in creative writing but the project leaders wanted me to add an environmental aspect to the whole process. It simply wasn't possible. What did I know about environmental issues and how could I possibly link the two things together? I decided to worry about it later!

The visit to the Botanical Gardens was fantastic. I was worried about how my street wise kids would react to the place. They loved it. Most had never realised such an oasis actually existed in the concrete jungle of Birmingham and the visit really opened their eyes.

I decided to approach the project through an identification of Asian plants. A nature trail I had written focused upon banana, mango, grapefruit, orange, rice, dates and other such plants and fruits. This gave the pupils a cultural link to objects and areas of the world many already knew.

We approached the story aspect from a group perspective. In small groups of 4 or 5, pupils were encouraged to create ingredients for their stories; a place, characters, an object [they chose an object from traditional Asian items] a fruit and magic.

The story writing process actually seemed fairly painless. A rough draft was created back in class. I was fortunate, with the help of colleagues to be able to give individual feedback to each group before redrafting commenced. I was really surprised at the quality of these initial efforts.

It was at this point I began to worry about the environmental aspect of the project. I felt that the kids were gaining an awareness of environment, simply through their contact with the Botanical Gardens. However, I knew that the project demanded more. I resorted to 'Banana Man' to give some economic, environmental issues to the kids. I'm not sure how much the kids gained from it but the finished stories did have some environmental issue focus.

The final activity was to return to the Gardens to read and record the finished stories. The kids were really proud of what they had achieved and rightly so.

One of the things which attracted me to the project was the promise of published stories. The project published a book of some of the stories written by my class. These looked very professional and each child was issued with a book containing the class stories. They were really chuffed.

Given the opportunity again I would definitely seize it with both hands. The standard of work produced by the pupils was outstanding, and quite frankly, the peaceful, beautiful environment was a breath of fresh air.

Nina Harvey
Park View School

A botanical challenge

One of the challenges of teaching in a selective school is that one's energies are geared to providing new and changing stimuli to satisfy some of the most eager and consuming intellects you could ever hope to find. The English Department at Camp Hill was delighted to participate in this project and felt that it would provide a new and original source of material to stimulate the creative writing of our pupils, as well as raising the profile of development issues within the school.

We launched the project in the Autumn term of 1995 when we invited the writer and story teller, Guy Hutchins, into our year 7 classes to work with our pupils in developing their skills in creating and developing their own stories. Many of his ideas have been taken up and successfully adapted by several teachers and are currently used with pupils of all ages.

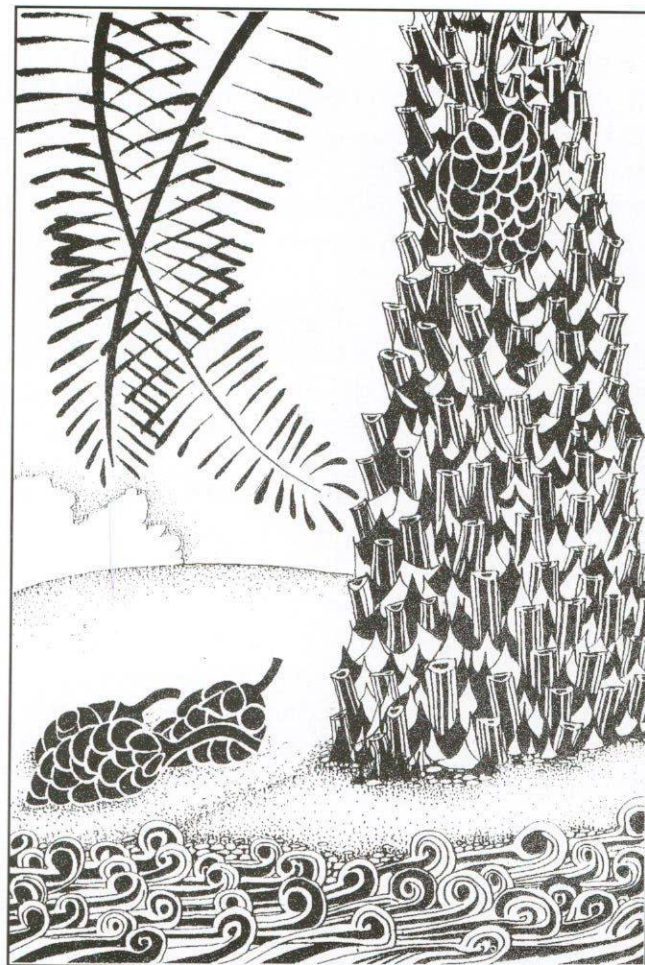
These initial sessions were followed up with class activities, most of which are included here, and led up to our eventual visit to the Botanical Gardens during the following Spring term. Despite the nature of our school, many of our pupils had not visited the Gardens before and so were excited by the new environments and the range of stimuli - copious enough to stimulate all the senses; the vivid and varied greens of the unusual plants; the pungent, sweet odours of the tropical houses; the sounds of birds and falling water; the contrasting feel of each plant - from the giant cactus spines, to the velvet undersides of certain broad leaved plants. Our pupils enjoyed the freedom to look, touch and smell. The idea of really 'getting inside' a plant appealed to their imaginations.

We took a fairly straightforward approach when back in the classroom. We utilised several of the ideas outlined here, but basically aimed to provide the opportunity for each pupil to produce a substantial piece of creative writing. The development education aspect of the project inspired some, and their ecological onslaughts were thought provoking and considered. Most, however, favoured a more romantic approach and produced imaginative 'origin' stories.

We decided from the beginning that this project would be a 'one off' activity which would produce something different for our pupils: new stimuli, new ways of looking at our world and new ways of thinking about development issues. Several of the stories have gone into our school magazine, and the Biology teacher who accompanied us to the Botanical gardens has a few new ideas about looking at plants!

We enjoyed being involved.

Andrea Makel
King Edward VI Camp Hill School for Girls



From The princess and the jujuba tree.

Time to explore

Plants, third world cultures, Botanical Gardens - these were the ingredients of the story-telling project which caught my attention. Just the sort of stimulus for my year eight English group, I thought.

The aim of this project was to encourage pupils to create imaginative stories with the objective to write and publish a class anthology of folk tales set in the tropical forests. I knew the tropical setting would challenge the pupils and broaden their experience and the pupils themselves were enthusiastic about the idea.

We began by looking at folk tales. Pupils did research and performed their favourite tales. The stories were discussed and consideration given to details necessary for the story to succeed. Another activity was writing a group story after having been given the name of a country and one or two characters to use. To make their story more authentic they had to research their country in the school library to find names of towns, rivers, people and any other information they could use. I was surprised at how little pupils knew about European countries but pleased that they enjoyed this detective work and learnt how to make use of this information in their stories.

Pupils were so engrossed in their story-writing that there was little time left for preparation for our visit to the Botanical Gardens. Surprisingly, none of the pupils had visited the Gardens, yet the excitement of expectation built up and left me wondering as to how much they would appreciate the experience. I needn't have worried. Like all visitors to the Botanical Gardens we had to make our way along the glass veranda of the entrance, edged with sweet-smelling plants. Having left the miserable January day outside, the aroma was refreshing and initiated pupil discussion. Once in the classroom, the pupils were welcomed by staff who explained the importance of plants to the local community in third world countries. The agave, banyan and banana plants were unknown to the children but they were eager to find out more about such plants during their visit.

The impact of stepping into the tropical greenhouse with its heavy, moist atmosphere and its abundance of exotic foliage was overwhelming for the group. They looked and behaved as if they were explorers, transported to a far-off land. Details and facts about the plants amused them and they were in awe of such plants as the giant agave with its octopus-like tentacles which we had been assured moved very slowly. What an opportunity to explore descriptions of scents, shapes and textures! After the plant study the story-writing began, with each group having an artefact from the South American rainforest and a photograph of a 'native' child which they were to incorporate into their story as well as a chosen plant. Having worked on the plan of their tales, we returned, enriched by the experience, to school to complete the project.

For pupils there were two successful outcomes, - deciding on the stories for the final version of the anthology and the return visit to the Botanical Gardens where pupils enjoyed performing their stories to the general public.

Bella Coiffard
Plantsbrook School

Section 2

Getting started - plants from every angle



You don't have to visit a botanical gardens to find plants. Here are some other sources of inspiration:

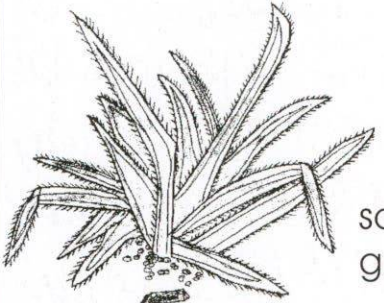
My students write well about what they know - it's difficult for them to write about what they don't know. Visiting the Gardens made it real for them.

This section suggests how you might introduce plants and different environments as a stimulus to creative writing. It offers ways of familiarising students with collections of plants, for example at a botanical garden or park. There are ideas for examining individual plants in greater detail and from unusual angles, enabling students to develop their imagination and creativity. We begin with activities which encourage pupils to get to know a plant collection and then to look more closely at individual plants.

Plants and their environments are also at the core of a range of development issues: who grows them, harvests them, processes and sells them? Who gains from this process? Which plants are valued by different cultures? How can we encourage sustainability? Who has the right to patent a plant for medicinal purposes? The later activities in this section examine ways of raising such issues.

Places where you might find plants or environments to stimulate this work

local parks arboreta botanic gardens
stately homes pot plants community gardens
formal gardens environmental centres
garden allotments outside the school gates - your own area
local woodlands cultural gardens
school grounds garden centres



1. Using a viewer

Aim:

- to concentrate pupils' range of observation by focusing on one scene and reflecting on issues arising from it.

How to:

- photocopy the sheet on page 12 for each pair or small group and give them a cardboard viewing frame [you could photocopy the bottom half of the page]. The sheet raises some questions you might want to explore about the environment. These can be altered to suit the group and the issues you hope to raise;
- ask them to choose a place to stand and then select a scene through the viewer. You might say, 'go and find something you would like to take a photo of';
- sketch the scene onto the sheet in the box and answer the questions;
- share with another group or the rest of the class.

This viewer can be used almost anywhere - in the playground, in the area around the school, in the park or in the city. It really makes you look closely and think about what you see.

We used the viewer on individual plants and changed the questions to: what do you see? Is it rough or smooth? What's it used for?

What do you feel?

I feel the wind as it goes passed me. I feel peaceful and not alone as I watch the flowers and the bees do their daily business.

What are the issues? [about people, money, the environment, power, decision making]

The people who own the land are lucky to have a nice garden. If people wanted to build on the land they would destroy the garden.

What else do you want to know about this image?

Who took the picture? When was it taken? How long did it take to get like this? Why did people let it get this? How did it get like this.

These responses are from a year 8 pupil at St John Wall School, Birmingham.

Framing an image

What do you see/hear/smell?

What are the connections with other places?

What do you feel?

What are the issues?

[about people, money, the environment, power, decision making]

What links do you have with this?

What else do you want to know about this?

What do you see/smell/hear?

What do you feel?

What are the issues?

What links do you have with this?

What else do you want to know about this?

What are the connections with other places?

2. If you were a plant

Aim:

- to explore which features of themselves the pupils see reflected in plants.

How to:

- in pairs pupils should consider the question: 'If your partner were a plant, what plant would she or he be?'
- discuss how you made this choice and explain which of their features or characteristics are reflected in the plant.

This is how one girl eloquently described her partner and herself:

'I think that Jainab would be a blade of grass, as grass does the same sort of thing: move in the wind. I think Jainab would do very well as she tries to blend in all the time. As she is very talkative, she would stand a bit taller than the rest to stand out a little bit, as she does now.'

'I think I would be an overgrown bush that shoves other plants out of the way. This is because I have a habit of standing out [which I do anyway]. I also change my moods a lot of the time. I go from happy to sad, like summer to autumn. This is like plants when they lose their leaves and flowers.'

Taking the students to a place where they could feel, touch and smell plants made such a difference to their ideas and writing.

3. A plant's eye view

Aim:

- to help imagine how a plant might see the world, building on the idea of symbolism.

How to:

- each person describes a plant from the plant's point of view.

'I am a poppy: strong, tall straight, despite my war-torn past. I grow up seeing, hearing and knowing all. You see me in the summer but I disappear when it gets cold. I was once thought to cause headaches and thunderstorms but people realised my deep scarlet beauty and used me for healing powers.

I am happy but my face is only seen on disturbed ground - which is why I have seen so much hate, so much that is loathsome, so much pain. I have been held and worn in remembrance of war. I am red, for the blood I have seen and death. But when I am dry and withered my seeds scatter about the breeze, like spirits in the wind. My leaves look like thistles - but are soft to touch.

I see you; you don't see me. I am a secret. You drive past me, walk past me or even ride, but not many notice and study my pure beauty, for I have seen what many haven't.

I have experience.'



Both these extracts are taken from year 7 pupils at King Edward VI Camp Hill Girl's School.

The students were quick to make links between tree felling and the tree protesters on the Newbury bypass.

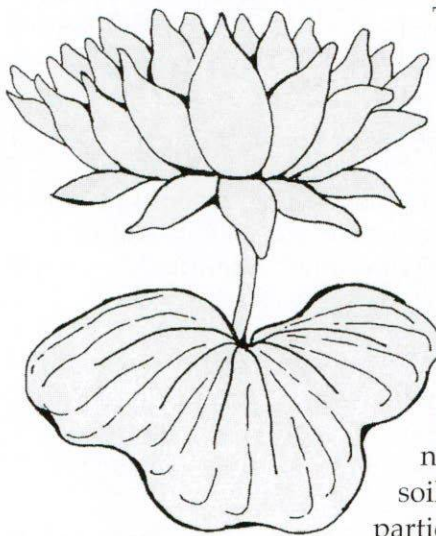
4. Plants as symbols

Aim:

- to explore how we place symbolic values on plants.

How to:

- there are many examples of plants which are used symbolically in different cultures. One such example is the lotus:



The lotus [padma] is a popular symbol for both Hindus and Buddhists. It grows in lakes, with its stalk rooted deep in the mud at the bottom of the water, the leaves floating on the surface, and the flower [usually white or purple] above the leaf. The goddess Lakshmi is said by some to have come from the primeval ocean on a lotus. Her title is Padmavati - Owner of lotus flowers, and the lotus symbolises her purity, since the petals never touch the water and are not soiled by mud. The white lotus is particularly a symbol of purity and enlightenment, and also of the cosmos.

Pupils could brainstorm a list of other plants that they know have symbolic meaning, examples include....

Plant	Symbolic meaning
rose	beauty - used by the Labour Party, and Yorkshire/Lancashire.
banyan tree	fertility - Hinduism
oak tree	strength, resilience and steadfastness
bo tree	knowledge/enlightenment - Hinduism/Buddhism
lily	death - a symbol in this country

- ask pupils to choose a plant, eg prickly pear, tulip, trailing ivy etc. The viewer technique could be used to brainstorm their reaction to the plant. What do they think it could symbolise and why?
- alternatively try the reverse activity, if pupils had to choose a plant to represent, for example, anger, or celebration, what would they choose and why?
- try some research, this could be focused on a particular culture, religion or country [many countries have a national plant, often shown on stamps]. What can pupils find out about these plants, where do they grow, what are their uses, why do they think that they were chosen as a symbol?

Plants have many uses - food, medicine perfume etc.

Pupils could find three plants with medicinal properties. This information could then be woven into a story...

"A child's quest to cure her brother's illness..."

5. Identifying issues

Aim:

- to identify and explore the development, environment, political, economic and cultural issues associated with plants.

The development compass rose is a tool or framework to help raise and discuss a range of issues. Like the compass we use when steering a boat or walking on the hills, it has four points. Instead of North, South, East and West, these are Natural, Social, Economic and Who decides? You can apply the framework of the development compass rose to almost any stimulus: a plant, a photo, a poem, a story or artefact. The idea is to generate questions for each of the co-ordinates and then explore the relationship between them. We suggest you try this activity as a class first.

How to:

- give each group a copy of the development compass rose and explain the idea of the four points;
- ask them to choose a plant, a product of a plant, or a picture of an environment and 'place' it at the centre of the rose;
- ask each group to generate questions under the four headings;
- next look at the intersections NE/SW etc and see if they can generate questions which link to each. This will enable them to explore some of the relationships between the economic and social factors, the political and natural factors etc; [see page 2 for examples]
- feedback the responses from each group and discuss how far there are common issues between different plants and environments.

What questions does this image raise?



Logging in Ashanti Region, Ghana. Included in the *Issues and enquiry* pack, DEC Birmingham

This framework provided a useful starting point to encourage questioning and discussion - it allowed pupils to look at a situation from many viewpoints.

Natural

These are questions about the environment - energy, air, water, soil, living things and their relationships to each other. These questions are about the built as well as the 'natural' environment.

Who decides?

These are questions about power, who makes choices and decides what is to happen; who benefits and loses as a result of these decisions and at what cost.

Economic

These are questions about money, trading, aid, ownership, buying and selling.

Social

These are questions about people, their relationships, their traditions, culture and the way they live. They include questions about how, for example, gender, race, disability, class and age affect social relationships.

Development Compass Rose

Natural

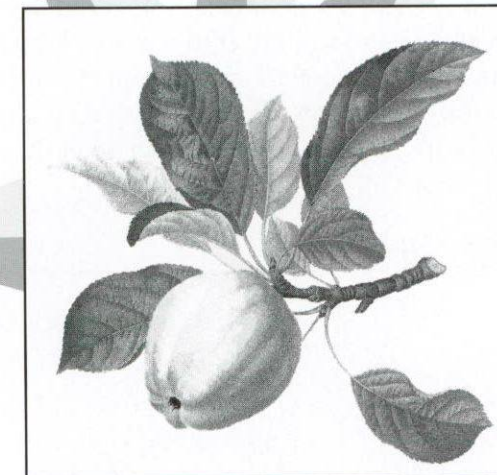
Where do they grow?
Are pesticides needed?
Is pollution caused?
How far are they transported?

What standards are demanded of the final product?

Where have the apples in your local shop come from?

Who decides?

Who controls the apple trade?



Economic

Can small traders compete with supermarkets?
Who profits from the apple trade?

Who decides whether a supermarket buys its apples locally or from overseas?

How vulnerable are these workers to changing markets?

Social

Who works on the farms?
Who transports the apples?
Who sells the apples?
What lifestyles do they have?

Section 3

Broadening horizons - using resources



This section explores how you can raise students' awareness of plants, environments and development issues using a variety of stimuli. In the project we drew on stories, poems, photos and posters as the main stimuli at the early stage of our work. Here we include some examples of resources you might find useful, alongside some simple activities for using them. There are many opportunities for oral and written work, and for engaging with literature and images from a range of traditions. This helps raise awareness of some of the different perspectives people have about the planet.

*Tourist, white man wiping his face,
Met me in Golden Grove market place.
He looked at my old clothes brown with stain
And soaked right through with Portland rain.
He cast his eye and turned up his nose
And said, 'You're a beggar man I suppose',
He said, 'Boy get some occupation,
Be of some value to your nation.'*

*I said, 'By God and this big right hand
You must recognise a banana man.'*

*Up in the hills where the streams are cool,
Where mullett and janga swim in the pool
I have ten acres of mountain side
And a dainty foot donkey that I ride
Four Gros Michel and four Lacatan
Some coconut trees and some hills of yam
And I pasture on that very same land
Five she goats and a big black ram.*

*That by God and this big right hand
Is the property of the banana man.*

An extract from:
Bananaman poster,
Evan Jones, Oxfam, 1991.
A poem from the Caribbean,
telling of the pride of the man
who harvests bananas and
about his way of life.

Poems

Activity: Reading poems

Aims:

- ☐ to create familiarity and empathy with a poem through a choral reading;
- ☐ to work as a group to interpret and present a poem to the class.

Choral reading as a group presentation

How to:

- ☐ select a poem which tells of ancestors who worked on the sugar cane, such as 'They were my people' by Grace Nichols. Invite the pupils to read the poem and identify which parts they want to work on and present;
- ☐ groups prepare choral readings using techniques such as the repetition of sounds, words and phrases, variation in volume and tone, noises such as shushing or clapping as background to the poem;
- ☐ they could then experiment with incorporating movements.

*Come on into my tropical garden, Grace Nichols, A&C Black, 1988. [out of print]
We found this beautifully illustrated collection of poems about life in the Caribbean very useful for inspiring pupils. Several groups used 'They were my people', illustrated here.*

They Were my People

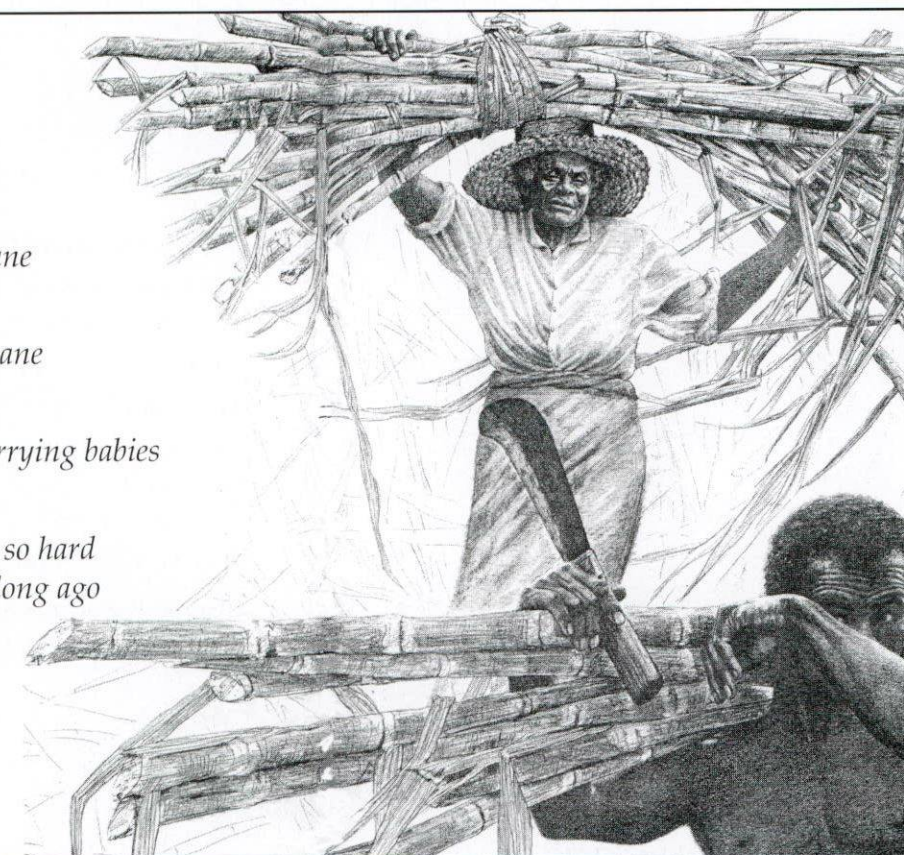
*They were those who cut cane
to the rhythm of the sunbeat*

*They were those who carried cane
to the rhythm of the sunbeat*

*They were those who crushed cane
to the rhythm of the sunbeat*

*They were women weeding, carrying babies
to the rhythm of the sunbeat*

*They were my people, working so hard
to the rhythm of the sunbeat - long ago
to the rhythm of the sunbeat*



From: *Come on into my tropical garden*



This drawing of the jujuba is taken from *The princess and the jujuba tree*. It illustrates a Sikh story about the tree.

The princess and the jujuba tree, religious tales from plants around the world, Lordswood Girls' School, Knightlow Rd, Birmingham, B17 8QB.

This book of religious tales was developed through a project involving Lordswood Girls' and the Botanical Gardens Birmingham.

A group of Year 10 girls collected tales about plants from around the world, from their own oral traditions. The rich heritage of tales reflects the cultural diversity of the school and of Birmingham itself.

The combination of descriptive language and superb illustrations, makes this a particularly useful resource for teachers. It's an example of the potential for using plants and their environments to stimulate creative writing. Also available in Urdu and Punjabi.

Stories

Activity: retelling a story

Aims:

- ☐ to encourage students to listen closely to the story;
- ☐ to encourage them to retell it in a different format, thereby exploring it from a different perspective.

How to:

- ☐ choose a story to work with, such as a short story or legend from another culture. *The tree in the moon*, and *The princess and the jujuba tree* include some useful examples.
- ☐ read the story and ask students to identify the main characters and the main structure of the story;
- ☐ ask them to retell the story from the point of view of one of the characters, referring to feelings and perceptions which weren't mentioned in the original, or events only alluded to;
- ☐ alternatively they could transpose the story into a different culture or different period of time.

Other resources

Two particularly useful books which include stories with an environmental process are:

The tree in the moon, Rosalind Kerven, Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Legends of plants and trees from many cultures, retold with illustrations.

The rain forest story book, Rosalind Kerven, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

A collection of traditional stories from forest peoples around the world, with information on their current conditions.

Pictures and photos

Activity: creating characters

Aim:

- ☐ to use visual stimuli such as posters, photos, drawings or painting to explore characterisation.

How to:

- ☐ give groups visual material with several people in it. Ask individuals to choose one character and imagine their name, where they live and with whom, what they are doing, what they were doing a few hours earlier and what they are feeling. What might they be doing in five years time?
- ☐ create a conversation between two of the characters - either orally or in written form.

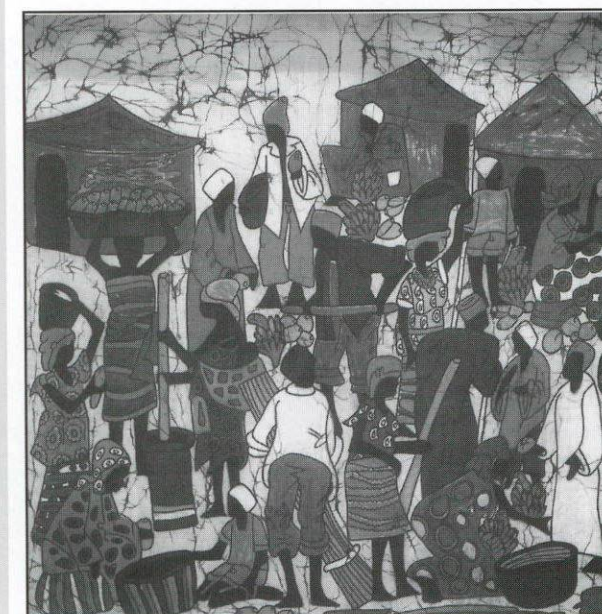
Useful sources of visual images

There are many sources of photographs and pictures which might stimulate writing:

- ☐ the National Geographic contains striking images - copies are often available in secondhand bookshops;
- ☐ paintings can evoke exciting language and imagery, for example, Gauguin's paintings of Tahiti;
- ☐ local newspapers can supply images of your local environment;
- ☐ pupils could take their own photos as part of the project;
- ☐ we used postcards showing a child from Brazil in *Picture, plant and artefact* [page 25], see Leeds postcards address on page 32.

As a way of exploring the atmosphere in the poster pupils wrote their own postcards from the market describing the sounds, smells, atmosphere and emotions associated with being there. This brought the place alive through images such as rain on the baked earth, chickens clucking, sticky heat.

A year 7 class used the 'Marketplace' batik poster of a Kenyan market scene. Coming up with details about the characters seemed to be at the limit of the pupils' own or found knowledge but they relished giving them names, ages and backgrounds and imagining what was in the odd shaped pots in the market.



Marketplace batik

Section 4

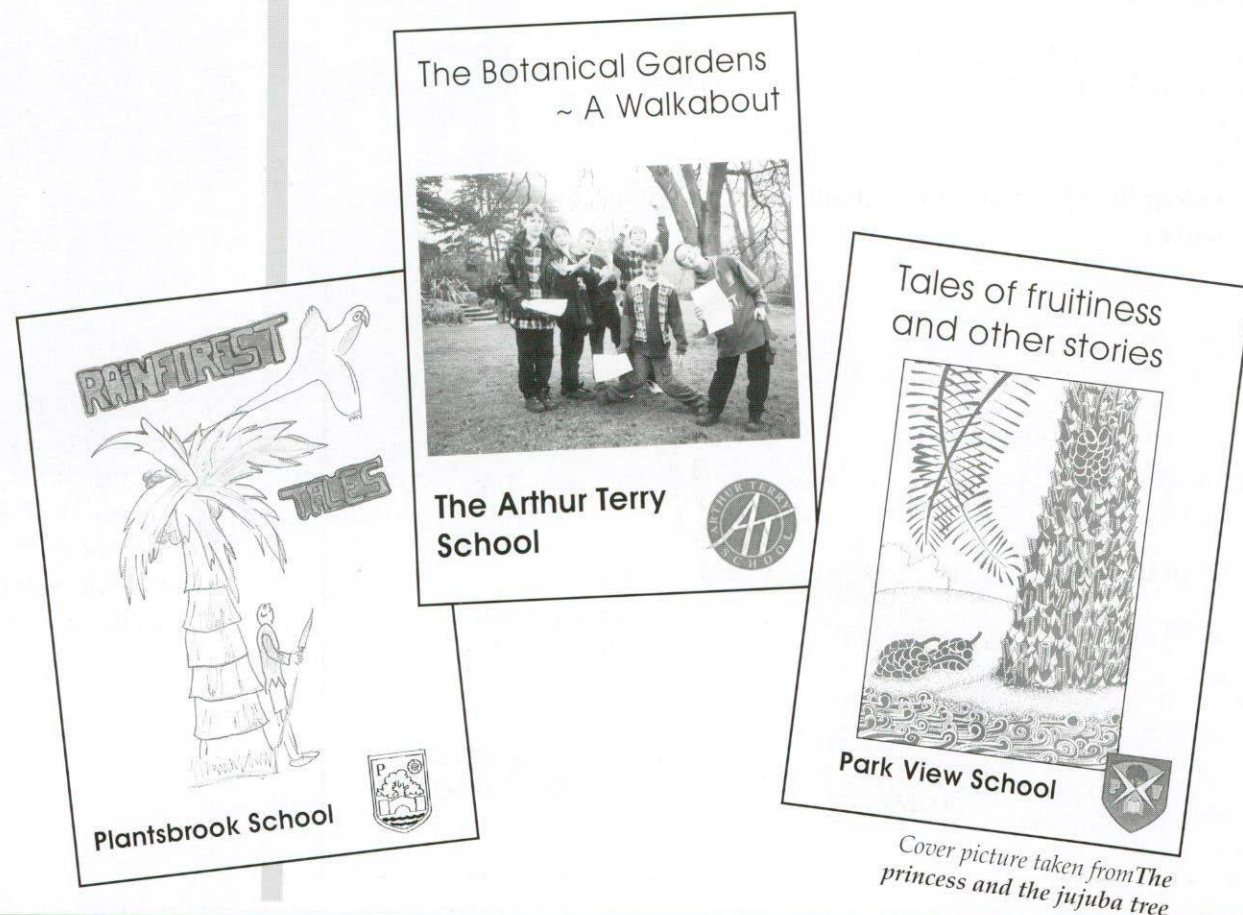
Working with words - creating stories



This section suggests activities which enable pupils to structure, plan and write their stories. The first few activities offer ways of finding out more about places or characters, or enhancing vocabulary. A postcard from the rainforest helps develop summarising skills. We have then included activities which offer ways of generating ideas and which build a framework for writing.

Finally, an important element of the project which led to this book was pupils sharing their stories, both orally and in written form. They gained an immense amount from having a real purpose for writing and a real audience. We share some reflections and strategies on page 29.

Some of the classes produced their own booklet of stories.



1. Choosing words

Aim:

- to help generate vocabulary to enhance the quality of the stories.

How to:

- ask pupils to brainstorm words relating to plants and environments - pictures and photos may help to stimulate ideas.

canopy rigid twisted tendrils
feathery knotted pitted
thorny overhanging veined dangling

Photographs are very useful to encourage students to think about nature's forms and the imaginative possibilities behind them. I showed a series of interesting photos of rock, water, plants and landscapes. We discussed the colours, shapes and nature of the terrain. We thought about creatures which could come to life from the rocks and plants. Stories began to develop there and then!

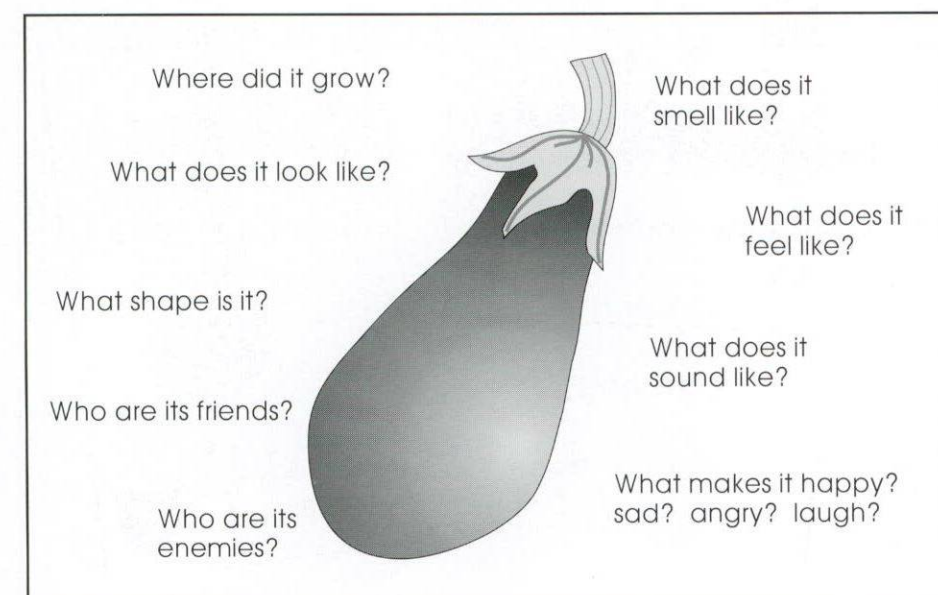
2. Busking a story

Aim:

- to use a 'busking' technique around an object to develop characterisation.

How to:

- pupils choose an object as their main 'character'.
- use questions to begin to get to know your object [see example with the aubergine]. What other ideas do you have about your object?
- these ideas can be used to start your story off in many ways - for example, try reversing the qualities, eg the aubergine that was red, or square.



One fine day in the south of Sicily, outside a town there grew a beautiful purple shiny aubergine. It hung by the prickly bit at the top from one of the many plants in the large green house ...

Create your own rainforest in the classroom for a day with books, posters tapes of birdsong

Dear Mom
I am having a great time here in the rain forest. It is hot, sticky and the moisture is unbelievable. There are loads of plants here and the best two are a dumb cane and an Anthurrium, a weird name I know but I will tell you all about it when I get home. There are some amazing birds here like a parrot and this chicken with the colours red, gold, green, brown, black and blue. Amazing don't you think? But I don't understand this place. It is hot and sticky but there is something inside me that loves this place. I miss your cooking but I will be home soon. See you soon.

A year 7 pupil
Wheeler's Lane Boys School

3. A postcard from the rainforest

Aims:

- ☐ to use a postcard format to summarise the experience of being in a different environment;
- ☐ to encourage pupils to write imaginatively, rather than factually.

How to:

- ☐ write a postcard from the desert house, the tropical house, a cultural garden. Include: the plants, people, atmosphere, noises, activities, experiences, feelings;
- ☐ draw the image on the front of the postcard, encouraging pupils to be as creative as they can. Ensure any special plant or animal names are incorporated to help memorise them.

Send a postcard from the rainforest

Describe what it's like in this hot, sticky place.
Say what you can hear and who's making the noise.
What are you feeling?
What are you thinking?
What's happening around you?

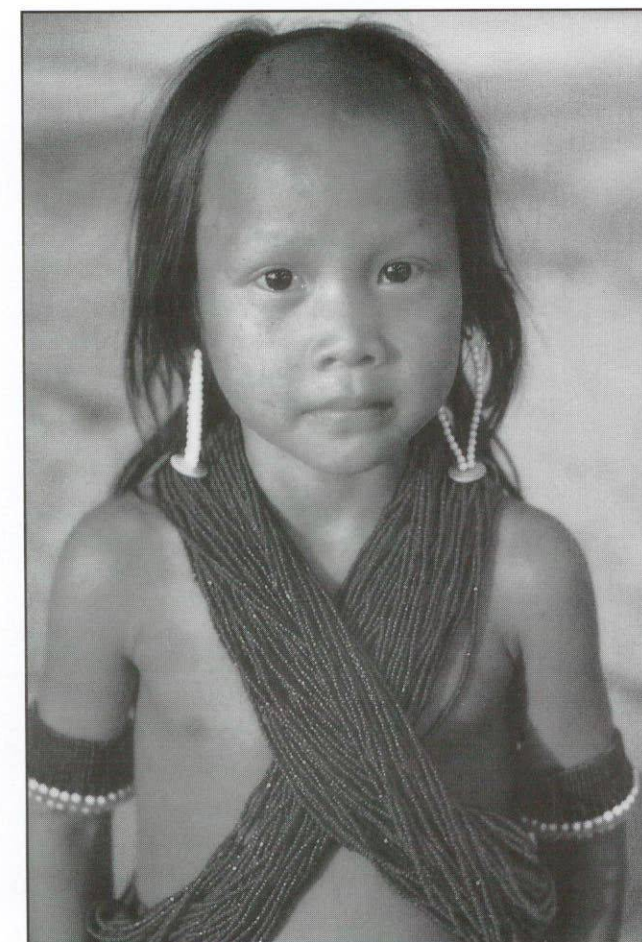
4. Picture, plant and artefact

Aim:

- ☐ to use stimuli outside pupils' own experience to encourage imaginative story writing.

How to:

- ☐ you will need to collect pictures or photos of individuals who live in another part of the world and artefacts or objects which might come from somewhere else. Pictures could be postcards, cuttings from magazines or from published photopacks see page 30. Artefacts might include a set of pan pipes, a mango, a seed necklace, a plastic bucket or clay pot;
- ☐ each group will need a photo and an artefact. Handle the artefact and talk about what it might be used for, where it might have come from and who might use it or have made it. Ask them to imagine who the person is, their name, where they come from, who their family or friends are;
- ☐ visit an environment in which the pupils can begin to create their stories, using the picture and artefact. A botanical garden might offer a tropical and desert environment in which to create a story.



Postcard of Kayapo child - Xingu Park, Brazil
The Rainforest Foundation, Leeds Postcards

We used a postcard of a Kayapo girl from Central America, a beaded necklace and created our story in the tropical house. The atmosphere, heat, smells and noises were a fantastic backdrop to our story making. We realised afterwards that we could have also used extracts from literature and poems at the start to help with the style of writing needed to set the scene.

You may need to do some work on expanding or challenging stereotypes of unfamiliar people and places.

"Where will my child be able to play if the field goes? ..."

Local resident



"This new supermarket will provide a real boost to the economy of 'Selly Grove' ..."

Head of supermarket

5. Looking at issues

Aim:

- to give pupils an opportunity to explore an environmental issue, and to respond to it in a variety of forms.

How to:

- look at the facts of the following case study, based upon a newspaper article:

A supermarket chain has offered a bid to buy a scenic green field site in the small town of 'Selly Grove'. The site is to be used to build a new store, [20,000 sq foot, with parking for 300 cars].

As part of the bid the supermarket chain is also offering to build a new primary school for 'Selly Grove'.

The present primary school is overcrowded, needing repair, and is unlikely to be replaced for at least 20 years.

Small businesses are worried about the effect that a new supermarket will have on their trade.

The green field site provides one of the few areas of open space in the town.

- ask pupils to imagine that there is to be a public meeting at the town hall that evening to debate the matter. Assign each pupil one of the following roles:
 - head of the supermarket chain;
 - local resident [house bordering green field site];
 - teacher in local school;
 - local council representative.

They are to give a speech in order to persuade people to their opinion, what arguments will they need to present? Pupils could work in groups according to their role, and brainstorm suggestions for their speech. Each point can then be written on a separate piece of paper, and ranked into a suitable order of priority. Finally pupils can be asked to draft their speeches, and a mock meeting could be held.

Further tasks could include:

- writing a newspaper report;
- writing a letter of support/complaint;
- describing what life in the town might be like 10 years on;
- re-writing a newspaper article from a different perspective.

6. Structuring a story

Aim:

- to provide a structure to encourage the creation of stories around 'real life' situations.

How to:

- you will need to offer pupils four key decisions that they will need to make when creating their story.

Choose a place: *Erdington, Jamaica*

Choose a time: *present day, 2010*

Choose at least two main characters

Choose an issue: *nowhere to play
your family are forced to leave
conflict over a piece of land
unfair treatment
creating a better future*

- pupils can either be given a free choice at each stage or you may wish to offer them a selection from which to choose [this may be helpful particularly to prompt specific issues related to real situations].
- this task can either be carried out individually, or by pupils working together as a group where each member is responsible for a different decision.

Choose a place

What does it look like?
How does it feel?

Choose a time

What are the major world events
at the time?

Choose two characters

Are they young/old/happy/sad?

Choose an issue

What caused the situation?
What is going to be done about it?

7. Making a mini-story booklet

Aim:

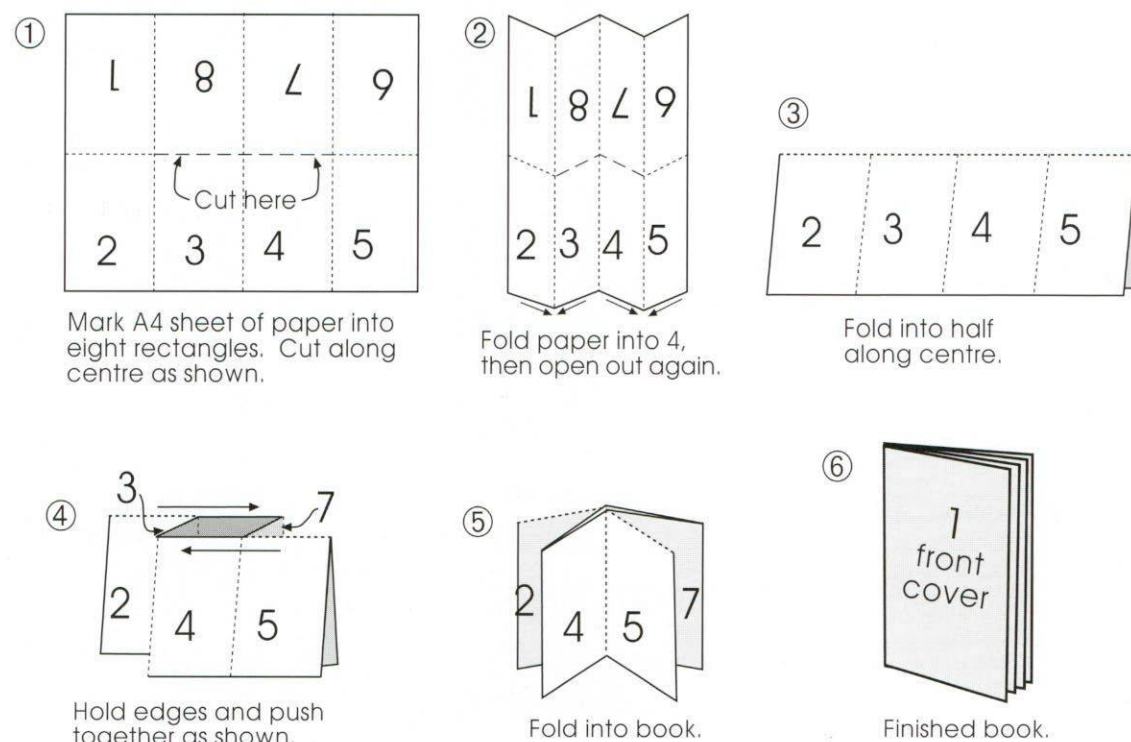
- ☐ to develop skills in summarising a story into a few key ideas and events;
- ☐ to focus on the use of imaginative vocabulary.

How to:

- ☐ using the diagram to guide you, create small booklets for story writing from a sheet of A4 paper. This gives an 8 page booklet. The contents of the pages are as follows:

page 1 front cover
 page 2 Introduce the main characters
 page 3 Symbolic illustration
 page 4 Introduce the action/crisis/event
 page 5 Symbolic illustration
 page 6 Resolve the crisis
 page 7 Symbolic illustration
 page 8 back cover - with a brief description of the book.

- ☐ using a simple plot around a character and an event draft the text for pages 2, 4 and 6. This works well if you draw a rectangle the same size as the actual page on scrap paper. Brainstorm ideas and words outside the rectangle, then use the space inside for drafting text. Redraft, editing out boring words;
- ☐ draw illustrations opposite the text which are symbolic rather than realistic.



What can we do with the stories?

Stories can be shared in a number of ways

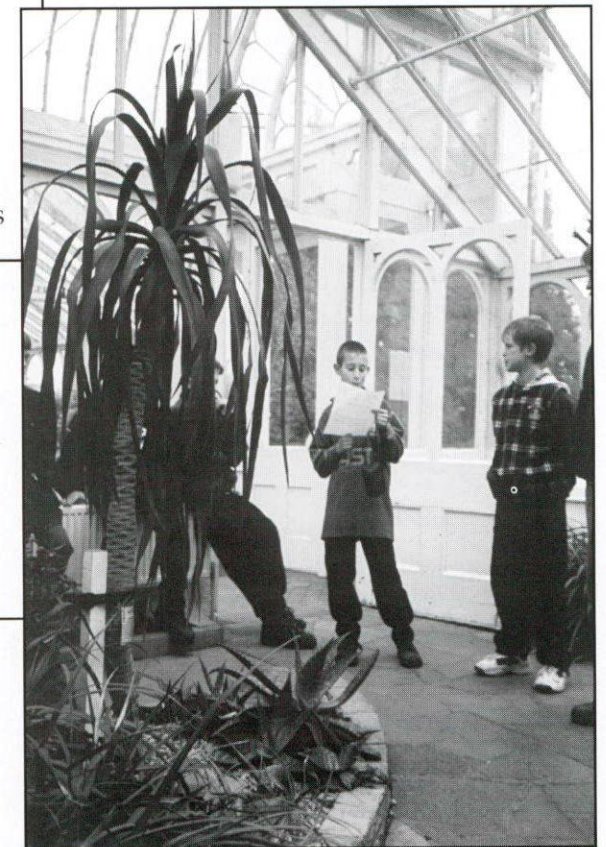
- ☐ with others in the class
- ☐ with others in school
- ☐ with feeder schools
- ☐ with other students of a similar age at nearby schools

Where?

You could tell the stories - in the classroom, in the school hall, in the park, at a botanical garden ...

How?

- ☐ one student narrates
- ☐ a narrator with mimed action
- ☐ dramatisation of the stories
- ☐ one narrator, with others taking spoken parts
- ☐ told without notes - the oral tradition - true storytelling!



I worked with an extract group who were not at all confident about reading. At the gardens they read their stories to the class from Plantsbrook - they read each story by the appropriate plant and were very nervous - but they were astounding.

Publishing stories

We found that producing a publication can be a good way of motivating pupils and stimulating high quality writing. It is also a way of celebrating and valuing their work.

It involves pupils in

- ☐ writing for a real purpose
- ☐ establishing and working to criteria for selecting stories
- ☐ collating stories
- ☐ drafting and redrafting
- ☐ matching style and content to a set brief
- ☐ matching illustrations to text
- ☐ working to deadlines
- ☐ collaborative teamwork

Some of the benefits of performance and publishing stories

- ☐ pleasure
- ☐ a sense of completeness
- ☐ raising confidence and self esteem
- ☐ builds confidence about speaking in front of a group
- ☐ less able pupils who tell their stories are freed from having to write and may often rise to the challenge and outdo their classmates
- ☐ enables pupils to differentiate between oral and written styles

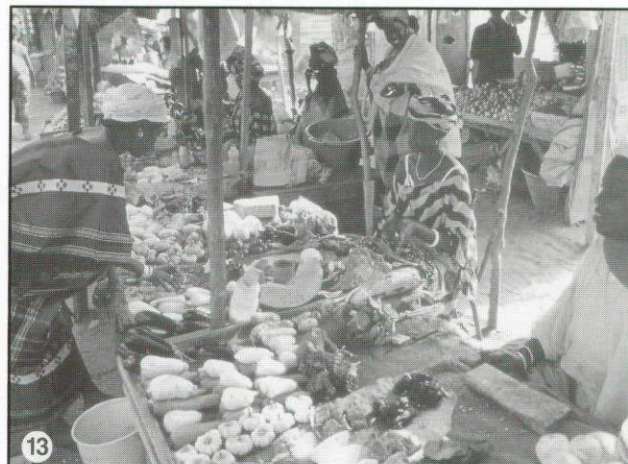
Section 5

Resources

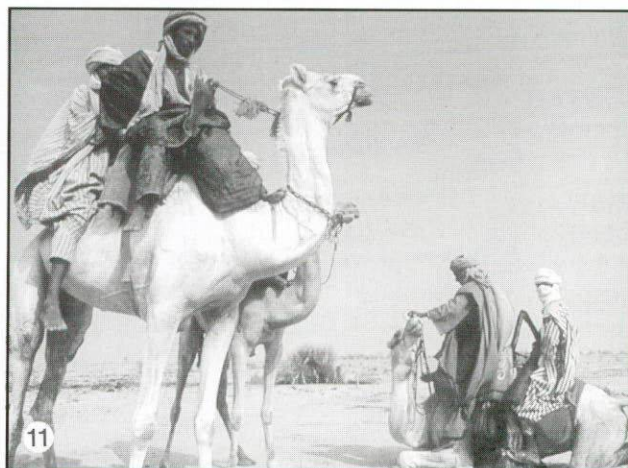


Visual resources

These are some published photopacks and posters which show a range of plants and environments:



From: *The development compass rose*



From: *Where camels are better than cars*

Eritrea, Africa's newest country, Christian Aid, 1993.

Another locality study about life in an arid mountainous region, where cactus leaves are used as fuel and as food for the ox. You could use in conjunction with *Daniel and the mischief boy*, a collection of stories about a family in this pack, giving a vivid picture of their daily lives.

Marketplace poster, Birmingham DEC, 1991.
A colour poster based on a batik, depicting a market scene in rural Kenya.

The development compass rose, Birmingham DEC, 1996.

A pack which explores the use of a simple framework for raising environmental, economic, social and political issues.

The web of life-forests, Scottish DEC, 1994.
Looks at Scottish pine forests and African rainforests and includes information on plants animals and people. The pack was designed for use with 9-11 yr olds, but it could also be adapted for use at KS3.

Where camels are better than cars, Birmingham DEC with Save the Children, 1992.
A locality study of a town in Mali, this pack offers source material, activity ideas and photographs about ways of living in a harsh environment, about growing, buying and selling food.

Stories

These are a few story collections which include stories about plants. There are many other stories about wider environment issues - including some GCSE texts.

Earth tales, young people and the environment, anthology and guide for English teachers, Maurice White, WWF, 1994.

A collection of stories, scripts and activities linked to the Channel 4 series 'Earth Tales'. The material presented is accessible to students, and drawn from around the globe, it provides a human perspective on a series of diverse environmental issues.

Literature from Solomon Islands, and *Literature from the Canadian North*, Ben Burt and Gill Crawford, WWF, 1993, 1995 resp.

Both books include personal stories drawn from two very different cultures. They provide a valuable insight into people's everyday lives and offer activities to stimulate discussion around the issues raised.

Seasons of splendour, Madhur Jaffrey, Puffin books, 1987.

A rich and dazzling collection of short stories about India. Madhur Jaffrey draws on her country's tales, myths and shares memories from her childhood.

Ten tall oak trees, Richard Edwards, Julia MacRae Books, 1993.

A children's picture book with a strong environmental message, adaptable for use with older students.

The people who hugged the trees, Deborah Lee Rose, Roberts Rinehart, 1990.

An environmental folk tale about the women from North India who protected their trees from being felled. Based on a true story, the present day Chipko movement support the non violent protection of trees.

The rain forest story book, Rosalind Kerven, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

A collection of traditional stories from forest peoples around the world, with information on their current conditions.

The tree in the moon, Rosalind Kerven, Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Legends of plants and trees from many cultures, retold with illustrations.

Poems

We found it quite difficult to find poems about plants, although there were plenty on animals and some which evoked a range of environments.

Bananaman poster,
Evan Jones, Oxfam, 1991.

A poem from the Caribbean, telling of the pride of the man who harvests bananas and about his way of life.

Can I buy a piece of the sky? poems from Black, Asian and American cultures, ed. Grace Nichols, Blackie, 1991.

Some excellent poems about the environment.

Come on into my tropical garden, Grace Nichols, A&C Black, 1988. [o.p]

We found this beautifully illustrated collection of poems about life in the Caribbean very useful for inspiring pupils.

I like that stuff and *You'll love this stuff*, both selected by Morag Styles, Cambridge University Press, 1984 and 1986.

Two anthologies of poems from many cultures which include some material about plants and environments.

Shades of green, poems chosen by Anne Harvey, Red Fox, 1993.

Celebratory poems about the environment in this country, expressing hope and inspiration.

Singing down the breadfruit, Pauline Stuart, Bodley Head, 1993.

Poems evoking the Caribbean, markets, mangoes, tropical rainstorms.

Sugar cane, Grace Nichols in *The fat black woman's poems*, Virago, 1984.

A powerful poem about the sugar cane itself, and the crimes committed in its name.

The Green Umbrella, A&C Black 1991.

Although designed for primary schools, this book has many poems, stories, facts on environmental issues which would be invaluable for older pupils.

What on earth ...? poems with a conservation theme, edited by Judith Nicholls, Faber, 1989.

An anthology from other cultures as well as our own, from the past and from the present to demonstrate poets' response to the environment.

Information about people and plants

Fruits and vegetables of the Caribbean, M. J. Bourne et al, MacMillan, 1988.

A useful guide to the plants, with colour photographs and information on their origins and uses.

Green inheritance, Anthony Huxley, WWF & Gaia books Ltd, 1984.

An excellent source book on plants throughout the world, and their uses as fuel, food, and medicine.

Green inheritance teaching pack, WWF/Botanic Garden Network, 1991.

Based on the book above and on the resources of botanical gardens, this education pack contains a wide variety of activities and ideas for work centred on plants.

Go bananas! Oxfam, new ed. 1995.

This photopack focuses on one food plant and the processes it goes through before it reaches our shops.

Green Ink, environmental education and GCSE English, Elizabeth Allen, WWF, 1990.

Focuses on the importance of language in the environmental debate, exploring the portrayal of issues through the media, poetry and other sources of literature.

People, plants and places, Julian Agyeman, Learning through Landscapes, 1995.

A teachers' handbook providing ideas, activities, and background information for investigating the historical origins and cultural significance of 'British' plants.

Plants for people, Anna Lewington, Natural History Museum, 1990.

Looks at the ways people have used plant-derived materials through history to the present.

The whole world cake, Christian Aid, 1994.

The ingredients of a cake provide the starting point for exploring the plants and the stories of people around the world who produce our food. With photographs and activity ideas.

What we consume: environment and democracy, ed. John Huckle, WWF, 1990.

One of a series of handbooks on issues of environment and development, this unit has information and drama activities on the modern Chipko movement in the Himalayas.

Organisations and addresses

There are a wide number of organisations which could offer support for your project including:

Botanic gardens

Full details of where to find botanic gardens are available from:

Botanic Garden Education Network [BGEN] contact:

University of Oxford Botanic Garden
Rose Lane
Oxford OX1 4AX

BGEN links botanic gardens and arboreta in the UK. Its members provide opportunities for schools to use collections of plants for educational activities.

Botanical Gardens Base
Birmingham Botanical Gardens
Westbourne Road
Edgbaston
Birmingham B15 3TR

Development Education Centre [Birmingham]

Gillett Centre
998 Bristol Road
Selly Oak
Birmingham B29 6LE
DEC produces a range of materials on development education across the curriculum and across age groups. Send for a publications catalogue or for details of your local DEC.

The Black Environment Network [BEN]

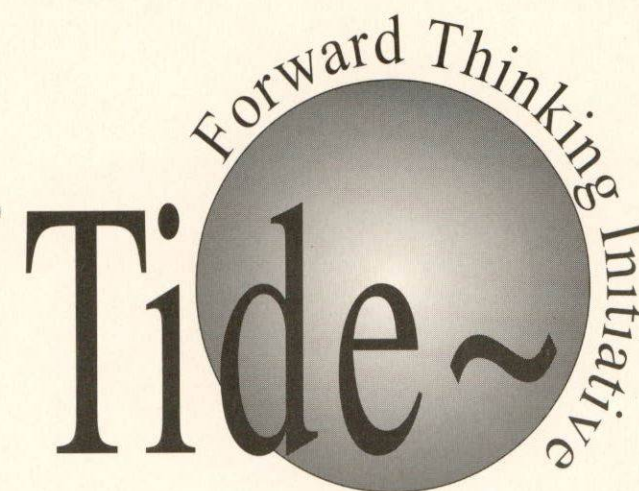
Regents Wharf
8 All Saints Street
London N1 9RL
Aims to raise cultural involvement in environmental projects and can supply information on cultural gardens.

Leeds postcards

Post Leeds
4 Granby Road
Headingley
Leeds LS1 4HU

Religious Education and Environment Project

8th Floor
Rodwell House
Middlesex Street
London E1 7HJ



The *Forward Thinking* initiative provides a variety of opportunities for teachers to work together to plan, implement and evaluate work which responds to the challenges facing us as we seek to meet the educational needs of young people growing up in an increasingly global context.

The initiative was set up as a result of a series of consultations which led to proposals for a core entitlement. This entitlement is the focus for a wide range of experimental activity in schools, involving each key stage and a variety of curriculum areas.

Young people are entitled:

to develop skills of decision making and participation

This includes skills of:

- listening and discussing
- recognising their own values and what influences them
- identifying prejudice, bias and discrimination
- empathy with people in different situations
- evaluating sources of information
- taking responsibility

to understand the importance of attitudes and values

This includes:

- being open minded and having a questioning approach to the world around them
- having confidence in themselves and standing up for justice and equality
- a willingness to develop their own identities, language and culture
- a willingness to learn from the perspectives and viewpoints of others

to have access to, and the skills to handle knowledge about local and global events

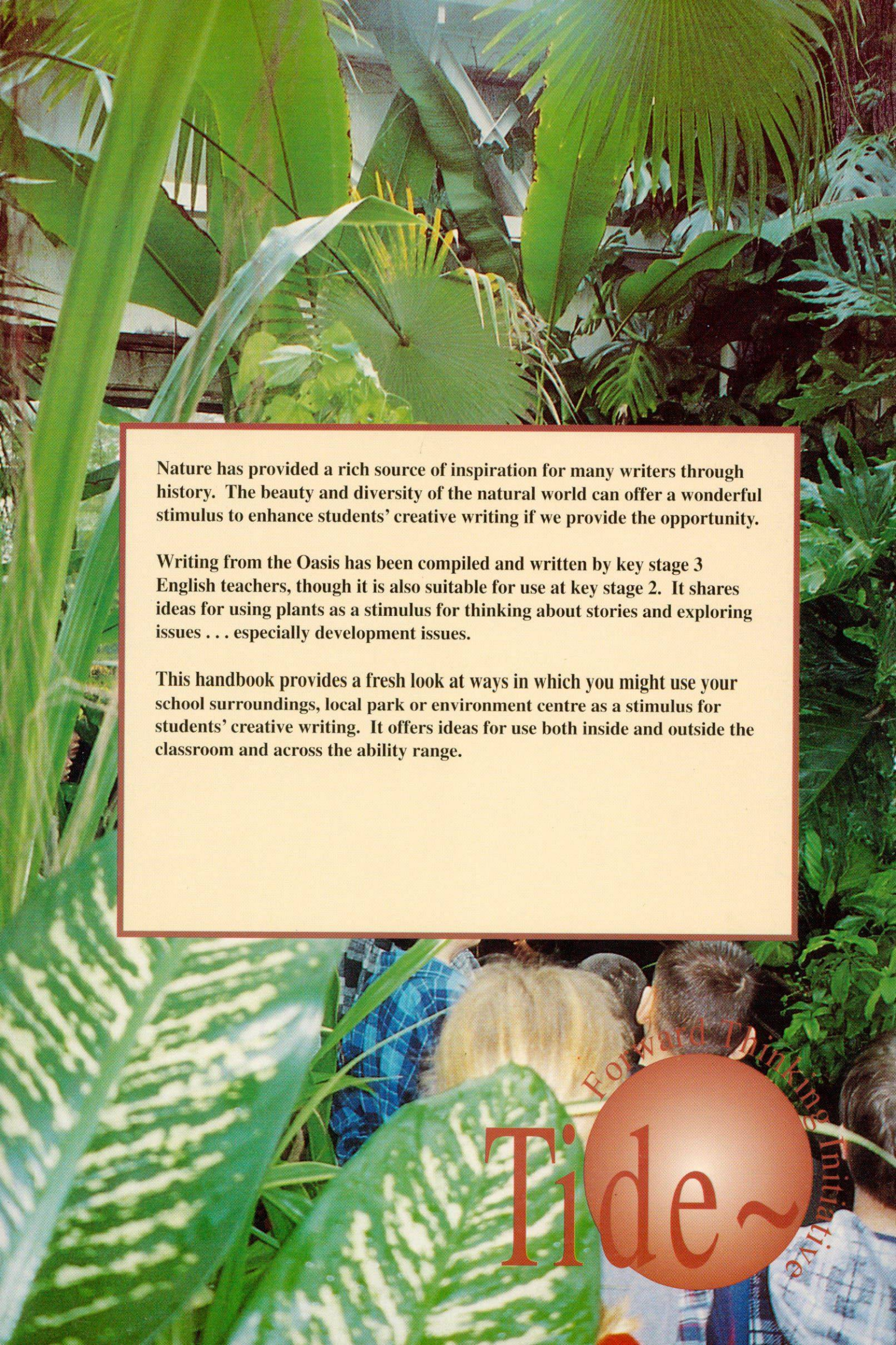
This includes understanding:

- that all people share common experiences and the right to equal dignity
- that events in one place affect events and people in other places
- that development processes involve environmental, economic, social, and political factors
- that power structures at local, regional, national and global levels affect us all
- how decisions are made, who makes them and how we can participate in decision making
- that there are legal international agreements that seek to protect and enhance people's lives, for example the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In order to do this, we need to draw on a range of perspectives and experiences from different places, including those from marginalised people in our own society and people from Africa, Asia and South and Central America.

Partnership is the key to *Forward Thinking*.

If you would like to get involved or to hear more about other work that has been developed contact:
Ina Clason, Teachers in Development Education, 998 Bristol Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 6LE. [0121 472 3255]



Nature has provided a rich source of inspiration for many writers through history. The beauty and diversity of the natural world can offer a wonderful stimulus to enhance students' creative writing if we provide the opportunity.

Writing from the Oasis has been compiled and written by key stage 3 English teachers, though it is also suitable for use at key stage 2. It shares ideas for using plants as a stimulus for thinking about stories and exploring issues . . . especially development issues.

This handbook provides a fresh look at ways in which you might use your school surroundings, local park or environment centre as a stimulus for students' creative writing. It offers ideas for use both inside and outside the classroom and across the ability range.

Forward Thinking Initiative
Tide~