



Sightlines Initiative

‘Early Learning in Nature’
Ivy Rd School
at Seaton Delaval Hall

“The project is funded by Natural England through Access to Nature, as part of the Big Lottery Fund’s Changing Spaces programme”.





Our Approach

‘Only by pursuing common interests, by building a community of subject matter and engagement do child-teacher bonds form. David Hawkins (1974)

‘Once study begins we become partners involved in an exciting endeavour. We get to know each other. We begin to appreciate each other. We become attached....**Through study I learn essential information about my students: what kind of investigators, artists, players and story-tellers they are. The curriculum becomes the basis upon which we build our communication.** This communication takes place on a new and exciting plane for pre-schoolers, a plane imbued with dignity and importance.’
Ben Mardell (1999)



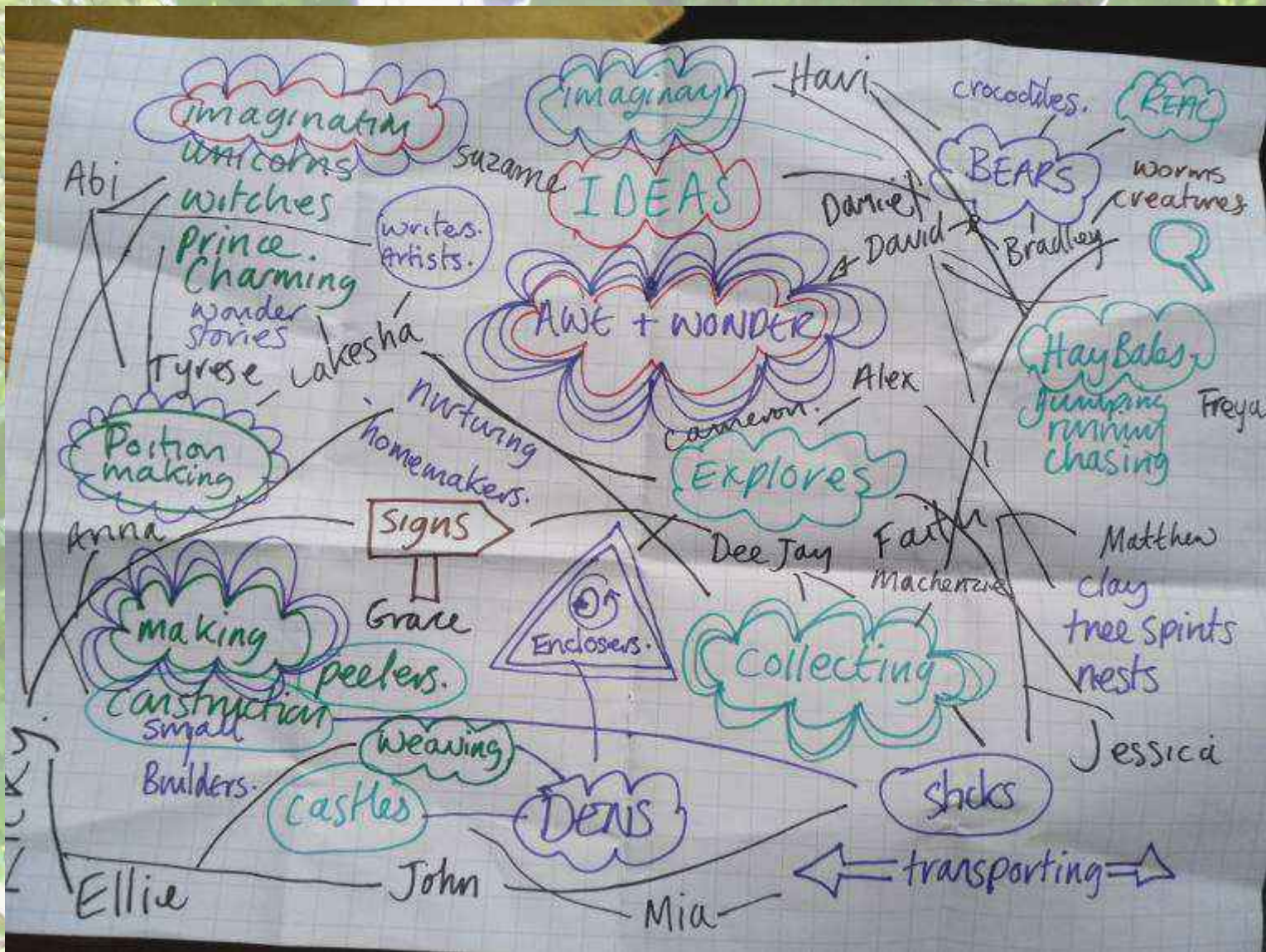
The Big Questions:

What is the background thinking?

What underpins the children's interests and responses?

While involving real and imaginary creatures on a superficial level, the focus of the play/fascination lay in the larger issues of **caretaking** and **survival**.

The children were making meaning about Life and Death.



Life and Death

A photograph of a child wearing a bright red jacket, sitting on green grass. The child is holding a dead bird, possibly a quail, by its neck. The bird's body is pale and its wings are spread out. The child's hands are visible, one holding the bird's neck and the other supporting its body. The background is a soft-focus green lawn.

'It's so hard for children to get up close to wild animals.....Today the sight of a dead animal is considered repellent, it's a sign of how out of touch we are with the natural world. Even a few generations ago most people would have had experience of killing animals or preparing dead animals for food.

But children haven't been socialised yet into being horrified by death. They are fascinated by dead animals. They want to know what's inside, where the bones are, what the muscles look like, and the fact that the animal's dead.... Well, that's just part of nature.'

Ben Mardell (1999)

Death in the woods



The Dead Bird

The children are fascinated rather than disgusted by the bird and consider it thoughtfully.

Ellie 'The bird flied and it fell out of the tree.'

Tyrese ' I feel sorry for the dead bird.

Ellie ' My Granny's died.'

We wonder what happens when things die.

' People get put in the earth.'



Perhaps the bird should be buried too... so the children gather sticks and start to dig a hole.

We walk over to the church to see where people have been buried.

Ellie 'Our bird needs a big stone.'

Everyone finds stones to bring back to the grave.

'And it needs some string – so that people don't walk on it.'

The children play some music standing by the bird's grave. Then, as though drawing a line under this experience, they drift away and become involved in a new adventure.

Later, in the circle, the children don't want to share their experience with the group. Has it lost its significance for them? Is it something private they don't want to share? Or has the act of burying the bird closed this chapter for them?



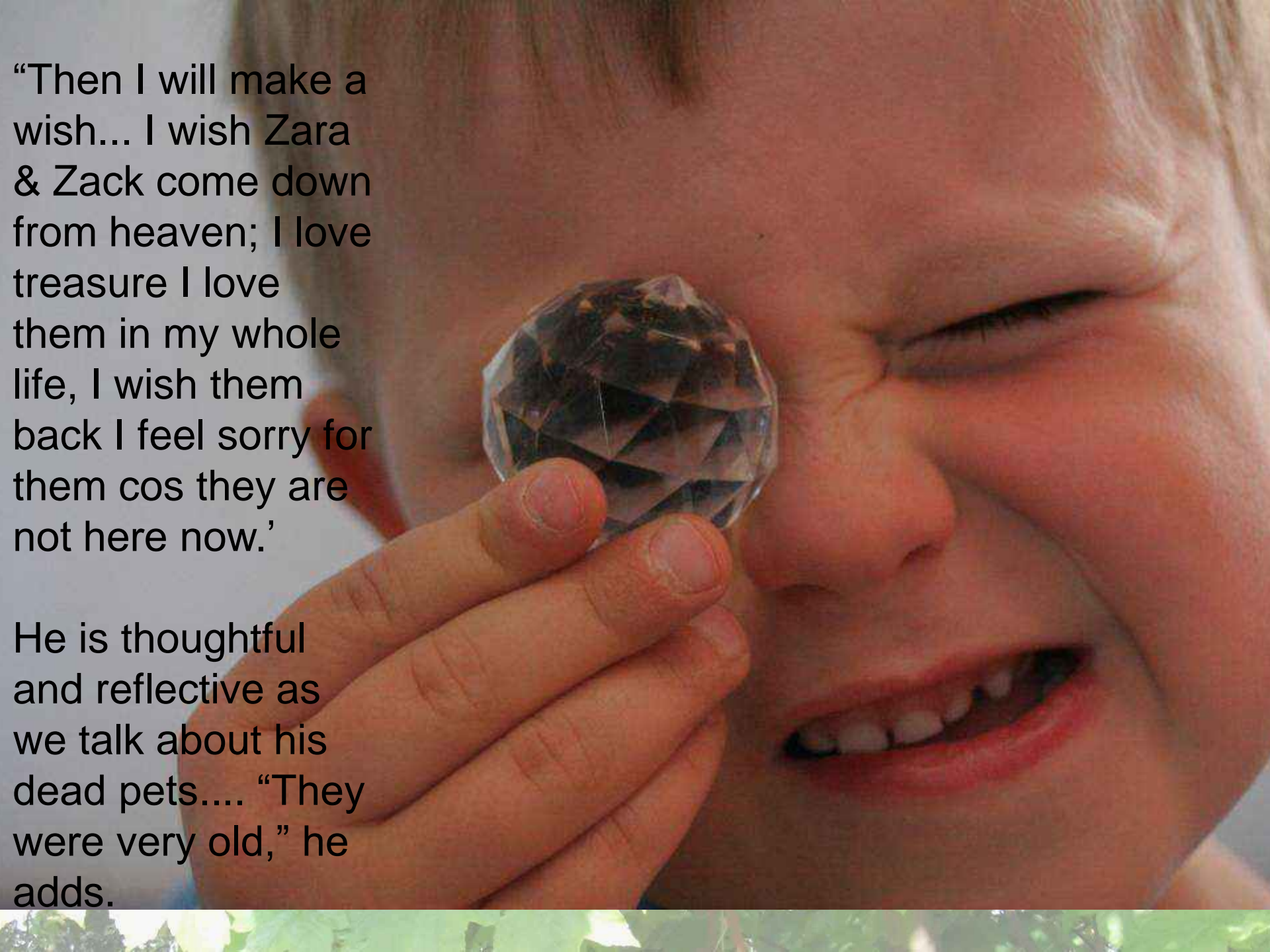
Personal Experiences

Tyrese has collected a bag full of treasure, he lays them out carefully examining each find, He discovers that by looking through the crystal he can multiply his collection.

“Wow, I’ve got 15778 million treasures”
He counts out his pieces of gold and silver. I tell him about how he’s like Aladdin as he rubs his magic lamp.

“Then I will make a wish...”





“Then I will make a wish... I wish Zara & Zack come down from heaven; I love treasure I love them in my whole life, I wish them back I feel sorry for them cos they are not here now.’

He is thoughtful and reflective as we talk about his dead pets.... “They were very old,” he adds.

Helping children to focus



Our strategies





A group of children discover a skull and antlers in a den.

They speculate about the creature and what happened to it.

'It's a goat.'

'A bull.'

Bradley **'It's a reindeer.'**

Daniel **'It's got sharp teeth, his body broken, so he died. He broken his leg'**

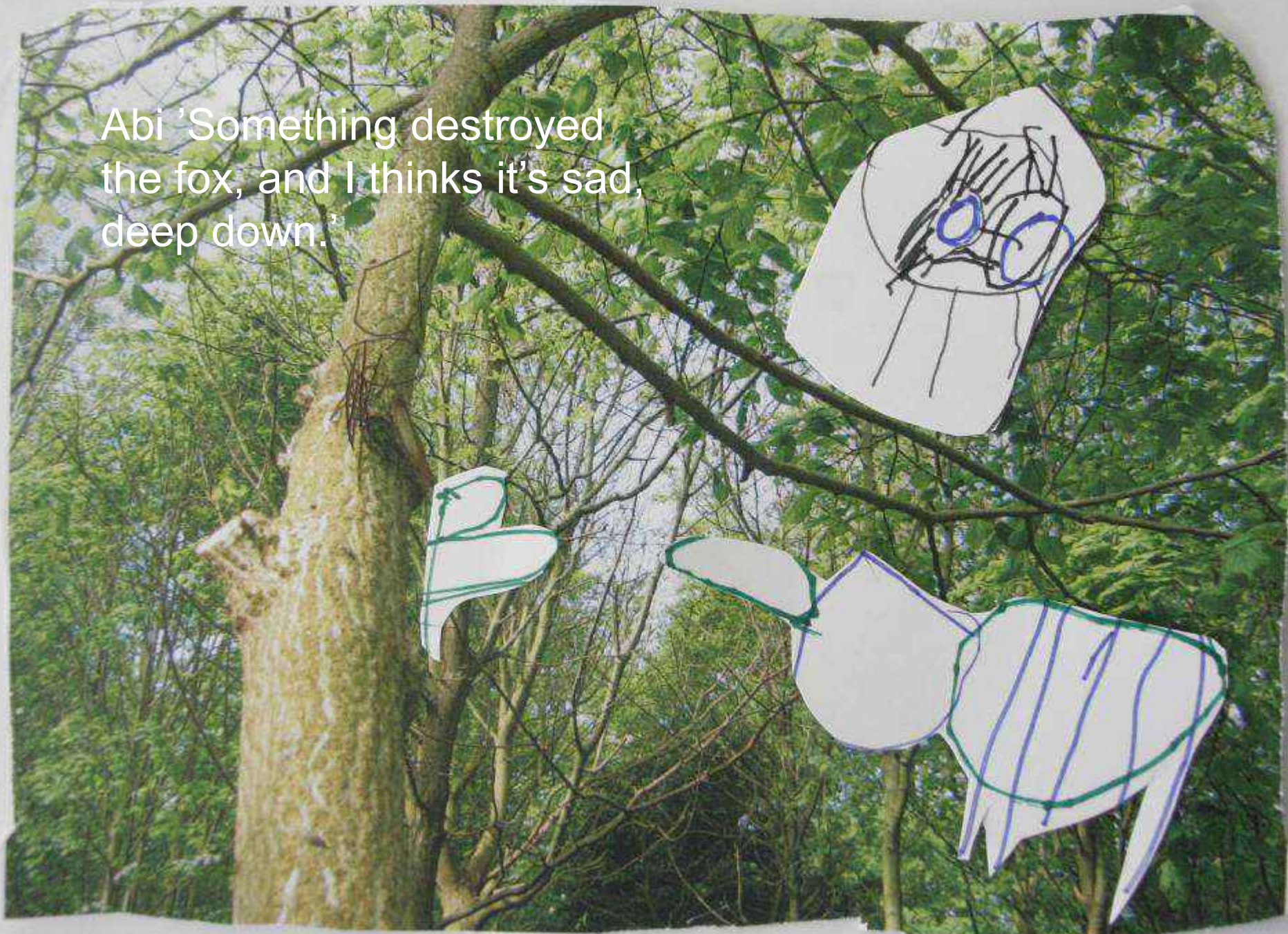
Alex **'It could be a deer's ear.'**

Keevan **'No it's a skeleton its from a reindeer or a goat because it has horns and these aren't bones them are antlers.'**

Daniel **I think it just came by and died that's when you become a skeleton**

Bradley **Its bones from a dinosaur- its Rudie from Ice Age 3.'**

Abi 'Something destroyed
the fox, and I thinks it's sad,
deep down.'



Personal Experiences



With arms heavy with blue bells the girls approach the burial site. Their cheerfulness is put aside as they take on a respectful stance. Anna speaks seriously
'Its like one of them graves. Like where my Grandma is, Lets write this down Jyl you write it down this is what happened.....'



Abbi 'I came here with my Daddy he stayed in the car and me and Anna and Ellie &.... (lists all her girl friends) we crept up and saw the stealer, he killed with his sharp knife and it was way past my bed time. The baby lambs were still in the fields we jumped over the fence and buried these bones and all the worms and beetles and spiders were here too on them in the hole and we ran and

Anna Yeah nearly got eaten by wolves and foxes and Dad was in the car asleep all the time! Hey.....What about we leave a message like in those grave yards yeah.'



*'We wish you could be stay
alive and we will miss you.
We leave you some flowers
on your little goats grave
yard.
Love from Abby Anna and
Jyl.'*

.....

Dying



The children discover a tree that seems sick.

What do trees need? Do trees ever feel lonely? The children suggest words to make our sick tree happy and post them on the tree. “Fun”, “love”, “Mum”, and “Dad” are all suggested.

And it needs a Grandma,” adds Hari, “to give it hugs.” Anna thinks the tree needs protecting and starts to make a sign for it.

The Sad Tree

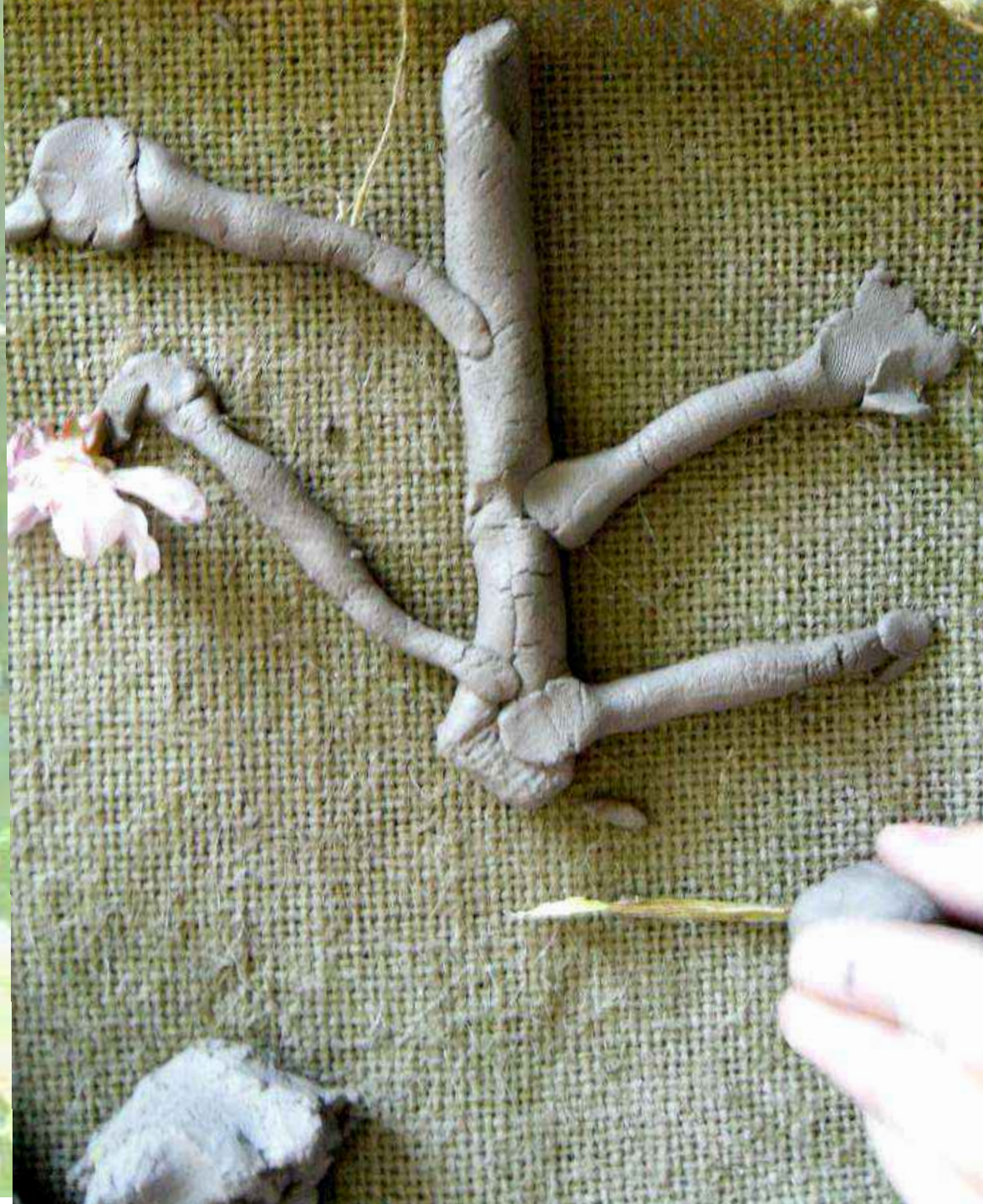
Hari 'You could draw a picture of your Gran that would cheer it up.'

Daniel 'It needs a Mum and Dad and a brother.'

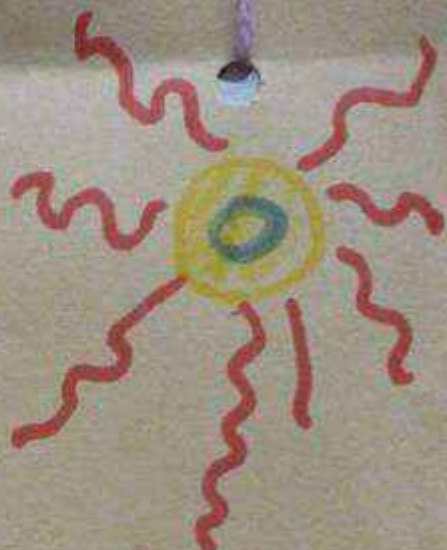
Bradley 'Maybe is sad cos they don't play, trees don't have friends. Friends play with you every time, they make you happy.'

Suzane 'It could call a friend, we could give it a name.'

Elliot 'I'm going to make this tree happy by being its friend.'



My
Tree



My
tree
is



tree
love

caused



The egg 'still wet inside'



New Life



The children are shown a photo of the egg found in the woods- and asked- what kind of bird came from the egg?

The children have a lot of experience of the woodland birds, as well as a rich imaginative understanding.

'Blackbirds-pheasants-bluebirds-pink birds-green birds

As the children draw the bird they imagine in the egg, they are invited to share their theories about birth.

How does the bird get inside the egg?

How is the bird born?

What does the baby bird feel inside the egg?

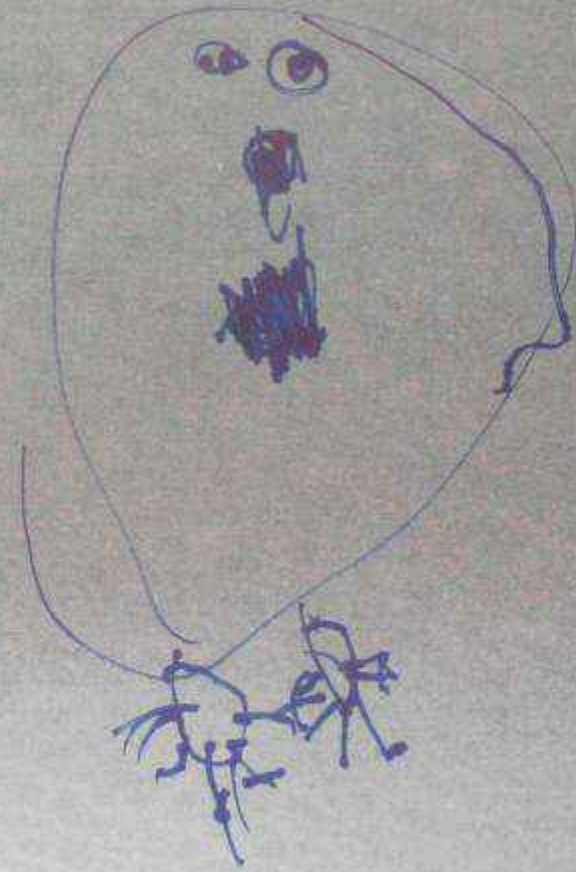
Hari 'The bird comes from another nest, it flies in the egg, dies and gets born again.'



Abi 'The bird's already in there.. The baby bird pecks a hole when it's ready to come out.

Inside the egg the bird has fun, it's soft inside, with soft feathers.

The Mammy teaches it to sing, that's bird talk.'





Freya 'The Mammy lays the egg. Inside the egg the baby bird's all squashed, I think it would hurt.

It would be hard to get out.

When my Charlie was born he was asleep at first, then he saw me. The number I was born on was 19th June.'

Births marriages and deaths

Anna and Abbi have been exploring for flowers, and now each have generous armfuls of bluebells.

Anna 'We're having a wedding, we got loads of flowers, these are called pinkbells.'

They make their wedding plans. Anna We need a world of bluebells. Girls get pinkbells and boys get bluebells."





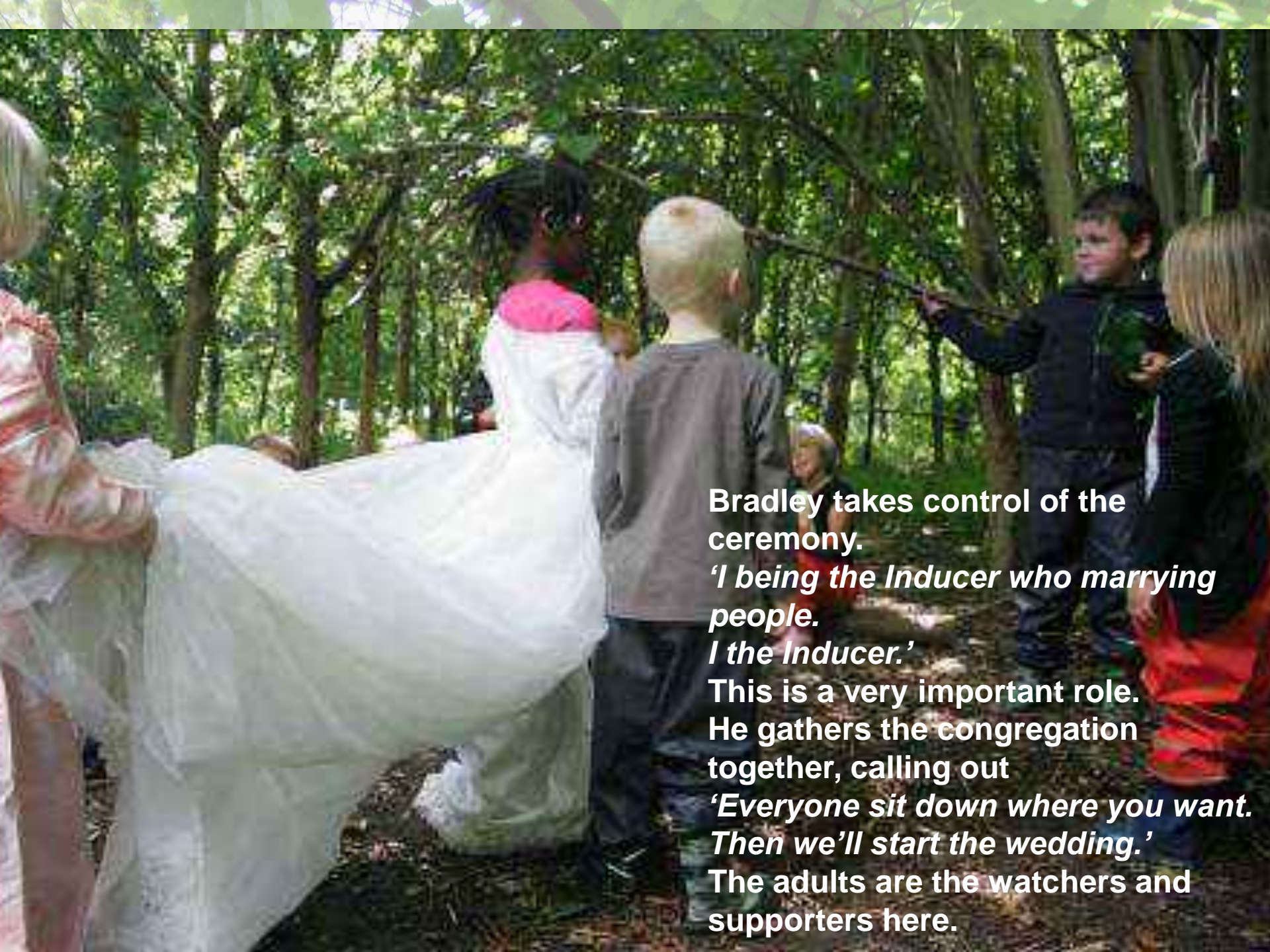
The Wedding Girls continue with their preparations.

Suzanne who had 'made dresses from flowers and hung them up to dry, and had some costumes for the princes' on the previous visit decided

'I'm going to do the shoes and the chairs today.'



Anna 'We need a prince
for getting married.'



Bradley takes control of the ceremony.
'I being the Inducer who marrying people. I the Inducer.'
This is a very important role. He gathers the congregation together, calling out *'Everyone sit down where you want. Then we'll start the wedding.'*
The adults are the watchers and supporters here.



Suzanne 'What about the dancing?'
Hari 'You make a lovely noise, like a lullaby or something.'
Abi 'I know a dance, I could teach everyone.'







The children organise themselves for the ceremony: making a seating area, and choosing their roles- bride/ groom/ attendant/ dressers/ musicians/congregation.

The wedding idea offers all of the children a role.

Bradley is the 'Inducer' again.

He is confident in this role.

This time he makes up his own words for the ceremony

'You're Married.'

The weddings begin, Bradley officiates.

Suzanne 'What about the dancing?'

Bradley 'I photographing everybody I marrying.'





What else do we
need for the wedding?

Guitar

Tambourines

Drinks

Cake

Dresses

Handsome clothes

A cloak

Crowns

A king

Plates

Fruit salad

Cookies

Cameras

A disco ball



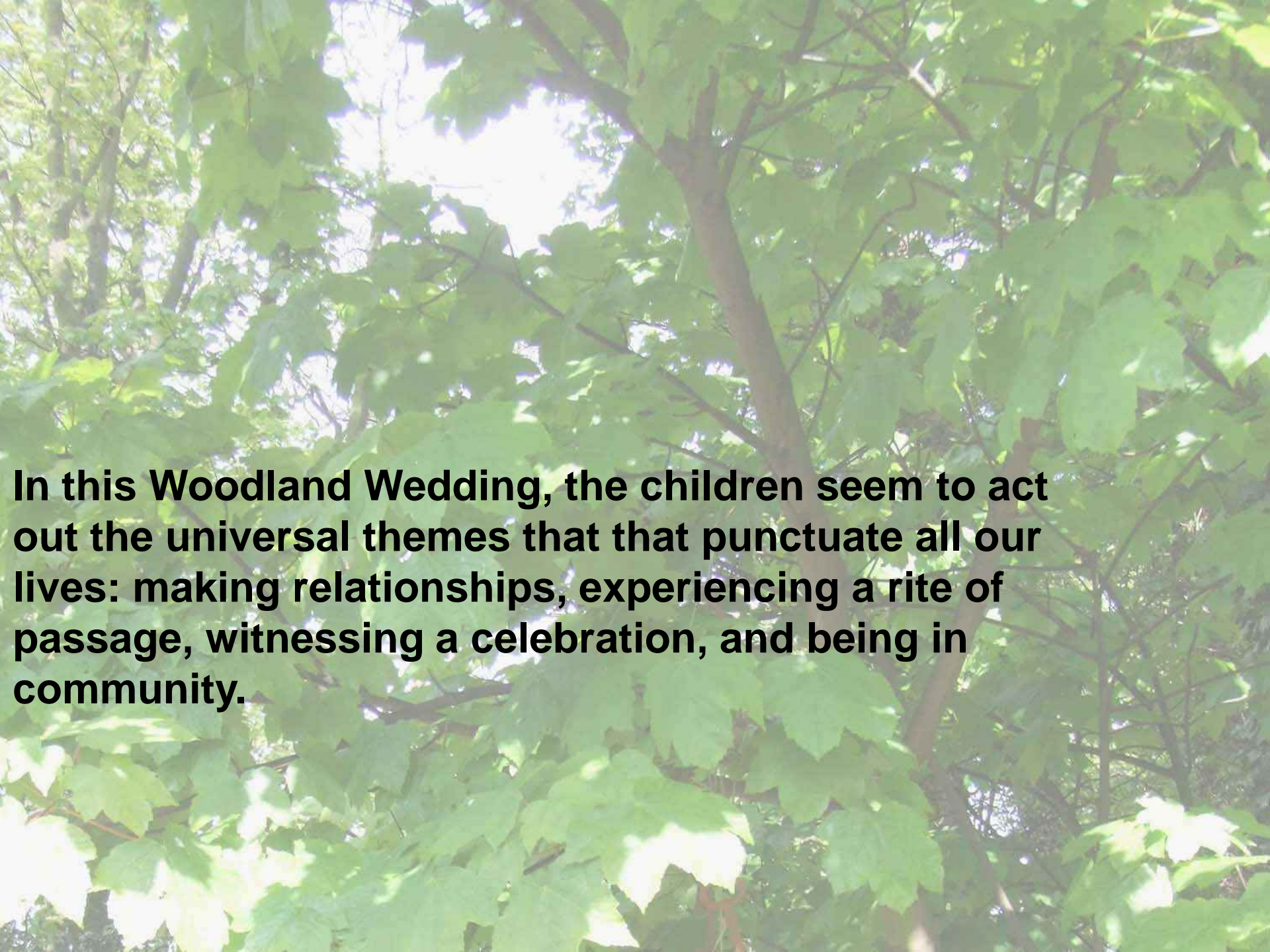


Why do we have weddings?

Abbi *'Because otherwise the babies don't get born.'*

'You have a husband to play fun games with you, while the Mothers have the baby.'





In this Woodland Wedding, the children seem to act out the universal themes that punctuate all our lives: making relationships, experiencing a rite of passage, witnessing a celebration, and being in community.

The Parents' Findings





‘In my view it is the most valuable experience a child can have aged three. At this stage they have little freedom to explore free of their parents and this I believe sets them up for life: we need to have confidence and self belief, the ability to investigate situations and what better way to learn these things?’

'This is a fabulous project especially for children who otherwise wouldn't get to enjoy woodland activities which is true for many children in our school. Even the quietest child got to express themselves in this environment. Having been lucky enough to join the children on one trip I have seen how much the children have engaged and enjoyed themselves.'



'Niamh enjoys being outdoors more; it expanded her imagination and gave her more confidence.

She came home every forest trip with a story to tell. When we visit Seaton Delaval Hall , she loves showing us round and telling stories about 'The Witch's House' and 'Prince Charming'. Her social development has noticeably improved after the forest project- she became more confident and outgoing. Niamh has a little sister in nursery and I would love her to have a similar experience, or to have a chance to do it as a family.'



‘Anna loves being outdoors, making things in the gardens. Loves to be outside.’





'Dee Jay said he liked
The Witch's House/ the
Haybales/Making
dens.'

‘Kai learnt lots of new things about animals habitats, and it encouraged him to go outdoors more.’



**‘Caitlin didn’t
used to
talk at school
and now she
does.’**





‘Leonie was thrilled to see a photo of herself hard at work in the woods in the Seaton Delaval Hall Guide 2011.’ “



‘Hari is now much more aware of his environment. He has always liked birds, but this project has made him more interested in nature. He is really interested in Birds, Trees and Flowers. He enjoyed the forest trips all through the year.’



'My child loved being outdoors with his classmates.'

'Fantastic project-please continue and offer all schools-particularly inner city and deprived schools.'

'We have visited the forest outside of school visits and are astounded at the confidence our daughter shows climbing, crawling, wading the stream and building things. It is something we would never have let her do on her own. It's brilliant!'

'Confidence and independence that he didn't have before, believing more in his own judgement.'

'Increased confidence and awareness of the outdoors. Enhanced enjoyment of walks.'

'They like being outdoors looking at plants and wildlife.'

'Getting outside more into a forest and learning about different animals.'

'Provided insight into outdoor activities and helped understand nature.'

'It was excellent. My child looked forward to it every week. He loved Bob!'

'Bradley has gained confidence, has enjoyed taking photos.'

'Crystal and Cameron like to be outdoors more and like plants and wildlife.'

*'I think it has helped Freya to be more confident with her peers outside of the school environment. It helped Freya settle into school
I think the children should have this opportunity every year, right through the school.'*

'Being outside is very important to us as a family and it has definitely persuaded us to get out regardless of the weather.'

'We will take any opportunity to have days out etc at the woods. I think it would be great if the funding was available to take the children all the way through primary School not just for one year.'



Anna 'This is my favourite life I ever had.'