

THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

– IN THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT



On the first day of Christmas, my true love sent to me: A partridge in a pear tree ...

Winter is the ideal time to plant fruit trees, such as pear, apple and plum. Why not find a spare corner of the school grounds to create an orchard? It can be any size – even a couple of trees will make a huge difference. The design and layout, the selection of trees, as well as the planting and after-care can all be used as an inspiring learning opportunity for pupils, as well as an activity volunteers may well be able to help you with. So why not tie in your new fruit-tree planting with this and win even more trees for the school?!

On the second day of Christmas, my true love sent to me: Two turtle doves...

Marine litter, particularly plastics, is a major global concern affecting many forms of ocean wildlife - hundreds of millions of plastic bags each year are left to float in the sea and the crisis has had a particularly harmful effect on sea turtles, which mistake the floating bags for jellyfish, a favourite food. This issue could be a really engaging topic for a class, particularly in PSHE at KS2 and 3. Why not participate in the MARLISCO video contest and share your vision in Europe? Have you noticed all the litter that appears on the beach? Where do you think it comes from and what are the problems it can cause in the sea? What can we do about it? I bet you have ideas and answers to these questions - SHARE them MARLISCO via www.marlisco.eu , learn about the problem of marine litter in the UK and then shoot your story in a creative and insightful short video. Tell MARLISCO why we should care, how it can be solved or what you have done in your school or community about this issue. If your video is one of the winners, they will make sure that your views are heard loud and strong, together with those of other youngsters from across Europe.

On the third day of Christmas, my true love sent to me: Three French hens ...

Have you ever considered doing a modern foreign language, like French, outdoors? Why not cook up a meal from your school garden all in a foreign language, or use the local environment as a stimulus for learning vocabulary, or creating written work such as stories, poetry or non-fiction? Or why not build an outdoor structure or create a short film in the outdoors in the target language?

On the fourth day of Christmas, my true love sent to me: Four calling birds...

Although the leaves are falling and winter is well on its way, there are still many birds calling at this time of year. Why not take a class out to listen for the sounds of winter in a local park or woodland? You don't need to go far. If budgets allow, you could bring in a

bird expert to help with your trenching, and of course this activity can link to many curriculum areas such as music, geography and literacy. Check out the RSPB website or a great BBC resource: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/science/birdsong.shtml>

On the fifth day of Christmas, my true love sent to me: Five golden rings...

What a wonderful time of year for colour... gold, brown, russet, red, yellow, green and orange everywhere. Visit a local green space [or just the school playing field] and see which colours stand out. There are plenty of ideas for art – one simple, cheap activity is to collect those colour paint cards from your local DIY centre, the ones with 5 or 6 colour tones, and give these to the children, who then explore the local space to see if they can find an exact match to the colour tones they have been given. You can always cut up the cards and give the children a wider range. Laminating them will mean they last longer in damp weather. The other project related to gold is to look at minerals and the local area's mining heritage; they are very few places in the UK that are not near a mine. Why not research this – did you know that some 218 million tonnes of minerals were extracted from the UK landmass for sale in 2011? Check out the British Geological Survey site: www.bgs.ac.uk and don't forget people have mined or extracted flint, granite, clay and cement, as well as precious metals. Maybe take the class panning for gold...

On the sixth day of Christmas, my true love sent to me: Six geese a-laying...and on the seventh day of Christmas, my true love sent to me: Seven swans a-swimming ...

It's no coincidence that these two birds feature in a winter-time song; at this time of year both geese and swans are very evident. The resident UK population of geese and swan is joined during the winter by others from colder regions who arrive to overwinter in our milder climate. Why not visit a local park with a lake or a nearby Nature Reserve to observe, record, discuss and learn about our winter bird population? Find your nearest National Nature Reserve at the Natural England site: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-nature-reserves-in-england> and check out the RSPB site: <http://www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/birdguide/families/swans.aspx>

On the eighth day of Christmas, my true love sent to me: Eight maids a-milking ...

Milk – what a great topic! You could look at:

- the local, regional, national and international aspects of milk production and dairy farming
- milk distribution and the transportation of milk and the business of selling milk and milk products – 'from grass to me'
- processing milk [i.e. turning milk into other products]. Is milk found in surprising places, like hair-care products and pet food? And how on earth does grass turn into milk? And then milk into cheese or yoghurt?
- choose a country and describe how important milk production is to the economy
- what problems do dairy farmers face? How are cows kept healthy and productive?

- what impact has milk production had on the local landscape [e.g. were farms once common, and what now remains of this industry, for instance in street names?]. Which farms within a ten mile radius of the school are involved in milk production?
- the benefits of drinking milk – what allergies do people have to milk?
- can you ‘buy a cow’ with a charity to support overseas development?
- explore the story of how Edward Jenner found an antidote to smallpox
- milk production methods in the past compared to today; visit the local museum or interview older residents about the countryside and the milk they drank as children and where it came from. Look at the technology used in dairy farming today and imagine what it might look like in the future
- Young Apprentices: your project this week is to create a marketing campaign to promote a new milk product! If you could create a new milk/ dairy product, what would it look, smell, taste and feel like? How would you market this new idea to a sceptical public? On the ninth day of Christmas, my true love sent to me: Nine ladies dancing... and on the tenth day of Christmas, my true love sent to me: Ten lords a-leaping... Let’s face it there are poisonous plants out there... and Lords and Ladies [*Arum maculatum*] is one of them. Lords and Ladies is common: look out for its poisonous bright orange-red berries at this time of year along paths, in gardens, hedgerows and in woods. Now you may shy away from dealing with the subject of poisonous plants but, on the other hand, the topic is likely to engage a class [and the TV show ‘Deadly 60’ is a hit series many of them will be watching at home - www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/shows/deadly-60]. The best place to visit if you are in the North East is the Poison Garden at Alnwick Castle – or dare to look at: <http://www.alnwickgarden.com/explore/whats-here/the-poison-garden>

On the eleventh day of Christmas, my true love sent to me: Eleven pipers piping and on the twelfth day of Christmas, my true love sent to me: Twelve drummers drumming...

Music in the outdoors – what a wonderful idea! We’ve mentioned bird-song as an inspiration but why not create a whole woodland band? You could create a range of instruments, using fallen logs for a xylophone, stumps and stones for drums, make twig whistles [www.youtube.com – search for ‘treewright whistle’], and plastic bottles filled with water. Could you hold an outdoor winter concert for parents? Try combining the normal school band and the natural ones you’ve created - wow! - with a bit of mulled wine and mince pies, of course, as a fundraiser. With the money you raise, why not go for a more permanent outdoor musical experience? There are several companies that can help and there’s a good bank of ideas at: <http://creativestartlearning.co.uk/c/art-music-outdoors/>

Can I get involved with Natural Connections?

The Demonstration Project element of Natural Connections concludes in March 2016 but a number of legacy initiatives are under development. Natural Connections has been working with over 120 schools since 2012 in the South West and we are now able to offer our service to all schools.

The Natural Connections Team can support all aspects of outdoor learning in primary, secondary and special schools throughout the UK and overseas. We are an experienced group of experts in curriculum development and outdoor learning practice across all curriculum topics. We draw on a range of specialists to tailor our services to the particular needs of each school. Our service to schools includes:

- Specialist professional development & training for teaching staff, governors and volunteers
- Bespoke Curriculum design to integrate outdoor learning into learning, teaching and Improvement Plans
- Practical outdoor learning activities and ideas to support lessons that engage pupils, develop skills, enhance attainment and offer creative lesson ideas
- A comprehensive set of resources for schools to build exciting lessons
- Advice on funding and partnership development
- Local support and access to a range of outdoor education providers who can help enhance your lessons
- An evaluation and research package to suit each school setting, based on many years' experience
- Access to the wider Natural Connections network, conferences, research papers, contacts and offers to support you in the long-term

Whatever the scale of your plans and whatever stage you are at with outdoor learning, please return to our home page and contact us to discuss how the Natural Connections Team can help.