

# THE LOST WORDS ACTIVITY PACK



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Oxford Poetry Library

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MIRIAM ELEANOR ART

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## INTRODUCTION

### About this Activity Pack

In 2020, in collaboration with Flo's Place in the Park, and made possible by the generosity of the Midcounties Co-operative and Community Action Groups, we planned to produce a series of workshops for kids inspired by The Lost Words by Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris. Due to the coronavirus outbreak in the spring, with public gatherings and events cancelled across the country, we have as yet been unable to bring all these workshops to life! However, you can't cancel spring, and there is still much glorious nature to be found in the gardens and green spaces around our home. We hope this pack will invite you and your family to explore the wildlife around you, and create something wonderful in response.

### About The Lost Words

Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris created The Lost Words after the 2007 edition of the Oxford Junior Dictionary introduced new words such as "broadband" and "blog" while words about the natural world (acorn, wren, otter, willow, to name a few) were lost. The dictionary made this decision based on the idea that children are losing touch with nature, so didn't need to look up these words anymore. It seemed the natural world was disappearing from children's lives.

Enter The Lost Words! This is a magical collection of acrostic poems by Macfarlane, gorgeously illustrated by Morris, which magics these words back into existence, brings them back to our hearts and minds, and helps us to rediscover the natural world around us. Each 'lost word' has its own poem and beautiful watercolour drawing to bring it to life. To explore some of them, you can see pages and poems from the book (and download some other useful Lost Words resources!) here: <https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/initiatives/the-lost-words>.

## How to use this pack

This activity pack is designed to mirror the workshops which we have run in the past around Oxford. The idea is to have a resource to help you recreate the workshops at home. We have a different pack for different areas of wildlife including birds, plants, and mini-beasts. Do all, or just those which take your fancy. Each workshop is split into three parts:

The first is the outdoors bit which will involve going outside either into your garden, or nearby green space. It doesn't need to be wild or wildernessy - any park or square will do! Just please make sure you are being safe, and if you are leaving your home, make sure it is in line with current social distancing advice.

The second part is where we think about how we used our senses and start putting our outside experiences into words. Finally, the third section is when we turn all these words into Lost Words-inspired poems!

All you will need to do these activities are:

- A pen or pencil
- Some paper
- Some art supplies to illustrate your poem (we usually like to have lots of crayons, coloured pencils, marker pens, collage materials and coloured paper)
- A computer connected to the internet

It might be easiest to print out the pack so you can write on the worksheets and fill in the boxes we've made for activities. But if you don't have a printer, just use any paper you have to take notes and do the activities and that will work just as well.

Finally: please do share what you've made! We would love to see your poems and illustrations. At the end of all the workshops, we are planning to collect all participants' artwork and writing in a zine which will be distributed around the city (and of course be free to all contributors). To submit your work, scan or photograph your masterpieces and send them to us at [oxfordpoetrylibrary@gmail.com](mailto:oxfordpoetrylibrary@gmail.com) or share them on social media with the hashtag #TheLostWordsOxford

Be safe, have fun, and most of all - enjoy the beauty and magic of the natural world around you!

## DISCOVERING



Plants! There are so many plants around us in our everyday lives, that sometimes we just forget that they are there. But plants are amazing and we shouldn't take them for granted. They can live nearly everywhere in the world, from the hottest deserts to freezing cold mountaintops, to cracks in the pavement. Some of them can even live underwater.

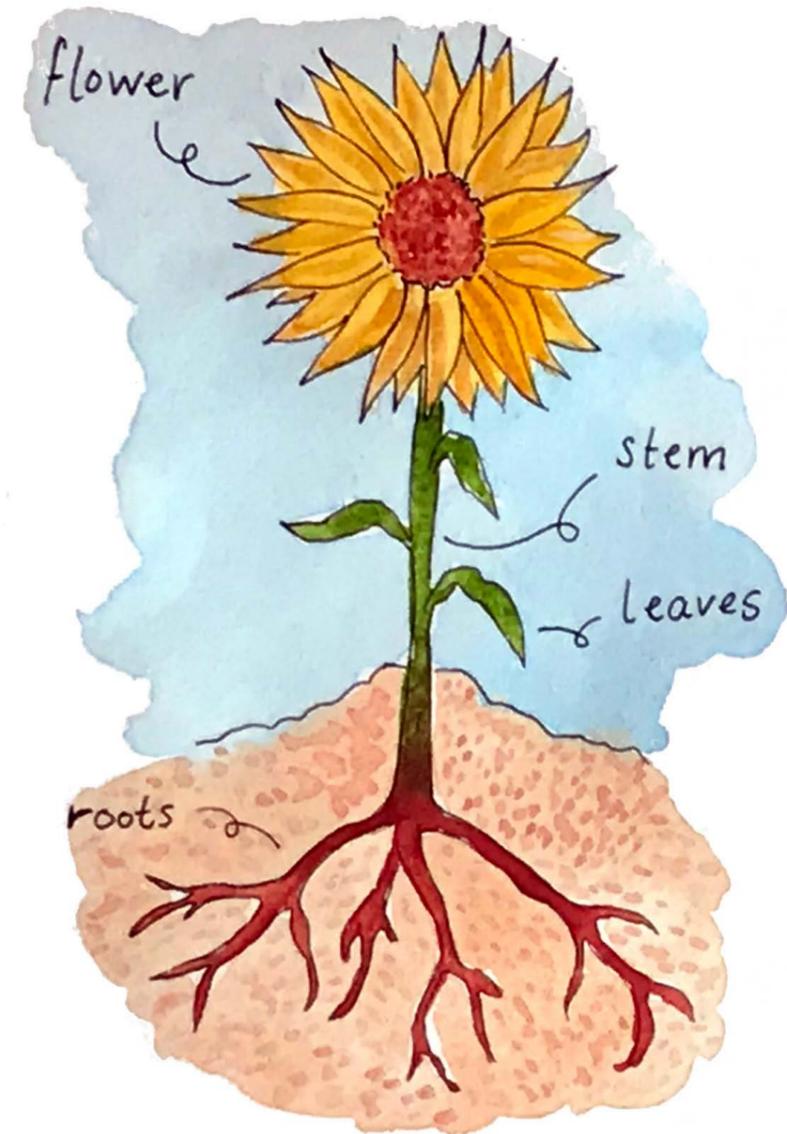


They create beautiful habitats, like forests, jungles, and meadows, and provide us and other animals with food and shelter. It's very difficult to imagine a world without plants - imagine a world without flowers, or pizza (there would be no tomatoes, or wheat to make the dough). In fact, no animals or humans would be able to survive at all because plants make the very oxygen that we breathe.

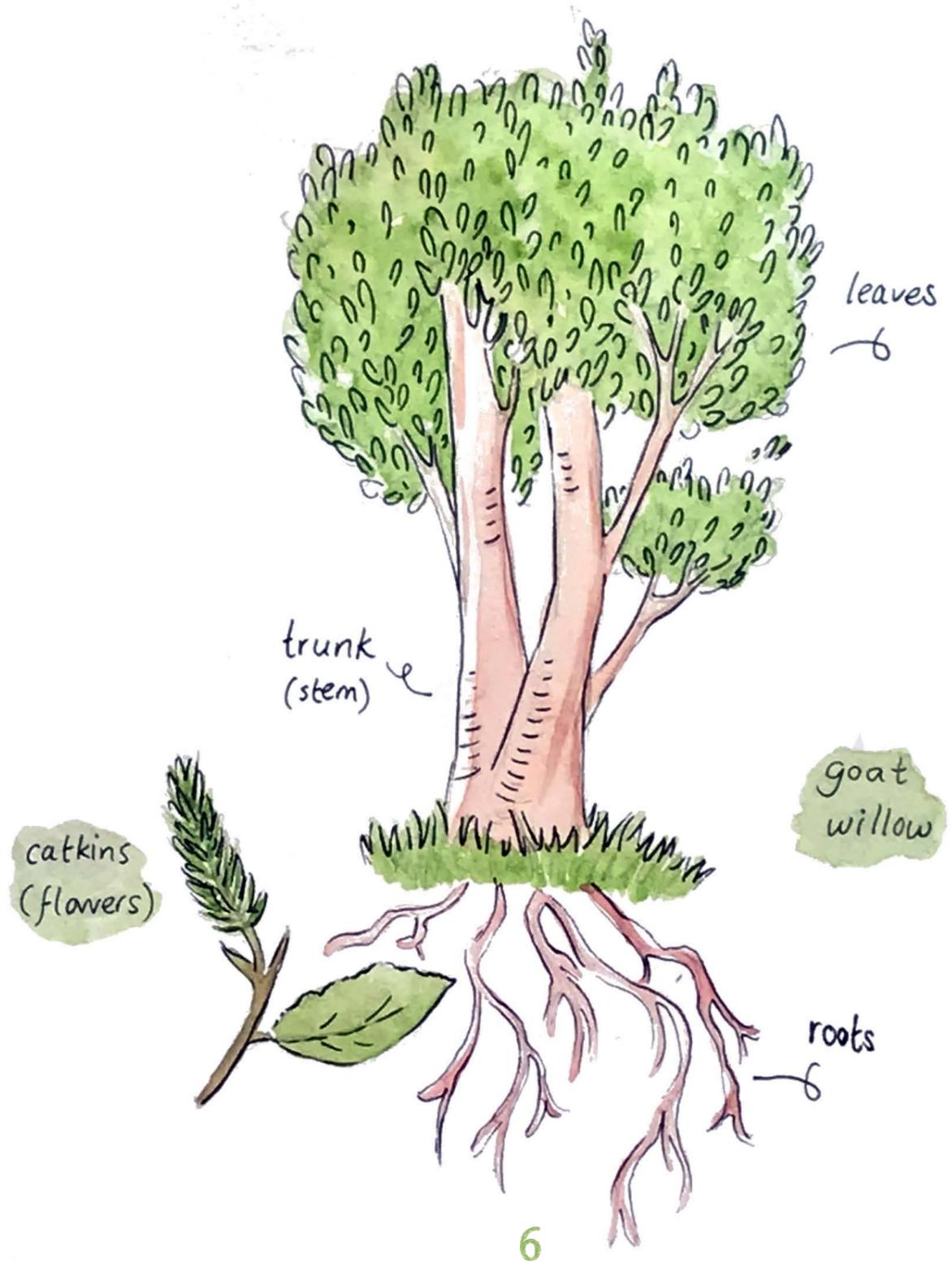


What exactly *is* a plant? Plants come in all shapes and sizes, from tiny moss to giant oak trees. However, they all have one thing in common: they can absorb carbon dioxide from the air and water from their surroundings and, using sunlight, mix these two to make sugar, which they use to grow. Now that is amazing - imagine just surviving off water, air and sunlight? This process is called **photosynthesis**.

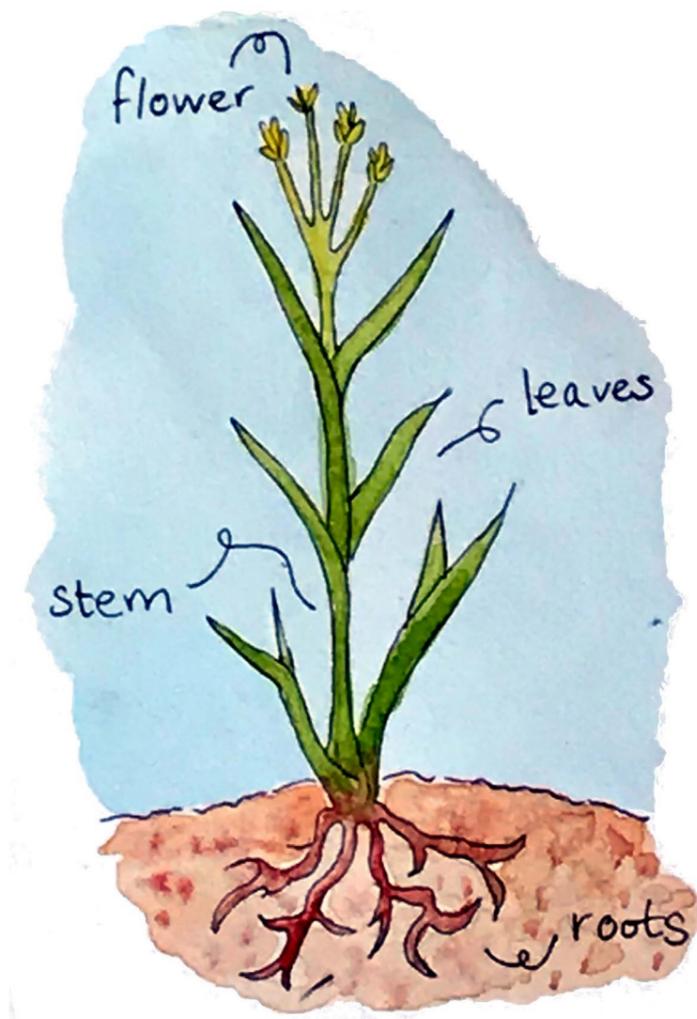
There are two types of plants, flowering plants and non-flowering plants. Flowering plants all have roots, a stem, leaves and of course, flowers! Here's a sunflower for example:



All flowering plants have these same basic parts, but they can look very different... did you know a willow tree is a flowering plant as well? The **catkins** are the flowers.

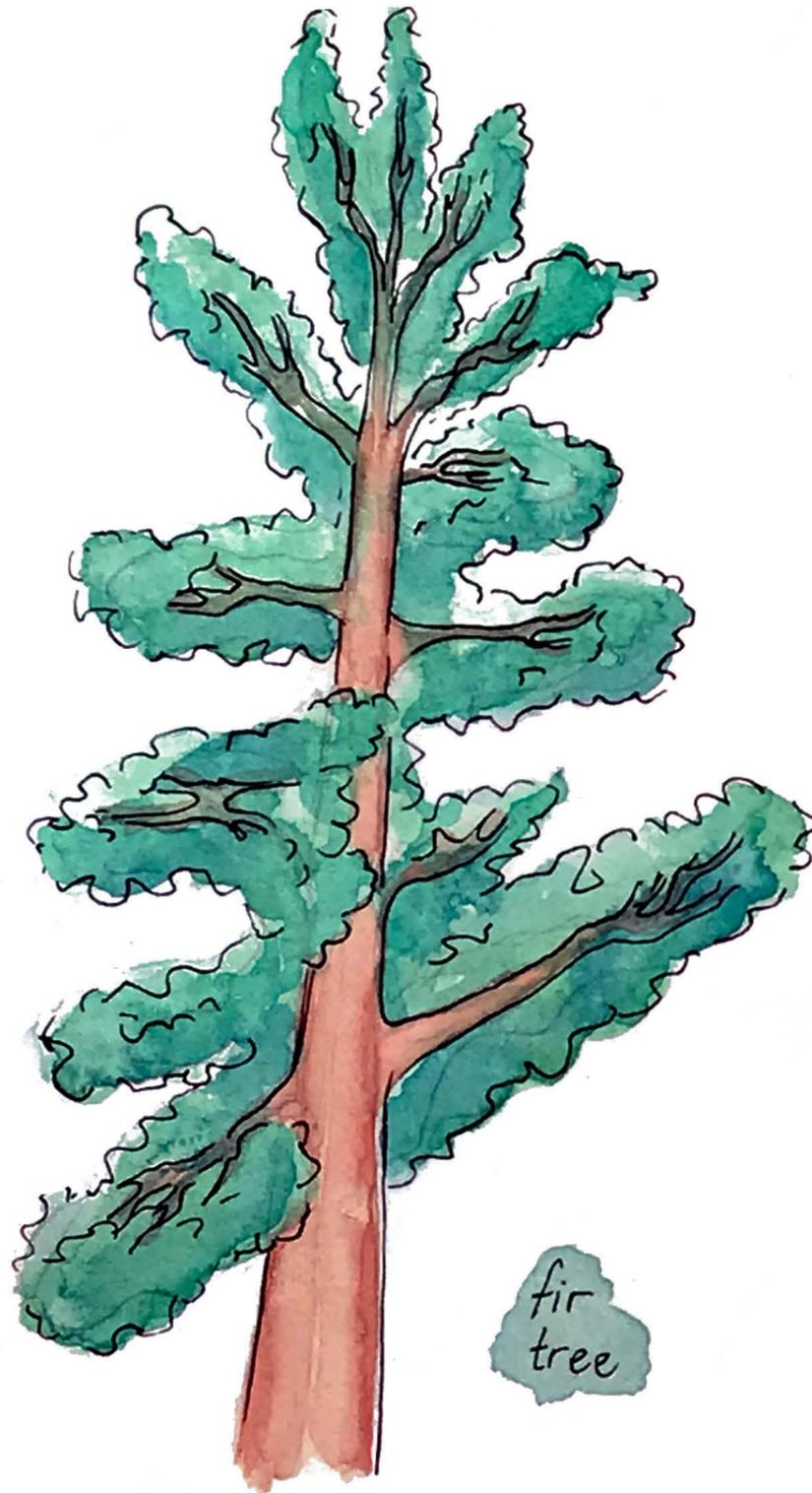


And grass is a flowering plant too!



Plants have evolved over time to be very different from each other. Duckweed is a tiny plant that floats on water, just three leaves and some trailing roots that's less than 1cm across. On the other hand, there are trees in tropical forests in Malaysia over 100m tall!

Non-flowering plants, like ferns, mosses and pine trees don't have flowers, but they can still be beautiful.



fir  
tree

8



fern

Some very weird plants are carnivores and can catch tiny flies. This is a sundew which lives in boggy places in the UK, like Scotland and Norfolk.



Sundew

9

## Go outside!

Go out into a green space near you (with an adult!). This can be your garden, or your local park or square. Make sure you are being safe, and if you are leaving your home, make sure it is part of your daily exercise, and you are keeping your 2m distance from other people.

You will need these pages or some blank paper, a crayon, a pen or pencil.



Take a deep breath. You just breathed in oxygen that was at one point made by the leaves of a plant. I wonder how many different plants made the oxygen in your breath just then?

How many different types of plants can you see around you right now? Probably too many to count, so we're going to look for just three.

## A big plant..

First, look for the biggest plant you can find. If it's a tree, give it a hug. What does it feel like? Is the bark rough, smooth, wrinkly? Does it have any shapes in it, or even faces? If it was a person, what kind of person would it be like - maybe a dancer, or a bent-over old lady?

Have the leaves come out yet? Can you see any flowers (remember, the flowers might not look like typical flowers or be very tiny). Can you see where the stem (trunk) joins the ground? Can you imagine the roots spreading out underneath you?

Here's some space for you to make any notes or drawings:

Here's a box to stick a leaf in



Here's some space to do a bark rubbing with a crayon:



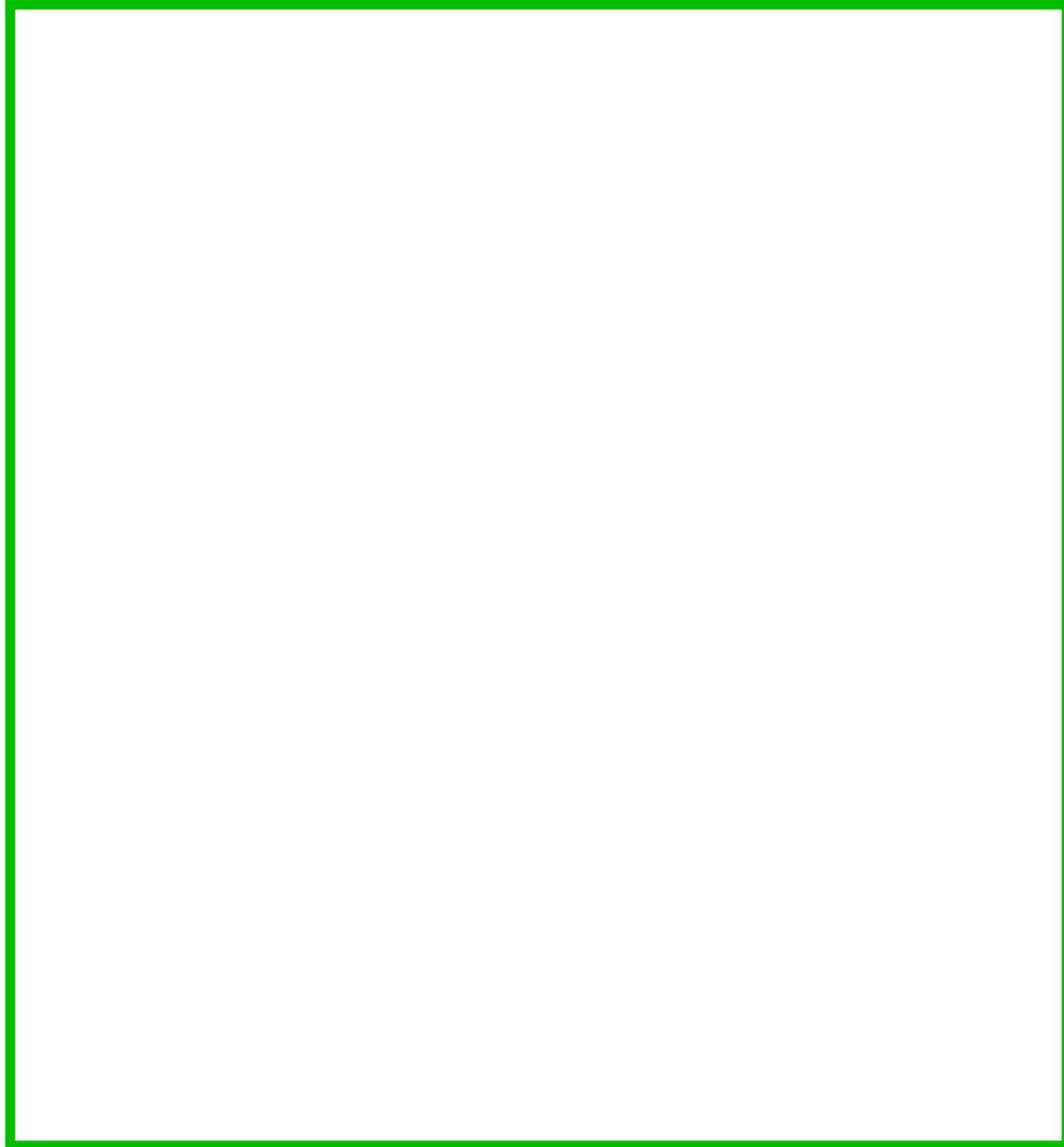
### A small plant..

Now, look for the smallest plant you can find. You may have to get down on your hands and knees, or on your stomach. Can you smell the plant, and, if so, what does it smell like? Can you identify the stem, leaves, and, if it has them, flowers? What shape are the leaves? Roll the leaves or stem around in your fingers: is it sticky, smooth, prickly (be careful!), hairy? How many colours can you see in your plant? If you take a bit of the leaf, flower or fruit, and crush it on the paper, does it make a colour?

Here's some space for you to trace or draw a leaf:



Does your plant have flowers? Here's some space for you to describe those flowers. What colour are they? What do the colours remind you of? You could even press some of the petals and see if they make a natural ink:



## An interesting plant..

Finally, find one more plant that you think looks interesting.

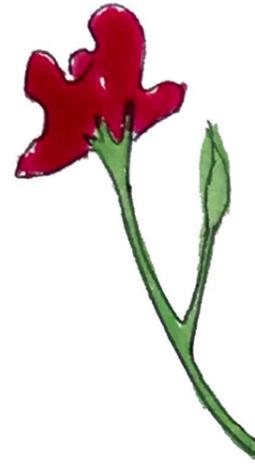
What shape is the plant growing in: is it creeping along the surface, or standing up straight and tall? Try and mimic the shape of the plant with your body.

Here's some space for you to write some notes about your plant. If this plant had a magical or healing power, what would it be?



Sit down and listen – are the plants making any noises around you? Here is some space to write down what you can hear. How would you write down the sounds? You don't have to use real words to describe them – you can write *ssshhhhhhhh* for the sound of wind in the trees, or *klikkle klakkle* for the sound of leaves rustling.

Maybe you would like to try and identify one of your plants yourself. If you want to identify a tree, you could try the Tree ID app from the Woodland Trust <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/tree-id-app/> or if it's a smaller plant, the app Pl@ntnet <https://identify.plantnet.org/>. It doesn't really matter if you don't know the "official" name of the plant, though. Most plants have lots of names and in the past would have been called different things in different parts of the country. How about making up your own name for it?



## ASK THE EXPERT

While you were out and about, did you find something you had a question about? Maybe a plant that you wanted to know the name of? Or maybe you want to know why a plant has a certain type of leaf or flower? If you have questions, we have experts on hand to answer them! Send us your questions with any descriptions, photos, videos, or sound recordings to [oxfordpoetrylibrary@gmail.com](mailto:oxfordpoetrylibrary@gmail.com) and we will pass your questions on to one of Oxford's local plant experts and send you back their personalised reply.



# mapping the SENSES

The title 'mapping the SENSES' is written in a mix of fonts. 'mapping' is in a blue cursive script, 'the' is in a simple black font, and 'SENSES' is in a large, bold, green block font. The background features blue water with several black birds flying.

## THINGS I SAW

Come back indoors, bringing in the notes, drawings, and any bits of the natural world that you've collected while being outside.

Did you use all five senses when you were exploring? Hearing and seeing and touching, but also maybe smelling and tasting?

Print out the following 4 sheets or write the 4 headings in the middle of separate pieces of paper. Write as many things as you can think of around each heading.

Try to give yourself 5 minutes on each piece of paper to write down all your ideas!

Hint: think about things you saw but also colours, textures, patterns.

## THINGS I HEARD

Hint: Try to write a few onomatopoeia (a word which makes the sound it describes, like 'bang,' 'whoosh,' 'hiss').

## THINGS I SMELLED/TASTED

Hint: You can write about things you might have smelled/tasted, but also try to imagine yourself as one of the plants. What might they smell or taste while you were watching them? Fresh air? Sunshine?



## THINGS I FELT

Hint: This can be textures or feelings: the breeze on your face, sunshine or rain on your skin, prickly grass. But there are also emotions you might have felt: happy, thoughtful, calm, worried, tired, bored?

In writing the poems for The Lost Words, Robert Macfarlane often uses all five of his senses. Take a look at some of the poems from The Lost Words here:

<https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/initiatives/the-lost-words>

Choose one or two and read them aloud to a family member, pet, or stuffed animal. What do you notice about the poems? Have a conversation with someone in your house about them. Think about how the poems use sound, repetition, and images. Do you notice how they use the five senses to bring the natural object to life?

You might also notice that each of the poems is structured with the title-word written down the side. Each letter of the word is the first letter of each line. This style of poem is called an acrostic.

Have a go at writing your own acrostic! It's easy - just follow these steps:

1) Choose a plant which you've seen today... something which you really enjoyed seeing, or find inspiring! Or choose a word from your sheets where you noted things you saw, heard, smelled, tasted, or felt.

My word is:

2) Write that word down the side of a piece of paper. For example, if you chose a robin, your paper would look like this:



3) Write a poem with each new line starting with the next letter of the word:



If you get stuck, use images and ideas from your sense mind-maps which you just made. Try to use all five senses in your poem to make it as descriptive as possible! Remember, a poem doesn't have to rhyme, but it can be fun to play with the sounds of words in your poem.

4) Decorate your poem however you like! You can use crayons, coloured pencils or pens, but you can also get even more creative and do some collage with old wrapping paper, coloured paper, even newspapers, magazines or old books (make sure to ask your grown-ups' permission first!). You can even use found objects (including things you found outside: leaves, feathers, flowers...)

For some inspiration, see some of the artwork from previous sessions: <https://oxfordpoetrylibrary.wordpress.com/the-lost-words>

## SHARE YOUR WORK WITH US!

Take photos or scans of your masterpieces and email them to us at [oxfordpoetrylibrary@gmail.com](mailto:oxfordpoetrylibrary@gmail.com) or, if you like, email us for an address and you can post us your work. We're hoping to make a zine full of all the creations from our participants so send us your work to be a part of that!

## FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

We hope you enjoyed the activities in this pack! If you did, and you want more wildlife and poetry resources, we list a few below (some for kids and some for grown-ups).

### For Kids:

Lots of The Lost Words free resources, materials, school projects and information: <https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/initiatives/the-lost-words>

The Lost Words activities and workshops in Oxfordshire: <https://oxfordpoetrylibrary.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/lost-words-school-guide-a4.pdf>

Lots of ideas for nature-based activities to do indoors and outdoors from the Woodland Trust <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/categories/children-and-families>

Free live lessons from fieldwork experts at the Field Studies Council (for a variety of ages) <https://encounteredu.com/live-lessons/fsc-fieldworklive-2020>

Nature activities and outdoor challenges for all kinds of wildlife: <https://handbookofnaturestudy.com/>

### For Adults:

Being a Beast by Charles Foster, (Profile Books, 2016) [local Oxford academic lives as a badger, otter, deer, and other creatures to get inside the head of those animals]

A Prickly Affair by Hugh Warwick, (Penguin Books, 2010) [local Oxford expert tells you everything you ever wanted to know about hedgehogs in an informative, entertaining, and charming way]

The Beauty in the Beast by Hugh Warwick (Simon & Schuster, 2013) [local Oxford hedgehog expert explores Britain's wildlife and the people who love them]

More information about Sarah Watkinson, emeritus research fellow in Plant Sciences at Oxford University, and poet in residence at Wytham Woods <https://sarahcwatkinson.wordpress.com/>

Oxford Plan Bee, research initiative in Oxford about bees and pollinators, running events and encouraging bee habitats in the city <https://oxfordplanbee.web.ox.ac.uk/>

## For Adults and Kids:

Become a citizen scientist! There are many wildlife and nature surveys you can take part in from your garden or as part of your daily exercise, all of which contribute to vital information on the health of our wildlife populations. Here are a selection (all dates are for 2020):

Plantlife: The Great British Wildflower hunt (any date) and Every Flower Counts (23rd - 31st May) <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk>

RSPB: Swift Survey (Late May - Late July) <https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/conservation-and-sustainability/safeguarding-species/help-us-help-swifts/>

Butterfly Conservation: The Big Butterfly Count (17th July - 9th August) <https://www.bigbutterflycount.org/>

Blooms for Bees: any time <http://www.bloomsforbees.co.uk/>

## Credits, thanks and acknowledgements

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We are extremely grateful for the input of the following both in helping us run our workshops and being our resident ecological experts with whom we could not have run this project! Hats off to:

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Stephen Harris  
Tonya Lander  
Hugh Warwick  
Sarah Watkinson

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A huge thank you also goes to Flo's The Place in the Park, and particularly Makena Lohr for her practical (and emotional!) support in driving The Lost Words Oxford.

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The **Midcounties**  
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