

Wondering

Mandy Haggith

This resource is based on a workshop held at Glasgow Botanic Gardens in February 2020. It involves using all of our senses to kindle a sense of wonder.

As a workshop this is ideally a two-hour process for around a dozen people, which allows for a gentle pace, although it could be done in a shorter period with fewer or more people.

It also works perfectly solo, and can become a daily practice for wellbeing.

Workshop materials

Paper leaves

Tidbits about a tree printed out on slips of paper from [the A-B-Tree website](#)

Pencils or pens

Ideally participants have their own notebooks with them

Workshop process

Gratitude

We begin with a round of introductions, so all participants know who everyone is and to begin with participating in something that is known to be good for our mental health: [gratitude](#).

Everyone gives their name and also expresses something or someone that they are grateful for. This act of appreciation helps the participants to shift their focus away from everyday worries, becoming present in the group in a positive way. The collective experience of hearing these statements of gratitude is heart-warming and we learn something important about each other by hearing what we are each thankful for in our lives.

Focus

Before we head outside to meet some trees we write down on a paper leaf a word or a phrase expressing what trees mean to us. This is a simple way to get people writing and words flowing without it being too challenging. Reading out what we have written on our leaves there is a sense of appreciation of trees and the start of engagement with other living things.

Sharing knowledge

On my website I have a section called [A-B-Tree](#), which is a gathering of tidbits of folklore, ecology, practical uses and poems about trees.

At Glasgow Botanic Gardens we used the holly tree as a starting point for our shared creative activity. Holly is, in folklore, the 'Lord of the Woods' in the winter months, a guardian and protector of all other lifeforms through dark times.

We went outside to some holly trees and stood close to them, to shelter from the wind, and handed round a set of tidbits about holly printed on slips of paper. Everyone got two or three

and we read them out in a round, one tidbit at a time. This is a non-threatening way for everyone to participate in sharing knowledge. Some of the tidbits are funny or trigger a thought or idea and it's good to be informal about this.

Depending where you are, and the time of year, you might want to choose a different tree, but the process is the same.

Wishing

Because the holly is a tree of protection, I invited everyone to make a protection wish. The prompt for this was 'what protection would you like to ask the holly for?' Participants wrote their answers and shared them in a round.

Again, you can also make wishes with other trees. If you're working with a group, hopefully by this stage everyone is comfortable enough to do this – it's an opportunity to acknowledge vulnerability and express a need for help.

Wonder-wandering

Now participants are invited to go off on their own and find three things to wonder at – three things that make you stop and look, or smell, to feel delight, astonishment, pleasure, three things that make you go 'Wow! Look at that!' Everyone is encouraged to use all five senses and to write down at least a phrase but maybe more to describe each wonderful thing. This can take up to 20 minutes, and we then regroup and share our wonder, reading out what we've written around the group. Participants bring back descriptions of beautiful plants, scents that brought back memories, intriguing textures and evocative sounds.

Wondering about

Following on from the feeling of wonder evoked through use of the senses the next step is the sense of wondering in terms of asking a question or thinking about something. So all participants are invited to pick one of their three wonders and ask it a question. Some of the results are funny, some philosophical, some deeply insightful and some fantastical.

'Cactus, do I smell as lovely to you as you do to me?'

'Big oak tree, do you enjoy the birds singing?'

Conclusion

We round off the session with a reading of Mary Oliver's poem [The Summer Day](#), noticing how she moves from questions to close wonder-filled observations and back to questions. This is suggested as a way that participants could take their wonderings onwards into a poem. To conclude, everyone takes another paper leaf, and writes what trees mean to them now. Everyone is encouraged to go away and continue finding things to wonder at and wonder about. We part company, full to the brim with appreciation and wonder.

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https://www.lapidusscotland.co.uk/lapidus_tool/wondering