

ONE week OF WOOD



Wendy Bowkett

reveals how any setting can organise a host of tree-based fun and learning opportunities...

We had reached the stage in our alphabet theme for us to think about 'W'. As usual, we chatted with the children about our next project and one word sprang to the minds of a couple of them – 'Wendy'. The staff of our pre-school were all known to parents and children by first names, but I didn't really want to be drawn, discussed or 'put on show', so that idea was quickly dismissed!

Washing, windy days and water were also mentioned, alongside white, wheels and whales. But Marcus, a quick-witted young lad, said "Wood would do? I love doing wood with my dad." His dad was a joiner with a workshop at home and Marcus often came to nursery with sculptures he had nailed or glued together, as well as bringing off-cuts for us to use when junk modelling. As soon as we put the idea to the children during circle time, several cheered at the thought of making models like Marcus. The seed had been planted and from it saplings and oaks definitely grew...

The first thing we decided to do was to look around our setting for wooden objects to start a touch table. That was when we realised just how many plastic toys and objects we had. The interest table began with just a few wooden bricks, a toy ark with animals, a peg board (but no wooden pegs), some percussion instruments and an old wooden ruler. After a trip around the garden, twigs and small branches were added. (There were more wooden things outside, but the picnic bench, chairs, sheds and climbing frame were best left there!)

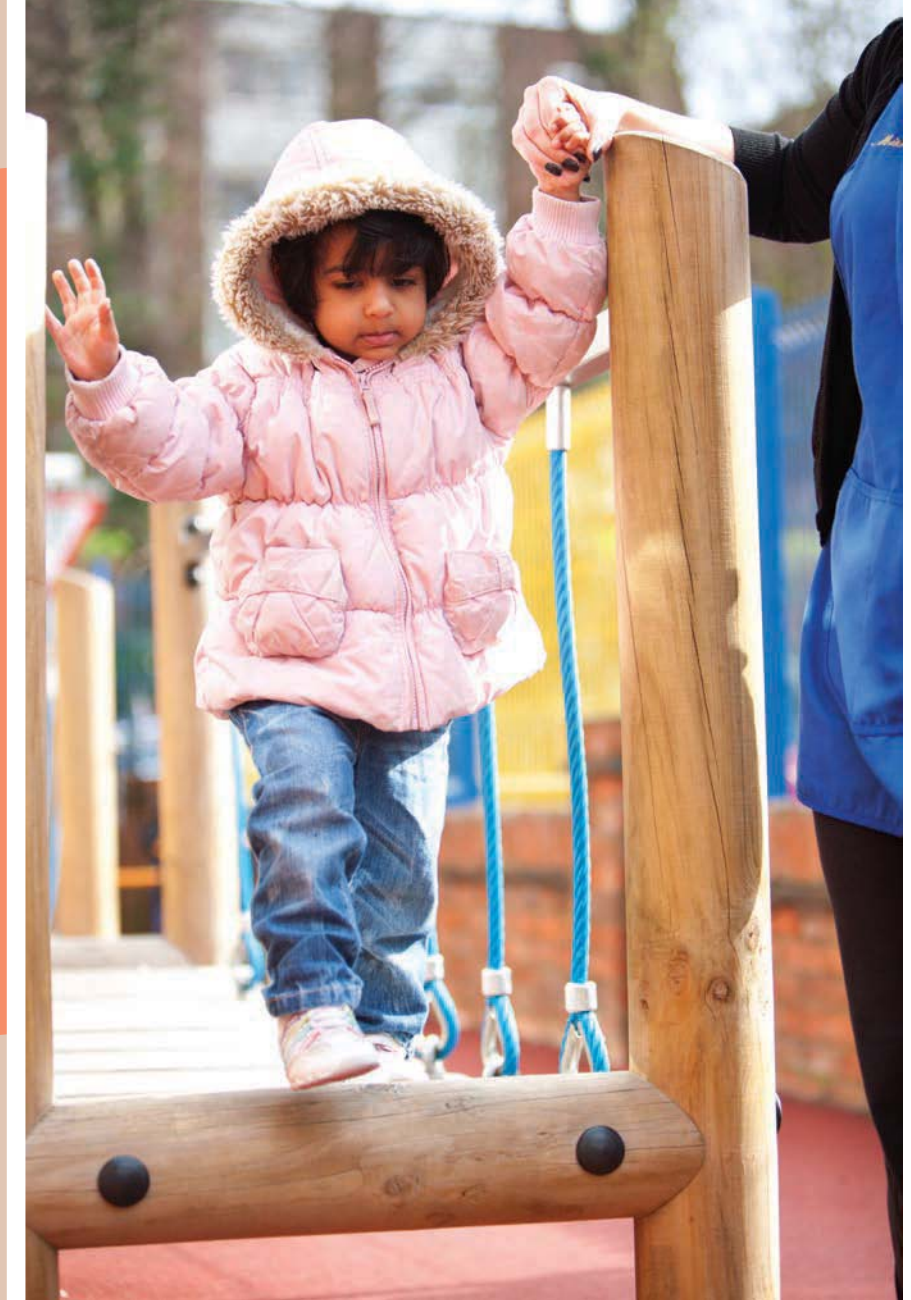
The children were less familiar with wood products that were around the nursery, and became fascinated to learn that wood can become paper, notice boards, newspapers and books. The interest grew so much that we had to introduce a display board to include other 'wooden' items the children found: cardboard, paper bags, boxes, pencils and crayons, paper towels and toilet rolls. Children brought birthday cards and wrapping paper from home, tubes and containers, old wooden cotton reels and knitting cones. The display grew beyond the board and became known as the 'wonderful wide wood wall with words' – well it was 'W' week!

Once we started to look at what wood could be used for, how the products were made and what we could do with them, our theme was into its second week! The following are just a few of the activities we included in our topic; try one or two out and see where they take you!

Talking trees (KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD)

■ Books with pictures of prehistoric forests show children how long trees have been on the Earth. We managed to source some pieces of fossilised wood from a colleague's collection, and the local museum had a couple of samples too. The Internet is a valuable resource with hundreds of images of trees and fossils for children to browse.

■ Marcus's dad brought in some sanded-flat pieces of wood showing a tree's growth rings. He explained that the two colours in each ring make a year's growth. We were amazed when he told us that the darker inner growth rings (called heart wood) was actually dead and gave the tree support. The lighter, outer region (called sap wood) was the living part of the tree. He also told the children that bark is not wood but grows like a suit of armour around a tree to protect it.



■ Trips to the local park and woods allowed us to observe the differences in trees, especially evergreens, like firs (which do not drop their foliage and are soft woods), and deciduous trees, like birch and ash, which shed their leaves in autumn, being hard woods.

■ When we used our lime trees' bark to take rubbings, the children noticed that ants were going up and down the trees in almost continuous lines. After watching them for a while, we saw them carrying aphids and found out later that they also collect the sticky, sugary sap that all lime trees' leaves produce.

looking like an object/picture dictionary with all sorts of wooden products on display.

■ Someone mentioned that her granny was always telling her to "Put the wood in the hole, you weren't born in a barn!" – in other words, "Shut the door!" This got us all chatting about 'chips off the old block', 'going against the grain', 'touching wood', etc., but we had to chuckle when Tom said "Well, I know one – my mum says she can't see the wolf for the trees!" Some of these sayings are easier to explain to under-fives than others...

■ Our writing area changed with a wooden table and chairs and was renamed the pencil and paper corner!

Wooden words (COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY)

■ Lollipop and match sticks were used to make individual name plaques glued onto cardboard. A couple of children cut their matchsticks so that the 'o' and 's' in their names were curved rather than square!

■ The wood word wall began with a photograph of the lime trees in our garden and related words. Other tree pictures and words were added, and soon it was

Circle time (CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT)

■ The concentric circles of trees' growth rings inspired us to draw circles within circles on circular paper, scribble circles to colour in and cut out circles of different sizes. These were placed on top of each other, glued and made into abstract pictures. Experiment with different thicknesses and colours of card as well as paper to produce different effects.

■ Bubble painting using the paint straight



Outdoor play

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- We measured the size of the tree trunks in the garden with rope, then estimated and compared them to the ash, birch and horse chestnut trees in the park.
- Circles became semi-circles by cutting them in half or folding them, and were often made into cones to make finger mice and puppets. Experiment with different sizes of circles for different sized cones. Can you make a hat for a doll, yourself or an eggcup?
- After realising that wood floats, simple rafts with lollipop sticks and wood glue were made. Our little play people figures had adventurous journeys on these rafts in the water tray. How many could fit on a raft to get to the other side before the raft tipped?
- By counting the growth rings on some their play equipment, the children were amazed that the climbing frame was older than them when the tree it had been was cut!

from the pots produces a solid circle surround if the paper is pressed onto the rim. Once dried and cut out, circles can be drawn to look like growth rings.

- We observed water ripples in the puddles when it rained, copying the idea in the water tray using a pipette to make the rain drops. Do ripples change in a square container?
- Making paper is great fun: very messy, wet and time-consuming but well worth the effort. Using an old liquidiser helps a great deal, but it helps if you remember to replace the lid before switching it on! Check out Internet sites for ideas and safety advice.

Hooray for hurdles (PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT)

- Marcus's dad made our hurdles, which were very popular. Different heights could be made by adding an extra block at each end of the dowelling poles. If a child knocked into the hurdle it just collapsed and no damage was done to either child or hurdle, and it could be easily built up again. Wooden bricks from your construction equipment and a length of 2x2 will work too.
- We played lots of games inspired by wood

growth circles. A four-year-old suggested this extremely popular game:

Run around the playground avoiding hoops and quoits lying there, then, whenever a 'wood' word is shouted out, everyone has to pick up a hoop or quoit, lift it above their heads, shout 'timber', put the equipment back down and start running around again. Very simple, energetic and fun!

Counting and measuring (PROBLEM-SOLVING, REASONING AND NUMERACY)

- Our discussions about how growth rings enabled us to tell the age of a tree caused a few children to wonder how old everyone was. Did we have growth rings? A difficult subject to explain to pre-schoolers, but it gave us the opportunity to use a long corridor wall (in need of repainting) to have a height chart along its length. Each child was measured and their name and age put at the top. The children loved to compare their height with their friends' and soon became aware that height and age do not always correspond.

Stepping stones (PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT)

- All of our wooden equipment, especially the wooden rocking boat and balance bars, were used with new enthusiasm. Imagine being in a choppy sea with sharks waiting for your boat to capsize or on balance bars across a crocodile infested river – help! It was quite inspiring to see children coming to each other's rescue if they slipped or fell.
- Marcus's dad had given us some huge one-inch-thick pieces of sanded wood, which we used as stepping stones outdoors. Indoors, we cut circles of paper and dotted them around the room with the aim to get from one side to another without stepping on the floor (the river). Each child waited on the river bank and took turns to throw a dice with only 1, 2 and 3 on it. As only one child could stand on each stepping stone, a variety of ways had to be found to cross the river. Cooperation and perseverance were needed to play the game!