EYFS Outdoor Understanding the World Opportunities

For pupils in or working at EYFS level

Books to read outside

This is by no means an exhaustive list of books to support Understanding the World topics, but some suggestions linked to each prime area that can be read to your class outdoors. Reading outside provides the opportunity to enjoy a book together in a fresh and engaging environment, so find a good spot and settle down!

BookSpace for Schools: Key benefits of reading outdoors

Past and Present	People, Culture and Communities	The Natural World
Lost in the Toy Museum by David Lucas	**Busy Diwali** by Darshika Varma	**Dear Earth** by Isabel Otter
Major Glad, Major Dizzy by Jan Oke	**Under the Same Sky** by Britta Teckentrup	**A Butterfly Is Patient** by Sylvia Long
Katie and the Dinosaurs by James Mayhew	**A Very Happy Ramadan** by A. M. Dassu	**The Tiny Seed** by Eric Carle
Amelia Earhart (Little People, Big Dreams) by Maria Isabel Sanchez Vegara	**The Proudest Blue** by Ibtihaj Muhammad	**Darwin's Super-Pooping Worm Spectacular** by Polly Owen
Seaside Holidays Then and Now by Clare Hibbert	**And Tango Makes Three** by Justin Richardson	**The Big Green – Everyone Can Make a Difference** by Ken Wilson-Max
John Agard's Windrush Child by John Agard	**What Happened to You?** by James Catchpole	**The Extraordinary Gardener** by Sam Boughton
Belonging by Jeannie Baker	**The Easter Story** by Brian Wildsmith	**Greta and the Giants** by Zoë Tucker

Past and Present

Related ELGs:

- Children can talk about the lives of the people around them and their roles in society
- Children know some similarities and differences between things in the past and now, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class
- Children understand the past through settings, characters and events encountered in books read in class and storytelling

Local area comparison

Prime area: Past and Present

Where possible, find old photographs of the school/local area. Head outside with these pictures to allow pupils to examine what looks the same and what has changed.

You could create a display with the old photographs next to new ones taken in the same locations, surrounded by pupils' observations.

What has changed? What has stayed the same? Why do they think this is?

"The fields look bigger here"

Bison Hill, Whipsnade 1931

"There are lots of buildings in this picture"

Bison Hill, Whipsnade 2023

Toys from the past

Prime area: Past and Present

Get pupils compare their favourite toys and playground games to what was popular in the past. They could try some of these games and share whether this is still something they would like to play (with) today, for example:

(you could make peg dolls as a class)		
Wooden spinning tops and wooden dolls from the Anglo-Saxon period	Quoits and the cup and ball game from Tudor times	Hoop and stick, marbles and hopscotch from the Victorian era

Playground timelines

Prime area: Past and Present

Create large outdoor timelines using chalk or by hanging up string or rope like a washing line. Beginning with mapping out their own lives helps pupils to understand that the past is what has already happened.

Ask pupils to plot some things they can remember from their lives, such as the birth of any younger siblings; family holidays; birthday parties; cultural celebrations; starting school. You may want to ask them to bring in photographs to support this.

This could then develop into mapping out other historical contexts or figures that you have learnt about in class. If covering events like Bonfire Night or Remembrance Day, pupils could physically ‘jump back in time’ to gain some sense of how long these traditions and commemorations have been recognised. Depending on how far back in the past you are going, these jumps could represent 1 or multiple years!

Building homes

Prime area: Past and Present

Compare homes from the past and present. Discuss with pupils what would be different about living in old-fashioned homes. How would they keep warm? Where did their light come from?

Ask pupils to create examples of different types of buildings using crates, fabric, natural materials and any other suitable resources available in your outdoor area.

Pupils could build cottages, castles, a modern house, or other buildings you have looked at that take their interest. Which home would they most like to live in?

People, Culture and Communities

Related ELGs:

- Children can describe their immediate environment using knowledge from observation, discussion, stories, non-fiction texts and maps
- Children know some similarities and differences between different religious and cultural communities in this country, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class
- Children explain some similarities and differences between life in this country and life in other countries, drawing on knowledge from stories, non-fiction texts and – when appropriate – maps

Personal maps

Prime area: People, Culture and Communities

Discuss what pupils know about the area around your school. Are there any notable landmarks that help them to visualise this? For example: shops, a large tree, a park, a roundabout.

Go for a walk in the vicinity around your school. If this isn't feasible, take pupils around the school grounds. Take photos of the things you see, guided by what stands out to your pupils. Once back in class, get pupils to draw maps of what they have seen or, in groups, provide materials for them to create messy maps.

Celebrating festivals

Prime area: People, Culture and Communities

When learning about different festivals, consider which activities could be taken outside, for example:

- Create rangoli patterns on the playground using chalk or coloured rice for **Diwali**
- Host an egg hunt/signs of spring hunt for **Easter**
- Make paper lanterns that can be hung up in your outdoor area for **Chinese New Year**
- Make vegetable prints for **Harvest** or do some of your own vegetable planting
- Have a pancake relay for **Shrove Tuesday**
- Use natural objects to create the 9 candles of a menorah for **Hanukkah**
- Share apples dipped in honey as a group to mark **Rosh Hashana**

Building materials

Prime area: People, Culture and Communities

Explore which materials have been used to build elements of your school and outdoor area. If possible, investigate other nearby buildings and see if these have been made similarly. You could also set pupils the task to find out what materials have been used to build their homes.

Compare what you have found about buildings in your local environment with houses and buildings in different countries around the world.

Discuss whether any of these materials would be possible to use in our country and why or why not: it may be that the materials aren't suitable for our climate, or that these materials can't be found in the local and surrounding areas.

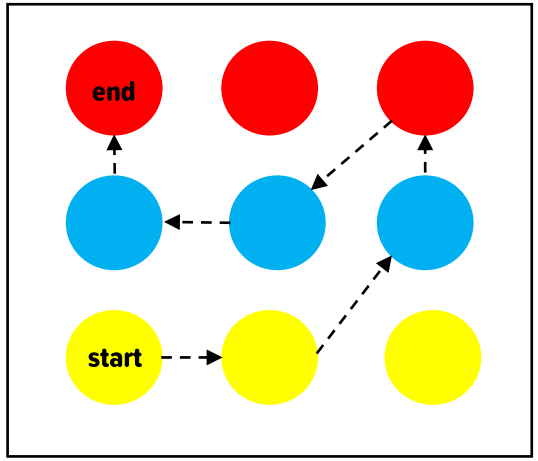
You could create a curriculum link with expressive arts and design and find out which materials from a provided selection can be used to build the most stable structure.

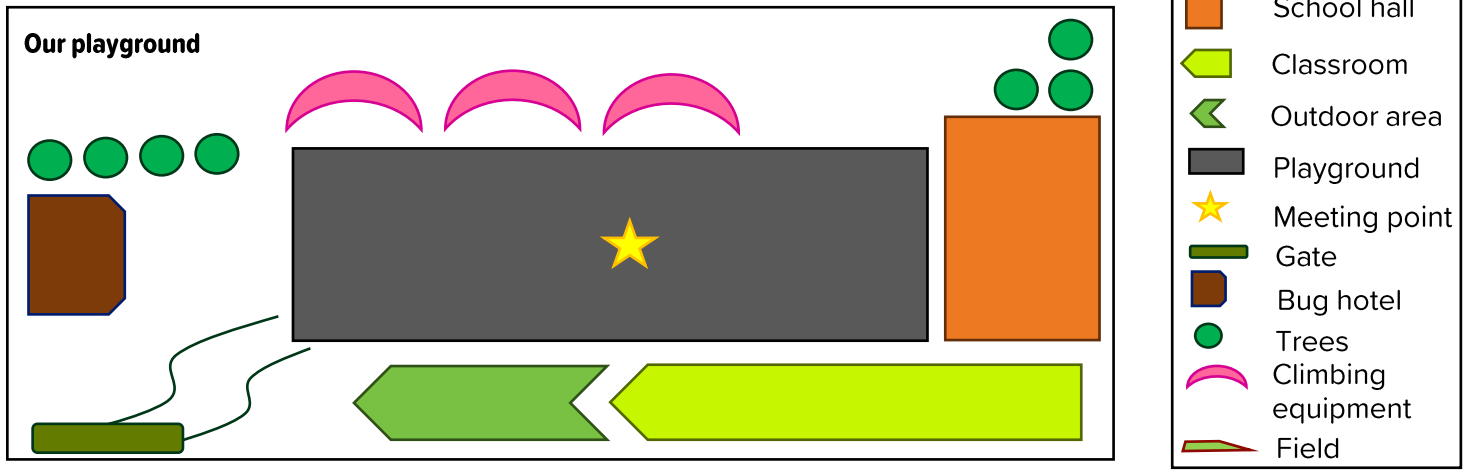
Simple orienteering

Prime area: People, Culture and Communities

Provide pupils with simple maps to follow around your school playground or the wider outdoor area. Pupils could navigate these independently, in groups, or describe the routes to a partner who has to follow their instructions.

Use cones to set up a simple course orienteering activity (see below), or create a hunt around your outdoor area and task pupils with marking on their maps where they find given signs/objects/numbers/etc.





Postcard writing

Prime area: People, Culture and Communities

Find out if pupils have family around the world and/or any different places they have visited. Mark these on a map and discuss with pupils:

★ What they know of these places;
★ How they would get there;
★ How far away these places are;
★ What weather and wildlife they would expect to encounter;
★ Whether going to school would be a different experience to what they are used to.

In your outdoor area, set up a writing station where pupils can draw and/or write postcards either sharing what they know or have learnt about these different places, or describing something about life in their local area. Add images of different locations to support this.

The Natural World

Related ELGs:

- Children can explore the natural world around them, making observations and drawing pictures of animals and plants
- Children know some similarities and differences between the natural world around them and contrasting environments, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class
- Children understand some important processes and changes in the natural world around them, including the seasons and changing states of matter

Nature detectives

Prime area: The Natural World

Encourage pupils to hunt for evidence of animal homes in your outdoor area; you may want to use the ID sheets we have linked on our site from the Woodland Trust.

Investigate different types of habitats and discuss which animals might live there and why. Could they live in this habitat all year round? What nearby resources are there for the animal to make use of?

Links to ID sheets available here

Signs of living things

Prime area: The Natural World

Can pupils find evidence of the animals that might make use of the habitats in your outdoor area?

Rather than looking for the animals, head outside to see if you can find signs of where animals have been, for example:

- Feathers
- Nests
- Nibbled leaves
- Spider webs
- Footprint
- Burrows

Take photos and collect what you able to create a class display showing “Who lives here?”

Minibeast hunt

Prime area: The Natural World

Before heading outside, discuss where you are most likely to find insects on your school site. What sort of conditions do insects like? Where are you most likely to find the largest sample of different insects?

Take outside magnifying glasses, bug pots or an observation photo frame, and find an area to observe. Set a 2-minute timer and observe the insects' movements and actions during this time. Look at where they go, how they move their heads, legs and bodies, whether they cross paths with other insects and how they interact or avoid one another.

Discuss your observations as a group. If time, set another 2-minute timer and see if you can spot any of the behaviours that others have noticed.

Link to observation photo frame here
Links to ID sheets available here

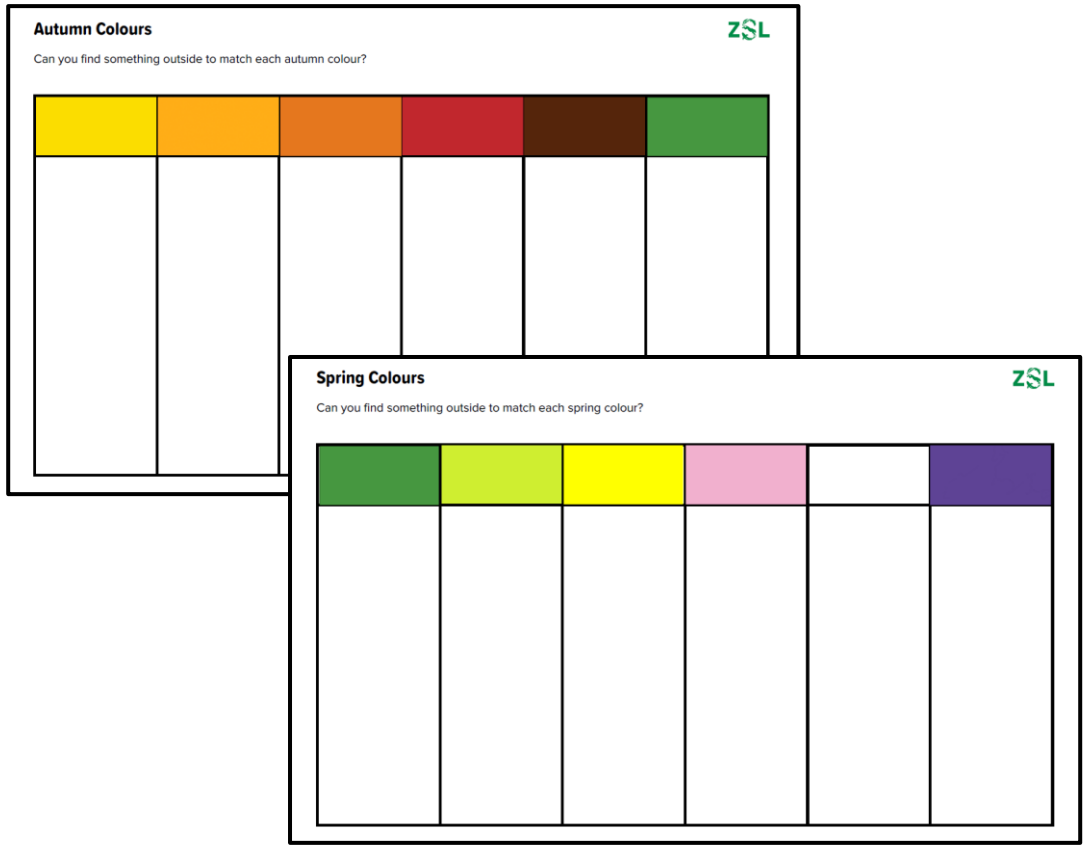
Seasonal colour hunt

Prime area: The Natural World

Provide pupils with colour swatches linked to the seasons, discussing their observations of the changes that take place and why we see different colours at different times of year.

Head outside to find natural items that match the colours on their swatches or worksheets.

Are there any colours that they can't find? Why might this be? Equally, are there any colours they come across that they didn't expect to see?



Links to collection sheets available here

Weather watcher

Prime area: The Natural World

This activity could be the responsibility of a different pupil each day or completed as a group.

Take note of the weather each morning either by looking out of the window, deciding how it feels while standing outside and/or looking online at the local weather forecast. This has the added benefits of helping pupils prepare for the day and alerts them to any possible changes to their routine, such as having indoor play due to bad weather.

Use this as an opportunity to discuss how weather can affect their own lives and has affected the lives of others. They may know what sort of weather to expect at particular times of the year, such as Christmas; summer holidays; around their birthday.

If possible, you could set up a role-play weather station in your continuous provision area. You could also set up a windsock and thermometer outside for pupils to observe and monitor.

Paper windmills

Prime area: The Natural World

Help pupils to create simple paper windmills (a free template download can be found **here**).

Once made, take these outside to see if the wind will make them spin; if not, encourage pupils to try running with their windmill or using their breath. Discuss pupils' observations about when the windmill is moving compared to when it remains still.

You could also provide pupils with other lightweight objects (such as leaves or feathers) and compare how the wind moves these items.

Puddle changes

Prime area: The Natural World

After a rainy day, get pupils to outline puddles with chalk and ask what they think will happen to the puddles over time.

Revisit the puddle regularly – perhaps at the start and the end of the day or over several days – and redraw the chalk lines to track any changes to the puddle.

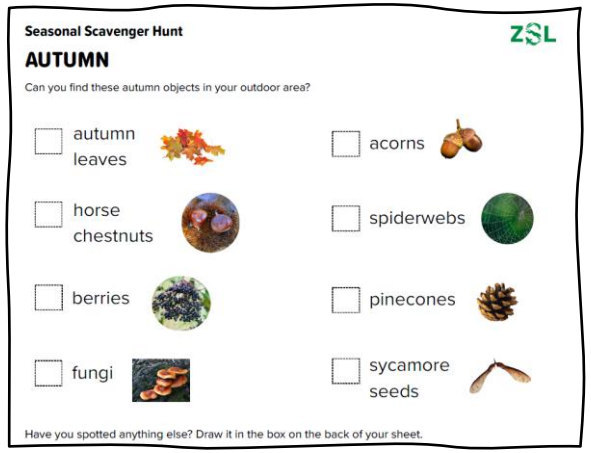
This will allow your pupils an opportunity to observe evaporation and have simple discussions about the water cycle.

Seasonal scavenger hunt

Prime area: The Natural World

Take your class group on a seasonal walk to spot signs of the current season. You may want to provide checklists of seasonal items to look out for.

If you have space in your continuous provision area, pupils could collect some items to add to a ‘seasonal’ table and make observations about the different objects and the changes they notice.



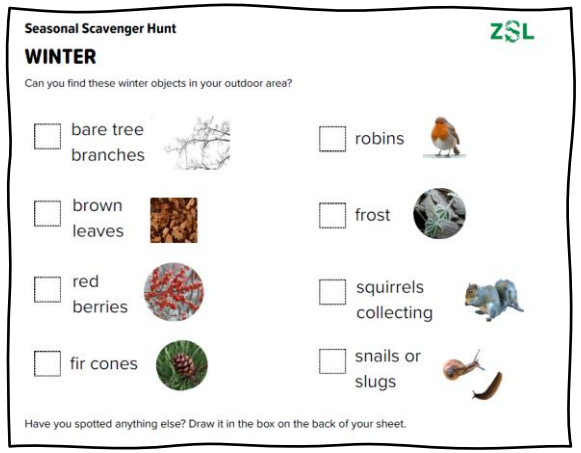
Seasonal Scavenger Hunt

AUTUMN

Can you find these autumn objects in your outdoor area?

- autumn leaves
- acorns
- horse chestnuts
- spiderwebs
- berries
- pinecones
- fungi
- sycamore seeds

Have you spotted anything else? Draw it in the box on the back of your sheet.



Seasonal Scavenger Hunt

WINTER

Can you find these winter objects in your outdoor area?

- bare tree branches
- robins
- brown leaves
- frost
- red berries
- squirrels collecting
- fir cones
- snails or slugs

Have you spotted anything else? Draw it in the box on the back of your sheet.

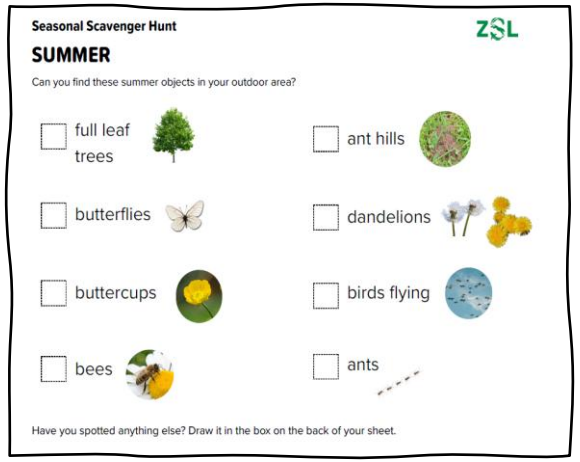
Seasonal Scavenger Hunt

SPRING

Can you find these spring objects in your outdoor area?

- buds on trees
- daffodils
- birds nesting
- catkins
- blossom
- plant shoots
- ladybirds
- feathers

Have you spotted anything else? Draw it in the box on the back of your sheet.



Seasonal Scavenger Hunt

SUMMER

Can you find these summer objects in your outdoor area?

- full leaf trees
- ant hills
- butterflies
- dandelions
- buttercups
- birds flying
- bees
- ants

Have you spotted anything else? Draw it in the box on the back of your sheet.

Links to worksheets available here

Float or sink?

Prime area: The Natural World

Allow pupils to investigate whether various natural objects in your outdoor area will float or sink (e.g. leaves, sticks, stones, snail shells, seeds, flowers, etc.).

Encourage pupils to use descriptive vocabulary to explain their predictions before dropping the objects into a water container and observing what happens.

Separate the items into two groups based on whether they float or sink and discuss the differences between the objects.

If time, allow pupils the opportunity to search for more items in your outdoor area that could be tested.

Planting seeds

Prime area: The Natural World

The book **Jasper's Beanstalk** by Nick Butterworth and Mick Inkpen offers a great link to planting seeds with your class.

Start by providing pupils with some beans/seeds to observe with a magnifying glass. Are they all the same? Why/why not?

How long do they think it might take for a seed to germinate? How will we know when a seed has started to germinate?

As well as planting seeds in pots or your outdoor area, display different seeds on damp paper towels in your classroom so that pupils have an opportunity to observe which seeds start to germinate first and what this looks like.

Frozen sun catchers

Prime area: The Natural World

Make frozen suncatchers as a class to investigate freezing and melting water.

Instruct your class to collect ‘treasures’ (natural objects) from outside that they will use as decoration for their suncatchers.

Arrange the collected objects in a suitable container and add water. Depending on the season, these could be left outside over night or put in a freezer.

Once they are frozen, remove them from their container and, if you are able, drill a hole to hang a string or ribbon through. The further you drill the hole towards the centre, the more time it will take the string to melt through the edge.

The information and guidance provided by ZSL are intended for educational purposes only. Responsibility for the safety and supervision of pupils remains with the school and its staff at all times. Teachers should only undertake activities that are appropriate to their setting and must ensure that all activities are planned, risk assessed, and carried out in accordance with their school's policies, procedures, and safeguarding requirements.