

Children appreciate minibeasts and the vital service they provide to soil, plants and ourselves.



Minibeast Magic 1



Process

- 1 Display the photos of minibeasts found in soil (see **Online Resources**) on the whiteboard and ask children what they know about them, which of them they have seen, etc. Start a discussion about them. You will likely hear negative comments about minibeasts. In this activity you turn that view round by leading children to understand the creature's vital role in the cycle of life.
- 2 Divide the children in groups. Provide each group with a minibeast card set that you have prepared from the **Online Resources** (printing + cutting + sticking pictures to stiff backing). Children try to discover as much information they can from the pictures. Ask them to try and find out from the cards (a) what their minibeast eats (b) where it likes to live (c) something they liked about it.
- 3 Children share with class what they learned. Assist, using information from the *Minibeast Minifacts* in the **Online Resources**.
- 4 You are now going to understand minibeasts' role in recycling life. Take a tour of your school grounds and look for minibeasts. See if you can match any of the information with what you observe together. Look in particular at the detritus/compost where you find minibeasts such as woodlice. Feel it, smell it and look at its colour. How is it different from soil? It is darker and richer because it is full of nutrients from dead plants that the woodlice and their friends make. You may put some humus in water and compare it with another container where you put soil in water. What differences do the children see? When a plant drinks through its roots, it is taking up all that rich juice, thanks to minibeasts. Make sure children wash their hands after the activity (avoid single-use wipes).
- 5 Back in class, plot this simplified nutrient cycle on your board: LIVING PLANT ► DEAD PLANT ► WOODLOUSE BREAKS DEAD PLANT INTO SMALL PIECES ► SMALL PIECES ENTER THE SOIL ► NEW LIVING PLANT TAKES IT UP. If you talk about recycling, or have a recycling bin, make the link. This way children understand that minibeasts are nature's great recyclers, as they constantly create food in the soil.
- 6 Back in class, represent the idea of minibeasts as recyclers. In the same groups as above, children decide how to use materials you lay out for them to represent their animal and how it recycles dead plants to make nutrients in the soil that are taken up by living plants. You may create hanging chains, wall charts, physical models, etc.

Points

150 points

Send photos of children (1) in groups with cards (2) sharing information with class (3) observing minibeasts in schoolyard (4) creating minibeast-recyclers displays.

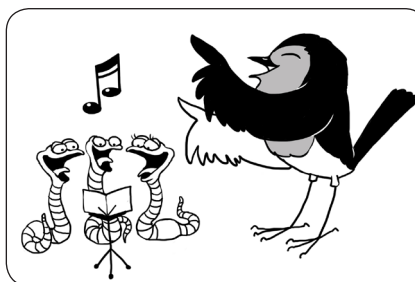
50 points

Send photos of how this activity was linked with other subjects or learning areas in the curriculum.

Children consolidate their knowledge and respect for minibeasts by making homes for them.



Minibeast Magic 2



Process

- 1 This activity consolidates the importance of minibeasts as nature's recyclers by building them homes in the school grounds. Ask the children whether they think your school needs minibeasts. If MINIBEAST MAGIC 1 was successful they should agree heartily. Ask how you can get more minibeasts to your school. Help children realise that you can attract animals by creating the habitat they like. If anyone suggests bringing minibeasts to school, explain why this is not a good idea, e.g. it's not right to make another place poor by 'stealing' animals from it; minibeasts won't find food and shelter if you don't have the right habitat; they could die in transit; if you have the right habitat minibeasts will come on their own.
- 2 From your first tour of the grounds in search of minibeasts the children should have a good idea of the kind of habitat they like. Make a list of items you need to create a habitat. Ideally, do this out in the school grounds together and find the right place. Link the discussion with the topic 'home' and connect children's need for things they like at home, with minibeasts' similar needs. You are the 'grown ups' making a good home. Talk about where you can get these things from.
- 3 Back in class, see the *Minibeast Minihomes* suggestions in the **Online Resources**. Did your ideas match the drawings? Did you leave anything out? Where are you going to get the home-parts from? Discuss and find solutions.
- 4 Make the homes together and set them up in the school grounds.

Points

100 points

Send photos of (1) children choosing site for homes (2) children making MiniHomes (3) the completed MiniHomes.

50 points

Send photos of how this activity was linked with other subjects or learning areas in the curriculum.

Children engage science and creativity skills together to consolidate knowledge and respect for minibeasts.



Process

- 1 Give your minibeast homes some time undisturbed before checking if anybody is home. Now factor in a minibeast tour as a regular part of your curriculum. If you disturb the homes too often, the homes will be deserted. Make sure the children understand this. During this tour, your children are going to be scientists.
- 2 Create a special diary for minibeasts, with date, weather and other associated topic links for which you want to develop children's observation skills. About once a week go to the minibeast homes and check what's about. On site, children fill in the diary information (weather, time, day, etc.) and either make a drawing of the minibeast they found, or tick a list that you have prepared. You may use material in the **Online Resources**. This is the science skills part of the activity, so make sure to talk about what you find, where you find it and why.
- 3 Back in class, the children bond with a favourite minibeast through a craft exercise. You may use the Minibeast drawings in the **Online Resource** or get the children to draw their own minibeast, to create a bookmark. The bookmark should have a message, such as *Minibeasts are Magic!* or *I (heart) Minibeasts* or *I'm a Minibeast Fan!* Link the bookmark with the recycling aspect.
- 4 The children should use the bookmarks, not put them on display. Tell them to take them home and talk to people at home about them.

Points

150 points

Send photos of (1) children recording minibeasts (2) children making bookmarks (3) bookmarks in use.

50 points

Send photos of how this activity was linked with other subjects or learning areas in the curriculum.

Children become aware that animals have voices and use them for the same reasons we do.



Nature's voice 1



Process

- 1 Start a discussion about pets. Ask those who have dogs, cats, etc. how they know when pets are hungry/happy/annoyed/in pain, etc. Ask them to imitate the sounds their pet makes to show these emotions. Open out the discussion to other animals children may have experience of and have fun imitating voices. Ask whether they think animals are like us, and draw the link between voices.
- 2 Now play the *Animal Voices* recording in the **Online Resources** and see if the children can guess what animal is making them (answers in **Online Resources**). Let them imitate the animal sounds, react and talk about them, be creative and use adjectives to describe the sound.
- 3 Listen to the recording again and focus on pattern. Take one, e.g. the robin, and count through the pattern in such a way that the children realise the pattern. A robin calling *tick-tick ... ti-tick-tick-tick*, would translate into the numbers "One-two ... One-two-three-four." A Sardinian warbler calling *ch-ch-ch-ch* would translate into: "One-two-three-four-five." Make links with number sequences, visual patterns if you like, and other representations of patterns.
- 4 Go outside and listen for bird song. In winter you should hear robins, Sardinian warblers, sparrows, maybe white wagtails. Help them single out birdsong from the din of man-made noises. Let them become aware of living things other than humans – this awareness will hopefully stay with them into adulthood and will make them consider other forms of life when making choices.
- 5 When sparrows come together they make a different collective sound, as individual chirps are drowned out. Show how the same happens to human voices: get one child to say a sound repeatedly, then two, and so on till you have a classful. Give the children listening homework: in the late winter afternoons (4.30–5.00pm) sparrows gather in large numbers to sleep in trees in town squares. Find out if your town has such a place from the *Where Sparrows Go To Sleep* list in the **Online Resources**. If so, ask children to get their parents to take them there at this time and listen to sparrows coming in to sleep. Ask them to think of words that describe the sound when they are there.
- 6 After, say, a week's chance for children to hear sparrows at a roost with their family, play the *Sparrow Talk* (**Online Resources**) and children try to guess which is the one of sparrows roosting.

Points

100 points

Send photos of children (1) listening and reacting to sounds in class (2) listening to bird sound outside.

50 points

Send photos of how this activity was linked with other subjects or learning areas in the curriculum.

Children hear more about nature's voices and bond with them through the story of a robin who visits Malta.



Nature's voice 2



Process

- 1 If you have a robin in your school grounds, take the children out and listen to it. Let them 'talk' to it and softly imitate it. Take cushions and find a nice spot to sit in a circle for story-telling.
- 2 Read the story *Ruby ssib dar ġdida / Ruby finds a new home* (in **Online Resources**) about a robin. As you read, children make the different voices as you come to them. If there are sounds they have never heard, let them invent. The third activity will introduce them to some of them.
- 3 After the story, discuss what happened and bring out how humans can help nature or destroy it. "Would Ruby come to our school?" Remind them that they are now Nature Helpers because of the minibeast homes they built.
- 4 Now for some craft. You can use material in the **Online Resources** to make robin mobiles to hang in class, or create a story map with various materials for the children to show different parts or objects in the story. Then use the story map to train memory and speaking skills.

Points

100 points

Send photos of children (1) dramatising story (2) doing craft follow-up.

50 points

Send photos of how this activity was linked with other subjects or learning areas in the curriculum.

Children develop a bond with sparrows – our most common resident birds – through storytelling.



Nature's voice 3



Process

- 1 This activity is best suited for spring. Your children will hear and feel nature's voices and compose a symphony. If you have a green space in your school large enough for children to feel surrounded by nature, use it. If not, visit a woodland, e.g. Buskett. (or book a visit to Il-Bosk with BirdLife Malta!).
- 2 Buy a set of children's stethoscopes. These will come in handy for all sorts of learning journeys (some websites have good prices, e.g. Aliexpress). Familiarise the children with the stethoscope. You may link other topics to this, but to connect it to this activity you must include listening to each other's heartbeat and knowing that we are alive because of the 'voice' of our heart deep inside us. Prepare the children for an outing to listen to nature's voices by generating a sense of mystery.
- 3 Once on site, head for a space among tall trees with at least 50cm girth. On your way start the listening journey. Find how best to keep the children quiet and listening for sounds as they walk. Stop at several intervals and ask what they heard. Once under the trees, discuss the sounds you heard. Which were more numerous, nature or man-made sounds? Why? Which were loud, which were soft? Lead children to understand that if you are loud you will never hear nature's voices.
- 4 Speaking softly, 'turn' children's ears to the various nature 'voices' around you. At every sound, children softly imitate it. Urge them to imitate sounds as a group, always keeping your voices soft.
- 5 Activity climax! Ask the children if trees are alive (they should be aware of this from earlier Dinja Waħda activities). Ask how we know a person is alive. Say that we need to be absolutely quiet for the next voice: a tree drinking! Give each a stethoscope, then all go quiet and put the stethoscope to a tree trunk. You may hear wood cracking, beetles inside and – most fascinating of all – a constant 'rushing' sound: the sap rising to the leaves! Make a big deal of this and get them excited. Tell them not everyone knows trees have voices because people are too noisy.
- 6 Create a symphony of nature's voices. Put children in twos or threes and ask each to choose a nature's voice from the ones you practised – don't forget the tree's heart! Record or video part of your symphony. You can use it later to make a short play for a school event, taking the audience through the children's learning journey, only this time they hear the children's symphony.

Points

100 points

Send photos of children (1) listening to nature sounds (2) using stethoscopes to listen to trees. Send an mp3/wav recording of Nature's Voices symphony

50 points

Send photos of how this activity was linked with other subjects or learning areas in the curriculum.