



SCAVENGER HUNT

Children have a natural urge to explore. A scavenger hunt is a fun, structured way of focusing this curiosity on all the shapes, sounds, plants, animals and other elements of their surroundings, opening the door to identification and deepening their bond with the landscape around them. This activity creates a sense of knowing, of familiarity, which in turn leads to a feeling of belonging, of being at home in the natural world.

By making connections between what is sought and what is found, children learn how one thing relates to another and hone the use of their senses. This can lay the building blocks for recognizing themes in other areas, such as reading and mathematics, helping children to sort, process and use information in a variety of settings. They also learn to make connections between their inner experiences and the external world. And all this through play!







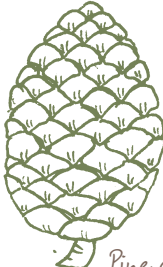

Get ready

Coming up with ideas for a scavenger hunt is easy: just think of outdoor objects that are common in your chosen area. (Obviously, avoid anything rare or poisonous!) You can also include experiences – for example, hearing a specific sound or feeling the wind on your face. Before you play, design a clue card with 9–16 things to find (adjust the number according to the age of the children and time available). Your clues could be pictures or just words or both pictures and words – see the example, which you can use if it works for your area. You could cut pictures from a magazine or download them from the Internet and print them out, then mount the pieces of paper onto sturdy cards. Alternatively, draw and write your clues straight onto the cards. To protect the clue cards, especially if you suspect it might be rainy, slot them into plastic sleeves. To allow the hunters to keep their hands free, string thread (enough to loop around the head and shoulders and allow the clues to be easily viewed) through holes in the card or through the protective sleeve.

Get set

Check in with all the hunters to make sure they understand the clues. You can make the hunt more challenging for older kids by adding a time limit, but keep any targets achievable so the children stay interested and don't get frustrated. Bigger groups can, if they wish, be divided into teams but bear in mind that some kids may prefer to hunt alone.



 Squirrel	 Bird	Something GREEN 
 Fallen log	Something ROUND 	 Oak leaf
SOUND of the WIND	 Pine cone	 Prickly leaf

Go!

Off the hunters go! Get them to put crosses through the clues as they find them. Don't be afraid to join in as a helper to liven things up and provide encouragement and hints. For example, you could ask, 'Was that a squirrel up there?' or 'Where do you think you might find an acorn?'. But always let the kids take the initiative and do the hunting themselves!

Endings

When you have finished, talk through the hunt with the children. What was the hardest thing to find? What was each child's favourite? Was there anything they couldn't track down and why? How did hunting and finding the items make them feel? You can provide some interesting facts about the clues to add to the enthusiasm and enhance the children's connection with nature.

Here are a few to get you started:

- English oaks live on average for 500 years, but there's an oak in Bulgaria that's 1,700 years old.
- Grey squirrels can jump 3m (10ft) from one tree to the next.
- Prickly leaves can protect plants from some grazing animals.
- A decaying log is a home for many insects, mosses, lichens and fungi, which in turn can provide food for other species such as birds, who love to eat insects.

Allow the children to fully express their thoughts and continue the discussion until it runs its natural course.



LOCATION

Any woodland or other natural area (such as a beach) that offers a good selection of animals, birds, plants and trees is ideal. However, with some planning you can make this game work in any environment.

AGE GROUP

3 years +

LEARNING ABOUT ...

Using the senses ☉ being active ☉ focus ☉ recognizing themes ☉ connecting with nature ☉ ecology

KIT

- A scavenger clue card for each child/team
- Clear plastic sleeves to protect clue cards (optional – depends on weather/terrain)
- String for wearing the cards around the neck (optional)
- Pencils



MUD FACES

There is such joy in squeezing and squelching mud through the fingers! Shaping a face from mud is blissful messy play. With a little imagination, this activity populates the trees with strange inhabitants and brings the forest alive in a whole new way.

Mixing together the elements of earth and water to create a mud face taps into every child's instinct to investigate natural things, and explore what these do and how they react. This activity combines art, science and sensory development, encourages communication and confidence through creativity, and also gives children permission to get really mucky! Studies show that being able to get dirty is an important part of a child's cognitive development. There are health benefits, too: safe exposure to natural organisms in soil helps to develop children's immune systems, making them more able to fight disease.

This may be the first time a child has been given the freedom to get really muddy. Some may relish this, while others may for a time feel it's a challenge. Repeatedly giving permission and encouragement can ease this worry to joy. Ask any adults involved in the activity to be enthusiastic, to let go any of their concerns over muddy play - the children will wash their hands afterwards.

This activity allows the children to explore and connect with their environment, whether they are looking for grass or ferns for hair, stones for teeth or nuts for eyes. Mixing, concocting and creating takes everyone back to the realm of invention and magic: the entire activity is full of possibilities for imaginative expression.

A wonderfully creative, liberating activity!

LOCATION	Any natural area with soil and trees. For atmosphere, woodland is ideal.
AGE GROUP	2 years +
LEARNING ABOUT ...	Imagination ☼ using the senses ☼ fine motor skills ☼ science ☼ art ☼ being creative ☼ communicating ☼ empathy ☼ connecting with nature ☼ confidence
KIT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Waterproofs and/or clothing for messy play → Suitable footwear → A trowel or small spade per player → A small bucket or other watertight container per player → Water (for mixing mud) → Soap and clean water (for washing hands afterwards) or lots of wet wipes until you can get to a tap!



Get ready

Encourage the children to talk about their ideas. Will it be a mud face for a tree, an animal or an insect? Will it be the face of someone they know, or the face of a character in a story or a magical being they've invented? Will it have big or small eyes? Perhaps there will be more than two eyes! What about ears? And hair - will it be fuzzy or straight or will there be none at all? Maybe the face will turn into a creature with arms, hands, legs and toes!



Get set

When everyone has had a turn talking about what their mud creation will be, head off to gather the materials. Perhaps they'll pick up acorns or horse chestnuts for eyes, leaves for ears, or sticks for mouths. Tiny feathers may be perfect for hair. Or perhaps they'll choose something completely unexpected. The makers decide! (Just avoid any rare or poisonous plants!)

Once they have gathered all they need, the children can use a trowel or small spade to dig a hole past the topsoil, down to the mulch-free soil (roughly 5-20cm/2-8in deep). Each child digs out enough soil to quarter-fill their bucket, then slowly adds water until they have sticky mud, the consistency of workable clay. Stickiness can be tested on a tree trunk - if the mud sticks, it's just right. (More soil and water can always be added if needed.)

Go!

All the makers find a tree where their creation will live, then take a good handful of mud from their bucket and shape it into a ball. Smaller children, with their little hands, may need help getting a ball that's big enough for shaping. Now the ball of mud gets splatted firmly onto the tree trunk. Press down the edges of the mud, so that it holds firmly onto the tree.

Once the ball is stuck, the creative magic begins! Let each child work on their face or creature as they wish. Watch as aliens, fairies, robots, animals and other weird and wonderful creatures emerge, each with their own lively expression and strange features.

Endings

If the children feel like talking about their creations, encourage them to do so, each taking a turn while others listen, following the story wherever it leads. Ask the children to describe and name the natural items. Where did they find them? Why were they chosen? Remember to say goodbye to all the faces before you leave. If the weather is dry, mud faces can last for several days, so consider coming back to visit them!

