

# URBAN SPACES: LITERACY



*These materials contain ideas for field work in urban spaces and public gardens. The materials were originally developed for primary schools in central London as part of the Gordon & Woburn Squares primary project, but can be used in most urban parks and gardens.*

This section engages with the first and second of our three key questions:

- What is your local urban space like now, and how is it used?
- What was it like in the past, and how was it used then?

Much of it focuses on speaking and listening, as well as on reading and writing.

If possible find a carving of a green man. They are often to be found on public buildings. Wikipedia has an entry for the Green Man with several images – see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green\\_man](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_man) . Or you may have a local group of morris dancers!

## The Green Man: Storytelling

### Resources:

- ‘Sir Gawain and the Green Knight’ story
- ‘Kirtimukha : the Hindu, Jain and Sikh Green Man’ story  
(download both from [www.primaryhistory.org](http://www.primaryhistory.org))

Tell the class the stories of two very different Green Men, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the Kirtimukha (Face of Glory). They come from two different cultures and religions – European Christian and Indian Hindu, and are only two of many such Green Man stories and figures from around the world. The Green Man is often associated with natural gods, and with the cycle of plant death and rebirth. It predates Christianity in western Europe, though it is often seen in churches and other public buildings.

Discuss with the children the symbolism and themes running through these stories.

### Vocabulary

Archetype

Divine

Muse

Nature

Verdant

Pentangle

### Themes

Death and rebirth

Cycle of renewal

Elemental, raw forces of Nature

Our oneness with Nature (green, vegetation)

Divine creative energy

Transformation

In Britain and Europe, the Green Man is traditionally represented as a head surrounded by foliage, often with vegetation sprouting from its mouth, ears or nostrils. There are thousands of Green Men carved in Christian churches and other public buildings throughout Europe. They also appear on Hindu and Jain temples.

## Researching and mapping the Green Man

### **Resources:**

- The Green Man: pictures
- Green man world-wide: recording sheet  
(download both from [www.primaryhistory.org](http://www.primaryhistory.org))

As a starting-point, see the pictures of the Green Man referenced or supplied.

- The Green Man in Woburn Square, London.
- For comparison, a William Blake painting of Puck with Oberon, Titania and fairies from Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* – you can find this on the Tate Britain gallery website (search on Blake Puck).
- There are three from central London – there's a pair on a church, and another on a building above a pub which used to be called 'The Green Man'.
- There are two more from the London area – Kew Gardens and St Paul's Cathedral, and one from Southwell Cathedral (Nottinghamshire).
- There are two from elsewhere – France.

There are several photographs of the Hindu Green Man available on the internet: ask Google Images for Kirtimukha.

Pairs of children can use the internet to research the many types and forms the Green Man appears in. Wikipedia is a useful place to begin ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green\\_man](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_man)). This activity provides practice in reading information texts.

To avoid the children simply printing out unread text, or copying it, ask them to use the *Green Man Worldwide* recording frame to summarise key information.

Away from the computers, the children can write brief descriptions of each type of Green Man. Create a class concept web, showing the various forms he appears in around the world in different places and cultures.

In English literature, more recent characters such as Puck, Peter Pan and JK Rowling's Dobby the house-elf have been associated with the idea of the Green Man.

Some names associated with the Green Man across time and place:

Al-Khadir (or al-Khidr)	John Barleycorn
Bacchus	Kirtimukha
Cernunnos	Osiris
Dobby	Peter Pan
Sylvanus	Puck
Green Knight	Viridios
Robin Hood	

## Personal interpretations of the Green Man

The Green Man: pictures (download from [www.primaryhistory.org](http://www.primaryhistory.org))

In the classroom, you could ask the children to draw their own interpretations of the Green Man, or make clay or other models.

Pin up the drawings on the classroom wall. Ask for volunteers to explain their interpretations. Now divide the class into groups of 2-4.

Give out a set of the Green Man pictures to each group.

### Questions for discussion by the groups

- Q How are the images different from each other?
- Q What particular features does each image depict?
- Q How different are these images from the children's own pictures?
- Q Which interpretation of the Green Man archetype does each represent?
- Q Are they representative of all the types of Green Man that exist?
- Q Which do the children prefer – and why?

### Your local green man

Visit a local green man if possible – or view photos.

- Q How has the artist interpreted the idea of the Green Man here?
- Q Which tradition of the Green Man is being followed?
- Q Why might this be?

### The Green Man in the literacy hour

#### **Resources:**

- Midsummer Night's dream text-breaker
- The Green Man pictures (download from [www.primaryhistory.org](http://www.primaryhistory.org))
- See also the William Blake painting of Puck, Oberon, Titania and fairies in the Tate Britain gallery <http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/> (Search on 'Blake Puck')

Who was Puck? Originally Puck was a pre-Christian nature spirit, but we mainly know about him through Shakespeare. Shakespeare's description of Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* presents an opportunity to extend the children's ability to read a difficult and challenging text. The Nuffield Primary History Project has developed an approach that will support this activity - the textbreaker approach. See 'Teaching methods' then 'Reading documents' on [www.primaryhistory.org](http://www.primaryhistory.org)

Use the Puck extract (R23) in textbreaker format during the literacy hour (blow it up to A3 size so that pairs of children can work on it together). The extract can be used with children in years 4–6. Do read it aloud to the children first – it helps them to gain a sense of the rhythm of the language, the variety of words used and an overall idea of the meaning.

### Using the school or public garden for storytelling and drama

**Resources:** This would depend on what you do

The children could now write and tell their own Green Man stories in a local garden, or school grounds if there is a green leafy space available.

In the Art/design section of this pack, there is an activity to design a Green Man coal-hole cover or plaque.

### Plane tree poem

A Literacy/Science link: if your local area has plane trees, read and discuss Amy Levy's *A London Plane-Tree* poem. You can find it at: [www.poemhunter.com/poem/a-london-plane-tree/](http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/a-london-plane-tree/)

Ask the children to write their own tree/plant poems, either in the same style or a contrasting one such as haiku.

### Science link

An explanation of cycling of materials could form part of the project work looking at themes associated with the Green Man.

## Pollution debate

### *Resources:*

- Historical photos of your local area – try your local public library, or use photographs in a Victorians topic book.
- Discussion and persuasion writing frames. Download from <http://www.warwick.ac.uk/staff/D.J.Wray/Ideas/frames.html> (to find this easily, ask Google for 'David Wray writing frames')

It is best to have this debate after the children have visited your local urban space at least once, and preferably after they have been on a time walk and examined some historical photographs (see History section).

### The issue to discuss is:

*Is the area more polluted now than it was in Victorian times?*

Working in pairs, the children could use a Discussion drafting frame to list points on each side of the debate and weigh them up. Then, having reached their conclusion, the children move on to drafting their argument on a Persuasion writing frame.

You can now hold a class debate, with the children divided into two teams with opposing views. A class debate provides an excellent opportunity to practise speaking and listening skills.

### Questions to consider for the debate

Dirt – how does it differ between Victorian times and now?

What created dirt 125 years ago?

What creates most dirt now?

Children might decide that in both cases it's traffic, but different eras have different dirty outputs (manure versus petrol fumes). Victorians also had

coal fires polluting the air, which we do not since the Clean Air Act of 1956. What else pollutes the air in modern cities?

Noise – what noises do we hear now? Can we remember what sounds, sights and smells we experienced on our walk?

What noises would the Victorians have heard? – horses' hooves, wheels, clatter of carts, voices, birds?

Litter in and around the area – what kinds of litter did they have 125 years ago? Look at old photos of public gardens and parks.

In the old photographs, can we see any litter? Any bins?

What litter is there now?

What did we see on the time walk?

Can we think of reasons for the difference? consider packaging, wealth of inhabitants, cooking/eating habits, number and type of shops.

Is the horse or the car the greater polluter?

Which costs the most to run? – petrol/horse food; other factors?

Which is most efficient – and in whose terms?

Which pollutes most? – dung versus carbon and other emissions.

Which is most suitable for a city?

Which has the most uses?

What about sewers? The current sewerage system was built during Victorian times, and until then the local rivers were open sewers. How would this have affected the environment in your local streets?

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## Health & Safety

Follow your school or local authority guidelines about taking children out of school. Carry out a risk assessment before allowing children into different areas of the park, gardens, urban space, or before touching anything in the area. See the Science section of 'Urban spaces' for more detailed notes – download from [www.primaryhistory.org](http://www.primaryhistory.org).

### **Nuffield Primary History: Urban spaces cross-curricular project**

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