The Bug Hotel

A John Muir Award

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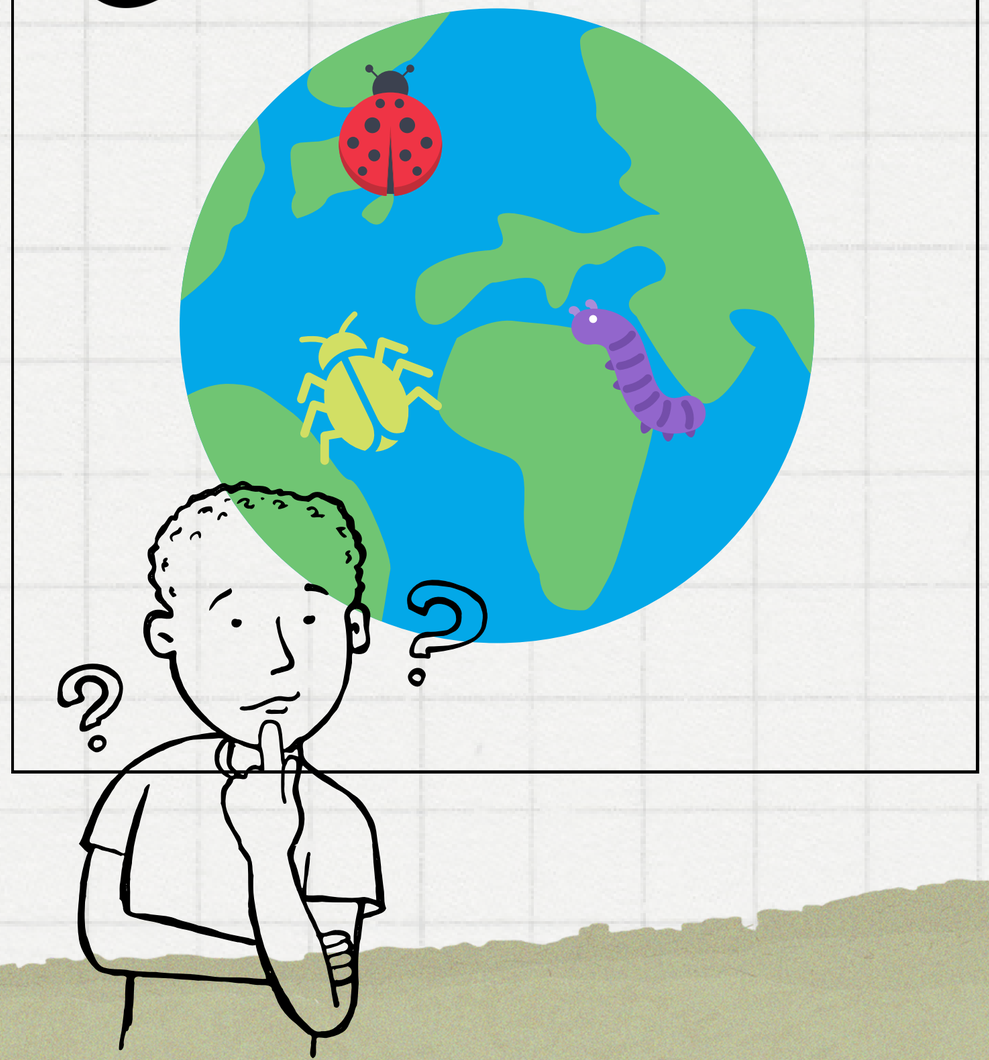
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Motivation

As the hot weather suddenly emerged and inevitably so did the flying, crawling and wiggling creatures too, I found myself having a food for thought moment. Working with a reception class of 4- and 5-year-olds, you witness their love for said creatures and how quickly the act to show you when they have one moving around in their hands, a moment where I am guilty of pretending to look enthused and impressed but deep down, I squirm. You see, I call these creatures ‘creepy crawlies’ subsequently due to my fear and dislike of their tiny bodies, quick movements and what I consider to be an abnormal number of legs, or lack thereof. There is not a time I remember developing this fear of insects and when I think deeply about it, there is nothing about them that is potentially harmful or scary to me, but nonetheless they are not an interest of mine. Despite this, I still found myself saying the phrase every early year's practitioner has said before “be careful when you hold them and that you do not squish them, we must look after our insects!”. An ironic phrase from myself who in fact, does not like insects. It was not until a child asked the question “Why?” that made me think why it is important to protect insects, a question I had never encountered before. Bees are the first insect that comes to mind as we know their role of pollenating and producing honey but there are millions of other insects that I was unaware of their role and responsibility on this world, if they had one at all. So, it became, the lesson of making a ‘bug hotel’.

Discover

A great opportunity arose to provide a learning experience to the children in my setting to teach them about their own roles and responsibilities in caring for the planet. The idea not only encouraged them to be creative, work collaboratively and make ethically informed decisions, it allowed them to explore their surroundings and gain a deeper understanding of the world around them.



Dicover

We are very fortunate in my setting to have great outdoor areas that provide us the best environment to give children enriched learning experiences and use every opportunity for outdoor learning. There is a ‘Peace Mala’ section of the school, which is a natural, woodland area filled with natural plants and trees with a forest type feel that children are allowed to explore in their free time. It is also used to support children’s health and well-being as they can use the area to socialise, relax and take part in vocational activities like planting. This seemed like the prefect area for children to exercise the activity and discover a new area of the school, as well as supporting the meaning and aim behind the lesson.



Discover

The area itself is peaceful, just like the name, that just induces a natural feeling of calmness and tranquillity. When you stop to discover the senses, you'd hear the rustling of blowing leaves, see walls of greenery with splashes of lavender, feel the different textures of trees and the leaves crunching under your feet, and smell the earthy and wood aromas. If you explore even closer, you will notice that you aren't the only one, there are birds flying over your head looking for materials to build a nest and hear the hushed piping of tiny insects crawling around you.



Explore

When exploring the area, I was surprised at the amazing facilities that were readily available to me. The area was full of minibeasts, wildlife and plants which created even more curiosity about our environment and all the purposes that we are unaware of. Together, we set out a plan of where we would place our bug hotels, what we would use and what would benefit this area the most. Discussion and debates were flowing amongst the children, and you could see the learning unfolding as they were getting thoroughly involved, critically thinking and acknowledging their surroundings. It made us wonder what minibeasts would visit our bug hotels, the children were engrossed and couldn't wait to find out what would happen next.



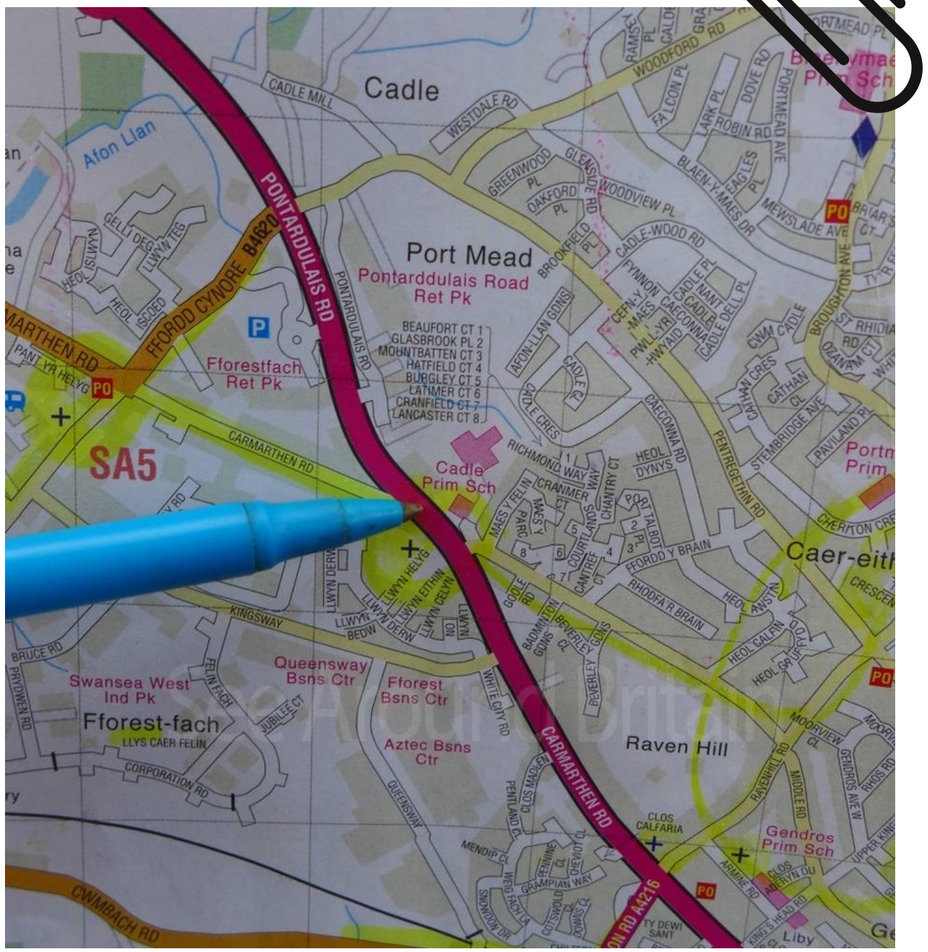


The Peace Mala Enterance



We found a bird feeder!

Peace Mala on the Map









Our Peace Mala garden already had lots of things that were supporting sustainability!

Conserve

01

The first step of this process was to collect some natural materials the children thought were accommodating to the bugs. We spoke about what characteristics made our homes comfortable and liveable, and what criteria we needed to make a hotel. The children decided they needed, materials to replicate items that they loved about their home, such as leaves for blankets, feathers as a pillow and grass and the carpets. The evidence of critical thinking astounded me as the children put so much thought and effort into this activity and took responsibility and consideration into caring for these bugs.



Conserve

A trial-and-error process began as with help from myself, the children started to create a bug hotel using recycled materials, natural materials they collected and a lot of help from sticky tape. Constructing the bug hotel wasn’t easy particularly for their age but I allowed the activity to remain and independent as possible.

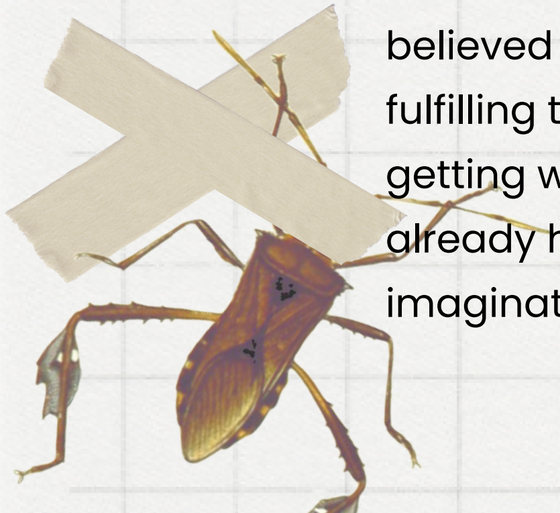


Conserve

02

Slowly the recycled materials started to form into a ‘hotel’ with deep consideration of placement of the materials, where children constructed different rooms with different purposes. It was interesting to hear the children’s ideas about to process and interpreted outcomes, some believed that lady birds would occupy one ‘room’ and ants would occupy another, whereas some believed no bugs would visit at all. It was fulfilling to see how creative the children were getting with constructing, the knowledge they already had on bugs and their ceaseless imagination.







Conserve

Finally, a completion of a franchise of bug hotels was ready for guests. Speciality rooms with the guest's interests valued, carefully constructed with great thought by an excellent team of ambitious, ethical learners. Each bug hotel was placed in the Peace Mala, and the grand opening filled both the children and myself with excitement about what would happen next. We decided to wait 2 days before going back, in hopes the hotels would fill with creatures that we could explore and examine.







What did we find?

After 2 days, we visited the Peace Mala to check on the progress of our bug hotels, and here is what we found. Many different colours, sizes and types of bugs that had visited, the children were astonished with the variety of insects that had inhabited our creation. Some insects were familiar, and some were new, both the children and I were excited to examine our visitors and find out all the information about them.



What did we find?

The Ladybug



- The first bug we found was a class favourite, the Ladybug. This insect was the motivation behind the experience as it was the insect that the children in my setting would frequently pick up and show me which ultimately made me think about their existence and purpose for this planet. Fortunately, this award brought the learning experience that I had hoped for both the children and I.

- Ladybugs help slow down the growing population of other insects who feed on plants. We made the correlation as to why we typically find Ladybugs near our planting area, so it was nice to know why they were there, protecting our plants.

- There are 5000 species of Ladybugs other than the commonly seen red and black, with each other meaning different scents to their attackers. This would explain the one we found here.



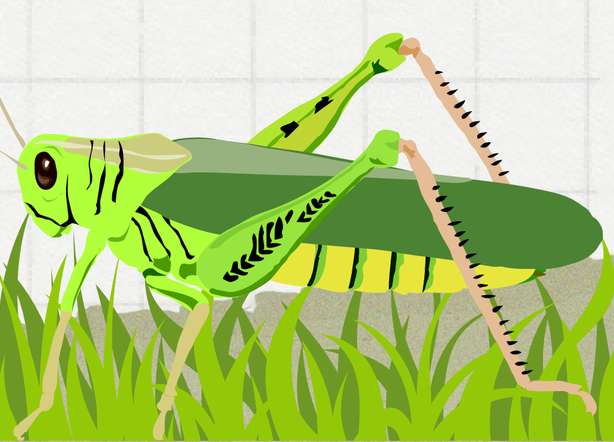




The Grasshopper



Next up, grasshoppers, which incidentally help with plants too. Instead, they are beneficial in supporting the biodegradable process once plants die and they start decomposing. Their fecal pallets aid a nurturing soil which is best for decomposing and new growth.



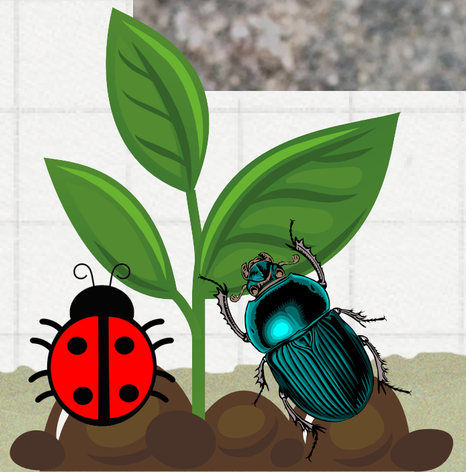
What did we find?

- Beetles actually combine the two purposes, decomposing and reducing the population of insects who feed on plants. Interestingly, Ladybugs are part of the beetle family and share lots of the same features and purposes, working collaboratively to benefits growing plans, fruit and vegetables. Some beetles, like the solider beetle, are great pollinators and spread pollen between flowers when travelling which helps them grow, similar to bees!

- It is interesting to note how insects are so different with their looks, sizes and sounds yet are working collaboratively with their independent roles which benefits the ecosystems of out planets.

The Beetle



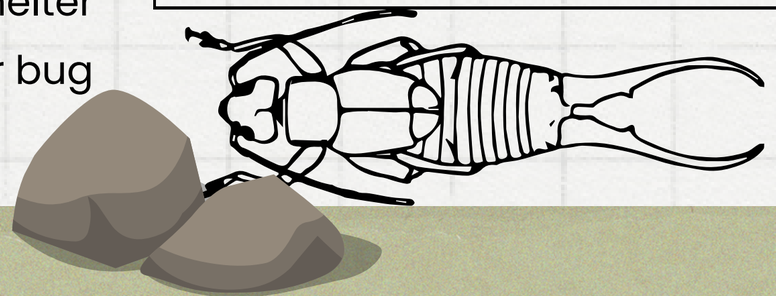


The Earwig

What did we find?

- Lastly, earwigs, which in comparison harm our plants more than help them. Earwigs feed off growing flowers, fresh fruit and vegetables so can be detrimental for horticulture growers as they eat through their produce. Despite eating off any other insects that pose a threat to plants, earwigs turn to fresh leaves, fruit and their roots if they do not find enough of their primary food source. This causes the commonly seen holes in leaves which are actually the remnants of the earwig's meal. Many farmers spray their produce with fertilisers which discourage earwigs from eating them.
- Earwigs thrive in environments with lots of moisture and shelter and particularly love twigs and stones, which suggests our bug hotel was the perfect habitat.





Reflection

01

It was evident to see the level of enthusiasm, motivation and care that the children displayed when taking part in this experience. Undoubtedly, they had a purposeful, fulfilling and enriched learning experience that thought them about the importance of caring for every living organism on this world, big or small. The children had a deeper level of understanding surrounding the topic as they had a level of responsibility that allowed them to think critically, plan with care and explore their thoughts and emotions.

02

The number of insects that surround us every day is astounding, and we should make more effort to acknowledge them all. Each insect has a purpose we are unaware of despite some of them being extremely beneficial to us. It is important that we acknowledge and respect the roles of these insects as they help us work towards a sustainable environment, and we should make every effort to aid them in doing so. A bug hotel is a simple but powerful gesture that we can provide insects a nurturing space to carry out their duties.

03

Weather shouldn't stop you, instead, embrace it! Rain and the cold were one of my concerns before this experience as I was conscious of our limitations when being outside, but I soon realised that we should embrace the weather and what it meant for our learning. Providing the appropriate clothes are worn, outdoor learning is beneficial in all weather conditions. We found that our bug hotels were benefiting the bugs as it was providing shelter from the wind and the rain, meaning we got to examine lots more bugs. Additionally, the weather changed the features of the environment and our senses to it. We heard falling rain, water gushing, moist textures and wet leaves, the weather enhanced learning, not prohibiting it.

04

Outdoor learning is a great opportunity for cross curricular skills. I witnessed children think critically, use fine motor skills, build on social and communication skills, physical development, explore humanities and much more. One activity was not only fun, but it was also educational supporting key aims of the Curriculum for Wales, contributed to a John Muir Award, supported health and well-being and contributed to sustainable living.

Reflection

I thought as a practitioner, I was the one doing the teaching and delivering the lesson, but the reality is that I was the one doing the learning. I was the one with the same, if not more curiosity about the minibeasts that I encountered every day. It was in fact the children's wonder, passion and imagination surrounding crawling and flying insects that I was once too scared to touch, that sparked a discussion so big they influenced a social change for myself as an adult, without even knowing it. The lesson learnt here is more than just how to build a bug hotel or the process of how bees make honey- those are equally as beautiful, but it is the power of working collaboratively in society to make a small impact that contributes to a larger scale of supporting sustainability for our world. Children are often overlooked as vulnerable members of society, but children should be valued as the next generation of sustainable citizens. As proven here, there is a lot to be learnt when you dig a little deeper.

