

**The Storytelling Garden**  
**Bishops Castle Primary School**  
**Amy Douglas and Michelle O'Connor**  
**19-29 April 2016**

**Summary**

Storyteller, Amy Douglas, and visual artist, Michelle O'Connor, worked with KS1 students, staff and volunteers to transform an under-used area of school ground into a creative play space, where children enter through a story arch, choose a character and create a new story to take away in the palm of their hand. The children were involved in the design and creation of the story garden as much as possible. They listened to lots of stories, modelling different styles of story and giving strong models with robust structures. Ideas were gathered and realised through listening to stories, creating stories, discussion, exploring the space, drawing and creating pots and creatures from clay. The children have enjoyed the process and love their new story garden. Although the artists have now finished in school, the garden will continue to develop as the grass reasserts itself; we plant seeds and secret flower trails and the KS1 children are going to buddy up with older children (who very much want to explore the new space) and show them how to use it.

**How the project worked**

The project was designed to begin with the children and gather their ideas, then to be more flexible until the artists knew what the ideas were; what donations we would receive; how much volunteer help we would have – and, of course, what the weather did!

The project was with two classes, Class 1, made up of Reception and Year 1 students, and Class 2, a mixed class of Year 1 and 2 students.

**The Artists' Diary**

**Week 1**

*Working with the children to inspire them to create stories and gather their ideas for the story garden*

**Day 1, 19/04/16**

We began the project with Class 2.

All storytelling projects should begin with a story and we began with the story of 'The man with his front door at the back' a story of hidden worlds.

The children explored our space and what is already there. We then called the children back and sent them through an arch, made with two of us joining hands, with their 'story-eyes' on. As they went through the arch they had to go into a story, with their story beginnings: 'once-upon-a-time; long-long-ago; one-scorching-hot-day; in-a-sparkly-magical-land...' With their story-eyes on, they looked to see what they could find and made up stories about witches; dinosaurs; children; monsters; worms; holes that led to caves underground; holes where worms wriggled out of and expanded to the size of houses....



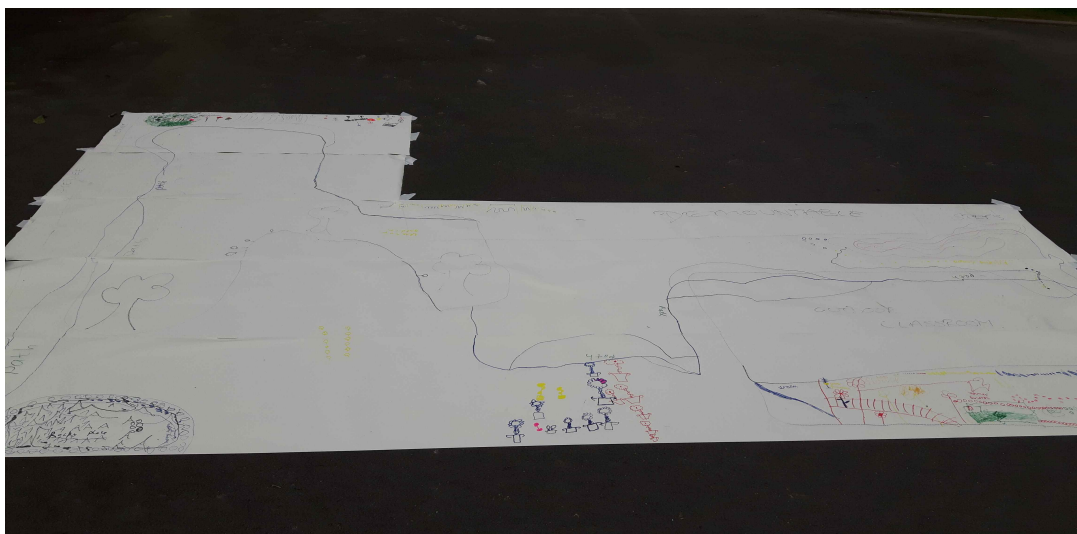
After they had explored the space in a very different way and many had made fairy gardens, decorated holes in trees etc, we brought them back through the arch as they said their story endings: 'and they all lived unhappily ever after'; 'and their mum made all of them tea', 'and the bad things couldn't do anything bad to the good things'.

Class 2 focused on doors – what is behind the door? Where does it lead?. The children each made two plywood doors, one to be hidden in the new story garden and one to take home. They created all kinds of doors: a red door with scratches on it leading to a vampire-tiger's lair; doors with 'GO AWAY'; witch's hats; and rainbow doors to worlds where unicorns play.



Time for another story: Laura's adventure, a story of a brave girl travelling a road that led through farmland, forest, sea-shore and into a city, helping various creatures on the way. This was the perfect story to lead into a discussion about different environments, how they affect the senses and how they change the atmosphere of a story. We talked about how we would like to introduce different areas into the story garden that could inspire different environments in story-making.

We went back to the story-garden area again to draw a map of what was already there. Using lining paper we made a huge map. Children marked their ideas onto the map of how we could change the space, including marking out a path to take people round the garden.





In the afternoon we introduced ourselves to Class 1 (R/Y1). We introduced the idea of the story-garden and asked them to explore the space as it is. We then asked Class 2 to show where they thought the path should go, marking it out with their bodies. Class 1 walked the path and then Class 1 children joined with Class 2 children, one by one, to make arches marking out the path and took turns to go through the other arches to try out the path.



Once the path was agreed, we passed a ball of string along the children, who were all holding hands, to mark out the path and we pegged the string down.

### **Day 2, 21/04/16**

Class 1: Telling of Stone soup, while Michelle made a coil pot from terracotta clay to be the focus of the tale and a place to collect the ingredients of the story.

We explored the idea of stories in the palm of our hand – beginning, character, problem, solution, ending, for the five fingers of the hand and tried it on Stone Soup and other stories they knew.

We took the students out into the area to be developed and, putting on our story eyes, considered how we might see things differently and start using found objects as ingredients for stories.

When we returned to the classroom the students started to tell their stories to Amy and the newly created pot. We then showed the students how to create their own pinch pots to contain their stories and be an aspect of the day to take home and create a dialogue between home and school.

After break we told Laura's adventure, a journey of a girl seeking her fortune and travelling through a variety of environments and aiding and then being helped by a number of creatures. From here we discussed the variety of places that stories can take place. We looked at simple symbols, lines and shapes to help people visualise different places for adventures to take place. In class the children continued the work making models and drawings of different environments – some inspired by the stories they had created. The artists took out small groups of children to cast paving slabs decorated



with shells to help create a watery area of the garden.



### **Day 3, 22/04/16**

We worked with both classes exploring ideas for characters within stories. We told the children stories with archetypal characters and discussed creating a range of exciting characters to tell stories about. Class 1 drew their own characters, which we then took (resizing if necessary) and traced onto marine ply. Class 2 made clay creatures and faces to be hidden in nooks and crannies in the garden.

We continued working with small groups to cast cement slabs.

## **Week 2**

*Realising the children's ideas and physically creating the garden.*

*Working with small groups of children when possible*

### **Day 4, 25/04/16**

Michelle had traced Class 1's characters onto plywood, the children were given back their characters to colour.

Michelle and Amy worked on varnishing Class 1's characters, designing the large boards to be attached to the outside of the demountable class room and pyrographing with Class 1's environment designs.

This was first of two volunteer days and afterschool the working party started digging. Despite tree roots and amazingly stony ground, the majority of the path was dug out – a major achievement!

The local community were very generous and we took delivery of tree rounds, play bark, pebbles and beautiful logs.

### **Day 5, 26/04/16**

The artists worked on varnishing, pyrographing, sanding, sawing and making steps.

This was the second of two volunteer days.

This was the second volunteer day. The entire teaching staff turned out to work like Trojans, with a few parents. They dug; barrowed bark; stained boards; barrowed pebbles; pegged log seats; barrowed earth and laid the cast cement slabs.





**Day 6, 27/04/16**

After a delivery of lots of tree rounds, we invited Class 2 to come and decide where the stepping stone paths would go. A volunteer dad came in on his lunch break to help us dig the tree rounds in. The school caretaker came in early and worked with us to create stepped pathway leading up from the playground.

**Day 7, 28/04/16**

A day of mounting boards on the demountable, sanding and varnishing.  
Worked with the caretaker to put up the storyarch  
Set up the cast trugs in the water area

**Day 8, 29/04/16**

Class 2 took their doors and found niches for all of them – some dug into the ground, some hidden in the hedge, some attached to logs and the demountable.



A large, light-brown wooden board with rounded corners is mounted on a dark brown wooden fence. The board features the title "What's my story?" written in a simple, hand-drawn font at the top center. Below the title, there are approximately 20 small, irregularly shaped wooden cutouts, each containing a colorful drawing of a person or animal. Each drawing is accompanied by a name written in a small, handwritten font. The names include "dog", "Hank", "Columbus", "Boris", "Gusman", "Boris", "Boris", "Boris", "Boris", "Boris", "Boris", "Boris", "Boris", "Boris", "Boris", "Boris", "Boris", "Boris", "Boris", "Boris", "Boris". The board is placed on a bed of straw or mulch, with a green lawn and a black plastic pot visible in the foreground.

## Feedback

'Can we go on the garden yet?'

The school was very flexible. Given that we couldn't know quite what would happen until we knew what was donated and how many volunteers we would have, we couldn't have done this without their 'can-do' attitude and flexibility

A joy to be able to have small groups of children at a time instead of a whole class – I'm used to having to work with a whole class at a time, but being able to take out small groups makes so many more things possible.

We're delighted with the space we have managed to create and know it is in safe hands – great to hear the plans they have for the garden!

'Your first success already! The child who just told you his story is a reluctant speaker and often will not speak at all to us.'

'We've seen the children retelling their stories and moving their fingers, using your stories in your hand idea.'



**From the parents:**

'The garden looks top!'

'The children can't wait to get on it'

Tell me about what you've been doing'

