

We've explored...

fairies

The children at one setting expanded their interest in fairies into collaboratively building and curating a fairy museum. **Annette Rawstrone** reports



Talk about fairies often emerges as children explore the magical woodland on their daily Forest School sessions at Little Barn Owls in Southwater, West Sussex. Earlier this year, interest in these mythical creatures occurred through an interest in tree houses, which atelierista Laura Thompson observes quickly developed into a desire to make small houses for fairies using foraged natural materials.

‘Before making the houses, we discussed what a fairy is, and the children were amazed to discover that not all fairies are pretty, with sparkly wings,’ she says. Laura posed the question ‘What is a fairy?’ and showed the children depictions of fairies, from typical pink, flowery fairies to more impish ones, male and female. This led to the children discussing their own ideas of fairies and drawing, painting and sculpting their own, ranging from a birthday cake fairy to a spider fairy and even a breakfast fairy made from cereal.

MAKING A MUSEUM

As the children’s exploration progressed, Laura asked if the children would like to curate their own fairy museum. They talked about what they knew about museums and what they should have in theirs. Some of the children had experience of museums and associated them with artefacts, pictures and also skeletons.

‘Through further discussion, the children were interested to know what a fairy’s skeleton might look like, as their experience of museums told them they needed to have skeletons on display,’ says Laura. ‘They concluded that different types of fairies probably had different types of skeletons, made from different materials, such as sticks, wire or “blueness”.

They researched skeletons and how they are formed by looking at how skeletons are represented in books, online research, a skeleton in the nursery’s atelier and even small ones they had found.

The children used sculpture to make their own fairy skeletons. They

Creating the museum enabled the children to use a variety of tools and skills

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also created a giant, collaborative skeleton drawing by children sketching their own representations and then voting on which body part, such as the fairy’s ribcage, they felt was most appropriate. ‘Working collaboratively has helped the children focus their drawing, knowing that what they produced would be judged by their peers,’ says Laura.

Pedagogical trainer Rebecca Kilshaw comments, ‘Children are able to have a voice through voting and it blows me away how two-, three- and four-year-olds can choose other children’s work because they feel that it is the best representation of what they want to achieve as a group, rather than simply selecting their own. They show how they are able to listen,

negotiate and debate and respect other people's ideas.'

WITH PRECISION

During the careful fairy skeleton drawing, Laura noticed a change in the children's accuracy of marks – 'turning from hurried scribbles to recognisable bones shapes'. 'For children who had previously not been confident artists, this was a huge moment for them, as they discovered that when they really focused and slowed down, they were able to produce fantastic drawings,' she reflects.

Along with gaining confidence with their drawing skills, children focused on their sculpture techniques to create fairy statues. 'I made the decision to give them polymer clay for these, as this can be reworked over and over again, allowing the children to take time with their sculptures, coming back to them and making changes, even weeks after they started,' says Laura. 'The development of the children's dexterity and ability to use the clay has been incredible, and by using a reworkable material, they have allowed themselves to be critical of their work, and take off and improve areas they weren't totally happy with.'

MYSTERIOUS LETTERS

After working on exhibits for a few months, the children were excited to find letters from some fairies. The letters said the fairies wanted to move into the museum, which created much excitement as the children planned for their arrival.

'They began by making tiny fairy clothes, cutting out the patterns and learning to stitch pieces together,' says Laura. 'This was a complicated process, and I was so proud of the children for their determination and patience. Alongside learning to sew, the children were eager to practise their writing, by leaving their own messages for the fairies.'

FAIRY HOME

They also began designing a house for the fairies. 'The children soon realised that as fairies are much smaller than us, their houses must be too, but weren't sure how much smaller. The children used rulers and tape measures to measure themselves and various objects, comparing whether they were bigger or smaller than a fairy,' Laura says.

'Eventually settling on a size, the children got stuck into the

woodworking tools. As a Forest School nursery, our older children are familiar with some of the tools we used, and they became excellent teachers for our younger children, showing them how to hold the tools correctly, and reminding them of safety procedures. It was lovely to see the nurturing way the children shared their knowledge.'

With the wooden house complete, the children furnished it with tables, chairs, shelves and tea pots, using their woodworking skills and sculpting techniques.

MUSEUM OPENING

As a centre piece for the museum, the children made a collaborative artwork of fairy wings sculpted out of wire. Rebecca says they enjoy using this medium as 'a language of expression – bending, twisting and connecting'. Children voted that they should be 'pirate map fairy wings'. These were wrapped in cellophane so they were covered but the wire remained seen.

They created invitations and tickets for parents to attend. The atelier opened on a Saturday for children to show their families around the sculptures, drawings, photographs and documentation of how their investigations progressed.

'While the children were able to proudly display their work, parents were also able to gain more of an insight into how they build skills and knowledge, rather than just focus on an end product, and talk about the setting's ethos, values and curriculum,' says Rebecca.

Laura adds, 'This has been a truly collaborative project. With children from age two to four taking an equally important role, learning from each other and gaining valuable new skills.'

Making a fairy statue with polymer clay



Fairy Science by Ashley Spires

All the fairies in Pixieville believe in magic, except Esther. She believes in science and uses it to get to the root of a tree problem.



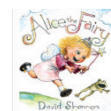
Freddie and the Fairy by Julia Donaldson and Karen George

Freddie wants nothing more than a pet, so when Bessie-Belle offers to grant his wishes, he knows just what to ask for. But Bessie-Belle can't hear very well and Freddie tends to mumble, which means the wishes aren't turning out as planned!



The Fairies – Petal & Nettle and the Big Birthday Surprise by Kirstie Watson and Tilia Rand-Bell

Petal is planning a birthday surprise for her fairy friend, Nettle. In an effort to be 'very thoughtful', she forgoes magic in favour of doing it all herself. But that's when the problems start...



Alice the Fairy by David Shannon

Alice has a nose for trouble, but luckily she's a fairy – a Temporary Fairy with a magic wand, wings, and a blanket, which she uses to disappear, fly and to transform her dad into a horse.



A Little Fairy Magic by Julia Hubery and Alison Edgson

Little Phoebe Mouse loves her new fairy costume. Phoebe tries to fly but it's a bit hard for a brand new fairy, so she decides to practise wishes. But can she really do fairy magic?



The Grumpy Fairies by Bethan Stevens

Deep in the darkest forests, under rustling leaves, live the fairies. You probably think that fairies are good, kind and sweet. Well, a lot of them are. These helpful fairies take care of the forest. But unfortunately, some of the fairies, particularly the littlest ones, are proper grumpy!