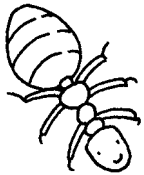
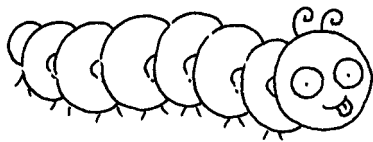


# Planning for Learning through Minibeasts



by Rachel Sparks Linfield and Penny Coltman. Illustrated by Cathy Hughes

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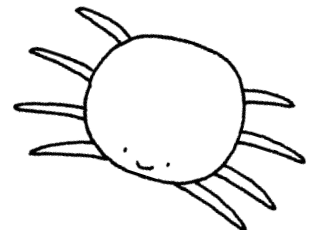
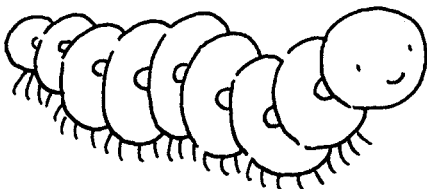
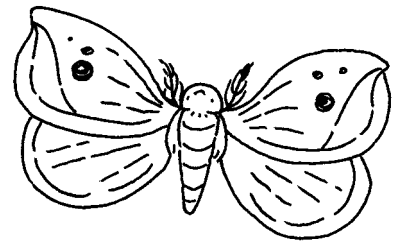
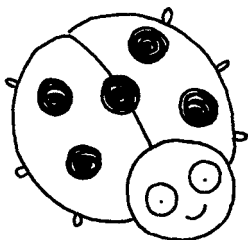
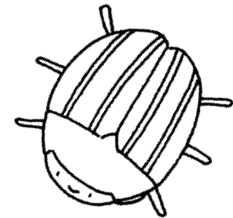
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# Making plans



## Child-friendly planning

The purpose of planning is to make sure that all children enjoy a broad and balanced experience of learning. Planning should be flexible, useful and child-friendly. It should reflect opportunities available both indoors and outside. Plans form part of a planning cycle in which practitioners make observations, assess and plan.

Children benefit from reflective planning that takes into account the children's current interests and abilities and also allows them to take the next steps in their learning. Plans should make provision for activity that promotes learning and a desire to imagine, observe, communicate, experiment, investigate and create.

Plans should include a variety of types of activity. Some will be adult-initiated or adult-led, that focus on key skills or concepts. These should be balanced with opportunities for child-initiated activity where the children take a key role in the planning. In addition there is a need to plan for the on-going continuous provision areas such as construction, sand and

water, malleable materials, small world, listening area, role-play and mark-making. Thought also needs to be given to the enhanced provision whereby an extra resource or change may enable further exploration, development and learning.

The outdoor environment provides valuable opportunities for children's learning. It is vital that plans value the use of outdoor space.

## The UK Frameworks

Within the UK a number of frameworks exist to outline the provision that children should be entitled to receive. Whilst a variety of terms and labels are used to describe the Areas of Learning there are key principles which are common to each document. For example they advocate that practitioners' planning should be personal based on observations and knowledge of the specific children within a setting. They acknowledge that young children learn best when there is scope for child-initiated activity. In addition it is accepted that young children's learning is holistic. Although within the documents Areas of Learning are presented separately to ensure that key areas are not over-looked, within settings, children's learning will combine areas. Thus the Areas of Learning are perhaps of most use for planning, assessment and recording.

## Focused area plans

The plans you make for each day will outline areas of continuous provision and focused, adult-led activities. Plans for focused-area activities need to include aspects such as:

- Resources needed
- The way in which you might introduce activities;
- Individual needs
- The organisation of adult help
- Size of the group
- Timing
- Safety
- Key vocabulary.

Identify the learning and the Early Learning Goals that each activity is intended to promote. Make a note of any assessments or observations that you are likely to carry out. After carrying out the activities, make notes on your plans to say what was particularly successful, or any changes you would make another time.

# Making plans

## A final note

Planning should be seen as flexible. Not all groups meet every day, and not all children attend every day. Any part of the plan can be used independently, stretched over a longer period or condensed to meet the needs of any group. You will almost certainly adapt the activities as children respond to them in different ways and bring their own ideas, interests and enthusiasms. The important thing is to ensure that the children are provided with a varied and enjoyable curriculum that meets their individual developing needs.

## Using the book

Read the section which outlines links to the Early Learning Goals (pages 4-7) and explains the rationale for focusing on 'Minibeasts'.

Use pages 8 to 19 to select from a wide range of themed, focused activities that recognise the importance of involving children in practical activities and giving them opportunities to follow their own interests. For each 'Minibeasts' theme, two activities are described in detail as examples to help you in your planning and preparation. Key vocabulary, questions and learning opportunities are identified. Use the activities as a basis to:

- Extend current and emerging interests and capabilities
- Engage in sustained conversations
- Stimulate new interests and skills.

Find out on page 20 how the Minibeasts activities can be brought together in a Minibeasts World event.

Use page 21 for ideas of resources to collect or prepare. Remember that the books listed are only suggestions. It is likely that you will already have within your setting a variety of other books that will be equally useful.

The activity overview chart on page 23 can be used either at the planning stage or after each theme has been completed. It will help you to see at a glance which aspects of children's development are being addressed and alert you to the areas which may need greater input in the future.

As children take part in the activities, their learning will progress. 'Collecting evidence' on page 22 explains how you might monitor each child's achievements.

There is additional material to support the working partnership of families and children in the form of a reproducible Family Page found inside the back cover.

It is important to appreciate that the ideas presented in this book will only be a part of your planning. Many activities that will be taking place as routine in your group may not be mentioned. For example, it is assumed that sand, dough, water, puzzles, role-play, floor toys, technology and large scale apparatus are part of the ongoing early years experience. Role-play areas, stories, rhymes, singing, and group discussion times are similarly assumed to be happening in each week although they may not be a focus for described activities.



# Using the 'Early Learning Goals'



The principles that are common to each of the United Kingdom curriculum frameworks for the early years are described on page 2. It is vital that, when planning for children within a setting, practitioners are familiar with the relevant framework's content and organisation for areas of learning. Regardless however, of whether a child attends a setting in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales they have a right to provision for all areas of learning. The children should experience activities which encourage them to develop their communication and language; personal, social, emotional, physical, mathematical and creative skills. They should have opportunities within literacy and be encouraged to understand and explore their world.

Within the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (2014), Communication and Language; Physical Development and Personal, Social and Emotional Development are described as Prime Areas of Learning that are 'particularly crucial for igniting children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, and for building their capacity to learn, form relationships and thrive' (page 7, DfE 2014). The Specific Areas of Learning are Literacy, Mathematics, Understanding the World and Expressive Arts and Design.

For each Area of Learning the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) describe what children are expected to be able

to do by the time they enter Year 1. These goals, detailed on pages 4 to 7, have been used throughout this book to show how activities relating to 'Minibeasts' could link to these expectations. For example, for Personal, Social and Emotional Development one aim relates to the development of children's 'self-confidence and self-awareness'. Activities suggested which provide the opportunity for children to do this have the reference PSE1. This will enable you to see which parts of the Early Learning Goals are covered for a given theme and to plan for areas to be revisited and developed.

In addition, an activity may be carried out to develop a range of different Early Learning Goals. For example, when making imaginary minibeasts from malleable materials they will be using fine motor skills as part of Physical Development. In addition they will be developing aspects of Expressive Arts and Design.

If they take photographs of their minibeasts outside they will use technology. Thus, whilst adult-focused activities may have clearly defined goals at the planning stage, it must be remembered that as children take on ideas and initiate their own learning and activities, goals may change.

## The Prime Areas of Learning Communication and Language

**Listening and attention:** children listen attentively in a range of situations. They listen to stories, accurately anticipating key events and respond to what they hear with relevant comments, questions or actions. They give their attention to what others say and respond appropriately, while engaged in another activity. (CL1)

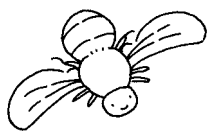
**Understanding:** children follow instructions involving several ideas or actions. They answer 'how' and 'why' questions about their experiences and in response to stories or events. (CL2)

**Speaking:** children express themselves effectively, showing awareness of listeners' needs. They use past, present and future forms accurately when talking about events that have happened or are to happen in the future.

## Example chart to aid planning in the EYFS

Week beginning:	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<b>FOCUSED ACTIVITIES</b>					
Focus Activity 1:					
Focus Activity 2:					
Stories and rhymes					
<b>CONTINUOUS PROVISION (Indoor)</b>					
Collage					
Construction (large)					
Construction (small)					
ICT					
Imaginative play					
Listening					
Malleable materials					
Mark making					
Painting					
Role play					
Sand (damp)					
Sand (dry)					
Water					
<b>CONTINUOUS PROVISION (Outdoor)</b>					
Construction					
Creative play					
Exploratory play					
Gross motor					
<b>ENHANCED PROVISION (Indoor)</b>					
<b>ENHANCED PROVISION (Outdoor)</b>					





# Theme 1: Meet the minibeasts



## Communication and Language

- Make plans to go on a 'Minibeast walk' (see activity opposite). Discuss aspects of safety, such as the need to hold hands or for the group to stay together. Draw attention to any potential hazards such as roads or ponds and explain the safety rules associated with them. (CL3)
- Ask the children to imagine they are tiny minibeasts. What sort of thing might frighten them? Talk about the importance of behaving as 'gentle giants' when working with such small animals. (CL1)

## Physical Development

- Make an obstacle course in which children move as minibeasts through an imaginary world. Include tunnels (worm holes) to travel through, benches (twigs and branches) to balance along, cones (stones) to move between and mats (leaves) to rest on. Clap to give a danger signal of an approaching hungry bird, at which all the 'minibeasts' must freeze to avoid being spotted! (PD1)
- Place a selection of plastic minibeasts on the dough table so that children can use them as inspiration as they model their own. (PD1)

## Personal, Social and Emotional Development

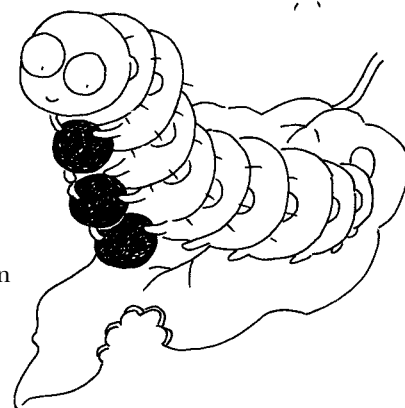
- When on the 'Minibeast Walk' make journey sticks to record the walk. The adult accompanying each group of children needs a strip of card, about 3 x 10cm. Place a piece of double-sided adhesive tape down the centre of the card. At various stages along the walk the group then chooses a tiny memento to fix to the card: a piece of grass from the footpath, a tiny white flower from the bush near the park gate, and so on. (If the adult is in charge of the card, it avoids the risk of children collecting living creatures!) Afterwards, use the journey sticks as a focus for discussion, describing the walk and placing events in sequence. (PSE2)
- Talk to the children about their own experiences of minibeasts. Ask them to think of recent events such as finding a spider in the bath! (PSE3)

## Literacy

- Encourage recognition of sounds by playing a game of 'I spied', referring to minibeasts seen on the walk. For example, 'I spied, with my little eye, a minibeast beginning with c', or 'a minibeast ending with er'. Help the children to write the minibeast names on strips of card. Use the words for sorting activities. (L1, 2)
- Share stories and rhymes that include minibeasts. (L1)

## Mathematics

- Talk about the idea of being very small. What other things can the children think of which are very small? Encourage them to make comparisons. Can you think of something in this room which is about as big as a ladybird? (M2)
- Provide a selection of plastic minibeasts for children to arrange in order of size. Which has the longest legs? Which is the smallest? (M2)
- Use plastic minibeasts for counting activities. Start with a small group of minibeasts and show the children how to count them, touching each in turn and moving it to one side. Progress to counting with touching but not moving. Provide numerals for children who want to record the count of each set. (M1)



## Understanding the World

- Go on a minibeast walk (see activity opposite). (UW2)
- After the walk, ask children to describe the animals they saw, referring to colour, size, legs, wings or shell. See if they can sort plastic minibeasts using their own chosen criteria. (UW2)
- Look at photos of the different habitats where the minibeasts lived. Where would children choose to live if they were a minibeast? (UW2)

## Expressive Arts and Design

- Use a variety of percussion instruments to produce sounds to which children move like minibeasts. Shake a tambourine to suggest wriggling or slithering. Use gentle triangle sounds for fluttering butterflies, a swanee whistle for leaping grasshoppers and maracas for scuttling beetles. (EAD2)
- Make a minibeast tree role-play area (see activity below). (EAD2)

## Activity: The minibeast walk

**Learning opportunity:** Developing an awareness of the minibeasts found in the immediate environment.

**Early Learning Goal:** Understanding the World. The world.

**Resources:** Adult helpers, preferably one to every two or three children; magnifiers.

**Key vocabulary:** Words for minibeasts and their habitats e.g. insect, worm, slug, snail, woodlouse, spider, log, mud, damp.

**Organisation:** Whole group.

**Note:** *Unless you have access to a fairly large enclosed outdoor space for your group, such as school grounds, you will need to consult your policy regarding trips and outings. You will need written parental consent before taking children out of the group's premises.*

**What to do:** Divide your walk into distinct stages, each of which focuses on a different type of habitat, for example grassy area, hedgerow, stone pile, rotting logs, old wall. At each place stop and encourage the children to look for minibeasts, using the magnifiers to help them to see tiny detail. Talk about searching at different levels, looking behind and under objects. Many minibeasts prefer dark, damp environments, so carefully lifting away a piece of bark from an old log is often fruitful. When searching hedgerows remember to look under leaves as well as on their surfaces. Talk about camouflage – some animals are hard to spot!

Discourage the children from touching or collecting their finds. Small animals are easily damaged by handling and some, especially woodlice, will quickly die if they are kept away from their damp habitats.

Record the findings of your walk by journey sticks and photographs which can later be displayed.

## Activity: Minibeast tree role-play area

**Learning opportunity:** Working collaboratively, using a variety of materials, tools and techniques in building an imaginative play area.

**Early Learning Goal:** Expressive Arts and Design.  
Being imaginative.

**Resources:** String or thin wire; green crêpe paper in various shades; paint; large brushes; green paper; card; glue; scissors; travelling rug; picnic basket and accessories.

**Key vocabulary:** Cut, paint, minibeasts, picnic.

**Organisation:** Small groups contributing, one at a time.

**What to do:** Make space in the corner of the room where you want the area to be. Make a backdrop by covering the walls either side of the corner with white backing paper. Cut out a tree trunk shape which will reach from floor to ceiling for children to paint. Mount it in the corner between the two walls. A second group of children can cut

out leaf shapes from green paper. Add these to the top of the tree.

Next make a leafy curtain through which children will enter the area. Fix two hooks in the ceiling or the top of the walls, about 1.5m away from the corner. If possible put a third hook in the ceiling so that a square is formed, the four corners of which are the top of the corner of the room, and the three hooks. Fix a line of tight string or fine wire like a washing line between the three hooks. Two sides of the square are now the walls, and two are the line.

Show a group of children how to make crêpe paper twists. Cut all the way across unopened rolls of green crêpe paper at 2cm intervals. Twist these unopened strips tightly, then shake them out to make green streamers. Hang them from the suspended line to form a green curtain which resembles the dangling branches of a weeping willow tree. Trim the lengths of paper so that the branches hang just above the floor.

Place a picnic rug and accessories on the floor inside the tree. Let children cut out their own drawings of minibeasts and stick them to the leaves, trunk and dangling branches. Details such as fringed paper grass or card flowers will give further ideas for creatures to include.

Enjoy using the role-play tree.

## Display

Make a display of the photographs taken on the minibeast walk. Let the children help you compose suitable captions. These will prompt the children to talk about their experiences as they share the pictures with group visitors. Include examples of the journey sticks.

