

# Winnie the Pooh

*inspiration  
for geographical  
and outdoor  
learning*

**W**idespread attention has been paid to the benefits of children learning outdoors since the American author Richard Louv developed the concept of nature-deficit disorder. In books such as *Last Child in the Woods*, Louv linked the rise in obesity, attention-deficit disorder and depression to children's lack of contact with nature.

The Winnie the Pooh stories (Milne and Shepard, 1994) can be used by teachers to inspire outdoor adventures for children. During an era where children are spending less time outdoors, it is opportune to revisit the characters created by A.A. Milne. The magical setting for Winnie-the-Pooh's adventures is a real place: the Hundred Acre Wood was inspired by Ashdown Forest, a wildlife haven that spans more than 6,000 acres in southeast England. Milne's childhood connection with nature inspired his writing as he spent hours outside exploring the woods

with his son.

In 1921 A.A. Milne gave his son Christopher Robin Milne a toy bear. Initially called Edward, the bear was renamed Winnie after a brown bear in London Zoo. Harry Colebourn, a Canadian lieutenant and veterinary surgeon, had brought the bear cub to England at the beginning of World War I. Winnie was named after the city of Winnipeg and she was donated to London Zoo when Harry's unit left for France. The origin of the second part of the name 'Pooh' is explained in the 1924 book *When we were young*. The name Pooh originally belonged to a swan, as can be seen in the introduction of Milne's *When We Were Very Young*. "Christopher Robin, who feeds this swan in the mornings, has given him the name of 'Pooh'. This is a very fine name for a swan, because, if you call him and he doesn't come (which is a thing swans are good at), then you can pretend that you were just saying

**Subject**  
Geography

**Strand**  
Natural Environments

**Strand Unit**  
The local natural environment



‘Pooh!’ to show him how little you wanted him.”

The friendship between Christopher Robin and Winnie the Pooh inspired a collection of books starting with *Winnie-the-Pooh* in 1926. The books were illustrated by E.H. Shepard. Winnie the Pooh has also been immortalised by the animated film created by the Walt Disney Corporation. Milne’s stories have been translated into 50 languages and are considered classic children’s stories today. Other characters, such as Eeyore, Piglet, Tigger, Kanga and Roo were also based on stuffed animals belonging to Christopher Robin. Most of these stuffed animals are now on display in the New York Public Library. The characters, Rabbit and Owl, were based on animals that lived, like the swan Pooh, in the surrounding area of Milne’s country home, Cotchford Farm in Ashdown Forest, Sussex. It is this area on which the 100-Acre-Wood was based.

The end-paper to *Winnie the Pooh* by A.A. Milne, first published by Methuen in 1926, is a map of the 100 ‘aker’ wood (Hundred Acre Wood). Using the device of a map or bird’s-eye view, it shows each of the characters in their own home or locality in the Hundred Acre Wood, where the story is set. When E.H. Shepard first drew the map of the 100 ‘aker’ wood he based the location on Ashdown Forest, near the home of the Milnes in East Sussex. Over the years there has been much speculation about the location of the story and how many of the landmarks were inspired by real places. According to Christopher Robin in his own autobiography *The Enchanted Places*, Ashdown Forest is 100 Acre Wood. The best-known landmark is Poohsticks Bridge, which on the local map is called Posingsford Bridge.

In his later years, Christopher Milne recruited Pooh to help in the campaign for the survival of Ashdown Forest, which was then being threatened by a proposed exploration by British Petroleum. Fortunately, Ashdown Forest was saved for posterity.

Initiatives such as forest schools ensure that children have an opportunity to play outside, to swing from ropes, climb trees and explore natural habitats with a sense of adventure rather than fear. The forest school movement originated in the Scandinavian countries in the 1950s and since the mid 1990s is increasingly being supported in the UK and more recently in Ireland. At forest school events,

children learn to make swings in trees, to use ropes to climb muddy slopes, and to be outdoors in all weather conditions. They take risks, develop gross motor skills and engage in problem solving. Teachers can design multiple outdoor activities inspired by the Winnie the Pooh stories.

### Geographical and outdoor activities based on Winnie the Pooh

- Select a special tree from the local environment. Find out its name and special characteristics. Draw a sketch of this tree using E.H. Shepard’s illustrations as inspiration. Encourage the children to label their picture with a title inspired by the Winnie the Pooh books. Also include the child’s name, date of drawing and name of tree.

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- Using an iPad or video camera, record children reading a favourite line from the story and their reasons for this choice. You could film this outside under a tree and use props to make it look like the Hundred Acre Wood. Collate the film clips together and show them to the rest of the school in assembly, or play the video on a loop at parents’ evening. There is excellent support available on the FÍS Film Project website via PDST.
- Map work: Situate the story in a local landscape. Show children a map of the Hundred Acre Wood. Discuss the map. Ask the children to draw a map of their local area as a setting for the Winnie the Pooh stories. Give each child a large piece of paper and a selection of collage materials, including coloured and patterned papers, twigs and leaves,

- small scraps of fabric, images of Pooh and friends and PVA glue or sticky dots. Then ask them to glue materials onto the map, to create a tactile and sensory piece of art. Include local versions of the key sites which feature in the story e.g. the ancient black walnut tree on the edge of the forest that became Pooh’s house, a bridge to represent Poohsticks Bridge and an old quarry where Roo played in his sandy pit.
- Create a honey trail in the school grounds using templates of bees dotted around the school ground. Children understand that bees are important pollinators. A decline in the bee species causes a decrease in pollination, new plants, flowers and ultimately honey. Part of the school ground can be planted as a wild garden with an explicit aim of attracting bees and enhancing the school’s biodiversity.
- On a fine day organise a Christopher Robin Tea Party outside. Children can dress up as their favourite characters or bring miniature toy versions.
- ‘The case of the missing tail’: Create a treasure hunt to enable the children to find Eeyore’s missing tail.
- Print out Winnie the Pooh characters on cardboard. The children can use these to create new Winnie the Pooh stories in their school grounds. These characters can also be used to create a diorama with a scene from the Hundred Acre Woods.
- If the school is located near a river or stream the children can play poohsticks. This is a game whereby each player throws a stick over the upstream side of a bridge into a stream or river, the winner being the person whose stick emerges first from under the bridge.

### Further resources available:

Aalto, K. (2015) *The Natural World of Winnie-the-Pooh: Exploring the Real Landscapes of the Hundred Acre Wood*, Timber Press

Louv, R., 2008. *Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder*. Algonquin books.

Milne, A.A. and Shepard, E.H., 1994. *The complete tales of Winnie-the-Pooh*. Penguin.

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