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## **Sustainable Stories Workshop Guide**

### **Why run a Sustainable Stories workshop?**

This guide has been created to help National Parks (and anyone interested) engage new audiences and inspire the next generation to imagine a sustainable future through storytelling. National Parks are places of wonder and learning, and by using this guide you can:

- Spark children's imaginations and foster curiosity about nature and climate
- Empower families to connect local experiences with global challenges
- Deepen connections to our Parks and strengthen community engagement
- Inspire hope for the future of our natural world

### **Introduction**

This guide is designed to help anyone planning a Sustainable Stories workshop – a creative, hands-on session that sparks curiosity about nature, the environment, and climate action through creative writing. Our pilot workshop focused on National Parks (Dartmoor in particular) with primary-aged children, but the format can be easily adapted for different ages and themes – from oceans and rivers to forests.

Inside, you'll find a flexible workshop template (a step-by-step structure you can adapt) and top tips for running an engaging, inspiring and fun session.

## Workshop Template

**Duration:** 1 hour 30 minutes – 2 hours

**Age range:** Adaptable; designed with ages 5–10 in mind, but suitable for children, families, and wider groups.

### 1. Welcome & Introduction (5-10 minutes)

- a. Greet participants and introduce yourself, plus any speakers or volunteers.
- b. Explain the purpose of the workshop: to explore [theme], learn about wildlife, and create imaginative stories inspired by nature.
- c. Share housekeeping (e.g., fire procedures) and simple ground rules to help everyone get the most out of the time together (e.g., “Be kind and respectful”).
- d. If time allows, do a short icebreaker (see top tips section).

### 2. Hear from Guest Speakers (10–30 minutes)

- a. Invite 1–3 speakers to share their knowledge and experiences for around 5 minutes each (see top tips later).
- b. As they talk, facilitators note down key words, themes, and facts, encouraging participants to do the same.
- c. Children jot down or draw anything that inspires them.
- d. Allow a short Q&A after each talk and ask participants what they found most interesting.
- e. Summarise key points before moving into the next activity.

### 3. Theme Selection (5 minutes)

- a. Ask participants to pick a theme for their story (e.g., favourite animal, environmental challenge, or outdoor experience).
- b. If participants are unsure, prompt them with:
  - i. What comes to mind when you think about National Parks?
  - ii. What’s your favourite wild animal?

### 4. Brainstorming Words & Questions (5–10 minutes)

- a. In small groups or individually, participants list as many words, ideas, or questions related to their theme as possible.
- b. Facilitators circulate to offer guidance, ask open questions, and provide prompts if needed.

### 5. Character Development (5-10 minutes)

Before writing, encourage participants to think about their main character(s) and draw or write about them. This helps kickstart their story.

- a. Your prompts might include:
  - i. Who are they - a person, animal or creature?
  - ii. Where do they live?
  - iii. What do they like/dislike?
  - iv. What challenges do they face?
  - v. What's their mood or personality?

**Tip:** if they aren't using characters, ask them about the *what/where/why* of their theme or message instead.

## **6. Story Creation (15+ minutes)**

Using their theme, key words, and characters, participants create a story, poem, or song. Remind them they can use storyboards or drawings - stories don't have to be just words. Facilitators circulate to support. Prompts might include:

- a. Setting: Where does it take place?
- b. Plot: What happens? How does it link to the future of National Parks?
- c. Senses: What can you/your character see, hear, touch, or smell?

**Tip:** Frame prompts around the "theme" or "message" as well as characters to keep writing flexible and not limited to stories. E.g., "What's the theme of your writing?" or "What message do you want to send?"

## **7. Sharing & Reflection (10–20 minutes)**

- a. Invite participants to share with the group or a partner.
- b. After each story, highlight themes such as:
  - i. Facts about National Parks
  - ii. Environmental/climate challenges
  - iii. Reflections on nature's future
- c. Thank people and encourage celebration of each other's creativity (applause).

## **8. Conclusion (5 minutes)**

- a. Thank you to the participants and speakers.
- b. Encourage continued curiosity and storytelling at home.

## **Top Tips for Running a Sustainable Stories Workshop**

### **Speakers**

- Diversity matters: Invite speakers with varied backgrounds and expertise (e.g., rangers, scientists, authors, illustrators).
- Brief them in advance: Share timing, audience, and topic guidance. Encourage short and interactive talks (around 5 minutes).
- Props and visuals: Suggest they bring engaging props, images, or materials.
- Value their input: Pay speakers if you can. It supports freelancers and shows you value their contribution.

### **Resources & Materials**

- Have plenty: Ensure you have plenty of pens, paper, crayons, and other supplies, taking into account the ages of people registered and number of participants (e.g., colouring sheets for younger participants). Consider extras like magazines, scissors, or glue for mood boards.
- Visual prompts: Place props, images, and story starters around the room to inspire ideas and help adults support children. Remember the younger the children, the less talk and more interaction needed. You could use a story basket/box to introduce stories, and pull out from the basket key characters or themes.
- Accessible setup: Arrange tables/chairs for good visibility and interaction. For larger groups, consider a central screen or multiple screens.

### **Venue & Setup**

- Acoustics: Choose a space where participants can hear speakers clearly. Soft furnishings or carpets can help reduce echo and noise.
- Comfort: Ensure the room is not too warm or crowded; provide breaks if needed. Provide water for speakers.
- Display space: Have walls, boards, or tables to showcase participants' work, if possible.

### **Timing & Flow**

- Keep talks short: 5 minutes per speaker helps maintain energy and focus.
- Adapt timing: Be flexible. Some activities or individuals may need longer. Ask participants if they need a few more minutes before moving on.

- Transitions: Give clear, simple instructions between activities.

### **Facilitating an Engaging Workshop**

- Keep it fun and open ended so children can experiment freely.
- Make it playful: Use simple games (e.g., “Which table can brainstorm the most words for their theme?”).
- Encourage collaboration: Allow participants to work in the way that suits them best, whether that’s as a table, in families, or individually.
- Support without leading: Use open-ended questions (“What else could happen?” “How might they feel?”) rather than giving answers.
- Celebrate contributions: Acknowledge creativity at every stage, not just at the end.
- Use Icebreakers: Icebreakers help participants get comfortable and start thinking creatively. You could:
  - Invite participants to share a favourite outdoors experience with the person next to them).
  - Provide an artefact or photo for each table (e.g., a toy animal) and ask children to think of words that describe it. Adults write the words on post-its, which are then posted on a board to generate more ideas for writing.

**Most of all - have fun!**