

ART AND NATURE WALKS TOGETHER:

ENVIRONMENTAL STORYTELLING - ANIMATE THE INANIMATE

A sensory and creative methodology for reconnecting young people with the natural world.

CONTEXT

This tool was created in the context of the Erasmus + funded project Art and Nature Walks Together (ARNA). Art and Nature walks is a project that stems out of a need for connecting with nature, and exploring it through different lenses. It's about collaborating, exchanging, and investigating the natural world we live in, and creating art as an extension to it. Located in the vicinity of the Donau River and Island, for one week the participants, based in five different countries (Austria, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Poland, Türkiye) are urged to explore the natural landscapes surrounding them whilst being in the city. Art and Nature Walk Together addresses the disconnect to the environment by offering a space for reflection, exploration, and creativity.

HOW TO USE

This tool is designed for outdoor and indoor use.

The first phase takes place outside in nature and is expected to take around **20 minutes**. The trainer should give an initial explanation of the task and afterwards give space for individual exploration. Additional information or interesting facts about the area can help guide the participants. However, there should be enough sensory stimulation in the surroundings already. The trainer is encouraged to pick a larger park with diverse landscape or species.

The second phase happens indoors and takes around **20-40 minutes**. Participants can work individually or in groups.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Environmental Storytelling: Animate the Inanimate is a two-phase non-formal education tool that combines outdoor sensory exploration with indoor creative storytelling to build a meaningful and embodied connection between young people and the natural environment.

In the first phase, participants are guided outdoors to build a personal sensory repository through direct contact with nature. Using their own devices or simple materials, they are invited to collect sounds, take photographs, gather small natural objects, write down smells and textures, sketch observations, and record short videos. The facilitator encourages participants to slow down, observe carefully, and engage all their senses rather than simply looking. This phase can take place in any natural or semi-natural setting, from an urban park or riverbank to a forest or nature reserve, making the tool highly adaptable to different contexts and locations.

In the second phase, participants bring their collected impressions back into a working space and are introduced to the Animate the Inanimate method. This is a personification technique that invites participants to select one element from their sensory repository — a leaf, a bird, a body of water, a fungus, a stone — and give it human qualities, feelings, a perspective, and a voice.

Guiding questions support this process:

What does your object experience in a single day? How does it perceive the world around it? Does it have a body? Can it feel, smell, or hear? What is its relationship with the other elements around it? What does it fear, and what does it love?

From this starting point, participants develop creative outputs in the medium of their choice — a short story, a poem, a monologue, a short film, a sound piece, or a visual artwork. The creative output is then shared with the group, opening space for discussion, feedback, and reflection on the environmental themes that have emerged. No prior artistic experience is required, and the tool is equally effective with mixed-ability and multilingual groups, as it relies on sensory and embodied experience rather than verbal fluency. This makes it particularly inclusive and well suited to intercultural settings and groups that include young people with fewer opportunities. The tool naturally bridges outdoor experiential learning and indoor creative workshops, giving participants a meaningful thread that runs across multiple sessions rather than a series of disconnected activities. It can be delivered as a standalone workshop of three to four hours or embedded within a longer programme as a recurring framework across several days, with participants returning to and expanding their sensory repository over time.

NOTES FOR TRAINERS

The tool works best when the outdoor phase is unhurried and participants are given genuine freedom to explore without a fixed outcome in mind. Facilitators should resist the urge to over-structure the collection phase and instead model attentiveness and curiosity themselves. It is helpful to show one or two brief examples of Animate the Inanimate outputs — a short film, a poem, or a monologue written from a non-human perspective — before participants begin their own creative work, as this opens up their imagination and reduces anxiety about the task. The sharing and discussion phase is as important as the creative phase itself, and facilitators should allow enough time for participants to respond to each other's work and draw out the environmental themes that emerge collectively.

Suggested Materials are: Gathering Moss (Robin Wall Kimmerar), Braiding Sweetgrass (Robin Wall Kimmerar), And now we are water (Uffe Isoloitto)

AIM OF THE METHODOLOGIES

Through sensory immersion the participant enter a state of journaling and embodying. In our overwhelming fast-based reality, feeling the contrast of calm and peace in nature, creates a possibility to observe and notice. This nature-based practice aims to promote a mindful presence in nature and later create capacity for interpretation and communication of these experiences.

The methodology of environmental storytelling and personification aim to cultivate empathy and perspective-taking by inviting participants to inhabit the point of view of non-human elements of the natural world, fostering a deeper understanding of ecological interdependence.

A mutual experience in nature promotes intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding by creating a shared creative process that transcends language barriers and draws on each participant's unique cultural relationship with nature.

PHOTOS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS TOOL



