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Woodland  
Wandering  
Course Handout



# INTRODUCTION



**Hello! Thank you so much for taking part in this Woodland Wandering creative writing course. On the following pages you'll find the instructions from the accompanying audio workshop in text format, poems for inspiration and some additional resources.**

The first thing to do is to find some woodland you can walk in. This could be a deep forest or a small patch of trees. Remember to go somewhere you feel safe, and take a companion with you if you'd rather walk with a friend. If you'd prefer to do this course from your own home, you can use my woodland audio journey and the included inspiration pack so you can work at home from your imagination.

## **What you'll need:**

- A notebook, pen and highlighter or coloured pen
- The audio workshop file downloaded onto a phone or MP3 player if you won't have signal
- Sensible shoes and waterproofs (and maybe something waterproof to sit on)
- A map of where you're going (the OS Map App is helpful)
- Drinks and snacks
- Headphones if you'd like the audio files to be at their best
- A smartphone or camera
- Bigger paper, glue and scissors (back at home or outdoors if you want to work outside)
- a bag or container for gathering objects

The exercises that follow can be done in one location or as part of a walk...

## 1. CLEARING OUT & TUNING IN

In the forest, take a few moments to tune in and become aware of your breath and body. Perhaps set a timer for 5-10 minutes and mediate with your eyes open or closed, trying to stay aware of your surroundings and the present moment.

For some initial inspiration, read the following two poems by William Morris and Mary Oliver:

### **The Forest**

*William Morris*

By woodman's edge I faint and fail;  
By craftsman's edge I tell the tale.

Chestnut-tree.

High in the wood, high o'er the hall,  
Aloft I rise when low I fall.

Oak-tree.

Unmoved I stand what wind may blow.  
Swift, swift before the wind I go.



# Sleeping in the Forest

*Mary Oliver*



I thought the earth remembered me,  
she took me back so tenderly,  
arranging her dark skirts, her pockets  
full of lichens and seeds.

I slept as never before, a stone on the river bed,  
nothing between me and the white fire of the stars  
but my thoughts, and they floated light as moths  
among the branches of the perfect trees.

All night I heard the small kingdoms  
breathing around me, the insects,  
and the birds who do their work in the darkness.

All night I rose and fell, as if in water,  
grappling with a luminous doom. By morning  
I had vanished at least a dozen times  
into something better.



## EXERCISE 1

Now in your notebook, write continuously for at least 10 minutes (set a timer if you need to) about anything that comes into your head. Keep your pen moving and don't stop writing. If you don't know what to write just write "I don't know what to write". This could be initial observations about where you are, how you're feeling, what the environment is like. Write until the time is up, nobody else will see it. Empty your head onto the paper. This is a warm-up!

## 2. AMONGST THE TREES

### Listening to the senses

We're going to tune into our senses now, all of which can help us write from a more embodied, natural state. Firstly, read this poem by Pablo Neruda:

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#### Lost In The Forest

*Pablo Neruda*

Lost in the forest, I broke off a dark twig  
and lifted its whisper to my thirsty lips:  
maybe it was the voice of the rain crying,  
a cracked bell, or a torn heart.

Something from far off it seemed  
deep and secret to me, hidden by the earth,  
a shout muffled by huge autumns,  
by the moist half-open darkness of the leaves.

Wakening from the dreaming forest there, the hazel-sprig  
sang under my tongue, its drifting fragrance  
climbed up through my conscious mind

as if suddenly the roots I had left behind  
cried out to me, the land I had lost with my childhood—  
and I stopped, wounded by the wandering scent.



## EXERCISE 2

Journal from your senses for 5-10 mins each about a) what you can see b) what you can smell and c) what you can feel, either with your skin, hands or eyes. For example, you might not touch a piece of bark but you can imagine it's texture, or how something feels, such as the presence of air. Switch between senses if you find it hard to focus on one at a time. Try to fill at least a page or more with writing.



### 3. FOREST VOICES The stories around us

The woods are full of voices; those of birds, animals, trees, leaves and the ground underfoot. Many trees have been there a long time, what are their stories? In this exercise, see if you can listen to the voice of the forest (literal and/or imagined). What does this woodland want you to know, or what would it like you to say on it's behalf? Think of stories that feature woodland; fairy tales such as Red Riding Hood, childhood stories, novels or modern narratives.

Before we do the next exercise, read the following poem  
by Les Murray:

# Cockspur Bush

*Les Murray*

I am lived. I am died.  
I was two-leafed three times, and grazed,  
But then I was stemmed and multiplied,  
Sharp-thorned and caned, nested and raised,  
Earth-salt by sun-sugar. I was innerly sung  
By thrushes who need fear no eyed skin thing.  
Finched, ant-run, flowered, I am given the years  
In now fewer berries, now more of sling  
Out over directions of luscious dung.  
Of water crankshaft, of gases the gears  
My shape is cattle-pruned to a crown spread sprung  
Above the starve-gut instinct to make prairies  
Of everywhere. My thorns are stuck with caries  
Of mice and rank lizards by the butcher bird.  
Inches in, baby seed-screamers get supplied.  
I am lived and died in, vine woven, multiplied.



## EXERCISE 3

Pick a voice that isn't yours; a tree, a bird, a leaf, the ground, the wind. Maybe there's a character that comes to your mind that you already know or you can make up. You could be a birch sapling or Sleeping Beauty, a crow or an acorn. What does the voice (or voices) want to say to you? Imagine you are that being or object and write for ~ up to 20 minutes.

## 4. COLLECTING LANGUAGE

### Gathering words, images & objects

Words and inspiration are available to us at any moment! In the next exercises, we're going to gather as much language and imagery as we can in a short space of time to use when we start to craft our pieces of writing.

#### EXERCISE 4

Make a quick list for 10 minutes or so, jot down every colour and species you can see. Try to be as specific as possible about colours e.g: terracotta mud, or white-silver bark, or emerald green moss. If you can't identify a species, describe it in a sentence.



#### EXERCISE 5

Using the bag you've brought with you, gather a handful of natural objects. These might be sticks, leaves, stones, acorns or man-made objects such as crisp packets! You can do this throughout the workshop.

#### EXERCISE 6

Use a camera or phone to take photos of things that intrigue you. Take snapshots of woodland paths, close-ups, yourself, the sky through the canopy. Try to take a photograph you're happy with. You can also capture video or sounds using a smartphone, we'll use these to write from later.



## 5 .CRAFTING YOUR WRITING

Now it's time to start sifting through what you've come up with and weaving words together. You can do this back at home or outdoors if you really like working outside. If using the cut-up technique demonstrated in the tutorial video you'll need a surface to work on and glue/scissors. Otherwise all you need is your notebook, pen and highlighter.

Remember that you don't have to write a whole poem, you might be using this course to write stories, prose or non-fiction. You could combine your writing with photographs you've taken. This next step might produce a piece of writing, or be a jumping off point for a whole new project!

If you find the idea of a whole piece overwhelming, write a haiku of three lines - something of the moment that doesn't have to mean anything. Here's an example Haiku, which are three short lines. You could join a few Haiku together to make a longer poem.

An ageing willow–  
its image unsteady  
in the flowing stream

~*Robert Spiess*



Here's a Sylvia Plath poem for inspiration and example of how you can weave personal themes into your woodland writing:

## Winter Trees

*Sylvia Plath*

The wet dawn inks are doing their blue dissolve.  
On their blotter of fog the trees  
Seem a botanical drawing.  
Memories growing, ring on ring,  
A series of weddings.

Knowing neither abortions nor bitchery,  
Truer than women,  
They seed so effortlessly!  
Tasting the winds, that are footless,  
Waist-deep in history.

Full of wings, otherworldliness.  
In this, they are Ledas.  
O mother of leaves and sweetness  
Who are these pietas?  
The shadows of ringdoves chanting, but chasing nothing.

*(Ledas, from greek mythology, laid two eggs bearing twins after being seduced by Zeus  
- twins of divine parenthood)*

*Pietas - Latin word, root of Piety, used for ancient Roman personification of familial affection, loyalty, duty, religion etc. Older uses suggest the isolation of a certain mystical quality where things just happen without question.*



## **TECHNIQUE: Rearranging**

Go through EVERYTHING you've written with a highlighter or coloured pen and underline the bits that stand out - words, sentences, ideas. When you've finished, write these lines and words out again by themselves. You can then start to rearrange them into ideas for poems.

A great way to do this more intuitively and visually is to use the cut-up technique (demonstrated in the second workshop video). If you write each line or word out on larger paper and cut them out, you can literally rearrange them and stick them down when you're finished. It's fun to bring magazines, newspapers or old books into this process or even use your own photographs!



## **TECHNIQUE: Acrostic writing**

Take a line you've written and write each word from that line in a vertical list. Then, using each word as the first word of a new line, write a sentence from that word. This is called an Acrostic poem.



## **TECHNIQUE: Images & objects**

Looking at the objects and photographs (and maybe video/audio) you collected, see if you can use any of these to write from - again just free writing in your notebook using that object as inspiration.

**Hopefully now you'll have at least a Haiku poem you've written, even two lines can be considered a poem!**

Using the above exercises and techniques in any combination, work at your own pace on one or more pieces of writing. I hope you've found this workshop inspiring, and will join the Field Notes FaceBook group if you're on social media. If you're not, feel free to email a piece of work to me for some comments. You can also sign up to my mailing list to stay in the loop about future courses and experiences. I'll leave you with this wonderful poem by Margaret Atwood to finish. There are also some further resources at the end of this handout. Thank you for joining me amongst the trees, and I hope to work with you again soon.



**Facebook Group: [www.facebook.com/groups/fieldnotescreative](https://www.facebook.com/groups/fieldnotescreative)**

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## The Moment

*Margaret Atwood*

The moment when, after many years  
of hard work and a long voyage  
you stand in the centre of your room,  
house, half-acre, square mile, island, country,  
knowing at last how you got there,  
and say, I own this,

is the same moment when the trees unloose  
their soft arms from around you,  
the birds take back their language,  
the cliffs fissure and collapse,  
the air moves back from you like a wave  
and you can't breathe.

No, they whisper. You own nothing.  
You were a visitor, time after time  
climbing the hill, planting the flag, proclaiming.  
We never belonged to you.  
You never found us.  
*It was always the other way round.*



***“The clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness”.***

*John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir*

## FURTHER RESOURCES

### **Ledbury Poetry Festival: Poet of the Woods**

Upload your woodland poems!

<https://www.poetry-festival.co.uk/poet-of-the-woods/>

### **The Woodland Trust**

Lots of great information and resources about woodland.

Check out their tree identification app too!

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/>

### **Gossip From the Forest by Sara Maitland**

A lovely book exploring forests and fairy tales

### **The Poetry Society**

Poetry resources, competitions, membership, journal and podcasts.

<http://poetrysociety.org.uk>

### **Arvon**

Charity dedicated to creative writing. Retreats and courses.

<https://www.arvon.org>

### **Trees for Life**

Scottish charity dedicated to re-wilding forests.

<https://treesforlife.org.uk>

### **Treesisters**

Women-led organisation supporting global woodland and forest replanting

[www.treesisters.org](http://www.treesisters.org)

### **Call of the Forest: The Forgotten Wisdom of Trees**

Brilliant 2016 documentary (available on Amazon)

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