

World Soil Day, 5th December 2019 and Responsibility Wristbands

My remit is to teach outdoors. Sessions are active and practical and most have an immediate and obvious connection to Real World issues. Sessions have either an explicit LfS focus or are taught in such a way that an LfS ethos is modelled and reinforced.

World Soil Day was on 5th December 2020. On that particular day I was working with a John Muir Award group constructing compost bins and planting Spring flowering bulbs (for early pollinators) and garlic (for humans!) in the school grounds.

I asked pupils why they thought that organisations and groups around the world felt that soils deserved their own special day. One pupil very quickly suggested that "Soils = Plants = Food = Life", other pupils said that plants provide oxygen and take in carbon dioxide which led to discussion about the importance of soils in carbon capture, another pupil had heard that plants also give off carbon dioxide Discussion was pupil led and prompted by a very simple question.

I explained the tasks we were about to do outdoors and asked pupils to connect those tasks to our classroom discussion. As is always the case, certain pupils were keen to contribute and some less so. However, I knew that working outdoors on the practical tasks would allow me to talk to the less forthcoming.

Making and Using Wristbands to Reinforce Learning

When we are about to embark on a block of work (perhaps the John Muir Award or a sequence of sessions in the school grounds or in nearby greenspace), the class work with a partner to make a personal wristband. The wristbands are used to reinforce our responsibilities when working and learning outdoors.

The photograph on the right shows responsibility wristbands made by pupils. The bands are made using 3 strands of wool. Each strand represents a responsibility we take on when we are learning outdoors though the responsibilities really apply anywhere.



Specifically, we are responsible for

- ourselves,
- our classmates and other people
- the environment (including all living things in it) we are using.

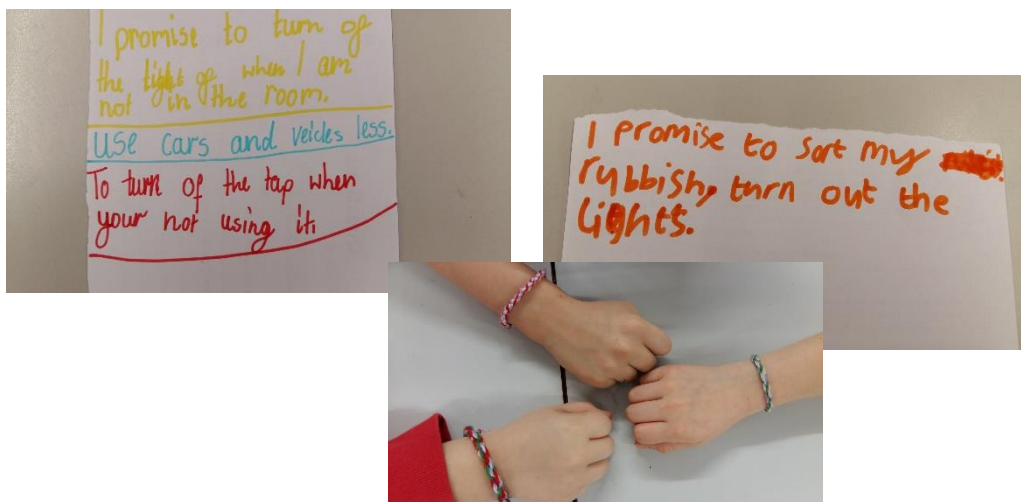
Pupils choose a strand of wool to represent themselves, a strand to represent other people and finally a strand to represent the environment (or space) we are working in. Using the three different colours, and working with a partner, pupils make their wristbands. Once

each pupil has a band, we recap on the responsibilities. We introduce the principles of Leave No Trace and reiterate the need for collaboration and teamwork.

The wristbands are very popular with pupils. They are fun to make and, though they are a test of fine motor skills for many, everyone gets great satisfaction from creating something attractive out of strands of scrap wool. They are worn for weeks at a time and some children keep the bands somewhere safe and bring them out specifically for learning outdoors.

I refer to the responsibilities throughout subsequent sessions. We might do this at the start of a session or during plenaries when we are looking back over what went well and what needs to be developed. If we are planning a task, it is easy to ask pupils to consider which responsibilities that particular task relates to. On World Soil Day, I was able to ask pupils which responsibilities were linked to building compost bins and planting and at the same time assess the pupils' understanding of the Sciences Experiences and Outcomes we were addressing.

Photographs below show some of the pledges P4 pupils made after making their own wristbands. All relate to the 3 responsibilities.



The wristband idea was borrowed (then adapted) from a colleague with Forest Schools training. Making the bands engages pupils. Having the wristbands to refer to as a physical object helps make connections in the learning. The intention is to highlight how everything is connected and that all of our actions have an impact - preferably a positive one!

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