

The Green Man

There have been stories of green men told for centuries and across many countries. Whilst he can mean different things to different people, he often represents an environmental guardian and keeper of the forest. As teachers, we have a responsibility to teach sustainability. The green man can be a useful cross curricular tool in exploring this.

We often tell a story when working with children in nursery all the way up to secondary, unfortunately I do not know the origin of it nor the true version, yet children enjoy it and it sparks their imagination.

The story goes

Once upon a time, there lived a rich and vain young prince. Servants prepared his favourite foods each day. His every wish was granted. He cared not for people nor animals.

One hot day, the young prince decided to ride his horse through the woods that were part of his kingdom, hunting small animals for fun. He thought that the woods and all its creatures belonged to him and he could do as he pleased with them. He raced over the woods and fields scaring many creatures as he went.

It was a hot day and he needed to cool down. He came to a loch – a beautiful, clear, cool loch.

The young man began to remove all of his fine clothing. He laid his clothes neatly folded on an old log and by the edge of the loch and tied his horse to a tree before jumping into the cool water.

While he was swimming and splashing away, a hand reached out from behind a tree and took his clothing and led his horse away. When the prince got out of the water, he discovered that he had nothing left to



wear save a piece of rope. He took the rope and fastened some leaves to it to make a cover up. He was a proud and vain prince. He could not go back to his home dressed like this, so instead he hid.

At night, the prince went looking for some shelter and he stumbled into a cave. He didn't sleep much that night. It was dark, and he was frightened, and he kept hearing animal noises all night.

In the morning, when the daylight came, it was clear that someone had been living in that cave! He found some food, bedding and a container for water.

Over time, the prince settled into life in the cave. He fashioned a whole garment out of leaves. He ate from the land. He covered his hand with mud to prevent stings and reached into a beehive for honey to eat. He became acquainted with all the small woodland creatures, and he cared for them, helping them over swollen streams when heavy rains fell, making sure they had food and water, and sheltering them in the cave on the chilly nights.

One day, whilst out walking he heard the screams of some scared children. Raced towards the screams and discovered two small children trapped by a wild pig threatening to charge. When he had chased the pig off, they looked at him. There he was, covered head to toe with leaves and mud, with wild beard and hair. "Are you the Green Man?" they asked.

"I guess I am," said the man, who no longer looked anything like a prince.

The children went back to the village and told their adults of the Green Man. As time passed, the villagers told their children a story about a Green Man who lived in the woods and cared for all of the small



creatures. They said he even watched out for children in the woods. The villagers faithfully left out food on winter nights for the Green Man to eat.

Many years passed, until one warm day when a hunting party came into the woods. The Green Man hid behind a tree to watch. A rich young man, a prince perhaps, became separated from his hunting group and decided to take a swim in the clear, cool loch. He took off his clothes, folded them, and left them under a tree. The Green Man reached out a hand and took the clothes and the horse, leaving behind his garment of leaves and a coil of rope. He used a sharp stick to trim his hair and beard, and rode into town, back to his parents' castle.

Some questions you could ask the children are

Who would be the green man now?

What does he need to protect?

Who looks after the forests now?

Why do they need looked after?

Why might so many cultures across the world have green man myths?

Some activities you could try are

Create green men using clay or found materials

Create homes for animals

Build a den for the green man