

SOUND ESCAPE / SOUNDSCAPE WORKSHOP

A forest sound experience as an introduction to storytelling, reading and ecological discussion

Application: school library and Croatian language / mother tongue classes

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Brief idea of the workshop

Pupils do not only listen to a story: they create it together with the facilitator. Using their voices, bodies and simple objects, they shape the sounds of nature, follow the flow of the narration, become aware of emotions and, at the end, discuss human responsibility towards nature.

1. Professional introduction: What is sound escape / soundscape?

Sound escape, or soundscape workshop, is an experiential and multisensory pedagogical activity in which storytelling is connected with sound, movement, imagination and emotional experience. In a school context, it can be described as a guided “journey through sound”: the facilitator expressively shapes the story and the atmosphere, while the pupils, according to agreed roles and signals, imitate the sounds of the space into which the story leads them, using their voices, bodies or simple objects.

This type of workshop is especially suitable for a school library and for language and literature classes because it introduces pupils to the atmosphere of a literary text, storytelling or reading. Before encountering the text, pupils calm down, focus their attention, develop their imagination, practise listening and create collaboratively. In this process, the pupil is not a passive listener, but an active co-author of the sound image of the story.

In ideal conditions, children can be placed in a real natural environment, such as a forest, meadow, riverbank or seaside. If the workshop is carried out in a library or classroom, the space is imagined: pupils close their eyes or focus their gaze on one point, while the facilitator uses voice, rhythm and expressive narration to create the feeling that they are somewhere else. This shift of the “inner space” is important because it encourages concentration, imagination and emotional involvement.

Pedagogical value

The workshop simultaneously develops auditory attention, oral language expression, non-verbal communication, group cooperation, emotional literacy and ecological awareness. It can serve as an introduction to a literary text, a stimulus for writing a story, creative retelling, drama play or a discussion about environmental protection.

2. Purpose of the workshop in the library and in language and literature classes

- Introducing the atmosphere of a text: before reading or storytelling, pupils enter the space of the story experientially, for example a forest, meadow, river or sea.
- Deepening concentration: pupils learn to listen to the facilitator, wait for their signal, and control the volume and duration of a sound.
- Encouraging imagination: sounds and expressive storytelling help pupils create inner images and connect them with language expression.

- Developing emotional literacy: pupils name emotions, recognise how feelings change during the story, and learn to express them through safe, agreed reactions.
- Raising ecological awareness: encountering an “inappropriate object” in nature, such as an old television, encourages discussion about waste, responsibility and the protection of natural spaces.

3. Workshop aims

- to develop focused listening, attention and self-regulation during a shared activity;
- to encourage imagination, experiential reading and the creation of atmosphere before literary or narrative work;
- to develop oral expression, clear pronunciation, rhythm, tempo and voice modulation;
- to train pupils to create a sound background collaboratively and to respect agreed rules;
- to encourage the recognition and naming of emotions: relaxation, joy, surprise, fear, concern, delight;
- to develop ecological sensitivity and responsible behaviour towards nature.

4. Expected learning outcomes

Area	The pupil will be able to...
Listening and concentration	follow the facilitator’s instructions, react to the agreed signal and participate without disturbing the group.
Language expression	describe an imagined space, retell part of the experience and connect sound with words, images and feelings.
Creativity	imitate a sound from nature using voice, body or an object, and contribute to a shared sound image.
Emotional literacy	name their own feeling during the story and express an agreed emotional state through a simple vocal reaction.
Ecological awareness	explain why waste should not be left in nature, whom or what it harms, and what should be done when we notice it.

5. Workshop organisation

- Duration: 15 minutes in the shortened version; 25 to 35 minutes if a longer reflection and ecological discussion are included.
- Pupils' age: adaptable for both lower and upper primary school; particularly suitable for Grades 3 to 6, with adaptation for younger or older pupils.
- Space: library, classroom, schoolyard or natural environment. Indoors, pupils sit in a circle or semicircle.
- Materials: sheets of paper for crumpling, desks or benches for rain sounds, optional role cards, a picture of a forest or a short musical background for the introduction; however, the workshop can also be carried out without technology.
- Rules: we listen to the facilitator, make the sound only at the agreed signal, pay attention to volume, do not mock anyone's voice, and everyone participates according to their abilities.
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Facilitator's signals

Before beginning, agree on three simple signals: a raised hand means silence; a circular movement of the palm means increase the sound or continue; a lowered palm means make the sound quieter or stop. In this way, the facilitator can "conduct" the sound image of the forest without interrupting the story.

6. How pupils imitate forest sounds

Phenomenon/animal	How the sound is performed	Pedagogical note
Wind	Pupils blow softly: "fff" or "shhh", first slowly, then more strongly. They may gently move their hands like branches.	Useful for learning breath control, volume and intensity.
Leaves on branches	Rubbing palm against palm, very quietly, like rustling.	Introduces a calm atmosphere and requires careful listening.
Walking on dry leaves	Crumpling paper or gently pressing paper with fingers.	Pupils can alternate between slow and fast walking.

Rain	Fingers gently tap on the table; then finger snapping; then palms on thighs. The speed represents the intensity of the rain.	Can be “conducted” from raindrops to a downpour and back again.
Birdsong	Short whistles, “tweet-tweet”, “peep-peep”; each group may have a different bird call.	Creates a feeling of joy and liveliness.
Flight of birds	Gently tapping palms on the chest or lightly waving the arms.	Emphasise that the sound should be quiet and soft.
Owl	A deep, quiet “hoo-hoo”, with pauses.	Useful for creating a mysterious night-like atmosphere.
Frog	A short “croak-croak” or “ribbit-ribbit” in a group.	Can be connected with a puddle after the rain.
Bees	Closed mouth: “mmmm” or soft buzzing “zzzz”.	Discuss that we do not touch bees and that they are important for nature.
Mosquitoes	A high, thin “zzzz”, short and playful.	Suitable for a brief comic pause.
Snake	A quiet, prolonged “ssss”, without sudden movements.	Introduce the topic of fear and caution, but without frightening pupils.
Bear	A low, quiet “grrr” and slow stomps with the feet.	Emphasise respect for wild animals and a safe distance.

7. Workshop flow: Forest sound escape

- 1. Introductory calming: pupils sit in a circle, the facilitator agrees on the signals and invites them to “enter” the imagined forest.
- 2. Distribution of sounds: each group or individual pupils receive one sound: wind, leaves, rain, birds, owl, frogs, bees, mosquitoes, snake, bear.
- 3. Guided storytelling: the facilitator tells the story slowly, expressively and with pauses; pupils join in when they hear their signal or when the facilitator looks at them / points to them.
- 4. Emotional check-in: the facilitator pauses the story several times and asks how the pupils feel; they may answer with a word or with an agreed sound.

- 5. Ecological turning point: in the heart of the forest, pupils find an old broken television/computer. The story pauses and turns into a discussion about waste in nature.
- 6. Final reflection: in one sentence, pupils say what they heard, what they saw in their imagination, what they felt, and what they would do to protect nature.

8. Facilitator's scenario: Journey into the heart of the forest

Instruction for reading the scenario

The text in quotation marks may be spoken directly to the pupils. The instructions in brackets are intended for the facilitator and for the pupils performing sounds. The facilitator does not have to read the text literally: improvising, slowing down, repeating a sentence, changing the voice and adapting the flow to the group are desirable.

Entering the forest

"Imagine that we are standing at the edge of a large green forest. Behind us is the school building, and in front of us a path begins. Take a deep breath. The air is fresh. We can hear only a gentle wind moving through the treetops."

(The facilitator gives a signal to the wind group: a soft "shhh/fff". The leaves group rubs their palms together. The sound should be gentle and even.)

"Step by step, we go deeper. Dry leaves rustle under our feet."

(The walking group slowly crumples paper, as if someone were carefully walking over leaves.)

Emotional question: "How do you feel now: calm, curious, excited? Show the agreed feeling with one quiet sound."

Morning among the birds

"The forest is waking up. Somewhere high on a branch, the first bird greets the morning. Then another joins in, and a third. The treetops move, and a flock of birds flies above us."

(The bird group makes short singing sounds. The bird-flight group lightly taps their palms on their chests or gently waves their arms.)

"Let us stop and listen. What has changed in the atmosphere of the forest? Does it feel lighter, brighter, more joyful?"

Emotional question: "Who feels joy or delight because of the birdsong? What would joy sound like? Let everyone make one short, bright sound of joy together."

Small inhabitants of the forest

"As we walk along the path, we notice the small inhabitants of the forest. Bees are buzzing around a flower. A little further away, near a puddle, frogs can be heard. One annoying mosquito circles around our ear, but we remain calm."

(The bee group buzzes softly: "mmmm/zzzz". The frog group says "croak-croak". The mosquito group makes a very short, thin buzzing sound.)

"We do not touch the bees because they have an important job. We listen to the frogs from a distance. We can wave the mosquito away with our hand, but without panic."

Emotional question: "What do you feel when you hear bees or mosquitoes: caution, laughter, discomfort, calm? Why?"

A change in the weather

"Suddenly, the light changes a little. Clouds have covered the sun. The wind is stronger. The leaves are no longer rustling gently; the treetops sway faster and faster."

(The facilitator increases the wind with a hand movement. The leaves group rubs their palms faster.)

"The first drop falls on our palm. Then the second. Then the third. The rain slowly begins."

(The rain group first taps their fingers on the table. Then finger snapping. Then palms on thighs. With the palm of the hand, the facilitator indicates the rain growing stronger and then calming down.)

"The rain is now strong, but we are together. We take shelter under a wide treetop and listen to the forest breathing."

Emotional question: "Are you worried because of the strong wind and rain? What helps us stay calm? What would we do if we were really in the forest?"

A mysterious encounter

"The rain is easing. The forest is wet and smells of earth. In the distance, we hear an owl, although it is not night yet. Its voice sounds like a question: who is in my forest?"

(The owl group says "hoo-hoo" with pauses.)

"Something moves on the path in front of us. Long, thin, silent. A snake glides across the path and disappears among the leaves."

(The snake group makes a soft "ssss" sound.)

Emotional question: "Who felt fear or discomfort? Why are we afraid of snakes? What is reasonable behaviour: touching it, shouting, or calmly moving away?"

"A little further on, we hear a heavy step. Someone large is moving between the trees. Perhaps a bear. We do not approach. We do not shout. We simply respect that the forest is its home."

(The bear group makes a deep, quiet "grrr" and two or three slow stomps with their feet.)

Emotional question: "What do you feel now: fear, respect, surprise? Why must we not disturb wild animals?"

An unusual discovery in the heart of the forest

"After a few more steps, we come to a small clearing. The rain has stopped. The birds call again, but more quietly now. And then, in the middle of the forest, between ferns and wet leaves, we notice something that does not belong in this place at all."

(The facilitator raises a hand: all sounds gradually fade away.)

“In the clearing stands an old, broken television. Or maybe an old computer. The screen is cracked. A cable is hanging down. Around it are leaves, soil and traces of rain. Suddenly, the forest becomes silent.”

(A short complete silence of 5 to 10 seconds.)

“What has happened to our forest? How do you feel now: surprised, angry, sad, confused? Why?”

9. Ecological discussion after discovering the old television or computer

After the sounds fade away, the facilitator does not immediately provide ready-made answers. The aim is for pupils to imagine, conclude and verbalise their thoughts spontaneously. The discussion can be held in a circle, and answers may be written on the board or on a large sheet of paper.

Facilitator's question	Possible directions of pupils' answers
What is this television/computer doing in the middle of the forest?	Someone threw it away; someone did not know where to take electronic waste; someone acted irresponsibly.
Who could have left it there, and why?	A person who did not want to pay or look for proper disposal; someone who did not think about the consequences.
How do we feel when we see waste in nature?	Sad, angry, worried, surprised; we feel that the beauty and safety of the space have been disturbed.
Whom or what does such waste harm?	Animals, plants, soil, water, people who walk there, and future generations.
May we touch unknown electronic waste ourselves?	Not without an adult; it may be dangerous, sharp, dirty or contain harmful parts.
Whom can we inform?	A teacher, parents, the school, municipal services, local authorities, nature rangers or the competent waste services.
What would we do as responsible guardians of the forest?	Photograph the location with the help of adults, report the waste, organise an educational activity, teach others about proper disposal.
Why do we not throw waste into nature?	Because it pollutes soil and water, endangers animals, spoils natural beauty and shows disrespect towards our shared space.

10. Closing the workshop

- Circle of feelings: each pupil says one word describing how they felt at the beginning and how they feel at the end of the workshop.
- One image from the imagination: the pupil describes the scene they most clearly “saw” while listening to the story.
- One ecological decision: the pupil completes the sentence: “When I see waste in nature, I will...”
- Connection with reading: the facilitator can introduce the literary text by saying: “Now that we have heard, felt and imagined the forest, we are ready to enter the story we are going to read.”

11. Tips for a facilitator leading the workshop for the first time

1. Start simply. Do not include too many sounds at once. Five to seven sound roles are enough for the first performance.
2. Practise the silence signal. The most important thing is that pupils know when to stop. This preserves concentration and group safety.
3. Conduct the volume. Use your hand to show when the sound should grow louder, become quieter or stop completely.
4. Use pauses. Silence is just as important as sound. It strengthens the experience and focuses attention.
5. Do not aim for perfection. The goal is not a technically perfect imitation, but a shared experience, listening, imagination and cooperation.
6. Pay attention to emotions. If fear or discomfort appears, normalise it: “It is all right to feel afraid. We are learning how to behave calmly and responsibly.”
7. End with discussion. Sound escape should lead towards words: describing, retelling, concluding and responsible action.

12. Short presentation of the workshop for a colleague

I use this workshop in the school library and in language and literature classes as an introduction to the atmosphere of storytelling or reading. Through a guided story, nature sounds and simple body or voice reactions, pupils develop concentration, imagination, listening and focus. The facilitator leads them into an imagined natural space, for example a forest, while pupils imitate wind, leaves, rain, birds, insects and animals. During the story, we also discuss emotions: when we feel relaxed, frightened, surprised, worried or joyful. In the final part of the story, pupils find an old broken television or computer in the forest, which becomes a stimulus for discussion about waste, responsibility and the protection of nature. In this way, the workshop connects literature, drama expression, emotional literacy and ecological awareness.

13. Shortened 15-minute version

Time	Activity	What the facilitator / pupils do
1–2 min	Agreeing on rules	Silence signal, signal for louder/quieter sound, distribution of sound roles.
3–5 min	Entering the forest	Wind, leaves, walking on leaves; a short question about feelings.
6–8 min	Life in the forest	Birds, bees, frogs, mosquitoes; discussion about joy, discomfort and caution.
9–11 min	Change in the weather	Rain grows stronger and then calms down; a question about concern and safe behaviour.
12–13 min	Mysterious encounter	Owl, snake, bear; a question about fear and respect for animals.
14–15 min	Ecological turning point	Discovering an old television/computer; one or two key questions: who left it there, whom does it harm, what shall we do?