Seeds of Change: Growing a Living History of Bristol

We are inviting primary schools and community groups to design and create their own ballast seed gardens, in Spring 2013. Taking inspiration from the journeys made by ballast seeds hundreds of years ago, this project invites us to explore our own journeys and relationships to the city of Bristol.

It includes some exciting opportunities for learning outside, as well as inside, the classroom. Choose from a menu of workshops for upper Key Stage 2 groups, designed to enhance learning in a wide range of curriculum areas including geography, history, science, literacy and art:

**Growing your living history of Bristol**  
An introduction on how to grow and care for your ballast seed garden

**The Secret Sounds of Plants**  
A micro-sound tour of the ballast seed garden and other plants in the Botanic Garden’s worldwide collection.

**Picturing the Tale**  
Explore the magical features of plants through plant-related folklore from around the world.

**Routes and Roots**  
A boat trip around Bristol’s waterfront with a comic storyteller to explore our own roots and relationships to our city.

**We are all here together: filmmaking workshop for community groups**  
Create meaningful records of personal journeys that value our diverse heritages and links to Bristol.
Background to Seeds of Change

From the 17th – early 20th C when Bristol was a working port, ballast from trade ships was often flung into the river before the boats docked. As well as earth, stones and gravel this ballast contained seeds of plants from wherever the ship had sailed. These seeds can lie dormant for hundreds of years, and by harvesting and growing them it is possible to develop a ‘living history’ of Bristol that shows its maritime trading past.

Brazilian artist Maria Thereza Alves is involved in ongoing investigations into this aspect of Bristol’s maritime history. Utilising an old grain barge, she has created a ‘ballast seed garden’ which is currently located on the floating harbour, next to Castle Park. This floating garden is populated with a selection of non-native plants and symbolizes a living history of the city’s trade and maritime past. The floating garden offers the visitor an opportunity to view the ballast seed plants from various levels and perspectives. The garden was designed by German designer Gitta Gschwendtner and was developed by Arnolfini with support from Bristol City Council and specialist advice from Nick Wray, curator of Bristol University’s Botanic Garden. Students from the Royal Horticultural Society courses at the Botanic Garden raised the young plants and helped plant the ballast seed garden display. For further information see www.arnolfini.org.uk/ballastseedgarden.

The plants have been selected from a list of species found growing on ballast seed dumps at British ports including Bristol. A more extensive range of Ballast Seed Garden plants are grown in a display at the University of Bristol Botanic Garden. Both plantings will be enriched with more species as they are sourced in future years.
Growing your own ballast seed garden – the practicalities

How big would the garden need to be?
As big as you want it to be: from a small symbolic collection of pots to a whole allotment sized plot within the grounds.

Where would it go?
This is up to you. There may already be a vacant plot or empty area in your grounds that is perfect for this garden. If you do not have much green space, we can help you design a garden using planters that can sit happily on tarmac.

Who would design it?
The Seeds of Change team will present you with suggestions and ideas to help you design it. You may wish to involve pupils, parents or users of your community centre in the creative design stage. Your garden could also become a shelter, a bench or enhance the landscaping of your playground – there are endless possibilities!

What support is available?
Students from the University of Bristol and UWE will be volunteering to support the design and garden building process. The students will also source and organise delivery of materials and equipment. This also offers those students valuable experience of public engagement and experience with schools. The students will be CRB checked – please talk to us about the specific CRB requirements for your school.

Seeds and building materials will be provided. If you are particularly ambitious with your garden we can talk with you about funding options.

Subsidies for coach travel are available for the workshops that happen outside school.

How can we use the garden to enhance learning?
You will be provided with a resource to assist with the processes related to gardening and caring for the ballast seed garden.

Printed and downloadable Seeds of Change resources will also be available to support each of the workshops, so that you can work on pre and post activities, alongside a trip, should you wish to.

What is the timeframe for the whole project?
The project is being planned around planting season!

Garden building and planting can begin in March 2013. The gardens should be finished by the end of May.

The Seeds of Change workshops will be available throughout March, April, May and June. A final celebratory Seeds of Change event for all participating schools will take place at the end of the summer term.
Seeds of Change workshops

Available throughout March, April, May and June 2013

**Growing your living history of Bristol: introduction to ballast seed gardening**

With pupils we will consider how to grow and care for a garden, as well as giving some background on some of the more unusual ‘ballast seed’ species they will be planting. We will also explore some fun ideas around designing a small garden.

This is a workshop that can be adapted for a class group, gardening club or other group at key stage two. It can also be incorporated into an assembly.

With a postgraduate from the School of Biological Sciences at Bristol University.

Curriculum Links: History, Science, Art

**The Secret Sounds of Plants: a micro-sound workshop**

At the Botanic Garden, Stoke Bishop

A micro-sound tour of the ballast seed garden and other plants in the botanic gardens worldwide collection.

A unique opportunity for pupils to explore the secret sounds of plants. Using headphones, pupils will be able to listen in to clicks, gurgles and other more unusual noises as the plants respond to light and water. They may even be able to listen to some extraordinary live action from the notorious Venus Fly Trap!

With sound artist Matt Davies and Nick Wray (curator of the University of Bristol Botanic Garden).

Curriculum links: Science & Geography

**Picturing the Tale: creative workshop**

Explore the magical features of plants through various plant-related fairytales from African, Slavic, South American, British and Asian folklore.

Pupils will listen to folktales from around the world and make connections with plants, places and histories. A drawing activity will invite personal and creative illustrations for the stories and plants.

With postgraduate student from the Department of History at Bristol University

Curriculum links: Art & Literacy
**Routes and Roots: Storytelling on the barge**

At the Bristol docks

Take a trip around Bristol’s waterfront with a comic storyteller. We will explore our own roots and relationships to our city, whilst having a lot of fun!

Starting from Arnolfini, the trip will include a short journey on a boat around the Bristol docks and a visit to explore the exotic plants of the floating Ballast Seed Garden, located near Castle Park.

With a local storyteller

Curriculum links: History & Literacy

**We are all here together: Filmmaking workshop**

For community groups

Taking inspiration from the journeys taken by the ballast seeds hundreds of years ago, this oral history workshop will invite us to explore our own journeys and relationship to the city of Bristol.

Working with a filmmaker you will explore the idea that wherever we came from, we are all here together. Learn some basic filmmaking techniques and exchange experiences and ideas with others in your group. This workshop will aim to create meaningful records of personal journeys and family histories valuing our diverse heritages and links to this city.

With a local filmmaker and workshop facilitator.

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For more information about Seeds of Change: Growing a Living History of Bristol please contact Martha Crean on 0117 3318313 or email martha.crean@bristol.ac.uk

For further information about Seeds of Change: Growing a Living History of Bristol, see web: bristol.ac.uk/seeds-of-change