

Workshops offered by Claire Simpson



I work with a vast array of materials and resources, it all depends upon specific projects, the participants, the settings and the themes being explored. Very often I work on long term projects with schools and community groups exploring a theme (such as the history and stories of a specific place, or creating caring spaces, or exploring issues around recycling or creating wildlife friendly outdoor spaces).

I do also run one off workshops and projects, always seeking to provide resources and materials that are accessible, tactile, engaging and which ignite imaginations and ideas.

There are LOTS of images and further information on my website with links to other projects and lots of examples of workshops. Please get in touch if you would like to discuss specific ideas or workshop formats.

<http://storiesunderstones.weebly.com/index.html>

I work with many different groups and have years of experience running creative projects with schools, pre-schools, day centres, in woodlands, nature reserves and many other places. I believe firmly in giving access to creativity and imagination through setting up environments which are inclusive, engaging, caring and relaxing. I believe we all (whatever age we are) have a deep rooted need to create, to explore, to play and to manipulate tactile materials. Working with resources such as clay is incredibly soothing and releases so many other things that are vital for us all as humans.

Examples of sessions I can offer for schools, (for pupils and for staff during inset days and twilight sessions), groups of children in other settings and also for groups of adults (eg gatherings of groups of friends and family for special birthdays):



ALL sessions listed below are completely suitable for beginners and no previous experience is needed of the techniques. I bring all materials and equipment with me. Usually sessions need enough space for participants to move around and manipulate materials, lots (but not all) of the sessions require tables to work at and lots need access to water. Usually its best to work in a space where its ok to get a bit messy (so not an area with expensive new carpets!).

Felt making – wet felt and needle felt. This is a wonderfully tactile technique. I've made felt with children aged 4 and over as well as with adults, its an easy technique to get to grips with and produces wonderful results. You can create individual pieces, large group pieces, 2d and 3d... you can combine it with fabric collage and you can add natural objects and little fabric off-cuts etc.

Paper making – again another wonderfully tactile technique which I've used with very young children, adults and all ages in between. I like to work with scrap paper that's otherwise destined for the bin – and you can create all sorts of wonderful layered decorative effects with colours, snippets of fabric and leaves etc. Its also great done outside on a warm day where you can gather leaves etc to add.

Print-making – mono print, oil printing and other techniques, frequently also using natural materials. I'm part of a studio print-making group based in Nottingham and adore working with print, it gives all sorts of decorative and unexpected results and lends itself wonderfully to exploration and discovery. I especially love working with natural materials and much of my own artwork explores prints with leaves, twigs, feathers etc. With groups I can bring equipment for a range of techniques which don't need a printing press – but, where applicable, I can also arrange to hire out a studio space in Nottingham where there is a printing press.

Hand made books – which can combine print-making, paper making and collage etc. Making books can work with all ages and be an activity in its own right or can sit alongside other techniques in a bigger project. I use a variety of techniques to make books (often teeny books): folding, stitching, fixing, rolling, cutting, collaging and binding. This has often lent itself to the creation of stories and poems in books created during projects (for example memory books created during residential work in the Peak District).



Shadow puppets and shadow story theatre – I've worked with shadows for years and frequently this is combined with working with movement / drama practitioners to explore manipulation of shadows (both objects created in projects but also using our own bodies on larger scale shadow work). I often run half day and full day shadow puppet / shadow theatre workshops (ideally using a space which can become relatively dark) and this works wonderfully in its own right but also links to story telling and all sorts of exciting scientific explorations around colour and light.

Poems and stories outside in the landscape – this works wonderfully with children and adults and is something I use a lot when running inset day training for primary school teachers.

Den making – both on a small scale (eg pixie homes under trees) or on a larger scale so that children and adults can fit inside. Dens are wonderful things and I've made hundreds over the years with children and adults – both inside and outside. Creating the spaces is a really wonderful thing and then using them as place to make further things or to share stories or unwind becomes very special indeed.

Altered books / paper folding and sculpture – this is something I use a lot when creating the work I exhibit myself but its also something I've been bringing into projects for many years. With children this includes creating paper birds, boats, houses, little books, flowers, leaves etc – as well as longer sessions to explore ways of altering whole books.

Patterns in nature – creating transient images / non-permanent arrangements with natural materials, which photograph beautifully and can also link with creating poems and stories. Ideally a session to explore this would take place outside, or would entail an exploration outside to gather items to use - but I can also bring in lots of natural materials and run this as an inside session. Its best linked with explorations of the seasons and can also link with lots of the other techniques mentioned here (eg patterns can be turned into stop frame animations or making patterns can be part of a longer day exploring natural materials and then using print or felt making etc).



Stop frame animation – I use stop frame animation a lot with groups, often combined with a set of other techniques. It works wonderfully and for children is a great way to explore story mapping and sequential thinking. It works best in small groups and can combine any number of different items to animate – children’s models, drawings, paintings, collected objects (eg animations of autumnal leaves and twigs)... the possibilities are endless.

Living willow (in winter) – I’ve created several living willow structures in schools, pupil referral units and wildlife friendly garden areas. Living willow does need to be planted in winter in order for it to have the best chance of forming roots. It also requires a bit of care after planting (watering and staking etc) just to give it the opportunity to settle in and establish good roots.

Clay work – inside and outside. Clay is a wonderfully tactile natural material and one that I use again and again. I used clay endlessly on my fine art degree many years ago and am constantly drawn to it and the possibilities it brings. I always use real clay with groups (sometimes we dig it up and prepare it ourselves) and occasionally we create work which is then fired in a kiln, but often I use clay as part of creating more transient things such as tree creatures outside.

Cob ovens – I’ve used clay for many, many years and recently have begun to explore the use of cob (clay and sand mixed and used as a building material) and this has included building cob ovens. They work really well as a community project as part of creating a special outside space. Cob ovens can be incredibly decorative AND they create wonderful bread, pizza, roast vegetables and so much more.

Willow lanterns - I’ve made lanterns on many projects over the 25 years I’ve been working with groups – and the magical light they cast and the way they illuminate the dark always bring a sense of awe and wonder. I use willow (withies) with a tissue and PVA covering to make lanterns; they have candles built into the framework so that they are secure, safe and weather-proof. Much bigger structures need to be lit with battery-powered lights, but it is candlelight that creates the magical atmosphere that a lantern procession can generate. I’ve noticed how people carry candle-lit lanterns with calm and care and reverence.



Bookings:

I usually need a few weeks notice for bookings (occasionally there might be last minute space available but generally I'm planning several months at a time in my diary).

The best way to contact me is either through the contact form on my website (which sends me an email directly):

<http://storiesunderstones.weebly.com/contact-claire.html>

or through sending a message to my work Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Stories-under-stones-Claire-Simpson>

Workshop costs usually range from £80 - to £300 depending on whether it's a half day, full day, how much planning and preparation is involved (often projects involve several meetings) and the distance of travel, size of group, materials consumed etc. (I'm based in Belper, so travel within a set radius is free but beyond this then a cost is added). Costs of sessions includes preparation and use of resources; costs of actual consumable workshop materials vary - I usually bring a selection of things with me for workshops and then charge just for the materials that are consumed (eg fleece used in felt making). Please feel free to contact me to discuss costs as this does vary from session to session and technique to technique.

I'm also a qualified forest school leader with many years experience running projects in woodland. This also means that in certain workshop settings I can create a reflective outdoor calm space around a campfire at the end of the day (I have a portable fire bowl I can bring in) and snacks such as popcorn etc. This does require a certain ratio of adults and the right setting, but can be a very magical and special way to end a days creative work.

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