



# Journeys in the Spirit

Children's work  
Topical Activity

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## Exploring our relationship with the Earth – a simple ritual

### A Council of All Beings – a ritual for today

This Council of All Beings is modified from *Thinking like a Mountain: toward a Council of All Beings* by Joanna Macy, Arne Naess, John Seed, and Pat Fleming. It also draws on a version written by the Institute for Humane Education (U.S). [www.HumaneEducation.org](http://www.HumaneEducation.org)

This was used with the Children's Programme 2 (5 – 11 year olds) at Yearly Meeting Gathering Canterbury 2011. The intention of this activity is that everybody is encouraged to feel and explore the simplest and deepest connection we each have with the Earth and everything we share it with – plant, rock, water, tree, animal, insect, fish, bird, air, soil. What is offered here is a script for the ritual that will last about 1 hour.

Our Quaker way of combining quiet reflection and creative activity is a perfect basis for doing this as a whole Meeting activity, as an all age Meeting for Worship, at a young people's event or in Children's Meeting for Worship.

#### First things to do:

- Make sure that you have at least one person to work with you on this.
- Read the script through carefully before doing it – talk about it. Share any feelings that you have about what you are about to do.
- Add your own notes to the script as is helpful.
- Look at [www.joannamacy.net/](http://www.joannamacy.net/) and read some of the content as background.

#### Resources you will need:

- Good quality drawing and colouring pencils; felt pens; wax crayons; oil pastels; A4 card – corrugated is good or at least slightly heavier than normal A4 card; scissors; white string or elastic.
- Carpet samples or tiles or cushions to mark out the circle in which everybody is invited to sit – makes the floor more comfortable and can, somehow, keep 'wrigglers' in their place.

#### What to do and say as facilitator of a Council of All Beings:

##### Being ready:

- Set out your arts materials on tables around the room – outside of the circle in which people are going to sit.
- Be sitting ready on the floor or a chair as people come in. Have a colleague 'on the door' to greet everybody – just be sitting still; this will help people settle.

##### Beginning:

⌚ 5 mins

- Once everyone is gathered maintain the stillness and quiet for a few moments.
- Look around the group – include everybody as you look around.
- Welcome everybody to what is going to be a special time – a Council for All Beings – say that you will be describing this in more detail a bit later. If you want to, you could say that you are doing something that is new for you and you need a little help with it; you too are a little bit nervous.
- Say that there are some important rules for what everybody is about to do together – these are to listen carefully; join in the things you are asked to do – even if you are very little or quite old; if you are not sure ask a question; ask for help if you need it.
- Say something like, '*So, what are we going to do? First, say hello to the people who you are sitting with – just in case you don't know them very well – you may want their*

*help or to help them a bit later. We are going to do two things – one is shorter and simpler; one longer with more things to do. I am going to explain a bit about the second one and we will just do the first in a moment – it's quite easy but still very important. In a little while we are all going to be part of a Council of All Beings. What is a Council – it's a meeting, a place or a time where lots of people get together to solve problems or help each other or other people. We are going to be a special council – we are going to be a meeting, just for a little while, of lots of the creatures, the plants, the things like rock, water and air, animals, insects, birds or fish, that are the whole of the Earth that we share. But first we need to become very still.'*

Becoming still:

⌚ 5 mins

- In your own words say, *'Sit or lie comfortably. Close your eyes if you want to. Breathe in and as you breathe in say, to yourself, the word 'in'; as you then breathe out say, to yourself, the word 'out'. Just keep doing this – in.....out. After a few times think to yourself – I am sharing the air with everyone in this room, with the trees and the plants and the birds outside this room. Breathe in.....out. Keep doing this for a while longer. OK - slowly just breathe normally, open your eyes, sit up, move about a little bit where you are sitting just to get comfortable again.'*

Beginning the Council:

⌚ 5 mins

- Say something like, *'We are now going to begin getting ready for our Council. Please sit or lie comfortably. Close your eyes, and let a picture of a creature or part of nature or landscape, slowly come into your mind. Don't make yourself see something like a pet or a favourite creature or place. Just let a picture come into the bit of your mind or brain where you have dreams – maybe a plant, rock, water, tree, animal, insect, fish, bird, air, soil. Big or small. ....Now, start to feel like, to pretend, to think that, for a little while, you are turning into what you have thought of.'*

Pause for few moments

⌚ 5 mins

- Say something like, *'In a moment I am going to ask you some questions. Try to answer them as the creature or part of nature that you have chosen or become. Just think about your answers – there is no need to speak them out loud. The questions are: What is happening to you as this being?....How do you feel?... What is your life like? ....Your days?.... Your nights?..... How do you get on with other creatures – with human beings?....What is it like where you live?....What would you like to tell people, do you have a message for humans?'*

Making masks:

⌚ 10-15 mins

- Bring some of the art materials into the middle of the circle. Ask everybody to open their eyes and *silently* to make a simple mask of the creature, part of nature that they have become or been thinking of. The mask does not have to be an accurate picture. Some people will be tempted to spend a long time on their mask. Remind them that the mask is only a representation, and give a five-minute and one-minute warning for finishing the mask. People can use the art materials on the table as well – help may be needed with cutting out and threading elastic to finish the masks. Your helper and you will be looking for where help may be needed.
- When the masks are finished or sufficiently complete form the Council – everybody puts on or holds their mask to their face.

Pause

- Say, in your own words, *"welcome to a Council of All Beings."*

⌚ 20 mins

In a small group there is time for everyone to introduce who they are and then go on to giving their message to the Council. In a larger group there may only be enough time for those who wish to, to give their message for humans – if they have one. Make a judgement about time. It is important to say that people can speak or not speak – this is done in a Quaker context and what is offered is Ministry so there is no compulsion. You may need to ask when some people have spoken if there is anybody else who wishes to speak. Everybody just listens without comment.

Here are the different things that you can invite people to say:

In a smaller group:

- those that want to can introduce him -, her -, or itself and say what their life is like, who they are, and how they spend their time. After each being speaks, thank them for what they have said.

- ask those that wish to, to speak again, this time telling the Council what is happening to them, including what people have done to them and what their message is for humans, to people.

Thank after each contribution – you could use the name of the being, part of nature that has ‘spoken’.

In a larger group:

- ask those that want to tell the Council what is happening to them, including what people have done to them and what their message is for humans, to people.

Thank after each contribution – you could use the name of the being, part of nature that has ‘spoken’.

Ending:

**⌚ 5 mins**

- When you judge that everyone has spoken who wishes to, say something like, “*We are now ending the Council. Everybody should carefully take off their masks.*” As each person takes off the mask, ask them to turn their masks toward themselves and make a small promise to do one thing that might help their part of nature or to stop something, even small, which hurts it. Then ask everyone to look and say hello to someone sitting next to them.
- Hold a short period of quiet. Thank everybody and shake hands.
- Time for drinks, cake, biscuits

Note: It can be that during the Council quite powerful things are said. It is helpful to be aware of people’s responses in case there is a little caring to be done afterwards.

