

Journeys in the Spirit



Children

Sheets 25.A

Gather



Explain that we're going to make a web of belonging, by joining ourselves up with wool! We'll say our names and then those of other people in our meeting as we pass the wool around. As we say each name, we'll just take a moment of silence before passing the wool on again, so that we can think about the person and our connection to them. When everyone has settled into silence, begin by saying your name and holding onto the loose end of a ball of wool, then pass or gently throw the ball to someone on the other side of the circle...they then hold the wool where it has reached them, say their name, pause, and pass or throw the ball on to another person in the circle. This action is then repeated until everyone in the circle has had the chance to say their name – a small web should be woven between you, joining you up.

If there is time, then go on to invite each person to pass the ball of wool again, but now you say the name of someone else in your meeting when the ball reaches you – this way you hold other members of meeting in the light, making them part of the web of belonging. If children can't think of another name, they can ask for help, or just say the name of family or other friends. And so, the web of belonging can grow and grow. Just start a new ball of wool when you run out!

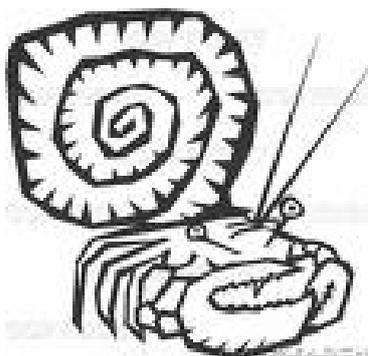
Take a moment at the end of this activity to look at the beautiful, colourful web of belonging that you have made...and hold all those people, including yourselves, in the light...before clearing up and moving on.

Engage

Hermit crabs find a home

Hermit crabs – some facts:

- Hermit crabs are members of the crustacean family (crusty-shelled animals living in the sea). They are often seen in a tidal area (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intertidal_zone) of a beach uncovered at low tide, for example in rock pools (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tide_pool) – you may well have seen a 'common hermit crab' if you have gone rock-pooling on holiday. If you are really lucky, you might have seen a hermit crab change shells...
- Hermit crabs are not true crabs and do not have a completely hard shell of their own. Because their body is quite soft, they have to protect themselves by finding an empty shell that used to belong to another sea creature to live in. They can retract their whole body into the shell if they are in danger. They particularly like the shells of sea snails, but will often use the shells of dog-whelks, periwinkles and other molluscs. Hermit crabs are very quarrelsome amongst themselves over the availability of snail shells!
- As they grow, hermit crabs have to find a larger empty shell to live in. (They also shed the armoured covering of their claws and front of their body in order to grow; a new larger hard covering grows underneath, then become hard when the old one is shed.)When they find a shell they wait next to it, checking, then rush quickly between their old home and their new.
- Some hermit crabs that live in the sea, regularly give a lift to sea anemones and other animals on their shells. Sometimes a rag worm will live inside the snail shell with the hermit crab, and eat the hermit crab's leftovers! Hermit crabs have a varied diet. They often scavenge around for rotting food, both in the sea and on land.



Journeys in the Spirit

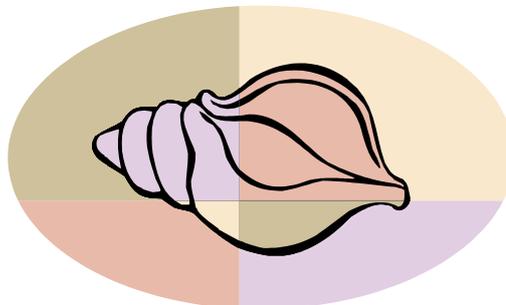
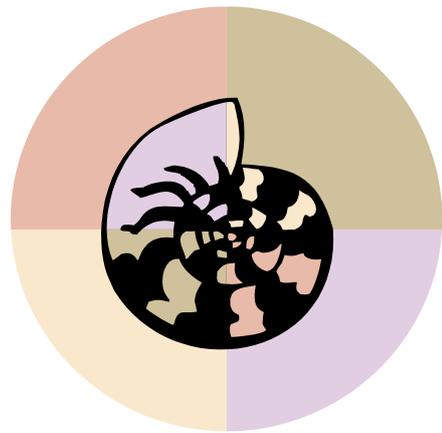
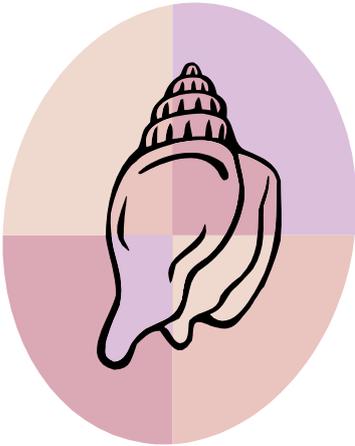
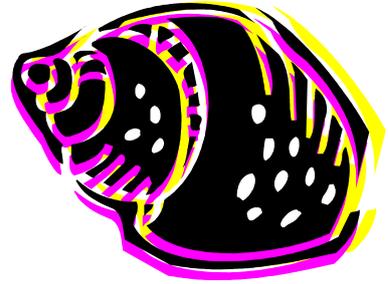
Children



Sheet 25.B

Respond

Hermit crabs find a home



Journeys in the Spirit



Children

Sheet 25.C Engage The story of the beautiful city

There was once a beautiful city that stood near the edge of a huge desert; the people who lived there and desert travellers just knew it as 'The City'. It was an ancient place, filled with graceful buildings with sloping roofs and carved wooden doorways leading into airy courtyards. Tall towers covered in shining metal shone and sparkled in the midday sun, so that travellers could see The City from far off across the desert.

In this city, in an elegant old building with high ceilings lived a young girl, her beloved father and two younger brothers (her mother had died when the girl was very young).

As the girl was growing up, she loved to walk through the streets and courtyards of The City, greeting friends and passers-by with a smile or a wave. She would slip into buildings like the Government Palace or the City Temple and spend hours staring up at the great curving ceilings, painted a deep dark-blue with bright gold stars, for which The City was famous. As the girl gazed at these painted domes, she would long to know what it was like to look up at the real night sky over the desert. City dwellers were not supposed to leave The City at night, as it was considered very dangerous in the desert, especially at night: you could be eaten by wild animals or simply get lost and die of thirst in the wilderness.

There were a lot of rules like this in The City. They were designed to keep you safe from harm. You weren't allowed to read certain books in case they frightened you. You had to stay indoors when dust storms blew in from the desert. And, most puzzling of all to the girl, only men, not women, could make the laws, sit on The City's Ruling Council or lead the prayers in the Temple. The girl knew plenty of women who were just as kind and wise as the men of The City, so she couldn't really work out why this rule had been made. It just seemed to have always been that way.

As the time approached when she would be considered a grown woman and ready to marry, the girl found she couldn't wait any longer to see the world outside the City. She wanted to find out what the desert was like, whether the night sky over the desert was as beautiful as the ceilings of the city palaces, and whether there were any other cities out there. The girl wanted to find out more about the world before she became a woman.

So, one day, before anyone else in the house was up, the girl packed a small bag with water and food, left a note for her father, walked out of the city gates and headed for the desert.

The day wore on and the girl kept walking in the heat of the sun. She saw no people - only a few small desert animals hiding among the rocks along the path. The girl was young and strong, so this walk into the desert was not hard for her and she enjoyed the freedom and excitement of her adventure. She sang songs that she had learned as a little girl and watched huge birds flying high overhead in the middle of the day.

As night fell, the desert became a lot cooler, and the girl was glad of the shawl she had packed in her bag. She was tired, so she curled up next to a large rock and drifted off to sleep, only to wake with a start a short while later when she heard the distant sound of people talking and animals bleating. She peeped over the top of the rock that had provided her with shelter, and, to her amazement, saw a large group of people gathering around a fire in the distance. These must be the desert people she had heard tell of so often in The City. Her curiosity was stronger than her fear, and she was beginning to feel very cold, so the girl made her way towards the little crowd around the fire: as she got closer, she saw that the people were making camp for the night and penning up a small flock of goats with woven brushwood fences.

When a group of the desert people noticed the girl, they came and greeted her in a very friendly way. Their language was not unlike the language of The City, but with a very different accent, so it wasn't too hard for the girl and her new friends to communicate if they listened carefully to one another. The desert people invited the girl to share their food, and offered her a place to sleep. Before long, she was telling them all about The City and her longing for adventure. She learned that the desert people had some farmland at the edge of the desert, but that they wandered the desert for much of the year, making camp whenever they were close to an underground water source: they seemed to know about lots of these desert springs. The people invited the girl to travel with them for a little while, so that she could see the desert and gaze at the stars above it at night.

And so the girl came to travel with the desert people for many months. She learned their ways, and took her turn cooking food, putting up tents and looking after the goats. She loved the way the desert people all took turns to lead their tribe on its travels, men and women alike, and that they often welcomed wanderers like her. She came to love lying on her back at night, close to the dying fire, and watching the dark sky overhead fill with stars. It reminded her of the ceilings of The City, and she would think of her father and brothers, sending them a blessing on the night breeze.

As she travelled with the desert people, the girl discovered that there were other cities and towns near the desert; she even visited some of them and helped her friends trade goats and grain for other food or tools. These places sometimes reminded her of The City that she had grown up in, but each had its own beauty, whether it was the spectacular gardens and fountains of one, or the people's love of dancing and colourful costumes in another. In several of these cities, both women and men ruled and led the sacred ceremonies. The girl wondered if she could go and live in one of these cities when she grew up, but she didn't

really know anyone there; her heart sometimes longed for the beautiful city she had called home for so long, and the friends and family she had left behind.

Eventually these longings became stronger, and the girl began to weary of the endless travelling and putting up camp. She had come to love the desert people, but she knew their way of life was not for her forever. So one morning, she packed her bag again and said goodbye to her desert friends, promising that she would come and travel with them again very soon.

The girl walked for many days to get back to The City, eating food that the desert people had given her for the journey, and drinking water at the springs that she now knew how to find. Her friends had given her many gifts on parting, and she carried her favourite in her hand as she walked: a tiny telescope that would fit into her pocket, so that she could look at the stars from any city roof or tower at night.

Eventually the girl spied the towers of The City shining in the sunlight a long way off. She was approaching from a direction she had never explored before, where huge rock cliffs lined the path. As she came round a corner, the girl noticed a small house standing by itself; it must have been about half a day's walk from The City. Outside the house was an old woman with long white hair tied back in an untidy plait; she wore a dark red dress and sturdy boots. The woman was leading some woolly little goats into an enclosure by the house and throwing grain from her pocket to some wild birds who had flown down to sit on the fence.

When the old woman saw the girl, she waved in greeting. She watched as the girl approached, seeming in no hurry to go back indoors, but just smiled at her visitor as if she had been expecting her all along.

The old woman greeted the girl warmly and invited her inside for a drink and a rest. It felt very peaceful in the old woman's little house, and the girl found herself telling her all about The City and her travels with the desert people. She explained about her need to explore the world a little, about how lovely The City was, but how she did not always feel she belonged there, yet she did not want to wander always like the desert people. The old woman then told the girl how she herself had once lived in a beautiful city, but felt a similar longing. She had followed that longing into the desert, where she had eventually come upon this little house, abandoned for many years, and had decided to live here, with the goats and birds for company. The woman invited the girl to stay with her for a while and see how she liked the life there on the edge of the desert, within sight of the gleaming roofs and towers of her childhood home.

Over the weeks and months that followed, the girl found that she loved the life here at the desert's edge. She would get up early to look after the animals and fill the water jugs from a spring nearby, then she and the old woman would spend the day working in the house, walking in the desert, digging the little vegetable garden or making colourful goats' wool weavings that the woman would take to The City to sell.

Sometimes people from The City came to visit; they would sit with the wise old woman and ask her advice, or learn the chants that she sang. Sometimes they just came to walk in the desert with her in silence, and go home refreshed. She would always greet them with a kind smile and listen to them as if it was the most important thing in the world that she could do.

Whatever they were doing, the wise woman taught the girl to turn her heart always to the Spirit of Love that she said was at the heart of all the religions of the cities and the desert; sometimes they would sit in silence as they worked, and sometimes they sang prayers and chants together. The girl felt like her heart had found a kind of peace, and she wondered if she could stay there forever.

The next time the woman went to The City to sell her weavings, the girl went with her, and so she was able to see her father and brothers and tell them all about her adventures. She told them that she was very happy living with the wise woman in the little house by the rocks, and invited them to visit her there.

Months passed, and one day the girl asked the wise woman if she could stay with her for good, as she had grown to love that place at the desert's edge, and had come to feel that maybe it was where she belonged. The wise old woman replied that the girl could stay as long as she liked. She said that the whole world and stars lay within the girl's heart, so she belonged anywhere that her heart could be happy. Then the wise old woman went to her little shelf and took a card with some words written on it out of an old book; she gave it to the girl and told her that the words were from an ancient holy book and that they explained better than she could do what it means to belong in this world.

The card said:

**NOW IN THIS CITY...
THERE IS A DWELLING PLACE,
A TINY LOTUS FLOWER,
WITHIN IT A TINY SPACE.
SEEK WHAT IS
WITHIN IT...
AS WIDE AS THAT
SPACE OUTSIDE IS THE
SPACE WITHIN
THE HEART.
WITHIN IT LIE
HEAVEN AND EARTH
FIRE AND WIND,
SUN AND MOON,
LIGHTNING
AND THE STARS,
EVERYTHING...**

...and the girl understood that both the starry ceilings of The City and the night skies over the desert would always be in her heart, wherever she went in the world.