

SHARING REPTON: HISTORIC LANDSCAPES FOR ALL

# Garden History Lucky Dip

## Curiosity Level prompt sheets

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The Garden History Lucky Dip is an activity to encourage informal interest in garden history. The Garden History Lucky Dip uses everyday objects to introduce a particular topic. The prompt sheets were developed to lead the conversation about the topic, stimulating discussion within a small group of participants. The sheets provide short stories about garden history to generate interest and inspire further involvement.

The Garden History Lucky Dip activity is intended to be an interactive workshop, and is suitable to do within an hour, easily conducted over a lunch break or long tea break at an event, AGM, or other meeting.

The prompt sheets are aimed at three different levels of interest and knowledge in garden history.

**Curiosity Level** is aimed at those who have some knowledge of garden history and are curious to know more.

Prepared by Dr Audrey Gerber  
<https://www.audreygerber.co.uk/>

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*from*  
PAGE TO GARDEN



# Object: Brick

## Subject : Walled gardens

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### Prompt questions:

Where do you think bricks might be used in a garden?  
Steps, paving, garden buildings. Lead conversation to walls, and then introduce the walled kitchen garden.

### Conversation teasers:

What would bricks add to a walled garden? (shelter from wind, protection from deer and rabbits, warmth from the sun)  
Can you think what the three main things are that plants need to grow? (water, sunshine, soil)  
Do you or your family ever grow vegetables? (If they have lived in a different country ask what they can grow there and not in the UK.)

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### Garden History story:

Walled gardens were important to the grand estates of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in Britain.

Not only did they feed the large family, but also needed to feed any visitors and all of the servants – this could easily be as many as **25 people in the house, and 12-16 men working** in the garden and wider estate as woodsmen, gamekeepers and dairymen.

Walled gardens were often more than an acre in size, and grew vegetables, fruit, herbs and flowers. **In 1844, Queen Victoria's Kitchen Garden was 33 acres large, with 150 gardeners.**

The design of the wall, and the layout of the garden were to capture maximum sunshine, the warmth of which was enhanced by the **brick or stone walls**.



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*from*  
PAGE TO GARDEN



- **Serpentine, or zigzag walls** were popular for two reasons:  
The additional strength and stability that the shape gave to the wall meant that **one-third less bricks** could be used.  
The other advantage was that they provided an **extended length of wall over** the same distance, increasing the space for planting against a warm wall.  
They were also known as **'ribbon'** or **'crinkle-crankle'** walls. In the Netherlands they were known as **'snake walls'** (slangenmuren).

**Two interesting examples of an unusual design to capture more warmth are:**

- **Trengwainton in Cornwall**, where the garden beds are **sloped towards the south** for maximum interception of sunshine. This garden has the additional curiosity of having been built to the same dimensions as Noah's Ark – 50x300cubits (the length of a cubit is not standard, varying in different cultures).
- **Chevening House in Sussex** has a 4.5 ha **hexagonal walled garden**, the shape allowing three south facing walls, instead of only one.

Some walled gardens had a **hot-wall**. This hot wall had a series of holes or pipes in it to carry smoke and **heat from fires or boilers** through the wall. Sometimes it was just the heat from **fermenting dung** that warmed the wall!

Reference: A history of Kitchen Gardening, Susan Campbell

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A LIFE IN LANDSCAPES  
*from*  
PAGE TO GARDEN



# Object : Toy sheep, cow or deer

## Subject: Ha ha

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### Prompt question:

Why would you not want animals in your garden?

Lead conversation – eat plants, could be dangerous, poo!

### Conversation teasers:

How else would you keep animals out of the garden?

Hedges, Fences and railings , Walls-where stone was plentiful, walls were used to demarcate field boundaries and to contain farm animals

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### Garden History story:

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century gardens were large and open, with views outward to the farmland which surrounded the house. Farm animals were not wanted in the garden, and yet it was desirable to have views uninterrupted by hedges. The **Ha-ha** filled both purposes: keeping farm animals away from the house, and allowing seemingly continuous pasture to extend across the estate. The Ha-ha is simply a **sunken ditch** which divides the farm pasture from the garden, yet which is only visible from a few yards away. It consists of a **retaining wall** constructed of brick or stone on the garden side, and a sloping bank on the pasture side.



- Although it is thought to have originated in France, the ha-ha was popularised in England by Charles Bridgeman.
- The name comes from the startled cry of "aha" on seeing a deep ditch so close by.

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TRUST



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*from*  
PAGE TO GARDEN



**Lancelot 'Capability' Brown**, who was one of the main designers involved in developing the English Landscape style, brought many **tricks of concealment into his gardens**. As well as having vision for design, he also brought **improvements to the estate** that were an essential part of its income management.

- The Ha-ha itself enabled areas of pastures to expand in size without losing the aesthetic dominance of the manor house.
- Brown's works in creating serpentine lakes were commonly a strategy to drain unusable agricultural land and increase its productive capacity.
- His tree plantings in clumps and shelterbelts balanced the need of shelter for livestock, with production of timber for the estate. At Fisherwick in Staffordshire alone, he planted over a hundred thousand trees, mainly oaks and pines.

There are many examples of a Haha in the UK:

Stowe, Buckinghamshire

Croome Court, Worcestershire

Rousham, Oxfordshire

Burghley, Lincolnshire

Petworth, West Sussex

Chirk Castle, Wrexham

Royal Victoria Park, Bath

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A LIFE IN LANDSCAPES  
*from*  
PAGE TO GARDEN



# **Object: Pineapple**

## **Subject: Fruit for the estate table**

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### **Prompt questions:**

Do you know where pineapples come from and how they got to England?

What would be needed to grow pineapples in England?

### **Conversation teasers:**

Have you tried any new fruit? Do you know where it was grown?

Can you think of another example of fruit or vegetables that we eat often that came from a foreign land/faraway place?

If they are from a different country, ask what they can grow in that country but not in the UK, likewise what fruit is there in the UK that is not available in their country of origin.

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### **Garden History story:**

Explorers brought back samples of exotic fruit and vegetables and these became very desirable. The **pineapple first became known to Europe in 1493** (4<sup>th</sup> November, to be exact!) when Christopher Columbus landed on the island now known as Guadeloupe., South America There are also reports from 1536 of pineapples in Venezuela, also in South America.

The name pine apple was given because the explorers thought it resembled the shape of a pine cone, yet was edible, just like an apple.

Despite attempts to bring pineapples to Europe, it was rare that they survived the long journey. And so there were many attempts to grow them here. The popular picture of King Charles II (1630-1685) being presented with a pineapple by his gardener John Rose (c1621-1677) was commonly suggested to prove that pineapples were grown in England circa 1670. In fact, the picture shows a pineapple that was brought to England attached to an entire plant in a pot.

**It was only in about 1720 that the secret of growing pineapples in England became known.**



A LIFE IN LANDSCAPES  
*from*  
PAGE TO GARDEN



- The **potato** is another example of an everyday vegetable that was introduced to Britain. This was discovered by conquistadors in Peru, and reached England in 1580s, courtesy of Sir Francis Drake.
- **Scarlet runner beans** came from North America, and were first introduced in 1633 for their beautiful red flowers, not as a vegetable.
- **Tomatoes** –from South America –were also first grown as an ornamental plant.
- **Beetroot** was originally grown for the leaves, similar to spinach, not the bulbous root that we now eat.

**There are many places to look to find out where plants originally grew, and when they were introduced.**

An inventory of goods shipped from Virginia in the **16<sup>th</sup> century** includes 'roots, seeds, berries, trees, and other plants', and notably the latest exotics of tulip trees (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) and sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*). Also mentioned are 'ears of Indian corn, and a bushel of peach stones', and a mysterious 'parcel of seeds and berries'!

Reference: <https://www.rct.uk/collection/406896/charles-ii-presented-with-a-pineapple>

John Rose (1619–1677), the Royal Gardener, presenting a Pineapple to King Charles II (1630–1685) (after Henry Danckerts. Thomas Stewart (1766 – c.1801). National Trust

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A LIFE IN LANDSCAPES  
from  
PAGE TO GARDEN



## Object: Plant in Jar

### Subject: Plant collectors, Wardian case

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#### Prompt questions:

I wonder what the benefit would be to keep plants in a glass jar?

Answers – sea and salty air, humidity, light

#### Conversation teasers:

Do you grow indoor plants? Where do you get your indoor plants from generally? Cuttings from friends? Supermarkets? Garden centres?

Why are they grown indoors? Answers- warmth, shade, humidity.

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#### Garden History story:

The air in London in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was so polluted – mainly by soot- that plants struggled to survive outdoors. **Dr Nathaniel Ward developed a glass case that protected plants and enabled them to grow.** The idea came to him almost by accident. He placed a chrysalis of a sphinx moth in a wide-mouthed lidded glass jar, burying the chrysalis in moist leaf mould. To his surprise seedlings germinated and thrived in the sealed bottle. These glass cases were called **Wardian cases**, and became immensely useful in bringing plants in from other countries.

The famous London nursery, Loddiges, supported plant-finding expeditions to distant countries. **In 1833 the first Wardian cases were sent to Sydney, Australia.** The Wardian cases were filled with Australian plants, closed up, and sent back to England. During the **8 month voyage** temperatures plummeted to **minus 7°C with snow**, and up to **49°C**. All of the plants survived, and this method became the way that many plants were transported on these long voyages. **19 out of 20 survived**, in comparison with only 1 out of 20 previously.

- It might seem strange that live plants were transported, not fruit or seed. Seed collection was used where possible, but the expedition was not always at the right time of year for seed to be ready.



A LIFE IN LANDSCAPES  
*from*  
PAGE TO GARDEN



**Wardian Cases became very popular for indoor plants too**, and this led to the terrariums that are popular now. Wardian cases were features in stylish drawing rooms, used for growing ferns during the fern craze, or '**pteridomania**', of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Collecting of ferns attracted amateur naturalists from all social classes, with a common interest in collecting from the wild bringing people from very different social classes together.

Ward produced **lengthy instructions** on how to manage plants in the case, giving advice that mould may arise "*either from cold, want of light, redundant moisture, or a combination of these causes, producing diminished vital action*".

- In 1851 at the Great Exhibition in London, Nathaniel Ward displayed a case containing "a fern or two with some mosses" that had not been watered for 18 years, relying solely on condensation within the case.

Wardian case Public Domain,  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=783650>

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*from*  
PAGE TO GARDEN



# Object: Bridge model

## Subject: Designed serpentine lakes

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### Prompt questions:

Where in a garden might you see a bridge?  
How often can these fit into a small garden? Maybe across a pond or small stream.

### Conversation teasers:

What can we tell from how a bridge looks; what does the design of a bridge reveal?

Answers: shows the design trends of the time, particularly architectural; what materials are available; what mode of transport crossed the bridge (foot, carriage, railway)

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### Garden History story:

- In the 18<sup>th</sup> century landscapes of England, **bridges became increasingly ornamental**, and there is even a case of a dummy bridge at Kenwood, London.
- Their **style varied from classical to rustic**, and were often used as eyecatchers to highlight a viewpoint in the landscape.

Lancelot Brown (1716-83), known as **Capability Brown** because he would tell his clients that the site has 'capability' for improvement, was Britain's most celebrated and prolific landscape gardener. He **designed and installed around 200 landscape parks**, creating an artistic and horticultural revolution with worldwide influence.



A LIFE IN LANDSCAPES  
*from*  
PAGE TO GARDEN



One of the characteristics of a Brownian landscape is a serpentine lake. These were often lakes that were designed to look like rivers.

- The placement of the bridge was often selected to create the illusion that the stretch of water, the serpentine lake, was in fact a river, not a static lake.
- The bridge was also part of the architectural design, almost like a sculpture.

**In many gardens the bridge was of a Chinese design** bringing a splash of red to the landscape. Examples of this are at Wrest Park, Biddulph Grange.

In **Heale House in Wiltshire**, a red lacquered wooden bridge (listed Grade II) crosses a small water channel running alongside the Rover Avon. The bridge is a **miniature copy of the Nikko Bridge in Japan**. To further develop the Japanese theme, there is a wooden Japanese teahouse with a thatched roof (listed Grade II) nearby, all surrounded by a Japanese garden. **Harold Ainsworth Peto** laid out the garden in the early 20th century.

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A LIFE IN LANDSCAPES  
*from*  
PAGE TO GARDEN



# **Object: Cut grass**

## **Subject: Large sweeping lawns**

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### **Prompt questions:**

If you didn't have a lawnmower, how would you keep your grass neat?

Answers – scythe, goats and sheep, No grass, low growing meadow.

### **Conversation teasers:**

In your garden, or your park how do you use your lawn? Answers – sport, sunbathe, walk the dog,

Do you know any other inventions that changed gardening?

What was used before garden twine? – hazel bark strips.

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### **Garden History story:**

The garden style of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century was for **large sweeping landscapes**. Although the appearance was natural, there was a distinct art in the planning and management of these landscapes. They were characterised by large lawns stretching away from the house. The idea was to create an effect of open space and views across the countryside.

- The management of these large lawns was not easy, and having a large, beautiful lawn was a sign of wealth and status.
- Sometimes they were kept trimmed by grazing of sheep.
- More commonly they were cut using a scythe and weeded by hand.



A LIFE IN LANDSCAPES  
*from*  
PAGE TO GARDEN



## What was in gardens before lawns?

- Chamomile lawns were popular in Elizabethan times, as they offered a soft, springy, fragrant surface that needed little maintenance.
- In Tudor gardens, raised banks of violets and chamomile were grown to relax on.
- Chamomile was known in Egyptian and Islamic gardens.
- Chamomile was grown in the Middle Ages for its medicinal properties, offering benefits against inflammation, insomnia and anxiety.
- Renaissance gardens included chamomile, not as a lawn, but for solid massed ground plantings, alongside bugle, mint, periwinkle, lily of the valley, and violets.

**The lawnmower was only invented in 1833 by Englishman Edward Budding.** The machine was an adaptation of a cloth-shearing machine. Early models were large and heavy and were pulled across the lawn by a horse. To stop the horses' hooves from damaging the lawn, the horses wore big leather hoof covers.

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A LIFE IN LANDSCAPES  
*from*  
PAGE TO GARDEN



# **Object: Tree bark or leaves**

## **Subject: Old trees in the landscape.**

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### **Prompt questions:**

Why are old trees special?

Answers to tease out – landmarks in the landscape, shade and fresh air, nature as birds and bugs (Moccas oak estimated age of 900 years supports a rare beetle population.)

### **Conversation teasers:**

What are the primary purposes of trees in designed landscapes (shade, boundary demarcation, timber, refuge for nature, eyecatchers – especially unusual trees, or trees with vibrant autumn colours).

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### **Garden History story:**

**Trees form an important part of heritage landscapes because they reach a great age.** This enables the original design to be seen decades and even hundreds of years later.

- The English oak can live to more than 500 years.
- The Yew tree and the Redwood also live for 5 centuries and more.
- Next oldest are Lime, Beech, Plane, Sweet Chestnut, Hornbeam, and the evergreen Holm Oak.

Trees were planted in landscapes in long avenues that marked roads and riding paths. **The word 'avenue' first became used in garden design terms in 1654**, when John Evelyn referred to an avenue as "*the principal walk to the front of the house*". Regular spacing of trees along an avenue signified, in design terms, very dominant ownership of the land and control of nature.

Within designed landscapes **avenues were used to emphasise the main lines of the composition** and to guide the eye towards a designated focal point, or to infinity.



A LIFE IN LANDSCAPES  
*from*  
PAGE TO GARDEN



Tree-lined access roads served many purposes

- trees supplied timber, and leaves and fruit were fed to stock
- trees sheltered travellers from wind and sun
- an avenue of trees guided travellers on roads in snowy or foggy weather
- in some areas trees stabilised roads by draining marshy ground.

**The design style in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was very much an expression of power and wealth, and avenues were used to create an impression of how grand the estate was.**

- The mile and a half long avenue at Blenheim was planted between 1705 and 1715 with double rows of elms.
- The beech and lime avenue leading to Castle Howard, considered to be '*the grandest approach in England to a country house*', offers the traveller a succession of structures and views, which contribute to 'a mounting sense of anticipation'.
- The beech avenue of Kingston Lacy is 2.5 miles long, and was planted in 1835 by William Banks (1786-1855) as a memorial to his mother, Frances, who died in 1823. The avenue was planted with 365 trees on one side, and 366 along the other; one for each day of the year and one for each day in a leap year.

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A LIFE IN LANDSCAPES  
*from*  
PAGE TO GARDEN



# Object: Piece of Glass

## Subject: Protected cultivation

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### Prompt questions:

What are the properties of glass that would be useful in a garden?  
Answers – shelter, warmth, light, to see what is growing.  
(Glass from photo frame perhaps, no sharp edges)

### Conversation teasers:

Do you know how plants that are cold sensitive survive if they don't have us to protect them with a glasshouse? (drop leaves, die back to a bulb, produce enough seed to regenerate the next year (annual plants))  
Can you think of anything that you eat that is grown in protected cultivation?

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### Garden History story:

**Before 1851 there was a hefty tax on glass**, which made it very expensive. Introduced in 1696, the tax added more than 300% the cost of glass.

**In 1848 sheet glass was introduced**, and panes of glass became reasonably priced.

It was these two events that contributed to a rapid rise in the popularity of glasshouses. Some of these were impressively grand. It was not just the glass that made these glasshouses impressively successful.

The **Great Conservatory at Chatsworth House** was the largest of its kind in England.

- It took four years to build, reaching completion in 1841.
- It had 4 underground boilers providing heat, and an underground tramline was constructed to deliver the 300 tonnes of coke and coal used in a single winter.
- It was too expensive to run, and was destroyed in 1920.



A LIFE IN LANDSCAPES  
*from*  
PAGE TO GARDEN



The 200 tonne iron structure of the **Palm House at Kew Gardens** was modeled on ship building structures and techniques, and this is the first example of using these principles architecturally.

- The curved profile of the design is angled to maximize light interception.
- The Palm House is 110.5m long, with 5,500 components and 16,000 panes of glass.
- Its central upper vault is rectangular in plan, 41.9m long, 30.5m wide and 19.2m high. The temperature is maintained at a minimum of 18C with 75% humidity.
- There is no set maximum temperature, but the vents are opened for staff and visitor comfort when the temperature rises above 28C.

There is evidence that protected cultivation was common in **Roman times**, and underfloor heating was supplied by running hot water through channels under the floor tiles.

Nowadays we might use plastic for agriculture and commercial fruit and vegetable production, but glass is still the best for home greenhouses and conservatories.

**The Eden Project in Cornwall is constructed with a transparent foil that is 1% of the weight of glass.**

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A LIFE IN LANDSCAPES  
*from*  
PAGE TO GARDEN



# **Object: Sprig of Rosemary**

## **Subject: Herbs, early gardens**

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### **Prompt questions:**

For what purposes are plants grown beyond their ornamental properties? What do they offer more than what they look like?  
Answers: Function – trees for wood, hedges for boundaries, plants to eat, plants for medicine. Lead conversation to properties of rosemary.

### **Conversation teasers:**

What other gardens might have herbs in them? Kitchen gardens. Sensory gardens – designed for those with poor sight so they can touch and smell to experience plants. Also texture, rough, smooth, prickly, soft grasses. Sound of leaves in wind, poplar, grasses. Which herbs do you like the smell of?  
What herbs do you use at home? – for cooking? – for remedies?  
Does your family have recipes that use herbs, and what are favourite dishes?

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### **Garden History story:**

Rosemary itself that we know as a culinary herb was grown for its medicinal properties. These include:

- Antioxidants and anti-inflammatory compounds.
- Improving digestion.
- Enhancing memory and concentration.
- Neurological protection.
- Prevent brain aging.

Early gardens were mostly functional producing herbs for remedies.

Outside of monasteries these gardens were the early forerunners of pharmaceutical supplies, and were known as physic gardens.



A LIFE IN LANDSCAPES  
*from*  
PAGE TO GARDEN



The **Chelsea Physic garden in London was established in 1673** by the Apothecaries to grow medicinal herbs. Covering 4 acres, it is London's oldest Physic garden and **contains 5,000 different plants**. Its close proximity to the Thames river allowed plants arriving from around the world to be introduced to the British Isles. The **unique microclimate** of the garden allowed many renowned gardeners throughout history to grow plants not frequently found outside in the UK.

Its international reputation was established quickly as a result of the **global seed exchange scheme, known as Index Seminum**, which it initiated in the 1700s and continues to this day. Through this system, botanic gardens create catalogues listing seed of plants that they have in their collections. The exchange is free, and is intended for scientific study and conservation only, not for any commercial purposes.

- The Oxford Botanic Garden is the oldest in the UK, established in 1671.
- The earliest university botanic garden in the world is still in existence today. Called Orto Botanico in Padua, Italy, it was established in 1545.

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A LIFE IN LANDSCAPES  
*from*  
PAGE TO GARDEN



# Object : Packet of seeds

## Subject: Plant introductions

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### Prompt questions:

(eg, Californian poppies *Eschscholzia*)

Do you know where these seeds come from?

Did you know that garden plants come from all over the world?

Why would we want to introduce plants from other parts of the world. (New fashion, prestige, competitive nursery business)

### Conversation teasers:

Do you have a favourite flower? Do you know where it comes from – what country?

Do you think there are problems with bringing plants in from other countries (climatic differences, pests and diseases)

Do you recognise any plants in the UK that you have seen in other countries?

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### Garden History story:

These seeds of the Californian Poppy (*Eschscholzia*) were **found in the wild in 1816** by a plant hunter to the far western section of North America.

Throughout garden history there has been a quest for new plants, and exploration and exchange has led to introductions of new plant varieties. New plants were often a show of wealth and indicated personal influence or powerful connections. They were first treasured in botanic gardens and by collectors in the grandest gardens, and then slowly became more generally available, often through the plant nursery that sponsored the expedition.

**Garden designed changed during each period of introductions, and a style to celebrate and show off the newest introductions quickly became popular.**



A LIFE IN LANDSCAPES  
*from*  
PAGE TO GARDEN



- The '**shrubbery**' was a new style to display **18<sup>th</sup> century introductions** of colourful flowering shrubs from North America. The design theme for planting arrangement was in a graduated array, just like the rows of seats in a theatre. This gave the shrubbery the useful purpose to act as a screen and, at the same time, displaying each plant openly and attractively. A collection of exotics in a shrubbery was just the thing to show off to impress visitors.
- The introduction of brightly coloured annuals from South and Central America and South Africa, gave rise in the **19<sup>th</sup> century to the Victorian fashion for 'carpet bedding'**. Masses of bright colours were laid out in an intricate and gaudy pattern.
- In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the introduction of exotic trees from China and North America lead to the planting of **formal and informal arboreta**. Conifers and trees with vibrantly coloured autumn foliage created beautiful displays.

Not all introductions were beneficial. Four plants introduced as new garden plants are classified as **invasive weeds in Britain**:

- Japanese knotweed,
- Himalayan balsam,
- *Rhododendron ponticum*
- Giant hogweed.

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A LIFE IN LANDSCAPES  
from  
PAGE TO GARDEN



# Object: Toy instrument

## Subject: Bandstand

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### Prompt questions

Do you go to your local park? Are there musical performances there? What sort of music might you hear in a garden, or a park. Answers: a band or a concert, buskers.

### Conversation teasers

Have you been to a concert in a park? What was the stage like? Perhaps you took a picnic? Was it a big park? Is there a café? If the participant has a country of origin different from UK, or has a wide cultural knowledge, ask about designed public open space in other countries

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### Garden history story

Bandstands became popular in British parks in the 19th century, with music seen as an uplifting influence. The Victorians believed that **'good music would free the mind of urban griminess and humanise the industrial landscape'**. Visiting parks on a Sunday was widely encouraged to get fresh air, and to provide distractions from unsociable behaviours.

**At the height of their popularity, there were over 1,500 bandstands in Britain.** The bandstand provided a focal point to the design of the park and were generally freestanding.



A LIFE IN LANDSCAPES  
*from*  
PAGE TO GARDEN



Bandstands and musical performances were particularly popular in the seaside resorts that flourished in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

- Scarborough is one of England's oldest health and leisure resorts, offering spa and seawater bathing. **The town boasted two bandstands**, one which faced the bay so that listeners could see the sea while enjoying the music.
- The same effect is found with the **octagonal bandstand** in Morecambe's West End Gardens. Deckchairs were placed in circular rows so that concert-goers had a lovely view out to sea.

In Gheluvelt Park in Worcester, the **bandstand is placed on an island** in the centre of an ornamental lake. This bandstand is a war memorial named after the battle of Gheluvelt (Flanders in October 1914). The octagonal, cast-iron bandstand was erected in 1923, and is accessed across a small wooden bridge.

**An extensive review of bandstands has been published by author Paul Rabbits.**

<https://www.paulrabbits.co.uk/the-history-of-the-bandstand>

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A LIFE IN LANDSCAPES  
*from*  
PAGE TO GARDEN



# Object: Tennis ball

## Subject: Games in parks

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### Prompt questions

What could be the link between a tennis ball and gardens? –

Answers: playing tennis on public courts, throwing a ball for a dog, family fun cricket in the park.

### Conversation teasers

Are games played in your local park? Is there space in your park just to run around or kick a ball?

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### Garden history story

**Public parks have served many purposes through time**, though the main focus has always been to provide leisure space for health and recreation. The big surge in public parks came in the **Victorian era** when rapid and uncontrolled urban development, together with a huge increase in industrial processes, made towns and cities crowded and unhealthy. **Providing outdoor space in nature was seen as essential to combat social and physical complaints.**

Children's dedicated play areas were proposed in the **19<sup>th</sup> century** by developmental psychologists, such as Frederick Fröbel. They were considered to be **an aid to development, and to encourage good manners and a sense of fair play in children.** *"Play is the highest expression of human development, providing free expression of what is in a child's soul."*

**The first purpose-built public access playground was opened in a park in Manchester in 1859.**

- Early playgrounds were divided, with boys and girls playing separately. This separation and a high level of supervision gradually fell away as it was realised that part of play was learning social interactions.
- The nature of the equipment in playgrounds have changed over time. Early playgrounds, either deliberately or simply to use discarded materials, were made of junk. Imagine the health and safety issues!

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*from*  
PAGE TO GARDEN

