



## Ealing Agreed Syllabus: guidance for teachers

### KS3.10: Seeds of unity (2)

**Overall aim:** to revisit the lessons of Seeds of unity (1), and to further examine the ethics of stewardship.<sup>1</sup>

<i>The awesome seed</i>	<i>Students will</i>	draw a parallel between the conditions that seeds need to grow and the conditions and influences individuals need in their lives to develop their talents.
<i>Aim:</i> to understand that all living things require the right conditions to grow, flourish and bear fruit.	<i>SEN</i>	
	<i>Gifted</i>	
<b>Possible activities</b>		<b>Suggested resources</b>
<p><b>Starter:</b> Draw a spider diagram, with the word 'seed' in the centre. Brainstorm with the class what 'resources' the seed needs to develop into a mature plant.</p> <p>Look at several different types of plants that might require different resources: e.g. different types of soil, exposure to light/shade, temperature.</p> <p>Ask class to imagine that they are a plant, and to write a simple paragraph about what conditions they might require for growth. Encourage them to delve into their imagination, to write what they 'see' there. (Note: you will be returning to this activity at the end of the lesson.)</p>		
<p><b>Activity 1:</b> Bring in a collection of pictures and objects from your childhood and beyond which show how your present identity and interests have roots in your past. These might include books you have enjoyed, photographs, pictures and even film clips of important people and places, recordings of music, items of sporting equipment, souvenirs from holidays or any items which you treasure from years gone by which still have significance for you today. Display these to the children as you talk about how your past has helped you to become the person you are today. Draw attention to any individual or group of people who sowed these seeds of interest, for example a parent, teacher or sporting team.</p>		<p>Pictures that show some of the people who nurtured you and encouraged your talent.</p>

<sup>1</sup> Note: this unit can be linked to the exploration in the science curriculum of how human activity and natural processes can lead to changes in the environment.

**Activity 2:** Invite the students to highlight some of their own key characteristics and interests and to reflect upon how these may have emerged and developed. Ask them to identify what may have shaped them into the people they are today, for example the passion of their parents for a particular football team, craft activity or even commitment to a particular religious community. Encourage them to think, too, of how they may *differ* from those around them, for example, some students may come from families with great musical aptitude, but may not enjoy learning music themselves. Ask them to consider what might be the reasons for this. Point out that ‘talent’ comes in all shapes and sizes, that it might not be as ‘news-worthy’ as great athletic or artistic ability, but might be something as ‘mundane’ as being naturally empathetic or having a feel for carpentry. Whatever is the nature of your talent, it is your responsibility to nurture and develop it: i.e. we become stewards for our own gifts.

**Activity 3:** Another type of ‘seed’ might be the beginnings of spirituality, or a way of thinking that can be nurtured to become part of everything you do. Remind students that Jesus wanted his listeners to respond to the ‘seeds of his teachings’ and be shaped by them. Invite them to think about which experiences/people might have planted seeds in their lives.

Read or tell the students the Parable of the Sower. Explain to them that the story is one that Jesus told to help his followers to understand that while all seeds have the spark of life in them, they need the right conditions in which to grow. (Various animated versions of the parable are also available on Youtube: e.g. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BI1hVutjTbY>)

**Activity 4:** Give a brief account of the plot of Billy Elliot, interspersed with some clips from the film (e.g. Billy is asked to join the ballet class, and attracts the attention of the teacher: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i0p2X2rO6Ag>; Billy’s teacher tells him about the trials for the Royal Ballet: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDISBx2Ry7s>; Billy’s frustration when his father and brother argue with the teacher (the ‘angry’ dance): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jens3h3eXH0>). Ask students to think about how hard it is to nurture a talent such as Billy’s and how lucky he was to have a teacher that recognised it, and fought for it (noting, of course, that his father and brother eventually came round and were incredibly proud of him).

**Plenary:** Return to the exercise from the introduction. Ask if anyone is willing to share their story; then ask the writer and/or class to come up with some practical suggestions as to how that person might nurture and develop the seed of their particular talent.

<i>Food for thought</i>	<i>Students will</i>	make links between beliefs about food and their sources and the choices we make; identify influences that affect their own food choices.
<i>Aim:</i> To reflect on the significance of food choices and the effect these choices may have on food producers and the natural world.	<i>SEN</i>	
	<i>Gifted</i>	
<b>Possible activities</b>		<b>Suggested resources</b>
<p><b>Starter:</b> Explain to the students that through this lesson they will consider some of the choices they make in relation to food in their day-to-day lives; that they will be given opportunities to reflect upon these choices and those of others, and will explore a range of issues, including the issue of responsibility for themselves, for others and for the world around them.</p>		
<p><b>Activity 1:</b> Encourage students to identify some of the factors—such as likes and dislikes—determining food choices, taking care to highlight the importance of a healthy and balanced diet (e.g., the need to eat five portions of fruit and/or vegetables a day). Some students may have dietary needs or restrictions related to health, such as an allergy to dairy products or gluten intolerance. It may also be appropriate to mention seasonal factors determining food choices, such as a preference for salads and picnic style food in the summer months, or warming dishes during winter. In addition, remind students that the cost of certain items may determine what their families are able to provide for them. Finally, draw attention to the fact that some food choices are a result of religious or non-religious ethical beliefs, which may mean that some people will only eat food which is halal, kosher, vegetarian or vegan, or food that has been sold according to the principles of Fair Trade.</p>		
<p><b>Activity 2:</b> Display a selection of everyday foods such as bread, chocolate or cornflakes and talk about their origins, drawing attention to how and where they were produced. Select one popular product like a bar of chocolate and also find an example of its Fairtrade and organic equivalents. Ask class to taste small, unlabelled pieces of the three types of chocolate. After the sampling, ask the students to say which one they would buy and why. Count the preferences for each type of chocolate and write them on the board, also listing the different criteria they used to make their decision. Point out that our choices are not always guided by taste but also by other criteria such as availability and cost.</p> <p>Ask class what the terms Fairtrade and organic mean (see background information) and then reveal how much each sample of chocolate usually costs. Discuss why any differences in cost might arise—pupils should understand that when items are fairly traded and/or organically produced, their cost is often higher. Ask the pupils whether they would alter the value they place on an object if it is fairly traded or organic.</p>		

**Activity 3:** Show students images from Ealing Farmers' Market and a supermarket. Ask them what differences there are in products being sold in the supermarket and those sold in a farmers' market. After the pupils express their opinion, point out that in the market, farmers sell their products directly to customers and therefore can control the quality, distribution and cost of what they produce. This is in contrast to products sold in supermarkets, which go through intermediaries before they end up on the shelves (e.g. transport companies, packaging companies). In addition, farmers have very little control as regards pricing; they also end up with a relatively small percentage of the supermarket price.

Compare the experience of going shopping in a supermarket with that of going to a farmers' market. Ask: What might it be like to talk to the farmer who actually grows the produce? What would they ask if they could talk to the farmers? Is it surprising to learn how fruit/vegetables, dairy products and meat are produced? What do they think of the working hours of farmers? Does this make them appreciate food more? Does it make them think twice about throwing food away?

**Ealing Farmers' Market:**

<http://www.lfm.org.uk/markets/ealing/>

**Other websites with useful information and resources:**

<http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/>

<http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/>

**Activity 4:** Ask students to work in groups to find out how their chocolate bars are produced. Explain that they will follow the story from the plant that produces the cocoa beans to the supermarket that sells the chocolate. Point out that this activity will help them understand how farmers from developing countries are often exploited and underpaid for their cocoa, while the chocolate bar is highly priced in the supermarket.

Split the students into groups and give each group images and short descriptions of the chocolate production chain. Ask them to place the images in what they believe is the right sequence, matching the images with the descriptions. At the end ask each group to explain to the rest of the class how a chocolate bar ends up on the supermarket shelf.

Point out that the price that the cocoa farmer gets is much lower than the retail cost of a chocolate bar. Talk to them about the basic principles of Fairtrade and where possible, give them an opportunity to investigate the stories of individual farmers and growers. Explain that some people choose to buy Fairtrade products wherever possible because this is in accordance with their beliefs and values, that it is important for them to know not just what they are eating but how it has been produced.

Coffee is another very popular product that many of us consume in our everyday life. Explain that it is prepared from the roasted seeds of the coffee plant (usually *Coffea arabica* or *Coffea canephora*), which is cultivated mainly in equatorial Latin America, Southeast Asia, South Asia and Africa. Point out that the production of coffee raises Fair-trade issues similar to those of chocolate. Tell class that they will explore the coffee supply chain, from bush to coffee cup through a role play in order to understand the position and the pressures that a coffee farmer has to face.

The journey of cocoa from the cocoa plant into a chocolate bar on the supermarket shelves can be found as **resource 5** in the following link:  
[http://www.bgci.org/files/Worldwide/Education/Seeds\\_of\\_Unity/ACTIVITIES\\_PDFS/foodthoughtlp\\_res1.pdf](http://www.bgci.org/files/Worldwide/Education/Seeds_of_Unity/ACTIVITIES_PDFS/foodthoughtlp_res1.pdf)

The 'Coffee Chain Game' is available at:  
[http://www.bgci.org/files/Worldwide/Education/Seeds\\_of\\_Unity/Oxfam%20Coffee%20Chain%20Game.pdf](http://www.bgci.org/files/Worldwide/Education/Seeds_of_Unity/Oxfam%20Coffee%20Chain%20Game.pdf)

'The Coffee Chain Game' is reproduced from  
[http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/coffee\\_chain\\_game/files/Coffee\\_Chain\\_Game/](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/coffee_chain_game/files/Coffee_Chain_Game/) (2005) with the permission of Oxfam GB, Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford OX4 2JY, UK

**Plenary:** Remind students that the “golden rule”—i.e. that you should treat others as you would yourself like to be treated—is found in almost all traditions. For example, in Christianity, the second of the two great commandments as taught by Jesus is ‘love thy neighbour as thyself’. This is the idea embedded in the philosophy of fair trade. Point out that the Prophet Muhammad, who was a very successful trader, was known as Al Ameen (‘the Trustworthy’) because of his fairness, honesty and high standards of dealing with others.

In conclusion, ask class to decide which type of chocolate they would now choose to consume and why. Count the preferences for each type again and see if any changes in the preferences appear. Point out that there is no right or wrong decision or right or wrong answer. When people buy food it should be their decision what product to choose. It is important though to know that their choices may influence both the people who produce the food and the environment.

<i>The green ark</i>	<i>Students will</i>	learn how various traditions understand the concept of stewardship; learn that there are choices to be made in order to both serve human needs and protect the environment.
<i>Aim:</i> To explore how botanic gardens act as green arks and some of the beliefs that support modern conservation efforts.	<i>SEN</i>	
	<i>Gifted</i>	
Possible activities		Suggested resources
<p><b>Starter:</b> Ask the class how they would feel if they woke up one day and all the gardens and trees where they live had disappeared? Ask if they know of any houses where the front garden has been paved over to make a space for parking?</p> <p>Play a YouTube video of the “Big Yellow Taxi”, e.g. the version by Counting Crows. Explain to the students that the Canadian singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell got the idea for this song during a visit to Hawaii in the early 1970s, and that it remains one of the most famous protest songs.</p> <p><i>Ask:</i> what do you think Joni was protesting when she wrote this song? Share with the class this quote from an interview: “I wrote ‘Big Yellow Taxi’ on my first trip to Hawaii. I took a taxi to the hotel and when I woke up the next morning, I threw back the curtains and saw these beautiful green mountains in the distance. Then, I looked down and there was a parking lot as far as the eye could see, and it broke my heart...this blight on paradise. That’s when I sat down and wrote the song”.</p> <p>Point out that the ‘tree museum’ in the song is a reference to a Hawaiian botanic garden. Foster Botanical Garden in downtown Honolulu, is a living museum of tropical plants, some rare and endangered. Explain that modern botanic gardens dedicate a lot of their resources to conserving plants—especially endangered ones—for the future, and for this reason they can be considered to be green arks.</p>		<p>YouTube video (Counting Crows version) of “Big Yellow Taxi” written by Joni Mitchell.  <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvtjPs8IDgU">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvtjPs8IDgU</a></p> <p>See background material for lyrics of the song.</p> <p>Wikipedia on Foster Botanical Garden:  <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foster_Botanical_Garden">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foster_Botanical_Garden</a></p>
<p><b>Activity 1:</b> <i>Ask:</i> Why should we protect the environment? Look at the word ‘conservation’. Point out that for some people conservation means to look after natural resources so that future generations have what they need to survive, whereas others believe that nature deserves to be protected for its own sake.</p>		

**Activity 2:** Look at different quotes from religious texts about protecting the environment, and introduce the term ‘stewardship’ (background info). Explain that modern environmental conservation began with scientific forestry methods dating to the 17th and 18th centuries. These scientific theories developed as more became known about the environment and the damage that could be done to it by industrial processes and over-use of natural resources.

*Ask:* How hard do you think it is to find a balance between the needs of human communities and the need to protect the environment? For instance in big modern cities parking is very difficult and so some people felt they had to pave over their gardens. They did this out of need, not because they didn’t like the sight of flowers and grass. Remind them that the ‘tree museum’ in Joni Mitchell’s song is actually a botanic garden, which helps preserve plants that are—or could become—endangered. One of the effects of paving over gardens is that the hard surfacing prevents rain from soaking into the ground, thereby increasing the possibility of subsidence as the water table lowers. This issue will become increasingly important in cities if climate changes mean more rain and wetter winters. What other surface materials (e.g. gravel, brick work, or stone paving that leaves gaps) could people use to allow rain to soak into the ground but still allow parking?

Brainstorm activity: how we can use thinking and ingenuity to come up with more creative choices. Consider the following:

- How could more people be encouraged to cycle rather than drive or take the bus?
- How does the way that cities are planned and built influence people’s willingness to walk or cycle? Compare countries where people do cycle, e.g. the Netherlands and Japan, to Britain. Consider Cardiff city centre, which has cycle lanes that are separated from the main flow of traffic by trees, making it a safer and a more pleasant/green environment through which to travel.

What could schools do in this respect? Could they develop cycle buses in the same way as some schools organise walking buses? Could parents be encouraged to cycle in with their children in big groups? Could children be taught how to look after bikes, fix punctures, could schools provide bike racks? Could schools hold a no car day?

**Activity 3:** Introduce the Hindu idea of sacred groves and how these can be considered green arks because of the species they protect (see background info). Show the class some pictures of these Indian sacred groves, and describe the traditions of protecting them, perhaps through the story of the Bishnoi tribes and their *orans*. Point out that even though sacred groves in India (and elsewhere) are incredibly important to the environment and to the wildlife that is dependent on them, nowadays they often require intervention in the form of laws to protect them.

*Ask:* How do the Bishnoi act as stewards? (For example, by only taking wind-fall leaves, branches and fruit.) The class could role-play—or make a story board—about someone cutting down a khejadi tree either to make way for a new road or, for example, by someone who was desperate for firewood. What would the consequences of this act be for both the Bishnoi people and the animals that depended on the grove?



**Activity 4:** Split students into groups of four or five, and give each group 10 blank cards. Ask them to draw on each card the image and name of a plant that they treasure. Initiate discussions asking them what sort of plant they might consider as important e.g. plants used for food, plants used for clothes, plants that are beautiful, plants used for medicine etc.

Tell them to imagine that there has been some kind of disaster and that they and their family are being ferried in an ark to a new place. They are only allowed to bring five of the ten plants along. Ask the groups to decide which five plants they would take with them and to write their reasoning for each choice on the back of each card. Get the groups to present to the whole class one of their choices, the reason behind their choice (i.e. why they consider that particular plant important) and how hard or easy it was to choose.

**Plenary:** Summarise the ideas that have been discussed so far: the importance of stewardship, and how some traditions—e.g. Hindu sacred groves—can be examples of green arks. Similarly the scientific work of botanic gardens also serves to conserve a precious heritage for humankind. Tell class to imagine that they live in an area where the habitat of a plant that is loved by them is under threat. Scientists have said that it might have medicinal properties, but in addition it is a unique and beautiful plant in its own right. However a developer has put in an application to destroy the only habitat where this plant grows in order to build a factory that will create new jobs. Write a letter to your local council either advocating for the protection of the habitat or suggesting a compromise alternative. What reasons will you give to support your point of view?

If you use this as an assessment exercise, students are working at the following levels if they can:

2. talk about what stewardship means.
3. give several reasons why the plant under threat (i.e. the one in the activity) is important.
4. compare their reasons for wanting to conserve the habitat with the developers' argument to use the land to build a factory.
5. discuss the above choice in terms of morality, i.e. whether there is a right or wrong choice.
6. come up with a suggestion that might be a creative compromise.

<i>Cultivating peace</i>	<i>Students will</i>	learn that acts of devotion can involve practical activities, e.g. gardening; articulate how working with others to create or plan a communal garden can cultivate peace.
<i>Aim:</i> To explore how working in a garden or working with others to create a garden can cultivate both inner and outer peace.	<i>SEN</i>	
	<i>Gifted</i>	
<b>Possible activities</b>		<b>Suggested resources</b>
<p><b>Starter:</b> Ask the class to close their eyes. Then get them to imagine a garden. Take them on a walk round this garden, conjuring different scenes, like wonderful beds of spring flowers and a vegetable patch full of their favourite vegetables. Maybe they can pick a ripe tomato from a vine and eat it. Take them to a bench where they can sit under a tree in blossom. Get them to imagine blossom raining down on them. Then get them to imagine fruit ripening on the tree, fruit that they can pick and eat, fresh from the tree. At each location, get them to imagine the sights, smells and sounds. Also get them to imagine how they feel in these places. When they've completed the exercise, get them to share some of their feelings about the various sights. Then, perform the exercise again, this time getting them to imagine that the garden was one they had created, that they – along with friends, family and/or neighbours – had done all the work of planting and nurturing the garden. How would they feel then? What different feelings (e.g. satisfaction and/or pride) might they experience?</p>		
<p><b>Activity 1:</b> Introduce the term devotion. Give some definitions e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ardent love</li> <li>▪ Commitment to some purpose</li> <li>▪ Willingness to serve God, for instance through acts of charity, e.g. working with disadvantaged people.</li> <li>▪ Willingness to serve humanity unselfishly (a religious and a humanist ideal).</li> </ul> <p>Explain that any task, large or small, can be seen as a devotion if it is done selflessly and with love. As an example, let someone read the quote from the Bhagavad Gita (see right). Remind them, if they have studied Islam, that the word Islam means both 'peace' and 'submission', i.e. submitting their lives to the will of Allah. As another example of devoted service, remind them of the Sikh <i>langar</i> (free kitchen), where Sikhs perform <i>sewa</i> (service) by preparing food and serving it to anyone who comes to the gurdwara. (Remind class that the food in the <i>langar</i> is always vegetarian so that anyone can eat it.)</p>	<p><i>"Set your heart upon your work, but never on its reward. Work not for a reward, but never cease to do your work"</i> (Bhagavad Gita, 2:47).</p> <p>In this passage Krishna is encouraging the warrior Arjuna to fulfil his duty, but to do it selflessly; in other words, Arjuna is being encouraged to let God (i.e. Krishna) work <i>through</i> him.</p>	

**Activity 2:** Ask the class if anyone has a garden and if they grow vegetables in that garden. If they don't have a garden, do their parents or anyone they know have an allotment? If they do, do they share the things that grow in the garden with anyone? If they live in a flat or tower block, does anyone they know grow tomatoes or herbs on their windowsill or balcony? Discuss the difference between an allotment worked by one family and a community garden. Do members of the class know of any local community gardens? Do they know of any derelict plots of land that could be turned into a community garden?

Explain that you are now going to look at three examples of how working in a garden can create peace and a sense of community. The first is community gardens and as an example look at the phenomena of guerrilla gardening (see background information) or the Bronx Green-up project that helps residents of the Bronx region of New York City to transform vacant lots into community gardens ([http://www.nybg.org/green\\_up/comm\\_gard.php](http://www.nybg.org/green_up/comm_gard.php).)

**Activity 3:** Working in a garden can also bring together people from different communities. As an example, tell children a bit about the work of Jerusalem Botanical Gardens (see Surkes 2001) and how their educational programmes have been drawing together local Jewish and Muslim children.

Can the class think of other groups of people that might usefully work together? For instance young people helping older people in protected housing to create a garden, where the young people might be able to do the work in building a garden designed by the less able residents.

Surkes, S. (2011) Building bridges over divided communities: the work of the Jerusalem Botanical Gardens, *Roots* 8,1, pp. 24-26  
Available online at:  
[http://www.bgci.org/files/Worldwide/Education/Roots\\_PDFs/Roots%208.1.pdf](http://www.bgci.org/files/Worldwide/Education/Roots_PDFs/Roots%208.1.pdf)

**Activity 4:** The final example to consider is prison gardens, which, in addition to creating a sense of community amongst the inmates, can actually help rehabilitate prisoners, and give them a sense of purpose and inner peace. Set out the following scenarios and ask the class to rate them in the order of what they think might have the best effect on the prisoners as compared to what might have the worst? (Suggest to the class that they try and empathise with the living conditions of each set of prisoners.) What, if any of these scenarios, might help rehabilitate prisoners and give them some sense of self-esteem and inner peace?

- Prisoners who are locked in a cell with a view of a concrete yard.
- Prisoners who are kept in a cell that has a window with a view of a garden.
- Prisoners who are forced to work in cotton fields picking cotton in the sweltering sun.
- Prisoners who are allowed to work in a thriving garden, the produce of which is donated to people in need.

Tell the class a bit about the work of the Horticulture Programme at the San Francisco County Jail and share the quote from Catherine Sneed, founder of The Garden Project (see background information).

**Activity 5: Role play activity** Discuss the meaning of ‘community’ and ask class to suggest who the different members of the community might be. This might include students, teachers, sports groups, members of a mosque /church and shop keepers, etc. Divide class into groups of five and explain that each pupil will represent a different member of the community. Explain that they are going to work together to act out the creation of a community garden.

Discuss the different jobs they might need to do, e.g. clearance, designing the garden/park, building and maintaining the site. Ask each group to devise three tableaux that capture the process of creating a garden: (1) initial meeting and discussion of community members, (2) building the garden, and (3) opening the garden. Remind them that it is important to think about the emotion of each character and to show the facial expression as well as their body posture. Give them a time limit (two minutes for each tableau).

With one or two of the groups, you can introduce *thought-tracking*. Explain that you are going to ask individual characters to speak their thoughts or feelings aloud—just one or a few words. When the group are in position, tap each person on the shoulder in turn. Ask them to speak the word or words as though they are the character. When all the groups have worked out the three images, sit the class down and spotlight each group in turn by asking them to demonstrate their three tableaux. Encourage the rest of the class to observe each member of the group carefully, so that they can try to guess what member of the community and job they are representing. Ask the class why it might be ‘spiritually’ important to create a garden?

**Plenary:** Review the role-play activity and ask students whether they can see a difference between doing jobs as a necessity as compared to doing them as a service to the community, e.g. sorting rubbish into different recycling bins. Ask them how they think gardening could be seen as an act of devotion. If they were to do weeding in a communal garden, how different might they feel if they were doing it as a devotion as compared to being told they had to weed before they could go out with their friends? Ask them to explain the ways this project might ‘cultivate peace’ and contribute to community cohesion.

If you use this as an assessment activity, students are working at the following levels if they are able to:

2. Talk about the jobs that might be needed to create a garden
3. Talk about how working in a garden can bring people together.
4. Discuss the difference between having to work in a garden as a chore and doing it unselfishly in order to serve the community.
5. Discuss the different ways that working with others in a garden can transcend differences and create understanding between people of different beliefs and backgrounds.
6. Explain how working in a garden can ‘cultivate peace’ and contribute to community cohesion, using at least two specific examples.

<i>Healing body and soul</i>	<i>Students will</i>	learn that many plants have medicinal properties; begin to understand the benefits to health and creativity of meditating or thinking in a garden.
<i>Aim:</i> To look at plants that have medicinal properties, and to explore gardens as places for meditation and inner reflection.	<i>SEN</i>	
	<i>Gifted</i>	
<b>Possible activities</b>		<b>Suggested resources</b>
[Note: depending on the time available, teachers may wish to split this lesson into two parts, especially if a trip to a local botanic garden can be organised.]		
<p><b>Introduction:</b> Ask: have you ever used food or drink made from a plant to help you feel better? For example, a drink made from root ginger, lemon and honey when you have a sore throat or cold? Have students ever seen a friend or relative take an aspirin? Show them pictures of willow tree and meadowsweet, both of which contain a major ingredient in aspirin, and which have been known for thousands of years to have healing properties. Explain that in the main activity in the first part of this lesson they are going to be focusing on these and other plants that have been discovered to have medicinal properties.</p>		
<p><b>Activity 1:</b> Explain to the class that many people believe it is important to serve humanity and for this reason it is crucial to conserve eco-systems that might contain plants with therapeutic potential. In addition it is important to test scientifically the validity and safety of traditional remedies, because some remedies might make us feel better only because we <i>think</i> they will make us well. Scientific testing can help us find out if there is any truth to these claims, and although several traditional herbal remedies have been found to be effective medicines, others have not. It is important to develop our ability to think critically and rationally so that we can learn what is healthy for us and what is not.</p>		<p>Information sheets on the medicinal properties of several plants and an outline of the human body can be found on the BGCI website:  <a href="http://www.bgci.org/education/seedsofunityresources/">http://www.bgci.org/education/seedsofunityresources/</a></p> <p>Coloured pens, poster paper, scissors, glue-stick.</p>
<p><b>Activity 2:</b> Divide the class into groups. Give each group a set of information sheets and an outline of a human body. Ask them to discuss the information sheets and to mark on the outline which part/s of the body the plants heal. Discuss the groups' findings. Do the components of some plants heal more than one ailment? Ask the groups to select one plant and to produce a poster about this plant, in particular explaining why it is important.</p>		

**Activity 3:** [Note: *this can be used as the assessment activity in conjunction with the plenary discussion.*]

*Discuss:* Considering that so many different plants have been shown to have some kind of healing property, do you think there might be plants out there with yet-to-be-discovered medicinal potential? If so, what are the implications for conservation?

If there is time and a group has finished their poster, ask them to look at the information about *Cinchona officinalis* (see information sheet on the [BGCI Seeds of Unity website](#)). Explain to them that there are many different types of Cinchona trees and that these also contain quinine. In Podocarpus National Park in Ecuador, there is one remaining group of *Cinchona mutisii* trees. They are recognised as endangered but there is mining and deforestation taking place in the National Park. Ask students to compose a letter to the Ecuadorian ambassador in the UK about why it is important to protect *Cinchona mutisii* to ensure its survival. Their reasons should include reference to the therapeutic potentials of the plant. Alternatively they could write a letter protesting about the destruction of a habitat that may contain plants with as yet undiscovered therapeutic potentials. At the end of these activities encourage the groups to share their posters and letters with the rest of the class.

**Activity 4:** Point out that the lesson so far has been about how plants can heal the body, but that now we are going to look at ways that plants—or more specifically natural spaces and gardens—can be places to meditate and think, i.e. that they can be refreshing to the mind and healing to the soul.

Ask the class if there is any place outside—e.g. in their garden, a local wood or park—where they go to sit alone and think. Have any of them climbed a tree to be alone? Also ask if any member of the class ever had to recover from an illness or a broken bone and whether they found it peaceful and healing to sit out in the garden.

Tell the class about Charles Darwin, the famous British scientist (background information). In particular how, in his later years when he suffered from ill health, he was encouraged by his doctor to take exercise in the gardens of his house. As well as helping Darwin recover from his illness, these walks actually helped him to think and to come up with new ideas. People still visit Darwin's home, Down House, to walk along his 'thinking path'. Ask: when you go out for a walk, do you get any ideas or come up with solutions to problems that have been bothering you?

**Activity 5:** Take the class outside to the school garden or nearby park. Explain that they are going to focus on different sensory impressions in a garden: sight, sound, smell, temperature, touch. Provide students with pencils, paper and clipboard and get them to sit by themselves in silence and record their impressions. Ask them what feelings this form of meditation provokes?

Ask:

- What were some of the unexpected sensations (sight, sound etc.) you experienced during your garden meditation?
- What do you think people might miss by rushing around everywhere?
- What place do you visit—or imagine visiting—when you need to feel calm and peaceful?
- Why might sitting quietly—or working—in a garden be healing?

**Plenary:** Show students pictures of a rain forest, a bottle of pills and a healing or rehabilitation garden.

Discuss with the class, prompting them with the following questions:

- Tell me about these pictures
- Can you name a plant that is used in medicine?
- How do you think these pictures might be linked?
- Can you explain why it is important to protect plants and their habitats?

Students are working at the following levels if they are able to:

2. talk about a plant that has medicinal properties.
3. give reasons why it is important that this plant is protected.
4. discuss the therapeutic and spiritual benefits of sitting quietly in a garden
5. discuss the future implications of destroying a habitat containing plants with unknown medical potential.
6. 5. give reasons why the plant world can be said to be capable of healing both body and soul.

<i>Fallow fields</i>	<i>Students will</i>	be able to draw comparisons between the ancient practice of leaving fields fallow and the human need for retreats, work breaks and summer holidays.
<i>Aim:</i> To look at a metaphor relating human experience to cycles of growth.	<i>SEN</i>	
	<i>Gifted</i>	
Possible activities		Suggested resources
<p><b>Introduction:</b> Review the definition of a metaphor. Explain to the class that you are going to look at a way that cycles of growth and rest in the plant world are reflected in human experience. Pass out copies of sheet with the two Bible passages (see background information). Get pupils to take turns reading the passage from Ecclesiastes. Then play a YouTube video or CD recording of the song “Turn, Turn, Turn”, which is based on this passage. Discuss. (Roger McGuin played in the British band The Byrds, whose version of this song was an international hit. If you play the Bruce Springsteen video, which was taken at a memorial concert for a member of Springsteen’s band who had recently died, look at the words: “a time to be born, a time to die”, and discuss how apt it is that it was performed as part of a memorial concert.)</p>		<p>Bruce Springsteen Turn, Turn, Turn  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZx-QYNBTug">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZx-QYNBTug</a></p>
<p><b>Activity 1:</b> Ask and discuss: How would you feel if you had to go to school every day of the week? How would you feel if you had to go to school every day of the year? Could the summer vacation be an example of a time when you get to rest your mind? At the end of the summer break, do you feel eager to start school again?</p> <p>If pupils have already studied the concept of the Sabbath or day of rest, ask them to explain it. If not, introduce them to the term (see background material). Then read the second Bible passage (or get someone to read it) and explain that there was also a Sabbath for fields that lasted a whole year, and that this was in order to help the soil recover. Look at the term ‘fallow fields’, and relate to sabbaticals. (Note: you might want to point out that although the use of fertilizers and compost means that fields are nowadays rarely left fallow – i.e. unplanted and unworked – crops and garden plots are still often rotated to prevent the build-up of pests that attack a specific crop and to replenish nutrients.)</p>		<p>You might want to play the YouTube video “I’ve got a feeling”, which demonstrates the joy with which Jews look forward to Shabbat.  <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5GW-frPw2oI">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5GW-frPw2oI</a></p>



**Activity 2:** Introduce the term 'wind-up', and ask pupils what it means. Ask if any of them had wind-up toys when they were young. Show them an example, either an actual wind-up toy or a YouTube video. What does it mean to wind someone up? Do people actually have a key in their back like a toy? Reiterate that to 'wind someone up' is a metaphor.

Then introduce the term 'unwind'. Again, is this literal or metaphorical? What do you do to unwind? Do you think you need unwinding time during the school day? Where would you have it? Invite the class to invent a practical unwinding activity.

YouTube video of wind-up toy (there are tons) or actual wind-up toy.

**Activity 3:** Ask if any of the students pray or meditate. Point out that for many people, praying or meditating is a good way to create space in a day for rest and renewal. For Muslims, the five daily prayers are considered an act of charity (giving time to God) as well as refreshing (as believers connect with God in prayer). Christian clergy have morning and evening prayers ('offices').

For Hindus and also many non-religious people meditation is an important way to clear the mind and find peace. Read the following extract from *The Bhagavad Gita* about practicing yoga: "To practice yoga, one should go to a secluded place and should lay kusa grass on the ground and then cover it with a deerskin and a soft cloth. The seat should be neither too high nor too low and should be situated in a sacred place. The yogi should then sit on it very firmly and practice yoga to purify the heart by controlling his mind, senses and activities and fixing the mind on one point."

**Activity 4:** Ask students if they have ever been on a retreat, or a family holiday that was in a very restful place? Maybe there is a park or special place in their own garden that they go to be by themselves and play quietly? Introduce the term retreat, perhaps with this quote from the *Good Retreat Guide*: “Men and women have always needed at times to withdraw temporarily from daily living in order to nourish their inner life of the spirit. ...In our ordinary lives, the kitchen or the shed at the bottom of the garden may be where we go to retreat from the world.”

Show some images of retreat places on the IWB, e.g. the Buddhist centre on Holy Isle. If you have time, introduce the idea of the Celtic thin places, and ask pupils if there is any place where they've felt particularly close to the spiritual or mythic realm. Point out that the ancient people who lived in Britain often marked these places with stones.

Holy Isle (<http://www.holyisland.org/>)  
The Retreat Association  
(<http://www.retreats.org.uk>)  
Holy Island, Lindisfarne  
(<http://www.lindisfarne.org.uk> )  
Celtic 'thin places'  
(<http://www.thinplaces.net/> )

**Activity 5:** Read the poem “Wintering Tree” (see background information). Ask: what do they think the poet was feeling when she wrote it? Do you think she was speaking literally, or was she using the poem as a metaphor for the way she was feeling? Students then to write a short paragraph or poem (or draw a picture) about their own spirituality or creativity, relating it to a plant or the need for periodic retreat.

**Plenary:** Return to the metaphor of fallow fields. How do students understand this now? How does the practice of leaving fields to rest relate to the need for summer holidays or sabbaticals from work?

Students to write a paragraph about what it would be like without their weekends, half-term breaks and summer holidays. Would their ability to learn suffer under such an intensive regime? Encourage them to think about whether their holidays help them to be more happy, relaxed and productive in their everyday lives/school work.

As an alternative activity they could write about a retreat they've taken or a place of retreat that they would like to visit. Maybe they could draw a picture of their ideal place of retreat.

Encourage them to make a reference to the practice of 'fallow fields' and cycles of growth and rest in nature.

Students are working at the following levels if they can:

2. describe what they think their life would be like without holidays.
3. talk about how some people use prayer or meditation as 'time outs'.
4. relate taking breaks (e.g. summer holiday/half-term breaks) to improving the ability to think and concentrate in school.
5. explain what a metaphor is and give examples.
6. relate the biblical practice of leaving fields fallow to modern-day school holidays and sabbaticals.

<b>Key words</b>	Stewardship, conservation, Fairtrade
<b>Acknowledgment</b>	A special thanks to Lesley Prior and Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) for permission to adapt the “Seeds of Unity” materials for the Ealing syllabus. Activities designed for visits to Botanic Gardens (e.g. Kew) can be found on the BGCI Seeds of Unity website: <a href="http://www.bgci.org/education/seedsunityresources/">http://www.bgci.org/education/seedsunityresources/</a>
<b>Sample assessment activities</b>	
<p><i>Note: This is an assessment activity related to the first lesson, but there are other suggested assessment activities throughout the scheme.</i></p> <p>Students write a few paragraphs or design a triptych storyboard about the ‘seeds of influence’ in their past, present and future.</p> <p>They could also write a letter or create a card to send acknowledgment to the people who have inspired them and had a positive influence on their lives.</p> <p>The students are working at the following levels if they can use their writing/artwork to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. tell the story of their own lives and identify things that have happened to them.</li> <li>3. talk about their beliefs, and ask other students questions about what they have included in their triptychs and why.</li> <li>4. describe what they have learned from the Parable of the Sower and what it might mean to a Christian and compare some of the things that have influenced them with those which influence other people, including religious believers.</li> <li>5. make links between the beliefs and values they have developed and how these are exemplified in their lives and make reference to people who have inspired and influenced them and why.</li> <li>6. suggest reasons for the similarities and differences between their own beliefs and ideas and those of others and explain why everyone has their own individual response to the question ‘what inspires and influences me?’</li> <li>7. draw a parallel between the conditions/influences they need to develop in life and what a seed needs in order to grow into a mature plant.</li> </ol>	

## Background information



<http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/>



Organic apple orchard in Pateros,  
Washington, USA  
© [Christopher Thomas](#)

**Fairtrade products:** According to the Fairtrade foundation ([www.fairtrade.org.uk](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk)) “Fairtrade is about better prices, decent working conditions, local sustainability, and fair terms of trade for farmers and workers in the developing world.”

Conventional trade often discriminates against the poorest, weakest producers. Fairtrade requires companies to pay sustainable prices to the producers (which must never fall lower than the market price) and focuses in particular on exports from developing to developed countries (e.g. coffee, cocoa, sugar, tea, bananas, handicrafts, wine etc.). Fairtrade also supports higher social and environmental standards in the developing world. Fairtrade organisations which are backed by consumers not only support the producers but they also raise awareness, and campaign for changes in the regulations and practice of international trade. Consumers can identify the Fairtrade products by the special labelling on their packages. A certification organization is responsible for conducting independent auditing of Fairtrade producers and traders to ensure that the agreed standards are met.

**Organic products:** Organic food is produced by farming that follows strict regulations and emphasises the protection of wildlife and the environment. The Soil Association explains that in organic farming:

- pesticides are severely restricted—instead organic farmers develop nutrient-rich soil to grow strong healthy crops and encourage wildlife to help control pests and disease
- artificial chemical fertilisers are prohibited—instead organic farmers develop a healthy, fertile soil by growing and rotating a mixture of crops using clover to fix nitrogen from the atmosphere
- animal cruelty is prohibited and a truly free-range life for farm animals is guaranteed
- the routine use of drugs, antibiotics and wormers is disallowed—instead the farmer will use preventative methods, like moving animals to fresh pasture and keeping smaller herd sizes

Organic farming recognises the connection between what we eat and our health. People choose to buy organic products for the benefit of their personal health and the environment. Consumers can recognise organic products by their special labelling. Any food products labelled as organic must meet a strict set of standards which define what farmers and manufacturers can and cannot do in the production of organic food. Organisations which certify the organic products conduct audits to make sure that the regulations are being implemented. The Soil Association, the UK’s leading organic organisation, explains about the difference in prices between organic and non-organic food: “As the costs of farming with oil-based fertilisers and chemicals increase, the price gap between organic and non-organic is closing. Where there is a price difference, you are paying for the special care organic farmers place on protecting the environment and improving animal welfare.” (<http://www.soilassociation.org/>)

They paved paradise  
And put up a parking lot  
With a pink hotel, a boutique  
And a swinging hot spot  
Don't it always seem to go  
That you don't know what you've got  
Till it's gone  
They paved paradise  
And put up a parking lot

They took all the trees  
Put 'em in a tree museum  
And they charged the people  
A dollar and a half just to see 'em  
Don't it always seem to go  
That you don't know what you've got  
Till it's gone  
They paved paradise  
And put up a parking lot

Hey farmer farmer  
Put away the D.D.T. now  
Give me spots on my apples  
But leave me the birds and the bees  
Please!  
Don't it always seem to go  
That you don't know what you've got  
Till it's gone  
They paved paradise  
And put up a parking lot.

*First three stanzas of "Big Yellow Taxi". The line, "Took all the trees, put 'em in a tree museum..." refers to Foster Botanical Garden in downtown Honolulu, which is a living museum of tropical plants, some rare and endangered.*

*The Lord envelopes all that moves in the moving world. By renouncing this, find your satisfaction. Do not covet the possessions of others. (Isha Upanishad 1)*

*The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it. (Psalm 24:1)*

*The world is green and beautiful, and God has appointed you his guardian over it. Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad.*

In modern terms stewardship is an ethic that embodies cooperative planning and management of environmental resources in order to prevent loss of habitat and facilitate its recovery in the interest of long-term sustainability.

Support for conservation efforts come from both humanists and religious groups. It is a humanist ideal to work for all humankind, and preserving precious resources for future generations is one aspect of that. In Judaism, Christianity and Islam the principle of stewardship stems from the belief that God is the ultimate owner of everything, and that human beings are accountable to God for the care and use of the things they take from the earth and the animals and plants they use.

In Hindu belief, all living beings are sacred because they are parts of God, and therefore should be treated with respect and compassion, especially as the soul can be reincarnated into any form of life. Hinduism stresses that true happiness comes not from outer possessions, but from within. This means that the search for material possessions—and the concomitant consumption of materials and energy—should not be allowed to dominate. Life's main purpose is to discover your spiritual nature, which in itself brings peace and fulfilment. Thus Hindu teachers consider the exploitation of earthly resources to be a distraction from humankind's true spiritual purpose.

The Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) is a secular body that helps religious groups to develop their own environmental programmes, based on existing teachings, beliefs and practices. It was founded in 1995 by HRH Prince Philip. More information can be found on their website:

[http://www.arcworld.org/arc\\_and\\_the\\_faiths.asp](http://www.arcworld.org/arc_and_the_faiths.asp)



Sacred grove in Tamil Nadu

© [sharonstjoan](#)

Many Hindu villages have a lake they considered to be sacred, and around it a grove of trees to catch rainfall and protect the banks from erosion. The lake and its grove store rainfall to irrigate surrounding fields and supply village wells with drinking water. These lakes and groves are very peaceful places and sanctuaries for wildlife, but unfortunately in recent times many have been neglected, which has led to serious water shortages and increasing desertification in parts of India.

The Bishnoi tribes in desert regions of Rajasthan manage groves called *orans*. Despite sparse vegetation and limited water resources, the area reportedly supports a higher density of human and animal populations than any other desert region in the world because of the conservation practices of the Bishnoi. Their philosophy is that all living things have a right to live and share resources, and therefore they have a set of laws that include a ban on killing animals and on felling trees, especially the *khejadi* tree, which stabilizes sand dunes and is said to increase yields of nearby crops. The Bishnoi do not harvest from the trees directly but collect fallen leaves (for fodder for their animals), branches (for fuel) and fruit (for food). These groves also provide a protective habitat for the Indian gazelle and blackbuck that live in the desert.



[Bronx Green-up Project](#)

**Community gardens** are an extremely valuable resource in areas with high poverty rates and in cities where most housing is in apartment blocks. These communally worked gardens provide opportunities for school children, the unemployed and disadvantaged groups to engage in work that not only connects them to the community and the production of their own food but also helps them to build confidence and self-esteem.

Across the world, approximately 700 million people are fed from urban farms or community gardens. While food production is central to many community and allotment gardens, not all have vegetables as a main focus. Restoration of natural areas and native plant gardens are also popular, as are gardens that are designed mainly for community gathering and interaction.



Guerrilla gardening, Calgary  
[wikipedia](#)

**Guerrilla gardening** is gardening on another person's land without permission. It encompasses a very diverse range of people and motivations, from the enthusiastic gardener who spills over their legal boundaries to the highly political gardener who seeks to provoke change through direct action. Guerrilla gardening has implications for land rights and land reform. The land concerned has usually been abandoned or neglected by its legal owner. Guerrilla gardeners believe that it is morally right to reclaim land from perceived neglect or misuse and assign a new purpose to it. Some guerrilla gardeners carry out their actions at night in relative secrecy, e.g. sowing and tending a new vegetable patch or flower garden; others garden during the day in order to be seen by their community.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guerrilla\\_gardening](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guerrilla_gardening)

Federation of city farms and community gardens in the UK: <http://www.farmgarden.org.uk/>





The Garden Project

“Today, for most prisoners, the work begins in a greenhouse with small plants that need constant nurturing. Each person cares for particular plants and learns, by watching them grow, the true nature of this life: growth, renewal, and perseverance. Somewhere during the time spent quietly working the earth, something happens and something changes. Witnessing the cycle of growth and renewal allows the prisoners to see their own potential for growth and change. People often ask me what I did to inspire people to work. I tell them that it wasn’t me, it was the plants.” (Catherine Sneed, founder of The Garden Project.

In 1983 a San Francisco prison counsellor named Catherine Sneed read John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*. Inspired by the way the families in the novel found hope through their connectedness to the land she arranged to restore a derelict farm that had been part of the prison. She engaged the help of some of the prisoners, and together they began to clear away years of weeds and debris. This was the beginning of the Horticulture Program at the San Francisco County Jail. The produce that is grown at the jail is donated to places with the greatest need, such as food banks, housing projects and centres for senior citizens. The prisoners who work in the garden take great pride in their ability to contribute to society, and along with the skills they learn, they also find out how to work co-operatively.

In Britain there is stiff competition for the much-coveted Windlesham Trophy, awarded by the Royal Horticultural Society each year to the prison with the best garden. Job preparation and contributing to society aren’t the only benefits to prison gardening projects. Being in close touch with nature can be healing in itself: studies have shown that prisoners who occupy cells with a view of trees are less violent than those who have no such outlook.



Darwin's 'thinking path'  
[wikimedia](#)

Charles Darwin was a brilliant naturalist who lived over 200 years ago. He is famous for his theory of evolution which was published in a book called *On the Origin of Species*. Darwin believed that all species (plants and animals) have descended from a common ancestry. Through natural selection individuals develop characteristics that make them more likely to survive. They would then pass these characteristics on to their offspring, and so on.

Darwin developed his theory through a voyage he took when he was a young man. He spent five years on a ship called The Beagle and visited countries as far away as South America. During his voyage he collected a huge number of geological and biological specimens many of which you can still see in the Natural History Museum in London.

Darwin suffered from bad health in later years and this kept him confined at home. It was at this time Darwin satisfied his great curiosity with experiments involving plants, for instance insect pollination and the movement of climbing plants. He would walk through the grounds of his estate at Down House three times a day, both for exercise and because it helped him ponder the questions that were bothering him: he called it his 'thinking path.'

*Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8*

<sup>1</sup> There is a time for everything,  
and a season for every activity under the heavens:  
<sup>2</sup> a time to be born and a time to die,  
a time to plant and a time to uproot,  
<sup>3</sup> a time to kill and a time to heal,  
a time to tear down and a time to build,  
<sup>4</sup> a time to weep and a time to laugh,  
a time to mourn and a time to dance,  
<sup>5</sup> a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,  
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,  
<sup>6</sup> a time to search and a time to give up,  
a time to keep and a time to throw away,  
<sup>7</sup> a time to tear and a time to mend,  
a time to be silent and a time to speak,  
<sup>8</sup> a time to love and a time to hate,  
a time for war and a time for peace.

*Leviticus 25: 1-7*

The LORD said to Moses at Mount Sinai, “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a sabbath to the LORD. For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of sabbath rest, a sabbath to the LORD. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest. Whatever the land yields during the sabbath year will be food for you— for yourself, your male and female servants, and the hired worker and temporary resident who live among you, as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your land. Whatever the land produces may be eaten.



[Fallow fields](#)

Sabbatical comes from Hebrew *shabbat*, i.e. sabbath, a word that means ‘ceasing’. The biblical sabbath—held to honour the belief that on the seventh day of creation God rested—is the origin of the modern practice of ‘the weekend,’ which contrasts to the work and school week, which for most people lasts from Monday to Friday.

There is also a commandment in the Bible (the practice of *shmita*, ‘release’) that requires farmers to cease working their fields for the seventh year of a planting cycle. This is known as a sabbatical, a term that in recent times has also come to mean any extended break in a person’s career. Students planning to go to university often take a sabbatical or gap year in order to work or travel. Other people typically take a sabbatical from employment to fulfil some goal, e.g., writing a book or travelling for the purpose of research, or to allow time to recover from creative or intellectual burnout. Some universities and other institutions go so far as to offer scientists, physicians, and/or academics paid sabbatical leave, which shows how much these breaks are valued.

"Wintering Tree" by Nora Leonard



Such slow growth...  
Over the years  
I have fruited and spread,  
suffered the scolding of squirrels,  
endured plundering birds  
and those who mourned  
ruined nests.

Hosts of avian angels  
migrate overhead.  
The stars are my fairy lights,  
the cold earth brooding  
beneath a blanket of snow.

Come spring  
there'll be another nest,  
the tenderest chicks  
swaddled in down,  
and the fresh green of growth  
won't all fall to the worm.

But that will be then.

For now my spirits  
sink to the very root.  
They pool and renew there.

This is the season to incubate and rest...

The poet was writing about the kind of flat, fallow period that typically follows a burst of creativity. For artists and writers this kind of inactivity can be as difficult to endure as the "dark night of the soul" experienced by religious people. However the imagery in the poem also reflects the need we all have for periodic rest.