



WHISPER OF THE SPIRIT

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The Joy of Learning Multiliteracies (MOI) research and development programme is designed to promote multiliteracy among children aged 0-8 years old. It entails collaboration with professionals working in early childhood education, pre-school and the initial stages of primary education as well as in libraries and the cultural sector. The Playful Learning Center, part of the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University of Helsinki, is responsible for implementing the development programme, which is funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture.



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WHISPER OF THE SPIRIT

Myths and multiliteracy

Myths are shared stories and beliefs about things that no one has really seen or experienced but that are still believed to be true. In the past, a long time ago, Finnish myths often had their origins in observations about nature. The natural world inspired people and they wanted to interact with it. People in the ancient times had a completely different relationship to nature from us.

Nature has always been especially important to people living in Finland as the four seasons make the environment very rich and varied here. It is not surprising that it has kindled people's imagination and been the source of many beliefs. For example, shooting stars were believed to be cracks in the sky through which gods could take a peek at the Earth. Forests and their spirits were also an essential part of the northern culture of Finland and way of life as they were an important source of food.

The Whisper of the spirit activity cards are our contribution to the celebrations marking Finland's 100 years of independence. The package can be used and distributed for non-commercial purposes in printed or in digital formats.

The educational aim of the activity cards is for children to take an interest in Finnish stories, nature and ancient beliefs from a variety of perspectives. The tasks encourage children to imagine, observe, collaborate, reflect, innovate and experiment in multimodal ways. We also hope the stories and activities will support children's interests and competencies in multiliteracies.

The production of the Whisper of the spirit activity cards was supported by the Joy of Learning Multiliteracies (MOI) project, which is funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture and implemented by the University of Helsinki. The material can be downloaded from the MOI project website:

www.monilukutaito.com/en/

EVERY CREATURE AND OBJECT HAS A SPIRIT

Ancient Finns believed in spirits. All things, both animate and inanimate, had their own spirit: for example, water, fire, houses and saunas had their own spirits, as did many objects and beings. The spirits' duty was to protect and defend them, and sometimes also to control them. Spirits were respected and valued. Every human being also had a spirit; people inherited their spirits from their grandparents.

Discuss what spirits would look like if people had their own spirits now. What about spirits of objects such as mobile phones or toys?





SPIRITS PLAYING HIDE-AND-SEEK

Spirits can be distinct kinds of creatures such as trolls, elves or fairies. People also believed that a spirit could turn into a tree, stone or rock.



Take a close look at the stones and trees in the school playground: can you see a fairy, an elf or a troll anywhere? Draw or take a picture of the creatures you can find. Discuss how the creatures moved and what they sounded like before they turned into a stone or a tree. What would they tell you if they were alive again?

TAPIO'S KINGDOM

Ancient Finns had great respect for the forest. They were close to the forest and the animals living in it. In addition to the spirits who lived there, the forest also had a god. He was called Tapio.

Discuss your experiences of walking in the forest. What does it smell like? What kind of sounds can you hear there? Go for a walk in a nearby forest. Can you find any holes that were believed to be homes of the spirits? What would a spirit's home look like?



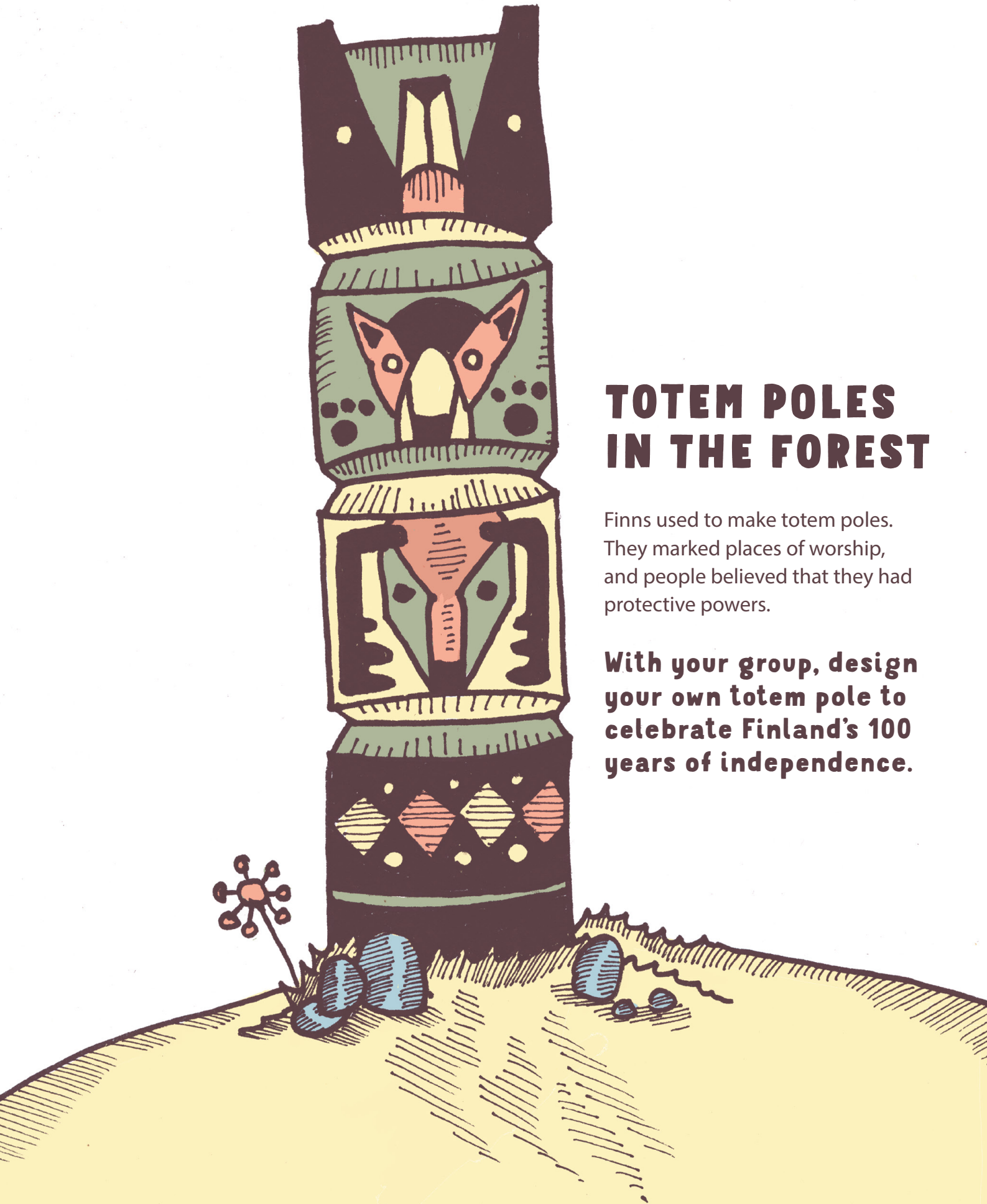


THE KING OF THE FOREST

The bear is the mightiest animal in nature in Finland. There are dozens of words for the bear in Finnish, for example: karhu, otso, ohto, metsän ukko, mesikämmen, hunajatassu and nallukka, or 'honey paw' or 'ruler of the forest' in English. People were afraid to say its name aloud because they thought that if the bear heard its name, it would come to them.

Can you come up with any other names for a bear? If you were a bear, what kind of forest would you like to live in and what would you like to do?





TOTEM POLES IN THE FOREST

Finns used to make totem poles. They marked places of worship, and people believed that they had protective powers.

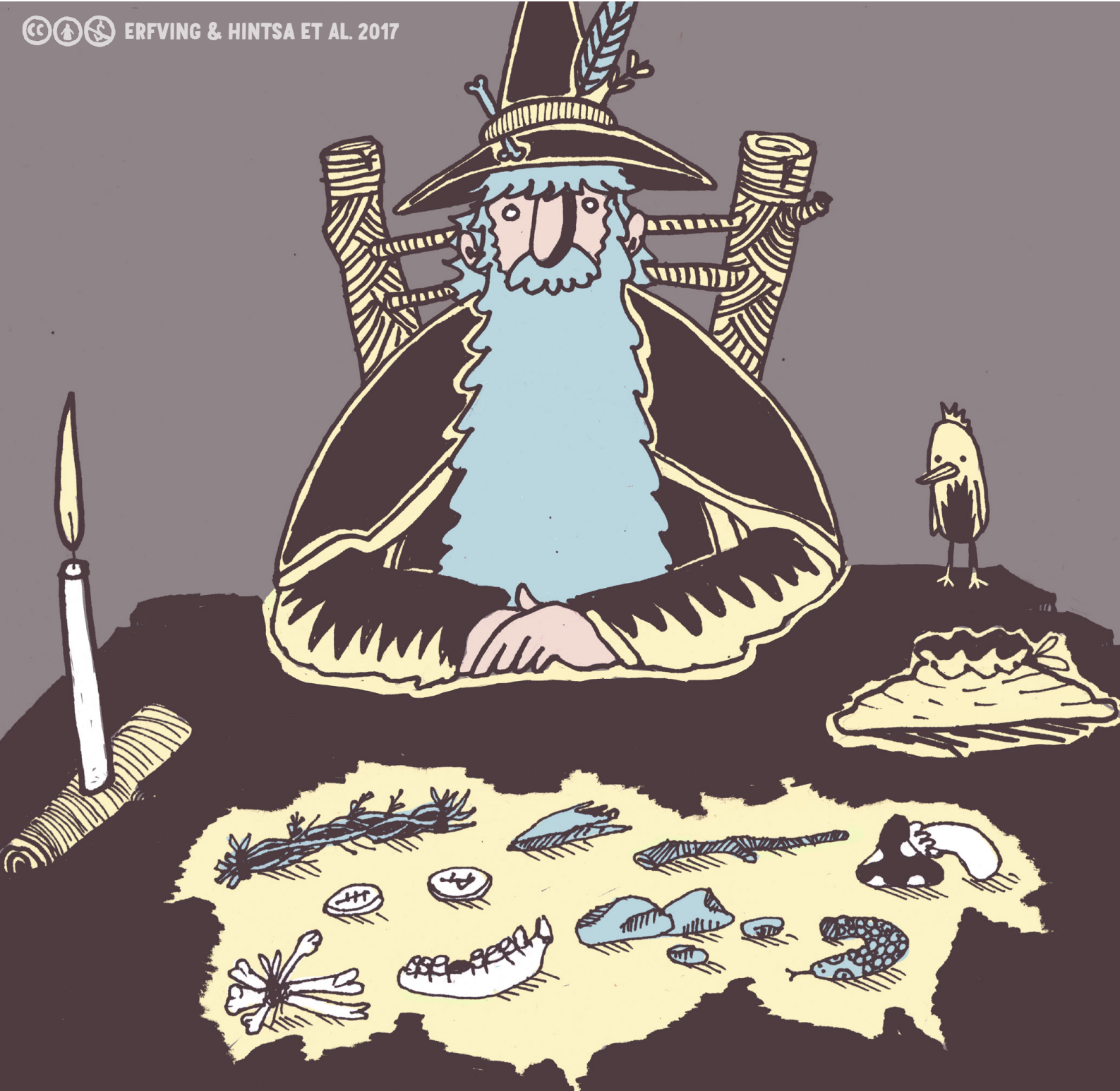
With your group, design your own totem pole to celebrate Finland's 100 years of independence.



THE WIZARD

There is an ancient wizard, Myrrysmies, in the forest. He looks at the twigs and stones on the ground and sees that they form different patterns. He says that he can tell the future from the position of the twigs and stones.

Pretend that you're the wizard. Come up with a question that you want an answer to. Pick up some sticks or small stones, or you can use pens and other light objects that you have at hand. Hold the objects and throw them on the ground, floor or table, and read the answer from their position.



THE MAGIC BAG

The ancient wizard, Myrrysmies, shows you what he has in his magic bag. There are treasures and odd-looking objects: a dried frog, bat wings, bear teeth and bear nails, snake stones, tree roots and branches twisted together. Every object is important for the wizard and reminds him of something.

Make your own magic bag by collecting different objects – what might there be? You don't need to collect all the objects at once; you can add to your magic bag when you go on a school trip, for example.

THE WIZARD'S MAGIC WAND

The wizard, Myrrysmies, is carrying a magic wand, which is made of a twig. The magic wand is so small that it fits into his magic bag. The wand has a core under the bark. If you press your ear to the core and listen very carefully, you can hear a friendly spirit whispering.



**Make your own magic wand,
making sure to include the
whispers of some friendly
spirits.**

MYTHICAL CREATURES

Because old beliefs had many elements that no one had seen in real life, people used to believe that spirits could be half human. For example, the water spirit Vetehinen was thought to be half human and half fish. People hoped that Vetehinen would help them to catch a lot of fish.

CREATE YOUR OWN MYTHICAL CREATURES USING THE FOLLOWING METHOD:

- 1.** Choose an animal to base your creature on and use natural elements (e.g. lichen, flowers, grass) to build its figure.
- 2.** Add a force element (such as a unicorn horn, a golden eye, or magic wings).
- 3.** If necessary, bring it to life with human features and skills (e.g. hands, the ability to speak).

You can make mythical creatures any way you like! Why not try making one out of natural materials, dress up as one or you could design and make a mask?



THREE EXPLORERS



Three explorers are crossing a river. When they look down, they can see the water spirit Vetehinen peeking up at them.

Draw Vetehinen's face, or use a sheet of paper to draw a whole picture of him.

As they walk deeper into the forest, the explorers see some wonderful flowers.

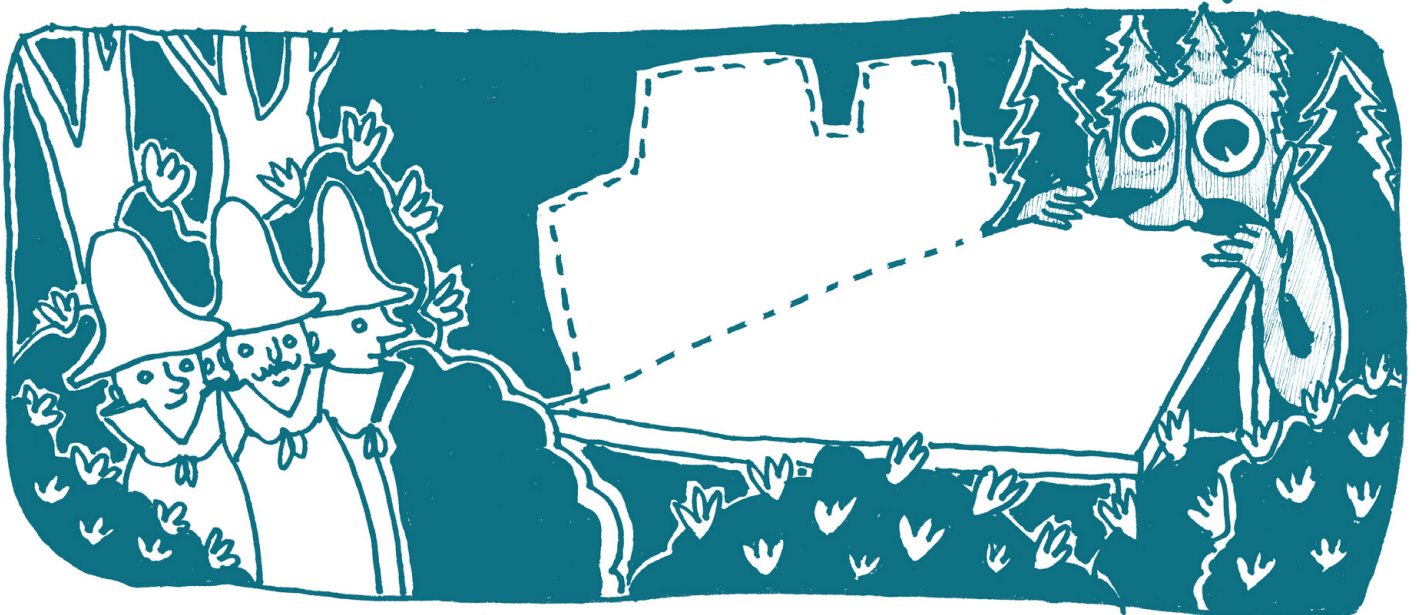
Draw the flowers in the box.





As dusk falls, the forest turns gloomy and the explorers become frightened.

All of a sudden, they can hear loud talking in a strange language. Can you describe that language through drawings?



It was Tapio, the god of the forest, speaking. He was just welcoming the explorers to a feast. Draw the delicious dishes that Tapio has put on the table.



UKKO! UKKO!

In the old days, people were afraid of thunderstorms but they also needed the thunder. Thunderstorms had their own god in Finland. He was called Ukko. People called Ukko by imitating the sound of thunder.

They needed water for their crops, grains and other plants, as well as for their animals and themselves. They thought that Ukko would roar his thunder when he heard people making the noise. But they didn't want to make Ukko angry because then there might be too much rain.

Help the people in the village to call for Ukko and water by imitating the sound that thunder and rain make. Can you think of anything else that you could call for by making noises? What kind of noises?



EMOTIONS IN NATURE

In the ancient times, people thought that natural forces were beings with a will, emotions and the ability to do what they wanted. With your group, read the list of words of different emotions. What emotions would you associate with which natural forces? Why? Try different methods to make the sound of a happy wind and an angry forest.



FURY



JOY



PEACE



LIVELINESS



Notes about myths:

You can find more information about beliefs and myths in Finland in the following books. The tasks in the Whisper of the spirit publication were inspired by these books.

Aalto, Ilari & Helkala, Elina. 2015. Matkaopas keskiajan Suomeen. Atena.

Ojanen, Eero & Ulv, Daga. 2015. Suomen myyttiset linnut. Minerva.

Pulkinen, Risto. 2015. Suomalainen kansanusko. Gaudeamus.

Simonsuuri, Lauri (ed.) 2017. Myyttisiä tarinoita. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 5th edition.



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