

Journey To The Cornfield

A Sensory Story Activity Pack to accompany John Constable's 'The Cornfield'
Constable Visits is organised by The National Gallery



John Constable, The Cornfield, 1826 © The National Gallery, London



Sensory Journeys

Bringing stories to life with your help

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About this pack

This sensory story activity pack has been designed to provide an inclusive sensory exploration of John Constable's, 'The Cornfield' (1826), ensuring that everyone can truly sense this beautiful masterpiece. These activities are particularly suited for early years children and individuals with severe or profound and multiple learning disabilities (SLD or PMLD). If you are a sensory communicator, this pack is for you.

The story has been written as a poem, inspired by the style of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Shelley's renowned works drew upon the imagery of the countryside and nature, coinciding with Constable's era.

To accompany the poem, you will need a collection of props and resources. We offer a list of suggestions that are affordable or even free, but you can use your own ideas and resources as well. Additionally, our website provides specially crafted sounds to enhance the auditory experience.

A truly enriching sensory story experience is one that can be revisited multiple times. As you retell the story, anticipation will build, and you may notice your participants expressing preferences or indicating their desire for certain parts to be repeated. The objective of this sensory story is to delve into the painting, foster connection, and discover moments of tranquility.

To further immerse yourself in 'The Cornfield,' we have included extension activity ideas involving art and nature, enabling you to delve even deeper into the painting through real-life experiences.

*"A great poem is a fountain forever overflowing
with the waters of wisdom and delight."*

Percy Bysshe Shelley, A Defence of Poetry, Published 1840

Resources

To stimulate the senses and bring the poem to life, you will need to find:

- Some dried mud to create the surface of the lane, adding boot or paw prints if possible - mud that has been left in the sunshine to warm or by a radiator would be especially good. Alternatives could include air-dried clay, or a mixture of flour and water baked on a very low heat in the oven, or even a mud face or body mask.
- The shepherd boy's clothes - shorts, a waistcoat, and a neckerchief. Alternatives could include fabric swatches in the same colours as those worn by the boy in the painting, dolls clothes, or clothing shapes cut out of felt; shapes could be used to dress a cardboard shepherd boy.
- A tray of cooled water - you can add bubbles to the water by blowing through a tube or straw, you can splash water on faces or use a soft, wet cloth to experience wetness on hands and cheeks, you can scoop water with hands to drink or press a moistened swab to lips.
- A border collie sheepdog - a hand or sock puppet. Alternatives could include pieces of black and white fur, a toy dog, your school's therapy dog or your family pet.
- Sheep fleece - real fleece or raw wool; available from eBay or from local farms, but you can also sometimes find pieces of raw wool on the ground or stuck in the fences of sheep fields; wash before use. Alternatives could include fleece fabric, woolly socks, or a sheep toy.
- Long, wet, green grass - best picked fresh and sprayed with water. Alternatives could include artificial grass mats, green shredded raffia, or green string. You could also use lettuce or edible flowers and taste them.

- A wooden handle - a rolling pin or wooden broom handle work well.
- The farmer's clothes - a white smock or large shirt, a floppy hat, and a neckerchief. You may also like to add in the stick the farmer is holding.
- Dried wheat - available from eBay, Amazon, florists and garden centres or direct from your local farm; if planning ahead, you can also grow your own by sowing a handful of garden bird food. Alternatives could include hay and straw, paper straws painted golden yellow, yellow cheerleader pompoms, or a yellow fringed party curtain.
- A blue sky - you could use fabrics and white furniture batting to make clouds, a blue sky umbrella, or a sky projector. If you tell the story outside on a sunny day, you can cloud-gaze at the skies above you; use a mirror to help anyone who finds it hard to look up.
- A large white daisy & butterfly - this is an optional extra, but can be a lovely thing to finish the experience with. You could use large artificial daisies, or cut one from card or a paper plate. For a butterfly, use a finger puppet or you could create one using origami or with your favourite craft technique. Alternatively, you can buy packs of wind-up butterfly gliders online that create vibrations if held and released on a hand or you can use them to build anticipation and then let them fly, which can be great fun. If using wind-up butterflies, prepare them in advance and trap them in a box for immediate effect or use the process of slowing winding them up as an opportunity to practice counting and build anticipation.

Resources Checklist

Dried mud

Plough

Shepherd Boys' Clothes

Farmer's Clothes

Water

Wheat

Dog

Blue sky

Sheep

White flower

Grass

Butterfly

Choosing Resources & Assessing Risk

When choosing resources, items that are as close as possible to the real things shown in the picture provides a truly authentic experience however, some factors should be considered to ensure inclusion, comfort, and safety:

- If using animal products, consider if anyone sharing your story has religious, cultural, or ethical needs e.g. they are vegan, their culture excludes dogs, etc.
- Some resources could trigger allergies or anxieties e.g. reactions to wheat, grass, dogs, sheep, or water.

If in doubt, choose or make resources using commonly available craft materials or household junk and differentiate according to your child's or group's individual needs. You can add or omit experiences as required.

Looking at a painting

Engaging with paintings, especially intricate ones, can create challenges for individuals with visual impairments or those who interpret and process visual information differently. It's crucial to acknowledge the distinction between merely noticing the presence of a painting on a wall and truly perceiving the entirety of the image, including its details. Furthermore, in an art gallery setting, additional limitations may arise due to the height of individuals relative to the size and hanging position of the artwork. For instance, a person in a wheelchair or buggy will have a distinct perspective on even a large painting compared to an adult standing upright.

While incorporating sensory elements can enhance the experience of paintings and enable people to engage with them through senses other than vision, it remains essential to prioritise the painting itself as the sensory focal point. Paintings are sensory experiences in their own right, and though we may not be able to physically touch, smell, or taste a masterpiece – tempting as it may be – we can still use our available vision to appreciate and examine it if we so desire.

Tips for helping to support seeing and looking:

- Project a copy of the painting as large as possible on a wall - a high resolution version is available on the National Gallery website with the ability to zoom in on different parts as you move through the story. Click [HERE](#) for access.
- Darken the room to help maintain focus on the projected picture. Take time to look at the picture as a whole, then at its details. Start exploring from the foreground, working towards the background. Imagine the picture as being formed of horizontal bands and work towards the background one band at a time; the structure of the poem helps with this.

- Play 'I Spy' and see if you can spot all the elements covered in the poem before you share the story and sensory elements. You could create prompt cards with Widgit symbols, or use Makaton signs as you find or point to each part of the picture.
- If darkening the room to use a projector, try using an angle-poise lamp, torch or other focused light to illuminate your sensory resources as you play with them and offer them against a black background.
- 'The Cornfield' is a very popular painting and you may be fortunate to find one at a charity shop or car boot sale, or maybe a friend or colleague has one at home, with a textured surface to explore with fingers.
- Try working in 3D and create a map-version of the painting by laying out a pathway across a table or floor using fabrics, paper, toys, materials and objects to make a physical journey from the foreground of the painting through to the background. Follow the map with fingers or, if working at floor size, follow the journey with bodies moving from one place to the next and back again.
- If working from a paper copy of the painting, enlarge it as much as possible and in high resolution. Choose matt paper so it won't reflect the ambient light in your space. Create the right background to display the picture by laying it on black fabric or paper.

Journey To The Cornfield

A poem in the style of Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792 - 1822)
inspired by John Constable's 'The Cornfield' (1826)

Oh, follow, then, my joyful step down the goodly baked brown lane.

Where shepherd boy, in garb of vibrant red and gold of noon,

Quenches his young spirit from the babbling stream sustained

And for a fleeting moment, we both savour nature's lovely tune.

I trace the steps of the lithe, panting dog in his fervent task,

Guiding the gentle sheep towards pastures fresh with dew,

The plough waits at the corner, basking in the fallow shade's mask,

While the farmer, in his bright smock, welcomes me anew.

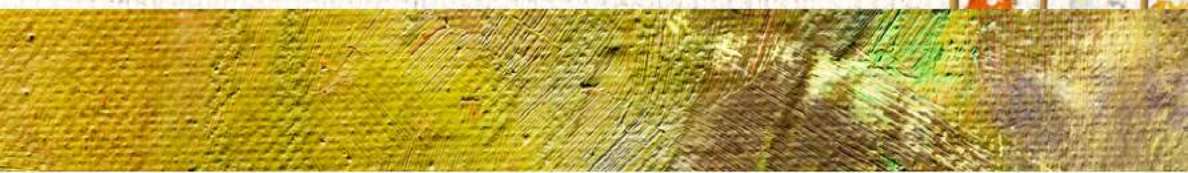
Through the open gate, I step into the mellowing rush of corn,

Embraced by a blend of gold and green, with the sky arched

with billowing clouds above,

In the distance, the church clock chimes, announcing the end of morn,

My heart leaps with joy at the wondrous beauty that surrounds.



Use your resources to create a sensory journey through the painting, pointing out each feature as you go. Read the words in bold out loud, then follow the invitations underneath each line to explore and play. Remember, spoken words are sounds to sense too so use plenty of expression and speak slowly - it's a hot day in the painting, talking might feel slow, heavy, and full of wonder.



Oh, follow, then, my joyful step down the goodly baked brown lane.

Explore the dried mud and prints with fingers - what sounds can be created by tapping on the surface or by running fingernails gently over the ridges of the prints? Try smelling the mud. Try making some 'joyful' steps with hands and feet.



Where shepherd boy, in garb of vibrant red and gold of noon

Meet the shepherd boy and explore his neckerchief, waistcoat, and trousers. You could try dressing up with your own bodies, on a toy, or with a cardboard model.



Quenches his young spirit from the babbling stream sustained

Explore the water tray with hands and by blowing bubbles, try pouring water to make dribbles, flows, and torrents. Try splashing water on faces and drinking water from cupped hands. To differentiate, use a wet cloth to moisten cheeks, or perhaps drink from a cup or moisten lips with a swab dipped in icy cool water.



And for a fleeting moment, we both savour nature's lovely tune.

Continue exploring the water and listen to the soundscapes of the countryside on the website or find one on YouTube. Take five long, slow, deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth as you play and share together in this moment; if the person you are sharing the story with is unable to take deep breaths, model this to create a moment of co-regulation together.



I trace the steps of the lithe, panting dog in his fervent task,

Meet the black and white Border Collie dog and stroke its fur. Make the dog keen and eager to say hello - can you make a panting sound using your mouth and tongue? Is the dog wagging its tail? Will it jump up to lick a face, or will it wag happily against legs and hands?



Guiding the gentle sheep towards pastures fresh with dew,

Meet the sheep and feel their woolly fleeces. Create the sounds of sheep making their way down the lane. Feel and smell the wet grass, and taste the lettuce or edible flowers if using them.



The plough waits at the corner, basking in the fallow shade's mask,

Explore the hard wooden handle, weighing it in your hands. What sounds can you make by knocking on it with your knuckles, or by knocking it gently against the floor or a table. Try rolling the handle between hands or pushing with it to move other objects, or even dragging it through thick paint, dough, mud or soil.



While the farmer, in his milky bright smock, welcomes me anew.

Meet the farmer. You could try on his clothes and see how you look in a mirror, or even take a selfie. Practice a farmer's greeting - what would they say or do?



Through the open gate, I step into the mellowing rush of corn,

Explore the yellow corn - perhaps its stalks will tickle hands, arms, or cheeks. If using natural materials be sure to smell them.



Embraced by a blend of gold and green,

Lay your wheat over hands, arms, or laps. Try holding it up high and letting it fall through the air; you could hold and stretch a sheet to catch it in.



with the sky arched with billowing clouds above,

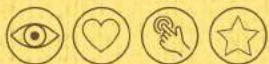
Explore your blue sky and clouds if using fabrics and batting, or huddle beneath your sky umbrella. If sharing the story outside, take some time to look at the sky and the clouds. Take five long, slow, deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth; if the person you are sharing the story with is unable to take deep breaths, model this to create a moment of co-regulation together.



In the distance, the church clock chimes, announcing the end of morn,

Listen to the church clock chiming? What time is it? What other sounds can you hear in the fields? Play some of our sound effects to create your own soundscape.

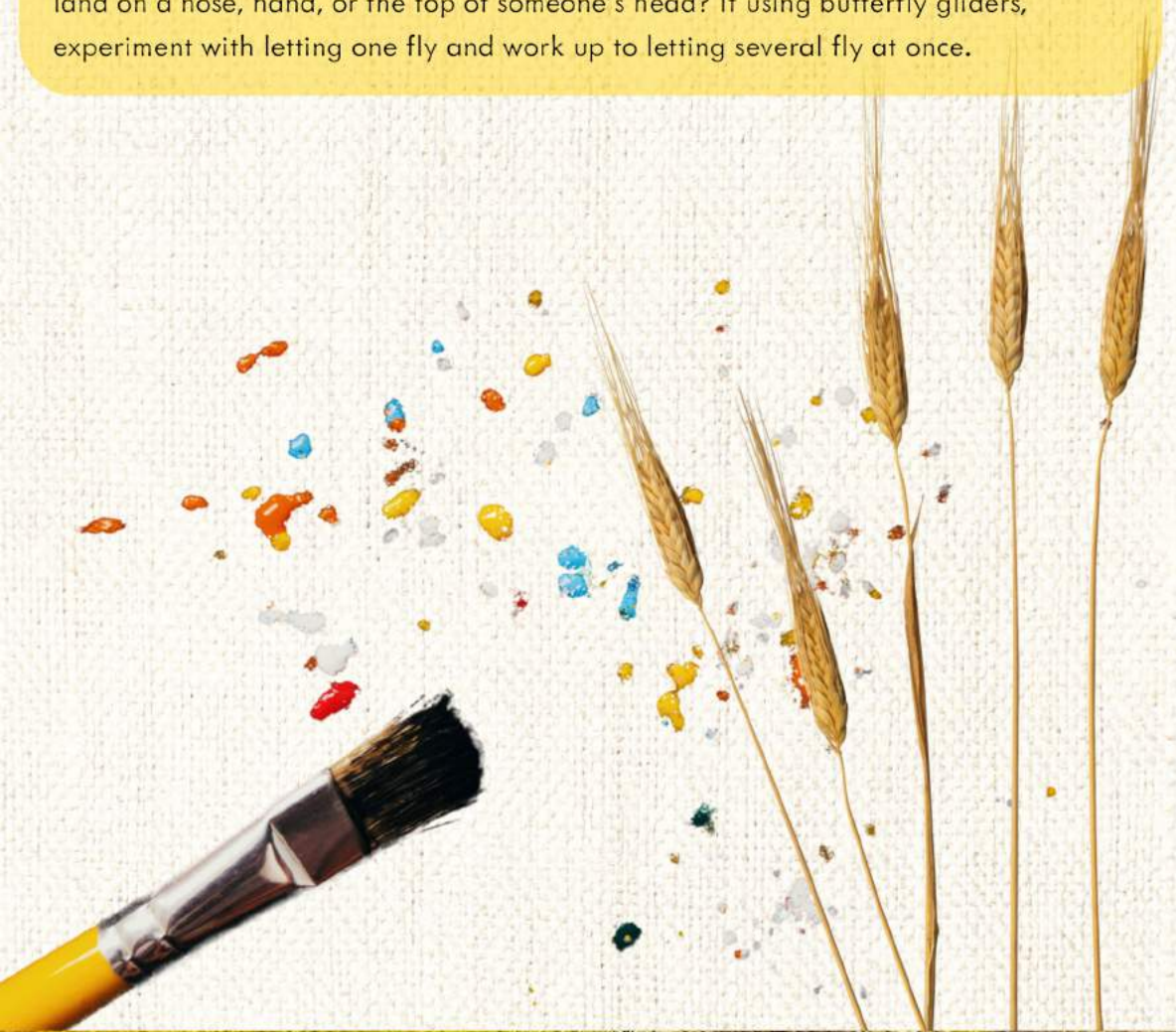




My heart leaps with joy at the wondrous beauty that surrounds.

Retrace your journey using the resources, putting each one away as you go - goodbye to the cornfields, goodbye to the plough, goodbye to the sheep, goodbye to the sheepdog, goodbye to the stream and the shepherd boy...but what's this at the side of the lane opposite the boy?

Draw attention to the butterfly on the flower in the painting. Explore your white flower and butterfly - will your butterfly take off and land again? Will the butterfly land on a nose, hand, or the top of someone's head? If using butterfly gliders, experiment with letting one fly and work up to letting several fly at once.



Foley Story

In radio, film, and television production, Foley is the art of creating sound effects in post-production with every day objects and resources. Using the suggested items and prompts, you can share the poem by making your own sound effects. The Foley version of the story may appeal to those who particularly need or enjoy sound stimulation, but could also be used as an exploration of percussion, conducting, and of different volumes and intensity which can make sounds feel closer or further away. These Foley sounds also have an ASMR quality. ASMR is very popular at the moment for the soothing, tingle-inducing sensations that certain sounds can create for some people.

Resources

You will need to find:

- Empty cereal box, jigsaw box, or shoebox lid
- Dry, clean, cat litter, dried rice, or dry cereal
- Bowl of water
- Dried leaves, old videotape, or strips of newspaper - you could also use dried hay or straw
- Pair of gardening or washing up gloves
- A piece of A4 paper and a pencil
- Comb and a hairbrush
- Empty plastic yoghurt pots or plastic food storage containers

- Pillowcase
- Metal bowl or water bottle

Resources Checklist

Cereal Box

Comb and hairbrush

Cereal or dried rice,
etc

Plastic pots

Bowl of water

Pillowcase

Newspaper strips
or leaves, etc

Metal bowl,
bottle, etc

Gloves

A4 paper and pencil

Use your resources to create a sound journey through the painting, pointing out each feature as you go. Read the words in bold out loud, then follow the invitations underneath each line to create accompanying sound effects. Remember, spoken words are sounds to sense too so use plenty of expression and speak slowly - it's a hot day in the painting, talking might feel slow, heavy, and full of wonder.

Oh, follow, then, my joyful step down the goodly baked brown lane.

Take the jigsaw box and separate the box and the lid to create two shallow trays. If you're using a cereal box, carefully cut the box in half along its long side. Fill each tray with rice, old cereal, cat litter or old puzzle pieces. Try walking on the spot in one of the trays. Or use your hands to "walk" in the trays. Listen to the crunching of footsteps on the hard, baked mud of the lane.


Where shepherd boy, in garb of vibrant red and gold of noon

Quenches his young spirit from the babbling stream sustained

Fill a bowl with water. Gently use your fingers to create a rippling effect across the surface. See if you can cup your hands to take a drink from the bowl. Gently slosh the water from end to end to create the sound of a babbling brook. You can also listen to our recorded sound effect of a running brook.

And for a fleeting moment, we both savour nature's lovely tune.

Hold a piece of newspaper in one hand and gently brush the strips with the other. Vary the speed to mimic the sound of the wind moving through the trees. You can also listen to our recorded sound effects of the woodland and moorland. Hold two gloves together in one hand and vigorously flap them to make the sounds of flapping birds. Try out the sound of birds with your voice: can you create a cooing sound like a dove? Or a cuckoo? Or even an owl? Fold the A4 paper in half and hold it at the crease to create a bird puppet, can you make this flutter and swoop? Run a pencil over the spokes of a comb. Does it sound like a cricket? You could try the same action with a hairbrush. Can you buzz like a bee?



I trace the steps of the lithe, panting dog in his fervent task,

Bunch your fingers together. Using one of the trays, try to make the sound of a dog's paws. Does the rhythm sound different to human footsteps? How fast does the dog walk? Is it running? Try panting like a dog, or even barking!

Guiding the gentle sheep towards pastures fresh with dew,

Holding one small pot in each hand with the opening facing down, you can mimic the sound of the sheep's hooves running down the lane. How quickly can you go? Are the sheep baaing? Can you make that sound? Baa baaaaaa!

**The plough waits at the corner, basking in the fallow shade's mask,
While the farmer, in his milky bright smock, welcomes me anew.**


Use your voice to make a greeting - what time of day is it? You could say 'Hello!', or you could just say 'Morning', or 'Afternoon'.

Through the open gate, I step into the mellowing rush of corn,

Listen to our recorded sound effect of a gate opening. Add some of your leaves, videotape, hay or newspaper strips to one of the trays and walk on the spot as before, swishing through the corn.

**Embraced by a blend of gold and green, with the sky arched with
billowing clouds above,**

Clouds may be silent but we can see them billow! Take a pillow case and waft it high to low. See if the air fills the case on the way down, like a balloon.



In the distance, the church clock chimes, announcing the end of morn,

Find a metal dish or tray, or a metal water bottle, and gently tap it with a pencil to create the distant chimes of a church clock. If it's the end of the morning that probably means there are 12 chimes! Can you tap gently to make it sound like the chimes are far away? Listen to our recorded sound effect of the church clock chiming.

My heart leaps with joy at the wondrous beauty that surrounds.

Choose your favourite atmosphere sounds: the newspaper strips for the leaves; the gloves for the birds; the comb and pencil for the insects. And which vocal sounds do you like best? The dove? The buzzing bee? The wind through the trees...? Or a mixture of all of them to create a soundscape! Replay our recorded sound effects, you could play two or more at once on different devices. Try varying the volume and position of the recorded sounds so they sound nearer or further away, or are coming from different directions.



Extension Activity Ideas

Exploring Paint

Constable worked in oil paints, which are wonderful for creating textures to feel when dried and are thick and slow-moving when wet. Oil paint can be very hard to clean off skin and should not be used by children under 12 due to the inclusion of solvents and other toxins in their formulas.

Alternatives include:

- Acrylic or tempera paints are easy-to-clean, affordable alternatives
- Use paints under cling film or clear plastic sheets - you can go as small or as large as you like, including covering whole tables or even floors! Create a base layer of paper or of cling film/plastic, then squirt on blobs of paints, seal completely with cling film/plastic, and then squish, spread, and smear the paint with hands, feet, rollers (toy cars can also work) to create marks and to mix colours together.
- If it safe to use oil paints with your group, wear medical grade disposable gloves to reduce the amount of contact between skin and paint and ventilate the area well.



Photo by Collar & Cuffs Co

MK Gallery Arts & Us Session 2022 | Cling film on table, paint layer, top covering of cling film

Adapting paints

You can adapt paints to modulate the sensory experience of using them:

- Chill paints in the fridge in advance or keep them on ice before use to create a cold sensation and to slow them down if using them for dripping or dribbling
- Warm paints by standing bottles or tubes in hot water before use, or wrap them up with a hot water bottle to make them runnier and to offer a warm tactile sensation - you can also leave them to warm in direct sunlight as well.

Acrylic and tempera paints can be thinned easily with water, but most oil paints repel water so can only be thinned with a solvent or a specialist medium. Check your oil paint carefully to be sure it is 'water mixable' if it is safe for you to use these paints with your child or group.

Textures in Paint

Tempera paint does not dry with a strong texture of its own if applied thickly, but textures can be created by adding sand or sawdust; mix in a little PVA glue to improve adhesion to your chosen surface. As an alternative, you can paint on sandpaper or other highly textured surfaces.

Acrylic paint can leave textures if used thickly and given plenty of time to dry. Textures can be achieved by using brushes but also try sponges, painting knives, lolly sticks, rags, rollers, and fingers.

If you are able to work across a whole table, try tying pieces of string or elastic tightly across the surface, then slide paper or fabric underneath. Pull up the string or elastic and rub paint along the underside and gently lay it back down. Invite your painters to pluck the string/elastic to

smack and spatter the paint. The string/elastic makes a pleasing snapping sound, and you can create some interesting effects - the more lines of string/elastic you have, the better! Create layers by allowing each set of lines to dry, then turning the paper and repeating.

Texture is visible in many of Constable's paintings, along with the smooth use of paint in one direction to show the different planes of the landscape. You can see this in 'The Cornfield' most clearly when you look at the fields where upright brushstrokes convey the stalks of the corn, and then the horizontal strokes of the fields beyond show the lie of the land.

"[H]e dots and dabs and grubs and splashes, more strangely in each succeeding year"

Comment about Constable's work by one of his contemporaries as quoted by the Tate

"The way Constable applies paint is often unexpected; it may be piled up or scraped down, aggressively jabbed or tightly and precisely touched, spread with a knife, scratched with the end of a brush, splattered and smeared"

Jonathan Clarkson, Constable, London 2010, p.211 | Tate

Use these quotes to inspire movement when applying paint. Try dotting, dabbing, grubbing, splashing, piling, scraping, jabbing, touching, scratching, splattering and smearing! You could paint to music to help your movements - key pieces from the same year as 'The Cornfield' (1826) include Schubert's Symphony No. 9 in C Major, Paganini's Violin Concerto No. 2, and Beethoven's String Quartet No 13.

Printing a cornfield

Try making your own cornfield by using printing techniques to create thick, textured paint when dried. Try matching your colours to those in Constable's painting.

You could:

- Print using dried wheat and grasses either by dipping them in paint and pressing them against a surface, or by laying dry wheat stalks on your surface and dabbing round them with a sponge or splattering over them by flicking paint from a brush - when you remove the wheat, an outline should be left behind.
- Print stalks with the edge of a long piece of thick cardboard dipped in paint and use finger prints to make the ears of wheat at the top.
- Dip and print by cutting wheat printing blocks from polystyrene or potatoes, or make stencils from acetate or cardboard and use sponges or rags to dab and dot.
- Try printing using other features of Constable's painting such as leaves, pebbles, cotton wool or batting for clouds, sticks, and flowers.

You can also create footprints such as boot prints for the humans, paws for the dog, and hooves for the donkeys and the sheep. You could print these using paint, or press them into air drying clay to create the busy surface of the lane.

Painting with natural materials

Try making your own paints and dyes inspired by 'The Cornfield' by using mud, rubbing and smearing juicy grasses, grinding up flower petals with water, or making 'wheat paint' by mixing flour with water, a few squirts of hand soap, a little bit of olive oil, and then colouring it with spices - turmeric works especially well for a golden yellow colour, but you can also use food colouring. Add salt to your flour paint to deter artists from eating it.

Mindful sensory summer moments

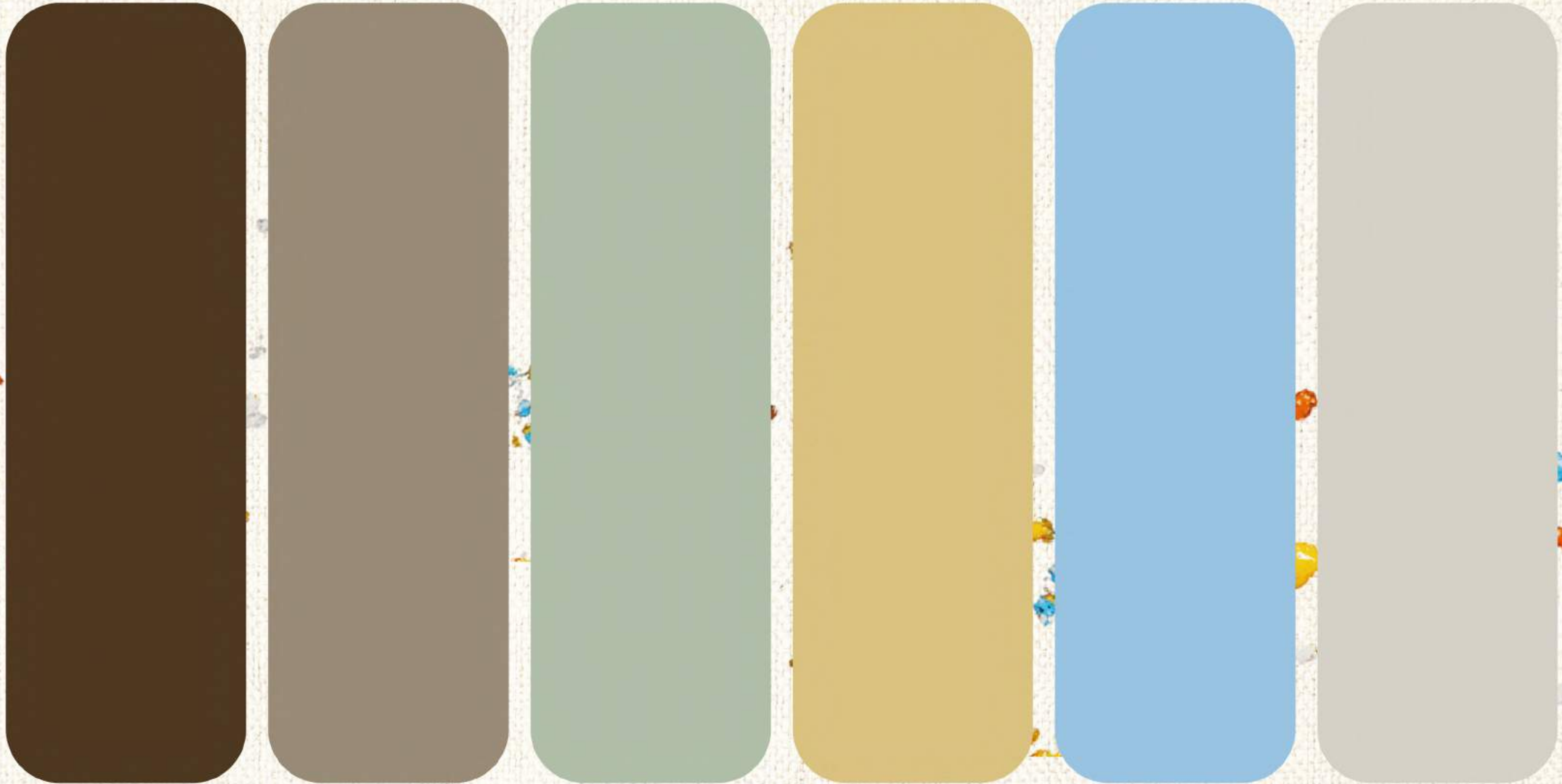
Taking inspiration from the painting, plan a trip to your local park, nature reserve, open farm, or the surrounding countryside and use all your senses to explore long grasses, wild flowers, or even fields of cereals growing:

- Look at the view, but also immerse yourself in the natural environment so you can see the tiny details too - magnifying glasses, sheets or pots can be helpful
- Explore using your sense of touch and think about using feet as well as hands to encounter grass or water; try not to pick wild flowers
- Listen for the sounds of the wind, birds, insects, animals, vehicles, and people around you - you could even make your own recordings
- Smell flowers and grasses, but you may also come across the smell of manure or even town and city smells such as doughnuts or onions cooking, car exhausts, or even people
- Make and taste a ploughman's lunch with fresh bread, cheese, pickles and a crunchy apple

Use the Treasure Hunt and Colour Matching Chart provided to pay close attention to what is around you and find animals, insects, natural features and colours that match Constable's 'The Cornfield'.

Constable Colour Matching Chart

Explore your home, garden, or local park and look for natural items that match these colours as closely as possible. Lay items on the chart to check your match.



Constable Treasure Hunt

Enjoy a walk, or look out of the windows during a car, bus, or train journey and try to spot these items from 'The Cornfield' - can you find them all?



Cornfield



Clouds



Tractor



Sheep



Church



Wild water



Big trees



Dog



Dried mud



Poem, sensory prompts,
and activity pack
created by



www.collarandcuffs.org

Foley effects and prompts created by

Ruth Sullivan

www.ruthsullivan.co.uk