

Graveyards as greenspaces and learning places

About this learning resource

We have created this guide to offer some inspiration on using graveyards as local places to explore the past and the present. We have created three different scavenger hunts aimed at early learners (Primary 2-4, or 6-9 year-olds), however the activities are fun for all ages and can be adapted to suit different groups. We have provided specific Curriculum for Excellence guidance in an additional document.

About graveyards

Graveyards are spaces set aside for the burial of the dead. The term 'graveyard' covers lots of different burial sites, from churchyards to cemeteries.

Most of us will have access to a graveyard in our local community. There is a long history of people throughout Scotland using graveyards as greenspaces not just to commemorate and memorialise the dead, but also to gather together with the living.

Remember to explore graveyards responsibly, be respectful, and wear suitable clothing and footwear for the weather and be careful of uneven surfaces.



With thanks to University of Glasgow students Erin & Ellie who provided the research for this activity.

Graveyard I-SPY

Take a walk around your local graveyard and pay attention to the different sights, sounds, textures and smells. What stories can you find here?

I spy with my little eye... secret symbols!

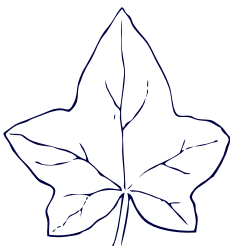
During Victorian times (1837-1901) people used different pictures to decorate gravestones and the pictures had meanings. See if you can spot any!



Handshake
Saying farewell



Hourglass
This stands for the passage of time and a reminder that time is running out



Ivy
Ivy stays green all year long, even in the winter. It stands for immortality (living forever).



Angel
Angels were popular decorations on gravestones. Can you spot one, or maybe just some wings?



Do you see any other symbols? Draw one here. What do you think it means?

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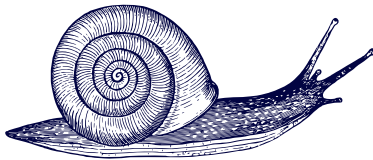
I spy with my little eye... a busy habitat!

Lots of living things make their homes in graveyards. From bugs to birds, graveyards are biodiverse greenspaces. [Biodiversity](#) means different types of living things and how they interact with one another. See what you can spot!



People

What changes do people make? Have they planted flowers? Mown the grass? Do you see worn paths or litter or other clues to how people use the space?



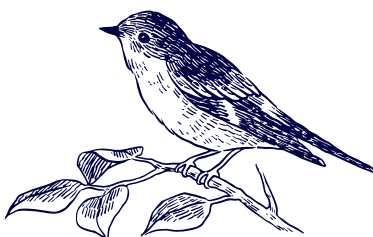
Fast or slow?

Can you spot a slow creature, like a snail? Or a fast creature, like a squirrel? Can you see a creature that crawls or flies or runs?



Plants

Ivy stays green all year long, even in the winter. Can you spot any green ivy growing in the graveyard? What else is growing at this time of year?



Birds

Many birds make their homes in trees and bushes. Can you spot any birds in the graveyard? Do you know what species they are?

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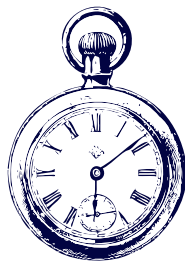
I spy with my little eye... lots of different people!

Graveyards are common throughout Scotland. How and where someone was buried depended on their religious beliefs, when they lived and died, and how much money they had.



People

Stones and memorials in a graveyard are there to help us remember people from the past. What names do you see? Can you find someone with the same birthdate as you?



Time

What is the oldest grave you can find?
What is the most recent?



Historical events

65 million people from all over the globe fought in the First World War (1914-1918). British and Commonwealth soldiers who died were given special white gravestones. Can you find one?

Rich or Poor?

Gravestones and memorials hint at how much money and power a person had in life. What is the largest memorial you can find? What is the smallest?



Guidance Notes

Content warning

Before and during the activity it is important to consider the understanding and reaction of people (young and old) when present in a graveyard. Some discussions may be upsetting to different audiences for many reasons (for example, talking about death, child graves, or religious segregation) and should be carefully considered.

It is also important to ensure the safety and accessibility for visitors. Be clear and honest regarding areas of the site that may not be accessible (for example, stairs or uneven ground, areas with poor lighting, areas impacted by weather conditions, where there are places to rest, access to toilets or other facilities, etc.).

Further reading

- Archaeology Scotland provides a number of [resources on graveyards](#), including how to look after or record sites
- Scottish Archaeological Research Framework has a [guide to graveyards](#)
- Consider turning your I-SPY activity into a photography activity and use our My Place Photography Competition [guide to taking good pictures](#)



Have comments or questions? Get in touch at sct@scottishcivictrust.org.uk

Backpack Essentials

Pencil and paper for notes

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Our graveyards guide

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I-SPY activity sheet

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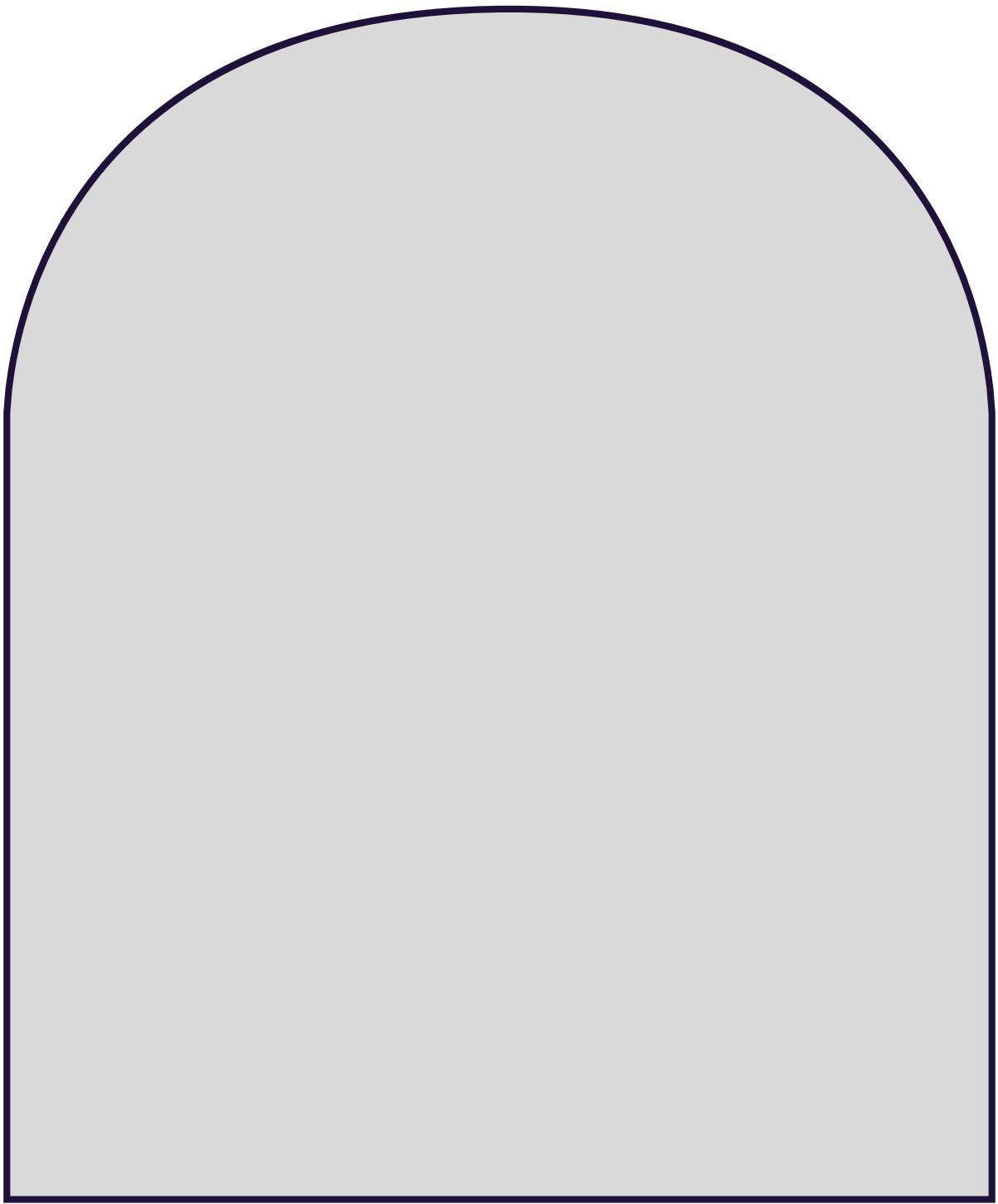
A map of your local area

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An umbrella or raincoat!

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Notes:



Can you draw symbols or inscriptions from gravestones you can see around you?

Make your own graveyard. Use a compass to orientate the graves, and use symbols and letters from the graves you saw on your visit to your local graveyard to decorate your paper stones. With the help of an adult, cut out the gravestones and tree bellow to arrange your graveyard. You could keep them and use them to decorate for Halloween.



