Blossom and Stardust

The Hedgewitch Almanac



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The Hedgewitch Herald

-Meet the Witch-

The Witch of Pungo: The Tale of Grace Sherwood

Princess Anne County, Virginia, the early 1700s
Beside the wide, grey waters of the Chesapeake coast, on a farm in a place called Pungo, there lived a woman her neighbours knew simply as Grace.
Her full name was Grace Sherwood. But as the years passed, almost nobody remembered her by it. They called her something else entirely.

The Woman Who Worked the Land

Grace was born around 1660. In 1680 she married a farmer named James Sherwood, and the two of them worked their land together. When James died in 1701, Grace carried on, running the farm herself.

She was also a midwife and a healer. When a baby was coming, or someone in the neighbourhood was poorly, people knew where to send for help.



A Healer's Winter

Like every healer of her day, Grace would have lived by the seasons. Cottage gardens and hedgerows were the medicine cabinet, and one of the most prized plants in them was a small, tough, grey-green herb that kept its leaves all winter long: thyme. When the cold crept in and coughs came with it, thyme was often what people reached for.

The Whispers Began

But a clever woman who worked alone, and who knew things other people did not, was an easy target for gossip. Her neighbours began to blame her whenever something went wrong. They said she had spoiled their crops, and that she could change herself into a black cat and slip through keyholes.

None of it was ever proved. Even so, the rumours grew until the local court got involved, and Grace spent several years away from her farm.



Home Again

By 1714 she was back, and she got her farm returned to her. She lived there quietly until her death in 1740, at about eighty years old.

Still there today

In 2006, three hundred years after those events, the Governor of Virginia formally cleared her name. Today there is a statue of Grace in Virginia Beach, and every year the Pungo Strawberry Festival chooses an honorary "witch" in her memory.

Fact or Legend

Very few hard facts about Grace survive. You may read that she grew herbs, loved animals and brewed remedies, but that part comes from stories told long afterwards, not from the records of the time. What we can say for certain is that she was a farmer, a midwife and a healer, that she was accused, and that she was finally cleared.

Grace Sherwood's story is a reminder that rumour can travel faster than truth, but the truth can still win in the end, even if it takes a very long time.
This month, we're following in her footsteps, with a herb that healers kept close through winter.

Thyme

"Thymus vulgaris"

Part of the Mint Family



Description

Tiny grey-green leaves • On thin woody stems • Found in sunny gardens and pots • Leafy all winter long

Uses / ailments

Traditional coughs & sore throats • Warm herbal tea • Soups & stews • Fairy folklore

Thyme

"Wishing Charm"



Hold your warm mug in both hands. Breathe in the steam, and make a quiet wish fmake a quiet wish to feel calm and cared for and let the warmth settle:

Little thyme in silver-green,
Where the fairies dance unseen,
Wrap me warm and hold me tight,
Soon I'll be feeling calm and bright.

Take a slow breath in, and a slow breath out. Then take your first sip & relax.

LEARNING SUMMARY NOVEMBER

A quick guide to the learning in this study, for your records, LA report or setting's planning. Adapt it to describe your own child's learning.

SUBJECTS COVERED

History · Science · English · Cooking & Nutrition · Religious Education & Culture · Art & Design · Wellbeing

WHAT WE EXPLORED

We learned the true story of Grace Sherwood, a farmer, midwife and healer from Virginia in the early 1700s. We found out how rumour led to her being accused, and how her name was finally cleared 300 years later. We separated fact from legend, and discussed how stories change over time. Our Herb of the Month was thyme. We learned that it stays green all winter, how healers used it, and the science behind its warm smell (thymol). In the Poison Cabinet, we met the fly agaric, learning how to identify it safely and how fungi and trees help each other underground. We also explored Martinmas, the story of St Martin's kindness, Stir-up Sunday, the Beaver Moon and the constellation Taurus.

SCIENCE SKILLS PRACTISED

Identifying plants and fungi by their features · understanding plant adaptations to winter · learning how fungi and trees share nutrients · recognising toxic species and staying safe · drying and preserving herbs · observing the night sky

OTHER LEARNING

English: reading and discussing poetry and a narrative tale, and using labels and instructions.

History: a study of a real historical figure, and comparing evidence with later legend.

Cooking & Nutrition: making thyme tea and labelling a remedy jar.

Art & Design: making a Martinmas lantern and an observational drawing of the fly agaric.

Wellbeing & PSHE: kindness and sharing (St Martin), how rumours can hurt, and a calming wishing charm.

LINKS TO THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM (OPTIONAL):

- KS2 History: a significant individual · how we know about the past, and why accounts can differ
- KS2 Science: Plants (Y3: functions of parts of plants) · Living things & their habitats (Y4/Y6: grouping and classifying, including fungi) · Earth & space (Y5)
- D&T (Cooking & Nutrition): preparing simple food and drink safely
- English: reading poetry and narrative, and writing for a purpose (labels and instructions)
- KS3 (ages 11–12): the same themes, explored with more independence

KEY WORDS

Thyme · Thymus vulgaris · thymol · antiseptic · remedy · midwife · accusation · rumour · evidence · legend · fly agaric · toxic · Martinmas · Stir-up Sunday · Beaver Moon · Taurus

IDEAS FOR EVIDENCE (SHOULD YOU CHOOSE TO SHARE)

The finished thyme remedy jar and its label · photos of making thyme tea · a fact vs legend chart about Grace Sherwood · a drawing of the fly agaric (from a picture, or from a safe distance if seen outdoors) · the Martinmas lantern · a sketch of Taurus · the completed My November Whispers page.

EXAMPLE FOR YOUR REPORT

"In November, [name] studied the life of Grace Sherwood, a healer and farmer from 1700s Virginia, and learned how rumour led to her being accused before her name was cleared 300 years later. [He/She/They] compared historical facts with later legends. [He/She/They] learned about thyme as a winter herb, made thyme tea and a labelled remedy jar, and found out about thymol, the natural antiseptic that gives thyme its smell. [Name] learned to recognise fly agaric from a safe distance, why we never touch it and how fungi help trees underground. Made a Martinmas lantern, and explored the traditions of St Martin's Day, Stir-up Sunday and the Beaver Moon."