

# TOTEMS IN SCHOOL GROUNDS

*If children are to respect and value their school grounds they must connect with their surroundings and enjoy being there. A nice way to strengthen pupils' connection is to let them leave their own mark in the form of hand-made totems.*

## **Definition**

Totem is derived from a native North American word referring to a spiritual being or a symbolic object as an emblem for a defined group. A totem is most frequently represented as a wooden pillar carved, painted or hung with a series of relevant symbols.

## **Procedure**

Ideally each class will have their own totem pole.

In this way all pupils can become involved with creating their own individual symbols which collectively make the whole structure.

Inspiration could be taken from the different species of wildlife that are found in the school grounds or locality and the pupils can consider an individual plant/creature's special features and how they can be expressed as a totemic symbol.

Ensure that any wooden pole erected is sufficiently embedded into the ground with concrete and further fixings dependent upon its height. Ideally the totem should not exceed two metres.

The wood should also be treated with a suitable preservative to extend its life. To ensure that the totems are sustainable then the features added to them by each class should be detachable otherwise be prepared to add further totem poles over time!





The totemic symbols can be made from: fired clay; metal; recycled materials or wooden discs onto which the image is etched or branded. They can be attached to the poles using twine, nails or wire.

When the totem poles are adorned this could be accompanied by a ceremony.

## Tips

- If embedding wooden poles in the grounds is not an option then totems could equally be attached to walls or railings.
- Existing pillars or posts could be commandeered as totem poles.

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