

# Monsters



Ways of Responding to  
Shared and Sustained Interests

Allens Croft Childrens Centre

Early in the year children were encouraged to share stories with their key workers who then recorded and read stories back to the children. These were collected together into a 'Storying' folder.

From this broad approach to gathering stories and demonstrating our interest in what the children have to say came a shared and sustained interest in monsters. At times there has been one monster living outside in the forest garden and at other times there have been individual monsters; unique creations for each of the children involved. These individuals with their differing personalities and physical characteristics developed from potential threat to a companion and a source of exciting play.

The shared interest of the children created a social glue; a reason to find each other, to talk and share stories.

As the children grew so did the personalities of their monsters moving from simple forms to complex creatures with families and histories.

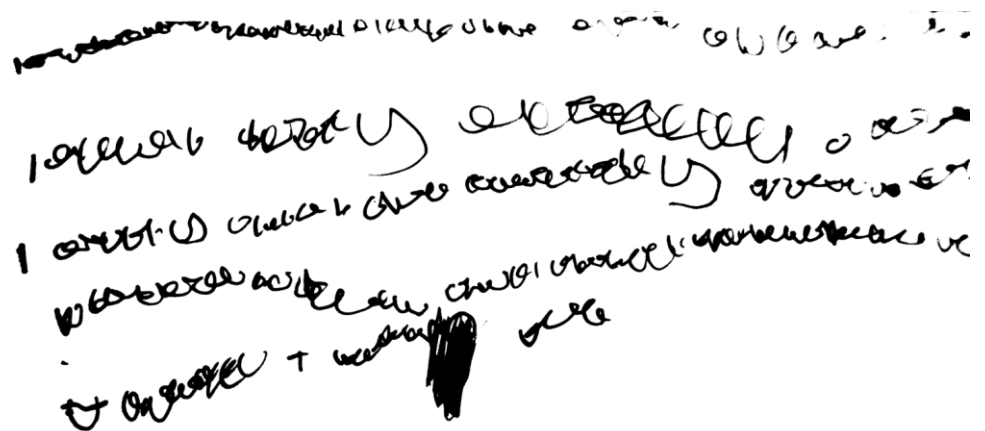


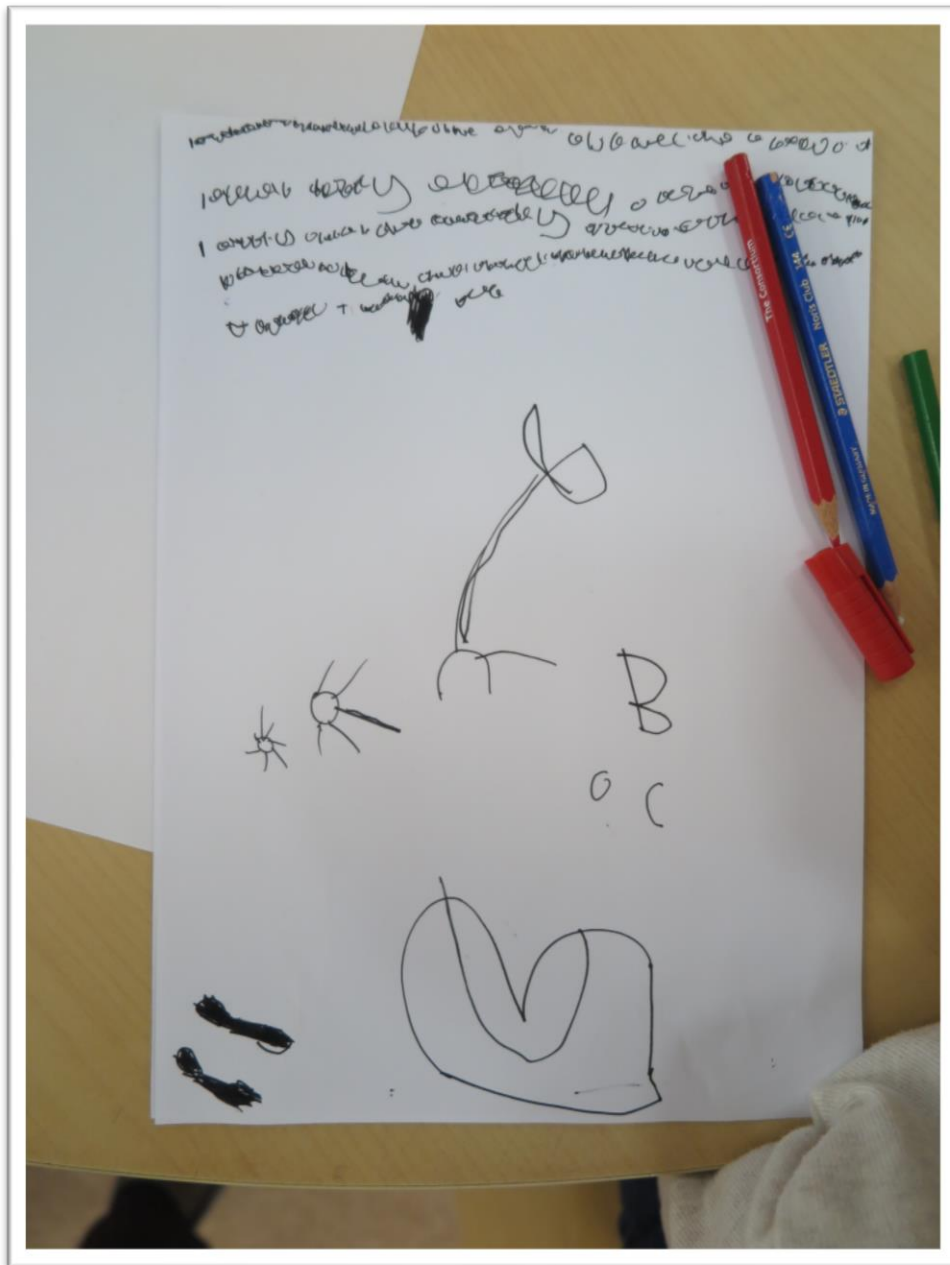
# Scribing. Storying.

Key workers encouraged the childrens storytelling early on in the year. They recorded the stories, scribing as the children spoke. In planning meetings we reflected on the development of these stories. The tales became longer and more elaborate, some children would seek us out to tell another story.

The act of scribing illustrated to the children that their stories were valuable. What they told us was important enough to record, and the recording allowed the story to be re-told. We find this generates enormous interest in writing. We observe the children mimic recording in books and on clipboards. They 'write' lengths of text that recreates sentence structure. They often gather in groups and 'read' their text back to each other.

A curiosity about text and written language is playfully supported.



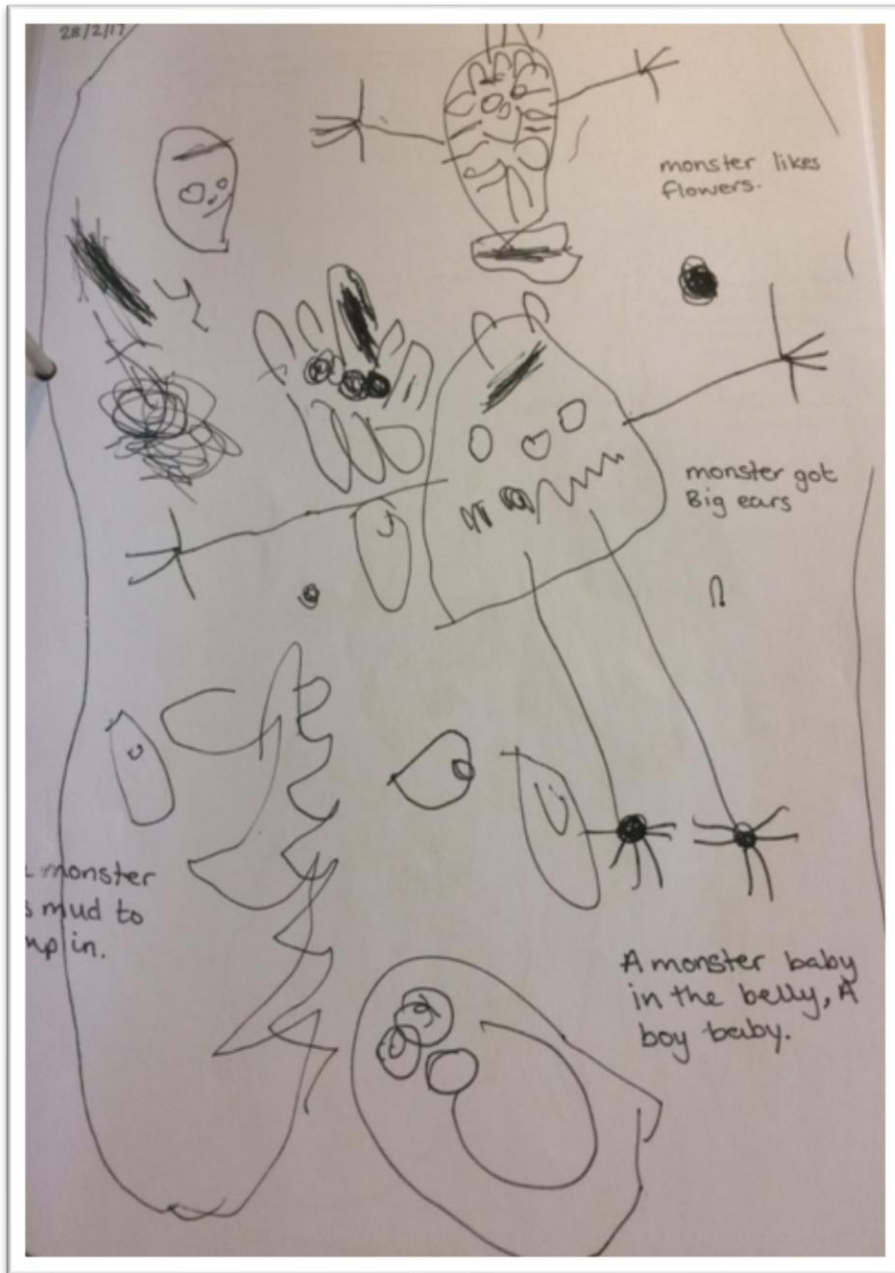


Here we see mark making that mimics sentences. Children are often highly involved in this play writing. Pictures are also added and some letter shapes as though they are also a decorative form.

Children often attempt letters from their own name-this being the most familiar text to them. Nursery is often the first place children realise their name has meaning and represents them. It symbolises ownership, personality and uniqueness. Text also has the ability to retain and be recalled like a memory. Spoken word is preserved.

When interests develop we encourage the children to share their ideas and stories visually. Drawing and modeling internal or imaginative images helps us to understand more about the children's interests and encourages the children to think in detail about their stories. Images are collected throughout projects. At the end of the year this makes a record of progression. Drawings become more detailed, text is added, images move from action drawings or scribbles into recognisable shapes and forms.



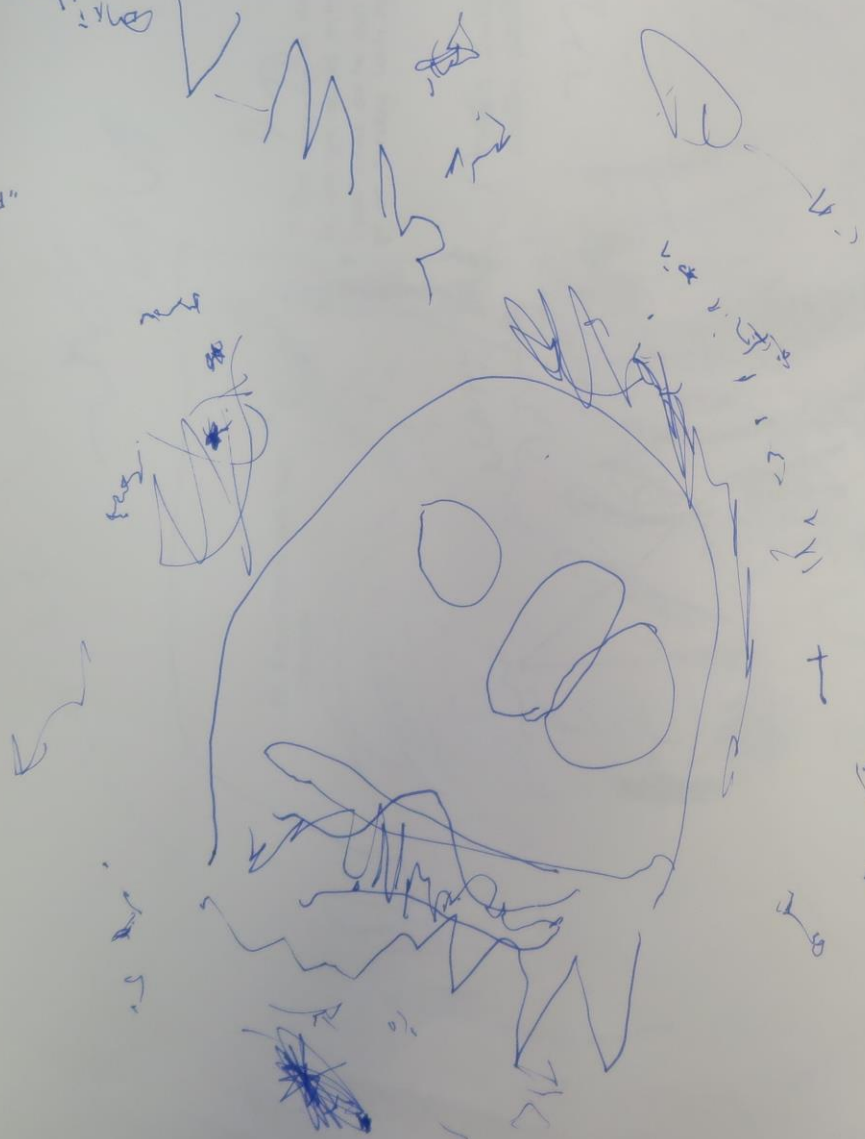


As we observed the children return to the monster theme, as their play grew in intensity and they wanted to share their experiences we gathered small groups for reflection. The children were accustomed to seeing us record their stories but now we wanted to understand what the monsters looked like. Each child will have their own monster with very different qualities. The children played together running from the same creature but their drawings revealed very different characters. Here several monsters are drawn. As the monster appears the child thinks of different aspects to its story; a baby monster, a monster with big ears, another that likes flowers.

Bilal  
28/2/17

"This is a river"

"He is 6 years old"

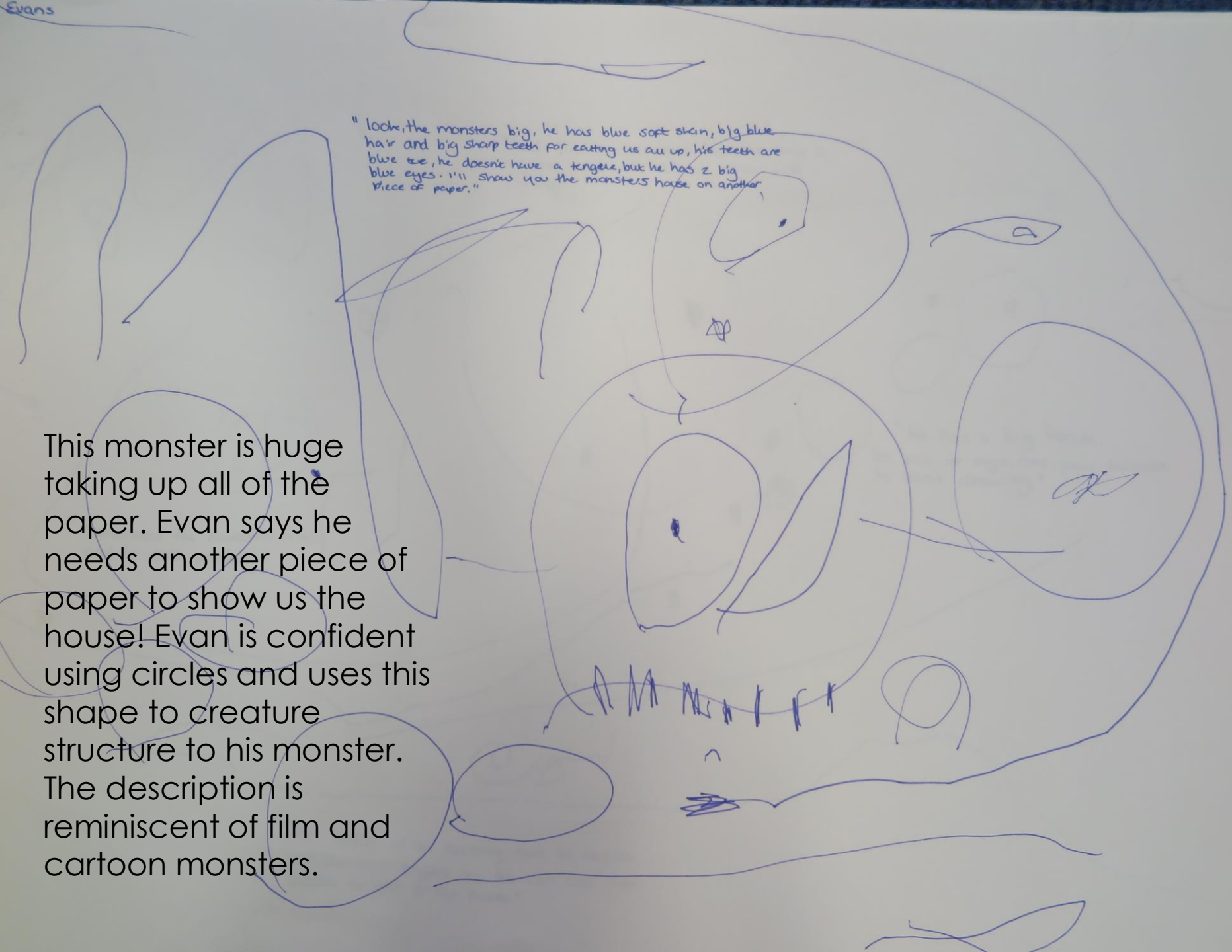


"The monster is actually Trevor, 3 purple eyes, big purple teeth with dirt. He has a black tongue because he eats poo and people. He lives in nursery, over there (pointed at class room) with his brother and sister. He has purple skin, he has prides like a monster, he has a scary voice when he says hello, he is here to eat us so we have to run fast."

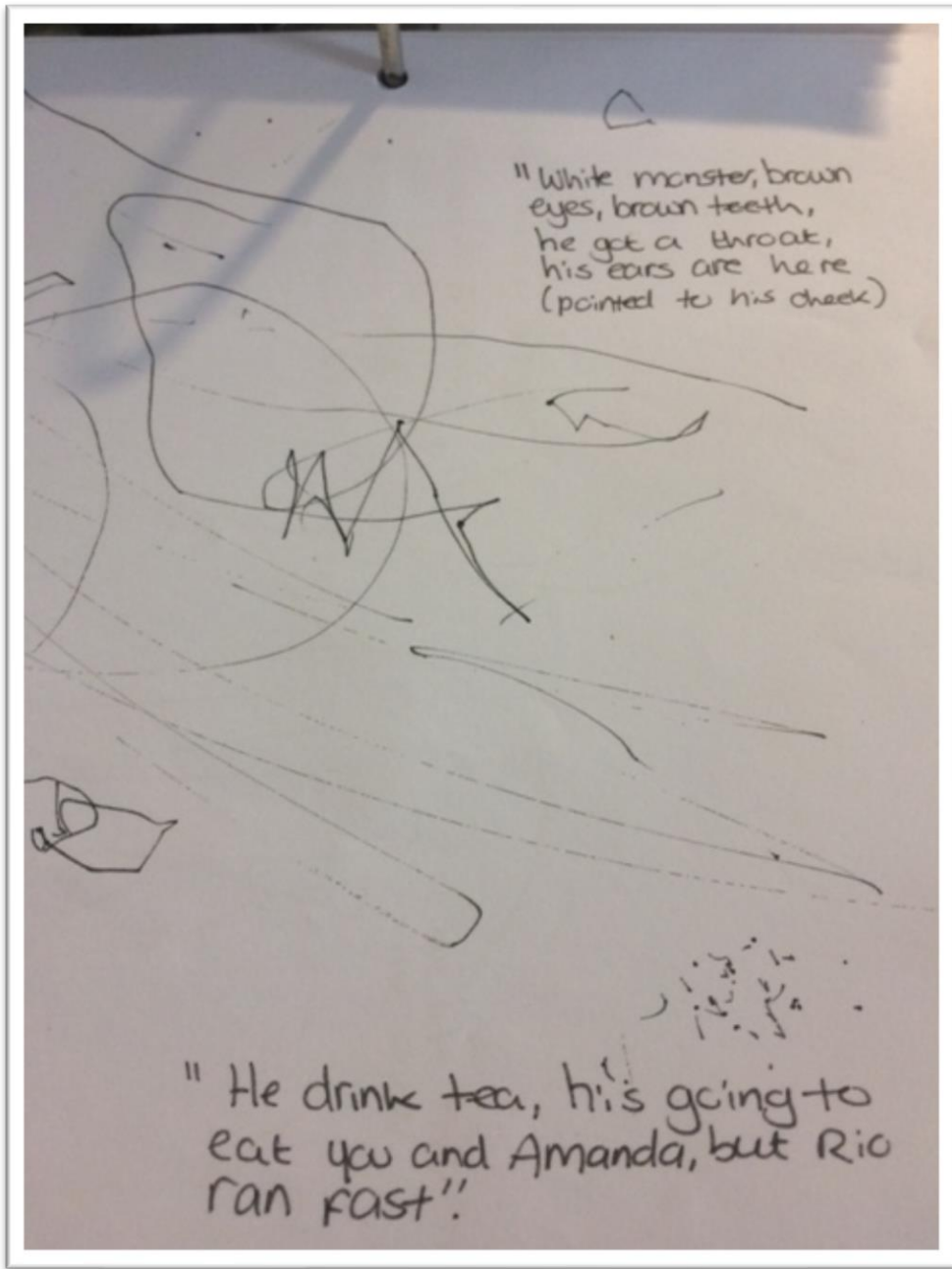
In this drawing Bilal has described his monster as not real. His story uses elements of play inspired by an adult pretending to be the big bad wolf. He then adds descriptive elements to create his imaginary creature.

" look, the monsters big, he has blue soft skin, big blue hair and big sharp teeth for eating us all up, his teeth are blue too, he doesn't have a tongue, but he has 2 big blue eyes. "I'll show you the monster's house on another piece of paper."

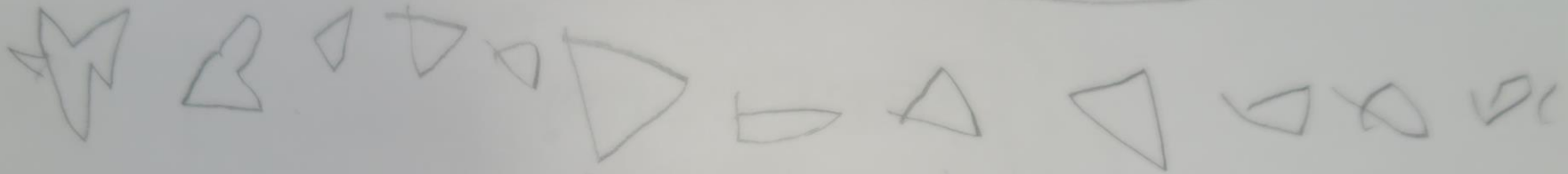
This monster is huge taking up all of the paper. Evan says he needs another piece of paper to show us the house! Evan is confident using circles and uses this shape to create structure to his monster. The description is reminiscent of film and cartoon monsters.







As the children describe their monsters they reveal different types. Some are scary, some have families and share interests with the children, liking the same foods, and games. Drawing adds another dimension to the play. The group game is thrilling but the quiet reflection that comes with drawing encourages the children to think of their monsters as more complex personalities.



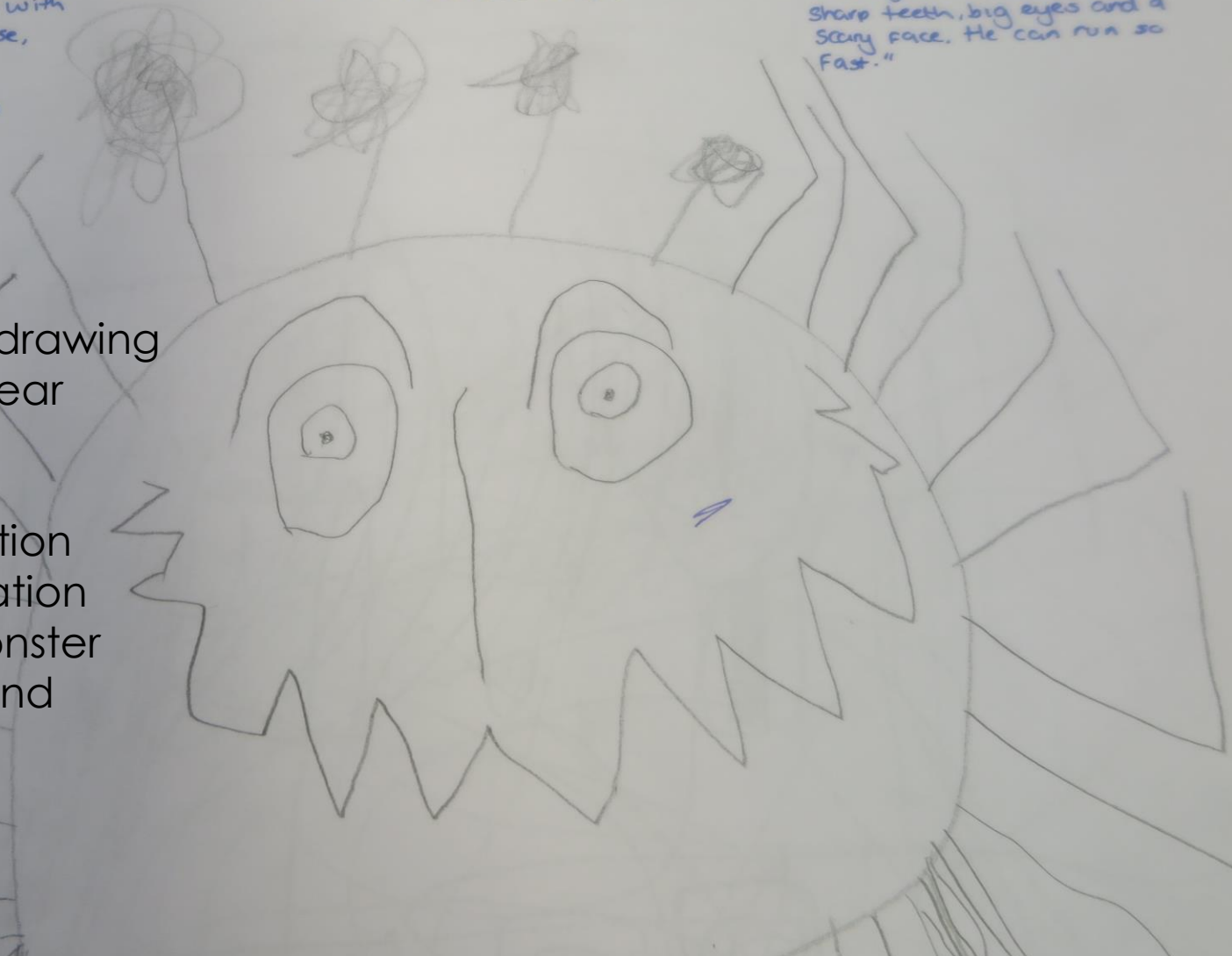
"The monster lives under ground but the trees live on top".

"He is waiting in the forest garden, monster has sharp teeth, big eyes and a scary face. He can run so fast."

"His tail is a rainbow, with all of the colours like these, (pointed at the lanterns).

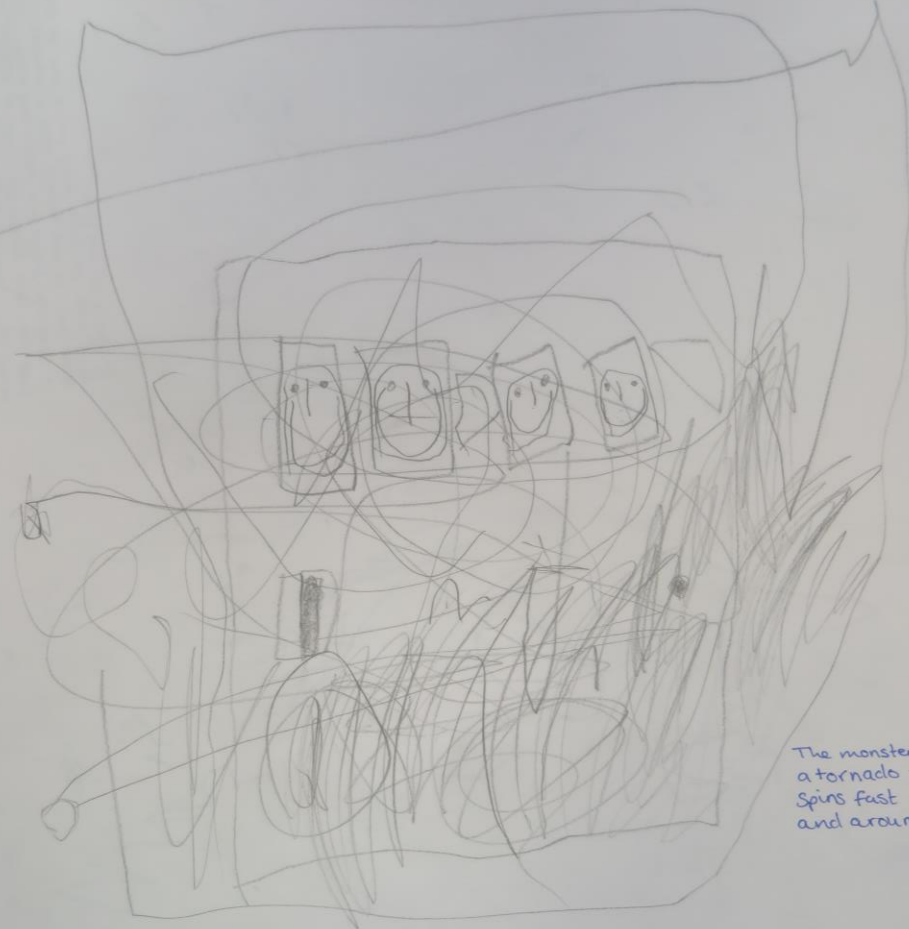
oh no, he has purple skin it feels like paper."

This is a very clear drawing where there is a clear idea of what the monster looks like. The verbal description adds more information about how the monster moves, its colour and rainbow tail!



Suliaman enjoys drawing and writing. He was a keen contributor to the original 'Storying' folder, relishing telling stories and illustrating them. Here he has drawn pictures of a group of four 'monsters'. He boxes them in and uses energetic lines to describe the force field. The story is active in his mind. The drawing tells a dramatic scene.

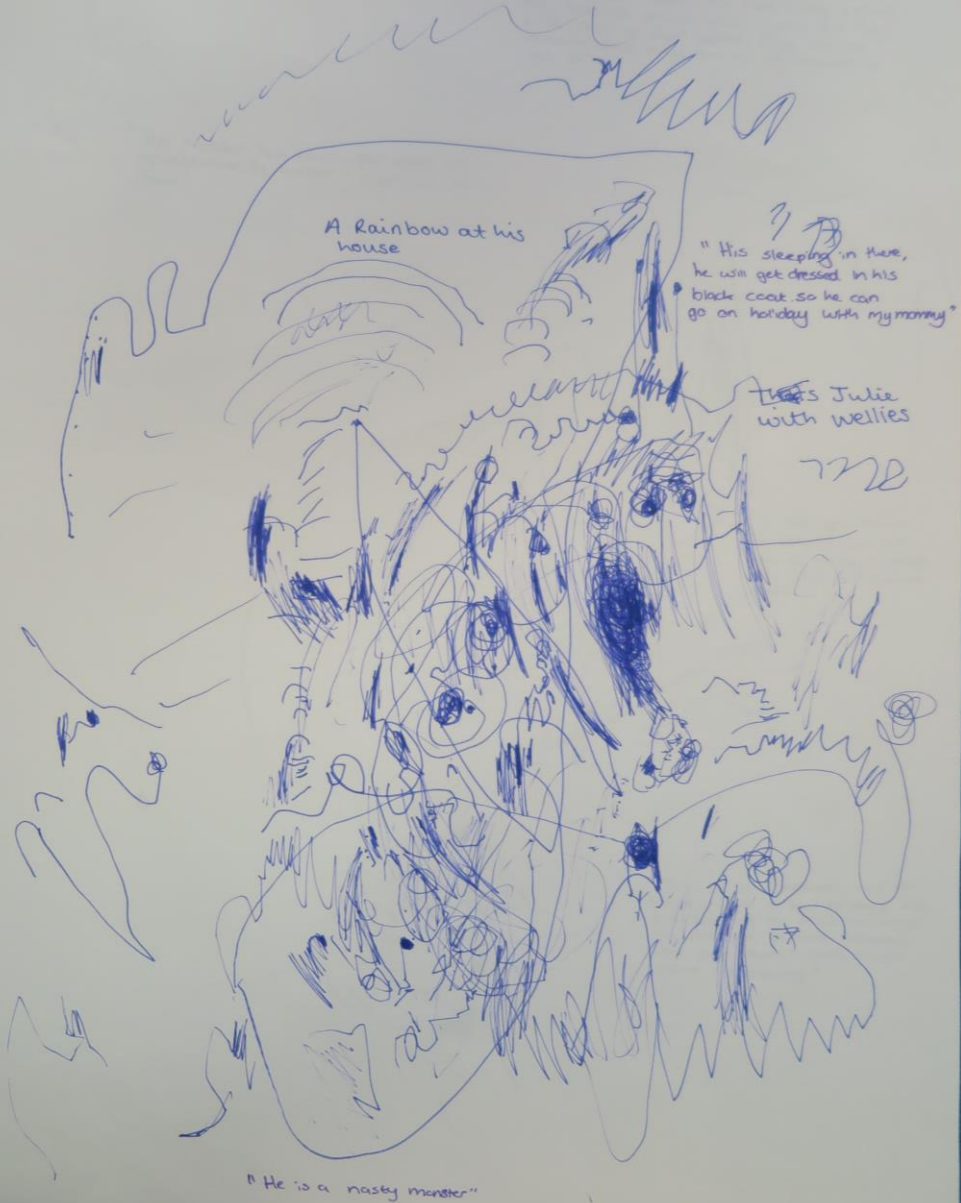
The monsters house has a force field, so people can't get it.



The monster has a tornado that spins fast around and around.

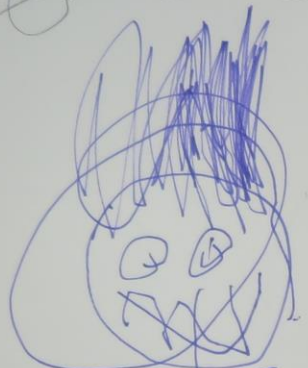
SLOLADLOI

"Bring our wellies to see monster, he has wellies eating eyes. The monster is a waterspout, the monster has some shoes, but he might eat them."



Ava's drawing combines fact and fiction. Her drawing includes motifs she likes as well as picturing Julie (the lead on the project) in her wellies in the garden. Much of children's play around monsters originates in the Forest Garden. Julie is often asked to come out to the Forest Garden to look for monsters. Ava's relationship is an important part of her interest in the project.

Mia Crawley  
28/2/17



Thats my charlotte who  
is at nannys bear bear

The monster is friendly  
he is holding charlottes  
hand

Mia's monster is friendly  
and pretty. She is  
someone she can play  
with at the park. Her  
drawing incorporates  
some her favourite things  
as if she describes a  
friend.

"The monster is a  
girl, charlotte is just a  
kid, Gemma is charlotte's  
mummy. The monster likes  
Charlotte, they go to the  
park."



The monster has  
got magic slippers  
they turn into shoes

"She's got the same skin as  
me, she's pink. She's pretty, charlottes  
pretty too. The monsters really friendly".

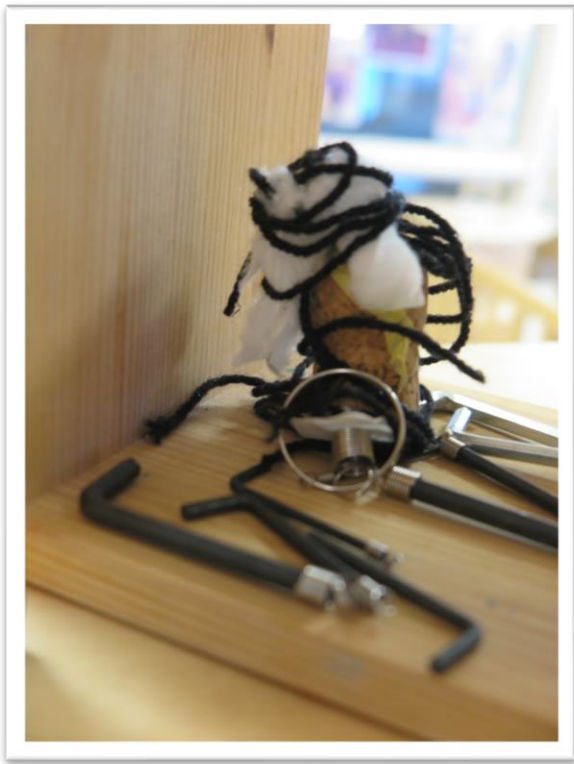
Thats the bottom  
Tree



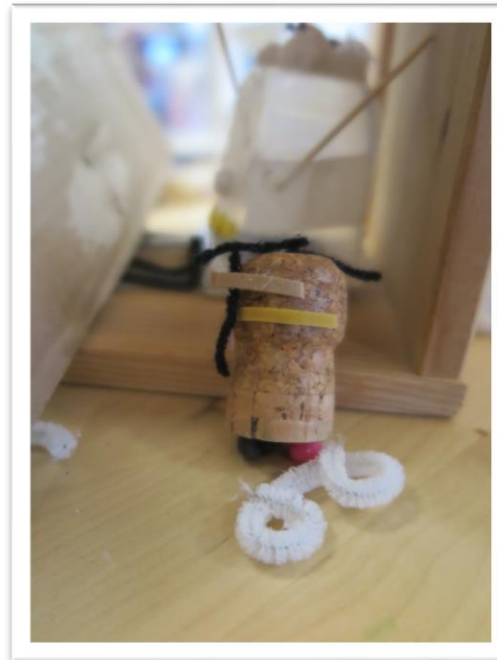


Building spaces and enclosures to keep monsters out and keep the monsters safe. The block play is used to create spaces to protect the children from the monsters. Walls enclose the children and provide a viewpoint to look out from.





Models of monsters made with junk materials that are freely available in the nursery. Small materials are added to create detail.



# Meeting New People. Strange Environments

Early Spring 2017 a group of students from B.C.U, studying for a BA Applied Drama, came to the nursery as part of their final year placement. Their brief was to develop a drama project that was appropriate to the age of the children. The students were encouraged by the nursery team to observe the children's play for the first few weeks.

The children's interest in monsters was strong. The students were careful to respond sensitively to this. They wrote 'we didn't want to force an image of a monster to the children as each of them have their own ideas.' They chose to respond to the interest by using props that suggested the presence of a monster rather than dictate or recreate a creature. They placed a hat over a blanket as if something slept beneath, they placed hats, a toothbrush and footprints around the forest garden area. On seeing the props the children cried 'The monsters coming, going to wake up!', 'The leaves rustle, monsters coming', 'When he's warm he wakes up, when he is cold he sleeps. Monster is invisible'

The following week, hats were placed around to imply that the monster had walked around the nursery. The children responded by hiding and making safe places or becoming more powerful as pirates or superheroes.



However the monster theme did not continue indoors. The children were convinced the monster lived outside in the forest garden. The students considered ways of bringing the theme indoors as this was where the majority of children played. They chose to work in role, creating characters that crossed various interests of building, cooking and the monsters. They created a Boss, a builder and a chef. Each character was given an emotive theme or storyline. The chef was frightened and unprepared for the task, the builder was unsure of what to do and how to build and the boss set the task that had to be completed-making cakes and a house for the monster. The students stayed in character but worked spontaneously with the children. The children responded to the characters dilemmas. 'Why is she sad?' asked one of the children as the chef became distressed at her task. The children were highly involved helping to complete the tasks set by the characters.

The characters returned over the following weeks. The emotional dilemmas of the characters engaged the children particularly when help was needed. In one scenario the chef was distressed because her baking had made the monster poorly. The children readily helped to find medicine. In response to the chefs concern that medicine couldn't be found Bilal said 'We will be ok, we can do this, we are human beings!'. The children responded with great concern to any problem. They persisted until they were sure she was happy again.

Reflection

## Listening. Fostering Confidence.

Dakota was unsure and nervous about attending nursery. She hesitated to speak to staff unless it was her key worker and seemed unsure about playing with large groups of children. Her key worker supported her by making time to listen to her and encouraging her participation in activities throughout the setting.

Julie encouraged her to talk about her interests and explained what the other children were doing in their play. In the Forest Garden Dakota stayed on the periphery of the group as they pretended a monster lived there. She watched but did not join in. The following day Dakota asked Julie about the monster in the garden. She was excited and animated and wanted to go out and see if it was still there. Julie encouraged this. Over the next few weeks Dakota became highly involved in the the Monster play. She drew pictures and shared stories with her Mum. She grew excited about attending nursery and playing with her friends. Friendship was supported by the shared interest with Dakota becoming a knowledgeable and enthusiastic member of the group.

The imaginative monster provided Dakota with an interest that was so exciting to her that it overrode her anxiety about nursery. At the end of year Dakota's mum wrote to Julie to thank her for supporting her interest in nursery.

# Safe Scares

We often observe children incorporating scary elements in their play. This year as the Monsters emerged they were initially terrifying, causing the children to run away, build defences and hide in small spaces. The play was exciting and allowed the children to play together in large groups. The play was simple and easily understood across language and ability. Building projects were often inspired by the threat of monsters, a need to create a safe space or a dark space where they can't be seen.

Interestingly, the monster play rarely upsets the children. As they run screaming to hide from 'it' there is also laughter, in the urgency to build a safe place there is planning and co-operation. The scary monster provides a framework for the children's play; a reason to come together.

We have observed scary themes in children's play and it tends to appear early in the academic year. We have reflected on the children's experience of starting nursery as being scary and this feeling being expressed, shared and explored in play. The children are left alone, they wait for their carer to return, they overcome the fear and find there is nothing scary in nursery.

Some of the children were involved in the project over several months and we observed real benefits to the children.

- Catherine was more independent in her play. She enjoyed the drama students input. Catherine continued being the boss wearing a helmet and holding a clipboard, the Boss Lady. Grew in confidence in play and interacting with others
- Dakota had settled into nursery. She became the mud master. Her relationship with Julie was highly valued by her Mum who described Dakota's confidence grow alongside her imagination.
- Tashan extended his ability to record stories, getting attention for positive interactions. His boisterous play became more sophisticated His ability to use his imagination improved his relationships within his peer group
- Rio moved from superhero play to group interactions that involved care, transition from solo play to imaginative play with others and he became a valued member of the group
- Generally the project encouraged friendships across groups and throughout the week