

THE UNDERCOVER CARETAKER AGENCY EPISODE 2: THE SECRET OF TREES



Evaluation
Pack

July 2024

CONEY

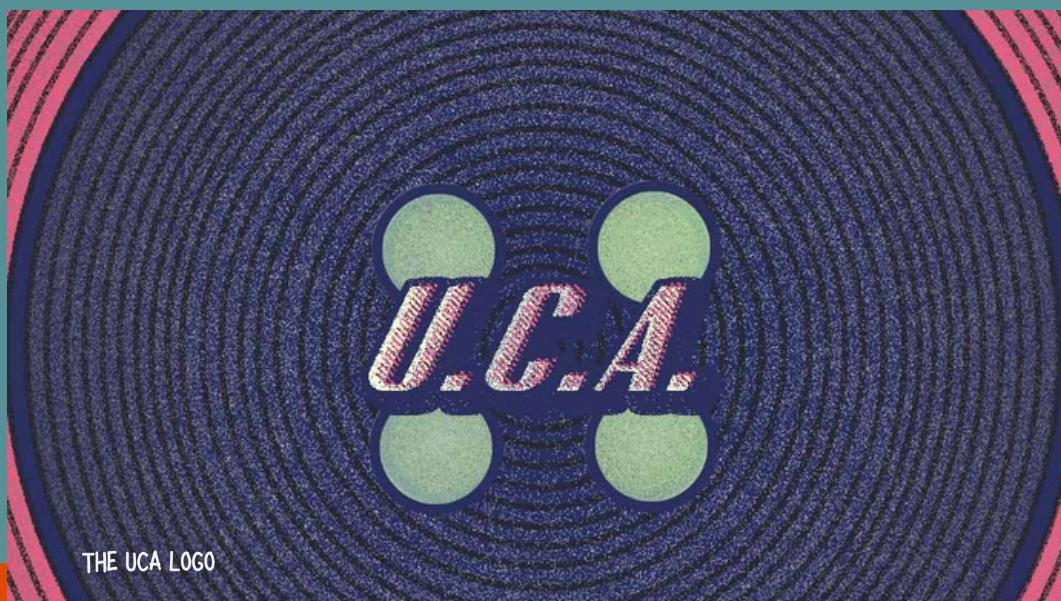


ABOUT THE UNDERCOVER CARETAKER AGENCY (UCA) SERIES

UCA is a series of interactive classroom adventures for Years 3 and 4 that provides toolkits for exploring issues voiced by local young people, from youth mental health to climate action. Each episode lands in classrooms, as an escape room-style box containing puzzles and challenges. The experience is facilitated by teachers and supported by our interactive online platform.

UCA adventures are co-created with young people and guided by teacher input and extensive classroom playtesting in our six partner schools in Tower Hamlets: Kobi Nazrul, Canon Barnett, Hague/Stewart Headlam, William Davis, Osmani and Thomas Buxton. Together, they are our Tower Hamlets Six.

We've been delivering [Episode 1](#) with these schools for over three years. Developing Episode 2, we have expanded the UCA fiction to create a brand new adventure .



THE UCA LOGO

ABOUT EPISODE 2

UCA Episode 2: The Secret of Trees explores the relationship between youth wellbeing and peer to peer collaboration, offering a fun and meaningful introduction to how we can take care of ourselves and our environment for Year 4 students. Initially piloting in six Tower Hamlets schools in 2024, the project will be available for further distribution in 2025.

In this second instalment of UCA, pupils receive a box indicating UCA's return to investigate curious signals surrounding their school. Through curriculum-based exercises covering tree anatomy, photosynthesis, and letter writing, students learn about climate activists Wangari Maathai & Felix Finkbeiner, the vital role of tree planting in climate crisis mitigation and the importance of collaboration in local action.



"We absolutely loved it! We have a lot of friendship issues in our class, I think this workshop really helped the children understand that our emotions can sometimes make us fall out over silly things but it's important for us to think how could we avoid those situations with our own behaviour and actions ... we covered so much including the curriculum."

- Stewart Headlam teacher



PHOTO: ROSS KERNAN

KEY LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Understanding the effects of both climate change and environmental activism globally;
- Developing foundational awareness of the importance of trees, photosynthesis and mycorrhizal networks;
- Experiencing the power of teamwork and collective action;
- Advancing skills in letter writing and effective communication.



CURRICULUM ENRICHMENT

All of our UCA projects are designed with specific attention to enriching existing curriculum points for different age groups. 100% of teachers in Pilot 1 said they could see direct curriculum links in UCA Episode 2, such as:

- **PSHE:** Kindness, teamwork, responsibility, understanding their own skillset, what they need and what they can offer in community.
- **Science:** Living processes such as photosynthesis, the anatomy of trees, introducing the climate crisis and effects of carbon dioxide, scientific methods (using diagrams, map work).
- **Literacy:** Comprehension, new and specific vocabulary, letter writing, persuasive language for effective communication.



PHOTO: ROSS KERNAHAN



MADE FOR, BY AND WITH

The process began in February 2023, when graduates of our Young Coney's Training Programme (recruited from across the Tower Hamlets Six) spent half-term digging into their passions and concerns...

- With isolation and eco-anxiety featuring high on their lists, we consulted more students and school staff about these issues.
- From here, we identified the key learning outcomes we wanted for the piece, and wrote the script for the video and online platform content.
- A team of artists, programmers and designers then developed the pilot experience.
- Finally, we trained up a brilliant group of local teachers through targeted CPD.
- Soon, six mysterious boxes were waiting at reception for curious students!

*"Your box [UCA Episode 2]
is the best box in the
world!!"*
- Student at Canon Barnett
Primary School



PHOTO: ROSS KERNAN (FROM
YCTP GRADUATES WEEK)

PLAYING 'THE SECRET OF TREES'

MEETING ANNE

A mysterious box is delivered to your school! Students must find the code on it, and enter it into the UCA Online Portal. Here, they meet Anne, an agent of UCA. Anne is trying to understand why that box has been sent to you, and notices some mysterious signals being sent around your school. With each section successfully completed, new codes are shared by Anne which enable to class to unlock new, successive compartments.

SIGNAL1: ANNE SAYS

A game of Anne Says featuring the parts of a tree is played out - with a solo and team version exploring how it feels to win on our own or with others. Our first signal is decoded to produce the word MY.



SIGNAL 2: PLANTING TREES

The second signal introduces Wanagari Maathai - the Nobel Prize winning tree planter and activist - through games and exercises that explore the importance of trees in our fight against climate change, and the importance of personal resilience in collaboration. Students begin building their own model trees with resources from inside the box. The second signal is decoded: CORR



PHOTO: ROSS KERNANAH

PLAYING 'THE SECRET OF TREES'

SIGNAL 3: WHAT WE NEED & GIVE TO OTHERS

Beginning with photosynthesis, students understand what a tree needs to perform this essential function, and what it gives out in return. Students are asked to reflect on what they need to receive, and anything they can give to their peers to have a good day in school. They write these on leaves, then stuck on their trees. The third signal is decoded: HI

SIGNAL 4: TAKING ACTION

Next, students learn about Felix Finkbeiner, a 9 year old inspired by Wangari Maathai to plant trees in his local area, now CEO of Plant for The Planet. Anne has an idea, and asks students to decide collectively on someone who they believe has the power to help them expand green space locally, and write letters to them. They are encouraged to use the facts they have learnt about trees, and persuasive language to make their letter as powerful as possible. The final signal is ZAL. Taken all together, we can decode: MYCORRHIZAL

WHAT IS THE MYCORRHIZAL NETWORK?

Yes, the signals spell out 'MYCORRHIZAL', which refers to the system of connections between trees, plants and fungi in an ecosystem that allow them to communicate needs and share water, nitrogen and carbon. Using this as inspiration, students then link their trees with string to see the Wood Wide Web, and are surprised with a little bit of magic!



PHOTO: ROSS KERNAN

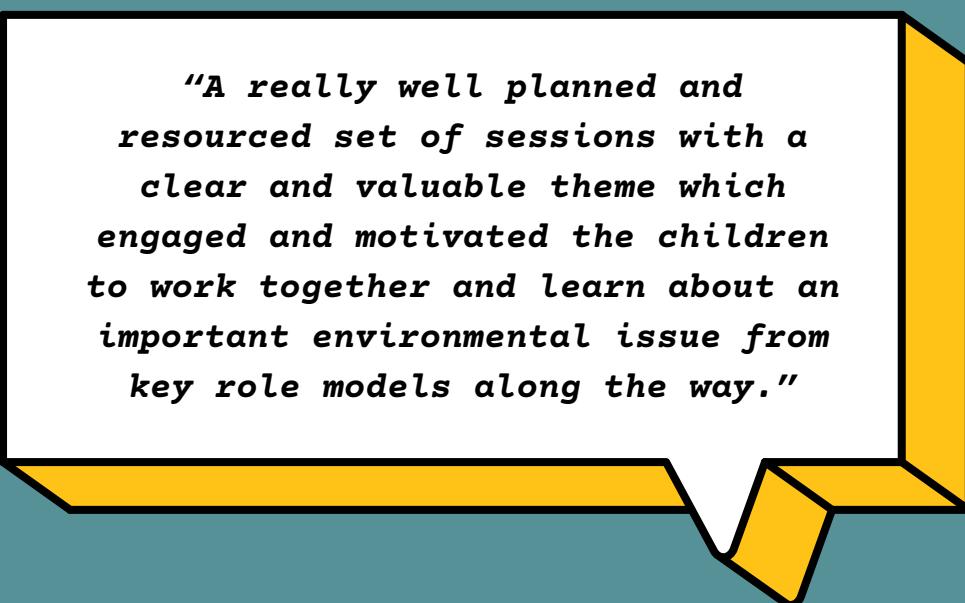
IMPACT DATA (QUALITATIVE)

TEACHERS SAID...

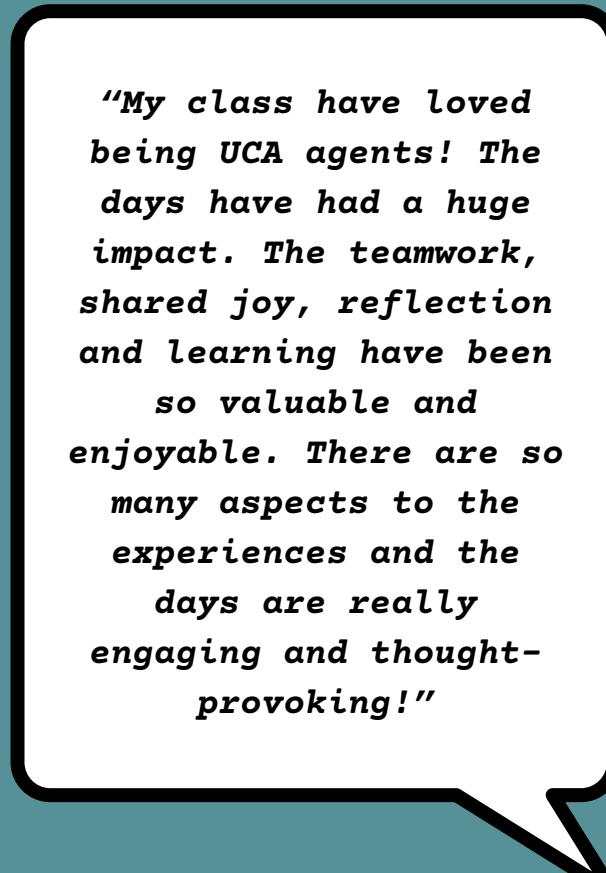


"My class was excited by the storytelling and world building of UCA and its characters, which caused high engagement with the themes and topics covered. These had clear curriculum links to sustainability and legacy and made for an intriguing and fun off-timetable day for my class."

"The Young Coneys team have a knack for making great fun out of detailed, complex issues that affect children."



"A really well planned and resourced set of sessions with a clear and valuable theme which engaged and motivated the children to work together and learn about an important environmental issue from key role models along the way."



"My class have loved being UCA agents! The days have had a huge impact. The teamwork, shared joy, reflection and learning have been so valuable and enjoyable. There are so many aspects to the experiences and the days are really engaging and thought-provoking!"

IMPACT DATA (QUALITATIVE)

STUDENTS SAID...

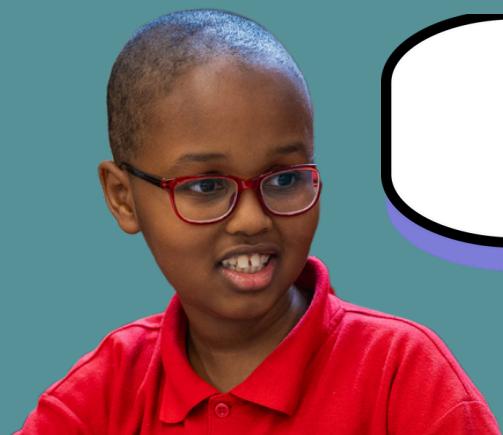
"I really loved the project about trees"

"Today was so fun!"

"Thank you for helping me to learn about trees"

"I have learnt to take care of nature and our environment"

"I have learnt that we are all connected"



NEXT STEPS

We know that our playful approach, and particularly our box projects, bring **magic** into classrooms. Building on this first pilot, we want to:

- Embed the feedback gathered, and work with impact researcher Dr Astrid Breel to understand key successes and challenges of the process so far;
- Develop the physical box to make it easily reusable, ensuring sustained impact in each school;
- Build relationships with funders and potential partners to support a wider release.

SUSTAINABILITY

Our ambition is to develop the UCA Episode 2 Box to ensure the physical box is **fully reusable**. This means that they can be handed over to schools, and can be delivered over multiple years - increasing the number of students reached exponentially and ensuring **long lasting impact** for school communities.

PARTNERSHIPS

UCA Episode 2 is now looking for funders for the next stage of development and dissemination. This will allow us to develop the content and design. With this, we want to connect with organisational partners, particularly in the field of environmental education and youth activism, that could help support the dissemination of the work through existing schools or other educational networks.





QUESTIONS?

*If you'd like to talk to us about
the Undercover Caretaker Agency,
please reach out to toby@coneyhq.org.
or eliza@coneyhq.org.*

