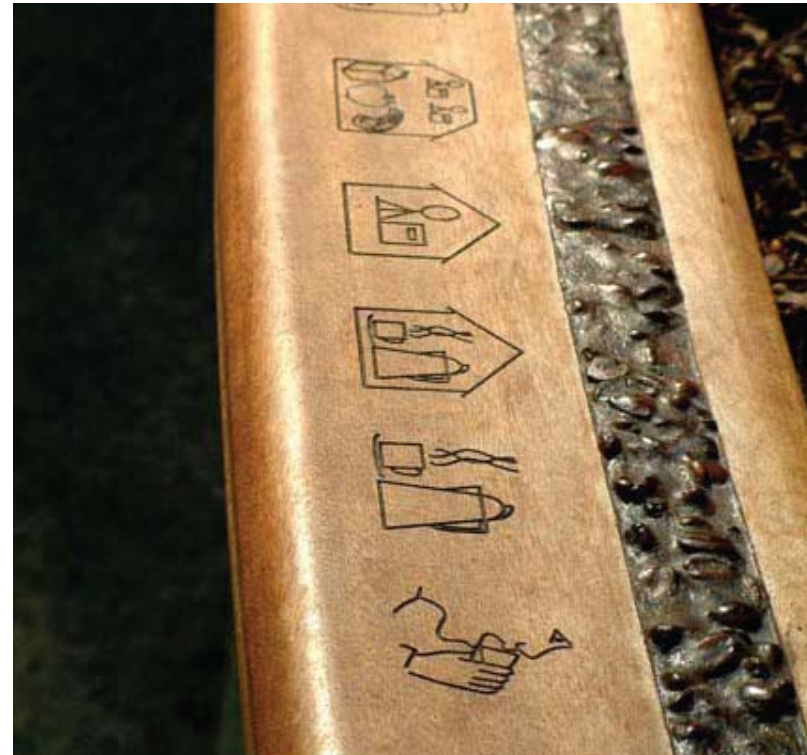


If you are a regular visitor to Eden you are probably used to seeing images and symbols on the signs, interpretation boards and publications throughout the site. The pictures add interest to messages and make interpretation boards more interesting and attractive, but they are much more than mere decoration.

by **Lynsey Robinson**,
Inclusive Designer, Sensory Trust



Every Picture

The illustrations and symbols we use are part of our commitment to inclusion and equality of access. They provide a welcoming and engaging environment for people with learning disabilities, people with low levels of literacy and people for whom English may be a second language.

Widgit Symbols were originally conceived for use in printed information in schools. For the past eight years the Eden Project and Sensory Trust have pioneered their use on signs, exhibits and educational information throughout the Eden Project, bringing symbol language out of specialist education and into public life, providing visitors with visual prompts to illustrate the meaning of individual words.

Developed over the last 20 years, Widgit Symbols are used across the world. Clear, concise and suitable for all ages, each has been carefully designed to illustrate a single concept without adding unnecessary information. There are more than 10,000 images covering a vocabulary in excess of 40,000 words. This vocabulary is continually being extended and gives users access to a wide range of topics.

For some visitors, the use of Widgits at Eden is part of the attraction of the site, indicating that Eden understands and welcomes visitors who use them. 'Positive feedback shows how excited Eden visitors feel when they find the same symbols here as the ones they use in their centre or school,' says Jo Elworthy, director of interpretation.

'Several people have actually visited after hearing that Widgit symbols are being used.' Examples of Widgits at Eden include the 'Discover Eden' packs which have been designed by the Sensory Trust as guides to exhibit areas at Eden; many interpretation panels throughout the site; and the coffee exhibit in the Rainforest Biome. Using only Widgit symbols engraved into the edge of the wooden coffee boat, we tell the story of how coffee is produced, from the harvest to the cup.

Now the symbols have spread from the real world to the virtual world of the Eden Project website. The people who brought us Widgits have developed a new system called Point. We use Point to make information accessible to people who may have a limited understanding of the English language.



tells a Story...

“Positive feedback shows how excited Eden visitors feel when they find the same symbols here as the ones they use in their centre or school,’ says Jo Elworthy, director of interpretation.

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When you visit our Point-enabled website and click the Point link you won't notice any immediate difference as the technology sits passively on the site. However, if you hover your cursor over a word, a box with the symbol for that word pops up, helping with understanding of the context and meaning of the words. The pop-up feature means that the support is not intrusive or invasive for people who do not wish to use it which is often what puts users, and web designers, off assistive technologies.

Point is just one of the many design elements that helps make the Eden Project website accessible to visitors from all over the world, and reflects the high standards of accessibility that exist throughout the whole Project. The challenges that face us in the 21st century mean much debate and action.

There is the potential to make positive changes to the way we all live, and yet for this to happen everyone needs to be able to grasp the kind of concepts we talk about at Eden in order to contribute meaningfully to the debate. Far from being mere decoration, symbols and pictures are part of the mechanism for including everyone in shaping how we might live in the future.