

Eggs in Nests

*Waldorf Curriculum
Preschool Newsletter*

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ACTIVITIES

As you well know, spending time with children is always rewarding. It can help you to see the world around you in a whole new way and to value things that you may take for granted or consider perfectly ordinary. On the other hand, when you are entirely responsible for their care, even small children can be intimidating. Just what do you do with them all day? This newsletter is here to help – whether you're a parent, grandparent, babysitter, caregiver, neighbor, or anyone acting as a substitute teacher and spending the day with a preschool-aged child.

The following sections will give some suggested activities for this week's theme as well as methodology and ideas for preparation.

Opening Verse

The Waldorf method places a strong emphasis on establishing rhythms throughout the day which give a comfortable sense of order and security to a child's life. One of these is to start your day (or your time together) with a short meditation called an opening verse. Choose a place which is clean and orderly; children are deeply sensitive to their environments and are unable to feel calm in the midst of chaos. Lighting a candle while you say the verse is customary, as this helps to establish a reflective atmosphere. Even if you choose not to do light a candle, the opening verse will be a transition for the child into your care. After you declare yourselves to be "ready now for work and learning", you can blow out the candle and begin your day!

Opening Verse:
In the morning at the sunrise
When the light of day doth break,
Children's souls, by angels guided,
Sleep from rested body shake,
Ready now for work and learning,
Happy, steady, and awake.

Game:

Duck, Duck, Goose

To begin, one person is chosen to be "it". Everyone else sits on the ground forming a circle. "It" walks around the outside of the circle, tapping the head of each person as he passes and saying either "duck" or "goose" as he does so.

When children are designated as ducks, they stay seated. Once a person is chosen as the goose, he stands up and chases "it" around the circle until both get back to the spot which was vacated. The goal is for "it" to steal the goose's spot; if so, he is safe. The

goose then becomes "it" and play continues. However, if the goose has caught "it" before "it" has a chance to sit down, "it" is made to sit in the center of the circle while play continues and is not released until another person is tagged and they are replaced.

This game works best when played outdoors with a group of children. If you don't have a large number to play with, consider going to a park or playground and trying to start a game there. Duck, Duck, Goose is familiar to most children. Another option is to modify the game for two people by simply running to a marker (instead of in a circle) with the goose trying to catch "it". Although it won't be quite as fun as playing in a group, the main element of the game is waiting and listening to hear the word "goose" instead of "duck" and the surprise and the scrambling to get up and run when you need to. This can still be achieved with just two people playing together.

Stories

Make Way for Ducklings

by Robert McCloskey

Bird Egg Feather Nest

by MaryJo Koch

The Pinkish Purplish Bluish Egg

by Bill Peet

Chickens Aren't the Only Ones

by Ruth Heller

Mister Seahorse

by Eric Carle

Remember that storytime or puppet shows at your local library can be a part of your plans for the day but DO NOT take place of reading one-on-one with the child. This personal connection and quiet nurturing time is a very different experience than the social one of experiencing a story in a group.

Nature

Take a walk together and try to spot some bird nests in the bushes or high in the trees. This will start to become more difficult as new leaves come out and camouflage the bare branches. If you do find a nest which has eggs in it, be careful not to touch them.

One of the most common sights in a Waldorf schoolroom or home is a Nature corner with items representing the current season. Create a bird nest for your Nature table out of woven pieces of vine, such as grapevine or ivy; or purchase mini grapevine wreaths at a craft store and line them with soft cotton or wool fleece to mimic a nest.

Handwork

Background: The Waldorf view of Handwork is different from the usual craft projects done with young children. Handwork must have an authentic context – it must be truly useful and must be completed slowly, deliberately, and with pride. As children grow, they benefit from the lessons learned in doing handwork – that taking your time, following all the steps, and doing your best work will result in a product of which you can be proud.

Today's Handwork project is a wet felting activity. You can use wool fleece such as roving if you have it on hand or purchase wool batting (used for quilting) from a fabric store. The wool batting should be a natural color which is perfect for making eggs to place in your Nature table nest. Be sure that the fiber you use is at least 90% wool or it will not felt properly.

If you are not familiar with wet felting, here is a very thorough explanation and set of directions for making felted eggs and some baby birds to hatch out of them:

<http://www.waldorfresources.org/gallery/designs/felteggs.php>

(Or, if you have read Chickens Aren't the Only Ones, you may wish to create other animals to hatch out of your eggs.)

At this time of year, plastic Easter eggs should be inexpensive and easy to find in clearance bins of craft stores or your grocery store. However, if you prefer, you can create the eggs and simply leave them uncut.

Art

Background: Process – not product – is the emphasis of Art time. Be sure that your child understands that art activities are for learning, for exploration, and not to be afraid to have fun! Even many adults in our society are afraid to experiment with art materials because "it won't look right"; nip this attitude in the bud!

Naturally Dyed Eggs

Bear in mind that this project will work much better with younger children if you create the dyes beforehand; there isn't much that a small child can safely do while the dyes are being made since boiling water is used.

Dyestuff	Color
Fresh beets, cranberries, radishes or frozen raspberries	Pinkish red
Yellow onion skins	Orange
Orange or lemon peels, carrot tops, celery seed or ground cumin	Delicate yellow
Ground turmeric	Yellow
Spinach leaves	Pale green
Yellow Delicious apple peels	Green-gold
Canned blueberries or red cabbage leaves	Blue
Strong brewed coffee	Beige to brown
Dill seeds	Brown-gold
Chili powder	Brown-orange
Purple or red grape juice or beet juice	Grey

Preparing natural dyes:

Choose the colors you would like to create using the chart above. All of the recipe ingredients listed can be easily found at your local grocery store. Use your own judgment about exactly how much of each dyestuff to use. Except for spices, place a handful – or two or three handfuls – of a dyestuff in a saucepan. For spices, add 4 or 5 tablespoons of the ingredient to your pan. Add tap water to come at least one inch above the dyestuff. Bring the water to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer between 30 minutes and an hour until you like the color of your dye, keeping in mind that dyed eggs will not get as dark as the color in the pan. Remove the pan from the heat and let cool until safe for a child to handle.

If you want the child to be involved as much as possible, you can go together to the grocery store to purchase the eggs and the dyestuffs. It will be fun for the child to guess what colors can be made from each material – sometime it's not obvious!

Preparing the eggs:

Working with hardboiled eggs is preferable for small children. To prepare the eggs place them in a pan just big enough to hold them in a single layer. Cover the eggs with cold water and bring them to a rolling boil. Cook for one minute, then remove them from the heat. When the water has cooled enough that you can put your hand in (about 20 minutes), the eggs will be perfectly cooked.

Dyeing the eggs:

Using several layers of cheesecloth (especially for dyes made with spices!) strain the dye mixture into a liquid measuring cup. Add 2 to 3 teaspoons of white vinegar for each cup of strained dye liquid. Pour the mixture into a small bowl that's deep enough to completely cover the eggs you want to dye. Use a slotted spoon or a wire egg holder from a dyeing kit to lower the eggs into the hot liquid. Leave the eggs in the water until you like the color. If you're using emptied eggshells, stir or rotate them to help the color reach all the shell parts evenly. Lift the eggs out with the spoon or holder. Let them dry on a rack or drainer. Eggs colored with natural dyes have a dull finish and are not glossy so, if you prefer, you can rub the eggs with cooking oil or mineral oil after they are dry to give them a soft sheen.

Eggshell Mosaics

You can do this project after the egg dyeing above or as a project on its own. Assuming you are starting with undyed eggs, you can either hard-boil the eggs or use raw ones. Either way, simply crack the eggs and wash and dry the shells. Since it is fine to use broken eggshells for this project, let the child help you crack the eggs and divide the shells into several piles.

Use food coloring or natural dyes to color each pile of shells – there will be recipes on the back of the food coloring box to create a wide variety of colors or you two can experiment together and create your own. Let the shells dry completely then separate them by color into zip-top bags. Place the bags on a counter or cutting board and crush the shells into large and small pieces using a spoon or fist.

Create a palate by placing each crushed color into a small dish or the sections of an egg carton. Let the child create a collage by gluing the colored eggshell pieces mosaic-style onto a piece of paper or cardstock.

Closing Verse

Use this verse to end your time together on a high note, striving to go forth and made the rest of the day a good one. Like the opening verse, lighting a candle is customary and provides a sense of closure. When the candle is blown out, you will go forward feeling positive about the next thing to come your way.

The golden sun so great and bright
Warms the world with all its might.
It makes the dark earth green and fair,
Attends each thing with ceaseless care.
It shines on blossom, stone, and tree,
On bird and beast, on you and me.
So may each deed throughout the day,
May everything we do and say
Be bright and strong and true,
Oh, golden sun, like you!

OTHER IDEAS

Cooking

No specific cooking activities are suggested because many children and families have restricted diets such as vegan or vegetarian, gluten-free, kosher, etc. However, cooking is always a wonderful activity for a child to participate in. Bearing in mind any food allergies, and common-sense kitchen safety, consider preparing a simple recipe with the child. Children love to wash vegetables, measure and mix ingredients, and set the table for a meal. Preparing and eating a snack is always popular!

Play

Don't forget the many benefits of unguided imaginative play. You need to stay nearby for safety's sake, if the child is in an unfamiliar environment or you aren't certain what should or should not be childproofed. All children need daily time to play. In the preschool years, play is the WORK of the young child. Prepare an appropriate play space and then stay out of it as much as you can; give the child the simplest and highest quality toys you can find such as large pieces of cloth, blocks, dolls, and materials from nature (such as pinecones, feathers, or shells). Avoid plastic toys. Consider a basin of water and some measuring cups or add some dish detergent and give the child a whisk. The more open-ended a material, the more of the child will be brought forth in playing with it. The more structured a material, the less will be required of the child – and the less he will grow and develop when playing with it. As a simple test, try playing with the toys yourself. If you find you tire of a thing quickly, so will a child!

Helping

Helping around the home is an essential part of any Waldorf curriculum. It is not necessary to put a child in front of the television while you do the dishes or sort the laundry into lights and darks; let the child help you. Even if you have an automatic dishwasher, a child can help by rinsing the dishes before they are loaded. Children love to do work that they know is truly helpful and all young children thrive in situations where they are allowed to imitate an adult. Washing the dog, washing the car, sweeping or dusting, repotting houseplants, feeding the cats, setting and clearing the table... all of these are wonderful activities to do with a preschool-aged child.

PLANNER

Activities: highlight the activities you would like to do

Opening Verse

- candle

Game

Stories

Nature

- small pieces of vine OR mini grapevine wreath
- cotton or wool fleece

Handwork

- plastic Easter eggs
- wool roving or batting
- wool yarn (optional)
- Ivory soap flakes
- large bowl & a whisk
- towel
- scissors
- sheets of wool felt (for baby animals, optional)

Art – Naturally Dyed Eggs

- dyestuffs (see chart)
- saucepan for each color
- eggs & a pan to cook them in
- cheesecloth
- white vinegar
- slotted spoon or wire egg holder
- drying rack

Art – Eggshell Mosaics

- eggs (hard-boiled or raw)
- egg dye
- bowl for each color
- Ziploc bags
- glue
- palette
- construction paper or cardstock

Cooking

Play

Helping

Closing Verse

- candle

PLANNER

Book List:

list the books you will be reading
feel free to substitute other books you may have on hand
which relate to this theme

Materials:

list all materials required for your chosen activities

BACKGROUND

For more information on the Waldorf method, try these resources:

reading: What is Waldorf Education?

<http://www.fortnet.org/rsws/waldorf/faq.html>

reading: Why Handwork?

<http://www.weirdolls.com/misc/homeschool.html>

reading: The Importance of Child's Play

<http://www.portlandwaldorfschool.org/lower%20school/our%20community/kinder%20garten.html>

reading: Creating the Play Space

<http://www.threesisterstoys.com/parenting/playspace.htm>

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