

Feathers and Fur

*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.

Fingerplay

Children love fingerplays and they are an excellent way to develop hand-eye coordination, fine motor skills, and memory. Use the fingerplay to introduce today's topic.

Fingerplay:
Little Robin Redbreast
Sat upon a rail

(crouch like bird with 2 hands behind back like bird's tail)

Niddle noddle went his head

(nod head)

And wag went his tail.

(use hands to make tail wagging)

Niddle noddle went his head

And wag went his tail.

Nature

Sit by the window and spend some time looking out, observing the birds. If you can't find any birds in your area, try to entice some by making a treat for them. Simply spread a pinecone liberally with peanut butter and sprinkle with birdseed. Then tie the pinecone to a tree branch with some string. If the child you are with is allergic to peanut butter, modify the activity by simply sprinkling some bird seed on the steps or along a walkway and watch to see if any birds find the food. If you can't see any birds, you can also try opening the window or sitting outside and listening for bird songs.

Art

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!

No-Hands Painting

Tape a large piece of paper to the wall; lay newspaper underneath to keep the floor clean. Set out a large flat dish of tempera paint. Use Velcro straps, a wide sash, or a belt to attach a feather duster to the child's arms like wings, around his waist and behind his back like a tail, or to his legs, feet, elbows, knees, etc. Let the child decide what he would like to try! Now let the child dip the feather duster into paint and paint on the paper. Note how feathers create a different texture painting than a standard brush. This exercise contains an additional element of creativity as the child figures out how to maneuver the feather duster while he paints.

Stories: Feathers

What Kind of Bird is That?

Tico and the Golden Wings

by Mirra Ginsburg

by Leo Lionni

Stories: Fur

Mr. Goat's Bad Good Idea

Little Fur Family

Not THIS Bear!

by Marileta Robinson

by Margaret Wise Brown

by Bernice Meyers

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.

Handwork

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.

For today's project, take a walk with the child and find feathers that have fallen on the ground. (If you want to skip this step, you can purchase feathers from a craft store). Once the feathers have been collected, have the child place them between two sheets of wax paper in a design he likes. Iron the two pieces on a low setting – adults only – until the design is secure. Then cut it out and mount onto a piece of cardstock folded into a notecard. Have the child dictate a letter to a family member or friend, then place the card into an envelope and address it.

Field Trip

To feel different textures of fur, take the child to a pet store. Pet the bunnies, puppies, kittens, and any other furry animals that you are allowed to touch. You can also visit a craft store and feel the angora yarn.

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

Fingerplay

Nature

- pinecones
- peanut butter
- bird seed
- string

Art

- feather duster
- Velcro strips, sash, or a belt
- tempera paint
- large piece of paper

Stories

Handwork

- wax paper
- iron
- feathers
- cardstock
- child-safe scissors
- glue
- envelope

Field Trip

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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