

Underground, All Around

*Waldorf Curriculum
Preschool Newsletter*

July 6, 2005

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 to 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.

Stories

The Snail's Spell

Spiders Spin Webs

Diary of a Worm

Thumbelina

Microcosmos: the invisible world of insects

by Joanne Ryder

by Yvonne Winer

by Doreen Cronin

by Hans Christian Anderson

by Claude Nuridsany, Marie Perennou

Snail

- **Snails as Pets**

Take a Nature walk with the child and collect a few snails for observation. Snails are most easily found by following their slime trails.

Set up a terrarium for your snails so that they may be comfortable while you observe them. You will need:

- an aquarium or large jar with a mesh wire lid or a plastic lid with holes in it
- dirt
- plants
- rocks
- a few snails
- fresh lettuce or cabbage leaves

- **Snail Investigations**

SNAIL

It hasn't any windows
It hasn't any doors
Although it has a ceiling
It hasn't any floors
'Twas built without a builder
A hammer or a nail
Because you see this funny house
Belongs to Mr. Snail

Read the poem above and discuss it. Can you imagine what it would be like to carry your house with you wherever you go? What might be fun about that? Or not so fun?

Consider the following series of investigations you and the child can do with your snails. Talk with the child and make a list of additional questions she would like to investigate – let her interest in the animal guide you in your observations. Also consider collecting some slugs and comparing them with the snails you have found.

Investigation 1 - Get to know your snail

Investigation 2 - Does a snail travel in a straight line?

Investigation 4 - How fast does your snail travel?

Investigation 4 - Does a big snail travel faster than a small snail?

Investigation 5 - Does a snail travel faster going uphill or downhill?

Investigation 6 - What does a snail like to eat?

Investigation 7 - Does a snail prefer light or dark?

Investigation 8 - What does a snail do when it encounters something in its path?

Investigation 9 – What does a snail do when it rains?

Feel free to share other investigation ideas with the group at waldorfcriculum@yahoo.com.

When you have finished observing your snails, please return them to the place where they were found.

Spider

Read selections of poetry from Spiders Spin Webs. Then take the child outside in the early morning to see how the dew has collected on spider webs, allowing you to see them more easily. You may be surprised at how many places you find spider webs, once you take a Nature walk to discover them. Why do you think the spider chose that spot to build his web?

Worm

Just as with the snail, you and the child will learn the most about worms if you are able to complete a series of observations and investigations.

Preparing a worm habitat: <http://www.naturenorth.com/fall/ncrawler/ncrawlcl.html>
Earthworm FAQs: <http://www.tvdsb.on.ca/westmin/science/snc2g1/worm.htm>

Mole

Read the story of Thumbelina. Her greatest cause for sadness at her upcoming marriage to the mole was that she would never again be able to go out into the sunlight. What would it be like to live underground all the time? What would it be like to not be able to see? Blindfold the child and have him describe the experience. Do any of your other senses become more important to you once you have been blindfolded? How might a mole use the different parts of his body to find his way around and live in darkness?

Microcosm

Take a Nature walk into your backyard or visit a local park. Choose one spot of earth and place a circle of string around it. Now get up close to observe your microcosm. First, what do you see on the ground? Are there plants and animals sharing the space? How do they work together or against one another? What is in the sky above your microcosm? What is the climate like there? How does the weather affect the inhabitants that tiny world? If you can, dig down and explore the world of the earth below your microcosm. How do the animals that live in the soil affect the things that live above?

Take pictures or make drawings of the things you observe. Create your own book chronicling what you have found. Make a list of questions you and the child have about the animals, plants, or other things you discovered. Use guide books or other reference materials to research the answers to your questions.

Read the book Microcosmos and discuss how many different microcosms there are in the world. On a different day, visit another area such as a sandy beach or a rain puddle and repeat the process. How many tiny worlds are all around us? What amazing things are happening all the time that we are often ignorant of and can learn so much from if we only stop to see...

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

Stories

- The Snail's Spell by Joanne Ryder
- Spiders Spin Webs by Yvonne Winer
- Diary of a Worm by Doreen Cronin
- Thumbelina by Hans Christian Anderson
- Microcosmos: the invisible world of insects by Claude Nuridsany, Marie Perennou

Snail

- Snails as Pets
- Snail Investigations

Spider

Worm

Mole

Microcosm

Cooking

Play

Helping

Closing Verse

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

JOURNAL

If you choose to use this topic as a mini-unit, use this page to keep track of observations the child has made, the results of your investigations, lists of questions and the resources you found helpful in answering them, and any other items of note. What was the child's initial reaction to the topic of "creepy-crawlies"? How had his perspective on these animals changed by the conclusion of the unit? What additional activities did you add to help develop the theme? Feel free to add additional journaling pages as needed.

RESOURCES

If you would like to develop this material into a larger unit,
consider the following resource:

http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/readers_guides/backyard.shtml

A Preschool unit on Insects (for the Spring) is also
available from Waldorf Curriculum through our website at
www.waldorfcurriculum.com

Please feel free to contact me at any time at waldorf_curric@yahoo.com.