

Happiness...

*Waldorf Curriculum
Preschool Newsletter*

July 20, 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

Happiness Is... a Warm Puppy
Harvey's Hideout
The Gigantic Balloon
The Bat Boy and His Violin
The Quiltmaker's Gift

by Charles M. Schulz
by Russell Hoban
by Ruth Park
by Gavin Curtis
by Jeff Brumbeau

Giggle Art

Read Happiness Is... a Warm Puppy. Talk with the child about how good it feels to be happy. Set up an easel or large piece of paper taped to the wall. Give the child a crayon (the block beeswax crayons work best as they are less prone to breaking) and encourage her to giggle, wiggle, laugh, jump around, or dance as children do when they are happy. With the crayon in her hand, have her draw the picture these happy movements make. My daughter likes to hold one color in each hand and hop up and down repeatedly, giggling with delight and coloring short happy bursts of color on the page. It was while watching her do this that I had the idea for this activity. Adults feel happy too, so feel free to get yourself a piece of paper and some crayons and let your happiness right out onto the page. Happiness should come from the heart but if the child is having a hard time with this activity, put on some happy music or sing songs and dance to get the mood going.

Happiness Is... Having Good Friends

One of the things that makes everyone happy is a good friend. Talk with the child about their friends. Read Harvey's Hideout. Does the child have a brother or sister who they fight with sometimes but really do love? Is there another person that they are glad to have in their life but maybe don't often show it? This is a good time to make some thank you cards for all the people you feel blessed to know. First, make some special stationery. Use colors and materials that convey how happy you are to know each person. When the papers have dried, write the thank you notes, having the child dictate their message of happiness and thanks.

Tin-Can Papermaking

http://www.hgtv.com/hgtv/cr_paper_crafts_make_paper/article/0,1789,HGTV_3292_1373476,00.html

Happiness Is... Living Your Dreams

What do you wish for? Talk with the child about some dreams of your own. Read The Gigantic Balloon. What are some of the dreams that they have? Not just "what do you want to be when you grow up?" but what are some of the amazing things in the world that they would like to experience, places to visit, things to see, and what kind of person they would like to become. Dreams can be so powerful!

This activity can be adjusted depending on the age of the child. A young child will have just one magical dream; an older child may have a list of wishes. Creating a Magic Wish Box helps focus the power of your dreams and guide your life to a better place.

How to make a Magic Wish Box

This is a deliciously simple project that has the power to change your life!

What you need

- A box: any size or shape or material you like. Cardboard shoeboxes, metal tins, recycled cereal boxes, wooden boxes, and gift boxes work great.
- Acrylic paints in colors you enjoy. This can be any inexpensive paint sold as craft paint in small jars or Liquitex Basics paints sold in tubes. You could also use latex paints left over from interior home painting projects.
- Collage materials: really use your imagination for this part and dig into your stashes of saved birthday cards, favorite magazines, old jewelry you no longer wear, and other precious things you enjoy but don't really use.
- Paint brushes and sponges: any size or shape that appeals to you. Natural sea sponges are nice, but any kind of household sponge will work.
- Scissors and Glue: glue sticks work best for paper, Elmers glue works for almost everything else except metal and ceramics, use super glue for these kinds of things. Use any scissors that will cut paper, if you have the ones with decorative edges, they add some flair to paper cut outs and can be fun to use for a design element.

The Magic Wish Box is your passport to creating your best life. Close your eyes right now and imagine how it would feel to be living the life of your dreams. How does your day begin? What are you wearing? Where do you live? What is the very first thing you do when you wake up? How do you spend your time? Write or draw three wishes connected to this vision on pieces of paper and tuck them inside your box, repeating this blessing: This or something better is on its way to me now.

Lay some newspaper or a plastic bag on a flat surface and put your box in the middle. Gather your paints and brushes and sponges and explore using colors that capture the feeling of your dream landscape. I like to sponge a soft layer of color over the entire box surface and then add dots and waves and symbols that appeal to me with a paintbrush. Let your intuitive inner artist guide you to your painting style.

When you are happy with your painted background, sort through your collage materials for the perfect elements to embellish your wish box. Acrylic paints dry very quickly, so let the paint dry as you sort. Cut out images, words, and textures into pieces sized to fit your box. Arrange these items on your box in a pattern you find pleasing and glue them down using a glue stick.

Now you are ready to add dimensional objects! Take those misfit earrings whose partner was lost somewhere long ago, fortunes from cookies, charms, beads, glitter, confetti,

small pebbles, ribbon, yarn and anything else you have laying around the house that now seems like the perfect element for this project and glue them in to place. As the glue dries, go on a treasure hunt for the perfect starter seeds to plant inside your magic box.

Fill your box with the perfect ingredients to help you draw your wishes to life, anything you find that helps you remember what your big dream is about. Add things as often as you like. When you find a new element for your box thank the universe for sending you another affirmation of your wish coming true and tuck it into your box.

Place your Magic Wish Box somewhere you will see it each day. When you need to shift your focus, take a special piece from the box along with you as a reminder of the loving forces that continue to show up to guide and support you. Feel the possibilities dancing into your life. When your wishes come true, say *Thank You!* and add fresh ones. Every time you notice your box remember the seeds you have planted.

Happiness Is... Sharing Your Talents

After reading The Bat Boy and His Violin, talk about how every person has talents which make them special. Knowing what you are good at and sharing it with others is one important part of being happy. A few days ago I saw a woman talking about Share Our Strength (<http://www.strength.org/act/>) and how every single person has a talent. She was emphatic that **everyone** has something to share, whether it is helping put together baskets of food, making the artwork to decorate the bags, or having a cheerful friendly attitude to make the recipients smile. This really inspired me and helped me to feel that my children were not too young either to give charitably or to start to feel the benefits of these actions. Find an organization near you which you and the child would like to support. Perhaps you can start weekly visits to a nursing home, volunteer for Meals on Wheels or Pets on Wheels, or organize a talent show, auction, or other fundraiser and donate funds to your cause. Please share your stories with the Waldorf Curriculum Group.

For additional inspiration, and ideas of what activities are appropriate for children of different ages, check out the recipients of the Family Fun volunteer awards: <http://familyfun.go.com/parenting/learn/activities/feature/volunteers-contest-winners/>

Happiness Is... Relinquishing Your Possessions

The Quiltmaker's Gift is an amazing, inspiring story that has a message even the youngest child can understand. Many families encourage their children to periodically go through their toys and weed out the ones which are no longer used but are still in good condition and donate them. However, at least in our family, my children only have

a handful of toys which we all love and enjoy and we would like to keep them for many more years!

In this case, take the initiative and clean out some of **your own** possessions, maybe an attic or closet. Talk out loud with the child as you sort through the items and have them help you box up those which you wish to donate. This sets an excellent example and will be worthwhile to you, too.

- Consider donating unused kitchen items, clothing which no longer fits, knick-knacks or artwork which you never really liked, unnecessary items of furniture, unopened soaps or other toiletries (which can be sent to our troops abroad).
- What about that jar of spare change (which can be donated to the Tsunami relief effort or any other worthy cause)?
- Drop off your old books to Books for International Goodwill (B.I.G) Project, where they'll be shipped to students and adults in developing countries, which lack both textbooks and recreational reads.
- Even if you work to keep your lives simple and feel you don't need to pare down any further, you can go outside to the garden and cut some fresh flowers or gather some produce and take it to a friend to share.

These simple gestures will help you and the child to share in some of the good feeling which the king feels in the story and will serve to reinforce its message.

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

- Happiness Is... a Warm Puppy by Charles M. Schulz
- Harvey's Hideout by Russell Hoban
- The Gigantic Balloon by Ruth Park
- The Bat Boy and His Violin by Gavin Curtis
- The Quiltmaker's Gift by Jeff Brumbeau

Giggle Art

Happiness Is...

Having Good Friends

- Tin-Can Papermaking

Happiness Is...

Living Your Dreams

- How to Make a Magic Wish Box

Happiness Is...

Sharing Your Talents

Happiness Is...

Relinquishing Your Possessions

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

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