

Over in the Meadow

*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 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

Over in the Meadow
Old Mother West Wind
Andrew Henry's Meadow
Where Butterflies Grow
The Wump World

by Ezra Jack Keats
by Thornton W. Burgess
by Doris Burn
by Joanne Ryder
by Bill Peet

Nature

Take the child to visit a meadow in your neighborhood. (Try your backyard, a park, a nature center, even the unmown outer areas of a ballfield.) Search for signs of animal life such as a set of tracks, droppings, a hole in the ground, a worn path, or vegetation which has been nibbled. See if you and the child can create a list of animals which live in this meadow habitat. Make a drawing or take a photograph of any mystery tracks and use a reference guide to help you identify them once you return home. Here are some common tracks: http://www.fws.gov/southeast/ea/fun_facts/pubback8.pdf

Art

Make a collage of animal pictures which represents the meadow habitat you investigated. Some ideas for collaging:

- use magazine or newspaper articles as a source of pictures
- add photographs you took on your Nature walk
- cut pieces of sponge into shape and create animal tracks over the pictures with India Ink
- use oil pastels (these may stain the child's clothes) to create a thick layer around or in front of the animals. Use scraping tools (nail, comb, toothpick, etc.) to bring the texture of the tall meadow grasses alive.
- add artifacts from your walk, as desired, such as dried flowers or leaves you found in your meadow.

Community Giving

Read [The Wump World](#) and talk with the child about how the beautiful meadow habitat you visited should be protected. If you saw trash on your walk, consider going back with a trash bag and picking it up (wear gloves for this, and don't allow the child to pick up sharp or dangerous materials). Or see if you are permitted to create a Do Not Litter sign to put up near the area. Encourage the child to come up with additional ideas to protect the plants and animals of this meadow habitat.

If you weren't able to find any type of meadow near you, consider a different approach. Read [Where Butterflies Grow](#) and plant a butterfly garden! To make it a real gift to the community, work with area teachers to begin one at a school, or get permission to plant the garden outside a hospital, library, nursing home, or museum. Plants recommended for a butterfly garden: <http://www.waldorfcriculum.com/butterflygarden2.html>

Science

What is recycling? How does it work? Take a trip to a recycling center.

In addition to this (or if a trip to the recycling center isn't possible), take a field trip through your local grocery store and see how many products you can find which are identified as being made with recycled materials. It isn't enough to just recycle your

own trash! Following through – by using items made with recycled materials – is also an important part of being eco-conscious.

You can also walk through the store discussing which products are recyclable. Look at the underside of plastic packages, discuss composting of paper products and produce, and examine aluminum cans. If the child is older, or very interested in environmental issues, you can introduce the term biodegradable. Again, see if you can find products which are labeled in this way. Which is more common: products which are recyclable, which are made of recycled materials, or which are biodegradable? Why might this be?

Handwork

Create a new toy out of recycled materials. Using an old deck of playing cards, cut two ½ inch slits in each side of each card (with scissors, an adult job). Allow the child to create a sculpture by sliding the cards together, fitting one slit into another slit. When the sculpture is complete it can be disassembled and another one begun. This toy is good for travel.

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

Stories

Nature

Art: collage materials

- paper
- glue
- scissors
- magazines, newspaper articles, photographs
- sponges, India Ink
- oil pastels, texture tools for scraping
- items from Nature walk

Community Giving

Science

Handwork

- deck of old playing cards
- scissors

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

RESOURCES

For more art projects & inspiration for creative activities perfect for this theme, I highly recommend Beautiful Stuff: Learning with Found Materials by Cathy Weisman Topal and Lella Gandini.

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Thank you!

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