

Look Ma, No Hands!

*Waldorf Curriculum
Preschool Newsletter*

May 18, 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 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.

Storytelling

Legend: "How People Learned to Make Fire"

<http://www.wildwayproductions.com/LivingSkills/howpeoplemadefire.htm>

A common way of teaching in the Waldorf tradition is through stories. In the case of "How People Learned to Make Fire", the legend is already written in a way that may lead you to believe it should be read straight from the screen or from a printout. Don't take this shortcut! The art of storytelling requires interaction between the storyteller, the audience, and the story itself. Take the time to learn the legend beforehand and then retell it in your own words. Then discuss the frog and the power of his sticky tongue as a way of introducing this week's topic.

Stories

The Wide-Mouthed Frog
Filling the Bill
No Accounting for Tastes
Diary of a Worm
Young Lions

by Keith Faulkner
by Aileen Lucia Fisher
by Aileen Lucia Fisher
by Doreen Cronin
by Toshi Yoshida

Rhyme:

Squirrels

Five little squirrels sitting in a tree.
The first one said, "What do I see?"
The second one said, "Some nuts on the ground."
The third one said, "Those nuts *I* found."
The fourth one said, "I'll race you there."
The fifth one said, "All right, that's fair."
So they shook their tails and ran with glee
To the nuts that lay at the foot of the tree.

optional project:

DO NOT do this project with a child who is allergic to peanuts. Always ask the child's parents first. And if you aren't sure, err on the side of caution and **don't** do the project.

Key Question – how do squirrels eat their food?

MATERIALS

Masking tape
Peanuts in the shell

With this activity, children get to test their dexterity, squirrel-style. How, without using their thumbs, can they crack a peanut shell and eat the nut inside? Have the child hold her hands out, palms up. Gently tape her thumbs to her palms using masking tape (kids love this part). Offer her a bowl of unshelled peanuts and challenge her to crack and eat them. You will be surprised by how quickly children figure out the best strategy and use their teeth to crack the shells.

Nature

Key Question – how do worms eat their food?

In reading Diary of a Worm we discover that worms have no teeth. So how do they eat their food? And what do they eat? The answers can be found at <http://www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/worms/anatomy/anatomy9.html>.

Again, your goal is not to simply read the information off the screen and to the child. Read the material on the website in advance, pose the Key Question to the child and discuss it together. After the child has had a chance to come up with several theories, you can collect a worm from outside and observe it. Use the information you learned from the website to explain to the child what and how a worm eats. If you like, you can encourage the child to practice eating a piece of bread (or dry cereal, crackers, and the like – again, be sure to check for food allergies beforehand) as a worm would, sucking on it until it becomes mushy and slurping it down without chewing.

Science

There are two Science projects for this week; make your choice depending on which topic the child might enjoy more or on which activity will be easier for you to prepare.

- Worms

Build a vermicomposting bin:

<http://www.earth911.org/master.asp?s=lib&a=organics/composting/wormcompost.asp>

OR

- Birds

Throughout the animal kingdom, creatures have evolved in ways that help them take best advantage of the environment they live in. Birds are a remarkable example of this. Their feathers evolved from reptile scales; their bones became hollow to lighten the load for flying; their feet adapted to paddling, perching or climbing; and their beaks became customized for specific kinds of food.

Key Question – how do birds eat their food?

MATERIALS

Poster board

Field guide to birds

“beaks”: clothespin, paper clip, drinking straw

“bird food” such as sunflower seeds, soft gummy fish, and apple juice
or other appropriate foods suitable for each type of bird bill as well as for the child (avoid choking hazards and food allergies)

From a bird book, copy the outlines of three bird bills onto the poster board:

1. the strong, short bill of a seed-eating bird such as the goldfinch;
2. the sharp, dagger-like bill of a fish-eating bird such as the heron; and
3. the long, slender bill of a nectar-drinking bird such as the hummingbird.

Display the board on a table and set out the “beaks” appropriately; that is, place the clothespin in front of the seed-eating bill, the paper clip (partially uncoiled) in front of the fish-eating bill, and the drinking straw in front of the nectar-drinking bill.

Set out bowls of "bird food" such as sunflower seeds, soft gummy fish, and apple juice (or other chosen foods). Ask the child to choose which "beak" would be best for eating each food. Then allow the child to eat the different foods, while pretending to be a bird and using the "beaks" provided for each type of food. Discuss with the child how every animal has a different diet and has adapted to best be able to eat its chosen foods.

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.

Key Question – how do birds take their baths?

You'll be able to see this for yourself by establishing a birdbath and observing. For directions and helpful tips: www.birdwatching.com/tips/birdbaths.html

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

Storytelling: Legend

Stories

Rhyme

- optional project
- masking tape
- unshelled peanuts

Nature

- bread, crackers, or dry cereal which the child is allowed to eat

Science

Worms

- plastic bin with lid and small drainage holes
- black and white newspaper
- cow or horse manure (optional)
- 1 lb. red wigglers
- food scraps

Birds

- poster board
- field guide to birds
- "beaks": clothespin, paper clip, drinking straw
- "bird food" such as sunflower seeds, soft gummy fish, apple juice or other foods suitable for the child to eat

Handwork

- materials suitable for building your birdbath

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

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