

# *Red Ochre, Blue Water*

*Waldorf Curriculum  
Preschool Newsletter*

*October 26, 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.

Many families also use the weekly newsletter topics in their regular lesson planning, completing the entire group of activities as a homeschooling unit.

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

Where the River Begins

If You Find a Rock

The Lion and the Little Red Bird

Colors: The Story of Dyes and Pigments

When Clay Sings

by Thomas Locker

by Peggy Christian

by Elisa Kleven

by Ber Francois

by Byrd Baylor

## **Storytelling - Where Does Color Come From?**

A common way of teaching in the Waldorf tradition is through storytelling. Colors: The Story of Dyes and Pigments is a parent resource, helping you to have a better background on this week's topic. Read through it and use some of your new knowledge to introduce the question – where do the colors in our world come from? Instead of reading straight from the book (not too child-friendly), take the time to learn and understand the information presented on your own, so as to be able to answer any questions, and then simply retell the story of ochre and clays in your own words. Your child will also enjoy seeing the pictures and getting a better understanding of what kinds of colored earth to look for on the field trip.

### **Play**

Read If You Find a Rock. Do you remember finding those magical chalk rocks as a child with which you could actually write on the road? Go outside with your child and try finding as many different kind of rocks as you can. Can you write with any of them? Play around with the rocks you find and enjoy them.

### **Field Trip**

#### *Follow the Source*

Read Where the River Begins. Find a small stream near you and hike along it, following it as far as you can to its source (without trespassing on private property, of course). Where I live, all the streams end up at the Chesapeake Bay. You'll want to try and find some large outcroppings along the edge of the water, where you can actually see the color of the soils. Also, reach down into the water (safely!) and gather some rocks. See if you can find some clay. Our clay is a dark gray and feels very slick. If you step on it barefoot, you begin to slide and lose your balance, so you know right away that it's clay.

Talk with your child about the different sizes of rocks you find. The words gravel, sand, silt and clay are all terms which carry with them a distinct size connotation.

- Gravel is any material greater than 2 millimeters in its largest dimensions. This includes boulders, cobbles, pebbles and granules (in decreasing size order).
- Sand is any material between 2 mm and 0.06 mm in size.
- Silt is material which is finer than sand, but still feels gritty when rubbed on your teeth.
- Clay is the finest material of all, and pure clay will feel smooth on your teeth, and will form a sticky ball when wet. As a general rule, material gets smaller the more it has been transported. Therefore very coarse material usually indicates a short distance of transport and vice versa.

#### *Sorting Out Layers*

Take a sample of the soil you find near your home. Most soil is made up of a combination of sand, silt, and clay. To see what is in your soil, fill a fruit jar about two-thirds full of water. Pour in the soil sample until the jar is almost full. Replace the cover or put one hand tightly over the top of the jar and shake it vigorously. Then put the jar

on the table and let the soil settle. Allow plenty of time (two to three days) because the very small particles will be slow in settling. You can do this with several soils taken from different places and compare. How is the soil at your house different from what you found at the bottom of the river?

## **Art**

What better way to investigate the properties of clay than to explore it through art projects! We enthusiastically recommend [The Great Clay Adventure: Creative Handbuilding Projects for Young Artists](#). Clay for these projects can easily be found at your local art & craft store.

## **Nature**

Clay has also been used throughout the ages for more cosmetic purposes. In fact, facial masks are some of the oldest known beauty treatments. The ancient Egyptians used mud and clay to remove dead skin cells and heal blemishes. The mask softens the skin, unclogs the pores, and removes the impurities. It also replaces lost moisture and soothes the skin – and is very relaxing. Your child (if he or she knows of the existence of clay beauty masks) may be amazed to discover that these masks are actually made up of real clay, just like the kind you find in the ground. Let your child try a facial mask and wear it all the way until it gets dried and crackly. How does it feel? Our favorite clay mask is “Firm Deal” by Yardley’s of London – this one is inexpensive enough that I don’t mind if we play around with it and it can be found at the grocery store.

Of course, you can also make your own clay masks. You’ll probably want to purchase specialty clays for this instead of using whatever you’ve found in the ground (or your clay for art projects). One good source for high-quality clays is Mountain Rose Herbs: <http://www.mountainroseherbs.com/clay/clay.php>

When making your own masks, use this guide

### **FOR DRY SKIN:**

If you choose to use a clay, use a white clay such as French white, or use kaolin or bentonite (light gray); these are least drying.

### **FOR OILY SKIN:**

Use green or red clay.

### **TO NOURISH THE SKIN:**

Use a mineral-rich black clay from the Dead Sea.

You can find clay mask recipes by searching on the Internet; here is an example:

## Egg Yolk, Avocado & Mud Facial Mask

Best for oily skin types

Clay or fuller's earth mud is available in powder form at any health food store.

### *Mix Together*

- 1 tablespoon dry clay
- 1 egg yolk
- 1/4 of a mashed avocado
- enough witch hazel to create a smooth mixture.

Mud dries excess sebum while the egg yolk and avocado replenish lost moisture. Witch hazel tones.

Make sure you search for "clay beauty mask" instead of just clay mask, or you'll get art projects!

## Science – Rusted Dirt

Perhaps on your field trip you were lucky enough to find a deposit of ochre. Ochre is, in fact, "rusted dirt" – that is, soil with a high iron content which has rusted through continued proximity to water. That is why you have the greatest success finding ochre deposits by wading around the edges of a river. Many ancient sites for gathering ochre became iron mines in modern times:

<http://www.aboutbritain.com/ClearwellCavesAncientIronMines.htm>

You'll know you have found ochre when the chunks of color are red, purple, or yellow and make marks on your arm. Gather your ochre in a pail with some water in the bottom. When you get home, sort out the colors, keeping each as pure as possible. Grind the colors to a powder, pushing them through the leg of a pantyhose to get them as fine as possible. Empty spice jars make an excellent way to store the colors in your collection. To make paint with your ochre, take a little bit of powder out of the jar and mix it with a small amount water until it is paint!

## History

### *Cave Paintings*

Read [The Lion and the Little Red Bird](#). Show your child a picture of ancient cave paintings, such as the one on page 17 of [Colors: The Story of Dyes and Pigments](#). Take some of your ochre paint (you can also buy ochre if you're in an area where it is not possible to gather it yourself –

[http://www.naturalpigments.com/detail.asp?ReviewAction=WriteReview&PRODUCT\\_ID=430-31S](http://www.naturalpigments.com/detail.asp?ReviewAction=WriteReview&PRODUCT_ID=430-31S)) and try making a painting on a rock outcropping.

### *Face and Body Paint*

Ochre has also traditionally been used throughout the world to make body paint for decoration in important tribal ceremonies. Even today, ochre is an important cultural resource for the Tasmanian Aboriginal community. Traditionally, Aboriginal women had the exclusive role of obtaining ochre. Today, many Tasmanian Aboriginal men continue to respect the traditional cultural custom by obtaining ochre from women only. Tasmanian ochre ranges in colour from white through yellow to red. It has many uses, including ceremonial body marking, colouring wood craft products, tie-dyeing and various other uses in crafts and arts. Tasmanian Aborigines consider ochre to be a special cultural resource.

Source: Aboriginal Art Online website

<http://www.aboriginalartonline.com/art/tasmanian-art.php>

Naturally, if you have some ochre, you can use it to make a traditional-style body paint. Of course, if you don't, there are many face and body paint recipes. Here are just a few. Remember: keep any face paint away from the eyes and mouth!

### *Baby Lotion Face Paint*

Mix 1/8 cup baby lotion, 1/4 teaspoon powdered tempera paint, and 1 squirt liquid dishwashing soap in a small dish (one per color). Paint on the face with small, clean make-up brushes or paintbrushes. Easily removed with soap and water.

### *Shortening-Cornstarch Face Paint*

Mix 1 tablespoon solid vegetable shortening with 2 tablespoons cornstarch. Divide mixture into small dishes, one per color. Tint as desired with food coloring. After applying the cream to the face with a small paintbrush, pat with translucent powder and a make-up pad to "set." Remove gently with cold cream and soft tissues.

### *"Tattoo" Paint*

Mix 1 tablespoon cold cream, 2 tablespoons cornstarch, 1 tablespoon water and food coloring in color of your choice. Stir completely. Using a clean paintbrush, create a "tattoo" anywhere on the skin. This also makes a terrific face paint. Comes off with soap and water.

## **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**

Because many children and families have restricted diets such as vegan or vegetarian, gluten-free, kosher, etc. we generally do not suggest specific cooking activities for the week's theme. 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!

## **Independent 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 preschool 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

- Where the River Begins by Thomas Locker
- If You Find a Rock by Peggy Christian
- The Lion and the Little Red Bird by Elisa Kleven
- Colors: The Story of Dyes and Pigments by Ber Francois

Storytelling - Where Does Color Come From?

Play

Field Trip

Follow the Source  
Sorting Out Layers

Art

- The Great Clay Adventure: Creative Handbuilding Projects for Young Artists by Ellen Kong

Nature

Beauty Treatments

Science

Rusted Dirt

History

Cave Paintings  
Face and Body Paint  
*Baby Lotion Face Paint*  
*Shortening-Cornstarch Face Paint*  
*"Tattoo" Paint*

Cooking

Independent Play

Helping

Closing Verse

# PLANNER

**Book List:** list the books you will be reading

**Materials:** list all materials required for your chosen activities

# APPENDIX



## One Room Schoolhouse:

If ochre is soil which is chock-full of iron, is it magnetic? (the answer is yes, when heated) This is an interesting question for an older child to explore.

We recommend:

"An invitation to pupils to measure magnetic particles in the soil" (website created by students in Denmark):

[http://www.bellahoj.dk/klasser/astronomi/measure\\_magnetic\\_soil.htm](http://www.bellahoj.dk/klasser/astronomi/measure_magnetic_soil.htm)

Other connections to this topic:

- Halloween, naturally, is an excellent time to enjoy the use of face paint.
- If your child enjoys exploring the world of rocks, look up our Preschool Newsletter Topic "Heart of Stone" (June 1<sup>st</sup> 2005)
- Reading The Lion and the Little Red Bird may lead you and your child into a discussion of how paints and dyes can be made with flowers, berries, and other plant materials. Again, Colors: The Story of Dyes and Pigments is an excellent resource for learning more about this subject. Please email this group if you discover exciting new projects for creating your own natural dyes!

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Face and Body Paint recipes were adapted from The Big Messy Art Book: But easy to clean up by MaryAnn Kohl.

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