

Outside Over There

*Waldorf Curriculum
Preschool Newsletter*

September 7, 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.

Poem

Use the following poem to introduce this week's theme:

I Knew a Gnome

I knew a gnome
Who had his home
Right in the middle of an oak tree.
He wore a hat
And breeches that

Were all of the colour of the oak tree.
Two squirrels lived above his head,
Some rabbits burrowed beneath his bed,
"I keep them warm and safe," he said,
"All in the middle of my oak tree."

A wise old owl
She found a hole
High in the trunk of the oak tree.
And come what may
She slept all day
High in the trunk of the oak tree.
But when at last she took her flight,
Hooting in the pale moonlight.
The gnome rode on her back all night,
Swooping all around about his oak tree.

Trevor Smith Westgarth

Stories

Around the Year

Flower Fairies of the Autumn

Rainbow Bird

The Great Kapok Tree

The Giving Tree

by Elsa Beskow

by Cicely Mary Barker

by Eric Maddern

by Selby Beeler

by Shel Silverstein

Field Trip:

Apples

Read the "September" poem from Around the Year. Take a trip to an orchard and pick apples.

Who else eats the apples? In our area, we often see deer munching on fallen crabapples under the trees. Read "The Song of the Crabapple Fairy" from Flower Fairies of the Autumn. Pick crabapples to make crabapple jelly:

COMMUNITY HOUSE CRABAPPLE JELLY

I use crabapples from the tree in front of the Community House, hence the name.

Wash apples, remove blossom end, halve and remove stems. Barely cover fruit with water and cook until very soft. Extract the juice by tying the apples in cheesecloth and suspending over a bowl until it no longer drips. Do Not Squeeze! Boil 8 cups juice with 6 cups sugar (3/4 cup sugar per cup of juice) to the jelly (use thermometer). Optional: Add 1/2 teaspoon vanilla or lemon juice. Pour into hot, sterile jelly jars and seal. Note: It's best to keep the batches around 8 cups. Doubling the recipe doesn't work for me.

Handwork:
Nuts

Read "The Song of the Hazel Nut Fairy" from Flower Fairies of the Autumn, then make hazelnut children using the directions from Feltcraft (by Petra Berger) p. 16. You can take a nature walk to find hazelnuts or, more likely, purchase them from the grocery store. If you are able to find nuts which have fallen from trees near you, add them to your nature table. Cicely Mary Barker also wrote and illustrated the Beech Nut Fairy, the Acorn Fairy, and the Horse Chestnut Fairy.



One Room Schoolhouse:

If you are able to find horse chestnut trees near you, gather a basket of conkers. In addition to being toys for the playroom, these make wonderful math manipulatives for older children. Older children in your "one room schoolhouse" may also enjoy holding a Nutting Party, as described in The American Girls Handy Book (by Lina and Adelia Beard) p.217, or using natural materials of the season to make some of the projects in the chapter on "Nature's Fall Decorations and How to Use Them." This book may also usefully be studied by those who are learning about the Victorian era.

Science:
Fire

Read Rainbow Bird. Use your own judgement to decide what type of activity regarding fire is best for your situation; perhaps you can gather wood and build the first fire of the season in your fireplace. Or you can go camping or simply build a fire in your backyard and use it to roast marshmallows. Be sure to thank the trees who gave you the fire and the sticks to roast with!

Nature:
Habitat

Read The Great Kapok Tree. Go out to a tree in your backyard or park and sit quietly and observe it. What animals do you see making a home in this tree? If you can, visit it several days in succession as you will probably observe different things each time. Stand far away from the tree as well as close up to it. Look at the roots, bark, branches, and leaves and see what animals or traces of animals you can find.

Giving Thanks

Trees give so much to us! Read The Giving Tree. In addition to providing habitat for many animals, trees give shelter to us when we build our homes with them. Walk around your own house and identify all the things you find which come from trees. You may find more things than you expect! Consider, in addition to the framing of your house, a broom handle, kitchen items such as a wooden cooking spoon or cutting board, the paper in your childrens' books, curtain rods, your comb, picture frames and other decorative items, and many others. Give thanks to the trees who do so much to sustain our lives... even if you're completely inundated with technology, there is surely paper in your printer!

Play Materials

In addition to baskets of conkers, pieces of wood make very good toys for the playroom. Simply gather some completely dry lengths of wood in varying sizes. You can remove the bark and place it in a separate basket for play, keep the bark on, or sand the blocks completely smooth (this is the best option for children with dust allergies or families with infant children who may chew on the blocks). One wonderful idea is to bring an entire tree stump into the playroom to become a magical table and area for imaginative play.

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 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

Poem – “I Knew a Gnome”

Stories

- Around the Year
- Flower Fairies of the Autumn
- Rainbow Bird
- The Great Kapok Tree
- The Giving Tree

Field Trip: Apples

Handwork: Nuts

- Feltcraft p.16
- The American Girls Handy Book p.217

Science: Fire

Nature: Habitat

Giving Thanks

Play Materials

Cooking

Independent 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.