

Dragons!

*Waldorf Curriculum
Preschool Newsletter*

September 28, 2005

BOOK SUGGESTIONS

Dragons of Legend

Saint George and the Dragon. retold by Margaret Hodges. illustrated by Tina Schart Hyman. adapted from Spenser's "The Faerie Queen"

Brave Martha and the Dragon. Susan L. Roth. based on a Provençal legend

Michaelmas

Michaelmas and the Soul Forces of Man. by Rudolf Steiner.

All Year Round. Ann Druitt, Christine Fynes-Clinton, Marije Rowling.

Friendly Dragons

The Best Pet of All. by David LaRochelle. illustrated by Hanako Wakiyama.

My Father's Dragon. by Ruth Stiles Gannett.

The Modern Dragon

Around My Room. poems by William Jay Smith. illustrations by Erik Blegvad.
"The Toaster"

Baby Shakespeare: World of Poetry DVD
"A Modern Dragon". by Rowena Bastin Bennett.
(featured word: train)

If you have other book suggestions to add to this list, please email the group at waldorfcriculum@yahoogroups.com.

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 as a one week long mini-unit for homeschooling.

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.

Dragons of Legend

In the circle of the year, the Day of St. George (April 23) and the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels (September 29) stand opposite one another. In many ways we can see how George's reputation as a courageous knight and champion of the oppressed, steadfast in truth, holds up an earthly mirror to the great warrior Archangel who fought the great dragon in heaven (Revelations 12).

Michaelmas

All Year Round, pages 139-140, gives some parent background into the meaning of the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels. If you choose to celebrate Michaelmas on September 29th, consider some of the following activities suggested in that book:

- Harvest Loaf page 140
- The Story of the Harvest Loaf page 141
- Michaelmas Candle page 143
- A Conker Dragon page 144
- Shooting Star Kite page 145
- More Michaelmas Dragons page 147

Friendly Dragons

It is not required, of course, that your family celebrate Michaelmas although it is considered a standard Waldorf holiday. You can share stories of dragons with your child in a more lighthearted manner by reading tales about friendly dragons such as

The Best Pet of All
My Father's Dragon

by David LaRochelle
by Ruth Stiles Gannett

The Modern Dragon (toaster)

Read "The Toaster" poem by William Jay Smith. Toast some slices of bread together with the child and enjoy! An older-style toaster, not a toaster oven, would work best for this, as you can push the slices down into the mouth of the dragon and then watch them pop back out.

The Modern Dragon (train)

The poem "A Modern Dragon" by Rowena Bastin Bennett compares a dragon to a train. Take the child to see a working coal-powered steam engine, if possible, and watch the men feed the dragon, see it blow smoke and steam, and hear it roar.

Dragons at the Pet Store

Bearded dragons are sold at many pet stores. Take the child on a field trip to see a real dragon! If you decide you'd like to buy one, here's a bearded dragon shopping list: <http://www.reptilecare.com/dragonlist.htm>. They require a lot of accessories!

Dragons at the Zoo

Another place you can go to see a real dragon is the zoo. We are lucky because the National Zoo in Washington DC has not only a Komodo dragon exhibit, but a breeding program. Check for a zoo near you; for a global zoo directory, visit <http://www.cbsg.org/directory/index.scd>.

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!

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

Dragons of Legend

Michaelmas

- Harvest Loaf
- The Story of the Harvest Loaf
- Michaelmas Candle
- A Conker Dragon
- Shooting Star Kite
- More Michaelmas Dragons

Friendly Dragons

- The Best Pet of All
- My Father's Dragon

by David LaRochelle

by Ruth Stiles Gannett

The Modern Dragon – toaster
"The Toaster" poem

by William Jay Smith

The Modern Dragon – train
"A Modern Dragon" poem

by Rowena Bastin Bennett

Dragons at the Pet Store –
the bearded dragon

Dragons at the Zoo –
the Komodo dragon

Cooking

Play

Helping

Closing Verse

PLANNER

Book List: list the books you will be reading

Materials: list all materials required for your chosen activities

APPENDIX: KOMODO DRAGONS

Komodo Dragon (*Varanus komodoensis*)

Classification and Range

Komodo dragons are also known as Komodo monitors, or by the local Indonesian name, "ora." These giant lizards belong to the family Varanidae, which includes 52 species of monitor lizards. All varanids belong to a single genus. *Varanus* includes very tiny lizards only a few inches long to the immense Komodo dragon.

Komodo dragons live on four southeastern Indonesian islands in the Lesser Sunda region: Flores, Gili Motang, Komodo and Rinca. As recent as the 1970s, their habitat also included the island of Padar.

Habitat

Komodo dragons inhabit hot, seasonally arid grasslands, savannas and monsoon forests. They live mostly in the lowlands, but have occasionally been found at elevations up to 1,967 feet (600 m).

Physical Characteristics

Male length: Commonly up to 9 feet (2.75m) long, including tail, although the record is slightly over 10 feet (3.05m).

Male weight: An exceptionally large male can weigh as much as 550 pounds (250 kg) after a large meal.

Females: Tend to be shorter and weigh less: up to 7.5 feet (2.3 m) long, and up to 150 pounds (68 kg).

*Males and females do not appear to be strikingly different, with the exception of size. A different arrangement of the scales around the genital opening is one distinguishing characteristic between the sexes. Adult Komodos are mostly black, green or gray, with patches of yellow-brown or white.

Life Span

Life span in the wild is estimated at up to 50 years, though few babies survive to adulthood. Komodo dragons have lived to be more than 25 years old in captivity; this is based on estimated age at acquisition.

Diet

In the wild: The primary prey for adult dragons is the Sunda deer, but they also eat birds, snakes, fish, crabs, snails, small mammals, pigs, water buffalo, eggs, wild horses and younger Komodos. Komodo dragons are also scavengers, and will eat almost any type of carrion.

At the zoo: Mainly rodents, NOT offered alive.