



READY...SET...WONDER!

NATURE PROMPTS FOR THE EARLY LEARNING & CARE EDUCATOR

A collaborative project that encourages the connection of children with the outdoors





Humber College supports sustainability as one of its six key values. We are committed to reducing the use of resources and creating a more sustainable footprint. This booklet was printed on responsible FSC Mixed Sources paper.





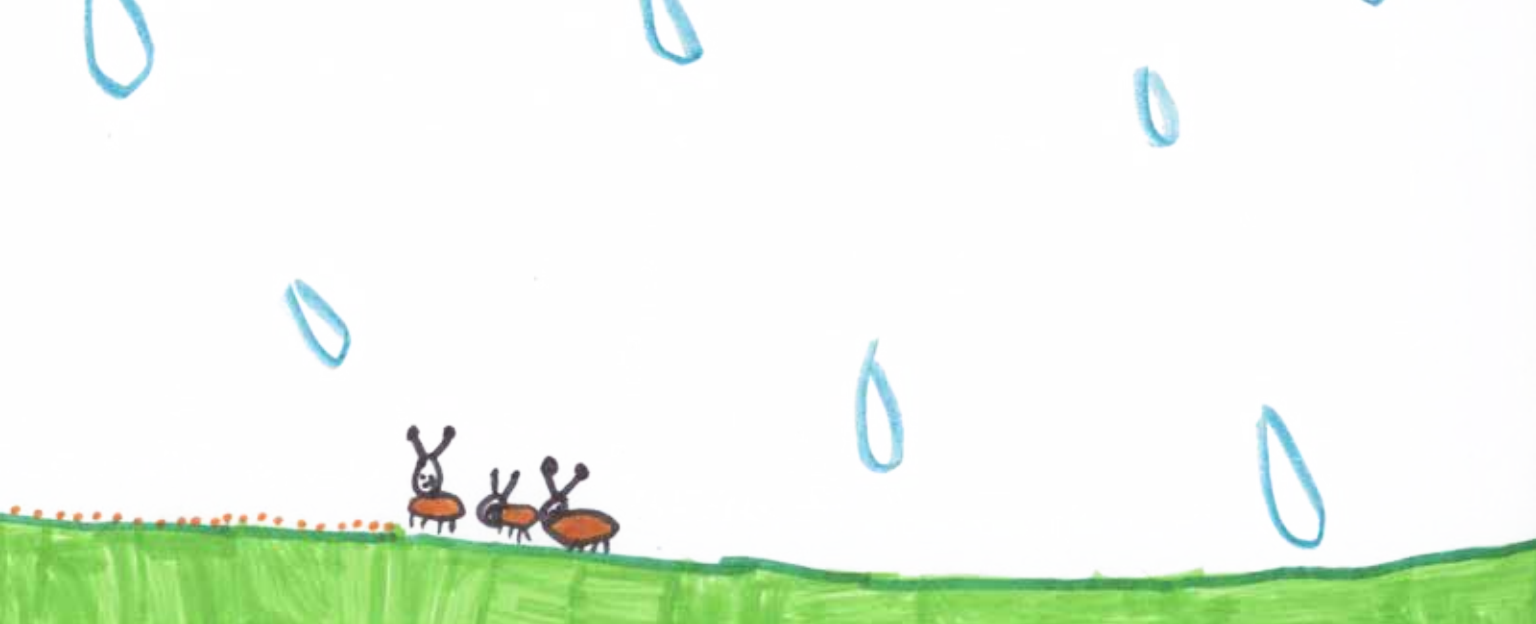
WELCOME TO READY...SET...WONDER!

The vision of this guide is to provide front line early learning professionals with a tool that prompts, engages, encourages and inspires a strong connection between children and nature. This is a resource to prompt ideas and opportunities for experiences with children infant to five years, by the weather conditions of the day. It is based on the following principles:

- i. emphasis on practical use across a broad range of early years learning environments (e.g., child care centres, home child care, ECE post-secondary educational institutions and training programs, full day Kindergarten, OEYC's and recreational settings)
- ii. approach learning as a fundamental process of discovery, with an emphasis on a responsive inclusive curriculum;
- iii. focus on providing outdoor learning experiences with nature for children 0-5 years.

****Special Note:***

We encourage you as professionals to use your knowledge and discretion when providing outdoor experiences and materials to the children in your care. Consider the age ranges suggested and plan accordingly to the needs of your particular group.



Humber Early Childhood Education is...

...engaging learners in quality education to inspire and promote excellence in early learning and care. We achieve this by; fostering relationships that contribute to knowledge creation & collaboration, embodying inclusive, ethical & reflective practice, advocating for and supporting children, families and communities, engendering leadership in the field of ECE, instilling curiosity and confidence in the pursuit of life-long learning. Some of the key elements Humber is committed to are finding new and innovative ways to encourage children and youth to interact with the natural world, studying the results of that exposure, and communicating our findings within the early childhood education sector.

Back to Nature Network is...

...a diverse and growing group of organizations uniting to build capacity to connect children, youth and families with nature in ongoing and meaningful ways. The network grew from the international children and nature movement that is focused on addressing 'nature-deficit disorder', a term spawned by Richard Louv's book *Last Child in the Woods*. Over 80 member organizations representing education, health, planning, environment and active living sectors, have come together with the mission of strengthening the health and well-being of all Ontario children and their families by building a vibrant network of people and organizations who actively create opportunities to experience nature every day. Learn more at www.back2nature.ca.



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SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION





HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

This tool provides prompts that can be used year-round in outdoor playspaces. You can find prompts and experiences by either age range or daily weather conditions.

The age ranges are categorized in order as:

PROMPTS FOR INFANTS birth - 12months







PROMPTS FOR TODDLERS 12 - 24 months

PROMPTS FOR PRESCHOOLERS/
KINDERGARTENERS 2 - 4/5 years

*Special Note:

We encourage you as professionals to use your knowledge and discretion when providing outdoor experiences and materials to the children in your care. Consider the age ranges suggested and plan accordingly to the needs of your particular group.

Experiences are accompanied by colour coded weather conditions. The weather conditions of the day are represented by the corresponding shaded colours at the side of each page:

	Cold	=	White
	Sunny	=	Yellow
	Cool	=	Green
	Warm or hot	=	Red
	Cloud or wind	=	Grey
	Rain	=	Blue



CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Each experience or prompt embodies a sense of wonder and discovery.

WONDER PROMPTS

The educator/caregiver uses invitations or provocations to ignite the child's sense of discovery. These can take the form of labeling, gestures, visual stimuli, and open-ended questions. Wonder out loud, ask questions – where, what, how, when, who... Engaging with the child in this way leads to enriched learning.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Opportunities for Learning provide a reference point to corresponding Domain and Skills from the OELF framework.

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

Adaptations for children are always a consistent consideration. Tips on adaptations are provided by season, ability and extensions to further discovery across age ranges.

As you engage with children, challenge yourself to extend each experience to its fullest!

Love an experience you see for a different age range than your group? Challenge yourself to deepen complexity or simplify according to your childrens' ages, skills and interests.



SAFETY STANDARDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Elements of temperature, surfaces, tools, and exposure to elements in nature are at the discretion of the professional educator. It is recommended that you consult with the appropriate early learning legislation to comply with safety standards.

Provisions for wind, sun, air quality and winter conditions must be made. Be sure to check appropriate regulations and legislation for shade requirements in all seasons. You might consider: shaded trails or tricycle tracks, living shade options - willow tunnels, domes or shaded sand play areas.

For further information on general safety outdoors and interacting safely with plants, please refer to the Section 3.



SECTION 2

TIPS & PROMPTS





NATURE TIPS FOR INFANTS

- Safety is key!
- Provide opportunities for a sense of wonder
- Consider using all senses – touch, smell, auditory, visual, and taste
- Be sensitive to new allergens
- Use simple language, vocalization
- Introduce natural materials slowly
- Wonder out loud!
- Enjoy their responses or imitate their responses
- Know your infants, be responsive and inclusive, treat them as capable
- Water! Lots of mittens and hats!

***Special Note:**

Younger infants have specific learning capabilities that differ from older infants.

Be mindful of their progression and consider repetition of experiences to help with mastery of skills

Prompts for Learning Experiences with Infants begin on page 15



NATURE TIPS FOR TODDLERS

- Delight in discovery and adventure, learn when to speak and when to be still
- Follow their lead, embrace the camaraderie of fellow explorers
- Investigation comes naturally to toddlers – look, listen and smell
- Allow for time, observe closely
- Wonder out loud, ask simple questions, enjoy the process – you are modeling
- Bring a bag, pail, or net to collect some natural treasures
- Repeat experiences in different weather e.g. what does the tree look like on a windy or a snowy day?
- Treat nature as a treasure to be preserved – practice responsible use and care for all living things
- Look for ways to extend new learning e.g. touching a tree, touching a rock and finding other textures that may be identical
- Know joy, reverence, astonishment, and gladness

Prompts for learning experiences with Toddlers begin on page 25



NATURE TIPS FOR PRESCHOOLERS/KINDERGARTENERS

Encourage curiosity: wonder out loud, discover together, create new adventures

- Use open-ended questions: “Tell me about_____” “What do you think _____?” “What have you found out _____?” “Why did that happen?”
- Prompt children to find similarities and/or differences: “Find one smaller than this one.”
- Carry treasure bags, bring a blanket or tarp for in the air discovery
- Listen, look, touch, sniff – sensory engagement is a must
- Let them take the lead – go with their interests, role model respect and care for nature
- Challenge the children i.e. walk quietly and experience everything
- Stop often and create moments with nature i.e. listen to the wind, the birds, crackle of dry leaves
- Use the scientific method – observe, hypothesize, predict, measure, infer, classify, communicate, interpret data
- Enable children to make discoveries and come to conclusions

Prompts for learning experiences with Preschoolers/
Kindergarteners begin on page 33



NATURE TIPS FOR ENGAGING FAMILIES

The connections between nature, children and families help to build strong communities. Engage them in the conversation, invite them to join in discovery and share the importance of this connection for their child. Families are an untapped resource! You'll be amazed at how much families are willing to offer and contribute to enrich the experience for their child, the centre and you...ask, include, invite and engage them too.

- Gather some attractive and easy to read information on the value of nature
- Whenever possible provide documents in various languages
- Use Bulletin Boards and Newsletters to inform and share events
- Invite parents to join a conversation, open house, potlucks, or playground clean-up
- Ask parents to share their nature experiences from around the world
- Invite parents to bring their skills and talents to create ideas and a welcoming outdoor environment
- Create an onsite family garden
- Ask for assistance with donations of natural materials
- Include them in Spring and Fall clean-up
- Provide a lending library of resources, website list
- Build and share a collection of picture books, songs and fingerplays that value nature
- Organize field trips to community gardens
- Enjoy family scavenger hunts
- Cook and feast on garden vegetables from your site
- Introduce composting
- Invite parents for ideas on sustainable practices



MYSTERY BOX

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Sit with the child on grass/tarp/blanket.

Child sits or squats near a large cardboard box with various items from nature inside it. Model placing your hand in the box, “oh what is here?” smiling

WONDER PROMPTS:

“What do you feel?” “Soft? Rough?” “What could it be?”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of wonder

Physical:

- Gross Motor - reaching and holding
- Fine Motor – palmar grasp, pincer grasp
- Sensory - tactile exploration & discrimination

MATERIALS

- large cardboard box with holes cut out on all sides large enough for child’s hands to go through
- blanket for infants to sit on
- collected nature items: leaves, pinecones, soft twigs and other items local to your setting

Age Range - Infants

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

All seasons, according to temperature.

Child can be sitting with support: pillows, bumper pads, hand over hand.

Provide additional loose parts by age: pebbles of various textures, feathers, tree bark, herbs or leaves of familiar plants, have one type (leaves) of different textures for identification by touch.

Extend by telling stories and songs of clouds fossils, birds.



BEYOND THE BLANKET

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

In a shaded outdoor space, on a flat surface, place the infant in various positions to stimulate muscle coordination; consider placing them on their back, propped up to sit, sitting with the adult. Ensure safety with materials and weather conditions. Engage the child by holding and moving items in their visual range and use timely vocabulary as related to the weather, items etc.

WONDER PROMPTS:

"We are outside" "Look up at the sky!" "It feels warm/cool..."
"Look this is a leaf!"

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of wonder

Social:

- Social interest, maintain connection across space

Physical:

- Senses – visual, touch

MATERIALS

- Blanket or other fabric to sit or lie on large enough to hold the child and the caregiver
- A variety of safe natural materials local to the setting

Age Range – Infants

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

Can be enjoyed in all seasons. During colder months, participants must be dressed according to weather conditions. Depending on muscle control and ability, child can be seated in a stroller, or on a lap of a caregiver or lying on stomach, with supervision. As children gain mobility, the caregiver can crawl with the child off the blanket to experience various textures on the hands as a result of changing surfaces. Supervision is mandatory.



ART IN HAND

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Child sits or squats near flat surface

Invite child to explore material, smiling “Let’s colour, paint!” “Is it squishy?” “Soft?” “Smooth? Look how beautiful!”

WONDER PROMPTS:

“what blue, yellow wonderful colours!” “This is the way we paint the ground” “shwoosh! shwoosh!”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of wonder

Cognitive:

- Cause-and-Effect Exploration, Spatial Exploration, Representation and Root Skills of Literacy

Physical:

- Fine Motor – palmar grasp, coordination

MATERIALS

- smooth Plexiglas pane, white board, chalk board, smooth area of asphalt
- chalk, non-toxic natural finger paint, wide nature paint brushes (such as twig with yarn, cotton balls or leaves attached), soapy water
- towels, wipes for clean up

Age Range - Infants

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

All seasons, according to temperature.

Child can be sitting with support: pillows, bumper pads, use of hand over hand, standing

Providing various tools and media to use according to age and as ability increases in sophistication.



SOUNDS IN THE GRASS

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Child lies in different positions or sits with supports. Hang or tie wooden chimes or ribbons in trees above, out of reach. Model hand to ear, “oh what do you hear?” smiling

WONDER PROMPTS:

“listen to the chime”, “drum, drum” “jingle jangle”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of wonder

Cognitive:

- Attention regulation

Physical:

- Auditory Exploration, Discrimination

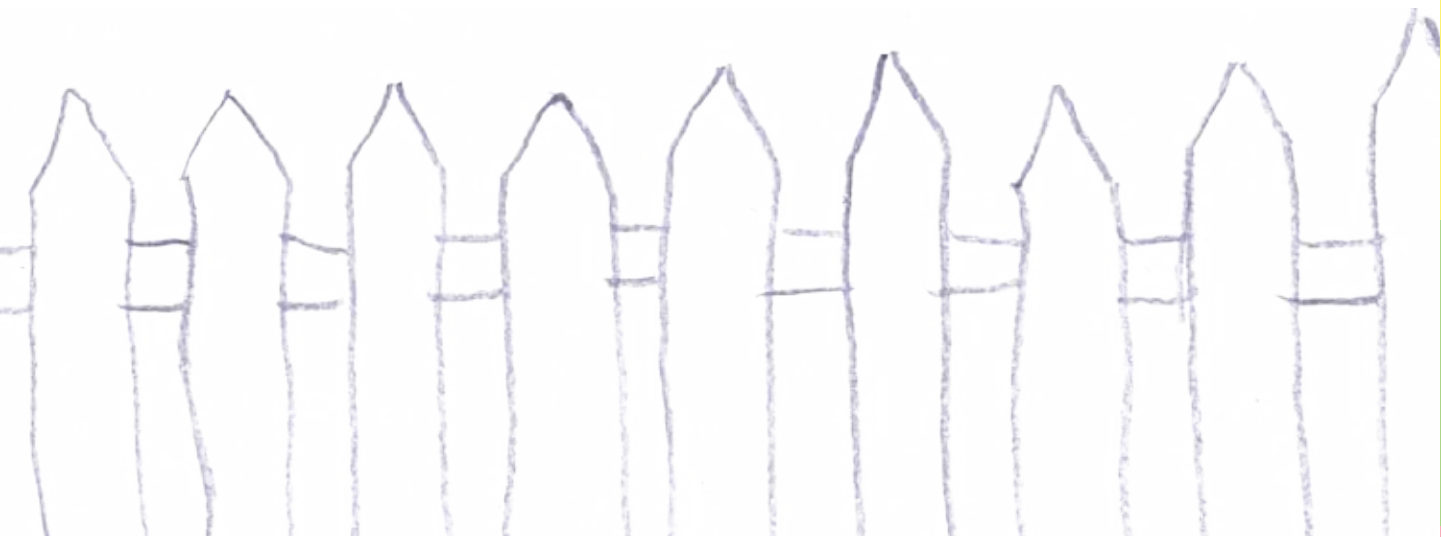
MATERIALS

- Blanket to sit or lie on
- Chimes of various sounds: handmade or produced chimes
- Drums of assorted material
- Bells on wrist or ankle bracelets

Age Range - Infants

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

All seasons, according to temperature. Provide additional instruments or sound pieces by age; natural and various sounds, soft and louder instruments, stories and songs of simple beats and rhythms and encourage child to collect items and make their own tools for sound.



STICKY CREATIONS

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Child explores and picks up items of nature that can be held in their hands. Invite child to place on the sticky tac for stability and later use as a display.

WONDER PROMPTS:

"this is a leaf, put it on the paper" "look at the pattern, how different it looks" "this is our art!" "let's put it on the fence/wall inside". Model sorting items, "oh what do you have?"

OPPORTUNITY FOR LEARNING

Sense of wonder

Physical:

- Tactile - tactile exploration & discrimination
- Gross Motor - reaching and holding, letting go
- Fine Motor - palmar grasp, pincer grasp

MATERIALS

- Mac Tac sheets secured on a flat surface
- Collected nature items: pinecones, leaves, smooth twigs, grass...

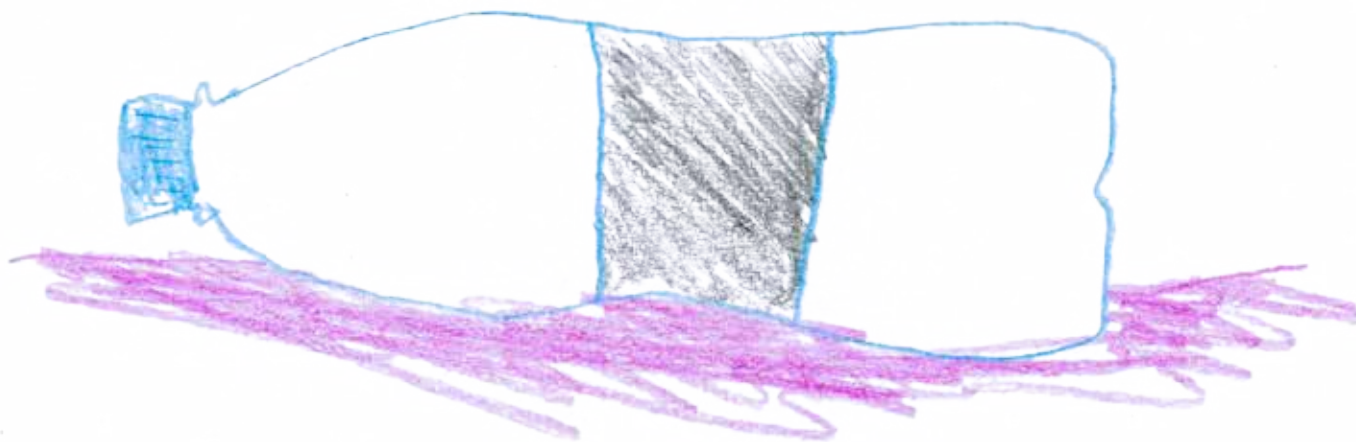
Age Range - Infants

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

All seasons, according to temperature.

Child can be sitting with support, given a collection of items collected to choose from.

Take children into a community park or walk to collect simple items, or sit in the area to create. Providing additional loose parts according to age: pebbles of various textures, feathers, tree bark, herbs or leaves of familiar plants, stories and songs of nature.



ALL NATURAL SHAKERS

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Place a variety of natural materials on a table cloth. Encourage children to explore the materials and to place some materials into the bottles. After the bottle is filled, close and shake the bottle with the child. Have one bottle filled with each material exclusively (i.e., rocks in one bottle, sticks in one bottle, and seeds in one bottle) for children to explore the differing sounds.

Children can compare the sounds of their own bottle, having a variety of materials, with the bottle containing only 1 type of material. Bottles can be used as instruments in program's songs

WONDER PROMPTS:

"Do you hear the sound?" "Shake, shake up and down".

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Physical:

- Senses - auditory exploration & discrimination, sensory motor integration
- Fine motor - palmar and pincer grasps, coordination

Cognitive:

- Cause-and-effect exploration

MATERIALS

- Clear unbreakable plastic containers/bottles with tops
- Tablecloth
- Loose natural materials (rocks, sticks, seeds, leaves...)

Age Range - Infants & Toddlers

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY AND EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

During various seasons, locate similar material and create additional shakers to compare in-season with change of season items, such as fresh leaves versus fall leaves.

Professionals/caregivers can guide (hand over hand) creation of shakers or use funnels to support pouring in of materials in the bottles. Discuss the different types of sounds each material make (loud, quiet). Extend use of Shaker Bottles as instruments during music experiences.

Provide opportunities to children to 'personalize' their shakers in the creative arts area of the learning environment.



HERB TASTING

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Place the herb planter on a natural surface or blanket. Either place or invite infant to the planter (dress child appropriately for the weather).

WONDER PROMPTS:

Take a deep breath and prompt children to do the same. Label and guide by saying: “Fresh herbs!”, “Smell the plant”, “Let’s touch the herb...is it smooth? rough?”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of discovery

Physical:

- Fine motor - feeling and picking herbs
- Sensory – sensory integration and exploration of taste, smell, touch

Social:

- Social interest - modelling and imitating picking and tasting

Communication, language & literacy:

- Expressive language skills - gestures, expressive language

MATERIALS

- Rectangular planter with variety of herbs that are safe for infants to eat (e.g. basil, rosemary, dill, oregano, mint)
- Ensure to discuss any food allergies or concerns with caregivers prior to implementation

Age Range - Infants

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY AND EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

Spring, summer, & fall, according to temperature. Planter can be brought indoors when needed.

Children can be placed at the activity or encouraged to move towards it (gross motor). Provide additional herbs to expand on the children’s sensory experiences. Provide opportunities for children to see, touch, smell the whole herb and discuss the parts of a plant (roots, stems, leaves).





BUCKET OF FUN

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Child holds brush and dips into the bucket of water

Model placing brush in bucket “put the brush in the water to get it wet”, “let’s paint the ground/fence”, “look how it changes!” smiling.

WONDER PROMPTS:

“is the water warm? It has bubbles!” “Drip drop on the wall”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of wonder

Physical:

- Touch - tactile exploration & discrimination
- Visual - visual discrimination and exploration
- Gross Motor - reaching and holding

Cognitive:

- Cause-and-Effect Exploration, Spatial Exploration

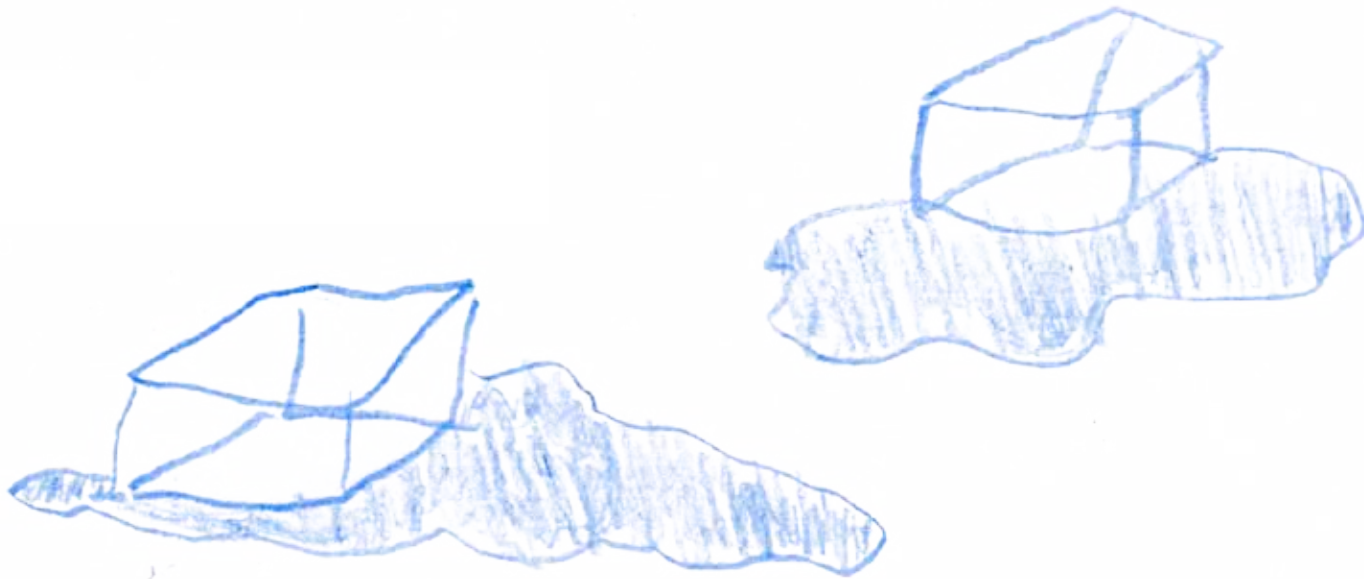
MATERIALS

- large buckets of water
- clothing appropriate for getting wet, towels
- very large paint brushes, large basters

Age Range - Older Infants - Toddlers

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

All seasons, according to temperature; substitute with mud or snow and alternate tools – shovels, wooden spoons. Child can be sitting or standing with support: pillows, bumper pads, hand over hand. Adapt tool to allow the child to interact with the water. Providing additional brushes or surfaces for them to ‘paint’. Take out large butcher paper for group painting and hang the mural outside. Use chalk to design and colour a mural on asphalt.



ICY COLOURS

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Place frozen coloured ice cubes in a container of water, in which the child can splash. Place the container on the ground on a flat surface for safety.

WONDER PROMPTS:

Label the feeling and what you see happening... "This ice is cold!"..."This water is warm!"..."Look! The ice is melting."

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of wonder

Physical:

- Sensory - tactile exploration & visual discrimination

Cognitive:

- Cause-effect-exploration, attention regulation

MATERIALS

- A non-porous see through container, or any non-porous container

- Warm water
- Pre-made frozen ice cubes with food colouring
- Towels
- A flat/smooth outdoor surface to place container on

Age Range 9-24 months (Infants-Toddlers)

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE GROUP

All seasons, according to temperature. Child can be sitting with support: pillows, bumper pads, use of hand over hand, standing. As attention span increases, see how long it takes to melt the ice cubes by singing songs and counting how many times you can sing the before the coloured ice cubes melt. Use varying temperatures of water in the bin to speed up or slow down the melting of the frozen cubes. Consider adding scents or flavours to the ice cubes.



NATURE HUNT

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Ensure that children are dressed appropriately for the weather. Provide each child with a bucket/pail and magnifying glass. Role model for the children, collect an object (pine cone, leaf, acorn, stick, rock), label it, describe the texture, how it looks, feels.

WONDER PROMPTS:

“What treasures can you find on the ground...on the grass...on the bush/tree?” “What do you see in the magnifying glass?” “What’s moving on the grass/soil/tree trunk?”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of wonder and discovery

Social:

- Imitation, social interest

Emotional:

- Expression of emotion

Cognitive:

- Joint attention

Communication, language and literacy:

- Receptive language skills – vocalizing, gestures, vocabulary

Physical:

- Fine motor – reaching, grasping and holding

MATERIALS

Wagon, Buckets or pails, Magnifying glasses

Age Range - Older Infants – Toddlers

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

Can be experienced in any season. Adapt walking by using a wagon to drive the children and stopping to explore various spots on the exploration journey. Encourage children to look high and low in the local setting to locate moving parts, changing parts, missing parts (such as broken leaves, twigs, grass). Bring objects back to the classroom and explore their properties further. Use them for an art experience. Make up a story using the objects about the experience outdoors, or create a habitat in an enclosed container for a small local insect or critter, such as a caterpillar.



MUD PAINTING

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Arrange 2-3 soil varieties in containers along with painting mediums around the writing surface. Ensure children are appropriately dressed for weather and activity. Place muddy footprints/handprints on a surface leading to or around the experience as a provocation.

WONDER PROMPTS:

"Where do those footprints go?", "Touch the mud, how does it feel?", "Is it wet? smooth? rough?", "Does it stick together when we squeeze it?"; "Can you make a handprint?"

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of wonder

Physical:

- Fine motor - manipulate a variety of soil types and painting mediums

Emotional:

- Expression of feelings

Social:

- Parallel play, interacting with adults

Communication, language and literacy:

- Expressive and receptive language skills - vocabulary, questions and conversation

MATERIALS

Writing surface (scrap paper, easels, large rocks, logs), variety of soil types (clay, sand, garden soil), water to mix with soil, containers/small pails to hold mud, painting mediums (brushes, sponges, hands, feet), smocks. NOTE: if on a nature hike, this can be recreated by finding a puddle, natural surfaces (logs, large rocks), and natural materials (leaves, sticks, pine cones) to use. Try to use natural materials that are collected from the ground to avoid damaging any plants or wildlife

Age Range – Toddlers to Preschoolers

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

Spring, summer, & fall, according to temperature. Clipboards or easels can be used to support children with assistive mobility devices.

On nature hikes, clipboards or stumps/logs can be used to display materials at the children's level. Provide additional natural loose parts by age; pine cones, sticks, leaves, feathers, stories and songs about mud/soil. Provide alternative soil types to provide different textures/ mediums.



WASHING NATURE

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Child sits or squats near tub or container.

Model holding brush or sponges and dipping in the water, “let’s wash the pebbles”, “brush, wash, swish, swash, scrub”.

WONDER PROMPTS:

“What are you washing?” “Is the water cold? warm?” “What is happening to the stone/leaves...?”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of wonder

Emotional:

- Autonomy

Communication, language and literacy:

- Expressive language

Cognition:

- Cause-and-effect exploration

Physical:

- Fine motor
- Senses – sensory discrimination

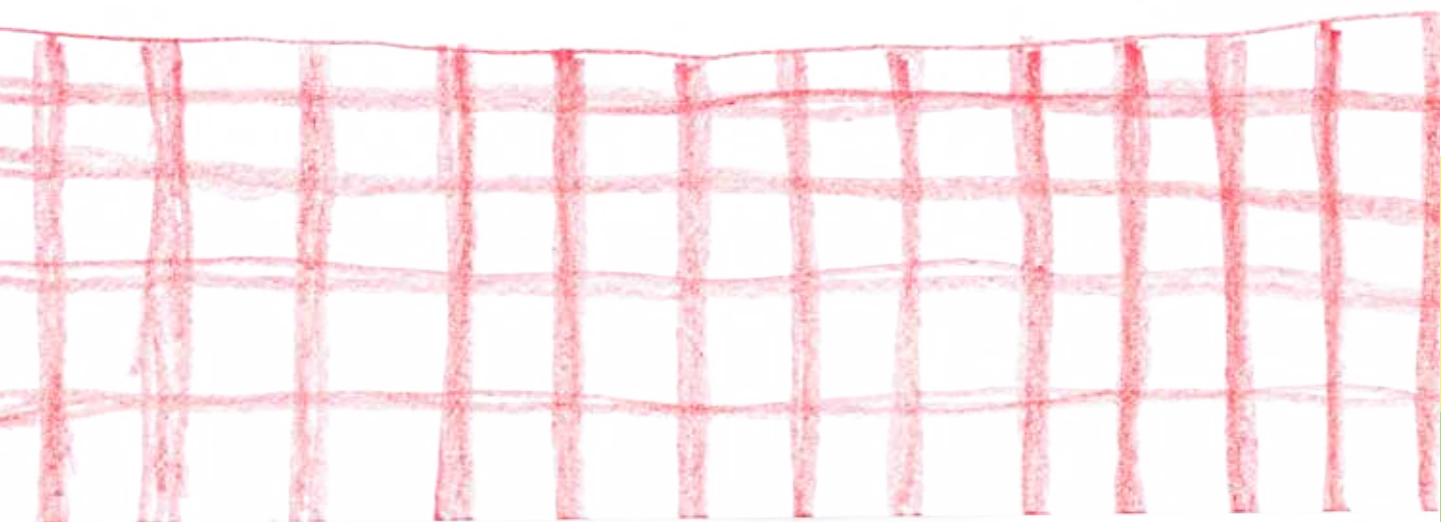
MATERIALS

- Various loose parts safe for water
- Tub or container of warm water
- Brushes and/or sponges for washing

Age Range - Toddlers

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

All seasons, according to temperature conditions. In winter use snow to wash pine cones and other local materials/loose parts in the setting. Using various tools for brushing, washing – different sizes, weights. Using various containers for sitting, standing. Collect items on walks and use various items according to age.



SORTING SEEDS

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Place 3 or 4 types of seed on a tablecloth or in a bin.

Have 3 or 4 smaller empty bins.

Tape 1 type of seed on the exterior of each empty bin, to show which container corresponds to each type of seed.

Ask children to help you sort the seeds by matching the seeds in the pile to the seed in the bin. Once they have found a match, the children can place the seed in the corresponding bin.

WONDER PROMPTS:

"Where do you think this seed belongs?" "Look, this seed is big/small...round/long..."

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of discovery

Physical:

- Fine Motor Skills

Cognition:

- Sorting, problem solving, exploration

MATERIALS

A variety of types of seeds Clear bins/containers Tablecloth

Age Range - Toddlers

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

This experience can be carried out in all seasons, both in and outdoor.

Assist children by asking prompting questions such as "Is this seed the same as the seed on the bin?" Consider discussing the types of seeds that are being sorted. After sorting, have children plant the seeds and look after the plant. For older children, have discussions surrounding what the plant will grow into after being planted, what seeds need to grow? Children can harvest seeds before sorting.



WINDY DAY PLAY

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Have the children assist you in attaching a chiffon scarf to the tongue depressor by winding one corner around the top of the tongue depressor and securing it with an elastic band or secure string.

Let the children explore how the wind is blowing, from which direction, one area being windier than another, encourage children to run with the scarf while holding onto the stick.

WONDER PROMPTS:

"Which way is the wind blowing?" "Where is the wind? Find the windy spot..." "Let's run/walk...how is your scarf blowing? ...fast... slow...not at all..."

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of discovery

Cognitive:

- Spatial exploration, problem-solving
- Cause-and-effect exploration

Physical:

- Gross motor – balance, walking, running, jumping

MATERIALS

- Tongue depressors
- Elastics
- Chiffon or light weight scarves
- Bubbles
- Streamers

Age Range - Toddlers

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

All seasons. Adapt materials by using kites or streamers. Consider asking children to blow on the material to see if it will fly/flutter.

Or, secure the tongue depressor to a stroller or wheel chair where the child can see it and feel it. Use a ruler for a larger grip or wooden spoon. Attach the scarves to a fence or structure like flags for the children to observe.



FENCE WEAVING

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Provide basket of fabric and natural weaving items. Invite child to create a mosaic or quilt on fence. Use willow branches, large cornhusk leaves, pampas grasses and explore with child. Engage child with feeling various textures and weaving materials, and playing peekaboo games.

WONDER PROMPTS:

“Feel this scarf/leaf, how soft and smooth”, “in and out it goes”, “blue and yellow and red, like a rainbow”

Songs about colour “I can make a rainbow”, “this is the way we weave our scarf”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of wonder

Cognitive:

- Spatial problem-solving

Physical:

- Touch - tactile exploration & discrimination
- Gross Motor - reaching and holding
- Fine Motor – palmar grasp, pincer grasp

MATERIALS

- Various items for weaving: scarves, strips of fabric
- Chain link fencing, or similar area

Age Range – Toddlers & Preschoolers

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

All seasons, according to temperature and availability of weaving areas.

Child can be sitting with support: pillows, bumper pads, and use hand over hand.

Providing additional items for weaving.



EXPLORE A POND

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Gather outdoors and read the story “In a Small, Small Pond” by Denise Flemming to the children – if close to a pond, go for a walk to explore. If not, use an existing puddle or create your own in the sand area for children to retell the story with you.

WONDER PROMPTS:

Ask children, “What do you think happened next?”...“How does (animal from book) move?”...

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of discovery

Physical:

- Sensory – sensory motor integration, tactile exploration, auditory exploration & discrimination
- Gross motor - coordination

Communication, Language & Literacy:

- Language – receptive & expressive language skills

Cognitive:

- Attention regulation

MATERIALS

- The book: In a Small, Small Pond by Denise Flemming
- Pond, or puddle or manufactured ponds in the sand area or in the playground; An alternative is to use a small portable plastic wading pool
- Items from the story
- Towels, optional if putting feet or items in water

Age Range – Toddlers-Preschoolers

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

All seasons, according to temperature – preferably in the spring, summer and/or fall.

Child can be sitting with support with feet in the water and imitate how the animal/creature moves; for different modes of mobility for children with limitations, place chairs that provide support on the ground, creating the pond on a table top.



CLAY PRINTS

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Invite children to collect loose materials from your outdoor setting. Place these on a flat surface or container. In individual trays, have children mix and mould wet clay and create a flat surface. Use the natural loose material the children collected and have them press these into the wet clay to make prints. Remove material and let the clay dry.

WONDER PROMPTS:

“How does the clay feel?” “What shape is the stick/stone/leaf?”
 “What happened to the clay?” “Take a look, what made this print?” (refer to the dry clay with the loose materials nearby)

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of discovery

Physical:

- Senses – sensory exploration and sensory motor integration
- Fine motor – tool use

Cognitive:

- Cause-and-effect exploration, spatial awareness, problem-solving, attention regulation, representation

MATERIALS

Clay, loose materials used as tools such as: smooth sticks, rocks, leaves, tree bark.

Smocks, as needed, individual trays.

Age Range – Toddlers - Preschoolers

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

Can be experienced in any season. Consider using melted snow in winter to mix the clay. Use hand-over-hand or vinyl gloves for children with coordination or sensory sensitivity. Extend by using the dried prints and loose materials as a matching and sorting experience. For more capable children, consider providing an opportunity to do colour rubbings of the prints and compare them to rubbings of the actual loose part.



SHADOW DANCING

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

On a sunny day encourage the children to look outdoors on the grass or pavement. Point out to children various parts of their bodies; hands, head and legs. Encourage the children to be small, large, make a line or circle with their shadows. Initiate the shadow game which can be similar to freeze tag, a child stands as a statue and another child comes and hides in their shadow to take their place. To extend the game, have one child 'strike a pose' and another takes sidewalk chalk to draw the outline of the shadow. Each child takes turns with chalk outline of the shadow.

WONDER PROMPTS:

Begin with the song "Let's play the shadow game...".

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of wonder

Social:

- Co-operating

Emotional:

- Self-concept

Cognition:

- Representation

MATERIALS

- Sidewalk chalk
- Music if wanted

Age Range: - Toddlers/Preschoolers

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE GROUP

Compare shadows at different times of the day.



MEETING A TREE

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Take the children to a tree, introducing the full length (roots to leaves).

If there is no tree close by, bring in a tree limb with bark still on to the playground. Introduce the tree to the children, or part of a tree and invite them to explore all parts of it visually or by texture.

WONDER PROMPTS:

“What do you feel/see/feel on this tree?” “What might live in this tree or visit the tree?” “Do you think it would make a good home or safe place for birds or animals?”

Fingerplay/song/story: “The Giving Tree”, “Steve the Tree”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of wonder

Cognitive:

- Observing
- Reflecting and reaching conclusions
- Questioning

Communication, Language and Literacy:

- Using descriptive language to explain, explore and extend Vocabulary

MATERIALS

Tree or parts of a tree, magnifying glass, camera, imagination, buckets, baskets, photos, books for research/comparison.

Age Range - Preschoolers

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

All seasons, according to temperature. Child can be sitting or standing with support: pillows, bumper pads, hand over hand. Providing additional loose parts by age; microscopes, containers, measuring tools Use tree cookies or various leaves for comparison, seriating or understanding of natural habitats of birds, bugs/ camouflage.



FEEDING BIRDS

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Create or find a few bird feeders to hang in various places out of reach. Easy ways to build feeders can be found at garage sales or made from empty milk cartons. Invite the children to decorate the feeders and secure in the playground where appropriate.

WONDER PROMPTS:

"What do you think a bird eats?" Do you see different birds and seeds in the feeder?" Let's sit quietly to watch and listen" "Can you count the birds?"

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of wonder

Social:

- Empathy, helping skills

Cognitive:

- Observing, Counting

Communication, Language and Literacy

- Using descriptive language to explain, explore and extend

MATERIALS

- Various types of feeders
- Camera
- Seeds

Age Range - Preschoolers

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

All seasons, according to temperature.

Child can be sitting with support; ie, pillows, bumper pads, hand over hand.



GETTING TO KNOW A PUDDLE

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Leave puddles on the playground following a rain fall, discover puddles in the neighbourhood. Stop to look and touch and interact with puddles ensuring children have appropriate footwear. Or another option is to spread a tablecloth on the grass, or ground with pad underneath for cushioning. Place infant on the tablecloth (dress child for appropriate weather, ie; bathing suit, splash pants, rubber boots)

WONDER PROMPTS:

"Splish, splash – wet bubbles!" "Touch the water", "Is it wet? cold? warm?"

Fingerplay/song: "this is the way we splash our hands"

"How did these puddles get here?" "How deep do you think they are?" "Will they be here tomorrow?"

Fingerplay/song: This is the way we jump in puddles...

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of wonder

Cognition:

- Representation, Observing, Reflecting and Reaching
Conclusions, Inquiry

Physical:

- Senses: sensory exploration

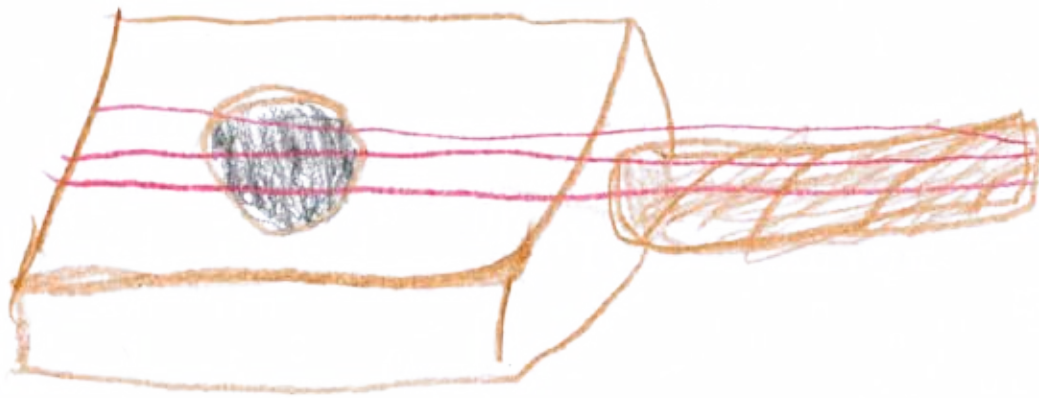
MATERIALS

- Puddles
- Resources such as bucket, containers, magnifying glasses, microscopes, paper
- Appropriate footwear

Age Range - Infants - Preschoolers

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

Providing additional loose parts by age; microscopes, containers, measuring tools, floaters, sinkers, stir sticks, stories and songs of clouds/rain/weather. Frozen puddles, muddy puddles, big puddles, little puddles, natural puddles and home-made puddles. Assist children with gross motor movement; stepping, jumping, hopping around and in puddles. When appropriate, use puddles for all age groups.



NATURAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Use various natural materials for creating sound. Teach children the signals for starting and stopping sound, quiet/loud sounds, fast/slow rhythmic patterns. Create a rainstorm by tapping, clapping softly and increase the sound and tempo to create rainstorms.

WONDER PROMPTS:

“Let’s listen first by closing our lips and opening our ears”, “can you hear this sound?”

Fingerplay/song: I hear thunder...

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of wonder

Emotional:

- Recognizing and Expressing Emotions, Positive Attitudes towards Learning

Communication, language and literacy:

- Phonological awareness

Physical:

- Gross Motor – Movement and Expression

MATERIALS

- Wooden or steel bowls (various sizes)
- Drift wood sticks, wooden spoons
- Rubber bands wrapped around both ends of the drift wood sticks
- Blanket or something appropriate to sit on if necessary

Age Range - Preschoolers

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE GROUP

Use found objects outside in warm seasons and use inside in colder seasons. Be aware of children’s sensory awareness and ability. With increasing age, facilitate different rhythms and add poems or chants.



HOLD A STICK AND TELL A STORY – THE TALKING STICK

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Ask the children to find a stick and tell a story about life on the tree. Once upon a time I was part of a branch on a tree – child passes the stick to the next child – and continues the story – a bird lived on my tree in a nest The educator may have to prompt the children by offering suggestions or showing the children other nature items that could be included in the story. “Along came a squirrel holding a chestnut”

WONDER PROMPTS:

“What a wonderful stick, do you see all of the lines and shapes on it?” “What story is in this stick?”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of Wonder

Social:

- interacting positively and respectfully, taking another person’s point of view

Communication, language and literacy:

- vocabulary, using descriptive language to explain, explore and extend; retelling stories

MATERIALS

Collect a variety of nature items found on, near and around a tree

Age Range - Preschoolers

ADAPT SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE GROUP

Change the nature items and where the story takes place – but must be outdoors. Assist children with vocabulary and movement to find items.



PINE CONE BIRD FEEDERS

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Have children go on walk to collect pine cones. Use spoons to put no-nut butter on cones. Roll in seeds, then string.

WONDER PROMPTS:

"How many birds can eat at the cone at once?"

"Some birds are ground feeders; others eat from bird feeders how many different birds will feed at our cone feeder?"

"How can we make a ground feeder?"

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of Wonder

Physical:

- Fine motor
- Gross motor

MATERIAL

- Bird food
- Pine cones
- Nut-free butter
- Spoons
- String

Age Range - Preschoolers

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

All seasons depending on temperature. Extend with binoculars, bird watching.



EXPLORING MINI-BEASTS

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Provide gloves, shovels, magnifying glasses and specimen jars for the children. Assist children in digging dirt. Ask open-ended questions. Exploration/discovery of species – insects with legs/wings, worms, isopods (e.g. pill bugs, sow bugs).

WONDER PROMPTS:

“What do you see?” “Does it crawl/fly?” “How does it look with the magnifying glass?” “Look for hiding mini-beasts”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of Wonder

Communication, Language and Literacy:

- Receptive language skills
- Vocabulary

Physical:

- Senses: Visual exploration and discrimination
- Touch: tactile exploration
- Gross Motor

MATERIAL

- Shovels
- Magnifying glasses
- Containers/specimen jars
- Gloves
- Nets
- Bug cards – images

Age Range - Toddlers - Preschoolers

Adapt by Season, Ability, Extending by Age Range: Spring summer fall. Sorting according to type.



NATURAL CREATIONS

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Explore the area you have for loose parts from nature. Spread the loose parts in an area outside and invite the children over to explore the items with you. Engage the children in imagining shapes or perhaps a creature or animal. Allow them time to collect their items and create their creature. Options are to limit the number of items each child can use or encouraged to work with a partner to complete. Once built, allow children the opportunity to discuss their creature and the materials they used. If on a nature hike, you can prompt children to stop and collect a number of natural items to build a creature. Be sure items are not living and are found on the ground.

WONDER PROMPTS:

"Do any of these items look like something else?", "Maybe an animal or a creature?" "Let's all try to make our own creature using natural materials!"

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of Wonder

Social:

- Co-operation

Cognitive:

- Representation

MATERIALS

Natural loose parts (pine cones, sticks, rocks, leaves, bark, tree cookies, wooden blocks, etc.)

Age Range - Preschoolers/Kindergarteners

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

Spring, summer, & fall, according to temperature. Provide additional loose parts by age.



DANDELIONS AND MORE

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Dig up a dandelion. Identify all the parts - flower, leaves, stem, and roots. Tell the story of how the dandelion got its name (leaves represent jagged edges like a loin's teeth.) Dandelion leaves can be eaten cooked or in salad as long as they are collected away from pets, lawn sprays and roadways before the flowers bloom (afterwards they are very bitter). Find other weeds or wildflowers in the playground, sidewalk and compare their parts.

WONDER PROMPTS:

Ask children to imagine how and why the plant got its name.
Compare parts of the plant to parts of a tree and what similarities do they share or not share?

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of wonder

Communication, Language and Literacy:

- Intentional communication.

Cognitive:

- Representation
- Observation

MATERIALS

Shovels, pails, bag, story, photographs or picture book on dandelions and wildflowers

Salad making - bowl and salad dressing.

Other plants - sorting containers for comparisons.

Garden gloves

Age Range - Preschoolers/Kindergarteners

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

Encourage the children to enjoy in the classroom and represent with paint or crayon drawings. Dandelion puffs are great fun on a windy day or for blowing as the seeds spread. Thread for necklaces and bracelets.



WINTER CREATIONS AND COLOUR MAGIC

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Assist the children in creating snow balls, demonstrating how the snow sticks together, make a variety of sizes. Provide paint, coloured water and sparkles for children to decorate with and explore. Enthusiastically comment on changes—ask inquiry based questions to create a sense of wonder. Encourage the children to exchange colours/materials with their friends, and identify or ask them about the differences they see. Older children may want to make snow sculptures as a group project, encourage them to tell stories about their sculptures and to engage in dramatic play with the sculptures i.e. snow forts, snow pets, snowmen, etc.

WONDER PROMPTS:

“I wonder how the the snow sticks together?” “What shapes can you make out of the snow?” “How big or small?” “What colours do you make?”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of Wonder

Cognitive:

- Comparing Quantities
- Seriation

Social:

- Taking another point of view

Physical:

- Gross Motor

Communication, Language and Literacy:

- Using verbal and non-verbal communication

MATERIALS

Snow (preferably wet), paint, plastic spray bottles with easy to squeeze triggers or plastic condiment bottles with small holes, food colouring, water, sparkles in plastic shaker bottles

Age Range - Preschoolers/Kindergarteners

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

During seasons other than winter, you can freeze ice in different sizes and provide the children with the materials to decorate the ice observing the changes. Children unable to manipulate the spray bottle or squeeze bottles can use paint brushes. Young infants can explore big and small snow balls while toddlers can decorate the balls observing the changes in colours.



MR. TREE SAYS

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Gather children in one area, sitting on a blanket or standing. Point out the various interesting parts of the playspace or park area such as trees, plants, surfaces. Play the game Mr. Tree Says ... Use the phrase “Find something that grows in the ground”, “find something that is part of a plant” and with each direction the children either move to the area or brings an item to the blanket. Read “A Tree Called Steve” or “The Giving Tree”.

WONDER PROMPTS:

“What do you wonder about one of the things that we found?”
Following the story, “what does the story make you think of?”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of wonder

Cognition:

- problem solving
- observing
- collecting
- organizing information

MATERIALS

Blanket to sit on or tree stumps to gather around.

Books: A Tree Called Steve, The Giving Tree.

Age Range - Preschoolers/Kindergarteners

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

Using comparisons i.e. short, long, small, big, smooth, rough, green, orange, brown, grey. Use same trees in all seasons for comparison.



NATURE GALLERY

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

To create a nature gallery, have the children choose a frame from a variety of recycled picture frames and encourage them to find loose parts (twigs, grass, stones, pebbles etc.) on the ground and create a nature picture within the frame. Take a photo so that the nature master-piece becomes part of the gallery in the classroom.

WONDER PROMPTS:

"Have you ever taken a picture or seen one in a frame?" "Would you like to be an artist today?"

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of Wonder

Cognition:

- Representation
- Observing
- Collecting and organizing information
- Using spatial relations

MATERIALS

Variety of nature loose parts grass, stones, sticks, shells, pine cones, weeds, gravel, bark, leaves etc., a variety of recycled picture frames.

Age Range – Preschoolers/Kindergarteners

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

Use across all seasons depending on the temperature and available loose part. Encourage partners or other scaffolding with children of varying skills and abilities.



NATURE REBUS RIDDLES

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Write nature riddles using words and pic symbols ie. sun, clouds, rain, snow, tree, branch, bird nest etc. Hide them around the playground. Children must find them and read the riddle to the group.

WONDER PROMPTS:

“Can you tell a story about the answer to the riddle?” “If you change the weather in the riddle would the answer be the same?”

“Can you use more than three pic symbols in a nature riddle?”

Answer the riddle then ask the children what they think the riddle is...

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of Wonder

Communication, Language and Literacy:

- Using verbal and non-verbal communication
- Phonological awareness
- Enjoying literacy

MATERIALS

Printed words and/or pictures on cards

Age Range - Preschoolers/Kindergarteners

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE GROUP

All seasons depending on temperature. Vary words and pictures by the season for learning about nature. Use partners or groups to find collections for others. Alternate pictures with symbols for more simple visuals.



NATURE SCULPTURES

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Provide a variety of nature materials – long grasses, twigs, branches, large stones, drift wood, moss etc. Challenge the children to create 3D nature sculptures for a nature gallery. Encourage the children to name their sculptures and tell a story about their creation.

WONDER PROMPTS:

Ask the children to bring their sculpture to life and tell the children what it is like to live outdoors in different seasons. Sculptures often require upkeep and maintenance; ask the children to describe the needs of their sculpture. Arrange for a gallery walk and invite other groups of children to ask the creators questions about their sculptures.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of Wonder

Cognition:

- Using spatial relations, directions, maps
- Collecting & organizing information

Communication, Language and Literacy:

- Enjoying Literacy
- Using descriptive language to explain, explore and extend

MATERIALS

Rocks, stones, drift wood, shells, string etc.

Age Range – Preschoolers/Kindergarteners

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE GROUP

All seasons can be used depending on temperature and available items. Record the images and display as an indoor photo exhibit for parents or a walking gallery tour in the playground. Use groups or partners to scaffold learning. Increase the complexity of the gallery as skills become more sophisticated.



CREATE A LEAN-TO

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Branches of varying lengths and thicknesses are placed around the playground. Instruct the children to find these materials and to create a lean-to shelter. Explain to the children that a lean-to is a primitive form of shelter that provides protection from wind, snow or rain etc.

WONDER PROMPTS:

“What animal might seek shelter in the lean-to?” “How many children could this lean-to provide shelter for?”

“What other materials could be added to protect visitors to lean-to from rain, sun, wind etc.?”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of Wonder

Physical:

- Gross Motor
- Increasing levels of activity, endurance & variation in types of activity and skills

Cognitive:

- Understanding two-dimensional and three-dimensional shapes
- Measuring length, weight & capacity, temperature, time and money

MATERIALS

Branches, twine, burlap, rope

Gather local materials in your surroundings

Age Range – Preschoolers/Kindergarteners

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE GROUP

Vary by season according to temperature. Use various books and photographs to extend learning across cultures and habitats. Invite individuals in to share different ways of living in shelters. Encourage children to take on different roles according to sophistication of skills.



MEASURING TIME AND SEASONS

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Locate a tree or plants in the play-space or neighbourhood. Visit the tree and have children stand by the tree and take each other's photo. Once developed, post the photos on a bulletin board where children can see and comment on the seasonal changes. Each month, revisit the tree and take another photo. Encourage the children to notice their own growth, the changes in the tree and other characteristics. Provide measuring sticks and tapes, rulers, paper and pencils for the children. Add clipboards.

WONDER PROMPTS:

"How many children are needed to hug this tree?" Encourage the children to adopt the tree by giving the tree a name. Lie on the ground under the tree, ask the children to describe what they see in the spring, summer, fall and winter.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of Wonder

Cognitive:

- Measuring length, weight & capacity, temperature, time and money
- Communicating findings
- Collecting & organizing information

MATERIALS

Tree or plant that is permanent.

Camera, paper

Pencils

Measuring Tape, sticks, rulers, clipboards

Age Range: Preschoolers/Kindergarteners

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

Use across seasons or during one season to observe changes over a shorter time period. Invite children to bring in photos of growth in plants at home and measure changes or observations of growth. Measure own height and plant height.



X'S AND O'S

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Provide sticks, twigs, shells or pebbles to play X's and O's. Use the flat asphalt area or grass area to play the game. Teach the children how to construct a simple grid with the sticks and play the game.

WONDER PROMPTS:

"If you change the size of the grid, how will this change the game?" Using shells and pebbles together create a game for three children. "Can you think of another game you can play with these materials?"

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of Wonder

Physical:

- Fine motor

Cognitive:

- Self-regulation
- Reasoning logically
- Using spatial relations, directions, maps

MATERIALS

Sticks, twigs, shells, pebbles

Flat area to play and create grid

Age Range: Preschoolers/Kindergarteners

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

Use various pieces that correspond with different seasons. Modify with simple board pieces for patterning. Create modifications with larger pieces for easier grasping and reaching.



NESTS AND NESTING BASKETS

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

On a walk, search for birds' nests. Discuss the importance of nests and which birds build nests. Provide assorted sizes of small baskets or wooden bowls that are made of natural materials. Using assorted twigs, mud, loose small parts found in the play-space, create a nest inside each of the small baskets and bowls. Have children, one at a time secretly hide their nest in various places. When all nests are hidden, encourage the children to search for all of the nests. Provide the children with a line drawing of the area so they can mark the location of each nest on a map that they create.

WONDER PROMPTS:

When all of the nests have been found place them in order from the largest to smallest and identify the birds who might live in each nest. Look for other landmarks that could be added to the map i.e. trees, grass, bushes etc. and colour code these. Ask children to hide their nests in the different colour coded areas of the map.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of Wonder

Physical:

- Gross Motor

Cognitive:

- Seriation
- Problem-solving
- Using spatial relations, directions, maps

MATERIAL

Assorted small basket, naturally made wooden bowls, twigs, mud

Age Range - Preschoolers/Kindergarteners

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

Use in all seasons depending on temperature. Adjust the items in structure or number. Use scaffolding by pairing children or working in groups.



MOSAIC ART

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Collect small tiles, glass discs, small smooth pebbles, branch cookies and leaves. Encourage the children to create a nature picture or sign. Children can be encouraged to look for other small pieces to add to their mosaic pictures. Mud, clay and wet sand make an interesting setting for the mosaic art.

WONDER PROMPTS:

“Tell me about your picture.” “How many different nature materials did you use to make your picture?” “What will happen to the mosaic picture when the mud or sand dries?”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of Wonder

Physical:

- Fine motor
- Increasing levels of activity, endurance & variation in types of activity and skills

Cognitive:

- Spatial relations
- Identify patterns

MATERIAL

Small ceramic tiles, glass discs, branch cookies, leaves
Mud, wet sand, clay.

Age Range: Preschoolers/Kindergarteners

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

All seasons depending on temperature. Create mosaic patterns with different media. Provide gloves for children. Encourage patterning in other ways, in the sand box or on wooden surfaces outside.



FOLLOW THE DRUMMING

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

The children are blind-folded with (strips of cotton). The teacher or one child stands somewhere in the playground drumming a constant beat that the children are able to follow. When the children have found the drummer a new drummer is chosen. Challenge the children by offering soft and loud drumming sounds for them to find.

WONDER PROMPTS:

“Sit on the ground, close your eyes and listen carefully, what sounds do you hear?” “Can you hear the wind? Can you hear a bird sing?” List the different sounds the children hear and begin to group them into nature sounds and non-nature sounds.

OPPORTUNITY FOR LEARNING

Sense of Wonder

Social:

- Co-operating
- Interacting positively and respectfully

Communication, Language and Literacy:

- Self-regulation
- Senses

MATERIAL

Drum, blindfolds

Age Range: Preschoolers/Kindergarteners

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

All seasons depending on temperature. Use various musical instruments and play sound games with children making the sound and others find the sound. Have children work together to locate sound. Use sunglasses and guided walking.



SORTING THE CONES

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Collect 6 types of cones, mix them all in a basket. Play various games of sorting and seriating the cones. Vary this game by using other items found in nature i.e. twigs, stones, bark, etc.

WONDER PROMPTS:

“Get to know your cone, choose a cone from the basket- feel it, smell it, experience it then place it back into the basket – can you find your original cone.” “Describe your cone - what colour is it, where does it grow, why do some tree produce cones?” “Do plants have cones? Do all trees have cones?”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of Wonder

Cognitive:

- Classifying
- Seriating
- Counting
- Comparing quantities

Physical:

- Fine motor

MATERIAL

Collections of pine cones of various types and sizes

Baskets

Age Range: Preschoolers/Kindergarteners

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

Use in all seasons according to found objects from nature that have similar qualities.



ARCHEOLOGICAL DIG

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Hide small objects in the sand box such as items found on a walk; leaves, twigs, colourful pebbles, fallen bark. Provide children with tools for digging, ensuring the children dig gently.

WONDER PROMPTS:

“What did you find?” “Can this item be found in nature?” “Can you find three things that grow on a tree?”

“Find 3 things that can be found on the ground?”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of Wonder

Physical:

- Fine Motor
- Increasing levels of activity, endurance & variation in types of activity and skills

Cognitive:

- Spatial problem-solving
- Cause-and-effect exploration

MATERIAL

Sandbox

Age Range: Preschoolers/Kindergarteners

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

All seasons depending on temperature. Use various medium for hiding in different seasons: dirt, snow, water. Use tools for digging that adapt to ability and age.



BIRDS, BIRDS EVERYWHERE

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Learning about various habitats for birds and various names and types of birds. Children use binoculars for bird watching books for identifying types of birds seen, clipboards for writing names and features

Making bird nests (spaghetti and glue) bird house making with plastic bottles

WONDER PROMPTS:

“What materials do birds use to make a nest?” “Why is it so difficult to find bird nests?” “If you were a bird, what materials would you use to make a nest?”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of Wonder

Cognitive:

- Symbolic thought, representation, and root skills of literacy
- Classifying
- Communicating findings

Physical:

- Fine motor
- Senses: sensory exploration, sensory discrimination, sensory motor integration

MATERIAL

Provide books about birds

Small sticks, feathers, yarn pieces, glue

Binoculars, clipboards and writing utensils

Age Range - Preschoolers/Kindergarteners

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

All seasons depending on temperature. Track bird migration with increasing skill sophistication. Identify the cycle of activity building nests, nesting and abandoning the nest.





PLANTING A BEAN

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Provide each child with a flower pot and bean seed. Assist the children with scooping up the soil. Demonstrate grasp for shovel and watering can. Provide the children with shovels and water in the watering can. Ask questions about how long they think the seed will change and the plant will take to grow.

WONDER PROMPTS:

“What kind of a seed is this?” “Have you ever eaten a bean?”

“Which part do you think will grow first?”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of wonder

Physical:

- Fine Motor
- Increasing levels of activity, endurance & variation in types of activity and skills

Communication, Language and Literacy:

- Vocabulary

Cognitive:

- Questioning
- Observing
- Reasoning logically
- Counting

MATERIALS

Seeds, soil, flower pots, water, watering can, shovels

Age Range - Preschoolers/Kindergarteners

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

Spring summer in the winter plants or seeds and seedlings can be indoors. Use various tools as skill level requires. Older children can graph, measure and estimate the growth of their plants.



CREATURES IN A CUP

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

In the spring on a warm day, give each child a clear plastic cup, a spoon and a magnifying glass. Have the children carefully dig four or five spoons of dirt into the cup. Ask the children to look carefully at the content of the cup – can they see small moving creatures? How are the creatures moving? Describe the size, shape and colour of the creatures.

WONDER PROMPTS:

“How many different creatures did you find?” “Can you move like the creature in your cup?” “Did anyone find a worm?”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of Wonder

Cognition:

- Observing, collecting and organizing information, using spatial relations

Physical:

- Fine and gross motor

MATERIALS

Plastic cups, spoons and magnifying glasses for each
Dirt

Age Range – Preschoolers/Kindergarteners

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

Use in various seasons spring through fall according to temperature and surface available. Scaffold children in pairs, provide alternate tools for digging and larger containers such as bowls. As skills become more sophisticated prompt labelling and classifying of the creatures, charting number and type.



FALL EXPLORATION

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Collect a variety of fall squashes and place them around the playground. Be sure to include a variety different coloured squashes of varying sizes and weights. Ask the children to sort the squashes. For further investigation cut open the squashes and compare and contrast the squashes inside and out. Follow up with your responses to the children's reactions.

WONDER PROMPTS:

"What do you see in the playground?" "What do they look like to you?" "Is this something to eat?" "I wonder what is inside them. What other fall vegetables do we eat?" "Squashes grow on vines; can anyone describe a vine?" "Potatoes are also harvested in fall; how are squash and potatoes the same and different?"

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of Wonder

Communication, Language and Literacy:

- Receptive language skills, expressive language, vocabulary

Cognitive:

- Observing, collecting and organizing information, using spatial relations

MATERIALS

Variety of squash of many colours, shapes and sizes

Weigh scale, rulers or other ways to measure

Age Range: Preschoolers/Kindergarteners

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE GROUP

Use across seasons spring through fall with appropriate vegetables and fruits. Provide baskets, small wheelbarrows and other containers for collecting and manipulating. As children's skills become more sophisticated, add the prompt of continual observation as changes in the gourds appear over time. Discuss and plan for composting.



LOG ROLLING AND BALANCING

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Collect several logs in varying diameters – 4” – 10” approximately 10 – 14” in length and flat planks 6” wide and 15” long. Encourage the children to place the plank in the middle of the log to create a see saw. Instruct the children to find items i.e. stones to demonstrate how the plank can provide a surface to study balancing. If the children feel confident they too, could try to stand, sit or lean on the log balance.

WONDER PROMPTS:

“Can you balance your body on the log?” “Can you make the log roll while balancing something on the log?” “How is the log similar to a wheel?”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of Wonder

Physical:

- Gross Motor, Fine Motor

Cognitive:

- Predicting, observation and spatial relations

MATERIALS

Logs of various dimensions
Planks of various lengths
Open area for movement of logs and planks

Age Range – Preschoolers/Kindergarteners

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE GROUP

Use in seasons spring through fall when temperature and conditions are appropriate. Use lighter material than wooden planks and lighter items to balance. As skills become more sophisticated, introduce balancing with other items. Use bamboo sticks as lighter option and balance objects.





LOOKING FOR HABITATS

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Locate a stump or large rock in the play-space. Pry up the rock or stump. Provide magnifying glasses for the children. Explain that this is the perfect habitat for slugs, worms, roly polly insects. Encourage the children to count the different creatures and describe their features. Visit this habitat monthly or weekly and encourage the children to comment on how changes in the weather might affect the creatures.

WONDER PROMPTS:

“What did you find?” “Why do these creatures live here?” “What does this habitat provide for these creatures?”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of Wonder

Physical:

- Gross Motor, Fine Motor

Cognitive:

- Observing, collecting and organizing information

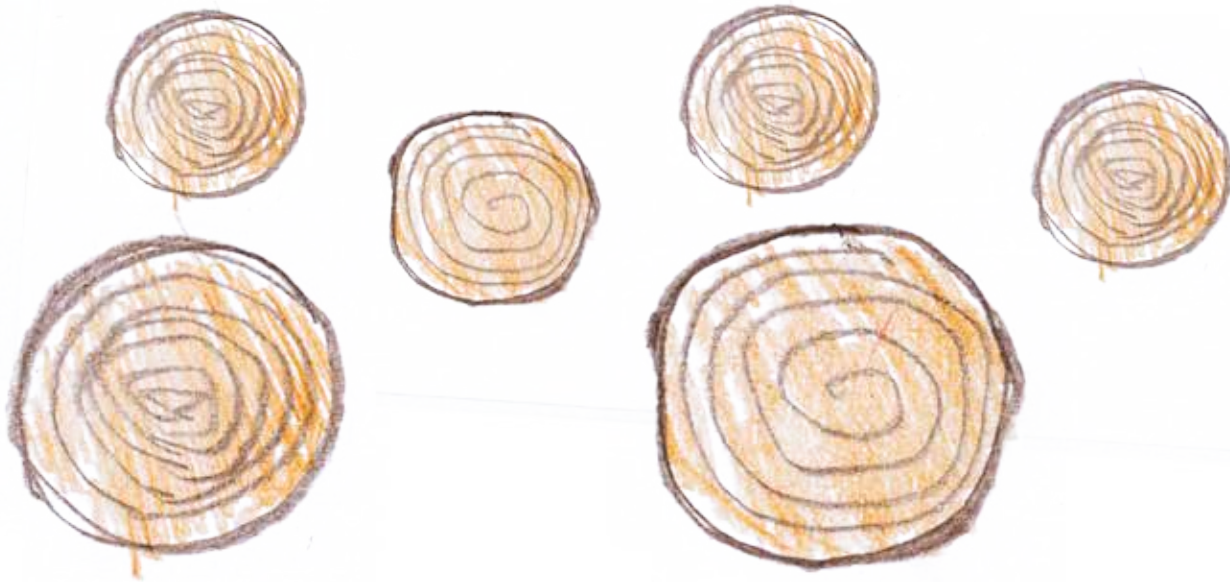
MATERIALS

Tree or plant that is permanent.
Camera
Paper
Pencils
Measuring Tape, sticks, rulers

Age Range: Preschoolers/Kindergarteners

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

Use across seasons spring through fall according to temperature and location of your playspace.



TREE COOKIE ENGINEERING

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Gather outdoors with a variety of branch cookies, tree cookies and a stump. Encourage the children to think about a tree cookie structure they would like to build – children can begin to plan and draw their structure before coming to the playground. With a plan in hand, encourage the children to represent their drawing using the tree cookies.

WONDER PROMPTS:

“Tell me about your plan. Does your building look the same as your drawing?” “What changes did you make in your structure as you were building?”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of Wonder

Cognitive:

- using spatial relations, representation, reasoning logically

Physical:

- Fine Motor

MATERIAL

Tree cookies, small stumps of trees or branches

Age Range – Preschoolers/Kindergarteners

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE:

Use across seasons according to temperature. Substitute tree cookies for other natural materials, willow branches, cornhusks, branches



LEAF ART

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Collect a variety of different leaves. Encourage the children to create a nature picture by choosing different leaves, pine needles or other small items and placing them on the sticky side of Mac Tac. Children can be encouraged to create leaf animals, people, buildings etc.

WONDER PROMPTS:

“Tell me about your picture.” “How many different leaves did you use?” “What are the best leaves for creating a picture?”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of Wonder

Physical:

- Fine motor, tool use, making a mark
- Sensory exploration

Cognitive:

- Understanding two-dimensional shapes, using spatial relations
- Identifying patterns

MATERIAL

Variety of leaves of different shapes and sizes

Clear sticky tac sheets

Age Range: Preschoolers/Kindergarteners

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

Use across seasons depending on availability of leaves.



BUTTERFLY FEEDER

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Introduce butterflies to children with stories or pictures. String dill, parsley and wedges of oranges on low bushes in the playground or surrounding bushes. Wait and watch for butterflies. Orange wedges will need to be replenished every two days. Look for flowers of reds and oranges to plant. Reds are better for hummingbirds: purple, yellow, pink are better than red for attracting butterflies.

WONDER PROMPTS:

“What do you think butterflies drink?” “Have you ever seen a butterfly near flowers?” “What other creatures are attracted to the orange wedges?” “What is nectar?” “Why are butterflies attracted to nectar?”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of Wonder

Cognition:

- Observing, collecting and organizing information

MATERIALS

Dill, parsley stalks, orange slices, string

Age Range – Preschoolers/Kindergarteners

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

Use in spring to late fall. Change the items to feed various birds in different seasons.



TWIGS IN SAND

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Demonstrate how to break small branches in twigs. Encourage the children to vary the lengths of the twigs. Provide varying sizes of pots, trays and baskets filled with sand. Children can create twig structures in the sand. Vary this experience by expanding the project to the sand box a whole twig habitat may appear.

WONDER PROMPTS:

"Who might live in a twig habitat?" "What else could we use twigs for?" Try drawing in the sand or printing your name in the sand with the twig. Sort the twigs.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of Wonder

Physical:

- Fine motor, tool use, making a mark

Cognitive:

- Understanding two-dimensional and three-dimensional shapes, using spatial relations

MATERIAL

Twigs of various sizes

Pots, trays and baskets filled with sand

Age Range: Preschoolers/Kindergarteners

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

Use in all seasons according to temperature. Alternate sand with snow in the tray. Use gloves or tools for children as needed. With increasing skill, prompt children to take photos of the creations or represent with drawings or paintings.



MR. POTATO HEAD

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

In the spring provide each child with a potato. Explore the potato, notice the texture, size, shape, and colour. Begin a conversation about potato eyes and why they are important. Discuss how potato eyes are different from our eyes. Give each child a potato to plant in the garden. Provide materials to care for the potato plants. Read the *Enormous Potato* by Aubrey Davis.

WONDER PROMPTS:

"What does the potato need to grow?" "Do potatoes grow on stems?" "Where do potatoes grow?" "When will the potatoes be best for harvesting?"

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of Wonder

Communication, Language and Literacy:

- Receptive language skills, expressive language, vocabulary

Cognition:

- Observing, collecting and organizing information

MATERIALS

Potatoes, shovels, watering can

Age Range: Preschoolers/Kindergarteners

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE GROUP

Use in spring through fall. Vary vegetable according to site location. Use planters in the playground if no suitable garden spot is available.





NATURE GRAPHING

CHILD ENGAGEMENT

Provide long sticks and demonstrate how to create a graph with several stick columns. At the bottom of the graph place twigs, leaves, stones, cones etc. demonstrate how to classify the items on the graph.

WONDER PROMPTS:

“What column is the longest?” “Shortest?” “What over items could be graphed?”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Sense of Wonder

Cognitive:

- observing, seriating, classifying, measuring length

Physical:

- increasing levels of activity, endurance & variation in types of activity and skills

MATERIALS

Sticks of various lengths with measured notches in them
Leaves, twigs, pinecones
Paper for graphing
Pencils, crayons for graphing

Age Range: Preschoolers/Kindergarteners

ADAPT BY SEASON, ABILITY, EXTENDING BY AGE RANGE

Use across seasons according to temperature. Use different ways to measure and with different items.



SECTION 3

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS





THE NATURE TOOL BOX

The Nature Tool Box is a collection of resources that travels with you both indoors and outdoors to support your program. The contents can be used for extended learning opportunities. Have your children take an interest in the Tool Box by filling it together. Keep it fresh and relevant by adding to it over the seasons. The Tool Box can take on any shape or size; a knapsack, a basket, a box, a satchel, a bucket, etc. Be creative and have fun with it! Below are some suggested materials you can fill your Nature Tool Box with:

- Pine cones
- Bark from fallen trees (birch, maple, etc)
- Leaves
- Pine needles
- Feathers
- Rocks in various shapes, sizes and colours
- Fossils
- Sticks

- Hardened clay
- Antlers and Bones

Support materials:

- Resource guides
- Compass
- Magnifying glass
- Empty jars or containers for collecting smaller materials
- Crayons and notebook



WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR TOOL BOX

- Take a small cloth bag and fill it with some of your objects from your nature tool box. Ask children to put their hands in and feel the objects. Have them guess the objects without looking in the bag. This can be repeated daily.
- During a story telling activity or discussion, select an object from the Box to be used as the talking object. Whoever is holding the object can talk and those not holding the object are actively listening.
- Use the contents for a scavenger hunt
- Hide the objects in an area and children have to find them.
- Paint the objects.
- Create stories that include the objects
- Use the objects to make imprints in the mud, snow or in clay.
- Look at the objects closely with magnifying glasses
- Classify and organize the materials by shape, size, texture, etc.





OUTDOOR LEARNING AND ONTARIO'S EARLY LEARNING FRAMEWORK

The Ontario government recently adopted the Early Learning Framework (OELF) as a resource required by the Ministry of Education and various municipalities in early learning and care settings for planning programs for children. The OELF is a resource that encourages educators and caregivers to take children outdoors to learn and play. It represents a Statement of Principles:

1. Early child development sets the foundation for lifelong learning, behaviour and health.
2. Partnerships with families and communities strengthen the ability of early childhood settings to meet the needs of young children.
3. Respect for diversity, equity and inclusion are prerequisites for honouring children's rights, optimal development and learning.
4. A planned curriculum supports early learning.
5. Play is a means to early learning that capitalizes on children's natural curiosity and exuberance.
6. Knowledgeable, responsive early childhood professionals are essential.



ONTARIO FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN CURRICULUM

The Full-Day Early Learning-Kindergarten program is a child-centred, developmentally appropriate, integrated, extended-day program of learning for four- and five-year-old children. The purpose of the program is to establish a strong foundation for learning in the early years, and to do so in a safe and caring play-based environment that promotes the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of all children. The goals of the Full-Day Early Learning-Kindergarten program are as follows:

1. to establish a strong foundation for the early years by providing young children with an integrated day of learning
2. to provide a play-based learning environment
3. to help children make a smoother transition to Grade 1
4. to improve children's prospects for success in school and in their lives beyond school

(http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/kindergarten_english_june3.pdf)





IMAGINE YOUR VIBRANT NATURAL PLAY SPACE WITH NATURE!

WHAT ASSETS DO YOU CURRENTLY HAVE IN YOUR OUTDOOR SPACE THAT YOU CAN BUILD ON?

When looking for opportunities to improve your outdoor space, start by looking at what you

ARE THERE CURRENTLY A VARIETY OF PLAY OPPORTUNITIES IN YOUR OUTDOOR PLAY SPACE?

For example:

- staging areas for props and dramatic play,
- unstructured areas or natural vegetated areas for free play, imaginative and creative play,
- trails and open space to support physical activity,
- stores of loose materials for experimentation,
- small and large group gathering areas – gardens, story circles, dens and forts

CHILDREN'S SELF-ASSESSMENT OF RISK

Plan for graduated risk in the environment. A highly sensorial, diverse play environment with opportunities for climbing, jumping, running, lifting and balancing helps children at different ages and stages learn how their bodies move, make predictions and take calculated risks

NATURAL MATERIALS

Rocks, logs, mulch, bark, willow, soil, are all essential ingredients in the nature playground. When cutting log rounds seating for preschoolers, the diameter of the base of the log round needs to exceed the diameter of the top in order to be stable.

Hot Tip: when using logs for furnishings select cedar, ash, oak, tamarack, or maple. Logs should be de-barked to increase longevity and reduce insect damage.

SCALE

Be mindful of the 'child's eye view', their size and mobility when planning the outdoor play-learning environment.

www.evergreen.ca



ONTARIO CHILDREN'S OUTDOOR CHARTER

The Ontario Children's Outdoor Charter aims to get children outside to discover the wonders of nature. Spending time outdoors is essential to every child's development, health and well-being. It builds a connection to our rich natural and cultural heritage.

(<http://childrensoutdoorcharter.ca/>)

<http://www.back2nature.ca/ontario-childrens-outdoor-charter>)

UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLES FOR CONNECTING CHILDREN WITH NATURE

(Developed by the Nature Action Collaborative for Children Leadership Team, a World Forum Foundation Working Group)

- Support children's appropriate risk-taking and adventurous play in nature.
- Provide children with opportunities for silence and contemplation in natural settings.
- Encourage children's development of a sense of wonder and a sense of environmental stewardship

(https://wf-media.s3.amazonaws.com/nature/pdf/ibm/universal_princ_dvd_english.pdf)

For Educators

- We believe it is important for educators to:
- Allow enough time each day for children to explore freely in nature based spaces.
- Understand their role as researchers and facilitators who observe children's interactions with nature and support the emergent curriculum.



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FOREST AND NATURE SCHOOL

The defining feature of this type of nature-based education program is that children are provided with opportunities to build an ongoing relationship with the land, to a dedicated educator, to one another, and to themselves through this educational lens.

For more information on Forest and Nature Schools visit:

<http://www.forestschoolcanada.ca/>

GARDENING TIPS

Gardening with children can be a rewarding and very educational experience.

Try these quick-and-easy gardening ideas:

- Plant seeds of fast-growing vegetables indoors in late March and then transplant them outdoors in May when the temperature warms up. Some good choices are lettuce, radishes, spinach, peas and beans.
- Rope off a small circular area and plant a bean teepee: push bamboo stakes into the ground and plant pole beans at their bases. Water well, and keep the area free from use until the

beans are well-established and climbing up the poles forming the teepee walls. The bean teepee can provide a fun source of summer shade for children.

- Learn how to plant herbs with children in containers
- Include lessons on composting
- Consult your local garden centre for easy growing items

LINKS:

<http://www.gardenjane.com/home.html>

<http://www.evergreen.ca/en/resources/school-ground-greening/food-garden-resources/>



INTERACTING SAFELY WITH PLANTS

Plants are everywhere, and offer special opportunities for discovery each season.

While most plants are safe to interact with just as they are, some plant precautions are necessary to ensure that children stay happy and safe. Tasting plant parts, such as wild raspberry fruit, is a thrilling experience; it is strongly recommended, however, that tasting be strictly controlled and limited to known plant food (and mushrooms) from the store or garden unless expert knowledge is available.

As is standard in all learning environments, a thorough understanding of children's sensitivities and allergies is essential. Remember to:

- investigate teaching areas beforehand and be familiar with common plants of concern;
- develop an “ask-first” understanding with children about touching unknown plants, particularly where plants such as poison ivy are known to grow in the area

- check with early learning legislation for your setting regarding health and safety practices

For more information, including an interactive search tool:

http://www.cbif.gc.ca/pls/pp/poison?p_x=px

Canadian Poisonous Plants Information System Other helpful links for outings in nature:

- <http://onnaturemagazine.com/field-trip-poisonous-plants.html> (short article)
- <http://ontariowildflowers.com/main/poisonous.php?id=1> (short list of poisonous plants with descriptions)



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READY...SET...WONDER!

