

The Holly and the Ivy

*Waldorf Curriculum
Preschool Newsletter*

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ACTIVITIES

As you well know, spending time with children is always rewarding. It can help you to see the world around you in a whole new way and to value things that you may take for granted or consider perfectly ordinary. On the other hand, when you are entirely responsible for their care, even small children can be intimidating. Just what do you do with them all day? This newsletter is here to help – whether you're a parent, grandparent, babysitter, caregiver, neighbor, or anyone acting as a substitute teacher and spending the day with a preschool-aged child.

The following sections will give some suggested activities for this week's theme as well as methodology and ideas for preparation.

Opening Verse

The Waldorf method places a strong emphasis on establishing rhythms throughout the day which give a comfortable sense of order and security to a child's life. One of these is to start your day (or your time together) with a short meditation called an opening verse. Choose a place which is clean and orderly; children are deeply sensitive to their environments and are unable to feel calm in the midst of chaos. Lighting a candle while you say the verse is customary, as this helps to establish a reflective atmosphere. Even if you choose not to do light a candle, the opening verse will be a transition for the child into your care. After you declare yourselves to be "ready now for work and learning", you can blow out the candle and begin your day!

Opening Verse:
In the morning at the sunrise
When the light of day doth break,
Children's souls, by angels guided,
Sleep from rested body shake,
Ready now for work and learning,
Happy, steady, and awake.

Stories & Poems

Choose from among the recommended stories and poems for this week

Flower Fairies of the Winter
A Little Book of Christmas Poems and Carols
The Holly and the Ivy: a celebration of Christmas
The Story of Holly and Ivy

by Cicely Mary Barker
ed. by Lena Tabori
by Barbara Segall
by Rumer Godden

Music

This is the time of year to get out the old record player and boxes marked "This Side Up" and "Fragile". Christmas carols have always been my favorite genre of music. For this topic, find a collection which includes The Holly and the Ivy. The words to this carol can be found in [A Little Book of Christmas Poems and Carols](#).

Christmas carols can also be found in [The Holly and the Ivy: a celebration of Christmas](#).

Flower Fairies

Fairies in Winter
by Phyllis Beebe

Tiny fairies in the garden
Dancing lightly on the snow,
Never leaving any footprints,
None, at least, that seem to show.
They wear boots of soft, grey mouse skin
Anoraks of thistledown
Caps and mittens knit by spiders,
As they circle round and round.
Winter doesn't faze a fairy
When it wants to play and dance.
Garbed thus in its warm attire,
Jack Frost doesn't have a chance!

Read your child "The Song of the Holly Fairy":

The Song of the Holly Fairy
*O, I am green in Winter~time,
When other trees are brown;
Of all the trees (So saith the rhyme)
The holly bears the crown.
December days are drawing near.
When I shall come to town,
And carol-boys go singing clear
Of all the trees (O hush and hear!)
The holly bears the crown!
For who so well-beloved and merry
As the scarlet Holly Berry?*

[Flower Fairies of the Winter](#), Cicely Mary Barker

Make a fairy house with your child and tuck it into a sheltered corner of your garden to make the fairies feel welcome. One morning you may see tiny footprints in the snow!

Nature Walk

Take a nature walk with your child and teach her to identify holly and ivy. These were the first two plants that my daughter learned and she really enjoys pointing them out on every walk. Pick some ivy leaves and bring them home with you (it is easy for your child to learn to grasp the stem and tug, and she can pick the chosen leaves herself).

Art

There are a bunch of fun Art projects you can do with ivy leaves. Here are three:

Painting Tools

Let your child paint with the ivy leaf instead of a paintbrush. She can either hold the stem and use the flat leaf to paint, or hold the flat leaf and use the stem to paint. Try both ways.

Leaf Bursts

Use masking tape to attach several ivy leaves to the paper on your easel. Use a sponge dipped in paint to paint all around and over the leaves. When the paint is dry, remove the ivy and see your finished piece! Ivy stays green for a while, even without water, so if your child prefers to keep the ivy leaves on as a part of her artwork, it will still look nice for several days.

Stencils

Make your own ivy leaf stencils by laying a leaf flat on a piece of cardboard and tracing around it, then cut out the inside of the leaf shape. Use one stencil over and over by removing and repositioning it to create a design of ivy leaves all over your paper.

Decorations with Greenery

Seasonal decorating of the house with holly and ivy is traditional; to quote The Holly and the Ivy: a celebration of Christmas, "When holly and ivy are gathered for Christmas decorations the sprites of the forest come too, with an elf or a fairy peeping out from behind every single leaf. Tradition holds that during the twelve days of Christmas, there is a truce between humans and the spirit world. But take care on Twelfth Night for then every last leaf must be out of the house as the truce is over."

The kissing-bunch, a traditional Christmas decoration mixing holly and ivy, was the centerpiece of many a home in days of old. Made of two hoops, one thrust through the other, each of the ribs was garlanded with holly, ivy, and sprigs of other greens and decorated with bits of colored ribbon, apples, and oranges. A bit of mistletoe is then carefully tied to the bottom of the kissing bunch. In modern times, the only thing which remains of the kissing bunch is a sprig of mistletoe.

Take care, in decorating your own home, that you do not bring in any toxic berries. If you have small children, remove all holly berries from their branches and avoid mistletoe altogether. However, recent studies have proven that the belief that poinsettias are toxic to children is an urban myth: <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/extension/newsletters/hortupdate/nov03/No.html> so there is no need for concern there.



One Room Schoolhouse:

Martha Stewart Living magazine, December 2005 has a beautiful article called Bountiful Baskets, which features sumptuous holiday baskets decorated with garlands of greenery. This would be a very appropriate project for older children and the resulting baskets could be used as decoration in your own home or given as gifts.

“Deck the Halls with Boughs of Holly” would be a very appropriate song to sing while decorating your home!

For the Birds

Instead of really stressing the idea that holly berries are poisonous, I simply tell my daughter that eating them will make her sick and that those berries are for the birds. We talk about how the berries are bright so that the birds can easily find them and how it is hard for birds to find a lot of food during winter. Now every time she picks up a nut or berry she asks me if we should save it for the squirrels or the birds, instead of assuming that it is edible and popping it in her mouth (this became a big concern for me once we did start gathering natural foods to eat such as black walnuts, so I have really stressed to her which foods are NOT for humans and telling her which animal does eat it, which helps her remember).

Along the idea of saving the berries for the birds, you can strip the holly berries off of any greenery you bring in and put them out into a little pile in your yard. There are many other bird treats you can make at this time of year – see the Preschool Unit “Families” for more suggestions.

Handwork/Gift Giving

Striped Soaps make a lovely and useful gift. See http://a444.g.akamai.net/7/444/703/20051116235040/www.marthastewart.com/images/pdf/homemade_gifts_planner.pdf (page 14) for directions.

For a holly-leaf template visit <http://www.first-school.ws/t/pattern/holly3.htm>

Yule

Holly and ivy have been important symbolic plants for many centuries, long before they ever became associated with Christmas.

The Winter Solstice (December 21st), the shortest day of the year, is also known as Yule and holly plays an especially important part in Pagan and Wiccan celebrations surrounding this holiday. Winter Solstice marks the longest night of the year. It is from this point that the days begin slowly to become longer and longer. The sun is at its most southeastern point over the Tropic of Capricorn in the northern hemisphere and has no apparent northward or southward motion. In the time of the ancient tribes this was a time of celebration, for it meant the turning point of winter and the eventual return of spring. Yule is the time when we honor the Goddess for giving birth to the sun once more. It is the time when the Oak King is victorious over the Holly King. The Holly King represents death and darkness that has ruled since Samhain, and the Oak King represents rebirth and life. The waning (diminishing) sun is overtaken by the waxing (increasing) sun, thus the days become longer after the victory of the Oak King.

In ancient Solstice celebrations, bonfires were lit in the fields, and crops and trees were "wassailed" with toasts of spiced cider. Children were escorted from house to house with gifts of clove spiked apples and oranges which were laid in baskets of evergreen boughs and wheat stalks dusted with flour. The apples and oranges represented the sun, the boughs were symbolic of immortality, the wheat stalks portrayed the harvest, and the flour was accomplishment of triumph, light, and life. Holly, mistletoe, and ivy not only decorated the outside, but also the inside of homes. It was to extend invitation to Nature Sprites to come and join the celebration. A sprig of Holly was kept near the door all year long as a constant invitation for good fortune to pay visit to the residents.

The highlight of Solstice celebrations was and is still the burning of the Yule log. In accordance to tradition, the log must either have been harvested from the householder's land, or given as a gift... it must never have been bought. Symbolic of the newborn sun, each year's Yule log is of oak, charged in a Magic Circle and kept in sacred space the following Yule. This not only celebrates the oak and places it in a place of distinguished honor, but also ensures there will be fuel for the remainder of Winter. Once lit the log would burn throughout the night, then left to smolder for 12 days, before being put out. A small piece of the log is then saved to start the fire for the log the next year.

It is also customary to decorate the Yule tree, and adorn the house with holly, ivy and pine. Yew is also honored, symbolizing the last day of the solar year; read "The Song of the Yew Fairy" from Flower Fairies of the Winter.

Many Pagan holiday traditions have been absorbed into the celebration of Christmas including caroling, wassailing the trees, burning the Yule log, decorating the Yule tree, the exchanging of presents, and kissing under the mistletoe.

As with the 12 days of Christmas, the significance of many of these traditions is being lost to us, only faintly echoed by the words of Christmas carols whose meaning is forgotten:

"see the blazing Yule before us"

– from *Deck the Halls with Boughs of Holly*

"on the twelfth day of Christmas my true love gave to me"

– from *The Twelve Days of Christmas*

"here we come a-wassailing"

– from *Here We Come A-Wassailing*

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

In general, we do not recommend specific cooking activities because many children and families have restricted diets such as vegan or vegetarian, gluten-free, kosher, etc. However, cooking is always a wonderful activity for a child to participate in. Bearing in mind any food allergies, and common-sense kitchen safety, consider preparing a simple recipe with the child. Children love to wash vegetables, measure and mix ingredients, and set the table for a meal. Preparing and eating a snack is always popular!

Play

Don't forget the many benefits of unguided imaginative play. You need to stay nearby for safety's sake, if the child is in an unfamiliar environment or you aren't certain what should or should not be childproofed. All children need daily time to play. In the preschool years, play is the WORK of the young child. Prepare an appropriate play space and then stay out of it as much as you can; give the child the simplest and highest quality toys you can find such as large pieces of cloth, blocks, dolls, and materials from nature (such as pinecones, feathers, or shells). Avoid plastic toys. Consider a basin of water and some measuring cups or add some dish detergent and give the child a whisk. The more open-ended a material, the more of the child will be brought forth in playing with it. The more structured a material, the less will be required of the child – and the less he will grow and develop when playing with it. As a simple test, try playing with the toys yourself. If you find you tire of a thing quickly, so will a child!

Helping

Helping around the home is an essential part of any Waldorf curriculum. It is not necessary to put a child in front of the television while you do the dishes or sort the laundry into lights and darks; let the child help you. Even if you have an automatic dishwasher, a child can help by rinsing the dishes before they are loaded. Children love to do work that they know is truly helpful and all young children thrive in situations where they are allowed to imitate an adult. Washing the dog, washing the car, sweeping or dusting, repotting houseplants, feeding the cats, setting and clearing the table... all of these are wonderful activities to do with a preschool-aged child.

PLANNER

Activities: highlight the activities you would like to do

Opening Verse

Stories & Poems

- Flower Fairies of the Winter by Cicely Mary Barker
- A Little Book of Christmas Poems and Carols ed. by Lena Tabori
- The Holly and the Ivy: a celebration of Christmas by Barbara Segall
- The Story of Holly and Ivy by Rumer Godden

Music

- The Holly and the Ivy: Carols from Clare College

Flower Fairies

Nature Walk

Art

- Painting Tools
- Leaf Bursts
- Stencils

Decorations with Greenery

For the Birds

Handwork/Gift Giving

- Striped Soaps

Yule

Cooking

Play

Helping

Closing Verse

PLANNER

Book List:

list the books you will be reading
feel free to substitute other books you may have on hand
which relate to this theme

Materials:

list all materials required for your chosen activities