

Waste Not, Want Not

*Waldorf Curriculum
Preschool Newsletter*

December 21, 2005

ACTIVITIES

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

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

Opening Verse

The Waldorf method places a strong emphasis on establishing rhythms throughout the day 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 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.

Booklist

<u>Corduroy</u>	by Don Freeman
<u>Button, Button, Who's Got the Button?</u>	by Hajo Bucken
<u>On the Banks of Plum Creek</u>	by Laura Ingalls Wilder
<u>The Children's Year</u>	by Stephanie Cooper

This week's topic is about textile recycling. Gather a variety of fabrics and old clothing to use in these projects.

Buttons

Read Corduroy with the child. Get out your box of old buttons and look through them.

Using Button, Buttons, Who's Got the Button? for inspiration, play some button games with your child.

Garlands & Ornaments

Read Chapter 13 of On the Banks of Plum Creek. String some of your buttons to make garlands to decorate your Christmas tree. It is easiest for a child with small fingers to use waxed dental floss and a darning needle for this. If you have two children you can try having them share the string, like Mary and Laura do in the story, but I found it easiest to give each child her own string. Tie the first button to the end of the string to keep them from sliding off – tie the other end of the string to the needle if you really want to keep it simple. Prepare for this project to entertain your child anywhere from 4 minutes to an hour and a half; some children find it boring, some find it fascinating.

You can also choose some of the most beautiful buttons to be ornaments by stringing them separately on loops of thread. Or take empty glass ball ornaments, remove the top (where the loop is), and fill them with small buttons.

It takes a LOT of buttons to make a garland! Boxes (often several pounds) of vintage buttons may be found on eBay. This is the least expensive way to build up a good collection.

Why I love button garlands:

1. it gets those buttons out of your button box so they aren't wasted – I can't abide storing something which I never end up using
2. buttons are a feast for the senses, with a variety of colors, textures (wood, metal, plastic, glass, shell), shapes, and sizes
3. it gives you a chance to stop and admire the individual beauty of each one
4. that sense of adventure and excitement as you search through the tin for just the right one to be next on your string
5. a humble thing such as a button often languishes in obscurity – this is their chance to be the star of the show
6. you can see buttons that you forgot you had
7. many buttons have stories behind them, and you can tell them to your children as you sort through the box – this is a very old button which my grandmother gave me, this is off your sweater when you were a baby, etc.
8. when you are all done, the buttons can be taken back off the tree and carefully put away, giving you a chance to sort them (by size, shape, or color) which is another fun project for children
9. since you are keeping the buttons when you are all done with them, you don't have to store your Christmas decorations yet you haven't had to put anything in the trash
10. children love small things which are kept in tins (and I think grown-ups do too)

Donations to Charity

Of course, old clothing which you have which is still in excellent condition may be donated to charity. There are many coat drives at this time of year, as well as collections of warm winter clothing for the needy. But if you want to hang on to some of your favorite pieces for sentimental reasons, here are some suggestions for reusing fabric in creative ways. Don't forget to cut the buttons off to add to your stash!

Stuffed Animals & Dolls

Use smallish pieces of leftover fabric to make stuffed animals or dolls (and doll clothing). There are many sources for patterns for this type of project. Lay out your fabrics by type (cotton, wool, silk, linen, corduroy, velvet, and so on) and choose a project which best matches the style and weight of your fabric. For example, corduroy works very well for small stuffed bears, which need to be quite sturdy. Consider the color of your piece of fabric as well; perhaps a piece with beautiful dyed blues could become a whale. Use leftover embroidery floss from cross-stitch projects to embroider the features.

Doll-making instructions can be found in The Children's Year, starting on page 143.

Flower Fairies

Flower fairies and felt wee folk are the perfect use for leftover pieces of wool felt from other projects, combined with a stash of embroidery floss. Use Felt Wee Folk by Salley Mavor as your guide.

Projects with Yarn

If your stash of old clothing includes some sweaters, consider reusing them for other purposes. The Children's Year gives directions for taking an old wool sweater and making a jumpsuit for a child with it (page 79). If the sweater is at least 90% wool, you can also use wet felting techniques to make felt with it, which can then be used in other projects. Wet felting works with cashmere also.

Of course, if the sweater is knitted or crocheted, you can work to unravel it and get a ball of yarn out of it. Any child would love this task! This yarn (which may be wool, linen, cotton, or other fibers) can then be used for other projects. Many knitted projects may be found in The Children's Year. This book also gives a suggestion for a Christmas present for a new knitter (especially good for a first or second grade child) called Magic Ball of Wool, page 114.

For directions to knit or crochet gifts for babies, please visit <http://www.carewear.org/>, a volunteer organization which donates handmade baby items to hospitals.

Quilting

The most time-honored way of using bits and pieces of old fabrics and clothing is to combine them into a quilt. There are many many books on quilting, but one I recommend is Fabled Flowers by Kumiko Sudo. She has written a number of books on gifts and projects one can make with fabric, all of which are worth looking into.

For quilting patterns on a tight budget, consider purchasing a quilting calendar after December 31st, when they are all on sale. Avalanche Publishing, Inc. has a beautiful 2006 Quilts Calendar, complete with instructions and patterns for 13 quilts.

Braided Rugs

Last, but not least, there are braided rugs. Directions for making braided rugs may be found online (this is a good use for worn flannel sheets):

<http://www.netw.com/~rafter4/index.html>

Martha Stewart Living magazine, April 2003 issue also contains a set of instructions for making unique braided bathmats out of old towels.

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

Booklist

- Corduroy by Don Freeman
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- The Children's Year by Stephanie Cooper

Buttons

Garlands & Ornaments

Donations to Charity

Stuffed Animals & Dolls

Flower Fairies

- Felt Wee Folk by Salley Mavor

Projects with Yarn

- The Knitting Sutra: Craft as Spiritual Practice by Susan G. Lydon

Quilting

- Fabled Flowers by Kumiko Sudo

Braided Rugs

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