

Town Mouse

*Waldorf Curriculum
Preschool Newsletter*

June 22, 2005

ACTIVITIES

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

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

Opening Verse

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

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

Stories

An Apartment House Close Up

Alphabet City*

Milly and Tilly: the story of a town mouse and a country mouse

Fly High, Fly Low

The Man Who Walked Between the Towers

The Gardener

by Peter Schaaf

by Stephen T. Johnson

by Maggie Kneen

by Don Freeman

by Mordicai Gerstein

by Sarah Stewart

*a note about the use of Alphabet City:

In the Waldorf method, children are not taught their letters until they begin school in first grade. Please Do Not try to teach the child the alphabet with this book. Instead, use it as a look at some of the beautiful shapes and forms found in the urban landscape. You might ask the child to try to identify the object in the picture, such as a stoplight, telephone pole, or paving stones – or take a walk outside and try to find some of the items shown.

Art

The emphasis on Art in the preschool years is on process, not on product. Your goal is to refrain as much as possible from showing the child “how to do it”; simply provide the supplies and encouragement.

Cardboard City

Place a large cardboard rectangle or square on a flat surface. Gather a selection of shallow boxes or pieces of cardboard cut into assorted triangles, rectangles, or squares. Glue smaller pieces of cardboard on top of your large background piece to form skyscrapers, houses, and towers. Overlap buildings to create a realistic look to your city. Place the smaller buildings on top of the larger ones. Once the glue has dried, paint your cardboard city. You can add miniature items to your city scene, such as felt or cardstock flowers in a garden atop one of the buildings (reminiscent of The Gardener). For a nighttime look, paint the background piece of cardboard dark blue and paint the buildings in grays and browns, leaving some windows dark and some yellow. Add stickers or glitter stars, and cut a moon out of a piece of shiny foil.

Handwork

Read An Apartment House Close Up. Now create a similar book about the child’s home. Use a black and white or color camera to take close up photographs, especially of some of the most common objects represented in the book such as Garbage, Windows, Hot Water/Cold Water, Heat, and Laundry. Print the photographs as quickly as possible so that the interest in this activity does not fade, perhaps by visiting a digital photograph kiosk in a drugstore. Then fasten each picture to its own page, labeling each item. You might consider laminating the pages so that they will last longer.

If the child really enjoys this activity you might travel to some other places to take similar photographs. You can visit the home of a friend or relative, the library, grocery store, or other location familiar to the child. Try to take several pictures of the same type of item so that each object has a two page spread, such as in the book. For example, if the child has a compost pile, you could take a photograph of the compost bucket in the kitchen as well as the larger pile outside, or even of the compost being spread in the garden. For a page on windows you can take photographs of the windows in your house, a car window, and a gap in the forest canopy through which you get a peek at the sky. This provides a richer context for the text of the book and shows that there are many ways to look at some of the things we take for granted.

Nature

Where is Nature found in the city? Other than in parks, you can find seedlings pushing up through sidewalk cracks, pigeons roosting or nesting on building ledges, and beautiful flowers blooming in window boxes. Even if you don't live in a city, you can build a window box and plant it with gorgeous summertime annuals:

http://www.bobvila.com/ArticleLibrary/Subject/Lawn_and_Garden/Pots_and_Containers/WindowBoxes.html

ANNUALS FOR WINDOW AND PORCH BOXES

Atzereturn

Lobelia erinus

Portulaca (Rosemoss) Verbena

Alyssum

Maurandia

Tagetes signata var. Pumila

Vinca rosea (Periwinkle)

Browallia speciosa

Petunia

Thunbergia (Clockvine)

Zinnia

Centaurea (Dusty Miller)

Phlox

Tropxolum majus (Nasturtium)

Music

"Beautiful Noise" by Neil Diamond is a wonderful song about embracing the sounds of city life. Lyrics: <http://www.imaginitpublishing.co.uk/guitar/song03/song0313.txt>

Play this song and talk with your child about the rhythms of the city. Perhaps you can do a field trip just to sit outside a small café on the sidewalk and observe the people passing by. Where do you think they are going? What might their lives be like? If the child isn't used to an urban environment, discuss what they think it might be like to live in the city. Which would you prefer, the city or the country? Talk about Milly and Tilly, who each found out that one another's lives were very different than they had imagined.

Although the Waldorf method tends to put a high premium on the natural lifestyle, being close to and demonstrating a reverence for the natural world isn't the exclusive domain of the country dweller. In fact, shortly after my daughter and I first began doing Waldorf, we went to a McDonald's restaurant and as we walked in, she exclaimed Trees! I looked up and, sure enough, the artwork on the walls was all nature photographs – which just goes to show that, if Nature is what's important to you, you'll find it everywhere.

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

No specific cooking activities are suggested 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

- candle

Stories

Art

- large flat piece of cardboard, assorted smaller cardboard shapes and flat boxes
- paint
- optional materials: felt, different colors of cardstock, glitter, star stickers, foil

Handwork

- camera (preferably digital or Polaroid)
- heavy duty cardstock and a pen
- clear contact paper for laminating

Nature: window box

- lumber, drill, wood glue, screws, sandpaper, primer, paint
- (optional: bed molding or chair rail, finishing nails)
- decorative stencils
- potting soil
- annuals

Music

- recording of "Beautiful Noise" by Neil Diamond

Cooking

Play

Helping

Closing Verse

- candle

PLANNER

Book List:

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

Materials:

list all materials required for your chosen activities

Please feel free to contact me at any time at waldorf_curric@yahoo.com.