

Spinning and Sewing

*Waldorf Curriculum
Preschool Newsletter*

June 29, 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

Rumplestiltskin
The Emperor's New Clothes
The Tailor of Gloucester
More Tales from Grimm

by Paul O. Zelinsky
illus. by Virginia Lee Burton
by Beatrix Potter
trans. by Wanda Gag

Spinning

- **Drop Spindle**

how to use a drop spindle:

http://www.mielkesfarm.com/spndl_inst.htm

make your own drop spindle:

<http://www.joyofhandspinning.com/make-dropspin.html>

- **Spinning Wheel**

Take a field trip to see a spinning wheel. View an actual demonstration if you can. Talk with your child about why the spinning wheel was invented; this will be easier for the child to understand if he has had a chance to use a drop spindle. In fact, in using the drop spindle, your child may comment himself that the process could be improved upon. Look around your area for spinning or weaving guilds which may hold demonstrations, or try living history exhibits at local museums.

Sewing

make a set of sewing cards for your child:

<http://www.sewnews.com/resources/library/1204sewcards/>

This activity will be especially fun if you allow the child to complete each sewing card with the different types of thread as you learn about them. This will give her a chance to really work with and experience the variety of fibers which can be used, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of each type of thread or yarn.

To begin the process of examining different types of fiber which are spun to make threads and yarns and woven to make cloth, have your child gather as many pieces of fabric that he can which are made of different fibers. It will probably be easy to find examples of cotton, linen, silk, and wool. These are the four main types of fiber which we focus on here.

If you find samples of more exotic fibers, you will want to build interest about how they are made and seize the opportunity to do a little more research on your own. Some of the exotic fibers you may encounter are camel, angora, alpaca, llama, hemp, cashmere, bamboo, and soy. As much as possible take the child through the process of producing these fibers, as well as comparing them to the others which you have learned about.

You can also purchase different types of exotic yarns and threads to examine:

<http://www.knittersreview.com/yarn.asp>

Cotton

Cotton thread is easy to find, simply visit your local sewing shop. Cotton clothing is even more common. See if your child knows where cotton comes from. If you can, find a farm near you which grows cotton and visit it. If not, you can grow cotton yourself from seed: <http://store.earthlyseed.com/cottonseeds.html>

Have the child find pieces of clothing which are made from cotton but which have a different texture, such as an undershirt, denim blue jeans, or a cotton knit sweater. Why do you think the items feel so different from one another?

Linen

- **The Story of Linen**

FRIGGA AND THE GIFT OF FLAX

There was once a poor shepherd who lived with his wife in a small house. They could not provide enough food to keep themselves well so the shepherd went hunting every day in the mountains above their farm.

One day the shepherd took his crossbow and went up the mountainside to hunt. He spotted a goat larger than any he had ever seen before just out of range of his bow. The shepherd was so eager to catch it that without realising he pursued the goat to the very top of the mountain. Above him rose the wall of a glacier into which a door like opening had been cut. Curious the shepherd stepped inside and was amazed to find himself in a cavern glittering with a thousand precious gems. Amidst the blaze of light stood three women wearing fine clothes and adorned with ornaments of gold. The shepherd recognised the women as the Goddess Frigga and her handmaidens and fell to his knees in awe. Frigga welcomed him and offered him a gift of his own choice to take back to his home. The shepherd gazed around the cavern at the gems and golden jewels, but his eyes kept returning to a tiny bunch of blue flowers that Frigga held in her hand. 'I would count it a blessing if you would just give me the flowers in your hand, great goddess.' he said.

Frigga smiled 'Take them with my blessing,' she said 'as they remain fresh you will prosper, as they wither so will you sink and die. Take also this bag of seed and plant it on your land, you must tend and care for the crop that will grow.' As the shepherd stepped forward to accept the seeds he was dazzled by the brightness shining from Frigga's face and closed his eyes. When he opened them again he was back on the mountain top, clutching the flowers and seeds.

The shepherd rushed home and told his wife what had occurred. 'What use are flowers?' the wife exclaimed 'Why didn't you bring back a jewel or piece of gold that we could have sold for food?' The shepherd ignored her and ploughed up his plot of land and planted the seeds. Time went by and the green shoots appeared which grew tall, topped with tight green buds. The plants bloomed and the shepherd was heartened to see the same blue flowers as those that Frigga had given him. His wife

however complained that he was wasting good land on plants not even fit to feed the sheep.

As time passed the plants became dry and brown, the flowers had gone and the stalks were heavy with seed heads. The shepherd was saddened because the flowers had reminded him of the day on the mountain top. One day Frigga visited the shepherd and his wife and led them out to the field. She told them that the plant was called flax and showed them how to harvest it and comb off the seeds. She retted the stalks in the river and combed out the plants fibers, and with these fibers she instructed the shepherd's wife on how spin and weave them into linen cloth.

The shepherd's wife worked hard at spinning and weaving and was able to sell the linen at a high price. The shepherd kept the seed and sowed a larger field and thus their life continued. They soon became quite wealthy and were able to bring up their children in comfort.

Years later when the shepherd was an old man he noticed that the bunch of flax flowers Frigga had given him in the cave were beginning to wither and die. He knew that his life was coming to an end and set off to climb the mountain for one last time. The climb was hard and slow for the old man but he persevered and eventually stood below the glacier. As before Frigga was waiting for him with her handmaidens and welcomed him, 'Come and dwell with us forever in peace and joy', and the door of ice closed behind him.

Although this tale has come to be associated with Frigga, the wife of Odin in Norse Mythology, it has only survived in Germany where the local goddess Holda claims the credit of the gift of flax. However the two goddesses have much in common and in Scandinavia the constellation we call the Girdle of Orion was known as Frigga's Spinning Wheel.

Linen has long been considered superior to wool and commanded a higher price. The production of linen cloth is more complicated, both in the preparation of the fibers and in the spinning of the thread. As linen was generally a finer cloth than wool and easier to clean it was used for shirts and undergarments until the spread of the use of cotton. The source of linen is flax, a plant which bears small blue flowers. Flax is pulled out of the ground when it is seeding. Much care is taken to remove the outer woody fibers of the plant by soaking the plants in pools of water, beating and combing, until the inner hairy fibers are ready to be spun.

- **Making Linen**

flax seeds: <http://www.woolery.com/Pages/fibers.html>

It takes around 100 days from seed to harvest.

growing flax as a field crop: <http://www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/afcm/flax.html>

preparation as thread: <http://www.ancientroute.com/resource/cloth/linen.htm>

Flax can be also used for twine or rope. See if your local hardware store has some of these products and purchase some linen thread for purposes of comparison. Talk with the child about how the way in which each fiber is processed accounts for two very different results.

Silk

Of course, there is no comparison for the experience of actually raising your own silkworms and watching them spin their magical cocoons. Silk is easy to raise in your home, whether it be in the country or the city. All you need is access to plenty of mulberry leaves (they don't eat anything else) and a willingness to devote about two weeks to intensive feeding of many baby silkworms.

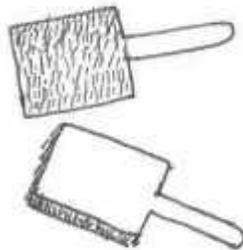
For more information: <http://www.aurorasilk.com/raisesilk/index.shtml>

Wool

Wool plays a very special role in Waldorf schooling, as it is the basis of many handwork projects and a special part of many toys. For this reason, you or the child may already have a lot of knowledge about where wool comes from.

If you are not familiar with this process, however, here is a brief overview:

- **Shearing**
A sharp knife (or large scissors) is used to cut the wool from the sheep.
- **Cleaning**
The wool is washed to clean away the dirt and the oil from the sheep's skin.
- **Teasing**
The wool is pulled apart to pick out grass, straw, and burrs that were stuck to the fleece.
- **Carding**
The wool is brushed to untangle it and get out the knots.



- Spinning
The strands of wool are spun into yarn . A spinning wheel or drop spindle is used to twist the fibres around a spool to make the yarn.
- Weaving
Cloth is made by weaving the yarn on a loom.
- Making clothing
Woolen cloth can be sewn into dresses, shirts, jackets, pants and other clothing. Yarn can be knitted into scarves, mittens, caps, shawls and stockings.

This is a long process but very easy for a child to learn and understand. Children can especially help with the cleaning, teasing, and carding of wool. It is a good experience to purchase some unwashed wool, which is still full of lanolin, and work with the child to wash it clean. This is an excellent way to learn about some of the parts of the wool process which you may not have been a part of before.

Child-size hand carders are also useful to have:

http://www.achildsdream.com/handwork_supplies/spinning_weaving.htm

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

Stories

- Rumplestiltskin
- The Emperor's New Clothes
- The Tailor of Gloucester
- More Tales from Grimm

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- The Story of Linen
- Making Linen

Silk

Wool

- Shearing
- Cleaning
- Teasing
- Carding
- Spinning
- Weaving
- Making Clothing

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

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