

Flying High

*Waldorf Curriculum
Preschool Newsletter*

October 19, 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.

Many families also use the weekly newsletter topics as a one week long mini-unit for homeschooling.

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

Kites: Magic Wishes That Fly Up to the Sky
Henry and the Kite Dragon
You Can't Take a Balloon into the Metropolitan
Museum
The Red Book
The Red Balloon
The Race

by Demi
by Bruce Edward Hall

by Jacqueline Preiss Weitzman
by Barbara Lehman
by Albert Lamorisse
by Caroline Repchuk

Handwork

The Waldorf view of Handwork is different from the usual craft projects done with young children. Handwork must have an authentic context – it must be truly useful and must be completed slowly, deliberately, and with pride. As children grow, they benefit from the lessons learned in doing Handwork – that taking your time, following all the steps, and doing your best work will result in a product of which you can be proud.

As Professor Kite says, "We have all have heard of stories about people who can not fly a kite. For years I have been frustrated when seeing children trying to fly a shape on the end of a piece of twine. Most of their creations do not fly and are quickly discarded. It is sad to realize that with the same amount of effort the children could be flying a "real" kite. That is to say, with a little planning everyone can make a kite that will really fly!"

<http://www.gombergkites.com/nkm/index.html>

For your Handwork project this week, make a kite with your child. Be sure your kite is put together correctly, or it may not fly. Refer to the directions given in [Kites: Magic Wishes That Fly Up to the Sky](#); or, if that book is unavailable, the above website gives a ton of useful information, including the history of kites, links to kite websites from different countries around the world, five easy kite plans and tips for making kites with children, science and math information (for older children) about the flying of kites and safety tips – which I am excerpting below as they are somewhat hard to find on the site.

Picking a Kite-Flying Day

Because you can't control the wind, learn to watch for the right kite flying conditions.

Wind that is too strong or too light is difficult to fly in. A flag or windsock is handy to help you see the wind. About 5-25 mph is best for most kites (when leaves and bushes start to move, but before it really starts to blow).

Flying is most fun when the wind is medium so you can do more than just hold on. You can make your kite dance across the sky by pulling in and letting out the line.

Flying space should be a clear, open area. Stay away from roads, power lines or airports. Open fields, parks and beaches are great for flying kites. The more room you have, the more line you can let out.

Remember that as the wind goes over and around trees and buildings, it gets bumpy and difficult to fly kites in. Watch out for kite eating trees!

No Storms!

Never fly in rain or lightening. Electricity in clouds is attracted to damp kite lines and foolish kite fliers.

Kite Flying Tips – Single Line Kites

Stand with your back to the wind. Hold your kite up by the bridle point and let the line out. If there is sufficient wind, your kite will go right up. Let the kite fly away from you a little, then pull in on the line as the kite points up so it will climb. Repeat this until your kite gains the altitude necessary to find a good steady wind.

Light wind? Have a helper take the kite downwind and hold it up. On command, the helper releases the kite and the flier pulls the line hand-over-hand while the kite gains altitude. Or, prop the kite up against a bush, post, or wall. Reel out enough line for altitude and simply pull the kite aloft.

If the kite sinks tail first, there might not be enough wind. If it comes down head first or spins, there might be too much wind. Different kites fly in different winds.

Bridles: If your kite has an adjustable bridle, move it higher (nearer the top) in higher winds, and lower (towards the tail) in lower winds. (Adjust no more than 1/2" at a time.)

Tails: Adding tails to your kite helps it remain stable in stronger winds. Use light-weight materials so you can use lots! Looks great!

Rice Paper Kites

Henry and the Kite Dragon explains a different type of kite making from the more simple (but effective) kites mentioned above. If your child is interested in making a kite with this technique, rice paper kite directions as well as other projects using rice paper can be found here: <http://www.rice-paper.com/usage/kite.html>.



One Room Schoolhouse:

While researching rice paper kites, I came across this wonderful website which sells chinese language and cultural activity kits. These monthly kits are sent directly to your home (she offers 1 month, 3 month, and 12 month subscriptions) and are recommended for first grade and older. Each kit contains 13 different activities and features a different theme each month. There are also four special kits celebrating the Chinese holiday events of Chinese New Year (January), Qing Ming (April), Dragon Boat Festival (June) and Mid Autumn Festival (September).

<http://www.ricepaperkite.com/index.html>

Drama

Read The Race. If necessary, read the story several times over the course of a few days until your child is comfortable with the story and able to retell it. Then act it out together (this is easily done with each of you pretending to be a character – if you are working with several children, one can be a narrator, the others can be vocal bystanders or can engage in conversation with the Tortoise or the Hare as they progress along their way). If you like, you can make costumes!

This story can also be acted out with figures as your child narrates. Use an empty walnut shell half and some modelling beeswax to create your tortoise. Directions for making rabbits out of magic wool can be found in More Magic Wool (“Easter Rabbit” on page 29, “Pom-pom Rabbits” on pages 31-33). One of the pom-pom rabbits photographed was made of white sheep’s wool dyed with onion skin to make a lovely light brown. This is easy to do at home, and would be a fun and inexpensive extra project for this week.

Ellen’s Onion-Skin Dye

http://www.ourcanadiangirl.ca/fun/fun_ellen.php

Science

Make your own hot air balloon! <http://www.oms.edu/visit/physics/air/act/balloon.pdf>

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

Because many children and families have restricted diets such as vegan or vegetarian, gluten-free, kosher, etc. we generally do not suggest specific cooking activities for the week's theme. 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!

Independent 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 preschool 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

- Kites: Magic Wishes That Fly Up to the Sky by Demi
- Henry and the Kite Dragon by Bruce Edward Hall
- You Can't Take a Balloon into the Metropolitan Museum by Jacqueline Preiss Weitzman
- The Red Book by Barbara Lehman
- The Red Balloon by Albert Lamorisse
- The Race by Caroline Repchuk

Handwork

Rice Paper Kites

Drama

- More Magic Wool by Angelika Wolk-Gerche

Ellen's Onion-Skin Dye

Science

Cooking

Independent Play

Helping

Closing Verse

PLANNER

Book List: list the books you will be reading

Materials: list all materials required for your chosen activities

APPENDIX

I'd love to say that going on a hot air balloon ride should be a field trip for this topic, but I think it would be too scary for many children (and maybe adults). But, if you're interested in finding out more about hot air balloons, and maybe taking a ride, here is some additional information:

How the balloon works: <http://www.eballoon.org/balloon/how-it-works.html>

General Questions & Answers

Who can fly a balloon?

The Federal Aviation Administration issues a Balloon Pilot Certificate to candidates who pass an FAA written examination, obtain a prescribed number of hours in a balloon, make a solo flight to altitude, pass a flight test, and submit a medical statement.

How many people does it take to inflate a balloon?

A minimum of three but preferably four. If the wind is over 8 knots, six to 10 people may be needed.

How do you steer a balloon?

The balloon goes wherever the wind takes it. However, pilots can seek higher or lower altitudes to find wind currents of various direction. We refer to it as the truest form of sailing.

How safe is a balloon?

Hot air ballooning is considered one of the safest forms of flying. The major risks are tangling with powerlines and treetops and hard landings. Serious accidents are rare. It is a sport that demands skill.

Is it cold in a balloon?

At high altitude, it is colder than at ground level, generally 3.5 degrees colder for each 1,000 feet of altitude.

What are the best conditions for flight in a balloon?

A balloon flies better in cooler weather since the hot air gets a better "lift." Balloonists usually fly just after dawn or before dusk, because there is less wind at these times.

How large are hot air balloons?

Most balloons are larger than your house. They hold from 19,000 to 240,000 cubic feet of air and loom from 50 to 90 feet.

How does a hot air balloon differ from a gas balloon?

A hot air balloon gets its lift from heating the air with propane fuel. A gas balloon gets its lift from lighter than air gases, usually helium or hydrogen.

What kinds of fabric are used?

Rip-stop nylon, dacron, taffeta and nylon are the most common.

What are the baskets that hang from balloons made of?

Because weight is critical in balloon flying, the baskets are made of light materials such as wicker, fiberglass or aluminum.

Do balloons wear out?

If well taken care of, a balloon envelope should last approximately 500 flying hours.

What instruments do balloons use?

An altimeter to indicate altitude, a variometer showing its rate of climb or decent, a compass to show directions, and a temperature gage to show how hot the fabric is at the top of the balloon. Each propane tank has a fuel gauge, and the burner has a fuel pressure gauge.

information taken from the Friendship Hot Air Balloon Company website:

<http://www.ballooningusa.com/home7.html>

Finding a hot air balloon company near you:

I found this to be relatively easy. Simply go to a search engine such as Google and type "(your state) hot air ballooning" into the search box. Autumn is generally considered to be the best time of year for hot air ballooning, as the weather conditions are right, but many companies I found offer rides all year round.

Making connections:

This topic fits in many ways with the Autumn Preschool unit: Sun, Moon & Shadow. Chinese culture and using magic wool are also explored in this unit.

This topic also works as a continuation of the October 12 2005 topic "Sailing By" as, in order to navigate, hot air balloon pilots seek higher or lower altitudes to find wind currents of various direction. Finding and travelling along wind currents makes flying in a hot air balloon very similar to soaring like a hawk!