

# *Who Plants a Tree*

*Waldorf Curriculum  
Preschool Newsletter*

*September 14, 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

The Tremendous Tree Book  
A Tree is Nice  
The Gift of the Tree  
A Log's Life  
101 Famous Poems

by Barbara Brenner  
by Janice May Udry  
by Alvin Tresselt  
by E. Wendy Pfeffer  
edited by Roy J. Cook

## Introduction

### Trees

The Oak is called the King of Trees,  
The Aspen quivers in the breeze,  
The Poplar grows up straight and tall,  
The Pear tree spreads along the wall,  
The Sycamore gives pleasant shade,  
The Willow droops in watery glade,  
The Fir tree useful timber gives,  
The Beech amid the forest lives.

*Sara Coleridge*

### Nature Walk

After reading the poem above, take a brief Nature walk with the child. Choose one point on your walk to stop and look around you quietly. Read [The Tremendous Tree Book](#). Show your child several different types of trees that you see growing next to each other. How can you tell that they are not the same kind of tree? Focus your attention on the variety of tree leaves and how they differ.

### Handwork

Since you'll be taking several Nature walks for this topic, find and decorate a personalized walking stick with your child:

[A Personalized Walking Stick](#)

<http://familyfun.go.com/arts-and-crafts/season/feature/famf97project/famf97project23.html>

### Art

Read [A Tree is Nice](#). After you have finished reading the book, go back and study the illustrations. Make a unique crayon rubbing in the style of Marc Simont:

Assembled Tree Rubbings

you will need:

- basket, bag, or box for collecting fallen material from trees  
OR a ball of yarn
- block beeswax crayons
- large sheet of paper
- tape

Take a Nature walk with the child, collecting leaves, pine needles, fir needles, twigs, and other fallen materials from trees. One nice way to do this is to find a sturdy forked

branch and weave your yarn around it to create a simple basket. Once you have found a variety of woodland materials, return home. Spread them out and choose the flattest items (these will make the best crayon rubbings). Using your flat items, assemble the shape of a tree on your work table. Begin with a sturdy trunk, then add branches and foliage. With short pieces of tape, make loops and fasten the materials to your table.

Once you have your tree shape, gently lay a large piece of paper over the design and tape down the edges to keep it from moving. Using your block beeswax crayons, gently rub the paper to reveal the tree design. When the rubbing is complete, carefully lift your paper.

You can also try this technique with colored pencils or oil pastels.

Note: When gathering fallen leaves, try to look for those which are still fresh and pliable. Completely dried leaves will disintegrate under the pressure of the crayon.

### **Tree Identification**

Talk with your child about the wide variety of fallen materials you found on the forest floor. In addition to identifying trees by their leaves, you can use the other natural materials they produce to tell what type of tree you are standing under.

Prepare for another Nature walk by listing (this is an activity for adults) the trees you commonly find in this area and how you can identify them. Try to keep the list short – four or five trees – to avoid overwhelming the child and creating frustration. If you have never tried to identify the trees in your area, don't despair. Find a nature guide for your region and take a few Nature walks on your own to become more confident. The internet is also a good resource for tree identification.

Identify and Name 100 Common Trees of the American Forest:  
[http://forestry.about.com/cs/treeid/a/100\\_trees\\_id.htm](http://forestry.about.com/cs/treeid/a/100_trees_id.htm)

Here is an example of your final "short list":

<u>item found</u>	<u>type of tree</u>
acorns	Oak
"whirligigs"	Maple
pine cones	Pine
gumballs	Sweet Gum

Now take a Nature walk with your child and demonstrate how to identify the trees you have chosen.

### **Nature Journalling**

As you become more interested in the minute details of the forest world around you, this is a wonderful time to begin nature journalling. Autumn is an exciting season of

change and you and your child will enjoy recording your observations and experiences. If you don't have any previous experience with nature journaling, you'll want to refer to Keeping a Nature Journal: Discover a Whole New Way of Seeing the World Around You by Clare Walker Leslie for ideas and suggestions about sharing journaling with children.

Your child's experience with the tree rubbings in Art will give him the confidence and skill to contribute to the illustrations of your journal, while you can transcribe any notes and observations.

Throughout your journaling, try to keep your eyes open for signs of life at every level of the forest. This includes:

#### SOIL LAYER

The soil layer is the foundation of the forest, supporting and providing moisture and nutrients to plant and tree roots. It consists of decomposed plant matter and inorganic material, such as rocks, minerals and clay.

#### LITTER LAYER

The litter layer is the floor of the forest, where decaying plant matter and fungi undergo the transformation into soil. Bacteria, insects and worms in the litter help break down the plant matter.

#### FIELD LAYER

The field layer is the first layer of growth on the forest floor – a soft carpet of mosses, ferns, wildflowers, grasses and other low plants. It is a habitat for many insects, mammals, reptiles and amphibians.

#### UNDERSTORY

The understory is made up of bushes, shrubs, woody plants and young trees reaching up to the forest canopy; it provides a habitat for birds and insects.

#### CANOPY

The canopy is the highest layer of the forest – the intertwined branches of mature trees that shade and protect lower forest layers and provide a habitat for insects, birds and small mammals.



One Room Schoolhouse:

We are lucky enough to have been just given a set of four blank paper journals which we intend to use to journal the next four seasons, thereby giving us the ability to look

back upon the entire year in nature as it unfolds. Older siblings who know or are interested in bookbinding can create a similar set of books for you to use with your preschooler.

### **Tree Life Cycle**

Read The Gift of the Tree with your child. Take another walk out into the woods and look carefully at the soil beneath your feet. This is another opportunity to thank trees for all they provide for us, as well as for many other plants and animals in the world. You can also sit down next to a rotting log and spend some time observing it carefully. Feel its spongy texture; then read A Log's Life when you return home.

### **Community Giving**

Purchase a small tree for you and your child to plant. September is the best month for tree planting and they should be available at any nursery or garden center. Having learned about some of the different types of trees, your child may have a special tree in mind. Otherwise, think carefully about what type of tree would best be suited to the location you have chosen. Many trees grow much taller and wider than one is able to visualize, and a lot of damage can be caused by extensive root systems too close to your home! You don't want the tree you plant with such love to never reach the prime of its life, cut down because it has become a nuisance.

Also consider planting a tree in an area other than your own backyard. Perhaps you can donate a tree to a nursing home, community center, or school. Look around your area to see if there are tree-planting programs that you could participate in with your child. The poem "The Heart of the Tree" in 101 Famous Poems is a wonderful way to share with your child the joy you have just spread; read it after your tree planting is done.

### **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!

## **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

- The Tremendous Tree Book by Barbara Brenner
- A Tree is Nice by Janice May Udry
- The Gift of the Tree by Alvin Tresselt
- A Log's Life by E. Wendy Pfeffer
- 101 Famous Poems edited by Roy J. Cook

Introduction: "Trees" by Sara Coleridge

Nature Walk

Handwork: A Personalized Walking Stick

Art: Assembled Tree Rubbings

Tree Identification

Nature Journalling

- Keeping a Nature Journal: Discover a Whole New Way of Seeing the World Around You by Clare Walker Leslie

Tree Life Cycle

Community Giving

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

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Assembled Tree Rubbings activity was adapted from Storybook Art by MaryAnn Kohl.

Please feel free to contact me at any time at [waldorf\\_curric@yahoo.com](mailto:waldorf_curric@yahoo.com).