Texas Tech Coalition for Natural Learning

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HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES

The following hands-on activities are designed for **early childhood educators, designers, parents, and children.** Each activity is designed to address the importance and useful tools available in outdoor learning environments.

ACTIVITIES FOR EDUCATORS AND DESIGNERS

ACTIVITY #1: "ING" Words

Materials:

1. Sticky notepads
2. Pens
3. Base map for OLE! Site

Instructions:

1. Provide each person with sticky notes and a pen. Ask them to write down words describing activities that should take place in the OLE! using only words ending in "ing" (running, reading, resting, jumping, etc).
2. Have participants discuss the words they wrote. Organize similar words to determine the most common activities desired.
3. Have educators, designers, participants explain where each activity should take place on the base map. Place the sticky note in the area determined by the group.

Target audience(s): Early Childcare center providers, educators, designers

ACTIVITY #2: Design Space

Materials:

1. Sticky notes (or notecards and tape)
2. Pens
3. 8 1/2 x 11 paper signs. Each sign should list a frequently used space in an OLE! Examples include "Hillside," "Garden," "Water," "Tree," "Grassy Area…"

Instructions:

1. Direct participants to use the sticky notes to explain activities that can take place in each space in the outdoor learning environment.

2. Have participants place sticky notes on and below the sign that relates to the activity.

3. Have educators, designers, and participants discuss the various activities that can take place in each space.

Target audience(s): Early Childcare center providers, educators, designers

ACTIVITY #3: Rank and File

Materials:

1. Photo cards of activity settings.

2. 12 - 8 1/2 x 11 paper signs. Each sign should list one of the 12 Best Practice Design Indicators.

Instructions:

1. Lay each sign on a table or floor.

2. One-by-one, have participants select 3 of their preferred activity setting photo cards and place them on or next to the sign of the appropriate Best Practice Design Indicator.

3. Have educators, designers, and other participants explain why the setting was selected.

Target audience(s): Early Childcare center providers, educators, designers

ACTIVITIES FOR EDUCATORS, DESIGNERS, PARENTS, AND CHILDREN

Note: When doing these activities with children be conscious of the developmental needs of the child. Letting children independently explore these activities will be of greater benefit than having them following direct and specific instructions. In other words, the "correct answer" is less important than providing children opportunities to explore and learn. However, you can prompt children with questions and guidance as needed to fulfill the objective of the activity.

ACTIVITY #4: Sink or Swim

Materials:

1. Rectangle shallow bucket with top
2. Natural items of different weights (i.e., rocks, leaves, sticks, pinecones, feathers, nuts)
3. Water for filling bucket

Instructions

1. Explain the purpose of *Sink or Swim*
   a. Identify all the materials
   b. Provide an example of the activity by choosing an item then (1) identify the item, (2) discuss if the item will either sink or swim when placed in the water, and (3) place item in water and describe the results.
2. Have children independently choose items and discuss with them (or have parents participate if available) their experiences.
   a. Identify and discuss items as they choose and test the sink or swim
   b. Provide as little or much assistance as the child appears to need, but allow the child to lead their experiences

Target audience(s): Children; Children and families (collaborative), educators

Developmental domains: Cognitive, language, fine motor

Best practice indicators: 5

ACTIVITY #5: Sandbox

Materials:

1. Rectangle shallow bucket with top
2. Natural items (i.e., shells of different sizes, rocks, sticks, pebbles)
3. Sand for filling bucket
4. Small shovel and bucket for digging and holding items

Instructions

1. Identify shovel and bucket for children to use
2. Have children dig-in to search for items
   a. As they find items talk about them and where they might find the items (e.g., shells can be found at beaches; rocks can be found many places; etc.)
   b. Place items in the bucket as they are discovered
3. Once all items or a good number are found, the children may go through their "bucket of treasures"
   a. Depending on age have children count or categorize the items

Target audience(s): Children; Children and families (collaborative), educators

Developmental domains: Cognitive, language, fine motor

Best practice indicators: 5

ACTIVITY #6: Natural Charcoal Rubbings

Materials:

1. Parchment paper
2. Charcoal/chalk/graphite sticks
3. A range of natural, loose materials (i.e., variety of leaves, bark, pinecones, nuts, rocks, feathers)

Instructions

1. Identify objects and materials
   a. Provide example as needed
2. Place a piece of paper directly on the surface/object intended to take the rubbing
3. Use charcoal (or chosen material) to rub across surface
   a. Suggest using varying pressures to reveal more sensitive surfaces
4. Talk about the different surfaces found on each of the materials used
   a. Were some more difficult than others?
   b. How are the surfaces different? (e.g., between bark and a feather)
5. Discuss where they can find their own objects in nature

Target audience(s): Children; Children and families (collaborative), educators

Developmental domains: Fine motor, language, cognitive, creativity

Best practice indicators: 5

ACTIVITY #7: Seedlings

Materials:

1. Cup with a seedling (marigolds? Cherry tomatoes? Sunflower? Radishes? Sugar snap peas)
    a. Cup
    b. Soil
    c. Started seedling
2. Information about seedlings: https://www.maximumyield.com/germinating-seeds-and-caring-for-seedlings/2/1184
3. Additional activity (see below): https://www.twinkl.com/resource/t-t-13786-parts-of-a-plant-foldable-interactive-visual-aid-template
    a. Crayons/markers for coloring
    b. Scissors
    c. Glue

Instructions

1. Have children complete the activity and discuss the parts of the plant (with assistance as needed)
2. Provide child with the cup with seedling and instructions
    a. Discuss the seedling and connect with activity (plants start as seeds, root, and grow/fruit, etc.)

Target audience(s): Children; Children and families (collaborative), educators

Developmental domains: Fine motor, cognitive

Best practice indicators: 10, 11
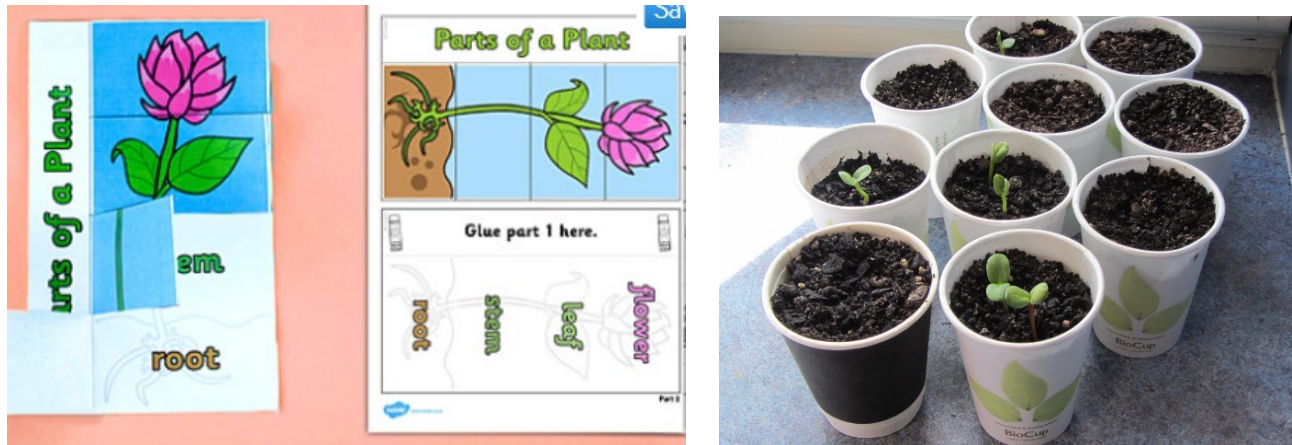
ACTIVITY #8: Matching Food with Home

Materials:

1. Activity : http://www.nourishinteractive.com/nutrition-education-printables/133-kids-garden-activity-produce-plants-matching-activity
2. Additional option:
   a. Make cards with a variety of fruits and vegetable pictures
   b. Larger cards with a variety of "plant homes"
      i. Trees
      ii. Shrubs
      iii. Underground/above ground planters
      iv. Vine

Instructions

1. Have children (and adults) complete the activity discussing the different fruits and vegetables
2. Match with the items "home" and talk about the different ways that they grow
3. Connect with the outdoor environment

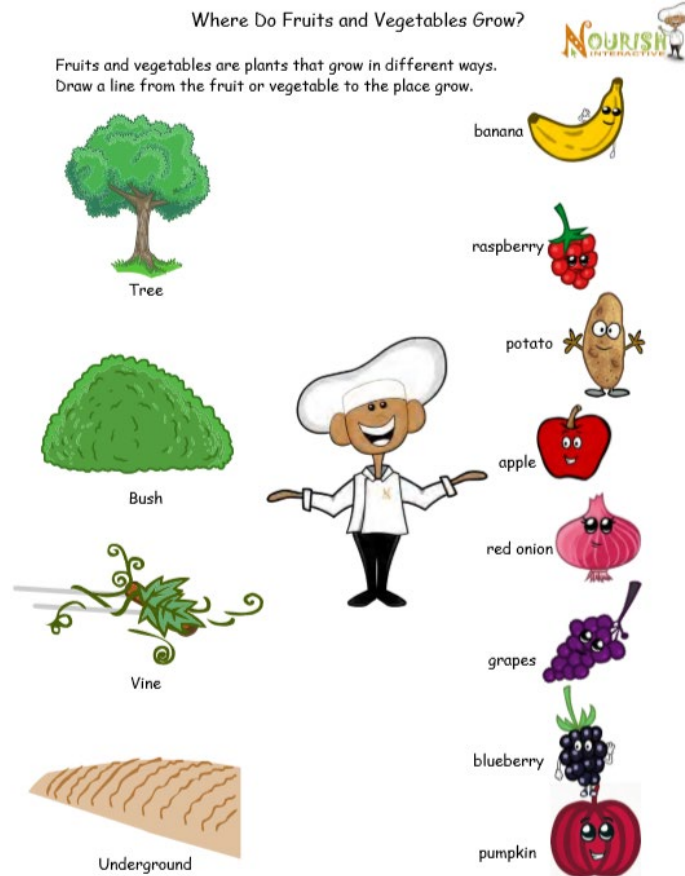Target audience(s): Children; Children and families (collaborative), educators

Developmental domains: Cognitive, fine motor

Best practice indicators: 9, 10, 11

Where Do Fruits and Vegetables Grow?

Fruits and vegetables are plants that grow in different ways.
Draw a line from the fruit or vegetable to the place grow.

Tree

Bush

Vine

Underground

banana

raspberry

potato

apple

red onion

grapes

blueberry

pumpkin

ACTIVITY #9: Making Shade

Materials:

1. Desk Lamp (AKA the sun)
2. Varying natural loose materials
3. Objects (e.g., toy people, house, etc.) for under lamp to be shaded

Instructions

1. Have children pick up different loose items and "make shade" over objects
2. Discuss how the different items provide a lot or little shade
3. Ask children to talk about what they see making shade outside

Target audience(s): Children; Children and families (collaborative), educators

Developmental domains: fine motor, language, cognitive

Best practice indicators: 4 & 5 (8)

ACTIVITY #10: Natural Texture (Busy) Board

Materials:

1. Board with different sections that have varying natural textures
    a. Bark
    b. Pebbles/rocks
    c. Grass
    d. Concrete
    e. Sand?
    f. Sticks
    g. Leaves (e.g., pine)
    h. Etc.

Instructions

1. First have children feel the different textures and try to guess what it is and where it is in the outdoor learning environment
2. Have loose material options that match the board texture and use these after initial identification
    a. Use these materials to match with the board
3. Discuss each of the materials with the children (have adults lead this if available)

Target audience(s): Children; Children and families (collaborative), educators

Developmental domains: Motor, cognitive, language

Best practice indicators: 5

ACTIVITY #11: Water Play

Materials:

1. Bucket
2. Water
3. Funnels
4. PVC pipe
5. Sand/rocks
6. Cups/spoons/bowls

Instructions

1. Allow children to explore using the materials
2. How does the water flow change if using a spoon vs. a bowl…etc.

Target audience(s): Children; Children and families (collaborative), educators

Developmental domains: Creativity, cognitive, fine motor,

Best practice indicators: 5