

A photograph of a dirt path lined with trees, likely in a park or schoolyard. The path is made of brown earth and is flanked by green grass. The trees are tall and have green leaves, with some showing signs of autumn. The path leads into the distance, creating a sense of depth. The overall scene is bright and sunny, with shadows cast on the grass.

Incorporating Nature in the Early Childhood Classroom

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Benefits of Incorporating Nature in the Classroom

- Nature resorts children's attention in the classroom. Taking a walk and exploring the outside with your class will help them feel fresh and energized.
- Time outdoors may be able to increase physical fitness. Having access to nature not only at home, but in school will be able to encourage children to be able to become more physically active and keep in shape longer as they are growing up.
- Nature settings may be able to promote social connections as well as becoming creative. Letting children spend time outdoors with natural elements or giving them structured nature experiences can make for a much calmer, socially safe, and fun learning environments.

Nature promotes learning by being able to improve learners attention, levels of stress, self discipline, enjoying the learning experience, and lastly the physical activity and fitness.

Strategies for Incorporating Nature in the Classroom

Decorate

- Use natural colors green, blue, and yellow. Green is the dominant color of the natural world. Yellow is associated with sunshine and happiness. Blue is associated with the sky and water.
- Add authentic pictures of nature in the classroom at child's eye level.

Collect

- Take the class on a nature walk and provide them with a bag to put their items in. The items can be used for lesson plans, activities, and show and tell.
- Plan a scavenger hunt for items children can look for to add to the classroom.



Nature scavenger hunt





Light

-Natural light is proven to boost the health and well-being of children and their teachers too.

-When possible, turn off the over-head lighting and incorporate soft lighting. Light tables are another great resource to use with nature.

Plants

-Add safe, non-toxic plants to the classroom. The children can see the physical properties and changes of plants. It can even lead to activities like planting, experiments, and predictions.



Additional resources with ideas, strategies, and information

- <https://www.weareteachers.com/50-ways-to-bring-nature-into-the-classroom/>
- <https://backyardlearning.wordpress.com/2015/08/27/tips-for-incorporating-nature-in-the-classroom/>
- <https://www.nais.org/magazine/independent-teacher/fall-2019/bringing-the-outdoors-into-setting-up-your-classroom-environment-to-maximize-students-and-teach/>

Incorporating Nature Into Math

- Encourage children to keep collections of materials such as feathers, leaves, rocks, etc.

Leaf Shape Play:

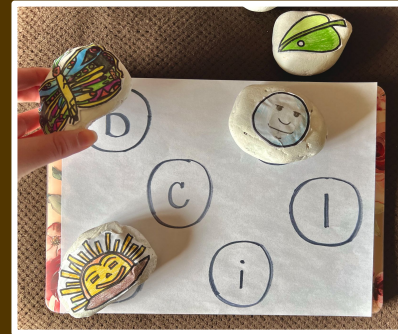
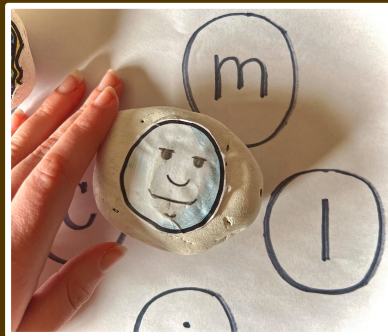
- Students will use scissors to cut shapes with the leaves and be able to create what they want.

PA Learning Standard 2.3 1.A.1- Compose and distinguish between two and three dimensional shapes based on their attributes



Incorporating Nature Into Literacy

- *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* Letter-Word Match
 - Students will use story stones based off of the story *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* to match up different words to their beginning letter sounds
 - For example: caterpillar → “c,” moon → “m,” and butterfly → “b”
 - PA Learning Standard: 1.1 1.C-Demonstrate understanding of spoken words, syllables, and sounds (phonemes).



Incorporating Nature into Open-Ended Art Experiences

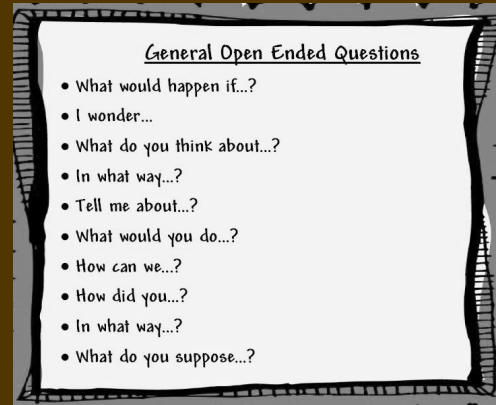
- Open-ended art has no step by step instructions and no final product in mind. Children are able to open and use their own creativity and imagination to produce works of art.
- Set up the environment that the children have access to various nature materials and art materials to create works of visual art.
- Provide provocations to invite the children.
- During the experiences, offer “I wonder...” and Wh- questions.

PA Learning Standard 9.1.V K.E Use imagination and creativity to express self through visual arts.



How can you create
a self-portrait?

What will happen if
you use the pinecone
as your paintbrush?



Samantha



Incorporating Nature Into Others Curriculum Areas

Not only can nature be incorporated into math, literacy, and open-ended art experiences, but it can be incorporated into other curriculum areas, as well:

- Sensory
- Science
- Cooking
- Language
- Movement
- Large or fine motor



Incorporating Nature Into Sensory Experiences

Using our senses is one of the best ways to explore and discover

- Nature sensory scavenger hunt
- Scented paint with flowers and herbs
- Nature sensory bin
- Sense of smell activity



Incorporating Nature Into Science Experiences

- Use loose parts that are natural
- Listen to the children and what they are curious about.
- Use KWL charts to create long term lessons.
- Incorporate hands on self directed activities.



Incorporating Nature Into Cooking Experiences

- There are so many ways to use nature in cooking experiences, one the exciting ways is to create outdoor experiences!

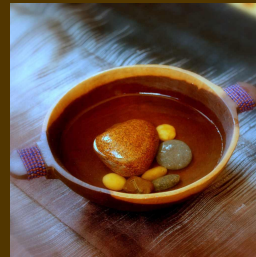
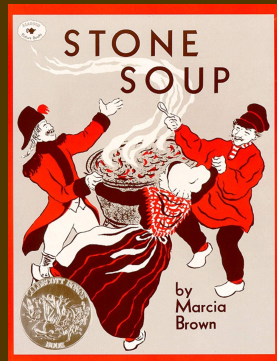
Stone Soup

- Stone soup book reading
- Pans
- Stones
- Ingredients from the book



Mud Pie Kitchen

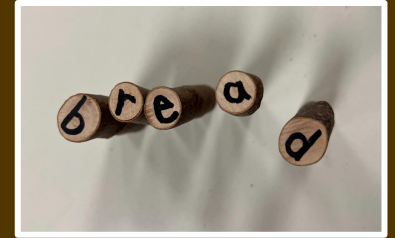
- Mud
- Water
- Pans
- Sticks
- Rocks
- Leaves



Incorporating Nature Into Language Experiences

- Tree Cookie Spelling Words

- Students can practice spelling words using tree cookie letters! They can manipulate the tree cookies using fine motor skills to spell different spelling words.
- PA Learning Standard: 1.1 1.D-Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.



- Twig Spelling Words

- Students can practice spelling words using chunky twigs! They can spell different words by trying to get the twigs to stand up using their fine motor skills.
- PA Learning Standard: 1.1 1.D-Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.

Incorporating Nature Into Movement Experiences

Cloud Searching - look for clouds and record findings, having children in groups in separate areas, do they see the same clouds? Have them draw what they see.

Standard - 9.1.V PK.E - Use imagination and creativity to express self through visual arts.

-Participate in teacher guided visual arts activities.

Tree Pose Yoga - Stretch like trees!

Standard - 9.1 Respond to different types of music and dance through participation and discussion.

-Participate in teacher guided music and movement activities.

Leaf Specimen Collection - Have separate containers for different types of leaves, coniferous and deciduous. This can also be used for different colors as well.

Standard - 10.4 PK.A - Demonstrate coordination of body movements in active play.

-Move and stop with control



Incorporating Nature Into Gross/Fine Motor Experiences

- Sorting varying shaped/sized rocks into groups - gross
- Stacking flat pebbles into a rock tower - fine
- Using water to create a tornado in a bottle - gross
- Counting the rings of a chopped down tree - fine
- Whistling using blades of grass - fine
- Act out a scene based on what type of weather is outside (stormy = angry, sunny = happy) - gross
- Take a walk and create a stick fort using twigs/sticks/fallen branches - gross



Conclusion

- Incorporating nature in various ways into the classroom is important because it helps promote learning in many ways.
- Bringing elements of nature inside such as leaves, sticks, rocks, sand, dirt, grass, etc will allow a teacher to use them for different projects to help engage children.
- Allowing children to engage with natural materials will teach them respect towards living and nonliving things surrounding them in their everyday lives