



HANDOUT 6

Get Inspired!

Directions:

- Read through the following interactions and strategies from the Caring for the Natural World section of the Preschool Curriculum Framework (Volume 3).
- Circle two interactions and strategies you find interesting.
- Choose another outside resource from the resource table and scan through it for more ideas.
- Using what you have read for inspiration, create a mini action plan incorporating your new and/or expanded ideas into the classroom.
- Find a “sole” mate to share your ideas with.

Interactions and Strategies

Use children’s current knowledge to plan effective curriculum. Attend to children’s spontaneous inquiry and provide them with the materials and tools needed to expand their understanding of a particular topic or phenomena—“Hmm . . . you are wondering if our pet walking stick has eyes. Let’s get a magnifying glass from our science kit and find out.”

Set aside time for outdoor explorations each day. The natural world supports all areas of learning, but the program’s outdoor environment is especially appropriate for children’s dramatic play, gross-motor activity, and scientific inquiry. Children need plenty of time to investigate, repeat actions, and attempt new tasks. Plan the daily schedule to include at least 30–40 minutes of outdoor play every day. Encourage weather-appropriate clothing so that children may explore the outdoor spaces year-round.

Provide children with sensory experiences, especially those with sand and water. Create a generously sized sandbox in the outdoor environment with access to water for children’s experiments. Indoors, offer children a sensory table for similar, small-scale investigation. Supply children with tools for exploration (e.g.,

magnifying lenses, small shovels, buckets, clear containers, drawing tools).

Integrate living things into the indoor learning environment. Choose program pets carefully with thought to the amount of care and attention they will require. Provide a clean, comfortable habitat. Post the name of the animal and information about its care at the children’s eye level. Encourage the children to participate in its care as appropriate. Incorporate child-safe, nontoxic plants throughout the program. Choose plants with different shapes, colors, and textures. For additional ideas, refer to *Designs for Living and Learning* by Curtis and Carter or *Natural Playscapes* by Rusty Keeler.

Observe life in its natural setting. In addition to making observations in the outdoor learning environment, plan frequent nature walks through surrounding neighborhoods. Offer children tools to focus their observations (e.g., paper towel tubes, binoculars, paper, pencils, cameras). Talk with children about how to be good observers (e.g., sitting quietly and giving an animal space to feel safe in its natural habitat).

Model respect and care for the natural world. Be careful to leave wildflowers, branches from trees, and insects and other creatures alone—“I see a caterpil-



lar walking across the sidewalk. Let's all move around so we do not hurt it."

Use descriptive language to converse about the earth and its features.

Encourage children to reflect on the colors, shapes, textures, smells, and size of elements in their natural world. Extend the discussion by sharing your own observations—"This plant has rough leaves, but this plant has smooth ones."

Compare and contrast living and non-living things.

Invite children to observe different objects and living things in indoors and outdoors. Ask them if each is living or not living. Encourage deeper analysis by asking, "How can you tell?" For more ideas on this topic, refer to chapter 3, "Science."

Teach young children easy ways to

conserve the earth's resources. Create an accessible recycling center for the program—"It looks like we have some scraps from our paper-cutting activity. I will put them in our recycling bin so they can be made into new pieces of paper." Repair toys and books where possible instead of purchasing new ones—"I think we can glue this traffic sign back together. Let's try it. If it works, we won't have to buy a new one." Reuse materials in different ways. Read *Not a Box* by Antoinette Portis to children and encourage them to think of creative ways to use recyclable materials. See the "Research Highlight" on page 111.

Grow a garden in the program's outdoor space. Use small plant boxes or



build a large planting bed. Plant seeds as well as seedlings. Document the garden's growth over time with photographs. Encourage children's observations and record them in a garden journal. Discuss why some things grow and why others may not.

Eat fresh produce at snack time and obtain food directly from a local gardener, farmers market, or food vendor when possible. Take time to converse with the children about where the produce came from and how it was grown.

Use books to extend children's investigations of the earth and its attributes.

Some explorations of the natural world may not be possible in the early learning environment or accessible to children in the program. Books allow children an alternative way to explore small- and large-scale phenomena (e.g., volcanoes). Display concept books close to related ongoing investigations in classroom areas.