

Wonder-full programming ideas

Would you would like to jump-start the programming that is happening in your home? Would you would like to incorporate more wonder and inquiry into children's play? Here are ideas and activities to consider:



Thought provokers

Unusual uses –

A person presents a well-known object, like a paper clip or a pen, and people in the group come up with as many alternate uses for the object as possible, beyond the expected, typical one. (Hadani 2015)

The absolutely very worst possible idea ever –

Think of a task (like ways to walk a dog or get home from school). Ask children to present their "worst" idea of how to do it, and then see if another child can come up with an even worse idea. Record the ideas on a paper or white board. Allow children to add ideas as they think of them to keep the exaggeration and silliness going. (Hadani 2015)

Wonder Wednesday –

Create a Wonder Bank or Wonder Jar—write interesting facts on slips of paper and place them in a jar. (School-agers and family members can contribute facts, too.) Each Wednesday pick a wonder-fact from the container, read it and talk about it. Ask the children how they feel about the fact, and what other things it makes them think about. If there is interest, use a tablet, computer, or encyclopedia to find out more or to see related pictures or videos. Be sure to post the fact or a key word on the white board so family members can ask what you wondered about. (Wonder Ground™ 2017)

"I wonder" wall –

Use a white board or piece of flip chart paper to write the things children wonder about. (Edutopia 2015)

Dream basket –

Ask the families in your program and your neighbors and friends to bring postcards or photos back from places they visit. Keep these pictures in a "dream basket" and when children seem bored, encourage them to go to the dream basket and pick out a picture of something they want to dream about. You can also use this as a tool at naptime.



Movement

Walk the talk –

Invite children to cross the room or yard using as many different “walks” as possible. Start with regular walking or crab walking and see what ideas the children suggest. Continue to prompt the group with “What else? What other way can we try? How else can we make our bodies move?” Ask, “Can you slither like a snake? Can you use EZ steppers?” (Hadani 2015)

A-maze-ing design –

Children design a tabletop maze using materials from the recycling bin. Use a ping-pong ball and power the ball through the maze by blowing air through a straw or by tilting a surface. (Hadani 2015)

Culture and art

Experience another culture –

Invite a child or family member to teach the other children about a game, song, ceremony, or food from their home culture. After experiencing the activity, talk with the children about the similarities or differences between that event and things in their home and their family.

Wonder weave –

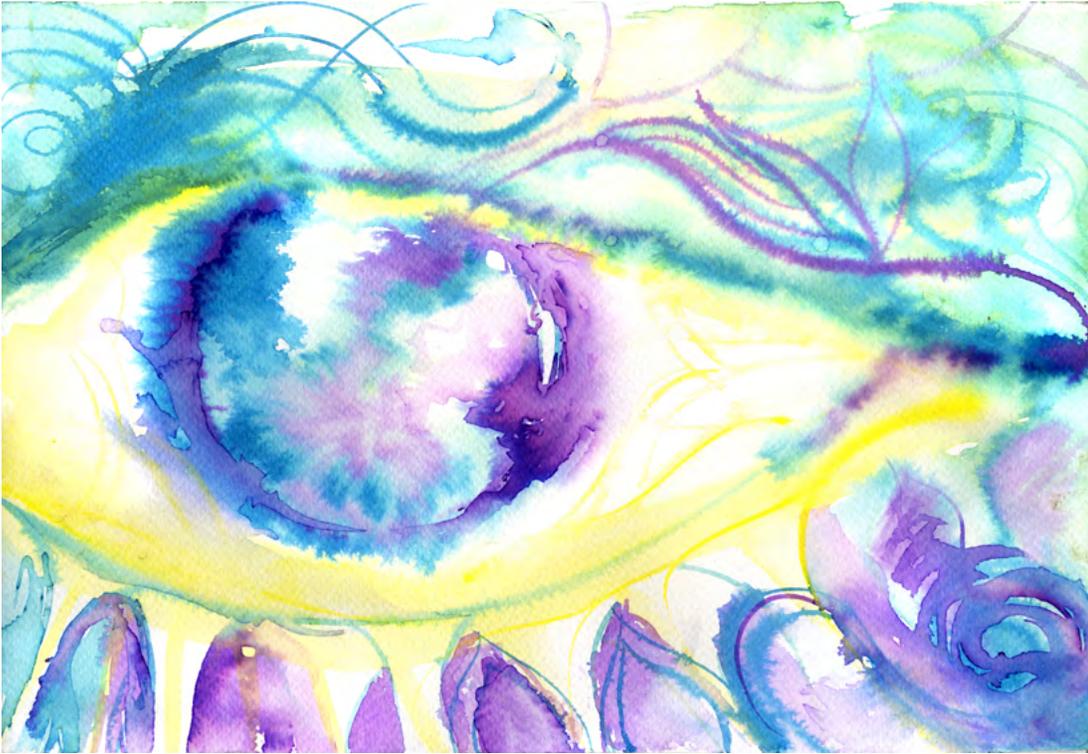
Using old fabric strips or strands of natural materials like ivy or winter jasmine, weave designs through a garden gate’s pickets or the spoke of a wagon or bicycle wheel.



Innovative painting –

Paint using unusual tools like dog toys, hair combs or picks, a wire handle threaded through a wooden spool, cattails, willow branches, bamboo sticks, dried flower heads. Paint by blowing through a hollow reed. Tape a stubby stencil paint dabber to a child’s construction hardhat. Allow the child to dip the dabber in a puddle of tempera paint and try to create paint marks on paper taped on a wall or table. How do these cause children to think about painting and body movement in a whole new way? “Infants and toddlers depend on us to believe in them and to provide them with the materials with which to learn. If we give them only one kind of brush, one kind of paper, or one color of paint, then we are giving them only one way to learn and expecting them to learn everything from it.” To support rich inquiry, children need an abundance of varied materials, high quality materials, “real” materials. (Aubel 2014)

Change exploration parameters



Go big –

Instead of exploring with two cups of flour and a mixing bowl and water, consider 50 pounds of flour and 5 gallon buckets of water. The inspiration and exploration changes dramatically if the scale is increased. (Bos 2016)

What makes it wiggle? –

In advance, make plastic containers (such as empty yogurt containers) full of clear gelatin. Unmold the gelatin blob onto a lunch tray or jelly roll pan. Allow children to explore it in any way they want—squish it, warm it, taste it, add paint or food coloring with eyedroppers, spritz with water... (Bos 2016)

Exploring curved surfaces –

Purchase a flexible curve ruler (sometimes called a shape ruler) at a home improvement or sewing supply store for under \$10 and provide a novel way for children to measure and capture the uneven, curved surfaces that they explore. (Jacobs 2015)

Bring the outdoors IN –

“Using authentic tools from nature turns the ordinary into extraordinary. For example, a plastic rolling pin produces fairly identical impressions on clay, but using Indian corn as a rolling tool produces impressions that are varied, unique, and beautiful.” Also try sticks, buckeyes, or gourds as rolling tools. (Duncan, DeViney, and Harris 2010). Bring snow, autumn leaves, or mud into the sensory table. Allow children to crush herbs with their fingers or a wooden mallet. Rosemary, mint, dill, or lavender provide very different sensory experiences. Dissect a dahlia bloom and notice the pattern of how the petals attach to the center. Look at the flower parts with a magnifier.



Build, use, take apart

Build a bird feeder –

Children can design and build a bird feeder. Once built, hang the bird feeder on a branch of a tree or iron stand and allow children to observe the animals that visit the feeder using binoculars. Identify and chart the bird feeder action. Put children in charge of monitoring the seed level and refilling the feeder as necessary.

Take apart time –

Search flea markets and yard sales for simple kitchen tools, woodworking gadgets, non-electric toys, or simple machines like a non-electric typewriter that children can take apart. Items with gears are particularly interesting. Equip children with safety glasses and hand tools like screwdrivers, pliers, and a flashlight then stand back and observe. Keep a closeable container for small parts. Be aware of safety precautions if infants and toddlers are in the play space. Children can also take apart natural items—cracking open an egg, looking inside a papaya, pulling the pieces off a pinecone and looking for seeds, peeling the bark off a birch branch.

Fabulous fabric –

Ask families to donate old, full-sized bed sheets and see what the children create, how it expands their play ideas. One provider commented, “Sheets are our number one material ahead of paint, ahead of anything else.” (Used with permission by Nurturing Roots, McLean, VA.)



References

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