The Stories Will Remain

Fostering Socio-Emotional Development and Mental Health
An Idea Guide for
Early Childhood Teachers and Parents

RICE UNIVERSITY
School Literacy & Culture
Susanne M. Glasscock School of Continuing Studies
From My Window

*As life has slowed down dramatically in the past 4 weeks, what have you noticed from your window?*

Take in the little things with your children. Enjoy the *What If...?* What if we slow down enough to see the joy in life? What if we enjoy the simple things like taking a walk, playing in our own backyard, or sitting near a window in the quiet.

Today, take a minute to notice what is outside your window and involve your children in this experience. Have them dictate to you or write on their own what they see from their window (literally, figuratively or metaphorically) during this time at home. It might look something like this...

**Let’s take the time to sit at the window and notice the little things.**

**Finish the sentence:**

**From my window, I see...**

Go the next step and have them illustrate the scenario.

We would love to collect this writing into a booklet to be shared with others. For more information, contact Sharon at Sharon.dworaczyk@rice.edu.
Mandala Art

Using found objects or “loose parts” to create beautiful patterns...
and possibly a delightful surprise for an unsuspecting walker!

There’s nothing like time outdoors to break up the tension of a day inside. So, spend a few minutes as a family taking a walk, riding a bike, or finding a green space away from your apartment. While you’re out, look for objects that might be fun to use in creating mandala art – patterns that radiate out from a central point. Leaves, rocks, sticks, flowers and pinecones all work... anything, in fact, that’s safe for children to create with. Bring the items home and create masterpieces there or leave a surprise for others to find as they pass by. Either way, children have opportunities to engage in such 21st century skills as creative problem-solving and collaboration as they practice the essential math skill of patterning.

If outside isn’t an option or mandala patterns are too complicated, create simple patterns (A-B-A-B..., A-B-C-A-B-C... or more complex ones A-A-B-C-A-A-B-C...) using leftover bottle caps of different colors or sizes, spoons and forks, or nuts and bolts.
Chair Ring Toss

Need something to break up the day? Gather the family for a rousing game of chair ring toss!
All you’ll need is a study chair or end table and at least one old margarine tub lid or other container top. Additional lids can lead to more complex rules as noted below.

Preparation

Cut out the center of the tub lid(s), leaving the outer rim to create a hoop of sorts. Then invert a chair or light table so that the four legs point up into the air. A chair creates an angled target, a small table creates one where the legs point straight up... the choice is yours. Be sure to find a space where flying hoops will be welcome!

Game play

Once the playing field is set, players simply agree upon a spot to stand, then take turns tossing! Math becomes meaningful when children keep score. Use lower point values for children who need to practice beginning math facts or choose double-digit point values if children need to work with more complex addition. Create special rules to bring in more complex operations – subtract points if a fellow player covers an existing score or bring in multiplication for awarding twice or three times the points if scoring on the first try. You get the idea... gather together, agree to some rules, and spending some time math-ing and laughing together!
Squiggle Art

Are you looking for a creative outlet for your children that requires nothing more than a piece of paper and any type of pencil or pen?  
*Squiggle Art may be just the thing!*

The concept of squiggle art is simple, but the results can be amazing. Just draw an unusual line on a piece of paper then trade the line you’ve drawn with one created by someone else. The idea is to take that random line and turn it into something wonderful... a character, a scene, or a work of modern art. The one bit of structure is that no artist is allowed to alter the line they receive. Should your family have access to markers, crayons, or watercolors, encourage your children to use those materials as well to supplement the design and increase the amount of time that children spend engaged in the activity!

There are also several ways that you can extend this learning activity.

- If children are interested in completing a variety of squiggle art projects over time, gather the resulting artwork into a book. Bind using staples, tape,
- If you have access to the internet, you’ll find a number of children’s books involving squiggles read aloud by their author or by teachers across the country. If you don’t have internet access, let the squiggle creations serve as inspiration for your child(ren) to write or tell a story of their own.
Make Your Own Puppet Show

Do you need an activity to engage your children for an extended period of time? A do-it-yourself puppet show may be just the ticket! Combine mismatched socks and other simple materials to stimulate creative thinking AND meet educational objectives.

The secret to a great puppet show actually begins long before the puppets themselves are created. The key is a great STORY! So, look around your living space and find small objects that you no longer need... bottle caps, scraps leftover from that mask you just created, mismatched socks, paper bags or sticks that you found on a recent walk. These treasures will serve as inspiration when you ask your children to think about characters they may be able to create from these objects or other things found around the house. Characters certainly do not need to be those currently found in children’s books or movies. Rather, the more imagination-driven they are, the better! Once children have determined whether they will be creating a flying dragon or baby kitten, invite them to think about ways in which their characters might interact. Where might they live? What might they like to do? What problem might arise that would allow the characters to save the day? If children are old enough to write, encourage them to compose the adventure, being sure to incorporate as many puppet characters as they plan to make. If children are younger, ask them to tell you the story and write it down for them, being sure to ask clarifying questions as you go. Realize that you might have to adapt the story later if puppet creation takes an unexpected turn and the dragon becomes a troll!

Once the puppets are created, it’s time to decide upon a stage. While you can certainly use a large cardboard box to create a stage, many of us do not have those hanging around our house at the moment. Instead, simply throw a blanket over a table and let children sit beneath it or position a tension curtain rod between the two sides of a doorway somewhere around doorknob height and have children hide themselves behind the curtain.

Decide upon a narrator, encourage your children to make tickets for audience members, then sit back and enjoy the fun!