

# HOME & CLASSROOM

VOL 07 | 2021

*Toys*



BRIGHTSIDE UP

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# WELL

# CHILDREN AS TOY MAKERS

by Abbe Kovacic



The arrival of the Sears, Roebuck & Co. catalog was met with great anticipation at my childhood home. The Book of Wishes, a massive collection of all manner of fascinating objects, was an essential play tool. With this tool, I made paper dolls. Dolls with extended families, exciting adventures, and every comfort the Sears & Roebuck Company could offer. This activity inspired long hours of thought as I formulated storyboards in my head. Pouring over the catalog, I selected doll size models to fit my narrative. Flipping from page to page, I carefully selected the same model in various outfits. A mother in a stylish dress, silk pajamas, and an evening gown. Carefully cutting the image from the glossy page, I pasted it to a cardboard frame; easily manipulated

imaginations. While it is entirely satisfactory to provide open ended toys such as dolls, balls, dishes, and dress up clothing to children; the focus of this article is on the production of toys. More specifically, the child's production of toys, through the use of open-ended work materials such as paper, cardboard, cloth, wood, clay, and playdough. Of course, children know this intuitively. Station a child at a trash receptacle and it will remain empty. There are countless useful items that are discarded daily; thread spools, matchboxes, broken clothes pegs, boxes, canisters, tubes, buttons, and wood. Cardboard is king. By adding string, cotton batting, and fabric, an empty Kleenex or shoe box is easily transformed to a doll's bed. Making cardboard doll

**The ability to retain a clear mental impression of an object and create new forms from that object has tremendous value to a child's sense of self. Their freedom to manipulate the physical world in order that they might realize an internal motivation inspires confidence only true "makers" understand.**

to independently stand upright on a tripod support. I quickly realized the importance of scale, position, foreground, and perspective in my attempt to find "characters" to act in my play. The images captured my imagination and introduced me to a world beyond my own reality.

The paper doll, it appears, is making a comeback. Last year the New York Times published an article encouraging readers to "tap into their inner stylist and return to a traditional art form: the paper doll." In fact, a google search yields countless examples of how children can download and print paper doll figurines to satisfy their own imaginings. In the 1990's my sons turned to self-fashioned paper dolls after learning that manufactured Power Ranger action figures were not granted entry to my home. These paper doll superheroes morphed with the aid of "security blankets" used as a strength enhancing agent. The act of constructing a toy places the child in control of play – free from scripted television narratives.

The use of open-ended learning materials offers children the opportunity to recreate the world around them and to explore the world of their

furniture and other playthings supports a child's understanding of form and structure. For example, a cardboard box is made of thick paper stock.

This material is used in shoe boxes, or shipping boxes- even notepads. Corrugated cardboard is stronger. Same material; different design. The fluted cardboard sandwiched between the inner and outer layers provides strength and durability. Measurement and careful use of cutting tools are required; enhancing problem solving and motor development. Scoring is a technique that will aid in creating a straight bend in cardboard. The child will learn the fine line between scoring and cutting – and in the process focus and control. Experimentation takes place as children will use various fasteners to secure two parts of the toy together. Glue, tape, string, and brads yield different results. Who among us has not fashioned a drum or banjo out of tin or cardboard?

The ability to retain a clear mental impression of an object and create new forms from that object has tremendous value to a child's sense of self. Their freedom to manipulate the physical world in order that they might realize an internal motivation inspires confidence only true "makers" understand.

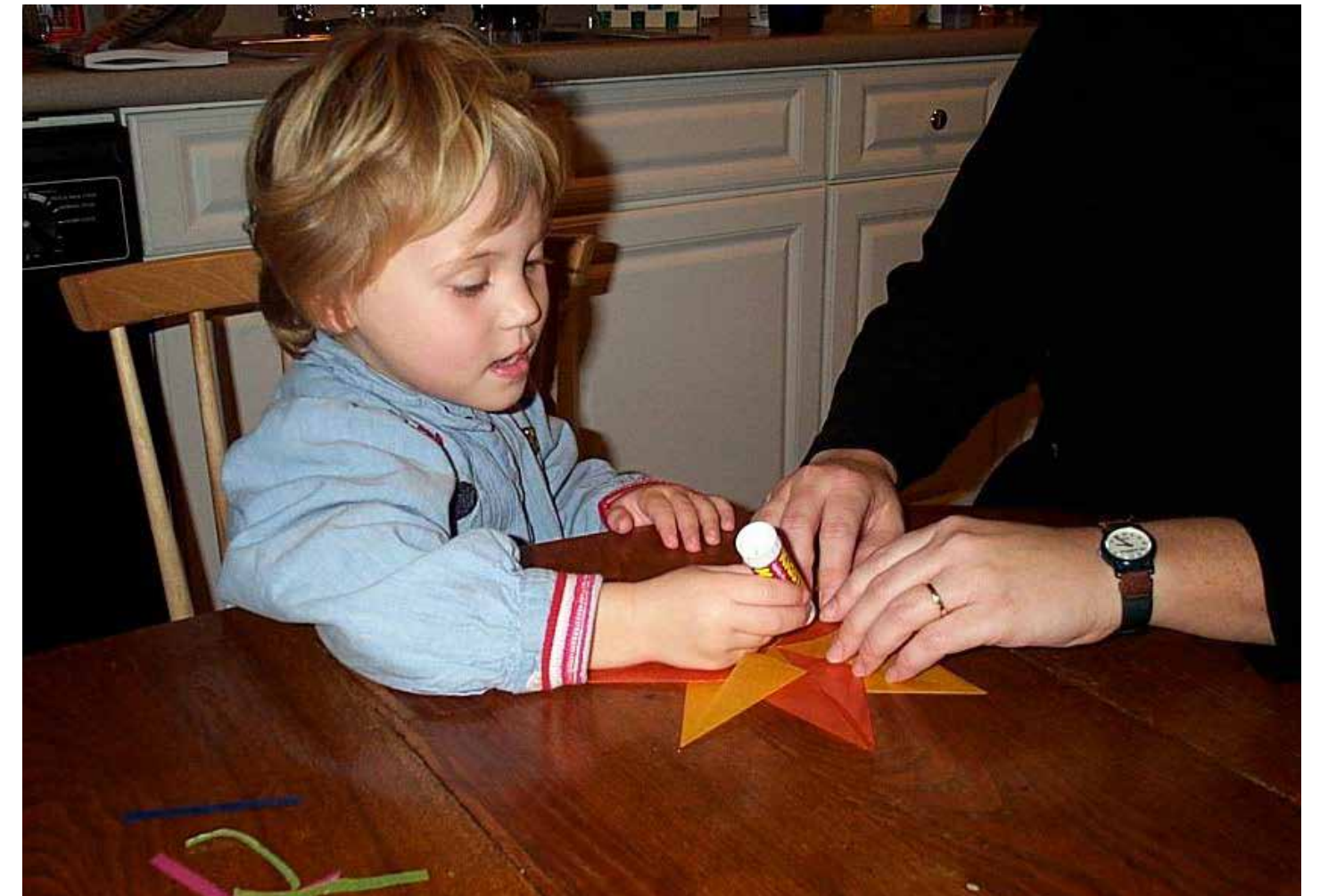
Children become toy makers through observation. The conceptualization of a toy or play object's parts; alone, in relationship to each other, and as a whole. For example, as a child I made doll clothing. This skill was developed after long hours of observing how clothing comes together; how buttons and zippers work, the function of seams, folds, and hems. I pulled the thread from clothing no longer used and studied the parts. I made countless sketches. My prototypes were glued or stapled paper for ease of assembly and reassembly. I had seen my grandmother measure a yard of fabric by stretching it from her nose to fingertip. I attempted to understand scale by doing the same with my dolls. Eventually I developed the ability to see the parts in my mind, speeding planning, problem solving, and production.

The outdoors is a wonderful environment for the production of playthings. As summer rains pool in dirt puddles, childhood adventures take root in mud. Mud pies, mud shelters, mud sculptures and the creation of pits and streams and valleys. Much like mud, clay in the outdoor space lends itself to the creation of playscapes, liberated by the woodland

environment. The combination of clay with treasures collected and scavenged from the outdoors might yield fairy beds, animal shelters, dishes, and flower vases! For children, adult engagement during construction is most important – the final product is simply a tool.

Necessity is the mother of invention. Rachael Boyer, in an article for World Vision, reports that in developing countries across the globe, children are making playthings from objects they find. A homemade soccer ball made with layers of plastic bags and string satisfies young players from Rwanda & Zambia where soccer is the sport of choice. Children in Bolivia fashion a similar ball for use in tetherball. A little imagination can transform basic items into bikes, race cars, or rocket ships!

For many of us, finding the balance between providing too few and too many playthings remains our quest. When next compelled to purchase a toy consider providing the raw materials for toy making.



# THE BEAUTIFUL STUFF PROJECT

BY JESSICA ORELLANA

Young children learn best when they are given intentional opportunities to develop skills through play. Free play or centers is a wonderful opportunity to provide children with hands-on experiences to explore and experiment in a variety of ways. During my time as a Kindergarten teacher, the district prioritized play-based learning and allotted 120 minutes of the programmatic day to free play. The Kindergarten team used the Boston Public School Focus on K2 Curriculum to promote creativity, collaboration and critical thinking throughout centers such as dramatic play, blocks, writing, sci-

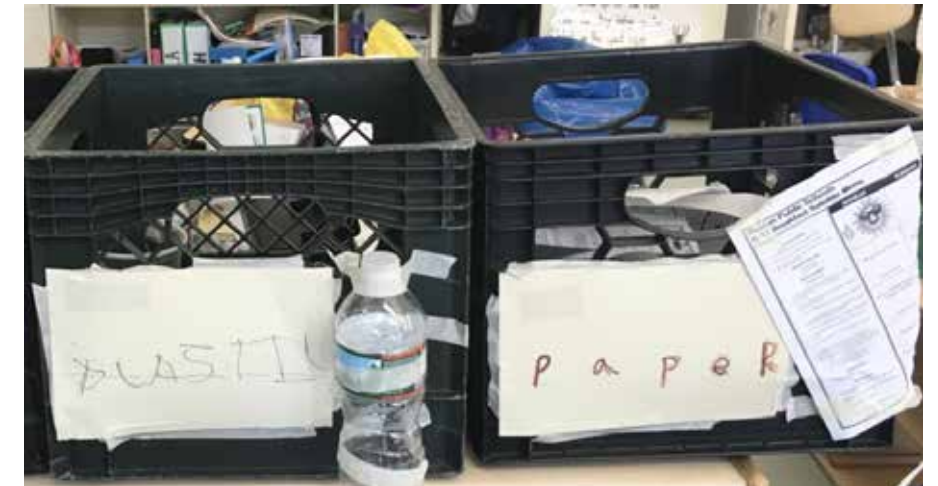
ence and art. One of the themes involved the Beautiful Stuff project, created by Marina Seevak. The Beautiful Stuff Project started off as a thrifty public-school teacher needing free materials for her "junk" center. Years later it has turned into a nonprofit organization that supports access to play and the arts using recycled materials. In this article, we explore how to plan, introduce and facilitate a center inspired by the Beautiful Stuff Project and the lesson plans created by the Boston Public Schools Early Childhood Department.

To prepare, start by sending home a newsletter to families introducing the Beautiful Stuff project and inviting families to collect recyclable materials such as toilet paper rolls, bottle caps and plastic containers. Next, designate a space or shelf in the room to collect the recyclable materials. Consider explaining the concept of donation so that children are prepared to share the items brought in from home. Once there is a variety of materials and enough inventory to start sorting, the center can be set up for children to use.

Place a collection of Beautiful Stuff, trays and baskets for sorting on the shelf or designated area that will be used for this center. Start with a small variety of recyclable materials and add more as needed. Ensure the center is stocked with pencils and paper for labeling the sorted materials. Lastly, set a limit for the number of children that can play in the area at one time. An effective way to remind children is by placing a colorful visual that represents the number. Now that the area is ready, the center needs to be introduced and the limits need to be set so that children can be successful.

Bring a collection of the Beautiful Stuff materials, a pencil and labeling paper to the whole group for a mini-lesson to introduce the center. You might say, "The materials we have been collecting from home are ready to be used during centers. These materials are recycled materials, which means they are being used again. We are going to sort and organize them so that our Beautiful Stuff workshop is ready." With the children, come up with 3-4 positively stated rules for the center. Center rules commonly include sharing, cleaning up and using materials respectfully and safely.

For the Beautiful Stuff center, consider creating specific rules that will help children independently access materials, use the inventory system and collaborate. Once the rules are established, invite children to make observations of the materials, noticing similarities and differences. Collect ideas on how to sort and label the materials. Model using the writing tools to create one label using the children's ideas. For example, "you noticed that the salad box and the water bottle are clear, we eat and drink with them and they have labels. This clear material is called plastic."



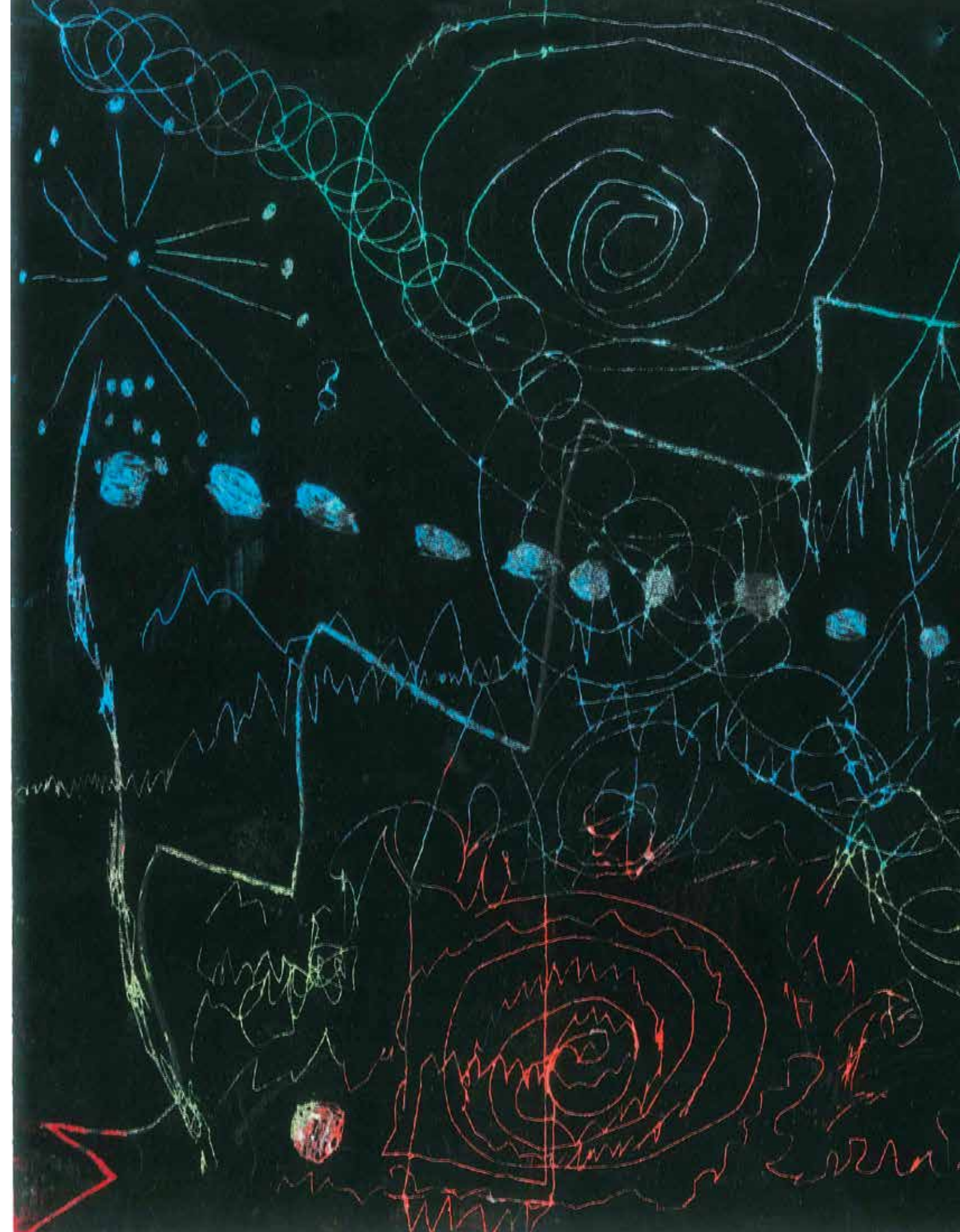
Now the children are ready to sort! When they choose this center, they can begin to sort and organize the materials onto trays or in baskets. Caregivers can facilitate by asking open ended questions to scaffold sorting and labeling: "What do you notice about this material? What is similar or different about these two materials? How will you sort these materials? What could we label this?" By the end of the week, materials will be sorted, and as new materials are brought in, children will have created their own system for organization. Now children can begin the next step, experimenting!

During the experimenting phase children explore the materials without tape or glue.

This is so that each day the materials can be used again to make new creations and children can experiment. As you introduce the Beautiful Stuff center this week, encourage children to use their imagination to think of different ways to use the materials. Ask guiding questions that may foster creativity and flexibility: “What ideas do you have about how to use these materials? How else could you use them?” (Boston Public Schools Early Childhood Department, 2021). Children will play in this center, experiment and then put materials back for the next child. Each day, new creations will be made and taken apart. Consider laying out images for inspiration and taking photos of the children’s work.

After a week of experimenting, children can now begin the composition phase. During this last phase, introduce adhesives such as glue or tape. Have these materials within reach to provide children with the opportunity to attach items together. Guiding questions can help children make a plan and execute it. For example: How do you think you might use the glue or tape? What ideas do you have? What other materials do you need? Here is a final product of a bedroom made from an Amazon box, tissue box, and paper cup and playdoh container during the third week of the process. Watch as children transform trash to treasure using Beautiful Stuff. -

References: Boston Public Schools Early Childhood Department. (2021). Unit 2: Animals and Habitats. Art Studio: Beautiful Stuff. Boston Public Schools.



# EVERY DAY OBJECTS & LOOSE PARTS AS TOYS

By Debbie Markland, Early Childhood Educator, Learn as You Play Blog



All photos by Learn As You Play team

As I thought about the theme for this month's magazine - toys- I was observing how my close friend and website partner, Shann, was using everyday objects with her little one, Devyn. And, as I thought about my favorite objects to use in my classroom, it directed me to my topic for this piece- everyday objects and loose parts are toys! Don't get me wrong- I love a sweet stuffed animal or a fun sorting toy for a toddler, or even Legos, but I feel as if those are not the only way to go. We can save time and money just by playing with REAL things around our home! Let's think about loose parts and everyday items as toys!

Shann is a mom of three, a preschool educator, and founder of LearnAsYouPlay (<https://learnasyouplay.net>). She did a small "experiment" with her daughter, Devyn. She placed two objects in front of Devyn, who was nine months at the time - one everyday object and one toy. Every single time, Devyn reached for the everyday object! It makes sense. Devyn wants to be just like her older brothers, her mom and her dad. She wants to play with what they are "playing" with. It's simple and I feel like this idea should be practiced more often. In an article on [childfamilyblog.com](http://childfamilyblog.com),

the authors (A. Lillard and J. Taggart) state: "Young children prefer play based on real life. We have explored children's activity preferences by questioning preschoolers, aged between three and six years, in the United States—most of them white, middle class, and well-versed in movies, toys, and video games that focus on superheroes and fantasy. When asked whether they would rather do pretend play or real activities, a firm majority preferred the real activities to their pretend alternatives." So, it's not just babies and toddlers. Shann says, "I can hand her [Devyn] anything from the kitchen while I cook and she will be completely engaged with it while I am cooking. She loves to "help" with laundry. She will stop whatever she is doing to come over and play with the clothes as I fold."

I also witnessed this preference in my PreK classroom. I would purposely put real-world objects in the kitchen dramatic play center. Why use a small unrealistic plastic spoon, when you can use a real spoon? Whatever conclusions or lessons students were naturally observing, were real-life lessons. For example, they were learning that metal utensils do make noise as you put them on the table, so if you don't want to

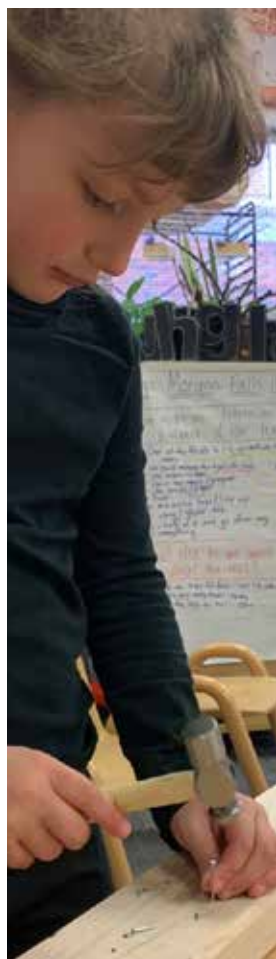
make noise then you need to set them down gently. On our playground, we use real shovels-metal ones, not plastic. They are sturdy and children learn that they are heavy and that they have to concentrate when they use them. On our playground, children play with real ladles and pots and pans. I also LOVE using real hammers and tools!

Let's embrace this idea, and encourage parents and educators to let children play with real life objects. After all, they will be using them one day, why not use them now?

I feel this same way about Loose Parts- I love using them! Instead of pulling out plastic bears for sorting- why not use loose parts? Loose parts (often natural) are materials/items that can be moved, carried, combined, redesigned, lined up, and taken apart and put back together in multiple ways. My favorite loose parts are floral stones, tree cookies and bottle caps. But the options are endless. When I am teaching in my classroom, I have found that my students are drawn towards these natural objects much more than purchased plastic items.

Loose parts are catalysts to creativity. The child decides how to use them. Tree cookies may become pizzas and watermelons! Floral stones might become money. They also lead towards problem-solving. When stacking tree cookies, they may not be cut as evenly as prefabricated blocks, so the child has to think about how they can move the cookies around so they don't fall over. They are drawing conclusions on their own.

The benefits of loose parts and real objects and material from everyday life, especially when used as teaching aids are endless. There is not a need to spend money on items to fill your classroom, look around your home, or outside, or the hardware store. With a new eye, think about objects that are around you every day. How can they be used in your classroom? Step away from pretend objects and think about how you can use real objects in your classroom. After all, our children will grow up to use all these things - let them experiment now - they want to be just like you!



# LEARN AS YOU PLAY.NET



# Keeping Science Fun by Making Science Toys

by Mary Miranda

Young children are natural scientists. If we compare the behavior of a young child to that of a scientist, the similarities are rather astounding. Children are very observant and curious about how the world works. They ask questions based on what they have observed in the world, formulate answers for themselves based on their observations, and given the opportunity, will continually try new things to test their ideas. These are the same behaviors practiced by scientists! These behaviors essentially comprise the active steps of the scientific method – observe, ask questions, formulate a hypothesis, make a prediction to test the hypothesis, and perform the test. Yet despite the hidden scientist that lives in every child, children often show a trend of becoming less and less interested in science as they progress through school.

## LAVA LAMP

**Materials:** Empty plastic water bottle with cap, plastic cup, eyedropper, 4 tablespoons baking soda, vegetable oil, vinegar, food coloring, safety glasses

**Directions:** Put on the safety glasses. Sprinkle the baking soda into the water bottle. Fill the bottle about  $\frac{3}{4}$  full with oil. Fill the plastic cup with vinegar. Add 4 or 5 drops of food coloring to the vinegar and swirl to mix the color. Pour the colored vinegar water into the bottle filled with oil until it reaches about one inch from the top. Watch as the colored vinegar forms bubbles, sinks to the bottom and reacts with the baking soda -the exciting lava lamp show begins!

**Here's the science:** The lava lamp toy actually demonstrates several scientific principles. The first is miscibility – the ability of two liquids to mix together. The food coloring and the vinegar are miscible - their chemical structures allow them to mix together. This allows the food coloring to mix completely through the vinegar and change its color. On the other hand, vinegar and oil are immiscible – their chemical structures prevent them from mixing together. So, when the colored vinegar is poured into the oil, the vinegar has to

How can we keep children's interest in science strong and keep that inner scientist alive? We need to keep science fun and interesting, and we need to keep science lessons discovery-based and use active learning techniques. One fun way to do this is for parents and child care providers to make science toys with their children. Playing with a toy is by its very nature a fun activity that will keep children interested and engaged. The toys make science concepts seem more real and easier to understand. It helps the child see that science has a real purpose in daily life and helps children actively discover the way things function in the world. Helping build, and then actually use the toy empowers the child. They control the experience, and they are directly involved instead of passively watching a demonstration - they are the scientists. To get you started, here are the directions for making four different toys, with an explanation of the main science concepts that make them work.

form itself into little colored balls as it passes through the oil. The next principle is density. Vinegar has a higher density than oil – it is 'heavier' than oil for the amount of space it takes up. So, the 'heavier' balls of colored vinegar pass through the oil to the bottom of the bottle, coming into contact with the baking soda there. The final principle involved here is a simple chemical reaction. When the baking soda comes in contact with the vinegar, the chemical reaction that occurs releases carbon dioxide gas, initiating the lava lamp motion. Since the gas is less dense than both the oil and the colored vinegar, the gas floats up through the oil, but some unreacted colored vinegar carries along with it to the surface. The gas/vinegar bubble pops when it breaks the surface of the oil, the colored vinegar ball sinks back down to the bottom of the bottle, and once again comes into contact with the baking soda. This of course starts a fresh chemical reaction, and the fascinating lava lamp action repeats. It will continue until there is no more unreacted baking soda and vinegar.

## HOVERCRAFT

**Materials:** Old CD or DVD, balloon, pop-top style cap from a water bottle, a 2-inch section of toilet paper tube cut from top to bottom, a very clean and smooth 'gliding surface' such as a floor or tabletop, hot glue and glue gun

**Directions:** Squeeze a ring of hot glue around the bottom rim of the pop-top cap. Center the cap over the CD hole and press down hard to attach it, making sure that the glue has made a complete seal between the CD and the cap so no air can escape. If necessary, squeeze more glue around the edge of the seal. Make sure the pop-top is in the open position. Blow up the balloon, and twist the neck to hold the air in, but don't tie a knot in it. While keeping the neck twisted, stretch the balloon opening over the pop-top of the cap. Open the toilet paper tube section and close it around the entire pop-top, to form a collar. The purpose of this collar is to support the balloon. Place the hovercraft onto your smooth flat gliding surface and gently release the balloon twist. Give it a very light tap and off it glides!

**Here's the science:** Your hovercraft craft in action provides a great demonstration of friction. Friction is a force that decreases the ability of two objects that are in contact with each other to move. If you place a CD on the floor and give a small tap, it will move, but the forces of friction keep it from moving very far or very fast. If you want it to go far and fast, you have to give it a tap that is strong enough to overcome the friction forces that are trying to keep it in place. Friction exerts different degrees of force on different materials; for example, it affects air to a lesser degree than the material on a floor or table surface. In the hovercraft, when the pressurized air in the balloon forcefully escapes through the hole

in the CD, it spreads out under the CD, creating a cushioned air barrier between the CD and the gliding surface. Since air is less affected by friction than the floor, the hovercraft can now glide smoothly at a faster rate and for a longer distance and with a lighter tap of your finger than it did without the balloon. Be aware that any imperfections or debris on the gliding surface or the CD will increase the force of friction. So, choose a smooth CD and the smoothest, shiniest gliding surface possible.

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## COLOR SPINNING TOP

**Materials:** Drinking glass, small piece of poster board, thin pointed item to use for the top's spinner (coffee stirring straw works well), markers in red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple, scissors

**Directions:** Invert the drinking glass onto the poster board and trace around the top to make the circle for your top. Cut out the circle. Use the markers in rainbow color order to create equal sized color wedges in the circle. Poke the spinner point through the center of the circle and move the circle up the stem until the lower spinner length is about an inch and the top portion of the spinner is 2 or 3 inches long. To make it work, just grasp the top of the spinner and quickly twirl all those pretty colors around. Surprise! Is that what you expected to see?

**Here's the science:** Isaac Newton used prisms to slow down the rate at which white light travels, causing it to separate into the individual wavelengths of the colors that it contains. This proved that white light, which is how our eyes perceive normal sunlight, is actually a mixture of all the colors of the spectrum. The toy top we just made, with its specific arrangement of colors, is also called a Newton's Disk. A Newton's disk proves the same thing as Newton's prism experiment, but in the opposite way. Instead of slowing down white light so that it separates into its component colors, it takes the separated colors and speeds them up; causing our eyes to blend them all together, so that the color of the spinning top returns to a whitish color.

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## BAKING SODA ROCKET

**Materials:** 20 oz. plastic water bottle, a cork sized to fit the opening, 4 long plastic straws or sticks, duct tape, various construction materials to create rocket nose and fins (optional), 1 Tablespoon baking soda, 1 Kleenex tissue, 1 cup vinegar, funnel, and safety glasses.

**Directions:** Do this outside! First, find a flat place in the middle of the yard where you can launch the toy rocket. Stand the bottle upright. Use duct tape to tape the 4 straws for legs around the side of the bottle; they should extend about two or 3 inches past the top of the bottle. Tape fins and optional rocket parts/ decorations to the bottle if desired.

Use the funnel to pour 1 cup of vinegar into the bottle. Drape the tissue over the top of the bottle, and gently push it down about two inches into the bottle. Hold the tissue sides at the top of the bottle so that the whole tissue doesn't go inside. When finished with this step the tissue should look like a pouch suspended about an inch above the vinegar. Carefully pour the baking soda into the tissue pouch. Continue to hold the sides of the tissue while you firmly insert the cork into the bottle. Put on those safety glasses, then quickly turn the bottle over, give the contents a swirl, and stand it on its legs. Step back quickly, and wait a moment while the gases build up, and then BAM, "Houston, we have liftoff"!

**Here's the science:** The rocket flight gives an exciting demonstration of two scientific principles. The first is the same chemical reaction explained earlier with the lava lamp. The vinegar and baking soda react to form carbon dioxide gas as a by-product. The cork on the bottle prevents the gas from escaping into the air; as the volume of gas increases, the pressure in the bottle behind the cork also increases, until it becomes so great that it forcefully pops the cork out of the bottle. At this point, another scientific principle comes into play - Newton's Third Law of Motion. Newton's Law states that if an object exerts a force against another object, that object will exert a force equal in strength but opposite in direction upon the first object. In short, for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. In the case of the rocket, as the gases forcefully eject downwards out of the rocket, a force equally strong is exerted in the opposite direction, and the rocket is launched upwards into the air.

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While simply making and using the toys is an educational and enjoyable experience for both you and the children, remember that science is not just following the procedure directions, like following the recipe in a cookbook. Science is more dynamic. The real science is in the thinking that takes place as you progress through the project. Make sure to model the thinking process for your child by thinking and wondering 'out loud' as you make your toy together and try it out.

Use the scientific method steps mentioned in the beginning of this article as a guide. Ask children questions about what they notice, and state out loud what you notice – that's the 'observation' step. When I tried out my rocket ship, I observed that it only flew up two feet, and that some of the foam came out

before lift-off. Wonder out loud why things happened the way they did and leave time for children to express the things they are curious about – that's the 'ask questions' step. I wondered why my ship did not fly higher. Encourage children to share their ideas and explanations regarding their observations; that's the next step, 'formulate a hypothesis'. For my disappointing rocket ship flight, I hypothesized that my rocket ship only went up two feet because some of the gas needed to provide a more powerful lift-off had leaked out of the bottle. Ask children open-ended questions to help them figure out a way to test their ideas; to 'make predictions', the next step in the scientific method. To test my hypothesis for the rocket ship, I predicted that if the cork is pushed tighter into the bottle opening, then the rocket will fly higher.

Finally run your tests, the last step of the process. Afterwards, you can discuss what you have observed and make conclusions as to whether or not your explanation or hypothesis was correct. When I tightened the cork in the bottle the rocket did indeed fly much higher, confirming that my hypothesis was true.

If your test shows that your hypothesis was not correct, no worries! The best thing about science is that a 'no' answer is just as important as a 'yes' answer! You will have just proven that something is NOT true, so that other scientific experimenters like yourselves will know not to try that. Pat yourselves on the back for this important discovery and return to step one – discuss what you observed during your experiment, then

ask questions, formulate your hypothesis, make your prediction to test that hypothesis, and run the test. In this fashion, simply making one toy could easily yield a weeks' worth of scientific discovery explorations.

The toys I've described here are just to get you started. Visit your library for fun science activity books that include experiments in the science areas of greatest interest to your children. Searching the internet will yield dozens more options for you to explore with your children. Just keep making those science toys, keep playing with science, keep asking children questions, and keep making science fun. Keep that natural scientist alive in your children!



# MMMA

## mindful moment

with Kim Polstein, LMSW

### GET GROUNDED

Be present in *this* moment.

Mindfulness is simply about focusing your awareness to the present moment, accepting this moment and all that comes with it as it is. Today we practice a truly mindful moment.

Take a moment to get grounded. You may choose to set a 1 or 2 -minute timer, or not, whatever feels best for you. Close your eyes or leave them open, not focusing on anything in particular. Find a sense of grounding here. Breathe deeply into the base of your lungs, feeling your belly rise and fall with each slow, clean breath. Maybe you plant your feet firmly on the floor, maybe you lie down. Notice the thoughts that come into your head and simply acknowledge them. Don't do anything else with those thoughts, they'll be there later. Right now, just let them in and let them pass. Notice how your body feels and what emotions may come up for you.

Know that exactly what you are right in this moment, is exactly what you need to be.

When you're ready, return to the external world around you. Bring with you whatever it was that allowed you to feel connected and grounded as you move through the rest of your day. ⚡



*AN INTERVIEW STYLE PODCAST WITH CHILD DEVELOPMENT EXPERTS WITH HANNAH & RACHEL HOME & CLASSROOM*



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# What Makes Story Stones Shine

By Wendy Sullivan, Early Childhood Educator

If you think back far enough, we all remember a favorite story or book. That special story that caused a party in your mind, made your ears hungry and your eyes race from one page to the next, even when you knew what was waiting for all of your senses on the next page. My most memorable favorite was *Howdy Doody and the Flub-a-Dubs*. I enjoyed it till the pages, spine, and covers were worn and taped and yellowing. I remember asking my mom questions about the story as she was trying to exit my dark room. This is the moment where Story stones can shine! Any character can be free to jump off of paper pages into the hands, hearts and minds of young readers as they build new adventures, or extend a beloved story.

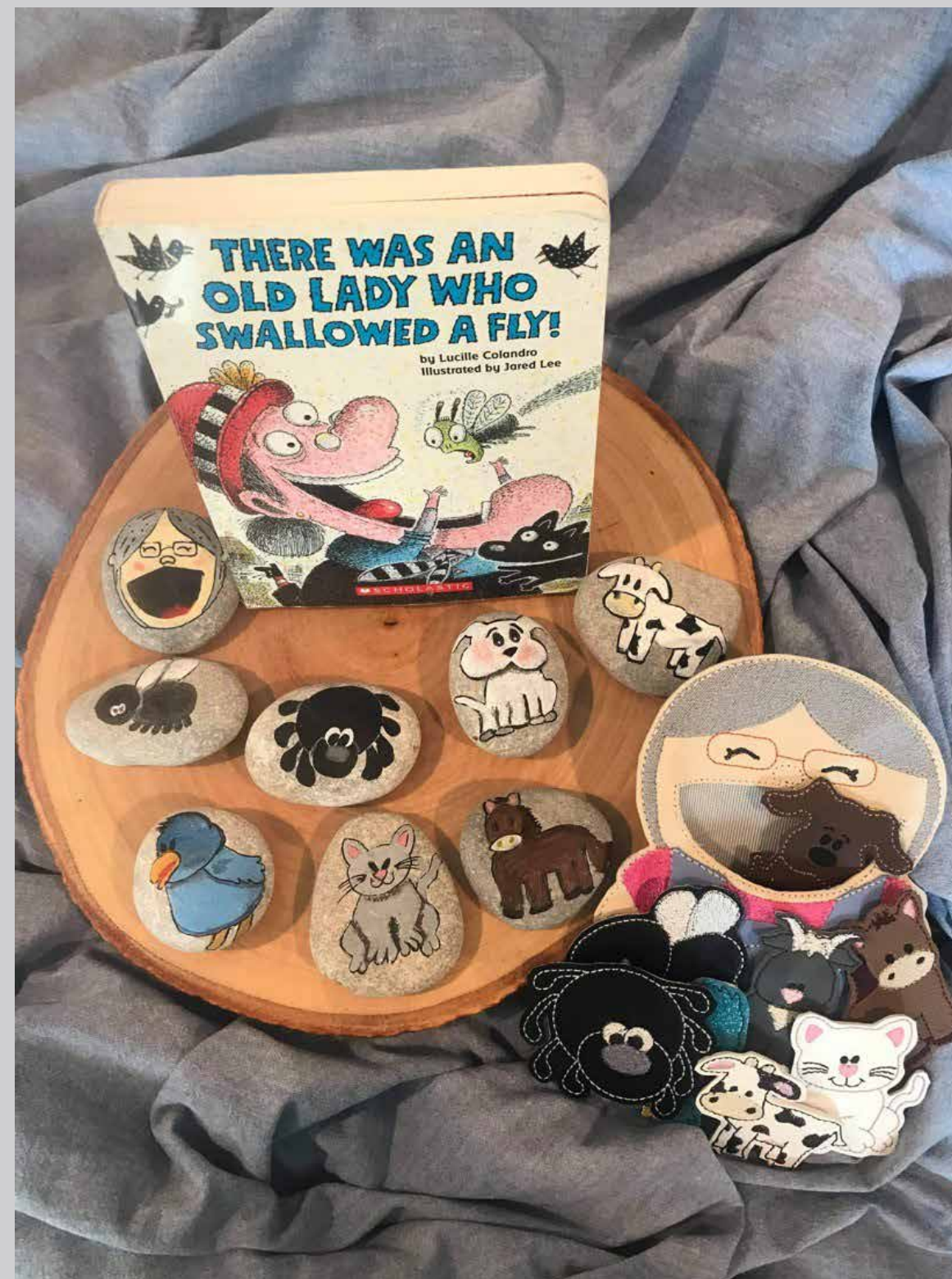
You do not need to be an artist to make story stone magic happen. You do need to be a collector of large flat rocks, or know a few toddlers who could help find some. They are born to be collectors of all things. To be honest, I ordered my stones and a set of paint markers from Amazon to get me started.

Story stones can be painted with pictures of familiar characters or random items that children recognize and that might inspire them to build a story. Animals, vehicles, a birthday cake, balloons, trees, a rainbow, different forms of weather, faces with feelings or planets all are great stones to start with. The sky is the limit!

Both of my grandchildren adore *I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly*. We've enjoyed many versions in hand or online. They had exhausted the puppets we have and they were eager and ready for more. The over and over-ness

of their requests nudged the howdy doody and toy maker in me! I ordered my stones and rock markers and then put my daughter, an artist, to work. Washing and drying the stones was a fun side activity in itself. The illustrations used in our copy of the book at home were simple and easy enough to trace and recreate. A penciled outline, to start with, was helpful in keeping the character centered on the stone and also made the more specific characters more easily recognizable. Young children benefit greatly from watching their caregivers creating art. My daughter worked while our 2 little ones checked in occasionally. If you're not feeling confident about painting, I've seen sets made with pictures cut out of magazines and decouped onto stones. Modge Podge (also on Amazon) was used to seal the paper to the stones. No matter what medium you use, I encourage you to put out some stones for little ones to paint or decoupage along with you. We do intend to seal the stones, but honestly, they were whisked off the table and were in hand as soon as they were dry. They haven't had a moment to rest since. So many new words, songs and ideas filled the air immediately.

I hope my reflections inspire you to make your first set of story stones. At home here, they are a welcome set of open-ended manipulatives, but in a week they may be used for a fun scavenger hunt outside. The next set I have in mind is an alphabet set made on smallish child safe pebbles that my youngest can use for alphabet practice and my soon to be 1st grader can spell her sight words with. I have a nice set of stamps that I think will work well. This, and where ever you are, is where story stones can shine! Enjoy!



# REFLECTIONS FROM FORMER CHILDREN

BY HEATHER SWEET

BY HEATHER SWEET

CHILDREN

FORMER

FROM

REFLECTIONS

**W**henever I hear the word play I immediately transport back to a time in my life when all my focus and energy was involved in imaginative activities. My first eight years of life I lived in a home that was located across the street from a dairy farm and in front of an apple orchard. It was a time where I was able to play outdoors for long periods, regardless of the weather. I remember feeling powerful in my investigations of the hoof prints in the lawn left from the cows and pigs that got loose and ran through our yard. I remember feeling tall when I would climb up high in the trees looking down on the tiny world below. I remember feeling needed when I cared for a litter of kittens that had been dumped in a box in our front yard. I remember feeling like I made a difference setting up my dolls with books, paper and pencils; teaching them spelling, math, and science. I remember feeling proud of the doll house I created out of four Xerox boxes I had stacked and attached together to make a four-story town house complete with carpeting and spiral stairs. I also made furniture out of clothing, socks, and recycled materials.

All of these play experiences shaped me into the intelligent, creative person I am today. It helped me make deep connections with the world around me as I saw, learned, and observed how I fit in it. I wonder how others remember the play they engaged in when they were children. I asked various teachers in our area to recall their childhood play activities. I asked them two questions and here are their answers.

## *What types of play activities did you engage in as a child? What did you make as a child to use in play?*

*"As a child, some types of play that I engaged in were the following: playing house, playing dress up, pretending to be a princess, pretending to be a teacher or a cook, playing with Barbie's and dolls, among other similar types of play activities."*

*As for creating materials used for play, I sometimes would use felt to make puppets, find objects to make sounds or music such as an empty tissue box with a rubber band, and would make up different, strange drink concoctions to serve while playing restaurant."*

*-Sarah Sustad, Pineview Preschool*

*"Growing up, my siblings and I engaged in a lot of outdoor and imaginary play. We would ride our bikes or scooters, swing on the swing set, draw with chalk, and run around the backyard playing tag games. My sister and I would play school or house often. We would also play with Polly Pockets, LEGOs, Little People, and American Girl Dolls."*

*While playing outdoors we would use sand and water to build sandcastles and mud pies and then would use sticks, grass, and rocks to build other things. We made paper dolls to play with and I even sewed doll blankets with my grandmother to use during play. I often used extra fabric that we had laying around our house to use for dramatic play with our dolls (it was used for blankets, clothes, tablecloths etc.)."*

*-Emma Jones, SCAP Head Start*

*"I used to love being read to as a kid. My parents always read to me, Disney books, or the Eric Carle books. My favorite was Make Way for Ducklings. I also had a tea set so I would set the table and play tea party with my stuffed animals or my best friend Krissy. There are plenty of pictures of us playing dress up and playing with the tea set. I used to listen to a lot of music too. I listened to Louie Prima, Rogers and Hammerstein, and Frank Sinatra. My dad danced with me as a kid; so this was also one of my favorite pastimes. He also enjoyed watching me dance around in the living room. As I got older, my dad would dance with me to the Beatles or Bruce Springsteen, music was always playing in the house.*

*As a child, I didn't really make a lot of things to use in play. There definitely may have been a time where I made a menu for my dad or mom to use when I was doing teatime. I did love to draw pictures for my mom at preschool; the refrigerator was typically covered in artwork, and my mom saved everything in different boxes. These boxes are full of my artwork from all different grades over the years."*

*-Gaby Andrea, ACAP Head Start*

*"We played outside a lot. My sister and I did a lot of physical, gross motor play. We used the trampoline, played on the swing set, and ran around! During the warm months, we were outside more than we were inside. During the cooler months, we still went outside but our activities varied based on the weather. We went sledding and built snowmen and forts in the winter, and raked leaves in the fall. I remember doing much more outside for play than inside!! I can also remember playing with baby dolls and having tea parties with my sister. She is 3 years older than I am so we played together a lot.*

*We played with anything and everything. We did some arts and crafts on rainy days, mostly coloring. However, one of my favorite things to do in the summer was press flowers with my flower press."*

*-Megan Rockwell, Lifeworks Community Action*

*"I played a lot of house, with family and friends and with baby dolls. I also played with a dollhouse. I would rather have danced and sang around the house than play. I was an only child and grew up with a lot of adults around, and not many children.*

*In play as a child, I used blocks and sticker people. I would use the dress up dolls from paper or stickers in my dollhouse with the dollhouse toys. I also used a lot of playdough and made different things with that."*

*-Erica Romeyn, Fulmont Head Start*

# A How to Guide for Collecting and Storing Recyclables

Lauren Cohen, MA, Creative Director at the Wonder Room

At the Wonder Room, we had a group of preschool children spend a few class sessions pretending to fly on a plane. They had set up chairs in two rows and eagerly took turns being the pilot. A few children had some direct knowledge from taking trips or from picking up family at airports. Others had seen planes in the sky but had no personal experience. We thought that our collection of recyclables might hold some promise to continue the conversation about air travel and to deepen their knowledge and offer a child-led, open-ended and creative outlet for this interest. We know that children are able to enter these activities at their own developmental level and that they will have multiple opportunities to develop physical, academic, and social-emotional skills at their own pace.

There are tons of everyday objects coming through our homes, schools and offices that make excellent and free supplies for children's exploration and creation. It's hard to know what to save, where to save it, and how to make it available to children without creating chaos, mess and overwhelming them. A few guidelines have made this process manageable in our art space and classroom.

## Only save **SOME** things:

1. *There are things you have a lot of.* These are great to save because building things with a standardized unit size is fun (stacking! lining up!). You'll have enough for the children to continue to refine skills and practice new ideas with the same materials over time and you'll have enough for full groups and classes of students.

Things in this category:

- Bottle caps (of all sizes and colors): Bonus here is that they are quite small and can be used as loose parts and sorting activities. Also, they can be returned to the recycling supply afterward.
- Small sturdy boxes: We like saving small toiletry boxes from hotels, K-cup boxes, milk cartons, jewelry boxes and berry or tomato containers. You can decide what your size cut-off is for this type of box. We do save larger boxes and shoe boxes for special projects but small boxes don't take up a lot of room and are fun to work with.
- Rounds: beyond toilet paper and paper towel tubes, think about the inside cardboard from masking and duct tape, Scotch tape centers, empty spools and empty ribbon spools.
- Interesting papers and cardboard: corrugated cardboard and paper packing materials, mesh bags and corner protectors from appliance packaging.

2. *There are things that are so fabulous you just want to see what the kids will do with them.*

Things in this category:

- We find lots of old board game pieces (we love Jenga blocks, checkers, chess pieces, Monopoly houses and decks of cards). Always salvage what you can from old games and games that are missing pieces and can't be played as intended. Garage sales are a treasure trove of these items.
- Beads, buttons, rhinestones, ribbons
- Partial sheets of stickers and labels, special papers

Store like items together. Use a bin or paper bags to sort the things you intend to keep. Tiny things can be stored in plastic takeout containers so the contents are secure yet visible. Have a bag designated as your "inbox" to toss all of the new materials until you have time to go into your storage space to sort them properly. Once the inbox is full, take the time to sort before collecting more. For a small group, one paper bag is a big enough inbox. For a child care center, you may want to use a large plastic tub.

Think about what topics and types of play your children are currently interested in. Once you have that in mind, you can go into your supply center (which could be anything from a collection of four paper grocery bags under the bed to a closet full of Rubbermaid bins) and pull out supplies to create "an invitation." The invitation is a curated collection of items that you think might be interesting to the children and their interests.

When putting out an open ended project like this, we don't know what our children are going to choose to create. We know that they have been spending a considerable amount of time playing and talking about air travel and that we've read books and added props to support that play to our block and dramatic play center. We don't know if on this day they'll want to create airplanes or an airport or a luggage carousel (or something else entirely)! We don't need a matched set of supplies for each child. They are each going to explore the materials and then choose to work on their own or together to create something uniquely theirs. We want enough supplies for the children to all be able to work and use similar supplies but not so many as to overwhelm. At this point we will start thinking about what table or workspace we will be using to set out the materials and which trays and containers will hold the supplies in a way that they are accessible and inspiring. We also want to be a step ahead. We'll pack ourselves an extra supply kit so that while the children are working, we have a few extra things that we think *might* work but either aren't necessary for the beginning of the project (aka might be distracting at the start) or may work depending on which direction the kids take once they get started.

We also need to set out the tools that children will need. In some cases, we start with scissors and tape and add mark making supplies afterward (whether it's markers, sharpies or paint). Children with more experience can have a wider variety of tools from the get go. When we can, we use tape instead of glue. It's less messy, more reversible and is a great strengthener for fingers, hands and wrists! Also yarn, chenille stems, twist ties, zip ties and brads can make good attachers.

Once the children see the supplies, their imaginations will soar. Try to listen more than talk at this point. It's amazing to see how they work through ideas either alone or in groups. They will need to pick up and play with and arrange pieces before they know exactly what and how they are going to attach, draw on and otherwise decorate their work. At first, with play like this, when children are unaccustomed to the freedom of the work, they may try to hoard/gather what they think are the most highly prized items. That's why we like to have lots of similar items at the start. As you do more of this type of work, though, you'll see that children have more confidence in their own ideas and less reliance on what might be considered "best." You'll find more variation, more collaboration and lots of interest and sharing of ideas. Give it time, and always start with plenty of similar items.

Once the children are deep into their work and we have been listening to their ideas, we see if the extra items we have set aside are the right ones. We have time to make changes, or perhaps introduce the other materials the next day. Bringing out new items based on the children's ideas is a way to extend their interest, expand their knowledge, and add complexity to their original ideas. Sticking with a project for a few sessions while adding supplies allows kids to try something different, add something new, jump in where they were initially unsure and really hear and see what their peers are thinking about. Often we find that as the initial building winds down, children want to dictate stories, record themselves talking about their work and add their own writing (signs, descriptions, faces, windows).

During snack time and circle time, you may like to bring out a few items from your supply and have the kids discuss what types of things they think the item could be used for. You'll find that having these discussions separate from the creating process lends an open perspective and will give you some ideas too.

In the end, many of the children chose to use flat cardboard pieces to make trays to hold airplane meals (using food from our dramatic play area). Someone used a toothpaste box to make an airplane. Another child was interested in the escalator in the airport and worked on a contraption that had an inclined cardboard plank. We talked a lot about what things we bring with us when we travel and what food we like to eat both at home and when we are away. We found a book about the trucks at the airport that help load the luggage, gas and food supplies onto the planes before takeoff. The flexibility of the objects in our recyclable collection allowed the children to create a project that was meaningful to them individually and as a class.



Separating and sorting the materials helps children see opportunities. Having access to the full set of supplies without any order can be overwhelming. The arranged materials (b) creates order and encourages thoughtful creativity. It's helpful to keep tools separate from supplies when possible (c). This arrangement of supplies is conducive to a house building project we've done many times. We have set up empty dollhouses on a separate table and children use the supplies to create items for the houses. Alternatively, each child has a shoebox to make their own room and the boxes can be used individually or stacked to create a house or apartment building.



House making in action



All images by the Wonder Room



A bag full of supplies is good for storage, but it's important to lay them out mindfully as an invitation for children. Cardboard, small boxes and containers can be used at the table and throughout the year in different configurations according to children's interests. Most families (and businesses!) create enough recyclables to supply enough for this to be done often in the home, childcare or classroom setting. Children can make objects that they can add to their play.



Some examples of cardboard and small box configurations. The town scenes at the bottom were made in a virtual class so those children did have nearly identical supplies but created on their own at their homes while chatting and sharing ideas on Zoom., The top two pictures show some of the variety created in the classroom.



# ENGINEERING CHALLENGE: BUILD A RAIN SHELTER

By Colleen Sterling

Children are natural engineers when they are building with blocks, gears, magnetic blocks, or other construction toys. They are learning about balance, geometry, measurement, physics and more. I want to encourage you to challenge your preschoolers to think about purposeful designs to solve a problem.

The engineering process (the abridged version for our youngest learners):

- 1) Think:
  - a. Identify the problem – choose something that is interesting to the children
  - b. Brainstorm with children many different ways to solve the problem
    - i. Types of materials
    - ii. Tools needed
- 2) Create:
  - a. Build a plan with the children
  - b. Sometimes we adjust our plan while creating to solve problems
  - c. Test your solution/structure with children
- 3) Share your Results
  - a. How did your plan turn out? (Not all plans work- and that is ok)
  - b. Do you need to make changes to your plan?

The first thing a child needs to take on a challenge is to make sure they understand the vocabulary. First things first, what is a shelter? Shelter is defined as a place or structure that provides temporary protection from bad weather or danger. Ask if they can think of any temporary structures that could protect them from rain. If they have, ask them to describe the shelter and explain how well it worked to keep them dry? I would recommend having large pictures of different types of shelters for children to compare and contrast what materials were used for real-life shelters, for example, tarps for camping, gazebos, forts, and bus stops. Remember to ask open-ended questions like, “Describe this shelter, how did they make it, what materials did they use?” and, “What do all these shelters have in common?” Hopefully, children will realize that a roof and supports for the roof are needed either with posts or walls. They might use different words, and that is ok.

Now for the challenge, to build a rain shelter that will keep your toy dry. When offering a challenge to children, you are providing them with the first step in the “think” stage of the engineering process, but it is helpful for children to repeat back what the problem is.

Materials needed:

- Toys on the smaller side that the children are going to make a shelter for
- Building materials like blocks, Legos, Lincoln Logs
- Recycled materials like craft sticks, straws, paper towel and toilet paper tubes, ribbon, tape, and yarn
- Natural items like sticks, rocks, leaves
- Squirt bottle filled with water
- Be flexible and allow children to add their own ideas for materials whenever possible

THINK: If you are doing this activity in a classroom, I suggest small groups stationed right in your block area. Children may choose to work together or on their own. Help them brainstorm, but try to use open ended questions so that the ideas are coming from the children.

- “What does a shelter need?”
- “What could you use as a roof?”

CREATE: Let the children create their structure. Help children to problem solve so they can create their structure. Try to use questions to help them problem solve, for example, “How can you support your roof?” Try to have them be the one to suggest a change in their plan during this stage, even if you know it is not going to work. This is a great opportunity for children to learn to be okay even if something didn’t work and we often learn a lot when we fail at something. After they have created their rain shelter, let them test it out. Review expectations on how to use the squirt bottle before handing it to a child to test their structure. “Spray the water over the structure.” Ask them to evaluate if their plan worked. Were their toys completely dry, mostly dry, or wet? If you can’t save their structure for the “share their results” stage, it is helpful to take pictures of the testing stage.

SHARE: Just like a real engineer, take the opportunity to have children share the results of their testing with the whole class. Engineers do this as part of their creation process to help expand knowledge and help other engineers optimize their own results. Children can share with a small group of children and family members, or with the whole class. Having the structure or a picture to share will prompt children to remember how they made their rain shelter, if it worked, what they learned, and allow them to reflect if they can make changes to their design.

BOOK EXTENSION: I love to incorporate books into a lot of my activities. I recommend, *Where does Kitty go in the Rain?* by Harriet Zefert. The book provides scientific facts about rain, insects, and animals within a fictional story. A little girl notices it is raining and realizes her cat is outside. She goes for a walk with her mother to find her Kitty. As they look, the little girl asks about the different animals and insects they pass to find out if they like to get wet and why. For example ducks are waterproof because there is oil on the top layer of their feathers, and the rain makes butterflies too cold to fly. At the end of the story, the book asks the reader “What do you do when it rains? This is a great way for children to share their experiences with the rain. After reading the story a few times with the children, I would introduce and discuss various rain shelters and the challenge.

# PLAY

An educator's  
role in curating  
materials

Eileen Mahoney

# TEACHES

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# TEACHERS

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As this issue of Home & Classroom has a focus on the wide variety of toys/materials that are used for learning, it seems fitting to start with a discussion on play. We have often heard the expression “play is the work of childhood” and attribute that expression to Maria Montessori (inspiredmontessoriliving.com). When we talk about Piaget and his ideas, he believed that children acquired knowledge through their “actions on objects” (Feldman, 2019). Mr. Rogers added to this discussion when he said that people talked about children’s play as if it was a relief from serious learning – but for children, play is serious learning (inspiredmontessoriliving.com). For all of us who work with children, we know that play is serious learning. We can see how important this “work” is to children as they have such intense looks of concentration as they play. As educators of young children, we are often asked to defend play – and talk about how play relates to development and curriculum areas.

My life’s work has been spent with children – as a parent, teacher, and teacher educator. In those roles, I have had the privilege of working with children from infancy through middle childhood, and also with the college students in the early childhood education program. We have required courses on Infant/Toddler curriculum, Child Development, and Techniques of Teaching through Play and in our courses the idea of play and the value of play is a part of each course. So, one might ask “what makes something play?” In our Techniques of Teaching Through Play course, we define play as something that children find intrinsically motivating, the activity is free of externally imposed rules, the activity is dominated by the players, there is active involvement, children carry out the activity as if the activity were real, and the activity is pleasurable. One of the major projects in this class is the creation of a “prop box.” The prop box assignment requires the college student to prepare the materials and bring them to their internship site, there they observe the children playing with the

prop box materials. We’ve had bakeries, car washes, laundromats, pizza shops, doctor’s offices and the criteria mentioned above have been observed many times. Through our observations, we can notice what children are processing about their experience, and add more details and materials to further engage the children. Students in the Infant/Toddler class read an article titled, “Why Babies like Boxes Best.” This article supports the idea that children direct their own learning, as the one year old manipulates the wrapping paper and box rather than touch the toy that was in the box. For a one year old, the paper and box afford more possibilities for learning than the toy in the box.

When we think about developmental domains, play certainly fosters development in the cognitive (language), physical, and social/emotional domains. Children are acquiring skills in problem solving, learning new vocabulary and using it in context, manipulating the materials helps with fine motor development, and talking and sharing with other children while they “negotiate” roles is certainly part of the child’s social and emotional development. Vygotsky would tell us that children’s play helps the child process the world they are living in and through play with others, they learn about situations they may not have experienced yet. A colleague told a story to our class about her own children playing after a trip to Disneyland. One might think that the rides and experience with all of the “characters” would have made quite an impression, yet the children came home and played “airplane” and set up chairs as plane seats, and it was clear that the children had listened carefully to the flight attendants as that was the language used in their play!

As teachers, we know the importance of observation and getting to know the children in our care. Swim (2017), the author of the text used in the Infant/Toddler class, discusses the “Three A’s” as “master tools” that caretakers use to learn more about each child. The Three A’s are attention,

approval and attunement. Attachment is the overriding “A” and is clearly influenced by our use of the three A’s. Observation is the critical piece of each “A” as it determines our reaction to the child. When we “attend” we are observing and fine-tuning our responses to the child, and what we attend to matters because it can influence the child’s development. Approval means that we show the child that we recognize their efforts and understand that there is meaning in the child’s behavior. Respect is a part of approval. Another discussion could be had about how we use “praise” but in this context, we are talking about showing approval for something meaningful to the child – for example, their effort in completing a task. The last “A” is attunement and this involves our awareness of the child’s moods, interests, as we gather this information through our observations and interactions with children.

Every student intern class at the college has a focus on observation and collecting data about a child and using that information to inform curriculum. In the class on infants/toddlers, students are expected to observe a child between the ages of six months and 35 months. After a child is identified, the student will write a description of what typical development for that age child might look like in each domain (cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and language). When that is complete, the student actually observes the child and writes down what they noticed about the child in each domain. We ask students to compare what they observed about a child to “published norms” using their text and guides like Developmental Profiles or Ages and Stages.

The next step in this capstone project is for the student to construct or create a material or toy that would be appropriate for that child based on what the student recorded about the child’s abilities and interests. The material is constructed and a second visit to the child is arranged. During the second visit, the student observes how the child used the

material and evaluates if the material is developmentally appropriate for this child. Safety, durability, and appearance of the material are also assessed. Based on the child’s response to the material, students are asked to comment on modifications that might be made to the material for future use.

The purpose of the capstone project is for students to create a material that would be of interest to the child they observed, and hopefully to other children as well. Students use materials that are commonly found around the house, or at a visit to the dollar store, and think of ways that they can repurpose materials for this project. A quick search yields many YouTube videos that demonstrate the use of common materials found in the home and easily acquired and repurposed to be learning games. We have had very clever materials: sensory bottles, animal washing station, construction site, sock babies, and manipulative boards are some of the ideas that students have created for the children they observed.

Assessment is what we do in all of our work with children. Sometimes we think of assessment in a negative way, yet it is assessment that helps us plan appropriately for all children. We observe, plan, implement, and assess. It is a lens that all teachers have, and once we start teaching, we may find that this lens carries over to other areas of our lives where children may be involved. One of the benefits of having a long career as a parent, teacher, and teacher-educator is that my definition of normal has increased over the years. As a beginner in the field, some students may think that children are not developing appropriately and share a concern about a child. One advantage of the Developmental Profiles text is that red flags are identified – and this is an area that we can observe to see how the child develops over time. What I’ve found over the years is a focus on the child’s strengths and the benefit of time can help provide us with a different perspective on children. Having projects where

students create materials for children is generally a highlight of the course. This project certainly makes the “observation-plan-implement-assess” circle tangible for our students.

Early childhood educators can access this course and other early childhood courses at Hudson Valley Community College through in person and asynchronous course work.

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# MEDICAL PLAY

by Desiree Myers, RN



Photo by Yan Krukov from Pexels

Do you remember going to the doctor as a child or having a medical procedure? Do you remember how it made you feel? Whether a child suffers from a chronic illness that requires frequent visits to doctors and hospitals or they just go for their preventative well visits, visiting a medical professional can be a frightening experience for a young child. Let's be honest, some adults are still afraid of going to the doctor. Sometimes the fear is simply due to a lack of familiarity with the equipment used, how it works, and/or why certain procedures are done. How can we help children reduce their fear and anxiety? Through play, of course!

Whether with real or pretend medical supplies, medical play is a chance for children to explore medical equipment and work through their own thoughts and emotions on visiting the doctor or dentist, or any other specialist in an environment where they feel safe. Children can pretend to be a doctor, nurse, or even a patient during medical play. They can act out different experiences with a teddy bear, doll or other toy, and a Band-Aid. These scenarios are a great way for children of all ages to express their feelings, concerns, and misconceptions about medical care in a nonthreatening environment. This play also gives the adult an opportunity to acknowledge the child's feelings and help them learn how the medical equipment works and the purpose behind different procedures, such as immunizations/shots or an x-ray.

Addressing any type of emotion or misconceptions the child may have is a vital part of medical play. For example, maybe the child thinks that getting a shot is solely to cause them pain. This is a perfect time to explain how shots keep us from getting diseases that can make us really sick. Or maybe the child thinks that an x-ray will make

their bones hurt more. The adult can explain that x-rays help the doctor see if they need a cast; and the cast helps the bone heal, so they can get back to playing and doing the things that they love.

Medical play helps get to the bottom of these feelings and helps children learn more about the medical field and why things are done. It is also a great time to practice coping methods for pain/discomfort like breathing or singing a song. All of these strategies and tools can help a child get ready for an upcoming doctor's visit or procedure by helping them feel more comfortable and in control.

The hardest part about medical play sometimes is just getting started. Adults may not know what to say, do, or what equipment to use. Thankfully, it's really pretty simple to get started. First, you'll need a doll, stuffed animal, sibling, or friend to play a role opposite the child, and then you just need some equipment. Toys have come a long way over the years. Fisher-Price or other toy medical kits will have close to everything needed specifically for medical play. From Barbie doll doctors and dollhouse medical sets, to even dentist Playdoh kits where children can pull teeth, fill cavities and more, there are plenty of options available for medical play.

Popular brands like Lego, American Girl and Build-a-Bear even have medical accessories to go with their bestselling toys. If a family member is a medical professional and has a real stethoscope and other equipment they'd be willing to share, children can also benefit from using the real items they may see when they visit the doctor. Some other things that can be helpful during medical play are real bandages and gauze, surgical gloves, surgical masks, gowns, and hats. Most

can be found online and in stores and are relatively inexpensive. Gloves, masks, hats and gowns are fun to play dress-up with and a great chance for adults to explain why these are used. Once everything is gathered and ready, the children can start their medical play with an adult close by. While observing, some things to look out for are expressions of fear, concern, or not knowing. Below are some helpful conversational tips for adults during medical play.

“I see your patient looks scared. Are they scared?”

“What do you think that stethoscope/object is for?”

“Did that shot hurt your patient?”

“Why do you think the doctor does this?”

“Tell me how you/your patient is feeling.”

“How do you feel when this happens to you?”

“Let’s talk about what we can do to help ease those feelings.”

These are just a few conversation starters that can help the adult dig deeper into what is going on in the imaginative minds of young children during medical play, as well as real doctor visits. If you have a young child or you work with young children, try to remember that they get scared. If you know they have a big doctor’s appointment coming up or think they may be fearful when going to the dentist, let them engage in medical play. If you feel like you don’t have the right equipment, another thing to remember is that common household items can be easily turned into medical tools with some imagination. X-ray machines can be made out of cardboard boxes, bandages out of toilet paper, and more. Websites like Pinterest and Google can be great resources to help you get started making your own medical play items.

Doc McStuffins is also a great children’s television show that can help children learn about medicine and how to handle some of their fears and concerns. Many cell phones and tablets even have medical play apps. There are so many options in our current world to help children learn; and no matter how it is accomplished, medical play lets them express their feelings and learn about medical equipment in a place where they feel safe. As their comfort level continues to grow, it can reduce their anxiety in the future and make doctor’s visits less frightening.



Photo by Amina Filkins from Pexels

# FRITTATA

by Bonnie Schultz, RD

Beautiful to the eye...nourishing to the body...frittata! Any way you cut it, produce patterns appear. The more we look, the more seems to be there as you wash and chop vegetables in different ways. What shapes and patterns do your children discover?

Whatever vegetables are on hand seem to blend well into a frittata. Held together with egg, this versatile Italian dish is tasty any time of day.

## FRITTATA

Serves 8

8 large eggs

¼ cup milk

½ teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon ground black pepper

2 Tablespoons vegetable oil

4 ½ cup vegetables ((Ex. onion, carrot, broccoli, cauliflower, radish, string beans, pepper, peas, potato, zucchini, kale, corn, edamame, mixed vegetables, mushroom, spinach, artichoke, roasted red pepper)

1 teaspoon dried herbs or 1 Tablespoon fresh

(Ex. rosemary, tarragon, chives, parsley, basil, dill, cilantro)

4 oz cheese, grated, crumbled or in pieces (optional)

(Ex. cheddar, feta, Swiss, goat cheese)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

**Measure** ingredients.

**Crack** each egg and **remove any shells**.

**Combine** eggs, milk, salt and pepper.

**Mix** with a fork or whisk.

**Wash** and prepare the vegetables. The hardest vegetables are best cooked first, such as onion and shredded carrot. Tender vegetables such as zucchini slices may be easy to **break into small pieces**. For more hands-on experiences, consider **ripping** leafy vegetables and fresh herbs into pieces.

In a cool 12” oven-safe skillet, **add oil**.

Transfer the skillet to the stove and heat oil over medium heat. Sauté the hardest vegetables, such as onions, until softened (~5 minutes), stirring often. Add additional softer vegetables and herbs. If using shredded potato, add it last since it tends to stick to the pan. Sauté until the potato starts to brown. Remove the skillet from the heat. Spread vegetables evenly in the pan.

Sprinkle cheese, if desired. Pour egg mixture over the vegetables and cheese.

Bake at 350 degrees for about 15 minutes or until the edges are lightly brown and the center is set. Cool about 5 minutes before cutting and serving.

*If you do not have an oven-safe skillet, transfer your cooked vegetable and egg mixture into a greased 9 by 13-inch pan and bake for 20-25 minutes or use muffin tins and bake for 12-15 minutes.*

Buon appetito!

CACFP crediting: 1 egg/serving = 2 oz meat alternative and ½ cup vegetable.

Already familiar with frittata? Looking for something similar and very flavorful? Consider searching Kuku Sabzi recipes, for an herb-rich Persian dish.

Children may be able to help with the **bolded** steps.

# PUPPETRY FOR ALL AGES

By Rebecca DelGiudice, LMSW, MS IMH-DP

Few moments are more magical to a child than a toy coming to life. As the youngest of three, I remember creating puppets with my family out of paper bags, socks, and even popsicle sticks. The decision making, attention to detail, and endless opportunities to create were enough to keep me occupied for hours. The magic of putting on a show never faded; I continue to smile as an adult when I think of the delightful shows we put on as kids. Puppets give voice to children's favorite characters and create a stage for their inner world to be explored. There is a reason why the late legend, Mr. Rogers' puppet, Daniel Tiger, earned his own spinoff series.

Young children are primed for magic because their brains are still developing. Determining what is real and what is imaginary is a skill that comes online for most children around five years old (New York State Early Learning Guidelines, p. 136). For toddlers and babies, that means that their response to puppets is rooted in their felt sense of reality. To them, the talking sock on your hand is a creature with thoughts and ideas of its own. It is only when you remove the puppet and reveal your hand that the child is left to wonder, "Where did my friend go?" For some children, puppets can be an opportunity for pure delight and discovery. For other children, puppets can be a source of fear. Aim to follow your child's lead in play particularly when using puppets.

Adults can create a sense of security and create new relationships with children using puppets. Popular puppets, such as Elmo and Daniel Tiger, have earned their claim to fame for their authentic warmth. Mr. Rogers is a classic example of excellent puppetry, as he approached children with kindness and compassion through Daniel Tiger. His open curiosity to explore difficult feelings through Daniel Tiger made talking about feelings accessible to children in a way that felt safe. For some children, speaking to a puppet is easier than speaking to an adult. It makes sense when you consider the child's developing understanding of the world, themselves, and their relationship to others.

## CREATING PUPPETS

**Sock Puppets** are an easy way to repurpose those lone socks that lost their pair. You can create a sock puppet with your little one or for your little one. Be mindful of using age-appropriate materials as listed below.

**Step 1:** Gather your materials. Pompoms make excellent ears. If you do not have googly eyes, buttons can become eyes. Perhaps most important is your canvas...a sock of your and your child's choosing. Be mindful that you are not using small pieces. Materials can be sewn or glued onto the puppet. Large pompoms, large buttons, and plenty of supervision are helpful here.

**Step 2:** Give choices to your child. Toddlers are developing their sense of autonomy and thrive when given an opportunity to make choices. For example, if you have two different kinds of buttons for eyes...ask your child "Which button? The blue one or the green one?" This is a great opportunity to model language for your child.

**TIP:** Only give choices that you are comfortable with your child choosing. For example, if you are picking socks to use and only want to use mismatched socks, have the available choices ready before you ask your child which sock. If the question is left open ended, your child may feel frustrated that they cannot use their brand-new socks for puppetry.

**Step 3:** Create together. Enjoy developing your puppets' personality with your child. Narrate what you are doing as you are gathering the materials and wonder with your child what you will create together. "I wonder what our puppet's name will be..." is a great place to start. Take turns making choices with your child.

Lead your child through tricky moments such as gluing materials to the socks as this can be difficult with little one's developing fine motor skills. Be hands on and guide your child to create with you. If you are using glue, allow ample time for the puppet to dry and consider choosing a place for it to dry that is within sight of your child.

**Paper Bag Puppets** are another option if your preschooler or school aged child brings lunch, and you have extra paper lunch bags on hand.

**Step 1:** Secure materials. You'll need at least one paper lunch bag (back ups optional for mistakes and additional puppet making). Markers, construction paper, glue, feathers, and scissors are appropriate materials for your preschooler or school-aged child.

**Step 2:** Create together. Paper bag puppets are fun to make because they require minimal assembly. Orient the paper bag so that the bottom of the bag is now the "top" of your workspace. Keep the bag flat while you're working. The bottom of the bag should fold in a way that creates a natural "lip" that will open and close to imitate talking. Give your child freedom to explore their ideas by creating one, two, perhaps even three puppets.

**TIP:** If you're feeling stuck, you can support your child by asking prompting questions such as, "Is your puppet going to be an animal or a person?"

**Step 3:** Practice putting on a show together. Show your child how to operate their paper bag puppet by giving it a try yourself! There is no right or wrong way to create, so long as you are creating together and having fun. Enjoy laughing and sharing the joy of a silly puppet on your hand and practice taking turns as you alternate who gets to be the puppet or lead the show.



References:  
New York State Early Childhood Advisory Council (2020). New York State Early Learning Guidelines. Early Learning Guidelines Revised. [https://earlychildhoodny.org/pdfs/Early\\_Learning\\_Guidelines-Revised-2020.pdf](https://earlychildhoodny.org/pdfs/Early_Learning_Guidelines-Revised-2020.pdf).

**Popsicle Stick Puppets** are a fun spin on puppets for school aged children. Using paper, glue, popsicle sticks and scissors, you and your child can create a cast of characters from your imagination. The only limit is your imagination!

**Step 1:** Plan your creation. For school aged children, you can begin by asking your child to imagine their puppet ahead of making it. Ask them specific questions such as, "What shape will they be? What color eyes will they have? Are they happy, mad, sad?" to help inspire your child. If your child can write, have them write down their idea ahead of creating. This will support their ability to think, plan, and execute a plan.

**Step 2:** Gather materials. Popsicle sticks, paper, scissors, and something to color or draw with are helpful here. Help your child refer to their plan to make sure you have everything you need to get started. Note that larger popsicle sticks may make it easier for your child to manipulate.

**Step 3:** Create together. Allow your child to take the lead and step in to support them as needed. Encourage your child to bring their design to life on paper. Be sure to color first and then cut out your design. Stay flexible and know that it is okay if your child changes ideas than their original plan; flexibility is key to creativity. Practice fine motor skills by allowing your child to cut out their design. Lastly, drop a few dots of liquid glue on the popsicle stick and place the design on top of the popsicle stick. Ensure there is ample room for your child's hand to hold.

## SETTING THE STAGE

Puppet play can take place behind a stage or alternatively, a makeshift stage. Couches and tables are excellent stages for young children to put on a show for you and vice versa. Consider modeling for your child a puppet show with your creations and invite your child to join you in play. Once your child gets the hang of putting on a show, try and follow their lead in storytelling. Puppetry is an opportunity for children to express their innermost world. Embrace their expression by being a respectful audience member. Children will explore themes that imitate life; resist the temptation to change their story and practice listening. Lastly...be sure to celebrate at the end with a round of applause!



# ENHANCING DRAMATIC PLAY

by Jackie Farmer

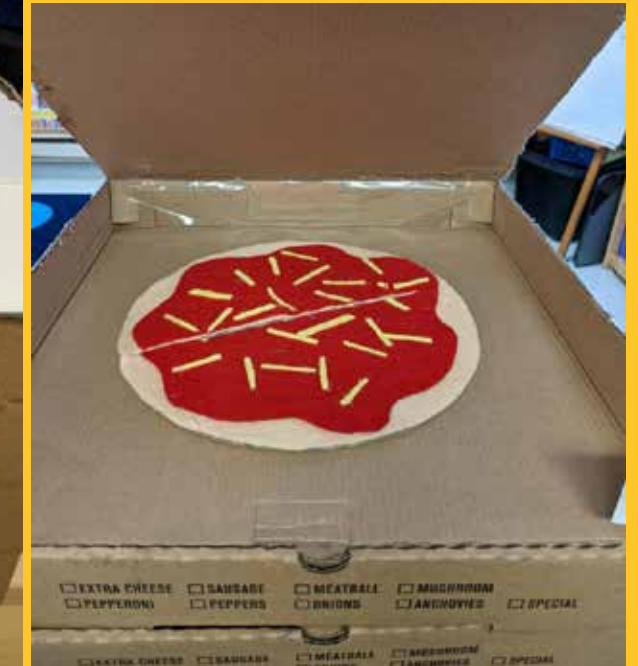
Dramatic play is any type of play where “children assign and accept roles and act them out.” This means that whether your child likes to pretend to be a doctor or a mechanic working the big wheel, they’re engaging in dramatic play. Enhancing dramatic play for children can promote rich pretend play and taking on different roles allows children to learn social skills such as communication, self-regulation, civility, and empathy.

You can enhance children’s pretend play by providing everyday items and homemade toys to the environment. For example, maybe you have observed your children having discussions about going to restaurants or cooking with their families. First, brainstorm with children to find out what information they know about cooking or what foods they like. Then, gather materials from your home, your program, community, or by asking families for help. Create a prop box with these materials that can be added to dramatic play to create a ‘restaurant’ experience for children. Introduce basic props like bowls, cooking utensils, play money, order forms, menus, cups, plates, fake food, and tablecloths. Then, you can extend play based on

their interests by adding additional props like aprons, pizza boxes, chopsticks, take out containers, cookbooks, and baking pans. To lengthen play further, you can plan a tour of a local restaurant, make your own placemats, make a graph of children’s favorite foods, or create a classroom cook book. Have families share traditional recipes and create a book to share with everyone.

There are endless possibilities of themes and experiences to introduce to children. They could be experiencing the arrival of a new sibling; introduce baby dolls, bottles, play diapers, blankets or baby strollers. Or, if children are going on vacation to the beach; add seashells, pails and shovels, beach towels, and ocean animals.

Dramatic play gives children the opportunity to act out real-life scenarios and understand what is happening in their world. It allows them to explore their feelings, learn conflict resolution, practice language and social skills. Your role is to observe their play, give them plenty of time to play and model how to interact with others and problem solve.



## COME AWAY FROM THE WATER, SHIRLEY By Abbe Kovacik

John Burningham has authored a number of books that give insight to the transformative effect of play on everyday objects. In his own right, Burningham was a master graphic story teller; winner of awards and accolades. By my reckoning, his work is evidence of a well-honed ability to see what is not there. His illustrations give life to the invisible plaything.

In the 1977 issue of “Come away from the water, Shirley,” Burningham joins a family on holiday at the beach. Mother and Father go about the usual affairs of a beach day— chairs, refreshments, reading and napping. Shirley however, uses beach finds to create a dramatic play scape inhabited by a friendly dog, fierce pirates, and treasure! In this story, Burningham demonstrates a sensitive and humorous understanding of the difference between the perspective of the adult and that of the child. More importantly, he confirms the notion that invisible toys are real. I learned this firsthand one evening when attempting to help my two-year-old son remove an item that

had been zipped inside of his Dr. Denton PJ’s. Imagine my surprise when the lost object zipped in his PJs was an invisible whistle! Then my amazement at being unwittingly lured into play where invisible toys are seen and heard.

Mr. and Mrs. Troutbeck of Burningham’s “Where’s Julius?” are a direct contrast to Shirley’s parents. The

Troutbeck’s understand that it is imaginative play that is detaining their son Julius from deliciously prepared meals. Julius is kept from the table because he has made a little fort in his room out of a curtain strung across a couple of chairs. The fort is just the beginning. At the start of each meal, the Troutbeck’s discuss the menu and then the adventure that is keeping Julius from joining them. On one such occasion for breakfast there is sausage, bacon and eggs, toast and marmalade, and also a glass of Three-Flavor Fruit Juice. “Julius says he cannot have breakfast with us today because he is riding a camel to the top of the tomb of Neffatuteum which is a pyramid near the Nile of Egypt.” “So Mr. Troutbeck took the tray with the sausage, bacon and egg, toast and marmalade, and the glass of Three-Flavor Fruit Juice – and another for the camel- to Egypt where Julius was riding to the top of the pyramid.” In the following double spread graphic representation of Julius at play – the camel is drinking from a straw!



And so it is with all of Burningham’s books - young readers are drawn into the realm of imagination invited to fill in the unwritten. In honoring Burningham, The New York Times writer Neil Genzlinger wrote, “He charts the clandestine terrain of childhood so aptly that one has to suspect the presence of a mole on the playground.”

Contact our education team and they will be happy to visit with a selection of Burningham Books in the Brightside Up collection:

- Hey! Get Off Our Train
- The Magic Bed
- Come Away From the Water, Shirley
- More... Would You Rather?
- England
- John Patrick Norman McHennessy: The Boy Who Was Always Late
- Time to Get Out of the Bath, Shirley
- It’s a Secret
- Mr. Gumpy’s Outing
- Where’s Julius





# Making Music Together

By Amelia Green

For many, music and play are tied together in their earliest memories. Most people can sing at least one song from their childhood on command or have a photo of themselves making music in the kitchen with pots and pans. From lullabies at birth to songs on the school-yard music is an integral part of childhood in all cultures and unites people of all genders, races, ethnicities and abilities. Developmentally, music and movement help the body and mind to work together and facilitate intellectual, social-emotional, motor, and language growth. For children with developmental or physical disabilities or other special needs, music and making instruments is a beautiful way to build a strong sense of community and inclusion while helping children to work on common areas of need such as grasp, fine motor skills, focus, and engagement by using a multisensory approach.

## BOX GUITARS

Using a few items you probably have around the house, a basic box guitar can be made and modified for children of all ages and abilities. To start, you will need an empty cardboard box. Let the child decide what type of box they would like to use. Have them tap on the box and listen for the different types of sounds they make, different size boxes may sound different from one-another. For

children who need assistance with grasp or fine motor skills work, a larger, more stable box will be easier to manipulate. The next step is to cut a hole in the box. Have or help the child draw the shape and size hole they desire. Have the child help and assist in the cutting to the best of their abilities. Once the hole is cut, any open edges should be secured with a heavy duty tape such as packing or duct tape. Now is the perfect time to get creative and customize and decorate your box guitar. You can use any sort of art medium from crayons and markers to paint and collage! Once the box is prepped it is time to “string” your guitar. Rubber bands are used in place of traditional strings. The rubber band is wrapped around the box once or twice – whichever is safest and sturdiest. Any number of rubber bands can be used to be laid across the hole, so be creative! To adapt this for children with differing abilities, use bigger and thicker rubber bands to make them easier to grasp and pull. Start with one rubber band and have the child try it out. Then add additional rubber bands and label the differences in feel and sound. Once the rubber bands have been added feel free to pluck away at your new homemade guitar! Children can use their creativity and imaginations to further decorate the box or add additions such as a neck or strap to carry it with.

## CARDBOARD TUBE RAIN STICKS

A rain stick is an easy to make multifunctional tool that can be both a fun musical instrument and a calming sensory item. The first item needed to build a rain stick is a cardboard tube. A standard paper towel tube works well for this. For some children a larger tube like from a roll of wrapping paper may be easier to hold and manipulate. The children can start by decorating the tube with markers or crayons. As this will be rubbed and run between the hands, paint and glued on items are not recommended. Once the tube is decorated, you will need a piece of construction paper.

1. Trace ends of tube on construction paper
2. Cut two circles about 3 inches outside of traced lines and cut slits from the end to the marked line inside
3. Lay one end of the tube on the paper circle and wrap the paper around using slits
4. Secure with tape

The next item needed is a large piece of aluminum foil rolled lengthwise. The piece of foil is then wrapped around the cardboard tube and slipped off so that it resembles a spring. The aluminum foil is placed inside of the tube and rice is poured in. The amount of rice varies based on the size of the tube but around  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup is just about right. The final step is to seal the other side of your rain stick with the other paper circle in the same manner as before – folding down the slits and securing with tape. It is important to include children to the level of their ability in each step of this process. While some children may not have the ability to measure and pour they may have the ability to let you know how much enough is. Consider the abilities and needs of the child and make changes along the way accordingly, such as adding or subtracting rice or adding more foil inside. Turn it from side to side to hear the soothing sounds of rain and celebrate your hard work!

## MARACAS

Maracas are a fun instrument that lets creativity soar as you fill them with sound! The base of the maraca is a container – a toilet paper tube is an

excellent base. This can again be adapted for children with differing abilities by using larger tubes or other easy to grasp shapes by using items such as tissue boxes, plastic containers, or milk jugs. Have the children get creative decorating the outside of their maraca. If a tube is being used the first step is to secure one end using construction paper in the same way the end of the rain stick was secured.

Once one end is secure, fill the tube a little less than halfway with small items. Some recommended items are beads, rice, corn kernels, small bells, or blocks. Try putting in different things or mixing items to see how the sound changes! Once you have selected the items for your maraca, seal the other side and then play away!

With items you have around your home or can easily and inexpensively purchase, you can start with these simple instruments and keep building your beautiful and inclusive band! Some of the tools used above can be very helpful in adapting toys you may already have for children with special needs. Using duct tape to cover buttons or parts of toys that are difficult or dangerous for children is an easy way to adapt for children with special needs. Consider using duct tape to build up small knobs on puzzles or to create tabs on books to make them easier to manipulate.

You can also use tape of different colors or consistencies to highlight or draw attention to certain areas in the environment or on a specific toy. As the child becomes more comfortable and familiar with the object, adaptations can be made again to meet them where they are. Like us, toys are able to change and rise to the occasion with the right help and support because, as we all know, the music is better when we all play together in the band.

# Bloom Where You're Planted

By Kathleen Harland

My grandfather's work required that he and my grandmother move often, even when they had young children. I can still hear my grandmother's retelling of all that goes into setting up a new house, "First things first...basics in the kitchen and then unpack the bedrooms so that the children have a special space." She prided herself on the skillful way she resettled the family into new environments, creating a home out of a house. As a child, traveling to visit my grandparents out of state, I would pack my dollhouse furniture and dollhouse people in a shoe box. One of my favorite things to do during our stay was to unpack them as if it was their moving day. With each visit

we'd find new spaces: shelves, stairs, boxes, small trunks, blanket chests, or cabinets to be their new house. I'd spend long periods of planning and arranging each room and would look forward to explaining every little detail to my grandmother. The carefully selected space, the furniture and gathered materials, and the connection with my beloved grandmother created a memorable and lasting play experience for me.

I think of this successful play now, as an early childhood educator, and realize that preparing for the play, creating a space to set up this new dollhouse was a big part of the play itself. Planning for play is play. I remember that creating staircases was important to me since the dollhouse people would certainly want to travel between floors. Sometimes we'd stack books or rocks or fold strips of paper accordion style and tape them from the "ceiling." One time we created a dollhouse rooftop patio outside in the birdbath with the dollhouse rooms set up on the flat patio stepping stones under it. That time, instead of

stairs, we hung a rope over the edge with a base attached that could move up and down the rope as an elevator. Once the house was selected, finding materials available to add homey details became part of the fun. Just like my grandparents, we traveled with the basics and gathered the rest. Tin foil would be cut in small rectangles to make bathroom mirrors or molded into a metal bowl for the dining room table. A spool of thread might become a stool or a side table. A root beer bottle cap could become a pie plate. I still have the tiny rugs and blankets that my grandma knit to help the dollhouse children settle into their rooms. It was a five-hour drive to visit my grand-



parents. While we drove I would start thinking about what I might search for and how I could make use of it. The play started before we even arrived.

The space and materials are certainly elements that helped to create this rich play but the time spent with my grandmother was the most important.

She celebrated my finds and creative approaches with interest and enjoyment. I still cherish those interactions. Now, as an early childhood educator I am aware of how powerful the exchanges are between adult and child during play. The back and forth exchanges during this planning and playing fueled me, my imagination and our relationship. My grandmother, Geraldine Lucas, was known for the saying, "Bloom Where You're Planted." She certainly did so and encouraged her children and grandchildren to do so as well. Looking back at all those dollhouse moves I realize that those were great practice experiences through play for me. Then, I just saw them as fun shared with my Grandma Lucas.

# Spotlight 30 YEARS OF SERVICE

with Abbe Kovacik

Request your own copy of *The Toy Lady* by calling 518-426-7181 or emailing [info@brightsideup.org](mailto:info@brightsideup.org).



In May, we celebrated Abbe Kovacik on her 30 years of service.

The board, staff, and Abbe's family came together today to celebrate her 30th year at Brightside Up. She was presented with a children's book entitled, "The Toy Lady," written in honor of her early years delivering toys and helping teachers learn about children's play. The book dedication is as follows:

*"My Mom teaches people how to play." -Adin Kovacik*

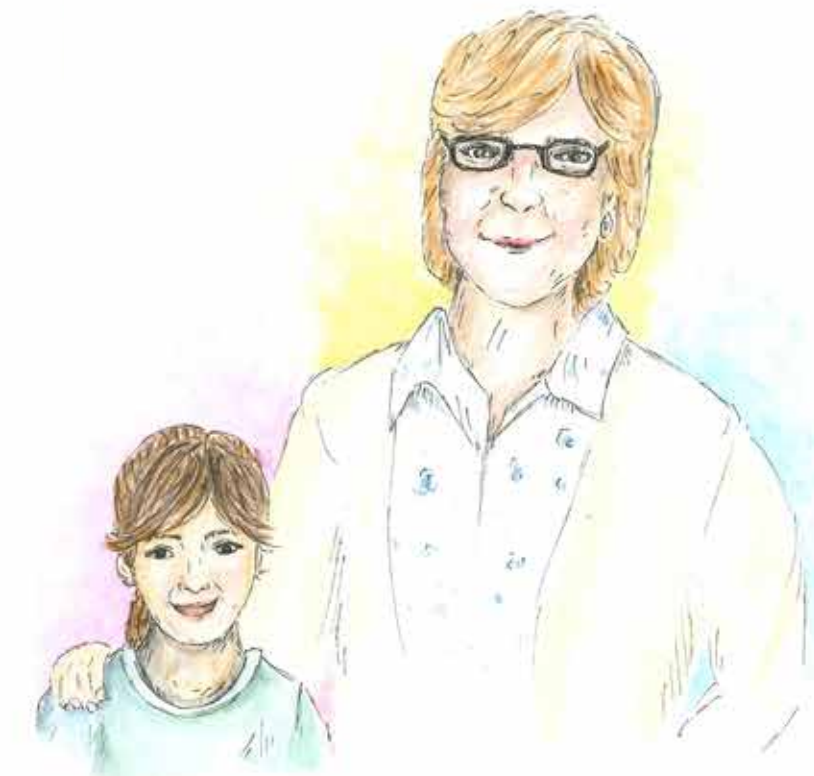
*This book is dedicated to Abbe Kovacik on her 30 years of service.*

*This is a very different kind of dedication, written to honor the dedication of an individual whose life work has been*

*devoted to early childhood development. Her tireless efforts, unwavering spirit, and limitless imagination have made an indelible impact on children's lives that will last for generations to come.*

*Abbe's career has changed, expanded, and evolved over time as the needs of the child care community have grown. In her 30 year career, she has always been innovative and determined in her pursuit of quality in every aspect of the early childhood field; but one thing has never changed, she has always made time to teach us to play.*

*Thank you Abbe, from the bottom of our hearts!*



Selected illustrations from the book by the very talented Gwen Kovacik



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