OUTDOOR PLAY

What is outdoor play?

Play that takes place outdoors, where the outdoors is defined as any open-air, wild, natural, or human-made space. Outdoor recreation is a specific form of outdoor play.

With respect to physical health, children's physical activity comes primarily from play, not formal exercise. Extensive research documents that children are more physically active and less sedentary when playing outside than when indoors (Gray et al., 2015[23]).

Outdoor play meets various subject areas and educational goals, promoting holistic development in children. Some of the subject areas and skills that outdoor play can address include:

1. Physical Education (PE) and Health: Outdoor play encourages physical activity, helping children develop their motor skills, coordination, and cardiovascular fitness. It also promotes an understanding of healthy lifestyle habits and the benefits of regular exercise.
2. Science : Outdoor play provides opportunities for children to explore and observe the natural world, fostering an appreciation for nature and wildlife. They can learn about ecosystems, plant and animal life, weather patterns, and environmental concepts through hands-on experiences.
3. Social Studies: Outdoor play can facilitate the development of social skills, cooperation, and teamwork. Children learn about cultural diversity, community dynamics, and their place in the world through interactions with others in diverse outdoor settings.
4. Language Arts: Outdoor play encourages language development through communication with peers, storytelling, and imaginative play. Children may also engage in reading signs or interpreting natural cues, improving their literacy skills.
5. Mathematics: Outdoor play can involve counting, measuring, and estimating distances or quantities. Whether it's counting objects, measuring the height of trees, or calculating scores in games, outdoor activities offer practical applications for math concepts.
6. Art and Creativity: Outdoor play provides a canvas for creativity and artistic expression. Children can use natural materials to create art, draw landscapes, or engage in imaginative play that enhances their creative thinking.
7. Environmental Education: Outdoor play is an excellent platform for teaching children about environmental stewardship, sustainability, and the importance of protecting the planet. They can learn about recycling, conserving resources, and caring for wildlife in their natural habitats.

What is risky play?

A form of play that is thrilling and exciting, which involves uncertainty, unpredictability, and varying degrees of risk-taking. Risky play can look really different for different children.

Risky play can be categorized as:

1. play with great heights, such as climbing trees

2. play with high speed, such as cycling fast, rolling down hills or tobogganing

3. play with dangerous tools, such as hammers or saws to build things

4. play with dangerous elements, such as fire or wat

5. play where children can ”disappear”/get lost, such as when kids feel like they are lost but their children are allowed to roam their neighbourhoods without adults

6. rough-and-tumble play, like play wrestling and horsing around

7. play with impact, like children banging sticks on ice, crashing into something repeatedly just for fun and bouncing on a trampoline

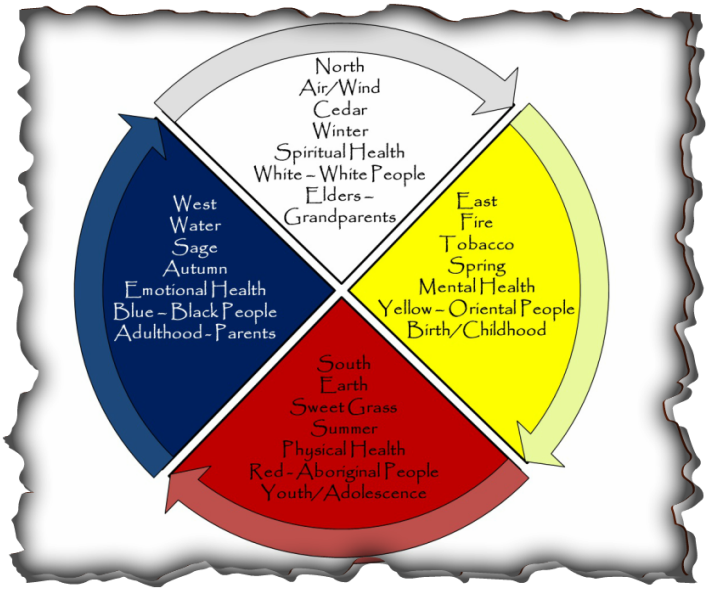
8. vicarious risk, when children experience thrill by watching other children (most often older) engaging in risky play.

Risky play can look really different for different children, depending on children’s capabilities and comfort levels. For example, for a toddler “getting lost” could mean hiding behind a bush and feeling independent, even though mom and dad know exactly where she is. Likewise, two eight year olds might have different comfort levels with climbing a tree, so that one goes to a lower branch and another heads right to the top of the tree.

Risky play gives children opportunities to experience positive emotions while gaining mastery over situations or stimuli that are a source of fear, and develop the skills to conquer these fears. Depriving them of these opportunities would result in the persistence of the fears, increasing the likelihood of phobias, anxiety disorders and other maladaptive behaviours. Sandseter and Kennair (2011[22]) provide extensive evidence to support their theory.

Benefits

https://i0.wp.com/powwowtimes.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/What-is-the-medicine-wheel.png?w=829&ssl=1



Outdoor play offers a wide range of benefits across intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical aspects of well-being:

Intellectual Benefits:

1. Curiosity and Exploration: Outdoor play stimulates curiosity and encourages children and adults to explore their surroundings, fostering a sense of wonder and discovery.
2. Problem-Solving Skills: Nature provides various challenges that require problem-solving and critical thinking, such as finding the best way to climb a tree or navigating through natural obstacles.
3. Scientific Understanding: Engaging with nature allows individuals to observe natural phenomena, fostering an appreciation for science and the environment.
4. Creativity and Imagination: Interacting with natural elements like sticks, stones, and leaves can inspire imaginative play, encouraging children to invent stories and games, thus fostering creativity.
5. Observation Skills: Being in nature requires keen observation to identify different plants, animals, and natural phenomena, enhancing attention to detail and observational skills.
6. Environmental Awareness: Outdoor play increases awareness and appreciation of the environment, fostering a sense of responsibility and care for the planet.

Spiritual Benefits:

1. Connection with Nature: Spending time in natural settings can create a profound sense of connection with the environment, leading to feelings of awe and reverence for the natural world.
2. Inner Peace and Mindfulness: Being surrounded by nature can promote a sense of calmness and mindfulness, allowing individuals to be present in the moment and tune into their inner selves.
3. Sense of Interconnectedness: Spending time outdoors can evoke a sense of interconnectedness with all living things, leading to a deeper understanding of the interdependence of ecosystems.
4. Reflection and Contemplation: The serenity of natural surroundings provides an ideal setting for self-reflection, meditation, and contemplation, nurturing inner growth and spiritual introspection.

Emotional Benefits:

1. Stress Reduction: Outdoor play provides an opportunity to escape from the pressures of daily life and reduces stress levels, leading to improved emotional well-being.
2. Joy and Happiness: Interacting with nature and engaging in outdoor activities often brings joy and happiness, promoting positive emotions and a sense of contentment.
3. Emotional Resilience: Overcoming challenges in nature, such as climbing a hill or crossing a stream, can build emotional resilience and self-confidence.
4. Emotional Regulation: Outdoor play offers a space for emotional release, allowing individuals to express themselves freely and regulate their emotions in a natural and supportive environment.
5. Social Bonding: Engaging in outdoor play with friends or family fosters social connections, promoting a sense of belonging and strengthening relationships.
6. Reduced Anxiety and Depression: Spending time in nature has been associated with decreased levels of anxiety and depression, contributing to improved mental well-being.

Physical Benefits:

1. Physical Activity: Outdoor play encourages physical movement and exercise, contributing to improved cardiovascular health, muscle strength, and coordination.
2. Vitamin D Intake: Exposure to natural sunlight promotes the body's production of vitamin D, which is essential for bone health and overall well-being.
3. Motor Skills Development: Activities like climbing, running, and balancing in outdoor environments help develop motor skills and spatial awareness in children.
4. Balance and Coordination: Activities like climbing, balancing on uneven terrain, and playing on swings or ropes enhance balance and coordination skills in both children and adults.
5. Immune System Boost: Exposure to diverse outdoor environments exposes individuals to various microorganisms, potentially strengthening the immune system.
6. Better Sleep Quality: Regular outdoor play and exposure to natural light help regulate circadian rhythms, leading to improved sleep quality and overall restfulness.

Overall, outdoor play offers a holistic approach to well-being, benefiting the mind, body, and spirit. Whether it's a child exploring a forest, an adult hiking through a scenic trail, or simply spending time in a garden, nature's therapeutic effects have a positive impact on various aspects of human life.

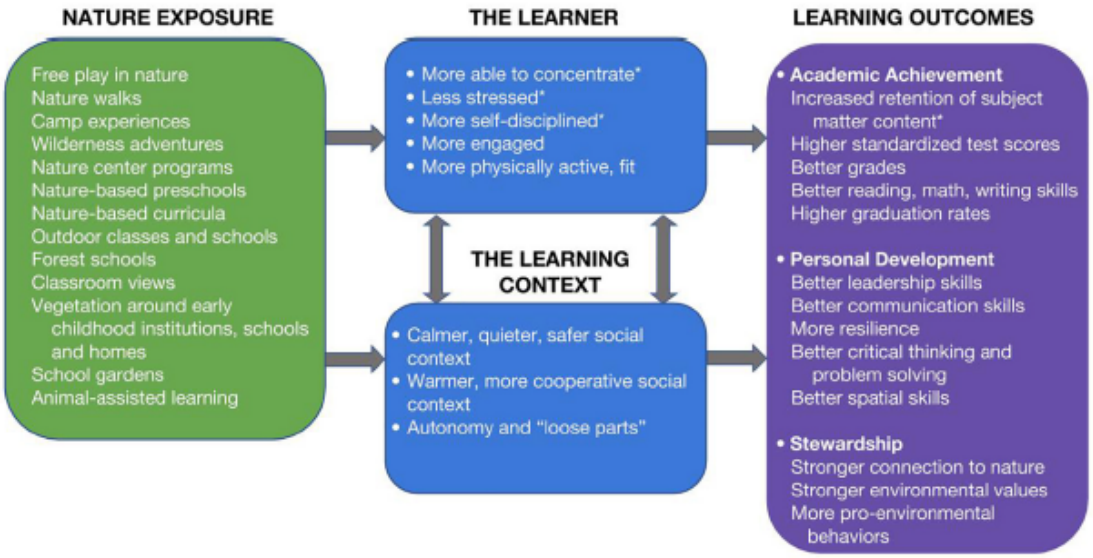


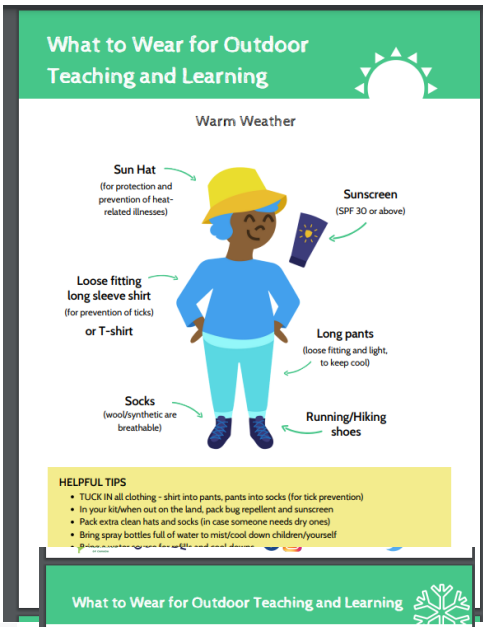
FIGURE 1 | Nature-based learning: exposures, probable mechanisms, and outcomes. This Figure summarizes the state of the scientific literature on nature and learning. The items and pathways here emerged from our review as opposed to guiding our review; thus each item listed has been empirically associated with one or more other items in the figure. Relationships for which there is cause-and-effect evidence are indicated with an asterisk; for example, "more able to concentrate" is

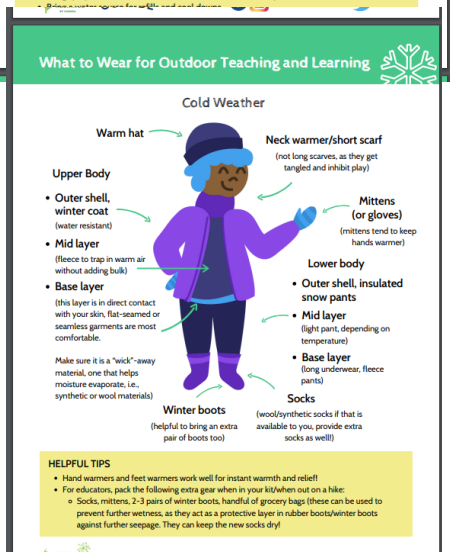
https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00305

Safety Considerations

Safety considerations for outdoor play include:

1. Supervision: Always have responsible adult supervision, especially when young children are playing outdoors, to ensure they are safe and to provide immediate assistance if needed.
2. Sun Protection: Protect against harmful UV rays by wearing sunscreen, sunglasses, hats, and lightweight, breathable clothing to prevent sunburn and heat-related illnesses.
3. Hydration: Encourage regular water breaks to stay hydrated, especially on hot days, to prevent dehydration and heat exhaustion.
4. Insect Protection: Use insect repellent to guard against bug bites and stings, and check for ticks after outdoor activities, particularly in wooded or grassy areas.
5. Safe Play Areas: Choose play areas with appropriate surfaces, free from hazards like sharp objects or uneven terrain. Ensure playground equipment is well-maintained and age-appropriate.



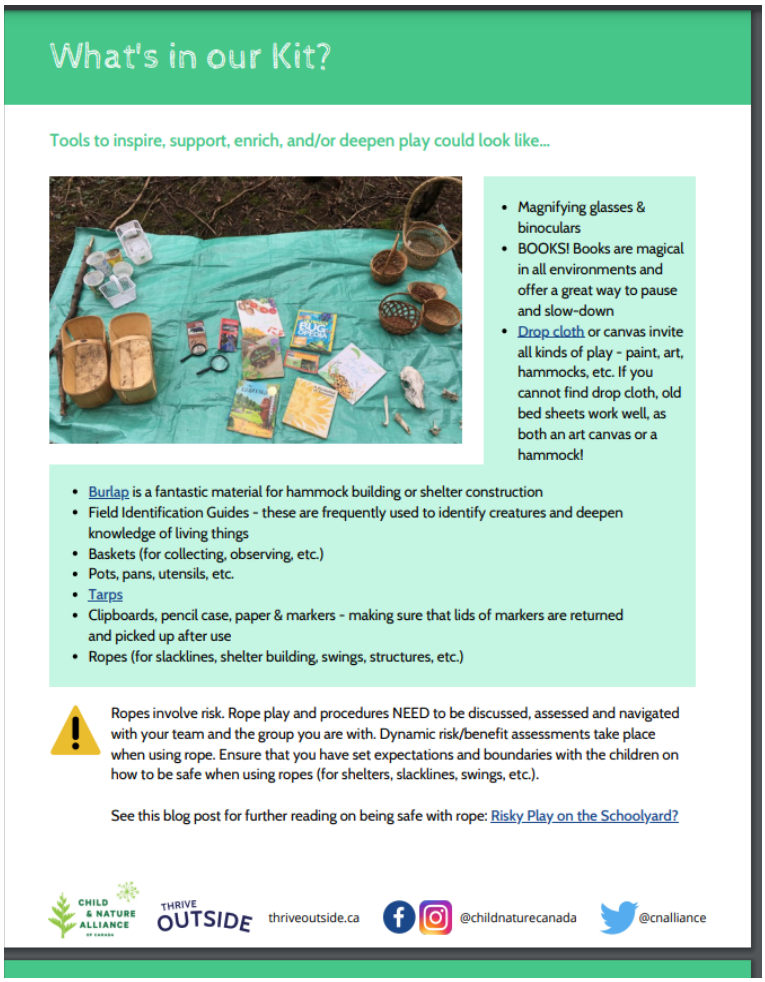


6. Appropriate Clothing: Dress appropriately for the weather and activity to prevent overheating or exposure to extreme cold.
7. Awareness of Surroundings: Teach children to be aware of their surroundings, including traffic if playing near roads, and to look out for potential hazards like rocks, roots, or other tripping hazards.
8. Water Safety: If near bodies of water, always supervise children closely and ensure they wear appropriate flotation devices if needed.
9. Allergies: Be mindful of any allergies to plants or other outdoor elements, and carry necessary medications (e.g., antihistamines) if required.
10. First Aid Kit: Have a well-stocked first aid kit nearby for minor injuries like cuts, scrapes, or bruises.

4. Tips and Tricks for Practitioners:

1. Building trust takes time. It is important to manage risks carefully with new and less experienced groups and to use a 'gradual-release model' in terms of how much freedom you allow in your program.
2. Consider the potential impact of adverse weather on your program/experience and include this in your program/experience risk-benefit assessment and site risk assessment, as appropriate.
3. More adventurous or challenging programs, activities, and experiences need detailed planning and risk management, involving scaffolded learning opportunities (i.e., building up to a higher level of risk). If children will use knives, tools, or specialist equipment, make sure you engage in careful planning and documentation to show how the risks are managed. Alongside the RBA, consider compiling lists of the equipment you need.
4. Every group is different and every child will navigate their environment and play in different ways. Their comfort and competence in engaging in everyday risks outdoors is not indicative of how they navigate risk at home or in a classroom. Some children who are very shy and quiet indoors can become robust navigators of their outdoor setting, and those who are loud and engage in intellectual risks inside may be quiet and timid when outside. Be prepared to get to know your children in a new light when they are outdoors.
5. Involving and empowering children in assessing and managing risk starts with dialogue. Offer them opportunities to reflect on what is happening in their environment.
6. Do not take children to a space you have never visited!
7. Make sure that the children's basic needs are met, while giving them appropriate opportunities to learn the consequences of their choices. For instance, be sure they drink lots of water and feel rested. Likewise, be sure they are not exhibiting signs of too little sleep or food. Be sure they are not too hot or cold or negatively affected by the elements. Children often lose their balance or fine motor skills as well as their sense of self-mastery if their basic needs are not met. That leaves them vulnerable to injury. In these moments, it is important to pause and sometimes change course to keep them safe.
8. If an injury or incident occurs during a session, it will be valuable to have an accurate record of what happened. While it may not always be possible to document these immediately, it is recommended that you record key details as soon as is practical, ideally on the same day.
9. Consider the need to establish emergency procedures, that outline meeting points, coordination of a group in an emergency, communication with emergency services/first responders, and make arrangements for rescue if you are in a remote location.

https://childnature.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2019-11-03-CANADA-RBAT-ENGLISH-1.pdf



What do you need?

1. First Aid Kit- band aids, polysporin, gloves, tweezers, icepack, alcohol swabs, any student medication (eppi pens, puffers for asthma)
2. Magnifying glasses
3. White board clipboards
4. Bug containers
5. Sit upons
6. Nets
7. pencils/ whiteboard markers
8. Small shovels
9. Loose parts
10. Compasses
11. Tape
12. Whistle

Sit Spots

A sit spot, also known as a sit spot practice or sit spot meditation, is a concept often associated with nature connection and mindfulness. It involves finding a specific spot in nature where you can sit quietly and observe your surroundings without actively participating in any activities.

The idea behind a sit spot is to establish a regular routine of spending time in nature, in the same location each time, and simply being present and attentive to the natural world around you. By sitting quietly and observing, you can become more attuned to the sights, sounds, and sensations of the environment, deepening your connection to nature and fostering a sense of calm and presence.

During a sit spot practice, you might observe the movements of animals, the rustling of leaves, the flow of a nearby stream, or the changing patterns of light and shadows. It's an opportunity to slow down, let go of distractions, and fully immerse yourself in the beauty and rhythms of the natural world.

Sit spot practice is popular among nature enthusiasts, ecologists, and those practicing mindfulness or meditation. It can be done in various natural settings, such as a park, forest, garden, or any outdoor space where you feel connected to nature. The regularity of the practice allows you to develop a deeper relationship with the specific place and its seasonal changes, creating a meaningful and meditative experience that promotes well-being and a greater appreciation for the environment.

Activity Ideas

Here are some seasonal activities! These can be adapted for different grade levels and to cover different outcomes.

Fall

1. **Adopt a tree-** Have students find a tree to adopt for the year. Explore the tree and answer questions about how your tree changes over the year. Students can also take care of their tree.

   ART: Drawing a tree from different perspectives.
   SCIENCE: Making scientific observations about a tree's leaves, twigs, and fruits. Looking for animal clues around a tree.
   MATH: Measuring perimeter (circumference) around a tree trunk.
   MATH: Measuring crown spread and learning about averages.
   ELA: Applying different poetic forms writing about their tree.
2. **Leaf maze-** Students can rake and pile leaves to create a labyrinth or maze.
3. **Find the tree that matches the leaf-** As leaves are falling to the ground have students try to match the tree that leaf came from. They can look at shape, size etc to try to find the matching tree.
   https://confidencemeetsparenting.com/outside-fall-activity/
4. **Look for symmetry in nature-** Use real autumn leaves and other natural items to see if they are symmetrical or not.
5. **Signs of autumn scavenger hunt-** There are so many changes between summer and fall have students search for signs the autumn has arrived.
   https://rhythmsofplay.com/signs-autumn-scavenger-hunt-kids/
6. **Make bird feeders-**As winter is coming the birds are looking for food. Students can create bird feeders. Discuss how birds adapt as the weather changes and how they meet their needs.
   https://www.thespruce.com/diy-bird-feeders-5081999#:~:text=Empty%20plastic%20soda%20bottles%20or,you're%20good%20to%20go.
7. **Go for a spider web hunt-** Although spiderwebs may be spooky they are fascinating. Ask how long they think it took the spider took to make the web. Look and see if anything is caught in the web. Discuss the location of the web and why the spider made it there.
8. **Climb a tree-** Encourage children to climb a tree. It boosts self-esteem, physical strength increases and it encourages problem solving skills.

9. **Look for frost flowers-** Frost flowers are made out of frost. See if your students can find any.
   https://runwildmychild.com/frost-flowers/

10. **Apple picking-**If you have access to crab apple trees this is a wonderful activity. Students can pick the apples and then create apple juice, apple crisp etc. They learn from harvest to table.

Winter

1. **Evergreen Identification-** Winter is a great time to learn about evergreen trees and how to identify them. Students can learn to identify trees by looking at their shape and needles. Different.
   https://smallfarms.cornell.edu/2019/02/arent-they-all-just-pines-how-to-id-conifer-trees/#:~:text=The%20most%20definitive%20feature%20of,of%202%2C%203%20or%205.

2. **Snow sculpture-** Want to build a snowman? Challenge students to create their own snow sculpture.
3. **Lichen Hunt-** A lichen hunt can be done at any point during the year. Linchen likes to live on trees, stumps and fallen logs. Discuss what lichen is and what it does. Lichen comes in all kinds! Make sure to leave lichen on living trees alone.
4. **Animal track hunt-** See if you can find animal tracks. Fresh snow is great for showing tracks of various woodland animals. Try to guess what animal made them, where they were going and what they were doing.
   https://cwf-fcf.org/en/resources/DIY/outside/tracking-down-winter-wildlife.html

5. **Snow maze-** Challenge students to make a maze. They can create maps to try to escape each others mazes. Challenge them to make a few different paths, shortest, longest etc.
6. **Make your own sled-** Create a STEM challenge where students create their own sleds. Try them out!
7. **Stem Skiier-** Work with your kids to plan, design, and engineer a skier (from aluminum foil or other material of their choice) that can stand on skis (popsicle sticks) and make it down a slope! Not only will this get kids thinking outside the box about physics, engineering, elements, and design.
8. **Build a snow fort-** Always be extra careful not to make it too heavy on top and make sure kids have proper adult supervision.
9. **Study Snowflakes-** Take a look at snowflakes close up! Each snowflake is unique. Use a black piece of paper or material to catch your snowflake. Discuss why each snowflake is different.
10. **Pinecone dissection-** Use tweezers, and a knife to dissect pinecones. Discuss how pinecones have seeds inside them. Explore the characteristics of a pine cone.

Spring

1. **Plant a garden**- Have students plant different fruit and veggies. They can take care of their own garden.
2. **Build a shelter**- Students can build different types of shelters using sticks and branches. Explore different types of structures like a lean-to. There are many ways to build a shelter.
3. **Press flowers**- Pressed flowers make beautiful art! Collect flowers and place the flowers between sheets of parchment or wax paper and lay a heavy book on top. **https://www.ftd.com/blog/how-to-press-flowers?fbclid=IwAR3ougGfCN8JmPwsC8ueFxVmpwfhTzCiwf-Uj5yd2gSK7n7wX8QRbDTfIBw**
4. **Make a fairy garden**- Fairy gardens are a creative way to spark imagination and make a beautiful home for flowers. **https://mygardenlife.com/how-to/make-a-fairy-house-from-natural-materials?fbclid=IwAR2oFvWoVwRmRmcte9EoDvx0Ro7bGUOVLnciyAiCNvfOdZmRxWvdRsdaZDM**
5. **Natures Paint brush-** Art is fun to do especially with natural materials! Students can collect different objects such as flowers, sticks, grass bundles, leaves etc. to use as paint brushes. Let them explore how each creates different textures.
6. **Bug Hunt**- Saskatchewan has many different bugs. Have students explore and find different bugs. They can identify what they found .

   https://www.insectidentification.org/insects-by-state.php?thisState=Saskatchewan&fbclid=IwAR2njgmLumw12dojUIvGw0sQ1zuZ9AzXfysEv8sJL_6L4EAj1fu84SgJmsc
7. **Start a nature collection**- Let students just explore. What can they collect and find. (feathers, rocks, shells, fossils, antlers etc. They can keep their collections in a vase, container etc. This opens up discussion on what did they find, where did it come from etc.
8. **Create a treasure hunt**- Create a treasure map and create a treasure hunt. Students can have fun doing each others treasure hunts. If you have add compasses to their treasure hunt.
9. **Photo scavenger hunt-** Use a camera to record your findings. You can use specifc items like find a pine cone or you can be more vague by saying find something that is alive, or something that is bumpy. If
10. **Make a Terrarium-** Students can create their own terrarium using rocks, sticks and different plants. For more information click the link. Spray water to keep the alive. **https://outdooradventures.wp.tulane.edu/2020/04/18/bring-the-great-outdoors-inside-native-terrarium-diy/**

Summer

1. **Make a bug hotel-** Build a bug hotel. Different types of material will attract different bugs. Use hotel a variety of sticks, pine cones, seed heads, bamboo shoots, and wood shavings.
   https://gardentherapy.ca/build-a-bug-hotel/

2. **Nature Hike**- Hiking is a great cross-curricular experience. https://runwildmychild.com/hiking-with-kids/
   Here are a few places to hike in Saskatchewan! https://www.alltrails.com/canada/saskatchewan
3. **skip rocks**- There is a science to skipping stones. Have students explore different types of rocks to try skipping. See how many skips each rock gets. Here is the science to skipping rocks. https://www.science.org/content/article/skipping-stones-gets-scientific#:~:text=Two%20key%20forces%20act%20on,bounces%20up%3B%20otherwise%20it%20sinks.
4. **Bird Watching**- Look for birds in your neighborhood. Here are a few common birds. This activity can be extended into other areas. For example explore different types of bird nests and build one. Try making different bird calls. https://www.birdadvisors.com/backyard-birds-saskatchewan/?fbclid=IwAR3E9GjkOg-Bh2MrQ56xSmnafgLIMXfwn-SjVcpwFQNTNrM1qeg4iasBhrU
5. Build a sandcastle- Build a sandcastle or other sand creations.
6. **Fruit picking**- Summer time is when berries are ready to be picked. Find saskatoon berries, raspberries, blue berries etc, What can you make out of them? Discuss how each plant is different. You can discuss the parts of the plant. Of course enjoy some treats!
7. **Play in the rain-** Find worms, jump in the puddles, make streams the possibilities are endless when playing in the rain.
8. **Pond dip**- Look for living creatures in bodies of water. https://swf.sk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Classroom-in-a-Box-Fish-of-Saskatchewan.pdf
9. **Make boats**- Have students collect natural products and create a boat. They can race them down a stream. To make it challenging your boat can have requirements.
10. **Walking stick**: Walking sticks are fun to make. Students can find the stick that is the perfect size for them. They can decorate with natural items or then can use tape and ribbons, or paint. It is a great object to add to hikes. https://runwildmychild.com/hiking-sticks/

Resources

1. https://saskoutdoors.org/
2. https://outdoorlearningstore.com/
3. https://childnature.ca/thriveoutside/
4. https://childnature.ca/ece/?fbclid=IwAR0zVrliikoWH0Y7AgjTEmMdrkwvaHBcI2Yp9MltAQ4bKQQA_wv_oB19rVo
5. https://wellbeingswithalysia.com/outdoor-play-books/?fbclid=IwAR3MT0AHut4ES1MBKyLTfL6QvkplFaiQ1Cg-4bU-nIhotYsylo2ZNwEa2DI
6. https://www.outdoorplaycanada.ca/
7. *https://childnature.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/T.O_9_EN_A-Teachers-Guidebook-for-bringing-learning-outside-1.pdf*

8. https://takemeoutside.ca/resource-directory/educational-resources/?fbclid=IwAR2_G-cSdt2X3rVTP8yA6dcvvYB53kzxr8VrX57qEnxyZRycVJ65eDg_1vM
9. https://saskoutdoors.org/outdoor_play_activities/
10. https://thimbleandtwig.com/how-to-start-a-nature-journal-with-kids/
11. https://www.facebook.com/SaskOutdoorsSOEEA
12. https://www.learnalberta.ca/content/aswt/talkingtogether/facilitated_talking_circle_fact_sheet.html
13. https://earlyimpactlearning.com/loose-parts-play-outdoors-resources-ideas-tips/
14. Facebook group- Educators for Outdoor/Environmental Learning
15. https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk//wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Loose-Parts-Play-Toolkit-2019-web.pdf

Go over first few pages

Show tool kit

Read a book to do an introduction

- Talk about
- Discuss setting up expectations- whistle

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- I want you to open your senses and see what you notice. Write it down on your white board.

Loose parts-

What is loose parts

The loose parts play theory is based on the idea that when children are presented with a collection of small objects (i.e. loose parts), they have more opportunities for creativity and engagement as they rearrange, redesign and tinker with the parts, creating patterns and new objects as they go. Architect Simon Nicholson developed the theory in the early 1970s.

Loose parts play is likely how your children naturally play. They collect bits and bobs from around them and bring them together to create something new. When we talk about loose parts play in an educational or more structured setting, it's about giving children more of these opportunities to explore and develop their innate creativity.

1. It is quite cheap to set up
2. It requires very little daily setting up
3. The same resources can be used multiple times in different ways without the children getting bored
4. It is an open-ended form of learning, and stimulates holistic development
5. Children can get fully involved and focussed
6. It can provide experiences across the curriculum
7. It is fantastic at developing independence, vocabulary, PSED, and many other skills

Build a boat out of natures materials

- Can only use natural materials
- Needs to float
- How many pebbles can it hold

Adopt a tree activity

Circle sharing- what is something you would try

Questions

My Tree

Tree's Name:_____

Type of tree:_____

Tree size:_____

What does it look like:

What textures do you notice?

Is it a home to anything?

Describe the leaves:

One thing that you notice about your tree? What makes it special?