

# DISCOVERY ZONE: SUMMER

## Study Investigation:

## Nature Ambassadors



Infant Edition



# STUDY EXPLANATION

## *Nature Ambassadors*

What does it mean to be an 'Environmental Steward' or an 'Ambassador of Nature'? This study will be about launching a pathway for our Infant children to appreciate nature, supporting them to take ownership and responsibility for caring for the Earth as they grow. Infants will be introduced to loose parts from nature, and engage in activities that showcase nature's beauty. Educators will support infants to get hands-on with activities that showcase their stewardship for the environment and appreciation of its elements.





## Inquiry Questions:

I wonder how I can support infants to explore nature?

I wonder what attributes of nature infants can explore?

I wonder how I can bring nature's loose parts into activities?

# Building Connections

## Activity One

Title of Activity: Nature Sounds

Skill(s) Focus: Appreciation for Nature/Connections/Expressive Language

Objectives: Infants will explore and manipulate different items from nature to create sound effects.

Materials:

- Items from nature (infant-safe)
  - Large sea shells, large smooth stones, clean pinecones, clean feathers, twigs
- Sensory tube
- Child safe spoon
- Large poster board/cardboard

Process:

- Prior to the day, glue larger items securely onto cardboard for a homemade sensory board.
- in addition, securely place items in a sensory tube for closer exploration.
- Present these nature displays excitedly to the infants, identifying the names of each and some of their attributes.
- Support infants to use their hands and feel the different natural items on the display board, and invite them to hold and turn the sensory tubes.
- Support infants to hold a spoon and tap the larger nature items on the display board.
- Describe the sounds made by the different items and narrate the actions of the children by making statements such as:
  - "This is a large stone! It is smooth. I wonder what sound it will make when I bang on it?"
  - "The seashell is rough and bumpy. Listen to the sound it makes when the spoon rubs across it."
  - "Tap on the twigs; tap, tap tap!"
- Take notice and narrate the actions of the infants, encouraging them to interact with each other. Consider the following examples:
  - "That was a fun sound! Look, Cora made a sound on the pinecone! Yay!"
  - "That was a funny sound! It went shake, shake, shake! Can you both shake your body?"
- Educators may wish to include items that do not make sound for comparison.
  - "I wonder if the feather will make a sound? Let's find out?"

Younger Infant Variation:

- Support younger infants to safely explore items in the sensory tube and on the board with an educator using hand over hand guidance.

Extensions for Additional Discovery:

- Add music with nature sounds to the lesson, asking questions such as:
  - "Can you make the sound of thunder? Or rain?"



# Building Connections

## Activity Two

Title of Activity: Upcycled Art

Skill(s) Focus: Connections/Fine and Gross Motor Skills/Creative Expression/Joyful Engagement

Objectives: Infants will paint the Nature Sound board from earlier in the week, creating an upcycled collaborative piece of art.

Materials:

- Nature Sensory Board
- Paint
- Paint brushes
- Tarp/sheet

Process:

- Bring out the Nature Sound board from earlier in the week, and announce excitedly that we have another activity for it, showcasing the reuse of materials.
- Lay the board down on a tarp of sheet in an open area, and place chunky paint brushes and paint pots close by.
- Support children closely to paint the board, engaging in hand over hand guidance as needed.
- Describe the nature items and its attributes and narrate the actions of the children.
- Encourage infants to take notice of each other, and paint collectively, engaging in conversations about the designs, colours, and materials used.
- This activity could also be enjoyed outside.

Younger Infant Variations:

- Sit with infants who are not mobile and use hand over hand guidance to paint with them.
- For the youngest of infants, offer paint mixed with materials in a sealed plastic bag, taped to the ground.
  - Supervise closely and support infants to manipulate the paint in the bag, mixing the colours as they go.
  - Encourage infants to take notice of the other painting activities happening in the classroom.
  - Bringing the littlest infants near the fun will ensure they feel included!

# Learning Discovery

## Activity One

Title of Activity: Find the Bugs!

Skill(s) Focus: Joyful Discovery/Fine and Gross Motor Skills/Fine Motor Skills/Vocabulary Development

Objectives: Children will explore nature elements and make associations with insects.

Materials:

- Elements from nature:
  - Large infant-safe leaves and flowers
- Sensory bin/tuff tray
- Paper towel tubes
- Egg cartons or tray
- Infant safe toy insects

Process:

- Set up the sensory bin with elements from nature and toy insects. Hide the insects in paper towel tubes and egg cartons within the bin.
- Start the activity by singing a song about nature and bugs to the infants, such as "The Incy Wincy Spider" or "Baby Bumblebee".
- Describe to the infants where different bugs live, such as in trees or under rocks.
- Support children to explore the sensory bin, challenging the infants to look for the bugs!
- Maintain close supervision during this activity.
- Invite the children to touch and actively explore the items.
- Talk to the children about the different bugs and insects, their features, and characteristics.
- Narrate the actions of the children, and describe the attributes of the nature items and the bugs.
- Celebrate the infants when they discover a hiding bug!
- Support younger infants to explore with hand over hand guidance, and enthusiastic narrations.

# Learning Discovery

## Activity Two

Title of Activity: Sea Shells are Swell

Skill(s) Focus: Joyful Discovery/Fine and Gross Motor Skills/Fine Motor Skills/Vocabulary Development

Objectives: Infants will explore characteristics of seashells, sea animals and the beach.

Materials:

- Water (little amount)
- Large seashells
- Scooping and dumping toys
- Infant sea animals
- Ocean sounds

Process:

- Place water, seashells and sand toys in a sensory bin and support the infants to explore its contents. .
- Model for the infants how to scoop and dig with the scooping and dumping toys, using hand over hand guidance.
- Support the infants to feel and explore the sea shells, describing their characteristics.
  - Talk to the infant about the different textures, using statements such as: "The shell has lines that feel bumpy" or "This shell feels smooth."
- Hide the shells and invite the infant to find them. Say, "Where did the shell go?".
- To continue the exploration, stack shells on top of one another to create a tower!
- Play ocean sounds or songs in the background during the engagement.

Younger Infant Variation:

- Create a sensory experience for younger infants using a sensory tube and filling it with infant safe sea materials. Hold the tube with the infant to allow them to explore the contents inside.
- Sing the song, "Slippery Fish", substituting the names of sea animals in the song for the items in the sensory bin.
  - Hold them up for each infant, bringing the animal closer to their line of sight and supporting with hand over hand guidance.

# Expressive Language

## Activity One

Title of Activity: Weather Songs with Props

Skill(s) Focus: Expressive Language/Appreciation for Nature/Joyful Engagement

Objectives: Infants will engage in songs and fingerplays related to the weather, learning and mimicking weather-related words.

Materials:

- Sun, Rain drop, cloud and moon props:
  - Puppets, finger puppets, pictures on paper
- ASL signs for 'Sun', 'Rain', 'Cloud' and 'Moon'
- Songs about weather:
  - Mr. Sun
  - Rain, Rain, Go Away
  - It's Raining, It's Pouring
  - Itsy Bitsy Spider
  - You are my Sunshine
  - Skinnamarink

Process:

- Guide infants excitedly to a gathering space and ask them, "I wonder what we know about the weather?"
- Discuss in clear, simple language the weather where you live.
- Introduce the different props, using statements such as:
  - "This is the sun! Can you say sun! It is yellow and in the sky! It keeps us warm!"
  - Incorporate the ASL sign for each prop.
- Sing the different songs with the group, pairing it with the the props and sign language for consistent engagement.
- Take notice of infants' attempt to communicate. Watch for body movements, laughs and giggles, and babbling. Engage with the infant when they respond to you.
- Repeat the songs throughout the day for ongoing connection.



# Expressive Language

## Activity Two

Title of Activity: Exploring Arctic Animals

Skills Focus: Expressive Language/Vocabulary Development/Appreciation for Nature/Joyful Engagement

Objectives: Children will build sensory awareness as they explore touch and visual contrast, and language development as they hear the names of the animals.

Materials:

- Soft white fabrics:
  - Fleece, faux fur, cotton, felt
- White blanket
- Mirror
- Black and white high contrast animal images:
  - Polar bear, penguin, seal
- Small stuffed arctic animals
- Basket or low tray

Process:

- Place fabrics in a basket or spread them on the floor over a soft white blanket to represent snow.
  - Educators may also wish to incorporate child safe mirrors as a base to also represent snow and ice.
- Add a few animal images or soft toys on top.
- Invite infants to touch, grab, and rub the different textures.
- Gently brush fabric across their hands and feet to feel the softness of each.
- Allow them to lay or crawl on the fabrics.
- Invite children to look at the high contrast animal pictures, identifying the animals showcased.
- As infants explore the materials, Educators should link the images with the fabrics using statements such as:
  - "The polar bear has thick, warm fur!"
  - "This is soft like a seal's body!"
  - "A penguin has black and white colours!"
- Educators may extend the activity by engaging in 'hide and discover' interactions, partially hiding the animal and allowing the infant to pull it into plain sight.

# Physical Literacy

## Activity One

Title of Activity: Sleeping Bunnies

Skills Focus: Gross Motor Skills/Joyful Engagement/Language Development

Objectives: Children will mimic the actions in the song, "Sleeping Bunnies", supported by the use of props.

Materials:

- Puppets
- Stuffed animals

Process:

- Sing the "Sleeping Bunnies" and use a puppet enthusiastically to engage the infants:
  - "Look at all the sleeping bunnies
  - 'Til it's nearly noon
  - Shall I go and quietly wake them with a merry tune...
  - Oh how still, are they ill?
  - Wake up bunnies and 'hop, hop, hop!'
- Educators can perform the actions and dance around, supporting children to mimic some of the actions themselves.
- Educators can then repeat the song, inserting different puppets or stuffed animals as props to support ongoing verses.
- Allow infants to explore the puppets and stuffed animals.
- Infants will enjoy the joyful singing and interaction more than the need to move, but any attempts at mimicking the actions should be celebrated!
- For younger infants, educators can engage them with the puppets and mimic the actions of the songs by moving the puppets accordingly.

# Physical Literacy

## Activity Two

Title of Activity: Animal Towers

Skills Focus: Gross Motor Skills/Joyful Engagement/Language Development

Objectives: Infants will be supported to stack large soft blocks and place a toy animal on the top.

Materials:

- Infant safe toy animals
- Large, soft blocks

Process:

- Introduce the infants to an assortment of toy animals, identifying each name as they display each animal.
- Allow infants to explore the animals.
- Announce to the children joyfully they will be building towers for their animals.
- Demonstrate to the children how to stack two or three blocks to form a tower, and place an animal at the top.
- Narrate to the children, using statements such as, "Look, the elephant is sitting on the top of the blocks!".
- Educators can support infants with hand over hand guidance, supporting them to stack two blocks.
- Children will also enjoy when the blocks get knocked down.
- Be sure to support infants to help any animal who has fallen, making statements such as, "Oh, let's help the bear who has fallen down and make sure they are okay!".
- Role model how to safely place the animal back on the top.
- Educators can support younger children who are not yet mobile by presenting the animals in their line of sight, discussing their names and attributes and allowing infants to hold them.

# Educator Reflections: *optional*

**I wonder if I successfully observed and responded to the behaviour cues of the children to lead further investigations?**

**I wonder how I could improve upon my teaching practices in the future?**

**I wonder what support I may need to better foster child inquiry in my learning environment?**

**I wonder what went well, and what could be improved upon regarding child-led learning?**

# Investigation Materials

## Building Connections

- Large infant-safe items from nature:
  - Sea shell, large smooth stones, pinecones, clean feather, twigs
- Sensory tube
- Child safe spoon
- Large poster board/cardboard
- Nature Sensory Board
- Paint
- Paint brushes
- Tarp/sheet

## Learning Discovery

- Large infant safe elements from nature:
  - Child safe leaves and flowers
- Sensory bin/tuff tray
- Paper towel tubes
- Egg cartons or tray
- Infant safe toy insects
- Small amount water
- Large seashells
- Scooping/dumping tools
- Infant sea animals
- Ocean sounds

## Expressive Language

- Sun, Rain drop, cloud and moon props:
  - Puppets, finger puppets, pictures on paper
- ASL signs for 'Sun', 'Rain', 'Cloud' and 'Moon'
- Arctic animals
- Plastic container
- Sensory bin
- Scoops
- Soft white fabrics:
  - Fleece, faux fur, cotton, felt
- White blanket
- Mirror
- Black and white high contrast animal images:
  - Polar bear, penguin, seal
- Small stuffed arctic animals
- Basket or low tray

## Physical Literacy

- Puppets
- Stuffed animals
- Toy animals
- Large, soft blocks