

Nature Buddies



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Activity Name: Nature Buddies

Ages: Preschool (can be adapted for K - Gr. 1)

Activity Energy: Low to Medium (from sitting to hiking)

Length of time: 45 minutes

Number of Participants: 1 - 15

Indoor/Outdoor: Outdoor

Concept: This activity leads children to discover a secret animal, plant or object through clues, puppets, exploration and stories.

Materials Required: mystery mailbox (this can be any kind of opaque closed container), natural objects pertaining to the secret creature, puppets, storybook

Introduction:

Children are intrigued by the secrets and mysteries of the natural world. This program uses familiar formats to invoke curiosity and wonder in a comfortable setting. Using the 'secret creature' maintains engagement while encouraging an analytical approach to exploring the natural world.

Methods:

Have participants gather in a comfortable space large enough that they can sit in a circle. This activity has 4 different components that are played out in sequence: Mystery Mailbox, Puppet Play, Exploration and Storytime.

1. **Mystery Mailbox:** Children are told that they will be given clues that will lead them to the discovery of a secret creature. Have some natural objects, images or other props in the 'mailbox'. Draw the items out one by one for the kids to look at and touch. Discuss how it is relevant to the secret creature. For example, if your secret is an eagle, objects could include an egg, a nest, a feather and part of a bird skeleton (if you are lucky enough to have one!).
2. **Puppet Play:** In a bag, have 3 - 4 different puppets. This is the time that the children get to guess what the secret creature is. Draw out the puppets one by one and ask the children some leading questions, such as "Does a frog have feathers?", that help the kids find the correct puppet. Always present the correct 'secret' creature puppet last.
3. **Exploration:** Guide the children on a hike or adventure into a natural area to find evidence or habitat of the secret creature or the creature itself. For example, look for large trees where an eagle might nest or look up into the sky or have them look through binoculars to do some bird watching.

4. Storytime: Take the kids back to the blanket for a story that is about the secret creature.

Adaptations / Extensions:

- Choose a secret creature / object that fits the ecosystem you may be studying.
- This activity can be adapted for older kids, such as Kindergarten or Grade 1 by making the creature / object choices more difficult. For example, have 4 different bird puppets to choose from but give them clues specifically for the correct bird.

Tips for Teachers:

- This is an excellent place based activity. By delivering this program repeatedly in the same location, children will be encouraged to explore and observe their place in varying seasons and through different 'eyes' as each new mystery creature unfolds.
- The entire activity is held outdoors unless the weather is extremely poor. In the case of bad weather, do all of the activities indoors but still take the children outside for the exploration component.
- Inform children that they are not allowed to guess what the secret creature is until the puppets are presented.
- The clues in the mystery mailbox can be related to the secret creature but not necessarily from that particular creature. For example you can have a chicken egg even though you may be discovering an eagle. The key is that your puppet selection should not have another bird, so that the kids do not get confused particularly for preschoolers.
- During the hike, ensure that children understand they should always be accompanied by an adult when they go out hiking. Be sure to have a leader in the front and a caboose in the back and tell the kids not to go in front or fall behind.
- Try to read a story book that uses actual facts about the creature.
- This can be a weekly activity that the kids anticipate with eagerness. For repeat programming, choose the secret creature according to the season and what may be around at that time.