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At-home activity for families

For: Pillar 3: Think (Critical and Creative Thinking and Discovery)

Practical and relevant strategies for providing children with opportunities to enhance their critical and creative thinking skills.

The Natural World as Inspiration: An Outdoor Art Show

What You Need

- Glue and/or tape
- Paint, crayons, and/or colored pencils
- Paper (Use construction paper or sketch paper for the artwork and lined notebook paper for the artist's statement.)
- Materials found outside (sticks, leaves, needles, acorns, flowers, small rocks, dirt, etc.)
- A bag or basket for each child to collect materials
- Clothespins, paperclips, or something else to use to hang the pictures up
- If children will be working on their artwork inside, you will want to spread newspaper or a washable tablecloth on the floor or table for them to work on.

Here's What To Do

1. Gather the preliminary supplies (adhesives, coloring supplies, and paper) on a table with a tablecloth if you are indoors or on any flat surface if you are working outside.
2. Explain to the children that they are going to create works of art using natural materials along with their colors/paints and paper.
3. Take children outside, give them each a bag or basket, and have them find at least five different things that they might want to include in their art. (Different can mean two flower petals of different colors or two leaves from different kinds of trees, for example.) Let them know that they don't have to decide exactly how they will use the materials just yet and that they might decide to only use three or four items instead of all five, so they don't have to worry about making those choices right now.
4. Once they've filled their bag or basket with at least five items, take them to the art supplies and let them work on their pieces together.
5. Explain that artists like to write about their art, so the children should think about what their artwork means to them or why they like their artwork and why they chose to include the natural materials they did.

6. Give the children each a piece of lined paper, and ask them to write a sentence or more saying what their art means to them or why they like it. Then ask them to choose one of the natural materials they used and write a sentence explaining why they chose to include it in their picture. (For younger children with limited writing ability, write the sentences as the child says them.)
7. Encourage children to think of titles for their artwork and include them at the top of their artist's statements.
8. Have the children tape their artist's statements to the back of their artwork.
9. Hang the pieces up on clotheslines, fences, or porches.
10. Give the children time to visit each piece of art during the outdoor gallery walk.
11. Sharing: Take the artwork down, and give each child an opportunity to read his or her artist's statement aloud to the rest of the group.
12. Reflection: Ask the children to sit in a circle and talk about what they liked about including natural materials in their artwork. How did it feel? How was it different from the art they usually make? What surprised them about it?

More Ideas To Try

- Instead of or in addition to an artist's statement, you might encourage children to write stories about their artwork.
- After the art walk, have each child trade artwork with a friend and write a story about their friend's art.
- Have children make invitations for the art walk and give them to their parents and/or friends.
- Have children make sculptures out of natural materials.
- Have children take their natural materials and trace them on paper. Then they can write a brief description of their colors and other distinguishing characteristics in order to catalog the various things they've discovered as they explore.

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