

Jack's Garden: Dramatizing the Plant Growth Cycle

Excerpted from "Rediscovering and Exploring Science" workshop
By Wolf Trap Master Teaching Artist Jeanne Wall

Working as a consultant in early learning and Kindergarten classrooms, I am often asked by the teachers to develop lessons about gardening in the spring. There is a wealth of good books to introduce this topic. I love Henry Cole's book *Jack's Garden* because each page is rich with information showing tools, garden preparation, planting, flowers, and the insects and birds that are necessary for a healthy garden. For this lesson, I am going to start by reading the book with the children, giving them a gesture for each sequence in the cumulative text. Whenever I read a book, I try to make it physically active for the children, adding gestures and always giving them a verbal phrase or response to the story. The gestures provide a kinesthetic learning experience while asking the children to work on a symbolic level, which is an emergent literacy skill. The spoken phrase reinforces vocabulary development, also enhancing emergent literacy. But the science emphasis in the lesson is what plants need to grow.

Main Experience

A simple drama experience can change the atmosphere in your classroom. Dramatic play and interaction with the environment are two of the best ways for children to learn. Tapping into children's love for pretending, you can accomplish curriculum goals through dramatic play while making your lesson active and engaging. Integrating the arts and learning creates lessons that appeal to a variety of learning styles and enhances child development.

Would you like to build a garden like Jack's right here in our classroom? We can because we have great imaginations.

Everyone, this is a flower seed. Is it large or small? Can anyone make their body small like this seed? Let's all try that. When you hear the music, it's time for the tiny seeds to sprout and very slowly grow up tall into beautiful flowers. Everyone make yourself small like a seed and start to grow when you hear the music.

(Music should be slow & soothing to help facilitate slow growing movements. Have everyone return to circle.)

We are going to take turns being actors and getting a chance to be a seed and grow in our garden, as well as be sun helpers and rain helpers. Children, what do we need first to make a garden? This cloth is going to be our garden soil.

(Choose the first group, making it small to play the part of the seeds.)

I'm going to place the first seeds in our garden.

(Hold up the word "seed" and place it somewhere out of dramatic action.)

Can you make your bodies small like a seed? Now we are going to cover the seeds with dirt or soil. (Hold up the word "soil," and place it with word "seed." Cover students who are playing the part of the seeds with a piece of fabric.)

Now what do we need to make the seeds sprout and grow? Rain!

(Place the word "rain" with other vocabulary words.)

We are going to need some rain helpers to gently pitter-patter rain on the backs of the seeds.

(Model the gesture and gentle touching of children under the fabric. Choose from remaining students to be rain helpers.)

Now the rain helpers sit down. What else do we need for our garden? Sun!

(Hold up the word “sun.”)

We need some sun helpers to gently rub the backs of the seeds to warm them up, and let them know it’s time to wake up and sprout.

(Again model gentle touch and rubbing. Use the remaining children for sun helpers.)

Now we are going to watch these seeds sprout and grow into beautiful flowers.

(Hold up word “flower.” Start music and watch as the children become flowers. Finish with applause.)

Let’s have a round of applause for our beautiful garden.

Now repeat the cycle one or two more times so every child gets a chance to be a seed in the garden.

Closing Experience

Teach song “Garden Friends,” using hand gestures to represent each animal in the song.

Garden Friends

by Jeanne Wall

*Honey bee, Honey bee
Making that honey in the honey tree
Honey bee, honey bee
Making that honey all day
Flying high, flying low
Up and down and around you go
Honey bee, Honey bee
Making that honey all day*

*Butterfly, Butterfly
Flapping his wings as he flies by
Butterfly, Butterfly
Flapping his wings all day
Flying high, flying low
Up and down and around he goes
Butterfly, Butterfly
Flapping his wings all day*

*Singing bird, singing bird
Singing her song so she’ll be heard
Singing bird, singing bird
Singing her songs all day
Singing high, singing low
Up and down and around she goes
Singing bird, singing bird
Singing her songs all day.
YEAH!*

SUMMARY

Performing Arts Strategies Used:

- Creative representation
- Dramatization
- Role playing
- Representational movement
- Singing in group

Curriculum Connections:

- Life Science – what plants need to grow, seasonal topics, planting, gardens, flower.

Developmental Domain:

- Motor/Physical: Gross and fine motor skills.
- Social/Emotional: Participating in group activity, following directions, turn taking.
- Cognitive: Memory.
- Language: Using new vocabulary, sequencing.
- Emergent Literacy Skills: Vocabulary development
- Decoding: Using signs to represent words and ideas, comprehension, listening to a book, sequencing, cueing (filling in the blanks).