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Sand Jars

Age Group: 6+

Ideal Number: Any

Amount of Time: Half an hour

Sand jars are pretty as they are or can be made into characters by adding features made of scraps of card or felt.

Before the session you will need to colour some play sand. This is done by mixing the sand with powder paint. If the sand is dry you may need to add a small amount of water. It is important that the sand is thoroughly dry before it is put in the jars. You can use a variety of jars but they must have well fitting lids. Dried herb jars are ideal

Pour the sand into the jar building up layers of different colours. Tap the jar on a solid surface regularly to make sure no air gets trapped. It is important that the jar is filled right to the top otherwise the layers will be destroyed when the jar is shaken. Screw the top on firmly. You make like to glue for extra security. The jar can now be decorated

Instead of sand the jars could be filled with layers of beans or pasta.

Photo Frames

Age Group: 6+

Ideal Number: Any

Amount of Time: Half an hour

These can be used to display photos or any pictures which the children have created

Before the session cut out a rectangle of card per person which should be twice the size of the finished frame. Score a line down the centre without cutting through the card. In one half of the card draw a second rectangle slightly smaller than the size of a photo. Pierce a hole in the middle to make it easier to cut this out. Also cut rectangles of the thin card the size of the finished frame

Cut out the central rectangle to create a frame shape and decorate by gluing on leaves, nuts, twigs or shells etc. To finish the frames fold along the scored line, this allows the frame to stand up. The picture should be stuck in the centre of the thin card which is then stuck to the back of the frame.

This can be a good activity to do after a trip out. Take photos on the trip and the children can decorate the frames with things they collected.

Miniature gardens

Age Group: 6+

Ideal Number: Any

Amount of Time: Half an hour

This is a good autumn activity when there are lots of pine cones, acorns and conkers to use. Have a session collecting these sort of items before making the gardens.

To make the garden put a layer of compost or damp sand into shallow dish. Polystyrene trays from the supermarket are good. Now arrange items in the compost to form a garden. For example A pine cone could be a bush, a twig would make a tree and a shell could form a pond. You could sprinkle light coloured sand onto compost to make a path or use small pebbles to create a rockery. Provide items like cocktail sticks, lolly stick and cardboard to make fences, garden sheds or even benches. If you like you could complete the garden by sewing grass seed in the compost. If you do then the compost must be kept moist for it to grow.

Pressed flowers

Age Group: 6+

Ideal Number: Any

Amount of Time: Varies

You can press all kinds of flowers but it is best if people bring them from their own gardens. You can also press leaves and the seed heads of grasses, herbs keep their smell and make nice scented pictures. For best results collect on a dry day

Lay the flowers between sheets of kitchen roll making sure that they do not overlap. Now place into a heavy book such a phone directory. Many sets of flowers can be placed in a single book. They will take a couple of weeks to press and dry

Use the pressed flowers to create pictures, cards or book marks. Use PVA glue and brush carefully on the back of the flowers to stick them down. If you are making a book mark cover the arrangement in clear sticky backed plastic to protect it.

Dream Catchers

Age Group: 8+

Ideal Number: Any

Amount of Time: 30-40 minutes

You can weave anything into your dream catcher. You make them to remember a special event by using items collected at the event.

If you can find a flexible enough twig you can bend it into a circle and bind the join using wool or string. It may be easier to hold it in place with stick tape while you do this. If you can not find flexible twigs lash five or six together twigs into a frame

Wind coloured wool or narrow strips of fabric across the frame to create a web effect. You can now weave objects into the web. Try leaves, pine cones and feathers. Objects like shells or pebbles can be fastened on by first tying a length of wool around them (as though you were tying up a parcel) then tying them to the web. You could also thread beads onto the wool as you create the web

To finish you dream catcher tie a hanging loop to the top. You could also add feathers or strings of beads at the bottom. You could make frames of different sizes and hang two or three up together.

Sand Candles

Age Group: 8+

Ideal Number: any

Amount of Time: 30-40 minutes + setting time

You can buy paraffin wax for candle making either as a block or as small chips from most craft shops. There you will also be able to get dyes or perfume to add to the wax. You can buy wicks either at a long length or as wax coated stick, these are easier to deal with but can be more expensive.

Fill a heatproof container such as an empty catering size tin with sand, this will be your mould. Press the sand down, it needs to be damp enough to hold it's shape. Now make a shape by removing some of the sand. Old spoons and knives can be useful here.

To melt the wax place it in a bowl over a pan of hot water. If you have a large group you may need to have several pots of wax melting. If you are using lengths of wick you will need to cut a length which will reach to the bottom of you mould and leave enough to tie round a stick to support it. This stick will be balanced on the top of you container of sand. Put the wick in place before pouring in the wax. If you have coated wick you should pour the wax into the mould first and then place the wick in the centre.

Once the wax has set turn out your candle and brush of any excess sand.

You can melt down the ends of old candles and make new ones in this way though you will need a lot of candle ends for a group.

Things that Grow

Cress Heads

Age Group: 6-9

Ideal Number: Whole group

Amount of Time: Twenty minutes

To make a cress head you will require some egg shells with only the top cut off. You will also need cotton wool and cress seed.

Make sure the shells are fairly clean through they need not be polished. Give one to each member of the group together will enough cotton wool to nearly fill the shell. The shells are stronger with the cotton wool in and can now easily be decorated with paint or felt tips. Water the cotton wool and sprinkle some cress seed into the shell. The cress will grow into hair. Egg boxes can be turned into stands for the cress heads.

Cress Caterpillars

Age Group: 3+

Ideal Number: Whole group

Amount of Time: Twenty minutes

A less delicate alternative to cress heads.

Cut an egg box in half lengthways, trim the tops of the cups to level them out.. Attach short lengths of pipe cleaner to the front of the egg box with sticky tape to form antenna then decorate using felt pens. Put enough damp cotton will in each cup to nearly fill it. It is best to moisten the cotton wool before putting it in the caterpillar to avoid making the cardboard soggy. Sprinkle cress seeds onto the cotton wool.

Grass Heads

Age Group: 6-12

Ideal Number: 4-6 per adult

Amount of Time: Half an hour

To make your grass heads you will require grass seeds, compost and several pairs of old tights (make sure they are not worn through at the toes), you will also need a little cotton to add the finishing touches.

Cut a section of tights about 20cm long and must include a foot. The toe part will form the head. Sprinkle a little compost into the toe. Sprinkle some grass seed on top of this before filling the rest of the toe with compost. Finally tie a knot at the bottom of the grass head to stop the compost coming out. The head should be about the size of a adult's fist when complete.

To complete the grass head draw a little compost out at the 'front' of the head and tie some cotton round to make a nose. The eyes can be drawn in with a dark felt tip.

Grass heads need a lot of water, they should be placed on a saucer and watered **at least** every other day. They can quite easily die if left for the weekend.

Age Group: 6-12

Cress Stencils

Ideal Number: Whole Group

Amount of Time: Half an hour

Another way of growing cress

You will need a small plastic tray or plate for each person, some card and scissors. Start by cutting a piece of card the same size as your tray then draw a design. You need to be able to cut out the design to form a stencil. Young children may need some help with this. Then cut out the design.

Fold a sheet of kitchen towel and lay in the tray. Moisten with water then lay your stencil over it. Sprinkle the cress seeds through onto the kitchen towel and remove the stencil. You should be able to see the design as the cress grows.

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