

It's Not Only A Stick

by Diane Wendelin, Pioneers Park Nature Center, Preschool Teacher

Sticks have been around for centuries, but no matter if you are three, four, five or six years old, they hold a new adventure for every child.



Outside in the natural world sticks have been imaginarily turned into many different things by the children at the Pioneers Park Nature Center preschool, all of which they've created by themselves, with very little teacher prompting.

We have seen sticks used as magic wands for princess parities, drumsticks to tap out a tune on logs, a flag while they pretend to play school or a stick horse to ride upon. The children have pretended to use sticks in all aspects of camping; fishing poles, a campfire, a stick for marshmallows and hot-dog roasting.

A wonderful eagle nest was constructed one day out in the woods, with sticks and small logs by the children. The children constructed it all on their own from a thought that blossomed and the children worked together to make their idea come to life. The children have built a log and stick fort, it gets remodeled quite often which makes for extra fun when the next preschool class comes to the fort and sees all the changes. Sticks are also used to write and draw in the dirt, sand, and mud; while learning numbers, the alphabet and children's names.

Sticks also become light sabers from Star Wars and other props as the children act out the different shows they've seen. An unavoidable use of the sticks is when they are used to swat, poke, and swing around, but this can be incorporated into a very teachable moment about weapons and their proper uses such as hunting. Many of our children come from hunting families and the children have stories to share about their family's experiences.

Inside our Nature Preschool classroom, a bouquet of beautiful sticks in all shapes and sizes is often displayed in a vase. Sticks have many creative uses in arts and crafts. Sticks as antlers to glue on deer and elk pictures. Sticks to make into mobiles, sticks to use as a picture frame for a child's picture at the beginning of the year to help recognize our friends and their names.

It is amazing to watch what the children do with a basket of assorted sticks. We have watched the children use these sticks to create pictures, create the letters of their name, measure their arms, legs or how tall they are, or even make a long, long line of sticks.

Besides playing make believe, learning letters and numbers, and doing crafts with sticks. These versatile, free, learning toys teach creativity, coordination, and critical thinking. One day, a student, was lifting a sizable log (for his age) to move to another location. He let it drop which of course would be dangerous if it had landed on him or another child. However, after a discussion with him about safety, he decide, on his own, that he could roll it to the new spot, which he promptly did. He was so proud of himself that he figured out how to move the log.

Sticks whether outside in the natural world or inside the Nature Preschool classroom, are a favorite of many of our preschool students and also the preschool teachers.

Please call the Nature Center Preschool Director at 402-441-8669 for more information. The Nature Center also offers six session of Camp Discovery, a summer day camp for 3-6 year olds. This program takes place 9:00 – 11:30 am, Monday-Thursdays in June and July. For more information visit lincoln.ne.gov, keyword: Nature Camps.