

Linking Drama to Children's Literature

Developed by Jeanne Wall

Extending the Story: Integrating the Performing Arts and Learning

Objective/Goal:

Dramatic play and interaction with the environment are two of the best ways for children to learn. By tapping into children's love for pretending, this experience addresses curriculum goals through dramatic play while making the lesson active and engaging.

Educational Impact:

- ✓ Vocabulary development
 - ✓ Sequencing
 - ✓ Listening skills
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Suggestions for use with the *Songs for Singing and Learning* CDs:

- ✓ "Garden Song"
 - ✓ "Katie's Lullaby" (This is slow, soothing music to be used for seeds growing)
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Materials Needed:

- ✓ The book *Jack's Garden* by Henry Cole (Hong Kong: Harpers, 1995)
 - ✓ Fabric
 - ✓ Device for playing music
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Procedure and Process:

Many early childhood teachers like to develop lessons about gardening in the spring. The Henry Cole book *Jack's Garden* is a good place to start, 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.

Start by reading the book with the children, giving them a gesture for each sequence in the text. 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.

Introduction:

Reading, with the children participating with gestures, helps focus their attention and kinesthetically helps them learn the vocabulary and sequence of the story. Often, the children are able to use the vocabulary and understand the sequence after only one reading when gestures are added. Some of these gestures will also be used in a song at the end of the lesson. Throughout the week, the book can be reread, stopping to discuss the details and illustrations on each page.

Children, this is the garden that Jack planted. He has worked hard to get his garden ready for planting. He's made his garden soil flat. Let's all make a flat garden bed like Jack using our arm. [Hold forearm parallel to the floor and stroke arm starting at elbow, ending at fingertips]

This is the soil that made up the garden that Jack built. [Children repeat garden bed gesture]

These are the seeds. Everyone pick up a seed. [With thumb and forefinger, pick up seed and put it in the garden bed on your forearm] *These are the seeds that fell.*

This is the rain. Let's all make some rain. [Lift both hands, fingers open, starting overhead and bringing them down slowly] *This is the rain that wets the seeds.*

These are the seedlings. What is a seedling? The seedling is the tiny baby plant that grows when the seeds get wet. Let's all make a seedling. [Point the tip of your finger so that it is sticking out above arm/garden bed] *These are the seedlings that sprouted.*

These are the flowers. Let's all make a flower. [Using your forearm as garden bed, make your other arm stick up perpendicular to it with your elbow resting on top of the garden bed arm. Your fingers are the flower, hand wide open.] *Let's all smell our flowers. These are the flowers that grew from the seedlings that sprouted when the _____* [Leave out the word "rain" and other words, showing only the gestures and allowing the children to fill in the missing words for each gesture]

These are the insects. Many insects visit the garden to drink the nectar of the flowers. First we'll make a bumblebee. Hold out your fist to make a bee. Now put a stinger on it. BZZZZ! [Hold fist upward, thumb sticking out to the side]

And this is a butterfly. Hold up both hands with palms facing toward yourselves . Make sure your thumbs are on the outside. Let's have other thumbs say a thumb hello to our neighbors. Gently touch your thumb to the thumb of the person next to you to say hello. Now cross your hands and hook your thumbs together. This is the sign for "butterfly." These are the insects that sipped nectar from the flowers.

These are the birds. This is the sign for singing bird. Put your thumb and finger together beside your mouth and move them open and closed.

[Continue reading, remembering to leave blanks for the children to verbally fill in when you cue them with the gestures] *These are the birds that chase after the... that sip nectar from the ... that grew from the ... that sprouted when the ... wet the ... that fell on the ... that made up the garden that Jack planted. And this is the garden that Jack planted.*

Main Experience:

A simple drama experience can change the atmosphere in your classroom. 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 and soothing to help facilitate slow growing movements. Bring everyone back to the 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 the word "seed." Cover the children 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 the children who are under the fabric. Choose from remaining children 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. [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 the word "flower." Start music and watch as the children become flowers. Finish with applause.]

Closure:

Teach the song "Garden Song" using the gestures the children already know for bee, butterfly, and singing bird.

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.

