

## Planning Fun Outdoor Winter Activities

By Marcia Demski, Licensing Consultant, Midland County in MiAEYC "Beacon" newsletter January 2014

Every year we look forward to the first snowfall when Michigan is transformed into a beautiful winter wonderland. The children can hardly wait to get outside and play in the snow and catch snowflakes on their tongues. Once they are outside there are many fun winter activities you can get the children involved in doing. With just a little planning on your part, these outdoor winter activities can be a fun learning experience for the children in your care:



- Make snowflake catchers. Cut black felt into 2" squares and have the children glue to a Popsicle stick. Put in the freezer or keep outside until used. When it is snowing children can catch snowflakes and view their intricate designs.
- Make icicles. On a very cold day repeatedly pour water over a section of fence or a log.
- Jump over snow hurdles. The children can lightly pack a bunch of basketball size snowballs and use them to build a course of hurdles to jump over while playing follow the leader. For toddlers smaller snowball hurdles would be used to step over.
- Construct a snowman. Have each child choose a hat and make a game of tossing the hats from ten feet away onto the snowman's head until one stays in position.
- Send the children on a snowy scavenger hunt. Bury colorful waterproof items in the snow drifts and mounds in the play area. Be sure to cover your tracks so the children don't find the hiding places too easily.
- Organize a nature treasure hunt. How many different pine cones, seed pods, nuts and berries can the children find? How many different leaves can they locate?
- Discover the birds in the play area. Create a contest to see how many birds the children can recognize. Listen to the bird calls and have them try to identify the birds.
- Put out different kinds of food for birds and other wildlife, such as various seeds, fruit, dry bread, and suet feeders. The children can track which animals eat what types of food. They can look to see what evidence the animals leave behind.
- Hunt for bird nests. Remember where they are so you can watch the birds nesting in the spring.
- Enjoy a winter picnic. Put a blanket down to sit on. Pack a warm sandwich in an insulated bag, and have hot soup and hot cocoa from a thermos.
- Attach plastic to the fence and ask the children to paint it with any images they like, or you can provide ideas according to your current theme. These colorful murals add a lot to the play area in the starkness of winter.
- Paint the snow using spray or squirt bottles of colored water or paint brushes dipped in water tinted with food coloring. Start with the three primary colors of red, blue and yellow. Have them mix the colors and identify the new colors they have created.
- Lie on the ground and watch the sky. What do the clouds look like in the winter? Are the clouds different from those in the summer?
- Create an outdoor weather station in your play area. Mount a thermometer to record the temperature, a rain gauge to measure rainfall, a wind/weather vane to record the wind direction, an anemometer to measure wind speed and a psychrometer/hygrometer to measure relative humidity. Record your readings in a journal.

Before heading outdoors do make sure the children are dressed warmly with several layers of clothing, including a warm coat, snow pants, waterproof boots, hat, and mittens. Come in before the children become tired, or begin to be chilled. This way the children will have fun, positive experiences outdoors in the winter weather and look forward to going outside again!

## Get Outside and Explore!

By Celia Ciecko, Parent Educator/Bilingual Liaison, Romeo Community Schools

*Winter is a perfect time of year to get outside and explore the great outdoors. Weather doesn't cause illness. Viruses cause illness. This article contains ideas for outdoor play that can be used by early childhood professionals and can be shared with the families in your center.*

Sadly, our children spend less time outside than we did when we were their ages. We need to do our part and bring back the days of outdoor fun, something we took for granted while growing up. Children really want to spend time with their family. Sharing time outside with your child will create memories that will last a lifetime. So bundle up and go outside, even though it's snowy and cold. What better way to have good ol' fashion fun with your child.

- Activities to help your children explore outdoors.
- Go for a walk
- Ride bikes
- Fly kites
- Blow bubbles
- Make treats for the birds
- Look for animal tracks outside
- Make an ice sculpture
- Make snow bricks (using a loaf pan)
- Make a small ice skating rink
- Throw snow balls for target practice
- Visit a nature trail at night and look for Snowy Owls. They are found in the Arctic tundra — The snowy owls are showing up all across lower Michigan this winter in search of food.
- Go sledding
- Go ice skating
- Roll a bigger snowball — save it until it snows again and roll it some more to make it bigger. How long will it take to melt?
- Build a bonfire and make s'mores
- Set up an obstacle course

### Ice Candles

An activity for kids that also can enhance your winter landscaping is creating ice candles. Using small containers such as beach pails for a mold, kids can create clear or colored candle holders from ice. Fill the pail with cold tap water and place an empty soda or soup can in the center. For colored ice candles, add a few drops of food coloring to the water. Fill the can with enough pebbles or gravel to keep it from floating to the top and allow the pail to sit outdoors until frozen. Run hot water over the outside of the pail to loosen the ice and gently slide the ice block out. Place an appropriately sized candle inside of the ice block to complete.

### Make snow

First, pop about 16 ice cubes in your blender. Then blend until you have ice that has turned to snow. Make sure your blender is strong enough to grind ice! Go outside and grab some REAL snow and make some observations.

Can you guess which one is the real snow? Pretty convincing isn't it? We noticed the REAL SNOW was colder, softer, and didn't taste as good!!! We observed the HOMEMADE SNOW was warmer, harder, and tasted better! Both snows could form into snowballs when warmer. Both melted....the homemade snow melted faster!

(selected activities from this article from **MiAEYC "Beacon" newsletter January 2014**)