

# **OUTDOOR NATURE PROGRAM**

**Rosedale Playschool**



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# OUTDOOR NATURE PROGRAM

## Purpose

The purpose of the Outdoor Nature Program is to connect children to the natural world. In this digital age, children are spending more time indoors, stationary, and in front of screens. The Outdoor Nature Program is meant to encourage children to get active and ask questions. The Outdoor Nature Program is meant to inspire and motivate children to move, play, explore and wonder.

## GOALS

- *Play outdoors using natural materials*
- *Gain a deeper understanding and respect for the environment*
- *Use your imagination*
- *Be able to think critically and ask questions*
- *Develop a sense of empathy and compassion for the natural world*
- *Use your five sense to explore nature*
- *Improved physical health and well-being*
- *Develop a sense of belonging, independence, mastery and generosity*

## “Let nature be you teacher” -William Wordsworth

The environment is often referred to as the 3<sup>rd</sup> teacher. The goal of learning and playing outdoors is to encourage children’s sense of wonder, curiosity and playfulness. By allowing children the opportunity

to explore nature and the outdoors, they will naturally ask questions or discover new ways to approach situations and problem solve.

## **OUTCOMES**

- *Demonstrate the ability participate within a group setting*
- *Develop a meaningful connection to the natural world*
- *Ask thoughtful questions and begin to think critically*
- *Develop a love for playing outdoors and have fun!*

The outcomes for the outdoor class will centre around a sense of belonging and enjoyment. For children to develop a meaningful connection, they need to enjoy the experience. Participation will be encouraged as children being to learn to work together and play together. They can ask for help, ask each other questions and create something magical together.

During nature walks, children will be asked open ended questions about their environment to which there will be no wrong answers. Teachers will acknowledge children's questions and help them find the answers even if it is not scientifically accurate. At this age, are helping children learn how think not what to think.

The Outdoor Nature Program will be experience through play-based where children will have the freedom to explore and learn through play. Whether we play a game together or freely explore our space, children will naturally become more creative, curious and playful in the outdoor setting.

# Program Overview

## DAILY SCHEDULE

The daily schedule will always depend on the day. As each year can be unpredictable, we must be flexible with our schedule as well with our planned, or spontaneous activities.

<b>Outdoor Nature Program</b>	<i>Fall (September-November)</i>
Arrival - 1:15	Walk to crescent heights park or bluff
1:15-1:30	Book, invitation, general meeting
1:30-2:45	Free exploration/play- use of natural materials and investigative skills, invitations for art using natural materials. Group snack
2:45-3:00	Walk back to Rosedale
3:00-3:30	Scribed journal, end of the day meeting, pick up

Upon arrival, the children, lucky duck, and teacher will engage in brief group meeting to discuss the plan for the day and to review safety rules using social learning curriculum. After our meeting we will proceed with a nature walk through the neighbourhoods toward our destination. This will be a good chance to STOP, LOOK, and LISTEN to our surroundings. In the Fall, we will be able to recognize the signs of the seasons shifting by observing the trees and the behaviour of animals. A trip to the bluff to oversee Calgary as the weather changes would be a fun activity to observe how the city changes. As the weather becomes cooler, we can discuss animal adaptations and people adaptations. The park will be our outdoor classroom where we might have a second meeting, eat snack, and engage in free play. The playground is off-limits.

The cooler weather will mean that time spent outdoors will vary. Even though the children will be properly dressed, we will spend less time at the park or in the outdoor space than usual. We have cut-off of -20 with wind chill. The extra time will be filled with planned activities in the classroom.

<b>Outdoor Nature Program</b>	<i>Winter (November-April)</i>
Arrival - 1:15	Walk to crescent heights park or bluff
1:15-1:30	Book, invitation, general meeting
1 : 3 0 - 2 : 0 0 (2:30)	Free exploration/play- use of natural materials and investigative skills
2:00-2:15	Walk back to Rosedale
2:15-3:30	Brief meeting, group snack, art, free play, scribed journal, and end off day meeting, pick up

Similar to the schedule in fall, we will attempt to spend at least one hour outside exploring and investigating nature; Footprints, adaptations and weather changes. We will also put more of a focus on what can be accomplished in the indoor classroom and how we can connect the indoors and the outdoor. There will be more emphasis on activities that relate to nature. Select areas of the indoor classroom will be sectioned off. There will more structure around activities, art and journaling, but we will still honour the importance of free play.

<b>Outdoor Nature Program</b>	<i>Spring (April-June)</i>
Arrival - 1:15	Walk to crescent heights park or bluff
1:15-1:30	Book, invitation, general meeting
1:30-2:45	Free exploration/play- use of natural materials and investigative skills, table invitations for art using natural materials. Group snack

2:45-3:00	Walk back to Rosedale
3:00-3:30	Scribed journal, end of the day meeting, pick up

In spring, we will be able to return to spending a majority, if not all, of our time outdoors. As bugs emerge from hibernation and birds return, we will be able to revisit these topics in greater detail. Over the winter, we could work on projects that are suited for spring such as bug hotels and bird feeders, gardening projects and life cycles.

## Program Overview

### JOURNALS

Children will be given a nature journal at the beginning of the year. In the nature journal children will be given the opportunity to sketch or draw objects they find in nature. Journals can be used to document life cycles, create art project, document experience, write a story or simply to use to colour. The teacher will give children prompts for their journals in class which will be dependent on what the children are exploring.



## Program Overview

### RISKY PLAY

As with any outdoor play, there will always be some risk involved. Whether the child is playing on the playground, riding their bike, or even just running through the field. The benefits of risky play outweigh the risks associated with injury. Through risky play children are learning to test their limits and strengthen their abilities. In the Outdoor Nature Program, risky play will be encouraged, but we will also respect children's boundaries and never pressure a child to partaking in an activity if they are feeling uncomfortable. When



children push themselves outside of their comfort zone, they become more confident in themselves. Most children know when the risk becomes too great and will ask for help or choose an alternative. Knowing when to stop and when to ask for help are great skills for children to develop.

Some examples of risky play we may experience are working with tools, climbing, sliding on ice or building with natural materials



## Program Overview

### BRINGING THE OUTDOORS IN

How can we connect our outdoor experience to our indoor experience? On days where playing outdoors is not an option, the Outdoor Nature Program will offer a variety of play experiences indoors to connect the children with the experiences they have outside. The use of natural materials, including leaves, sticks, pinecones, flowers and more will be incorporated into short-term and long-term projects. Interest in

animals, weather, life-cycles will all be explored in the classroom using books and materials relevant to the topic of interest.



## Topics

### FALL

#### Meeting the Children:

Our ice breaker activity was to introduce yourself by saying your name and sharing your favourite thing in nature. This activity was to learn more about the children's interests and to find out what they know. Many of the children shared their favourite animal.

## **Ice breakers:**

First Impression: Show children pictures of a variety of animals and ask them how they feel about that animal. You can pose many different questions to children about why they may like or dislike these animals, or why some animals are wild, and some are tame.

Silent Hello: This game will take some practice. You start by sitting in a circle while holding hand. The “hello” will be a squeeze of the hand. Once you feel your hand squeezed then you can pass on the hello by gently squeezing the hand of the person next to you. The squeeze will be passed around the circle until it reaches the first person.

## **Five Senses:**

The first day, we did an activity that would help us tune into nature. We started with our eyes open and identified all the different things we could see. Next, we closed our eyes and tried to be very quiet to identify all the things we could hear. With our eyes still closed, we thought about what we could smell, as well as what we could touch. This activity can be repeated throughout the year with the changing seasons and in different locations.

# **Activities**

## **Nature Bag:**

Included on each nature walk will be a nature bag for children to collect natural items. We discuss the importance of only taking something that is already on the ground, and not removing nature from its original place. Picking flowers or taking leaves of the tree can harm the plant so we must wait until it comes off naturally.

### **Promise Beads:**

At the beginning of the year the children created promise beads. Children chose three beads each bead representing a promise. The first promise is to take care of the self, the second is to take care of others, and the third is to take care to their place. The beads represent kindness, empathy and compassion for themselves, others, and the environment.

### **Leaf Man:**

The "Leaf Man" is a story by Lois Ehlert. The illustrations of people, landscapes, and animals are all comprised of leaves. After reading the story, the children could use the leaves they had collected to create creatures, collages, animals or people.

### **Bird Feeders:**

Talking with the children about migration and which birds stay and which birds go, we decided to make bird feeders. The children mixed bird seed and lard together then used cookie cutters to create the desired shape. We put the feeders in the freezer while we went for our nature walk and then tied string to the bird feeder to hang them from a tree.

### **Pumpkin Decorating:**

The children decorated small pumpkins in the spirit of Halloween. There were sequins, pipe cleaners, tooth picks, beads, shells, googly eyes, and paint to decorate their small pumpkins.

### **Bird Nests:**

We built our own bird nests using clay and natural materials the children had collected. The children were able to hold and examine real

bird nests to see the materials a bird would use. An interesting aspect that was pointed out was that there was a little bit of garbage in the bird nests. The children decided that birds don't actually want garbage in their nests, but it happens sometimes because there is so much litter.

### **Colour Hunt:**

Using paint hue cards from a home store, the children used their personal collection bags to go on a colour scavenger hunt. The hues were various greens and browns and the children found natural materials to match the colours on their cards. Later, the children glued the objects they found to the cards.

### **Scavenger Hunt:**

An easy activity that can be adapted depending of the season. For this scavenger hunt, the challenge was to find objects with different textures and structures along with a variety of items. The textures were smooth, rough, soft and hard. We also looked for leaves with different shapes.

## **Topics**

### **WINTER**

### **Animals Tracks:**

Discovering the evidence that animals leave behind can be an activity to explore all winter. Each week there will be something new to examine and explore. Animals don't only leave footprints, but scat, fur, feathers and food as well. Try asking the children to be detectives and tell a story based on what they see around them. Trace or draw animals and tracks in the classroom and talk about why some tracks look the same and others look different. The same can be done with scat in regard to the animal's main food source.

### **Migration:**

The children might notice that there are a few animals who have suddenly vanished. Where are the butterflies, some of the birds? This is a good question to ask the children and find out what they know. The children usually know the animals go somewhere hot. But why? When? How far do they fly?

### **Hibernation:**

Hibernation is an interesting topic to explore. Many children know that bears hibernate and assume that that means bears sleep non-stop for months! It's interesting to explore all the different animals and insects that also hibernate and where! Children can have the opportunity to play made up games like building caves or burrows to sleep in for the winter.

### **Food Chain:**

This year the children were very interested in natural food chains. The book "Who Eats Who" guided us through a variety of food chains. As practice, the children started with a seed and worked their way through the chain until they reached an animal who was not eaten by anyone. We played a game where the children were divided into groups. The children decided on the food chain (squirrels, coyotes, and wolves) and tried to survive without getting eaten! Later the children could practice drawing their own food chain which included dinosaurs and sharks.

## **Adaptation:**

The best example for children to observe adaptation in wild animals is by watching the rabbits fur change from brown to white! Many other animals and plants adapt in the winter, but you will have to be an investigator to discover how other animals adapt in the winter time. How do people adapt in the winter time?

## **The Mountain:**

This year the children we fascinated by the Mountain; which was just a very large pile of snow! But to the children, the possibilities were endless. The children worked together helping each other climb to the top. They used stick as climbing pools and created slides to ease their way down. The children role played as mountain lions or wolves, climbing up as fast as they could.

## **Not A Box:**

After reading "Not a Box" we provided the children with two huge boxes, one for practice and one to build which. It was important for the children to work together and come up with a common idea for their box. The children used a variety of other materials to add to their creation such at paper towel rolls, shoe boxes, and duct tape.

## **Snow Play:**

There are so many ways to play in the snow! Build snow men, snow forts, digging, and even drawing in the snow. The children were allowed lot of unstructured snow play and were encouraged to keep moving so that they didn't get too cold.

# **Topics**



## **SPRING**

### **Bugs:**

We began to discover evidence of bugs in late March. The first thing we noticed were spider webs and we knew a spider must be near by. As the weeks passed more and more bugs emerged. First, we saw spiders, ladybugs and ants. We had to talk as a group about what to do when we saw bugs or if we felt scared. When it comes to bugs like wasps, mosquitos and bees, the children often feel afraid because these bugs can bite or sting! Its important to talk with the children about being as still as statue, or to move away from the bug calmly as not make it upset. We also encourage the children to the bugs with kindness and care; don't step on or squash bugs just because you don't like it. Respect the bugs and all the good it does for the circle life.

### **Plants:**

One activity the children did to observe the growth of plants was paint weekly still life photos of the garden to track how it changed over a couple of months.

### **STOP!**

This was an activity we introduced in spring because the walk became more of process and less of a destination. We were less focused on arriving at the park and instead how we got there. The child would say "stop" when they came across something that they found fascinating and we would all stop to have look and talk about it. This really help the children become more aware of their surroundings and helped them gain a sense of mastery as they became leaders and guided other children; teaching them about their discovery.

### **Puddles:**

Children love puddle and given the opportunity to jump in them- they will, happily! Some thing to keep in mind is appropriate clothing and



footwear. Even with a great pair of rubber boots there is still a chance that children's clothing will get very wet, especially their socks. Ensure you have extra clothes packed before you go puddle splashing. Have an adult or child check the depth of puddle as it can be deceiving how deep the water can go!

Puddles are also a great opportunity for some simple water play. You can make boats, do a sink or float test, make mud and more!

## Topics

### ONGOING

#### **The Haunted Tree:**

At the beginning of the year, the children were very enamored with the giant tree in the park. For a little while the tree had a ghost who lived inside, and then eventually, as the leaves began to fall, the children believed that tree had fallen ill. They used the leaf buds they found on the ground as medicine for the tree. When we asked when the tree would be healed, the children replied that they tree would be fall better when the leaves started to grow back. As spring approaches, we are excited to see our tree become healthy again.

#### **Bug Hotel**