

Nature-Based Learning and Development: Language and Literacy Ideas for Teachers

Narrator: With language and literacy, we communicate with each other and express our ideas. We all have a story.

Teacher: They started dancing. Again.

[Teacher and children singing in Native American language]

Narrator: Our stories and languages connect us to our past and future, to each other, and to the world we live in.

Teacher: And... all the raspberries and salmonberries came out.

Narrator: As teachers, we can use ideas from the natural world to help young children gain the language and literacy skills they need to be ready for kindergarten.

Teacher: What are you going to paint? We saw birds today. We saw worms. What else did we see today? We saw flowers.

Narrator: We need language and literacy to understand symbols and written words and gestures and signs.

Teacher: Green. Who remembers the sign for green? That's red. Eve's remembering green. That's green. You're remembering green.

Narrator: Let's see how these teachers are using ideas from nature to teach language and literacy skills. We all know that nature activities are full of words that are new to children.

Teacher: You see the bubbles in the water?

Boy: I see those bubbles.

Teacher: Yeah, you know what that is? What is that? That's air. That's oxygen for the fish.

Boy: Look, that's a rock.

Teacher: Those are rocks. That's gravel. That's gravel, yeah. They call them "rocks", too.

Boy: What scientist do dig the bones out of a dinosaur?

Teacher: What did you say? Oh, that's the paleontologist.

Boy: Paleontologists dig dinosaurs because dinosaur real dead, turn to bones, and then put the mud.

Narrator: With real objects from nature, children can use their senses to learn. They can listen, smell, and touch with pine cones that are gigantic, daffodils that are delicate, and berry bushes that have thorns.

Teacher: Okay, I'll grab it so it doesn't pinch you guys or scratch you.

Child: Or poke us.

Teacher: Or poke you, you're right. There you go.

Child: It's big!

Teacher: It's big!

Narrator: "Duh." D is for dogs. E. E is for eagle. For older children, how about making a nature alphabet book? You could go on a nature walk and help them make an alphabet book from the things they see, find, and hear. Nature sounds are more than just fun.

Teacher: Say "cow." Moo! Moo!

Narrator: They're a good way for infants and toddlers to begin to learn the sounds of language. And with nature words like "paleontologist" and "metamorphosis," there are plenty of opportunities for phonological awareness.

Teacher: Now, watch this. Clap with your hands. Get your clapping hands ready. Con-den-sa-tion.

Narrator: Children can practice writing letters and numbers in lots of ways.

Teacher: It might be fun to use some of our things that we've gathered from outside. Do you want to use a stick to make your "l"? Look.

[Teacher laughs]

Girl: It's like a lollipop.

Teacher: It is, yeah.

Girl: Look, a lollipop!

Teacher: That's so funny, huh, a lollipop? Yeah, she has an "l", too. She might want to use a stick, too.

Narrator: For example, if you have a classroom garden, the children can draw labels for the plants and practice copying letters. And with seed packets, you can make a game of Concentration. It can be fun to go on a nature scavenger hunt. You can make a picture list of things the children will look for: a leaf, an ant, a butterfly. Help them cross off each item when they find it. Of course, books cover a wide range of topics on the natural world, and we know that it's never too soon to introduce children to books and the love of reading.

Teacher: Oh, yes, you know what kittens are. There's another one! Look at that one. That looks like Bella. Have you seen Bella the cat?

Teacher: Now, what about this arrow?

Children: Leaves.

Teacher: Pointing to the leaves.

Narrator: Children love to hear stories, retell stories, and make connections between the things they learn.

Teacher: So he wants to get a new shell, and, look, three choices, too. And then we have a mediumsized shell, and then we have --

Girl: We have a little, like the three bears and Goldilocks.

Teacher: I'm telling you the truth. You are so right!

Narrator: The natural world is an endless source of stories, ideas, and mysteries for us all. And when it comes to telling stories, many children are eager to tell their own.

Girl: I heard a bear at my house. It was sleeping in my house. I said, "Ahh, a bear!" And my papa grabbed me out of the bear's mouth.

Teacher: Whoa, you know, you told a story that made everyone listen. I hope that you write your story down.

Narrator: According to research, when children have opportunities to spend time in nature, they're better able to pay attention and learn. We can use nature activities to teach important literacy and language skills: vocabulary and novel words, letter names and sounds, phonological awareness, early writing, books, and stories and dramatic play. Through nature, we can encourage children to share their ideas. With simple activities and materials that are easy to find, we can enrich their language and literacy skills. We can show them new ways to understand.

[Music]

[End video]