

Camping

Background

Many children who live in urban, or even some suburban, areas have never experienced spending time in nature—outdoors without buildings, streets, lights, or other comforts. The children may not know what it is like to find a chrysalis attached to a twig, cook over an open fire, or listen to crickets chirp. A camping theme will heighten their awareness of the environment and foster an appreciation of nature.

Within this theme children could extend their learning to other subject areas. In language arts, children could compose letters and postcards to friends back home. Computing distances on a map or costs of a meal could become a math lesson. Science studies of nutrition, small woodland animals, insects, weather, and safety blend in here.

Creating a New Center



Turning the Dramatic-Play Center into a Campsite

Remove the home center/dramatic-play center and replace it with a campsite. If a small pop-up-style camping tent is not available, simply tie a rope

between two sturdy chairs to make a tent. Then, fold a flat sheet in half and drape it across the rope, spreading the sides out to form a tent. The tent becomes the focal point of your campsite.

Add sleeping bags, outdoor cooking utensils (Dutch oven, skillet, potholders, etc.), small logs complete with red cellophane fire, binoculars, compasses, flashlights, battery-operated lanterns, child-sized lawn chairs, and a small table. During the course of the unit, children can create trees and bushes to add to the out-of-doors atmosphere. A park ranger station can be created nearby—a simple shelf and chair will suffice for the ranger's office.



TIP

Center Set-up

To make a more durable tent, slice down one edge of a large, square cardboard box (donated refrigerator boxes work well). Trim off the top and bottom of the box and overlap two of the sides, creating a "pup tent" or triangular-shaped box. Securely fasten the sides together. Alternatively, you can make a tepee-style tent with long strips of lumber tied together at one end. Spread out the bottom end of the wooden strips and cover this cone-shaped frame with thin fabric. Secure the wooden strips to prevent the tepee from falling over. Or, simply drape a sheet over a table for an instant tent.

Enhancing Traditional Centers

Art Center

Add plenty of green and brown paper, paint, chalk, etc., so the children can create a backdrop for the campsite. The children can mix blue and



yellow paint to make various shades of green. Add some white and black paint to vary the hue as well. Provide leaves for leaf rubbings, sticks for painting utensils, and tree bark for printmaking. The children can also make lanyards to hold whistles or magnifying glasses by braiding yarn or cord.

TIP

Center Management

Provide a place to store the whistles. Label the lanyard with the child's name and store on hooks on a pegboard. Let the children use the whistles at recess.

Block Center

Depending on the materials provided, the block center can become a canyon, forest, river, mountain, trail, or just the outdoors. Provide photographs of various camping areas (travel or recreational-vehicle magazines are good sources). Add small twigs and blue construction paper for water.

Discuss the necessity of keeping food away from wild animals. Provide materials so children can design an animal-proof food container.



Listening Center

Wee Sing® tapes provide a rich source of campfire songs for sing-alongs and fingerplays. Environmental recordings will add an authentic touch to your campsite. Provide a guitar and folk music.

Math Center

Objects from nature are great for sorting and patterning. Collect small rocks or pebbles, break twigs into small pieces, or gather leaves. At the park ranger station, children can use play money to pay admittance fees. They can select a campsite by looking at a map.

Reading Center

Provide books and magazines about camping, travel, and outdoor life. Boy and Girl Scout handbooks or field guides are appropriate additions, as well as books about woodland animals, habitats (woodlands, mountains, prairies), trails, white-water rafting, and canoes.

TIP

Center Set-up

Store the books and tapes in a backpack during this theme. Add a small blanket for a pallet for the children to sit on while they are in this center.

TIP

Center Set-up

Provide child-sized folding chairs for the children to sit in while reading. Group the chairs around a pretend campfire—logs and red cellophane paper arranged together.

Sand Center

The sand center could become a model of a campground. Show the children simple maps of a campsite and encourage them to duplicate the campsite in the sand center. Provide small twigs and fabric for making tents. Additional twigs and leaves could become trees. Using the sand center's tools (rakes, etc.), the children can smooth trails, build mountains, and more. Provide small compasses for the children to use. Small models of forest animals (bears, deer, raccoons, etc.) could be included here. Provide books about animals' tracks and encourage children to duplicate the tracks.

Vocabulary

camping
lanyard
compass
campsite/
campground
trail
woodland
forest
prairie
canteen
trail

Science Center

Provide books about stars and constellations. Equip the center with books about insects, and small models or specimens of insects. Provide magnifying glasses for close examination.

Writing Center

Picture postcards from campgrounds inspire young writers in this center. State parks or campsites often distribute these as advertising materials. Provide card stock cut into postcard-sized pieces. Children can add their own drawing to the front, write the message on the back, and address the card to a classmate or family member. Encourage children to write songs, poems, and stories to share around the campfire. They could also create informational signs to place around the campsite here.

TIP

Center Set-up

Attach glow-in-the-dark stars to the ceiling in the patterns of easily recognizable constellations. These stars can be purchased from most science or school-supply catalogs.

Culminating Activity

Replace the class's usual cafeteria lunchtime with an outdoor cookout. The children can prepare the food. Menu possibilities include foods that can be grilled on a hibachi, such as hot dogs, mixed vegetables wrapped in foil, etc. Enlist parent volunteers to help supervise the cooking. Sit around the fire and sing camp songs. Roast marshmallows on sticks over the hibachi.

Extending the Theme

Make trail mix. Mix together equal parts of peanuts, small pretzels, bagel chips, bite-sized cereal, and chocolate chips in a large bowl. Scoop out individual servings into resealable plastic bags. The children can then take the trail mix to the campsite and enjoy their snack.

Books That Support the Theme

Curious George Goes Camping by Margret and H. A. Rey (Houghton Mifflin, 1999)

This book continues the pattern familiar to the *Curious George* series. George and his friend with the yellow hat go camping. George's curiosity leads to several adventures, and he becomes a hero after saving the campground from a possible fire.

The Giants Go Camping by Jane Yolen (Houghton Mifflin, 1979)

Jane Yolen's engaging words and Tomie dePaola's lively illustrations join to make an enjoyable book about camping. The giants' escapades lead them to some unlikely adventures, as their personal characteristics guide them.

The Lost Lake by Allen Say (Houghton Mifflin, 1989)

This poignant story of how a boy and his father become friends during a camping trip to the mountains gives children insights into family relationships and an appreciation of our natural environment.

Make Friends, Zachary! by Muriel Blaustein (HarperCollins, 1990)

Zachary, the tiger cub, gets into trouble when he plays with other children until his cousin Alfie joins him on a family camping trip. Zachary finds that having a friend is not so bad as the cousins solve their problems together.

National Audubon Society First Field Guide: Trees by Brian Cassie (Scholastic, 1999)

This reference book can serve as an introduction to various kinds of trees, or as a guide for identifying trees. The photographs and organization style make it understandable to young readers.

Starry Night by David Spohn (Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1992)

In this book, two brothers and their dad share a night of peaceful camping in the woods behind their house. The book portrays the simple pleasures of camping: collecting firewood, building a fire, and observing the stars.

T H E M E 5

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Construction

Background

When students construct, they build, frame, or devise something. They work systematically to produce an idea or perception resulting from the orderly arrangement of facts, impressions, or materials. This hands-on experience gives students the chance to witness the creation of something from its inception to its completion.

Given opportunities to create, students face the tasks with energy, ingenuity, and resourcefulness. They think collaboratively with friends. They become inventive, determined, curious, and confident. The process also gives students a model from which they can explain their thinking.

This theme offers opportunities for students to extend their academic skills. Reading strategies

