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Preschool Playground

Arts, Crafts, and Music

Color Scavenger Hunt

Go on a scavenger hunt to find five things of each color.

SAMPLE

The article including this idea first appeared in *Creating a Rich Environment and a Fun Place to Learn for Preschoolers*, published by *The Old Schoolhouse® Magazine*. Thanks to Courtney Sanchez for this idea.

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Dramatic Play

I realize some of us aren't lucky enough to have an extra space for a school room, but don't worry—many of these ideas can be created in a living area or even in your kitchen. Young children love to imitate their world. Pretending to be someone else is natural and a creative part of themselves.

When I mention dramatic play, you might think of a kitchen center setup or a dress-up box, both of which are fine. Other ideas might be to create a pet shop. Gather a few boxes, some stuffed animals, play kitchen dishes, and a set of doctor tools. The boxes can be the cages the animals sleep in. You can add a kitchen dish to each box for animal food. You could even add a cash register for paying for supplies, or you could have some scraps of material for bandages. You can really create any kind of store this way.

You can create an area for a little secretary by using an old typewriter (we used an old computer keyboard that had stopped working). Other tools to go with this are pencils, crayons, envelopes, stamps, and old junk mail. My daughter always loved the fake credit cards that came in the mail. She also loved pretending to fill out the forms that came with them.

Another great idea that was a hit with my older and younger children alike was discovered after we moved into our current home. We had lots of boxes left, so we folded all the flaps in toward the inside of the box. We painted them and added black painted paper plates for wheels and a black plate for a steering wheel. We had made cardboard cars. We had a bigger box, too, that more than one child could go in, so we made that one a fire truck. Make some road signs to go with it, and your children can play for hours. Take it outside and make a course to drive through. Honestly, we had made these over the summer, and they played with them all year.

Another use for boxes is to create a puppet stage (or simply throw a sheet over two chairs). Get creative; the ideas are endless.

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#### Art Fun

This is where a lot of moms don't like my ideas because I am a messy mom. I love when my little ones can get their hands into something. All people feel a strong pull to create with their hands. It is what God intended for us to do, and it is no different for children.

Let's start with paint. Finger paint is always fun and a tactile experience as well. If you don't want the mess, put the paint in a large gallon-sized resealable bag and take the paint outside. If you have a little one who likes to put his hands in his mouth, try putting him in his high chair and giving him a piece of paper and some chocolate pudding. The pudding will dry for some creative art, and your child can eat it. Another fun kind of paint is puffy paint. It is one part shaving cream and one part Elmer's® glue. Children can sort of scoop the paint to their papers, and it dries puffy. My favorite kind of paint tools are the Bingo Daubers, sold in school supply catalogs. Washable paints and water colors are fun to explore as well. An easy tip for using paint is to squirt paint into an egg carton for easy clean up—just throw the carton away when you're finished. You can also use the new plastic baby food containers. Some have lids on them so you can save the paint for another day.

Now let's talk about gluing. Gluing can be hard because little ones often use too much. Mom or Dad could just add little dabs on the paper and allow their toddler to apply the objects to the paper. Another option would be to put a dollop of glue onto a plastic lid and allow children to use a cotton swab to apply it. You can also use glue sticks, but sometimes they don't hold larger things like buttons or sequins. Another option is paste; this substance is thicker, and children can use their fingers to glue things together. Here are two recipes for paste:

#### Flour Paste

1/2 cup flour  
2/3 cup water  
Oil of peppermint or wintergreen

Mix flour and water together.  
Stir until creamy.  
Add a few drops of oil as a preservative.  
This makes 1/2 pint.

#### Cornstarch Paste

3/4 cup water  
2 tablespoons light corn syrup  
1 teaspoon vinegar  
1/2 cup cornstarch  
3/4 cup water  
Oil of peppermint or wintergreen

Mix 3/4 cup water, corn syrup, and vinegar in sauce pan. Bring to a boil. Mix cornstarch with the second 3/4 cup of water and add slowly to the boiling mixture. Stir constantly to avoid lumps. Let mixture stand overnight before use. Add a few drops of oil.

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Music

When things get a little crazy around here, one way to get everyone on the same page is to allow some time to explore music. I like to use praise music, Bible songs, and classical music for the explorations. Try a wide variety of music that is appropriate for children. It is important and wonderful to share classical music with children. Because we have spent time listening to and dancing to this type of music, my 10-year-old can tell you if the piece is by Handel or Bach. This was an amazing realization on my part as that was not my initial goal, but she was making a game of it.

So let's play with music. Grab some scarves and dance. Tap to the beat. Walk around the room to the beat. Sing some songs, teach them finger plays, paint to music, pass a ball to the beat or play freeze. This is a game where you stop the music, and the children freeze in one position. Make some instruments and play along. Music can also help a child who has speech difficulties. My son has a speech delay, but he can sing some songs the entire way through. I am not sure why that is, but he is able to pick up the sing-song tone and repeat the sounds the words make. Music is also great for getting your child's attention. Try it sometime when he doesn't want to do something. Sing it. Honestly, he will be picking up toys in no time.

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## Sandpaper Pictures

Lay a piece of sandpaper down, rough side up, on a flat surface. Make sure the paper is not so rough that it could easily cut little fingers. Give your child cut pieces of colored yarn to attach to the sandpaper. The yarn will stick to the sandpaper—no glue required! When you get tired of one picture, just take the yarn off and start over. Make sure your child is old enough to understand that he or she must not rub the sandpaper on any nice surfaces (like the table) or put their fingers in their eyes, nose, mouth, etc., until after they have washed at the end of their craft. Some sandpaper leaves a fine grit on hands and skin that they will need to wash off.

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Fun with Puzzles

Ask a parent to cut out the pieces, then see if you can line them up right on the big picture.

