

Animal Helpers

An Environmental Stewardship and Earth Spirit Curriculum for Preschoolers
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GOALS:

To guide preschool children on an exploration of environmental stewardship, using images of animals to inspire us.

To encourage children to incorporate the values of each lesson into their own value system and translate these ideas into action.

OBJECTIVES:

To have fun!

To use storytelling, role playing, music, dance, crafts, and discussion to reach each child in her or his special learning and attending style.

To learn simple meditation techniques for lifelong spiritual development.

To identify with a specific animal which embodies positive qualities and encourages the child to be her or his "best self". The animal may continue to serve as a meditation image long after the class is complete.

To learn about environmental stewardship by engaging in projects to help creatures of air, land, and water.

To build the separate lessons into a presentation to the congregation honoring the children's learning.

THANKS:

To my spouse for the freedom to write, the cozy straw bale cabin in which to do so, the photos of the snapper and the moose who came to visit, and our shared joy in words and all things green, including the two sprouts;

To the Seventh Principle Project for encouragement and their good work;

To William Barbour for great line drawings, Michael J. Fromberger for the skill to digitize them, and both for delightful company.

Dedicated to the Chairman of the Standing Committees.

Undertaken in service to the Spirit of the Birch.

CONTACT:

Please reach me with comments, questions, & suggestions.

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To the Religious Educator;

Hello! Thanks for embarking on this adventure with your preschool class. While many would offer only “supervised play” to children under five, you and I know that these vital, formative years are not to be wasted. Habits of stewardship learned in the preschool years not only lead to a lifetime of environmental action, but to the empowerment inherent in knowing that one small child can make a difference.

Animal Helpers can be used at any time of year, of course. I hope that your situation will allow for some outdoor time. Use *Animal Helpers* over the course of several Sundays, or adapt it for a one-week summer experience by eliminating the last two sessions (which are preparation and presentation of a worship/performance). Classes run just about an hour, plus or minus outdoor time.

Each lesson requires careful preparation. On the next page I’ve listed all the unusual materials that are called for over the lessons, so you can start looking for materials ahead of time. Things like crayons are useful all the time! Here are a few stories which you might find go well with each lesson.

Session 1: community of animals; interdependent relationships; *Wonderful Nature, Wonderful You* by Karin Ireland

Session 2: air and airborne animals; *A Fly in the Sky* by Kristin Joy Pratt-Serafini

Session 3: land and land animals; *The Tree in the Ancient Forest* by Carol Reed-Jones

Session 4: water and sea, river, lake and pond-dwelling animals; *This is the Sea that Feeds Us* by Robert F. Baldwin; *The River*.

Session 5: masks; taking another’s perspective; *In a Nutshell* by Joseph Anthony

Session 6: Please, please read *Old Turtle!*

Session 7: an intergenerational presentation celebrating the children’s work.

Helpful Hints:

- Read this whole curriculum tonight. It will help to get the whole picture in your head, and become aware of the preparation needed each week. You’ll have time to try the project, clarify a point, find supplemental books to share, or write a take-home letter for parents.
- This curriculum is designed for flexibility - add extension activities, substitute your own activities and projects.
- You will discover that I write about your discussions with the children using the language that I would use with them, not the language I would use to an adult. Please speak in your own voice!

- You will also notice that I've repeated myself from lesson to lesson - who knows when you might get ill and a substitute needs a full description of the closing circle?

Things to collect & do ahead of time!

Each week requires preparation and gathering materials, but a few items should definitely be acquired or made well ahead of time:

- old wildlife calendars and magazines - cut out good quality photos of animals and mount separately on construction paper (or similar sturdy, attractive material)
- a small potted tree (or a larger one that's easily accessible or movable)

The Classroom environment

The Altar

Chalice - I use a sealable food container so I don't get sand everywhere; throw in sand, add some glitter if you like, and seat a votive candle in the center (an unscented votive with no metal in the wick).

matches - I get about twenty small books of matches and stash them everywhere, 'cause they always get lost ;)

Tree - any size that fits your situation. I've done it in a soda-bottle terrarium (project for Session 3) so it was portable!

watering can - find the smallest one you can so the blessed little thing doesn't drown each time the children water it. Your local craft store might have a miniature one.

And display your classroom covenant prominently! (If you don't have one yet, try a big sheet of newsprint with a few key principles in kid language, which everyone can sign)

Supplies

First Aid kit including gloves
paper, crayons, scissors, glue
handi wipes, napkins, snack and drink
Fidget materials - carded wool, pipe cleaners, modeling clay, or similar tactile thing.

CD or tape player and some wordless music - both soothing and dancing tunes! (I really like to use Ed Van Fleet's *Grand Eagle* album.)

Animal Clothes - pieces of cloth with animal prints or solid animal colors, roughly 18 inches by 36 inches, with head slits cut in the middle.

Animal storybooks.

Texture boxes - snap-lid boxes with things to feel: a sand box with marbles, a rice box, cotton balls, dry pasta, et cetera.

The Daily Format

Preparation

I'll list special supplies or preparation here

Letter home - it's always optional, but parents would love a chance to know you and to know what's going on - even what to ask their children about!

Children's Message

If the children have time for a story from the minister or DRE before Sunday School begins, this space will let you jot down the minister's story title.

Warm Up

Otherwise known as Getting Their Attention! A song or activity that will allow children to join in at their own pace. Often you'll have parents talking with you as you're trying to begin class. If one teacher focuses on the children and their warm up activity, the other can speak with parents and answer questions.

Chalice Lighting

Use a consistent signal to bring the children from the Warm Up Activity into community together – I like to ring a chime (and ask the children to listen to how long the tone lasts!).

The children use the same song and actions each time. Teacher lights the chalice and then leads all children in the song and motions.

Song

<u>Words</u>	<u>Hands</u>
Rise Up, O Flame	begin in front of the belly - your center
by thy light glowing	cross in front of chest and reach up like a flame
show to us beauty,	open out to the sky (about 10 and 2 o'clock)
vision and joy.	continue circling to below the horizon (8 and 4)
	circle all the way in to center, the home of joy.

Sharing

This is a time for the children to share their own joys and concerns. You have a small tree and tiny watering can; each child receives the can, speaks, pours a few drops of water, and passes the can. One of the teachers should begin, to give an example of what the children could share and how to do it. If you're at a loss for words, you can say something like, "Now is the time when we share something from the past week that made us happy or sad. When you have the watering can, it's your turn to speak, and our turn to listen. This week I'm happy because I got a new book." As the children speak, it may be appropriate for you to comment on what they've said, help them pass

(it's always OK to pass!) and pass the watering can on. To help everyone's memory, you might ask each child to say her or his name before saying their joy or concern.

What?

Time for the guided meditation (in the first lesson, it comes much later) Children may need some practice, they may need to have the adults help them with boundaries (like moving them out of reach of one another), but preschoolers are perfectly capable of short guided visualizations. Your consistency, high expectations, and judgment will help them learn this skill - which will be useful to them their whole lives.

There may also be a story or discussion now - full of information and wonder!

So What?

Your students are ready and eager to get to the root of the matter! Ask them what's the big idea behind it all. If there's been a story, ask Why did this character do that? How did she feel? They will lead the conversation like homing pigeons to a belief or value which you can hold up next to our UU beliefs and values. Is it a match?

Pass out the fidget materials if you need to. Clutching soft, carded wool can really help us pay attention (how many adults do you know who bring their knitting to church?).

Now What?

It's not enough to get to the idea. Our children are eager to walk the walk. It's time to do something. This will be a concrete project - maybe a craft, often a very small service project. As always, Teacher, please feel free to try out your own ideas!

Celebration

Sing, dance, eat... It's a wonderful thing to be together and a wonderful thing to learn; use their energy.

Our sharing of food is our feast, not a plain old snack. Each should wait until all have been served, and I feel strongly that we should give thanks before eating. Let the kids know before they go to the Feast Table that we will wait for one another and say Thanks. You lead this blessing, inviting them to join you as they learn it:

We thank the Earth, We thank the Sun

We thank the Rain, We thank the farmers.

Wrap Up

At wrap up time, gather them up in your circle for goodbyes. You might choose a chant or song or group huddle for this closing ritual.

Enjoy the journey!

Peace, *Sparrow*

Session 1 - Meeting Our Animal Helpers

Preparation

Name Tags: tree cookies with holes drilled for yarn or 4x6 index cards or pieces of tag board - punch holes in top corners and tie on yarn so names can go around neck
crayons

Animal Clothes: pieces of cloth with animal prints or solid animal colors, roughly 18 inches by 36 inches, with head slits cut in the middle.

Fidget materials

Children's Message

Warm Up

Letter to Parents - this is the day when parents are most likely to want to come to class. If you have a letter waiting for them, you can introduce yourselves and Animal Helpers quickly and easily. Include all other materials they might need for your program such as a registration form, a release, a medical alert form.

Name tags all around! Set up crayons and name tags on the coloring table for kids to make out as they come in. Many will need a grown up's help to do the writing, so station one teacher there while the other greets at the door. If you know most of the names ahead of time, you can fill them out and have each child find and decorate her or his own.

Animal play - the children may try on the Animal Clothes and pretend to be critters. Encourage them to trade around and try out being different animals.

Chalice Lighting

Use your signal and help the children gather into a circle.

If a chalice lighting is new to your students, take a moment to explain that this light is something that people all over the world do together to symbolize the light of truth, the warmth of friendship, and the fire of action.

Teach the song and motions. Light the chalice and lead the song.

Words

Rise Up, O Flame
by thy light glowing
show to us beauty,
vision and joy.

Hands

begin in front of the belly - your center
cross in front of chest and reach up like a flame
open out to the sky (about 10 and 2 o'clock)
continue circling to below the horizon (8 and 4)
circle all the way in to center, the home of joy.

Sharing

Pass the small watering can around. Each child may sprinkle a little water on the tree and tell their friends about a joy or sorrow from the week, or do it silently.

What?

Now it's time for a different kind of sharing.

Sitting in circle can be very difficult, no matter what your age! At this point, I like to hand out something to fidget with, saying, "Sometimes it's easier to listen when our hands have something to do. This is for you to hold and touch in your lap so the rest of you can listen." If this is the kids' first experience with the fidget material, you'll need to allow a couple of moments for them to settle in again.

Going around your circle again, invite children to introduce themselves again and say something that makes them proud of themselves. Some language that might help them - "When you do your very best, what are you like?" You're looking for personality traits rather than concrete activities, but meet them where they are. You might help them with finding the right word to go with what they describe. One of the teachers should **scribe** during this portion!

Using the animal photos on construction paper, talk about animals and personalities - what characteristics do they already associate with animals? A snail might be patient, a bear might be strong -

Now the children get to search through the pile of animal photos to find one that seems to match their "best self". Use the scribed notes to remind them of what they said earlier about themselves. If a child is attracted to an animal that doesn't seem to match, just trust the child's intuition. As you work with the children and comment with them, make sure they know what sort of environment that animal lives in - underwater? arctic tundra? Each child may hold the picture for the rest of class.

So What?

Bring the children back to circle with your signal.

Prepare the children for a guided meditation. You might explain, "Today, we're going to think about the animal you just chose. We're going to think by using our imaginations to picture a scene I will tell you about. Make yourself quiet and comfortable - you could even close your eyes as you relax." When you read the meditation aloud, remember to use your "National Public Radio voice". Put in plenty of pauses of about one breath's duration.

** Listen to your breath. Feel your breath inside you, coming in and then going out. Feel your body and make it comfortable on the floor. Take three deep breaths now, listening and feeling.

Your animal lives in a certain kind of place. That might be under water or in a tree. Think about where your animal lives. Open your imagination to see that place, wherever it is.

Is there warm sunlight on your shoulders? Do you need to squint? Listen to the sounds of this place.

Explore this place where your animal lives.

Look at the sights.

Listen to the sounds.

Smell the smells.

Feel the ground or water or rocks or wind near you.

You may even taste the water or plants.

Take three deep breaths in your animal's place, so comfortable and safe. This is a place where you can be your best self all the time.

Your animal friend is coming to visit you here. This animal is like your best self. Whatever you like best inside your self is also inside this animal. Listen and look quietly for this animal to approach you.

This animal can even help you be your best self. This will be your Animal Helper. You and your animal enjoy spending time together quietly. You may tell one another your names. (pause a full minute)

You can come back to this place to visit with your Animal Helper any time that you need to. Say goodbye for now, in whatever special way you and your Animal Helper have.

When you are ready, you may open your eyes and return to our circle.

Now What?

Try to imitate your animal! Teachers, here's your opportunity to mention what each animal is like, what it eats, or similar.

The children may use the Animal Clothes of course. This activity should degenerate quickly into frivolity!

Celebrate!

Time to do a dance as your animal! Ed Van Fleet's *Grand Eagle* album is a great one for getting out of our human skin. Definitely practice head movements, walking or flying or swimming movements - You'll be using all this on Children's Sunday!

While the children dance, set up the Feast table with the chalice at the center.

Feast! Let the kids know before they go to the Feast Table that we will wait for one another and say Thanks.

You lead the blessing, inviting them to join you as they learn it:

We thank the Earth, We thank the Sun

We thank the Rain, We thank the farmers.

While they enjoy feast, collect the name tags and animal pictures. Show the children that the Animal Helpers pictures go up on the bulletin board with their name tags hanging from the same tack! If your classroom doesn't have a display board, make sure the kids know their pictures go in a special place; you will take care of them!

Wrap Up

No need to reconvene at the circle, just stay together at the table for your closing ritual. Please make sure to sing together before any child leaves.

All blow out the chalice together, 1, 2, 3...

One teacher returns to the circle area to read story books to those children who are finished with snack. Remember that no preschooler should be allowed to leave without their own special grown up!

Session 2 - Being an Animal Helper - Helping Animals of the Air

Preparation

Please remember that it is illegal for private citizens in the U.S. to collect feathers or any bird parts. If you have feathers from a craft store or your neighbor's chickens, they are fine to use on your altar.

Materials for making a big nest! - carpet squares, fleece blankies. You may want a stack of pillows too, or even rope or ribbon for defining the circle. You may even be able to get some old, long grape vines.

Animal clothes (use for making the nest at the beginning, for flying later)

Print out an outline of an accipiter (the goshawk or the gyrfalcon) from <http://www.coloring.ws/birds10.htm> onto tag board, then cut it out to use as templates. If you cut carefully, you can have both the "figure" and the "ground" to use.

Print more birds from those pages, if you like, for further activity.

construction paper

child-friendly scissors

permanent marker

fidgets

extra animal photos

blank name tags for newcomers

crayons

Warm Up - Building our nest.

As the children enter, one teacher greets the children and parents, giving out name tags, while the other leads the warm up.

Any new children should make a name tag. Teacher, help the child choose an animal photo of a creature which has a quality that the child likes in her or his "best self". This will be the child's Animal Helper.

It's time to create Sacred Space! See how much of this can be done silently - if you're feeling brave, see how much of this can be done without hands!

From the pile of supplies, each child is encouraged to take at least one pillow or carpet square or ribbon and contribute it to the creation of your circle. If you can get things-to-sit-on in a circle and ribbons around it all, that's awesome!

Chalice Lighting

Use your signal and help the children gather into a circle.

Welcome the children with words of praise for them. Point out explicitly that they've built their own sacred space, a special safe place for learning. You are giving them the vocabulary with which to hold the experience as well as setting up an expectation of a special, safe *time*.

Light the chalice and lead the song.

Words

Hands

Rise Up, O Flame
by thy light glowing
show to us beauty,
vision and joy.

begin in front of the belly - your center
cross in front of chest and reach up like a flame
open out to the sky (about 10 and 2 o'clock)
continue circling to below the horizon (8 and 4)
circle all the way in to center, the home of joy.

Sharing

Bring the Animal Helpers pictures out from their special place. Hand each child's animal to her or him to keep during class.

Pass the watering can to share joys and concerns.

Do they remember what their Animal Helpers were? Did they get to try anything from their animal's wisdom this week?

What?

Hand out the fidgets with a reminder that we hold them low in our laps to help us listen better.

Who has an airborne Animal Helper? What is it like to be a bird or bat or insect? What do you eat? Where do you live?

Let the children answer with their ideas. You might want to add some information if their ideas are too far afield.

Prepare the children for a guided meditation. You might explain, "Today, we're going to think about the air that the birds and bats and insects fly. It's the air that all the land animals breathe, too! Make yourself quiet and comfortable - you could even close your eyes as you relax." When you read the meditation aloud, remember to use your "National Public Radio voice". Put in plenty of pauses of about one breath's duration.

Listen to your breath. Feel your breath inside you, coming in and then going out. Feel your body and make it comfortable on the floor. Take three deep breaths now, listening and feeling.

Think about the vast, free sky. Open your imagination to see the sky before you as you sit in your nest. Your Animal Helper is coming to join you in the nest. In your imagination today, you and your Animal Helper can fly! Take a deep breath. When you feel ready, the two of you can lift off into the air.

Feel the sunshine on you. Feel the wind rush past your face.

Listen to the wind.

Look at all the things you can see from up here.

What can you smell up here? Is the air fresh and clean?

Take three deep breaths up here in the sky, flying so free and safe with your Animal Helper. This is a place where you can be your best self.

You and your Animal Helper enjoy spending time together flying. You might fly through a cloud or a snowfall or toward the stars! You can talk to one another now if you wish (pause for a full minute)

You can come back to visit with your Animal Helper any time that you need to. Say goodbye for now, in whatever special way you and your Animal Helper have.

When you are ready, you may open your eyes and return to our circle.

So What?

What was it like to fly? What did you see?

Today we get to be the helpers of the birds!

What are windows like?

Birds don't know about windows. Windows seem clear, just like the air. A bird flying along might not realize that it would hurt to fly into a window. It might fly right into that window and get hurt.

What might birds be cautious or afraid about? They're definitely cautious about bigger birds that might eat them!

We're going to make pictures of big hunter birds to put in windows so other birds don't fly near the window.

Now What?

Each child outlines an accipiter template on her or his construction paper.

Cut out your accipiters.

Children who are quick with crafts can make more than one each - some folks from your coven or circle might like to have one.

Celebrate!

Dance a bird dance using the animal clothes for wings.

Sing a favorite song using bird noises!

Practice whistling?

During this part of the celebration, one teacher sets up the Feast table.

Feast! Let the kids know before they go to the Feast Table that we will wait for one another and say Thanks.

You lead the blessing, inviting them to join you:

We thank the earth, We thank the sun

We thank the rain, We thank the farmers.

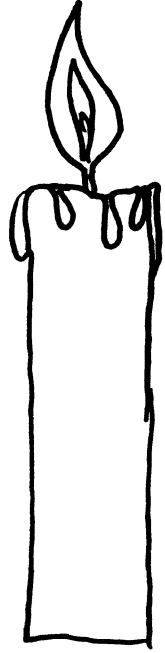
While they enjoy feast, collect the name tags and animal pictures. Show the children that the Animal Helpers pictures go up on the bulletin board with their name tags hanging from the same tack! If your classroom doesn't have a display board, make sure the kids know their pictures go in a special place; you will take care of them!

Wrap Up

No need to reconvene at the circle, just sit together at the table for your closing ritual before any child leaves.

All blow out the chalice together, 1, 2, 3...

One teacher returns to the circle area to read story books to those children who are finished with snack. Remember that no preschooler should be allowed to leave without their own special grown up!



Session 3 - Being an Animal Helper - Helping Animals of the Land

Preparation

for Warm Up

Texture boxes - snap-lid boxes with things to feel: a sand box with marbles, a rice box, cotton balls, dry pasta, et cetera.

for Terraria

clear 2 or 3 liter plastic bottles, one for each child and teacher, including your demo. Cut off the tops for easier access.

plastic wrap and tape to secure it as tops to the terraria.

drainage layer for tiny gardens. Can use gravel, but better to use something that the kids think of as trash - broken pottery or masonry; the *tops* that you just cut off the bottles, shredded a bit ; plastic soda bottle caps; packing peanuts.

sphagnum moss (optional - use only if you know it was sustainably harvested)

charcoal if you can't find sphagnum moss (not cooking briquettes, but for planting - find at your local plant nursery)

potting soil; if you make your own, it's clean dirt, sand, and already rotted organic material like grass-clippings.

seeds or seedlings

chop sticks if you're using seedlings - you might have one of the slender "plant grabber" tools, but otherwise chop sticks will do nicely. For little hands, wrap an elastic band around the back end of each pair and tuck a bit of paper, folded over until it's about a quarter of an inch thick, into the V where the elastic holds the end together. This keeps the chopsticks aligned and together, children need only coordinate squeezing the working ends together.

you may need plastic sheets to put under the work area, and you'll definitely need hand wipes.

Warm Up

As the children enter, one teacher greets the children and parents, giving out name tags, while the other leads the warm up.

Any new children should make a name tag. Teacher, help the child choose an animal photo of a creature that has a quality that the child likes in her or his "best self". This will be the child's Animal Helper.

Warm up with texture boxes today, getting our hands on all those great, grounding, great-feeling materials.

Chalice Lighting

Use your signal and help the children gather into a circle.

Welcome the children with words of praise for them.

Light the chalice and lead the song.

Words

Rise Up, O Flame
by thy light glowing
show to us beauty,
vision and joy.

Hands

begin in front of the belly - your center
cross in front of chest and reach up like a flame
open out to the sky (about 10 and 2 o'clock)
continue circling to below the horizon (8 and 4)
circle all the way in to center, the home of joy.

Sharing

Hand out their Animal Helper cards. Any learnings this week? Did they do anything like their animals? ("I ate a big salad!" "I walked very quietly!")

Pass the watering can to share joys and concerns.

What?

Prepare the children for a guided meditation. You might explain, "Today, we're going to think about the land where the walkers and creepers and crawlers live - the runners and slitherers, too. Make yourself quiet and comfortable - you could even close your eyes as you relax." When you read the meditation aloud, remember to use your "National Public Radio voice". Put in plenty of pauses of about one breath's duration. this meditation is a little longer than the first two.

Listen to your breath. Feel your breath inside you, coming in and then going out. Feel your body and make it comfortable on the floor. Take three deep breaths now, listening and feeling.

Think about a warm place and fresh air. Open your imagination to see the soft earth all around you. Your Animal Helper is coming to join you in a patch of sunshine, here in a great and lovely forest. In your imagination today, you and your Animal Helper can sit side by side here in the forest, watching and listening.

Feel the sunshine on you. Feel the earth, soft moss, and hard, rough stones near you.

Listen! Birds sing. Little feet scuffle through the leaves.

Breathe deeply and smell the leaves, the earth, the pine needles.

Look just to the side, at a huge old oak tree. You can move to it and touch its rough bark, feel the strong roots where they enter the ground. Lie back and look up, up, up the trunk as it reaches to the sunlight, branches spiking out in all directions.

Who lives in this tree? Look for a squirrel's home and birds' nests up high; look for a tiny mouse hole down among the roots. In the hollow parts of this big tree, you might even find owls or bats. Look under a loose bit of bark and you will see insects living and eating in this tree.

This tree makes shade, keeping the brook water cool and good to drink. Deer come to drink, their young fawns blending with the dappled shade of the tree.

This tree has grown since your grandmother's grandmother was a little child. It shelters creatures from the snow. It feeds animals with its acorns. In the fall, its leaves turn deep golden brown and fall to the ground, where they rot and turn to fresh soil.

Take three deep breaths here in the forest, warm and safe with your Animal Helper. This is a place where you can be your best self.

You and your Animal Helper enjoy spending time together. You can talk to one another now if you wish, asking questions and giving answers, or being silent together. (pause for a full minute)

You can come back to visit with your Animal Helper any time that you need to. Say goodbye for now, in whatever special way you and your Animal Helper have.

When you are ready, you may open your eyes and return to our circle.

So What?

Who has land Animal Helpers? We're helping them today! How did all those creatures rely on the Big Tree? Did you know that trees - and all plants - help us by making oxygen for us to breathe? Did you know that plants with good roots hold on to the soil, keeping it from blowing or washing away?

Now What?

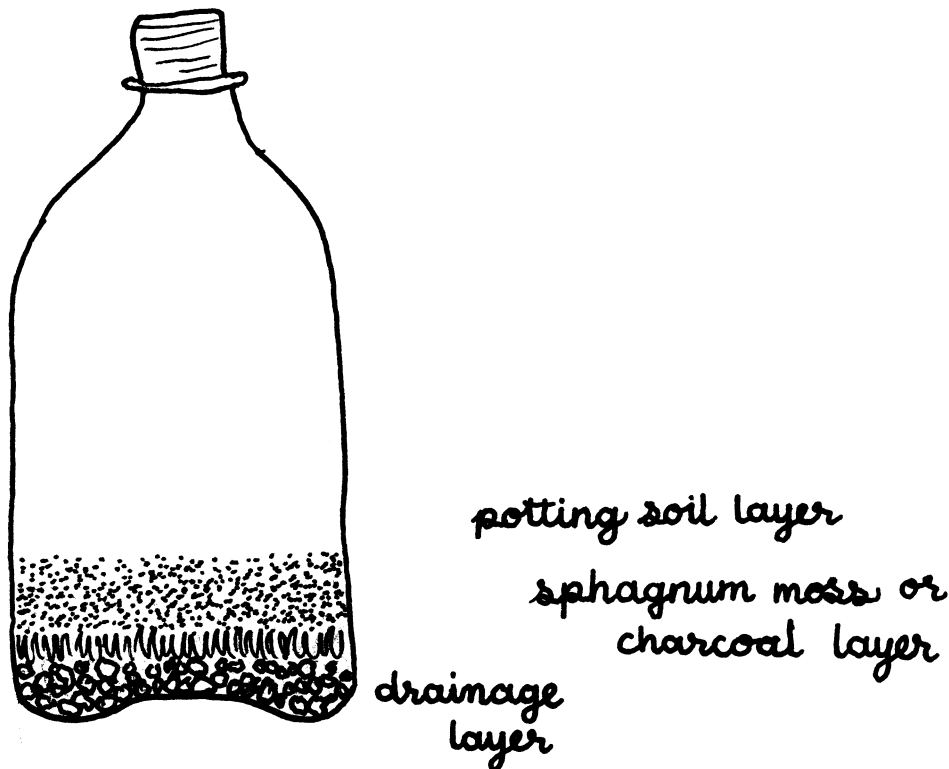
A terrarium is a tiny self-contained ecosystem - have fun making yours! These baby trees or plants can be planted outside when they get big to hold onto the soil. You can also keep the plants indoors and watch their lives to learn about them.

At the bottom of each plastic bottle goes the drainage layer.

Next, the sphagnum moss or charcoal layer.

Then potting soil, seeds or seedlings, water, and cover!

Over time, the children will see the water collect as droplets on the roof of the terrarium and rain back down.



Celebrate!

How about a game of Predator - Prey (outside, if possible)? establish boundaries, each kids is a prey animal who makes a special noise, Teacher is a Predator who makes a noise *but* has a blindfold. It's Marco Polo on land. When Predator makes her noise, Prey must make a noise, too. If you tag them, they can either sit out or (more fun) become Predators, too.

During this part of the celebration, one teacher sets up the Feast table.

Feast! Let the kids know before they go to the Feast Table that we will wait for one another and say Thanks.

You lead the blessing, inviting them to join you:

We thank the earth, We thank the sun

We thank the rain, We thank the farmers.

While they enjoy feast, talk about the origins of the food - seeds from a sunflower? fruit from trees? grain from fields? Collect the name tags and animal pictures. Show the children that the Animal Helpers pictures go up on the bulletin board with their name tags hanging from the same tack! If your classroom doesn't have a display board, make sure the kids know their pictures go in a special place; you will take care of them!

Wrap Up

No need to reconvene at the circle, just sit together at the table for your closing ritual together before any child leaves.

All blow out the chalice together, 1, 2, 3...

One teacher returns to the circle area to read story books to those children who are finished with snack. Remember that no preschooler should be allowed to leave without their own special grown up!

Session 4 - Being an Animal Helper - Helping Animals of the Water

Preparation

for Warm Up

water table (definitely optional!); pitcher of ice water and cups

for Saving Water

pond water and hand lenses (can you get a microscope?)

gallon jug of water & tablespoon

a floor plan of the building (can be just your own sketch)

blue and red crayons or stickers

if your building has full-sized water tanks on the toilets, get bricks to put in - and the permission of the building owners!.

for Celebration

cloths for dancing - the animal clothes, or other scarves, ribbons or cloths in watery colors.

Warm Up

Can you have a water table in or near your classroom? Warm up with feeling the water, playing with it. Provide a big pitcher of ice water and cups so we can all feel and taste the cool water going down.

Chalice Lighting

Use your signal and help the children gather into a circle.

Welcome the children.

Light the chalice and lead the song.

Words

Rise Up, O Flame
by thy light glowing
show to us beauty,
vision and joy.

Hands

begin in front of the belly - your center
cross in front of chest and reach up like a flame
open out to the sky (about 10 and 2 o'clock)
continue circling to below the horizon (8 and 4)
circle all the way in to center, the home of joy.

Sharing

Hand out their Animal Helper cards. Did they have chance to think of their animals this week? Did they do anything like their animals?

Pass the watering can to share joys and concerns.

What?

Prepare the children for a guided meditation. You might explain, "Today, we're going to think about the water where the stream and lake and sea creatures live. Make yourself quiet and comfortable - you could even close your eyes as you relax." When you read the meditation aloud, remember to use your "National Public Radio voice". Put in plenty of pauses of about one breath's duration.

Listen to your breath. Feel your breath inside you, coming in and then going out. Feel your body and make it comfortable on the floor. Take three deep breaths now, listening and feeling.

Think about a tiny splashing sound. Open your imagination to see water bubbling up in a spring. Your Animal Helper is coming to join you here at the spring at the very beginning of a stream. In your imagination today, you and your Animal Helper can float on the water or even under the water if you want.

Feel the water on you. Feel the coolness and wetness and the curves as you slip around all the rocks without bumping.

Listen to splashing and bubbling and waves.

You flow down the stream, past trees and rocks and turns in the stream bed. You fall whoosh! over a small waterfall to land in a pond. Small fish and a turtle dart in and out of the shadows. You float gently to the beaver dam, where you pass gently through the twigs. Other streams join yours, and soon you are following a river, passing islands, flowing sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. The river has otters and fresh water weeds. You pass towns and now a city - the river is broad now and the water has a tiny taste of salt to it. Now it flows gently out to the sea. Looking with your imagination, you can see tiny molecules of water, warm with sunlight, rising up out of the sea and clustering together into clouds. You know that the clouds will let their rain down onto the earth again, where the water will seep through the soil and rocks back to the source of the spring.

Take three deep breaths here floating on the sea, warm and safe with your Animal Helper. This is a place where you can be your best self.

You and your Animal Helper enjoy spending time together. You can talk to one another now if you wish, telling one another your thoughts, or being silent together. (pause for a full minute)

You can come back to visit with your Animal Helper any time that you need to. Say goodbye for now, in whatever special way you and your Animal Helper have.

When you are ready, you may open your eyes and return to our circle.

So What?

How do you use water?

How does your Animal Helper use water?

Look at all the neat things that live in pond water!

Animals who live in the sea get all the water they need right there. The other animals - including us humans - need fresh water. If this gallon jug of water were a model for all the water in the world, only this tablespoonful would be fresh, drinkable water.

Now What?

A Water Treasure Hunt! Time to skibble around the building and find ways to save water. Have one or two children carry the floor plan and crayons or stickers.

Toilets with full tanks can have a brick set in to use less fresh water per flush.

Check each faucet for drips (count the drips per minute! see how long it takes to fill a small cup - multiply to see how much water is dripping per day!)

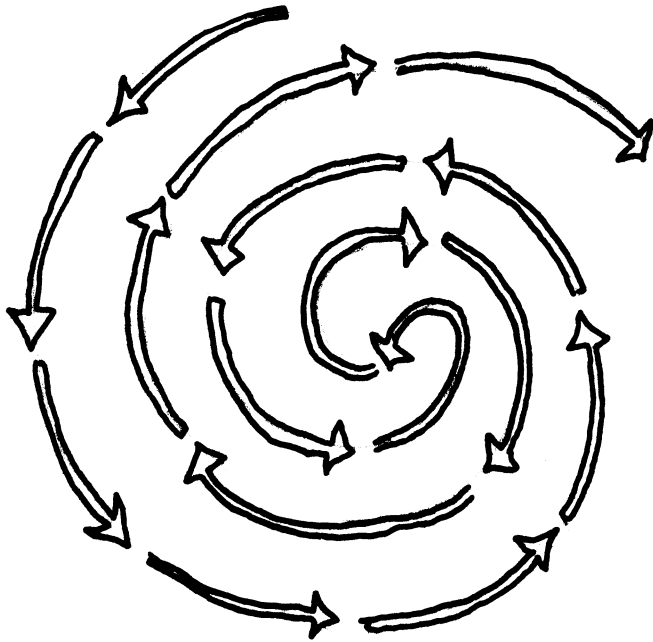
On the floor plan, mark in blue every place the children find a water source that's OK. Mark in some other color any water source that needs the attention of the building owner - leaky faucets or pipes, or a drinking fountain that doesn't work right.

Hand in the Water Treasure map - if you have a live person to give it to, so much the better!

Celebrate!

Time for a River Dance - the Eddie Van Fleet album *Grand Eagle* is good for this. Everyone gets one piece of cloth, then join together and make a river!

Try out a Spiral Dance - with all children joined in a line, the leader makes a big circle of the dancing area. The leader circles again, about a meter inside the line of the first circle. Continue spiraling inward until the leader comes to the center of the dance. Leader turns, still attached in line, and passes in front of the next person in line, spiraling out along the path between the other dancers. **You will be using the Spiral Dance again** - so make sure to use and enjoy it! Here's a dance map:



During this part of the celebration, one teacher sets up the Feast table.

Feast! Let the kids know before they go to the Feast Table that we will wait for one another and say Thanks.

You lead the blessing, inviting them to join you:

We thank the earth, We thank the sun

We thank the rain, We thank the farmers.

While they enjoy feast, collect the name tags and animal pictures. Show the children that the Animal Helpers pictures go up on the bulletin board with their name tags hanging from the same tack! If your classroom doesn't have a display board, make sure the kids know their pictures go in a special place; you will take care of them!

Wrap Up

No need to reconvene at the circle, just sit together at the table for your closing ritual before any child leaves.

All blow out the chalice together, 1, 2, 3...

One teacher returns to the circle area to read story books to those children who are finished with snack. Remember that no preschooler should be allowed to leave without their own special grown up

Session 5 - My Animal Helper - Mask making

Preparation

mask bases - paper bags, milk jugs cut in half vertically (the handle makes an excellent elephant trunk), or aluminum foil

craft box with glue, paints, ribbons, construction paper, crayons

You'll need the drop cloth today!

some masks - fancy and plain, including sunglasses - any that cannot be handled should be mounted up on the wall for display only.

Animal clothes

masking tape and indelible marker.

Warm Up

Let the children come in to a display of masks as a focus! The kids can handle and try them on, perhaps in combination with their Animal clothes.

Chalice Lighting

Use your signal and help the children gather into a circle.

Welcome the children.

Light the chalice and lead the song.

Words

Rise Up, O Flame
by thy light glowing
show to us beauty,
vision and joy.

Hands

begin in front of the belly - your center
cross in front of chest and reach up like a flame
open out to the sky (about 10 and 2 o'clock)
continue circling to below the horizon (8 and 4)
circle all the way in to center, the home of joy.

Sharing

Hand out their Animal Helper cards. Did they have chance to think of their animals this week? Did they do anything like their animals?

Pass the watering can to share joys and concerns.

What?

Introduce the word "habitat" - many of them will know it. They're going to hear it in the meditation.

Prepare the children for a guided meditation. You might explain, "Today, we're going to think about our animal Helpers and what they do and how they live. Make yourself quiet and comfortable - you could even close your eyes as you relax." When

you read the meditation aloud, remember to use your “National Public Radio voice”. Put in plenty of pauses of about one breath’s duration.

Listen to your breath. Feel your breath inside you, coming in and then going out. Feel your body and make it comfortable on the floor. Take three deep breaths now, listening and feeling.

Think about your Animal Helper. Open your imagination to see the special place where you like to meet. Your Animal Helper is coming to join you here and lead you to its own habitat, its home.

Feel what is around you. Feel coolness or warmth.

Listen to all the sounds that your Animal Helper hears. Listen with the hearing of your Animal Helper - perhaps you can hear more things. Listen to the sounds of other creatures in this habitat.

Smell the scents with your Animal Helper’s sense of smell.

Taste some of its favorite foods.

Look at all the sights around you the way that your animal Helper does. Is it dark or light? Can you see very far? Can you see in dim light? Is it difficult to see?

Move around the habitat the way that you Animal Helper moves - swim, run, leap, fly, creep, crawl like your Animal Helper. Imagine what that feels like.

Take three deep breaths here in this habitat, comfortable and safe with your Animal Helper. This is a place where you can be your best self.

You and your Animal Helper enjoy spending time together. You can talk to one another now if you wish, telling one another what it’s like to live in your different habitats, or being silent together. (pause for a full minute)

You can come back to visit with your Animal Helper any time that you need to. Say goodbye for now, in whatever special way you and your Animal Helper have.

When you are ready, you may open your eyes and return to our circle.

So What?

Mask making! The bags and milk jugs can be painted, glued on to, have raffia or grass or whatever tied on. The milk jugs don't hold paint that well, but you can easily color them with crayon. The foil can be molded to the child's face.

The children should make a mask of their own Animal Helper. Teacher, keep the masks in the classroom to dry and otherwise not get lost. Use the tape and marker to put each child's name inside the mask.

Extension: In the happy even that you are doing such an activity with bigger people, very beautiful masks can be made with papier-mâché right on their faces. It takes almost an hour of *very* good control of not-itching or picking at the masks while waiting for them to dry enough to be peeled off and hold shape while they dry the rest of the way. You can see it won't work with our preschool crowd, but maybe this will spark a clever idea or two...

Now What?

As children finish their masks, set them aside to dry. Each child should have chance to show and say a few things about her or his mask.

Celebrate

Time to practice the Spiral Dance again, wearing animal clothes.

During this part of the celebration, one teacher sets up the Feast table.

Feast! Let the kids know before they go to the Feast Table that we will wait for one another and say Thanks.

You lead the blessing, inviting them to join you:

We thank the earth, We thank the sun

We thank the rain, We thank the farmers.

Wrap Up

No need to re-convene at the circle, just sit together at the table for your closing ritual before any child leaves.

All blow out the chalice together, 1, 2, 3...

One teacher returns to the circle area to read story books to those children who are finished with snack. Remember that no preschooler should be allowed to leave without their own special grown up!

Session 6 - My Animal Helper - Story Making

Preparation

make copies of the story page - one for each child with a couple of extras - and three-hole-punch them.

display an Earth-from-space flag or a globe (preferably not a political one with impossible colors outlining artificial boundaries!)

a copy of *Old Turtle* by Douglas Wood

Warm Up

Let the children enter to discover a visual representation of The Old Turtle story. An arrangement of stuffed animals holding council can be a springboard for imagination - and imagining a story more vividly.

Share the book together.

Chalice Lighting

Use your signal and help the children gather into a circle.

Welcome the children.

Light the chalice and lead the song.

Words

Rise Up, O Flame
by thy light glowing
show to us beauty,
vision and joy.

Hands

begin in front of the belly - your center
cross in front of chest and reach up like a flame
open out to the sky (about 10 and 2 o'clock)
continue circling to below the horizon (8 and 4)
circle all the way in to center, the home of joy.

Sharing

Hand out their Animal Helper cards. Did they have chance to think of their animals this week? Did they do anything like their animals?

Pass the watering can to share joys and concerns.

What?

Prepare the children for a guided meditation. You might explain, "Today, we're going to think about our Animal Helpers and what they look like and what kind of wisdom they have to share. Make yourself quiet and comfortable - you could even close your eyes as you relax." When you read the meditation aloud, remember to use your "National Public Radio voice". Put in plenty of pauses of about one breath's duration.

Listen to your breath. Feel your breath inside you, coming in and then going out. Feel your body and make it comfortable on the floor. Take three deep breaths now, listening and feeling.

Think about your Animal Helper. Open your imagination to see the special place where you like to meet. Your very special Animal Helper is coming to join you. It is strong in many ways and gentle in many ways. What gift does your Animal Helper share with you? You are strong and gentle in many ways. Look in your friend's eyes and know what goodness you share.

Your Animal Helper will lead you on a special journey.

First, your Animal Helper leads you to water. Feel the coolness as you splash, swiftly this time, down the stream, down the river, into the sea where all waters meet.

Listen and see what your Animal Helper wants to share with you.

Now you will be swept up by the sunlight into the air. You and your Animal Helper are floating and soaring among the clouds.

Feel wind and warm sunshine.

Listen to all the sounds that reach you on all the winds.

Farther and farther you rise until you can see beneath you the whole green and blue and silver Earth.

Listen and see what your Animal Helper wants to share with you.

Fly down gently now, riding on a cloud, closer and closer to the Earth. Smells the scent of Earth. Look closely at the good land and stand upon it.

Take three deep breaths here on this beautiful planet Earth, comfortable and safe with your Animal Helper. This is a place where you can be your best self.

Listen and see what your Animal Helper wants to share with you.

You and your Animal Helper enjoy spending time together. You can talk to one another now if you wish, telling one another about the whole world all together, or being silent together. (pause for a full minute)

You can come back to visit with your Animal Helper any time that you need to. Say goodbye for now, in whatever special way you and your Animal Helper have.

When you are ready, you may open your eyes and return to our circle.

Let the children know that they may take their Animal Helper's picture home today. They might like to put the picture in a place where they will see it often and be reminded of their friend - and of being their best selves.

So What?

Now it's time to write a story together. Fill in one page for each child. All the children may offer suggestions about each different Animal Helper's paragraph, but the child whose Animal Helper it is gets final say.

Once there was a _____
who lived _____.
This _____ was very _____.
It loved to eat _____.
It lived _____.
It liked to _____.

This is how it danced. (music plays softly in accompaniment)

It wondered how to keep its home lovely, with clean air and food and water. "I can only do small things by myself," it said, "and the Earth is very big."

The _____ went to Council Rock to think.

If this is the last animal, continue:

When all the animals were gathered at Council Rock, they greeted one another. "I want to keep my home clean and safe," they all said, "but I can only do small things by myself." One by one the animals reached out to one another. (*children join hands*) And they realized they could do great things by working together.

Turn up the music and children end the story with a Spiral Dance.

Now What?

Explain when and where the children will share this story with others.

Time to run through the whole story.

Children should wear an animal cloth and their animal mask.

Finish with the Spiral Dance.

Take your time and work out the timing of the music. About 20 seconds of individual dancing should be sufficient, then figure out how much music you need to complete your spiral dance, ending with all holding hands in one circle.

Celebrate

Time to enjoy a little dancing as an animal with masks and clothes.

During this part of the celebration, one teacher sets up the Feast table.

Feast! Let the kids know before they go to the Feast Table that we will wait for one another and say Thanks.

You lead the blessing, inviting them to join you:

We thank the earth, We thank the sun

We thank the rain, We thank the farmers.

While they enjoy feast, make sure each child has her or his animal picture. The children may take them home today.

Wrap Up

Re-collect the masks and animal clothes - these things disappear once they get home!

No need to reconvene at the circle, just sit together at the table for your closing ritual together before any child leaves.

All blow out the chalice together, 1, 2, 3...

One teacher returns to the circle area to read story books to those children who are finished with snack. Remember that no preschooler should be allowed to leave without their own special grown up!

Session 7 - Children's Celebration!

Preparation:

prepare all your story pages.

matches

signal chime

Animal clothes

masks

set up your music source (CD player? sanctuary audio system?) and someone to play your dance music during the story. Be sure your music helper understands to play the music for about 20 seconds while each animal dances individually (that's actually a long time "on stage"). Then, of course, play through the whole Spiral Dance.

Let your parent group, coven, or congregation know ahead of time that their presence and support is needed this day.

Set up a display to show off the children's projects – bird-window-stickers, terraria, and the water map of the building!

Chalice Lighting

Use your signal and help the children gather into a circle at the front of the space.

Light the chalice and lead the song.

Words

Hands

Rise Up, O Flame

begin in front of the belly

by thy light glowing

reach up like a flame

show to us beauty,

open out to the sky

vision and joy.

continue circling to below the horizon

circle all the way in to center.

Invite the group to join you in singing again, this time as a round.

Joys and Concerns

Please come forward if you wish to water our tree in joy or concern. You may speak your thoughts or come in silence. If you wish to remain

where you are, catch my attention and speak from there, I will be happy to water the tree for you.

Thank you, friends.

I will sprinkle a few drops for those joys and sorrows which have remained unexpressed.

Let us hold one another in wonder and awe for the mystery and miracle of this growing tree.

Story Time (*during this introduction, children should put on their masks and animal clothes*)

Friends, we are pleased to bring you a glimpse of the work that our children have done over the past several weeks. Each child has chosen an Animal Helper to meditate with and to help become her or his best self.

The children have done projects to help creatures of the air, land, and water, becoming Animal Helpers themselves!

We'd like to share a story we wrote about our animals and our work.

Insert all your Story pages next

Benediction

Share your closing ritual with the entire group.