

## **Four Montessori-Inspired Activities for the Winter**

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*Forest Bluff School Blog*

After a difficult spring, we have enjoyed a summer of relative normalcy and freedom in Illinois. While abiding by restrictions and safety measures, people gathered in outdoor spaces, children attended socially distanced camps, and we've all had the chance to swim, walk, run, and explore. This freedom has done a great deal for everyone's mental health and happiness! Being together, being outside, and engaging in structured social activities has been an antidote for a difficult time.

As we head into a winter of uncertainty, many parents and caregivers are looking for creative ways to continue to engage in the outdoor world, as well as bring inspired and open-ended activities into the warmth of their homes. Restrictions on museums, gyms, churches, and other normal places for gathering and exploring have created the time and opportunity for us to "make our own fun"! Here we share four Montessori-approved and inspired activities for this unusual winter.

### **Build an Indoor Carnival**

Encourage your children to build an indoor carnival! They can make rides, games, and spectacles for family members to play with and explore. They can practice practical math skills by making tickets and awarding prizes. A cardboard box becomes a slide, and sofa pillows on the floor become a giant trampoline. The carnival may have a bean bag toss, bobbing for apples, or a petting zoo from stuffed animals (or pets!). As with all Montessori activities, the purpose here is for your children to engage in the bulk of the work and productivity. Your role is to inspire and support, and let their creativity and motivation do the rest. To this end, you can make the suggestion to create a carnival, but then see where your children's unique creativity leads them. Only give as many suggestions as necessary to let their own enthusiasm take over!

### **Make a Pie...or Nine!**

Host a pie tasting event. In the children's classic, "Harold and the Purple Crayon," Harold sets up a picnic with "all nine kinds of pie that Harold liked best." Do you know what your nine favorite kinds of pie are? Pie making appeals to all ages and has flexible recipes. You can add more or less sugar, mix fruits, change up the toppings, and find many ways to explore and create variety. Decide how many pies your family wants to bake in a day or a week, and determine which flavors you want to compare and rank. Younger children can help roll out dough if you choose to make your crust from scratch (the grocery store offers pre-made crusts in the pan for those who are less inclined for baking!). They can also rinse

and prepare fruit by removing stems and leaves, and cutting large fruit into pieces. They can pour ingredients and stir. Older children can look up recipes and decide if they want to make substitutions or experiment. They can measure ingredients and follow instructions. And the very oldest children can take over most of the activity on their own, only inviting parents in for the taste testing portion. Once all the pies have been tasted, they can make an award for the best tasting pie, and add honorable mentions for the other pies (Tartest Pie, Messiest Pie, Most Burnt Edges, and so on).

### **Have a Cookout**

Have a family meal around a fire pit! First make sure your city allows for cooking over an open fire. On a chilly day, invite your children to collect dry kindling and wood for the fire. Then gather around to prepare your meal together. There are many different kinds of food you can cook in this way - hot dogs on sticks, chopped peppers and onions wrapped up in tinfoil, pizza in a cast iron skillet, and, of course, S'mores for dessert! You can sing songs and play games around the fire. My children love "Truth or Dare." Dare usually involves eating a spoonful of mustard or running around the yard saying something silly! The fire creates special memories and a comfortable way to gather outside on cold days.

### **Explore Nature**

Explore a nature preserve. Most people think of nature preserves as an activity for warmer temperatures, but these open spaces are special year round. The winter offers an incredible time to look for animal footprints, see the dramatic branches against the sky, observe the bravest animals, and breathe fresh air. The landscape is different but still very beautiful! Dress warmly, bring hot chocolate in a thermos, find a pair of binoculars, and hit the trails with your family. There are many wonderful preserves in our community. Lake Forest Open Lands has several throughout the area, and Independence Grove offers year round accessibility as well. If you feel like traveling farther, Starved Rock in Illinois is a beautiful site for a day trip - be sure to pack a picnic and a thermos!

The restrictions of this time encourage us all to be creative and resilient. While it is hard not to have our usual activities and destinations available to us this winter, there still are many ways we can enjoy our time during the season. By being willing to explore possibilities outside and inside of our homes, we can find joy, comfort, and fun in the world around us.