

Seasons of a Tree

SEASONS OF A TREE will be used to demonstrate:

- how the different developmental domains can use the same underlying activity but focus on specific identified skills, knowledge or attitudes
- how a nature-based activity nurtures the idea of becoming a “**Steward of the Earth**”

Activity: SEASONS OF A TREE

This activity is basically free, easy to do, easily accessible, and limitless in how many other activities can be developed around the basic activity, depending upon your supplies

- Find a tree that is accessible all year for you and the children
- Children must be able to use all of their senses to examine and explore the tree
- Observe the same tree once a week, through all of the seasons

Developmental Domain 1: Social & Emotional

The following explanation is an excerpt from *Cradle to Crayons, Volume 2 No. 1*

“The domain of Social and Emotional Development emphasizes understanding and recognizing emotions; the development of self-confidence and increasing independence; and beginning to understand other’s rights and privileges. Of particular importance in this domain are the skills children demonstrate in making friends, solving conflict and functioning effectively in groups.

Children use play to explore, practice and understand the many social roles and relationships they observe and experience. The skills they develop through play include: reading social cues of others, self-regulation, and entering play groups. Through the caring, nurturing and supportive relationships with significant adults, the child is forming the foundation needed for social success.”

How does this developmental domain nurture becoming a “Steward of the Earth”?

Being a good steward requires that the individual or child, have/use positive character traits such as respect, caring, responsibility, and good citizenship toward the land, air, water, plants, animals and people. (Good Character, Good Stewards: Caring for the World Around Us, National Park Service).

These positive character traits can only be developed if children are on track with their own social and emotional development. Children need to be able to identify and describe their feelings and the feelings of others. They also need to begin to understand their role as a member of a group, and how their actions impact others. These character traits continue to be important as children grow and develop through adolescence and into adulthood.

Initial Activity of SEASONS OF A TREE that promotes how to become a “Steward of the Earth”

Activity:

1. Go on a nature walk to find a tree that can become your child’s special tree.
2. Have your child really examine the tree – feel it, smell it, describe it, draw it, do a nature rubbing of the bark, if summer – have a picnic under it, look at the leaves, etc.

3. Encourage your child to name their tree.

Supporting development:

- This activity helps children to develop a relationship with their tree that is both an emotional attachment and cognitive understanding of how trees grow and change through the seasons.
- This learning can be extended by reading about how trees provide essentials for us – oxygen, shelter, homes for animals, products used by people such as paper and wood.
- Discover with your child how trees are used to make paper, set up a paper recycling bin.
- Use some of the paper in the recycling bin to make your own paper.

Developmental Domain 2: Approaches to Learning

When educators talk about ‘approaches to learning’, they are referring to the attitudes, behaviors and learning styles children (and adults) use in social situations, in acquiring information and knowledge, and in being flexible and resilient when confronted with change or conflict. ‘Approaches to learning’ also encompasses the development of positive attitudes and dispositions.

Your child’s inborn ‘approach to learning’ not only impacts their cognitive/school learning, but their social and emotional development. In the Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress preschool document, (MN early learning standards) **curiosity, risk-taking, imagination and invention, persistence, and reflection and interpretation** are examined. For example, being comfortable with new, unfamiliar circumstances demonstrates positive emotional development and self-concept.

How does this developmental domain nurture becoming a “Steward of the Earth”?

Nurturing your child’s natural curiosity, imagination and interpretation greatly enhances their ability to get along with others, problem solve, and understand their world! These skills and attitudes are essential for becoming successful adults – not only in their work and personal lives, but also in our society in general.

We do not live in a vacuum; we need the support, help, and interaction of other as evidenced in the news on a daily basis. Our ability to problem solve, take risks, and create solutions to help others in need is what makes us ‘humans’. This is part of being a “**Steward of the Earth**”.

Activity for SEASONS OF A TREE that promotes how to become a “Steward of the Earth”

Activity:

1. Visit your child’s tree.
2. Ask questions such as: How does your tree look?; What makes your tree grow?; How can you make the area around your tree better for the tree?
3. Try to get your child thinking about the ‘what ifs’ and how they can make things even better for their tree.

4. Encourage your child to think about 'what happens next or after' a choice/decision is made.

Supporting development:

- This type of thinking encourages children to think about others instead of just themselves. This is one of the first steps in developing empathy.
- This also encourages them to develop higher levels of thinking – to look at all of the information to help make decisions.
- Encourage your child to think/learn about non-toxic solutions to common gardening problems such as bugs, fertilizers, and weeds.

Developmental Domain 3: Language & Literacy

Language and literacy is how we communicate with others, how we express our feelings, and how we learn and share knowledge. **Emergent Literacy** is a gradual process that happens within babies and preschool children over a period of time. It is already there within the newborn infant, but needs the right conditions to develop and **emerge**.

Literacy refers to the interrelatedness of all language skills:

- Listening
- Speaking
- Reading
- Writing
- Viewing

How does this developmental domain nurture becoming a “Steward of the Earth”?

One of the most important gifts we can give our children is a love of learning. This starts in infancy, and hopefully will continue throughout their entire lives. When we talk, touch, read and sing to our infants, toddlers and preschoolers, they react like little sponges, soaking up all of the words, sounds, actions and feelings we are portraying.

Language and literacy development reflects a child’s social/emotional development and how they ‘approach learning’, (developmental domains previously discussed). Children use language to express their thoughts, feelings and emotions. They also use language to process and share what they are learning, how they are thinking, and what they will do to solve problems. This is a concrete way to connect with nature and its importance.

Activities for SEASONS OF A TREE that promotes how to become a “Steward of the Earth”

Activities:

1. Create a book by writing stories about what is happening with your tree... tell about how the leaves grew from buds in the spring/summer, how they changed color and fell in fall/winter; tell about the bird that built a nest in the spring; tell about how you had a picnic n the summer etc.
2. Write simple poetry using the cinquain style of writing:
Line 1: one word, subject

Line 2: two words that describe Line 1

Line 3: three action words that relate to Line 1

Line 4: four words – feelings or sentence that relates to Line 1

Line 5: one word – synonym of Line 1, or a word that sums it up

Supporting Development:

- Telling a story encourages children to develop sequencing skills.
- Language activities increases vocabulary and descriptive language.
- Writing or telling a story helps children organize thoughts and make choices.
- Create a poster about recycling newspapers because they are made from trees.

Developmental Domain 4: Creativity & the Arts

The **creative arts** provide many valuable learning experiences and opportunities for young children. Being involved in the creative process provides the chance for children to **create** their own art, **respond to** the art of others, and **evaluate** both their own art and the art of others. The **creative arts** includes the mediums of paint/paper, music/song, dance, and dramatic play/theater; and nurtures the development of all domains.

Providing children with a variety of materials and mediums encourages them to show what they know, express how they feel, and expand on their thinking. Early childhood is the perfect time for experimenting and developing a sense of aesthetics – finding out what they like or dislike.

How does this developmental domain nurture becoming a “Steward of the Earth”?

Most young children are free, uninhibited and truthful with their creative expression. Children use their art work to tell about the things that mean the most to them – their families and their world.

The creative process allows children to show joy, concern, happiness or sadness about their world.

Early childhood is also a time for children to begin developing a sense of right/wrong, a sense of community, and a love for the world around them. The **creative arts** can be a tool or strategy that helps them define and describe their feelings and understanding of what is happening in their world.

This understanding can lead to children identifying the value of nature in their world.

Activities for SEASONS OF A TREE that promotes how to become a “Steward of the Earth”

1. Draw, paint or color pictures of your tree through the seasons. These could be illustrations for your book.
2. Do a series of crayon rubbings – bark, leaves, twigs and seeds/flowers from your tree. Create a collage or ‘patchwork quilt’ design from the rubbings.
3. Collect leaves in the fall, glue them onto a piece of construction paper, laminate it (or use contact paper) and use for a placemat.

4. Create a dramatic play 'tree costume' using a grocery bag for the trunk, headband with paper leaves for top of the tree, and roots made from yarn - attached to bottom of grocery bag.
5. Use collected leaves for printmaking – paint the raised side with tempera paint, lay a piece of paper over the paint and rub, lift paper off and you have a beautiful leaf print.

Supporting development:

- Creating a picture encourages children to develop a sense of color and design.
- Pictures can be 'artistic interpretation' or realistic. Both types of pictures have value for different reasons and neither one is right/wrong or better than the other.
- Use scrap paper to tear leaves, trunk, grass etc. to create a picture of your tree.
- Collect 'found' items from around your tree and create a collage from the items. The collage could focus on a 'trash' theme, or simply a nature theme.

Developmental Domain 5: Cognitive – Math, Science, Social Systems

Early childhood is a time of wonder and learning. It is a time when children acquire knowledge and understanding of the world around them through organizing and using information. The specific categories in the cognitive domain are mathematical and logical thinking, scientific thinking and problem-solving, and social systems understanding.

Early childhood is also a time of intense brain development. A child's brain is a very complex organ. At birth, a child has almost a full set of brain cells – about 100 billion. The cells are there, but the connections or synapses, between the cells are not. These connections are formed through positive stimulation – play, affection, discovery, and language interaction. Our thought processes, our personality, and our physical abilities are regulated by these connections, which continue to develop throughout adolescence and young adulthood.

How does this developmental domain nurture becoming a “Steward of the Earth”?

Children are curious, inquisitive, and want to know 'why'! Knowledge about the world, and developing skills to use that knowledge, are important in being able to find creative solutions to solve problems.

Along with acquiring knowledge and skills, children need to have guidance in identifying what is of value to them. Knowledge, skills and a value system are keys to becoming a “**Steward of the Earth**”.

Activities for SEASONS OF A TREE that promotes how to become a “Steward of the Earth”

Mathematical and logical thinking

1. Collect leaves to: count; create patterns; sort by color and size etc.
2. Measuring: the circumference of the trunk; your child's height on the trunk; size of the leaves.

Scientific thinking and problem solving

1. Make a list of items that are made out of paper, decide which items from that list can be recycled and then start collecting them for recycling.
2. Use the items from the recycled paper bin to create other art projects such as paper, collages, sculptures etc.
3. Use a magnifying glass to get a closer look at your tree – the bark, the leaves, the bugs crawling on and around the tree.

Social systems understanding

1. Observe your tree to see what animals and birds use your tree for their home; talk about the materials used to build your own house.
2. Find out how paper is made, and how many trees it takes. Plant a tree someplace and watch it grow.

Supporting development:

- Cognitive skills help children develop higher-level thinking and problem-solving skills.

Developmental Domain 6: Physical & Motor

The physical and motor aspect of your child's development includes three different components:

1. Gross motor or large muscle control, coordination and development;
2. Fine motor or small muscle control, coordination and development;
3. Physical health and general well-being

All three of these areas affect your child's ability to interact with and understand the world around them. Children need to be physically and mentally healthy in order to be **'ready to learn'**.

How does this developmental domain nurture becoming a "Steward of the Earth"?

Children learn best when they are able to touch, feel, smell, and manipulate objects through their play. As they grow and learn, each new experience becomes connected or inter-woven with already learned concepts or past experiences. Positive experiences create productive ideas, positive values and successful outcomes. A very positive outcome is becoming a **"Steward of the Earth"**

Activities for SEASONS OF A TREE that promotes how to become a "Steward of the Earth"

1. Lay on the ground and look up through the tree branches. What do you see, how do you feel?
2. 'Become' a tree – encourage your child to try the 'tree' yoga pose
3. Use your body to move like a tree in a spring rainstorm, in a summer breeze, in a fall wind storm, in a winter snowstorm
4. Investigate what types of food comes from trees – does your tree provide any food for animals, for people?

Supporting development:

- Children need many opportunities to use their muscles (both large and small), in a variety of ways.
- Nutrition, exercise and rest are three components that contribute to physical wellness.

Stewards of the Earth – our children, our future

We are very fortunate to have valuable resources right at our fingertips – our children, nature in our world, and the ability to impact the future. As caregivers, we have an incredible responsibility to make sure that we protect these gifts.

A sense of wonder, a love of nature, and an inquisitive mind are qualities our children can share with us. Building upon those traits, we can instill in our children a sense of purpose, good citizenship skills, and caring behavior which will protect our resources. We can nurture our **“Stewards of the Earth”** for now and the future.

Check out the Stewards of the Earth Unit of Study, available at <http://earlylearningsuccess.net/product/stewards-of-the-earth/>