

This book belongs to

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Developing a Theme with Learning Centers

There are many advantages to developing themes through tasks in the learning centers already established in your classroom. Tasks are added to the learning centers to reflect what you are studying.

Use these guidelines to develop the tasks to reflect your theme:

That Are Motivating to the Children

Tasks

Choose tasks that are interesting to the children, ones that allow work for a meaningful amount of time. Tasks in learning centers may be done many times. The best test for meaningful tasks is if the children want to go back to them again.

That Provide Real Experiences

Tasks

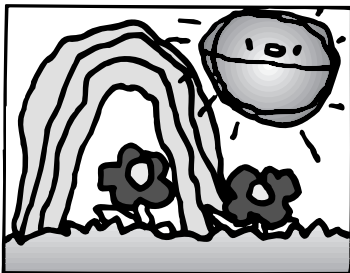
Develop tasks that will provide real experiences about the theme. Children need to feel as if every task that they work on has a purpose. Meaningful tasks are ones where the child can stay with the work for a sustained amount of time. These tasks will keep children engaged and develop deeper understanding about the theme.



That Allow Children to Construct Knowledge

Tasks

Tasks should be developed that allow the children to begin with what they think they know about a theme and build on that knowledge to develop deeper understandings. One way children construct new knowledge is from conversations with other children about their work. Consider tasks that encourage children to discuss what they are doing.



Tasks

That Have a Process and a Product

The product is an important way for the child to show what he or she has figured out in the process. Whether it is an art piece, writing or some other creation, the product serves as the indication that the child has figured out something which can be shown to others.

Designing Meaningful Starting Points for Themes

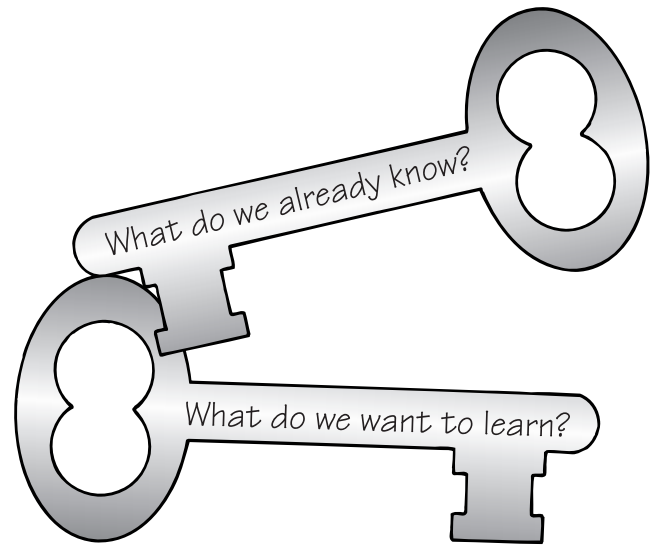
Starting Point

Think broadly about a starting point. Traditionally books have been used to introduce a theme. But what could be designed that would give you feedback about what information the children bring to the theme? Create a scenario that has mystery, something memorable that you will be able to refer to throughout the theme. The starting point should be unexpected with an element of surprise.

The starting point should lead to a discussion that results in gathering information around the key areas:

What do we already know?

What do we want to learn?



Other Things We Want to Learn

Print the information on large charts with the heading listed at the top. As each child contributes information for the charts, transcribe his or her words and the child's name.

Post the charts in a place that is at the eye level of the children. Plan to leave the charts posted throughout the theme and refer to them often. When the children discuss information they have learned from a task they have completed, relate it to the chart to help them connect what they're learning.

Add a third chart with the heading *Other Things We Want to Learn*. Add information that is acquired throughout the theme.

Starting Point for the Pet Store Theme

Purchase a package of white lunch-sized paper bags—one for each child. Gather a variety of art materials that include feathers, pipe cleaners, straws, yarn and a variety of colors and types of paper. On an index card print this message: *You are a dog in the pet store.*

Include a variety of types of animals that are in a pet store including dogs, cats, gerbil, snakes, hamsters, fish and birds. You can have more than one of some or all of the animals. Place the index card in the paper bag for each child. Instruct the children to read their cards (assisting where necessary), but keep it a secret from the others.

Ask the children to use their paper bags as masks of the animals on the index cards. Using the art materials, they can make their masks as unique as they wish. Assist the children in cutting out eye, nose and mouth holes with scissors. Encourage them to keep their animals secret.

When the masks are complete, gather the children in a circle. Ask the children to put on their masks and listen for their animal parts in the following story:

Just down the street is a store that everyone likes to visit. It is Mr. Daniel's Pet Store. If you go in you will see and hear the pets. There are several varieties of dogs. (Encourage the children wearing the dog masks to make themselves known.) The cats and kittens are some of the favorites. In small cages you will see gerbils and hamsters. And just over there are tanks with fish. Mr. Daniel even has some snakes. Don't forget to look at the birds when you visit the pet store.

When the story is complete, lead the children in a discussion about their pets and pet stores. Make a chart with information that the children know about pets and pet stores. Record each piece of information on the chart along with the child's name. Mount the chart for reference during the theme.

Save the children's animal masks and reread the story on subsequent days during the theme.

