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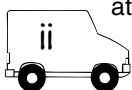
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Developing a Theme with Learning Centers

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

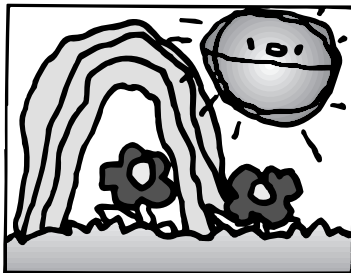
Develop tasks that will provide real experiences about the theme. Children need to feel as if every task that they work on has a purpose. Meaningful tasks are ones where the child can stay with the work for a sustained amount of time. These tasks will keep children engaged and develop deeper understanding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



That Allow Children to Construct Knowledge

Tasks

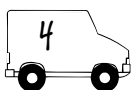
Tasks should be developed that allow the children to begin with what they think they know about a theme and build on that knowledge to develop deeper understandings. One way children construct new knowledge is from conversations with other children about their work. Consider tasks that encourage children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

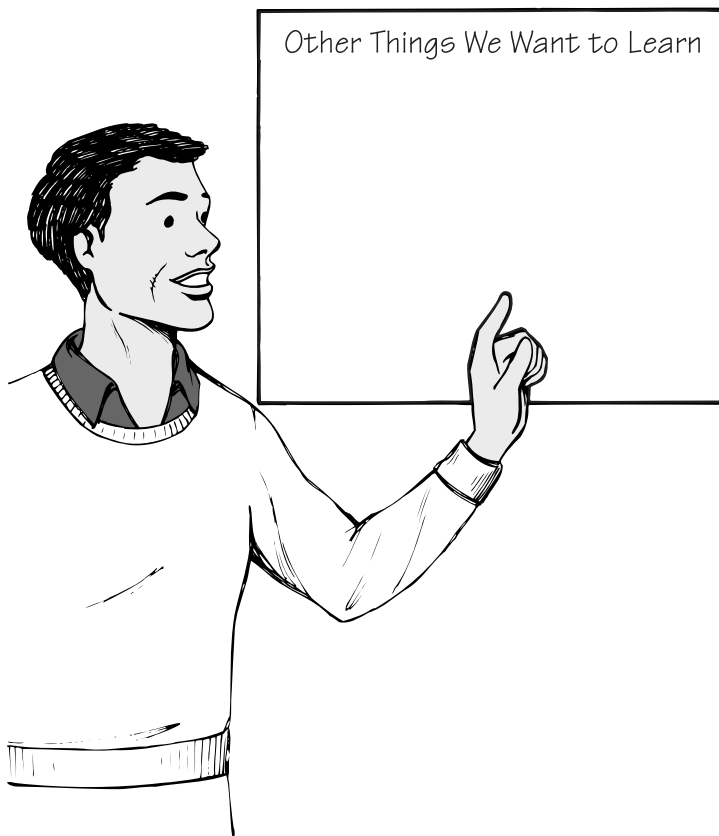
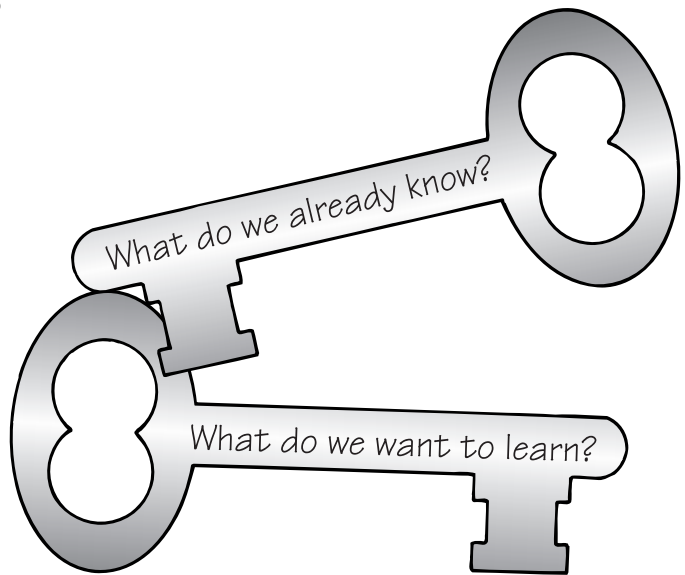
Starting Point

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?



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 Transportation Theme

Go to several car dealerships and gather brochures describing different types of vehicles including two- and four-door sedans, sports cars, trucks, mini vans and all-terrain trucks. Mount each of the brochures on a sheet of chart paper. Display each of the charts where the children can see them.

Gather the children in an area near the charts. Explain to the children that you are shopping for new transportation for your family. Tell the children that you have been shopping and have collected information about the different types of vehicles that are available, but you would like their help in deciding which type of vehicle is best for you. Begin by making a chart listing things that you need to consider in a vehicle. For example, include how many people will need to ride in the vehicle, typical trips you will make and where the vehicles will be parked.

Introduce the types of vehicles that you found on the shopping trip to the car dealerships. Point to each of the charts and lead a discussion about the positive aspects of each of the types of vehicles. Encourage the children to share information they have about the different vehicles. As information is offered, print it on the charts and include the child's name.

Use this discussion to help the children make comparisons about the different types of vehicles. Include questions about the number of passengers, safety issues, storage space and size.

Introduce the theme of transportation. Explain that during the theme the information that they have about the different types of vehicles will be helpful as they learn more. Continue to refer to the charts throughout the theme.

