



Fall for Puppets!



| BY SHARON KATZ COOPER |

Acorn Puppets

This Helps Develop . . .

As the leaves fall around us, we are surrounded by colors and seasonal activity. Why not take advantage of all the natural materials of fall to create handmade costumes and puppets? Encourage your child to put on shows for you, their other friends and family using their unique creations.

Using natural materials and getting outside in the crisp, clear, at last un-humid weather is a great way to encourage exploration, observation and fun.

Leaf Crowns

What you need

- A 3-inch wide strip of construction paper about the length around your child's head
- Glue stick, regular glue or double-sided tape
- Leaves with a variety of colors

What to do

1. Make a strip of construction paper about 3 inches wide. Using the strip, measure a length around your child's head, marking where the strips overlap. Lay the strip flat on a table for later use.

2. Now go on a leaf hunt. Together track down the largest and most colorful leaves. Can your child find a bright red one, a yellow one, an orange one? Try to collect a sample of every color you see.

3. Once you have collected all your leaves, use a glue or double-sided tape to arrange and attach the leaves to one side of your strip paper. Encourage your child to choose a pattern he or she likes and tell you why.

4. Once you have finished attaching all the leaves, staple or tape the ends of the strip together using the marks you made earlier and—voilà—a leaf crown!

What you need

- Brown paper lunch bags
- Glue
- Magic markers
- Acorns
- Natural items for decoration (grass, twigs, seeds, flowers, etc.)

What to do

1. Take your child outside for an acorn hunt. Look for whole acorns and pieces of acorns. When you pick up each broken piece, look for telltale signs of what caused it to break. Do you see teeth marks? What could have chewed it? Is it smooth? Do you think it broke when it fell from its tree? Also gather natural materials to add other features to your puppet.

2. After you have gathered a bunch of acorns and other items, use liquid glue to work with your child in attaching them in a face arrangement on a lunch-sized paper bag. Don't forget to include hair, teeth, and eyebrows if you like!

3. Encourage your child to add colorful details with markers.

4. When you have completed your face, you have an acorn face puppet!

Create a Show

With your leaf crowns and/or acorn puppets, encourage your child or children to put on a show outside. Who are the characters? What is the story? Do they need any other props? Encourage them to create props from nature also, such as sticks, small rocks, or piles of leaves. Then let their imaginations go! If you have the chance, invite other friends or family to come over and enjoy the show.

Gathering objects and considering their shapes and patterns helps to develop cognitive skills by stimulating awareness, observation, and reasoning. Comparing and contrasting items and their colors encourages development of skills that will be useful for science, art, and mathematics.

These activities also develop fine motor skills—the use of small muscle movements in the hands that occur in coordination with the eyes. Children build fine motor skills when parents encourage them to select and gather their own objects with their hands, examine them carefully and place them into patterns.

Social emotional development involves a child's feelings of self worth, confidence, and pride as well as their ability to get along with others in a group setting. Children love to create and many children have developing senses of drama. As they create their puppets or crowns and act out a show for you, they will observe your reactions and develop a sense of achievement. Actively using their imaginations and performing will also enhance your child's communication skills. ❖

This monthly family activity series, "Hands-on-Kids!" is brought to you by a partnership between the Children's Museum of Northern Virginia (CMNOVA) and FAMILY Magazine. For more activities you can do with your children to spark their love of learning, visit the CMNOVA web site, www.cmnova.org. On their web site you will also find information about the Children's Museum of Northern Virginia and how you can become involved. CMNOVA is committed to building a place where our children can freely explore and develop a lifelong love of learning. Sharon Katz Cooper is a museum educator and freelance writer in Fairfax. She is a volunteer with CMNOVA.