



Dig In!

Curriculum Guide Preschool

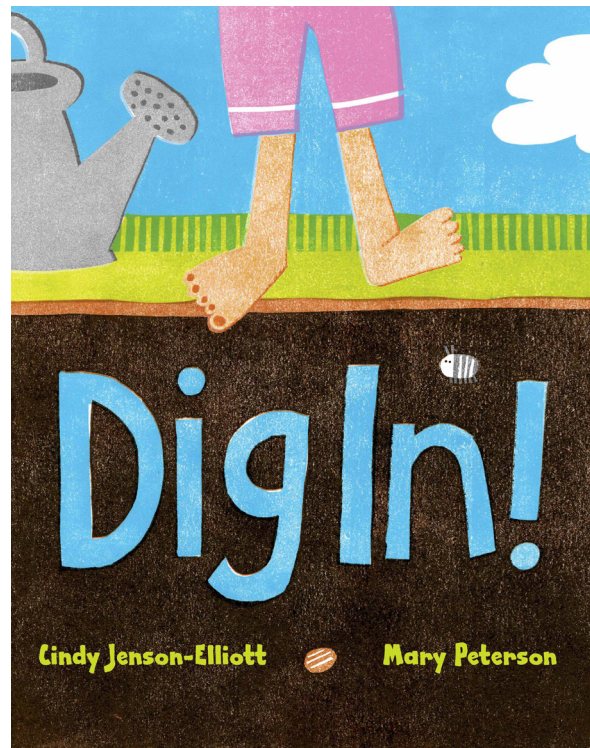
Cindy Jenson-Elliott



Mary Peterson



A Preschool Curriculum Guide to



Dig In! Discover the wonder of hands-on learning in nature.

Anyone who has watched young children play outdoors knows that children thrive outdoors. Developmentally, children learn best by experiencing the world with their whole bodies, and nature offers opportunities for...

Climbing up trees

Jumping down from stump to stump

Crawling under bushes

Stirring water and dirt

Smooshing mud

Building forts

Running fast

Sitting still, watching and listening

Creating an imaginary world in which they are in charge

In grown-up terms, this means that in nature, children develop large motor coordination, small motor strength, the spatial awareness needed for math and science, and social-emotional skills such as patience, persistence, imagination, and cooperation. Most of all, in nature children taste wonder, feel connected, and experience the joy of learning and doing.

So, *Dig In!* and get dirty!

The world is waiting to be discovered through the muddy wonders of hands-on learning.

Your Friend,
Cindy Jenson-Elliott



Dig In! Discover! What Can You Find in Nature?

"There is something of the marvelous in all things of nature." —Aristotle

NATURE SCAVENGER HUNT

Plan...

Go outside.
Just go!
Don't plan an agenda.
Just see what children find.

You can...

- Create boundaries, and ask children to see what they can find within it
- Brainstorm the kinds of things they might look for: plants, insects, spiders
- Look for evidence of animals (holes, scat-droppings, tracks, sounds)
- Invite children to draw what they discover

Try this...

Linger over each discovery. Take your time. Talk. What fierce wonderings come from your discoveries? Write down what children say about what they found and what they wonder.





Dig In! Touch!

What Can You Feel in Nature?

"The world is mud-luscious ... [and] puddle-wonderful..." —e.e. cummings

Plan...

Mud is a marvelous plaything. If you don't have any handy, you'll have to make some. Let the children experiment, and you'll be making a scientist at the same time.

You can...

Make it, squish it, mold it, splash it! What does it feel like?

Try this...

Write a recipe for mud

Ingredients: Dirt, sand, and water

How much dirt and how much water makes the perfect mud for mud pies?

How much water should you add to make it perfect for sloshing feet?

How much sand will you need to dry it out to make a mud doll?

How many times do you need to stir it, mash it or mix it?

Write down your recipe.

Make a recipe book.

What other delightful "dishes" can you add to your book?





Dig In!

Make, Do, and Imagine!

*"I can change the world, with my own two hands,
Make it a better place, with my own two hands,
Make it a kinder place, with my own two hands,
With my own, with my own two hands."*

—Jack Johnson

Plan...

Gather loose parts—natural materials, small and large:

rocks, leaves, sticks, twigs, straw, stumps, branches, grass, flowers, rocks, seeds, seed pods, bark, mosses

Add cloth for roofs, wings, and capes, dress-up items for imaginary play tea sets for teatime in nature

You can...

Make fairy houses out of small items,

Make forts out of large items. Have a tea party, a battle, a ball.

Imagine a world of wonder!

Try this...

Make seed balls.

Gather ingredients: seeds of **native** plants from your region, natural clay, compost, and water (if you are unsure what is a native plant, contact your local Master Gardeners program).

Mix together mud with compost, natural clay, and water.

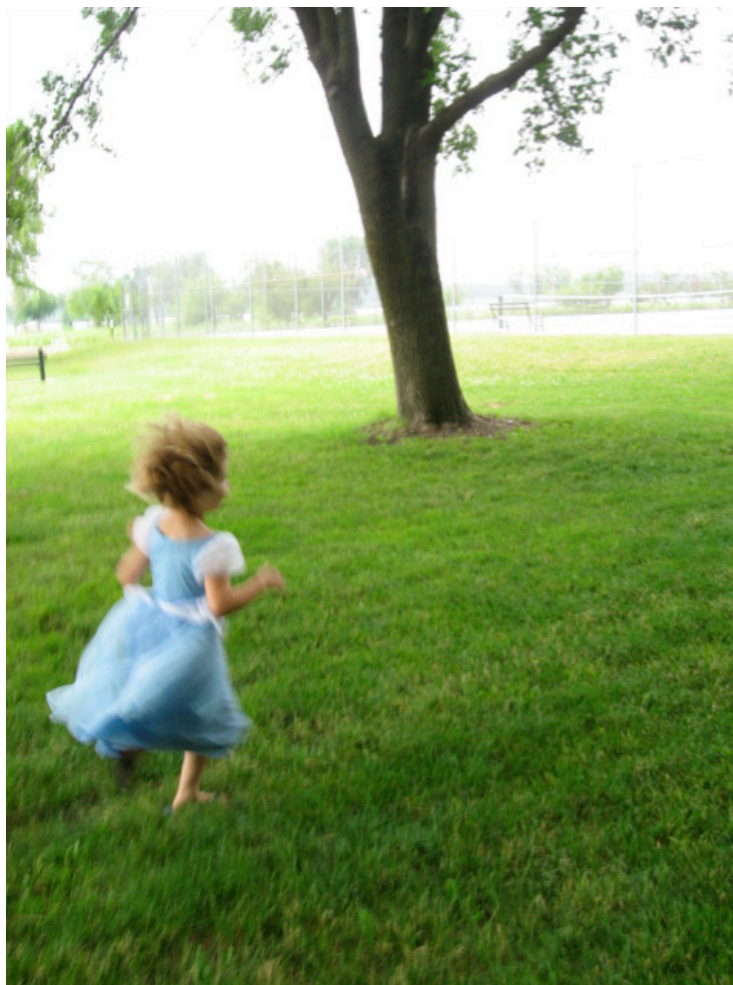
Let dry, then toss into an area that needs more native beauty.





Resources for Digging In to Nature with Young Children

- NAEYC: the National Alliance for the Education of Young Children
www.naeyc.org
- Children and Nature Network—an international movement to connect children, families, and communities to nature: www.childrenandnature.org
- *I Love Dirt!, Let's Go Outside, It's a Jungle Out There!*,
all books by Jennifer Ward: www.jenniferwardbooks.com
- National Arbor Day Foundation outdoor education program;
www.natureexplore.org
- *Weeds Find a Way* and other books by Cindy Jenson-Elliott: www.cindyjensonelliott.com



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