
Our City

Children are naturally inquisitive, creative, good observers and full of colorful imaginations. This activity encourages the use of these skills. As you get ready to create the model city (town or neighborhood), take several days to observe a “real” city. If possible, take a walking tour, read stories or look at pictures of cities. Make picture charts of the different “parts” of a city and refer to these as the model is developed.

Materials:

large piece of sturdy cardboard or an old window shade for a base
art supplies as needed
large variety of cartons, boxes, paper tubes, packaging
scraps of paper or any recyclable or reusable items

Procedure:

1. Designate a table or out-of-the-way area to build the model city. (Setting aside a large space may be a problem for many facilities. If this is the case, divide the children into groups to work on several smaller cities or neighborhoods.)

2. Plan to build your city over several days or sessions. During each session a certain component of the city can be built. Consider these components:

- Streets
- Houses
- Important Buildings
- People
- Vehicles
- Nature
- Other ideas

3. Brainstorm with your children; find out what they know about a city. Ask them, what is a city? What things are in a city? Where do we find a city? Write or draw their ideas on a chalkboard or large piece of paper. Next, take your children on a short walk around your neighborhood. Have them look for things not already on the list. When you return, add newly discovered things to the list. Show your children the base or “ground” on which their city will be built and explain that this is where they will create their own special city together.

Streets

Take a walk outside and look at the streets in the neighborhood. You may also want to show the children pictures of streets in magazines and books. Ask your children some of the following questions: Are the streets straight or winding? What color are they? What are they used for? For young children, outline the street(s) for them on the base. Everyone should participate in filling in the streets. Use paints, crayons or markers to add color. Or “paint” glue with your finger over the surface and cover with sand, dirt, coffee grounds or seeds. Try gluing in place scraps of brown paper bag or old newspapers.

Houses

Take a walk outside and look at the different houses in the neighborhood. Discuss features such as doors, windows, chimneys, etc. Ask them what their houses look like. Help children make a pretend home that they would like to live in. For the houses, use pint and half gallon sized milk cartons cut in half. Try using small paperboard boxes leftover from food packaging or small gift boxes for apartment buildings or condominiums. Houses don’t have to have straight walls. Use margarine tubs or yogurt containers for futuristic homes. Cut out windows and doors or cover containers with paper and draw on windows doors, bricks, shutters, etc. Be creative with a roof covering and include a chimney made from a slice of paper tube. Add cotton smoke. Let the children decide where they would like to place their houses in the city.

Important Buildings

Talk about other places or buildings that children may be familiar with in their neighborhoods or city. They may mention schools, churches, libraries, gas stations, stores and factories. Take a walk around town to look for these buildings. Make a list of the buildings seen. Back in the classroom, have children choose the type of building they would like to build. As with the houses, supply children with a variety of different sized boxes and containers to build structures. Suggest gluing different containers together for bigger and taller buildings. Use paper tubes for smoke stacks or steeples and cellophane or tissue paper scraps for cut-out windows.

People

Introduce this session by talking about what different people look like. They may bring up hair color and length, skin color, size and age. What are some of the different parts of the body? Ask about the important people in their lives (parents, grandparents, siblings, teachers, etc.). Provide children with old magazines, catalogs and junk mail. Let them find a picture of “themselves” and another picture to represent someone special. Help the children cut out and glue the picture onto a thin piece of paperboard. When the glue is dry, cut the figures out again. Make a cut straight across the bottom of the figure. Using the scrap paperboard, make small triangular stands that are straight across the bottom. Cut a short slit in the center bottom of each figure and a slit in the center top of the stands. Fit the slits of the stand and figures together so that the bottom of both are flush. The cut-out person will stand.

Vehicles

Discuss with your children the different types of vehicles they see on city streets. Take a walk outside. What vehicles do they see? Make a list of all the vehicles seen. Have children describe what the vehicles look like. Are they big or small? How many wheels do they have? What shape are the wheels? How big are trucks and buses? Supply children with a variety of small boxes, cartons and containers. Let them create their own vehicles for the city. Give them toilet paper tubes, spools and film canisters if they want to make wheels. Encourage them to use their imaginations. How might their vehicle be propelled? What is their vehicle used for? Let the children place their vehicle on the city streets and move them around.

Nature

Ask your children what other things live in the city — like plants and animals. Start a picture list of things that live and grow in the city on the chalkboard or large piece of paper. Take a walk outside to look for lawns, gardens and parks. Talk about trees, grass, flowers and bushes. What colors are they? Are they all the same? Also, look for animals that are found in the city. What kinds of animals are found here? Now let the children add some nature to their city. They can use pieces of sponge dipped in green paint to print a grassy surface, or they can dip cotton balls into green paint and glue them on the base as bushes. Paper tubes make good tree trunks. Children can rip circles from paper for tree foliage, color with crayons or paint, and glue them on the trunk. They can also glue cotton balls or popcorn dipped in green

paint on the tree. Foliage can also be created from bunched up crepe paper or tissue paper glued into place. Children may want to collect real leaves and glue them to the paper tubes. Flowers can be made from scraps of bright colored paper cut or ripped into tiny pieces. Some children may want to cut pictures of flowers from old magazines, wrapping paper or greeting cards. Glue pieces directly on the ground. Animals can be made from cut out pictures. See the section for “People” for directions.

Other Ideas

Walk around the neighborhood again. What things do the children see that have not yet been included in their city? Keep a list of the things they mention. Back in the classroom, ask them what additional things they would like to put in their city. Help them to create these things. Power lines can be made from used straws and scraps of string. Fire hydrants can be made from spools or film canisters. Use toothpicks to lay a railroad track. Try adding lakes or pools made from meat packing trays. Include a farm or zoo with animals made from cut-outs. Children may want to show where the landfill or recycling center is. Encourage children to use their imaginations.

4. As your city grows and is completed, children will feel a sense of pride for contributing to its creation. Teachers should allow children to play with their cut-outs in the city when it is finished.

Going Beyond:

- Older children may want to make a more futuristic city. After completion, discuss the probability of someday having real cities being built from recyclable materials.
- Instead of a city, create another setting like a playground, park or farm. For a farm, make houses and barns from boxes, fences from pieces of plastic berry baskets, silos from paper tubes. Cut-out figures of people and farm animals from magazines.