



NATURE

Matters

TEACHING CHILDREN ABOUT THE NATURAL ECOSYSTEM AROUND US AND OUR PLACE IN IT HELPS THEM BECOME BETTER PEOPLE.

CULTIVATING CHILDREN'S LOVE FOR NATURE

Environmental issues can be complex. Making it easy for a five-year-old to understand and appreciate nature can be challenging. NParks has developed a set of educational materials that focuses on native biodiversity. These materials have been designed in consultation with ECDA and the Ministry of Education to ensure they are age-appropriate and aligned with the Kindergarten Curriculum Framework, shares Mr Lim.

The educational package was given out to all preschools licensed under ECDA. Each set includes a picture book which uses rhymes to introduce common plants and animals. It also comes with a DVD featuring a character called Peeky the Pangolin, which explores Singapore's trees, wildlife and parks, posters, picture word cards and a Snap Card Game featuring native animals and plants.

The local species of flora and fauna featured in these materials are commonly found, so children are able to see real-life examples around them, which enhances their appreciation and love for nature. To extend their learning at home, parents can access more resources such as activity sheets, videos, and a plant and animal directory from www.nparks.gov.sg/learning.



Photos courtesy of NParks, Kiddiewinkie Schoolhouse @ Novena and Zion Kindergarten

For toddlers and preschoolers, exploring the outdoors with their parents is not just an enjoyable way to bond. There are plenty of teaching and learning opportunities in the lush green pockets of our 'City in a Garden', which is home to a rich diversity of flora and fauna.

With the growing interest in our natural environment and how our actions are affecting it, Mr Lim Jiang Jim, Group Director of the National Biodiversity Centre in NParks, explains that it has become even more important for children to understand big concepts like biodiversity and sustainability.

He says, "Our younger generation are our future leaders. By communicating to them the importance of conserving our biodiversity, they will hopefully realise that there is a need to strike a balance between ensuring our environment is conserved, and the progress of urbanisation."

BUILDING GOOD VALUES

Teaching children to do their part in caring and protecting our environment reinforces the values of care, responsibility and civic-mindedness as well. Mr Lim explains, "As we share our environment with other living things, it is essential we are considerate to them. No less important is the need to be mindful towards other people. For example, by not removing plants and animals from their natural habitat, other park visitors will be able to learn about them and enjoy their beauty."

APPRECIATION OF BIODIVERSITY IN NATURE



WALK THIS WAY

Sign up for a guided walk or plan your own route. Check out NParks' list of guided walks and DIY Trail Guides at www.nparks.gov.sg/gardens-parks-and-nature/walks-and-tours



OUT AND ABOUT

But nothing beats getting close to nature in person, and the various parks across the island offer plenty to see and do.

Mr Lim elaborates, "At Singapore Botanic Gardens and some other parks, walks and workshops for preschool children are accompanied by storytelling sessions and books, which come with stickers and fun activities like connect-the-dots, crossword puzzles and word searches. During the walks, trained guides encourage children to engage their senses, for example by smelling flowers, feeling the texture of leaves or touching tree bark. The children also learn how to observe and document nature through drawing, colouring, making bark rubbings and labelling plant parts."

Many of our parks offer nature trails suitable for families, including easy routes for children below six, such as the Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park trail, the Pasir Ris Park trail and the Woodlands Waterfront Park trail.

Most importantly, parents should lead by example, says Mr Lim. "When children see their parents keep a respectful distance from wildlife and ensure shared spaces are kept clean, there is a higher chance that they too, will do their part to conserve our biodiversity."

NETWORK OF LEARNERS

Preschools which are part of the NParks and ECDA Innovation Guidance Project initiative have come up with innovative and fun ways to help children appreciate and understand biodiversity. Called "Our City In A Garden", this initiative ties in with the ECDA Innovation Projects Grant which provides funding and training to help participating centres to engage and partner with the communities they are part of.

One of the participating preschools is Kiddiewinkie Schoolhouse @ Novena. The preschool has created an eco-garden designed to get the children involved in investigating plant growth requirements, soil use and nutrition. Here is how the children were involved:

- ▶ Brainstormed, and shared ideas and suggestions for the design of the garden
- ▶ Helped recycle used PET bottles and containers for use as planters
- ▶ Took turns to plant and care for the garden's various vegetables, herbs and non-edible plants
- ▶ Got to eat the fruits of their labour during mealtimes



Children from Kiddiewinkie Schoolhouse @ Novena recycling used PET bottles as planters for their eco-garden



Planting vegetable seeds with the help of Parent Volunteers

BRINGING THE COMMUNITY TOGETHER



Community In Bloom, an NParks programme, aims to foster community spirit among people of all ages through the love of gardening.

Preschools that sign up are given horticultural advice on how to start and maintain innovative themed eco-gardens within their compounds, which can be used as a curricular tool. Activity booklets and other information can be found at www.nparks.gov.sg/gardening/community-in-bloom-initiative/cib-schools.

Preschool teacher Anusha from Zion Kindergarten (Tavistock) says the centre had previously tried growing vegetables and other plants, but failed. After attending a course under the "City In A Garden" Programme, she and a colleague decided to register with Community In Bloom for advice on setting up a butterfly and a vegetable garden.

"Our objective was to expose children to various flora and fauna," Anusha shares. "Azza, an NParks Community In Bloom Manager, helped us identify a location with favourable sunlight and drainage.



Observing the plants in the butterfly garden

She provided us with informative books on plants, as well as seeds and gardening tools.

We were taught how to protect the plants from pests, how and when to water, fertilise, and prune the plants. It was a learning experience for the teachers."

The children got to choose what they wanted to grow, and the preschool invited both its former and present preschoolers' parents and grandparents to share their gardening knowledge.

"I enjoyed planting seeds and watering the plants. And I like looking at the butterflies," quips six-year-old Arielle Ho. "The trees provide oxygen for us and make our environment nice!"



Principal Suzana Mohamad Ali notes that the concept of biodiversity can be difficult for a young child to grasp. However, preschools can create opportunities for children to observe, explore, express and collaborate, in order to help them understand the concept.

She elaborates: "We plan experiential learning within a discovery context where the children see, feel, touch and smell the plants around them. Through these hands-on experiences, learning is further broken down into bite-size, age-appropriate activities that the children can understand and build on for further learning."

Ms Suzana adds, "These experiences with nature can enhance and deepen children's thinking about the role we play in the whole ecosystem." ♥



GARDEN VARIETY



NParks is organising a series of fun family-friendly activities, including bird watching and mass chalk art drawing, from July to September. Registration for these events is required unless otherwise indicated. For more details, visit www.nparks.gov.sg/events

FOR YOUR DAILY DOSE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD INSPIRATION...

Grow@Beanstalk is your one-stop early childhood (EC) resource portal for inspiring stories, useful tips and activity ideas, as well as the latest happenings from the EC sector.



Visit www.ecda.gov.sg/growatbeanstalk, or scan the QR code



You can also share your passion of "Giving a Good Start to Every Child" by "liking" our Facebook page for daily content, and engaging with other parents and EC educators.

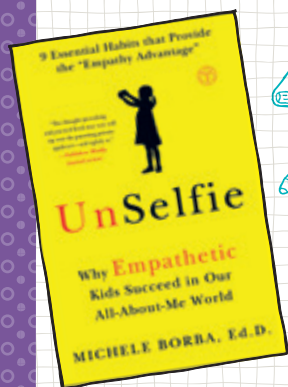


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Reading THE WORLD

BOOKS THAT INSPIRE GLOBAL-MINDEDNESS IN CHILDREN.



UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About-Me World
By Michele Borba



In today's self-centric world, raising children to be compassionate and mindful of others can be a tough challenge. In this book, Dr Michele Borba emphasises the importance of cultivating empathy in children. Her book offers age-by-age strategies to help parents and educators develop this essential skill in their children for a better future.



Contributed by Shirley Lim, Librarian, National Library Board



One Land, Many Cultures
By Maureen Picard Robins



People from different parts of the world reside in the United States. In this book, young readers will discover more about their languages, foods and customs. The colourful maps, images of mouth-watering dishes and a picture glossary will spark children's interest in exploring other cultures and foster their global awareness.



Contributed by Manemegalai A, Librarian, National Library Board

