

ACTIVITY SUMMARY:

The Loose Parts Activity Kit is designed to promote unstructured outdoor play with a variety of natural materials in order to encourage creativity, imagination, physical activity, cooperation, communication, and to improve focus, attention, motor skills, and coordination.

This lesson plan was adapted by the Keep Austin Beautiful Education team for at-home learning.

UNIT: Naturalist**GRADES:** Pre-K and up**MATERIALS:**

- Sticks and twigs
- Logs (if available)
- Sack or curtain or fabric (contain materials)
- Bamboo Sticks (if available)
- Tree Cookies (if available)
- Rocks
- Various seeds: Acorns, acorn caps, seed pods (if unavailable, use dried seeds from the pantry such as pinto beans, lentils etc.)

TIME REQUIRED: 5-45 minutes**OBJECTIVES:**

Youth will be able to:

- Engage in unstructured outdoor play with a variety of natural materials
- Create various structures by using their imaginations
- Work and communicate as a team to build

TEKS CORE CONCEPTS:**Science**

Kindergarten: 5A, 6C-D, 7A-C

1st grade: 5A, 6C, 7A2nd grade: 5A, 5C-D, 7A, 7C**Fine Arts:**K-5th grades: 2A-C**Activity Outline:**

The Loose Parts Activity Kit is a collection of materials found in nature that can be assembled or disassembled into a variety of structures. The only true guidelines for this activity are to ensure safe and respectful handling of materials, and youth should be encouraged to explore their creativity in a safe environment. Encourage youth to be respectful of other group members' decisions during the activity, and let them know that their structures will not be permanent i.e. *ephemeral*.

Activity Background:

Loose parts play, specifically *natural* loose parts play is self-directed, creative and inclusive play that involves natural materials which can be stacked, pushed, pulled, poured, built, re-built, manipulated, taken apart, put back together and more!

Play that involves loose parts is proven to be more imaginative, multi-dimensional and supports dexterity, coordination, and can connect youth of all ages. This kind of play should have minimal guidance from adults, allowing youth to create their own world of games, rules and possibilities.

Some key definitions:

Natural loose parts: Open-ended natural materials with few or no rules or stipulations about how to use them. Natural loose parts can include but are not limited to: rocks, sticks, twigs, mud, sand, dirt, logs, tree cookies, leaves, seeds, water and more. An example of synthetic loose parts would be Lego bricks or K'nex pieces.

Ephemeral Art: A creation that occurs only once; art that is temporary. The famous nature artist Andy Goldsworthy's work is noted by its site-based and short-lived natural creations.

Introduction and Set-up (10 minutes)

1. Spread materials out on the ground, and show youth the different types of objects that are available. You can go into as much depth as you like regarding these materials such as where they came from, what they might become or decompose into, how nature uses them, and how

people might benefit from them. Unless the activity is structured (e.g. “shelter building”), refrain from giving too much direction regarding what to build.

- Review safety expectations: Remain safe and consider your surroundings. Be aware of distance between friends when manipulating sticks and throwing, and refrain from running with long or pointy objects.
- Encourage sharing of materials among group members.
- Each creation will be disassembled.

Activity (5-30 minutes)

Loose parts play can take many forms and last as long as youth are engaged. Here are a few ways to structure this activity:

Free Play:

1. Allow youth to freely explore, build, and create for as long as time allows.
2. Actively monitor for safety.
3. Encourage creativity, but try not to tell students how they should create. Let them explore on their own.

Shelters:

1. Tell your group they'll be building shelters with their natural loose parts! Encourage them to think of what pieces need to come together in order to successfully build a shelter for an organism.
2. Stipulate parameters such as, how big the organism is (E.g. Is it a shelter for a mouse or a cat?), distance from your sight line, and talk about what things animals need in and around their homes to live.
 - An alternative to this would be to create a “thumb shelter”, a structure big enough to shelter your thumb from the elements!
3. Once shelters are built, gather together and tour each shelter, one by one and allow youth to explain their process.
4. Extensions: Shelters are a great place to start when thinking about dramatic play and connect very well with habitats and the things organisms need to survive in their environment.

Nature Art:

1. Tell your group that we will be “nature artists” today! Ask them guiding questions such as:
 - What’s your favorite kind of art?
 - What do you think is beautiful and/or interesting in nature?
 - What are your favorite colors, patterns, shapes etc.?
2. Encourage youth to create a work of ephemeral art
3. Once artworks are built, gather together and tour each creation, one by one and allow youth to explain their process.

Closing (5 minutes)

1. Allow sufficient time for youth or groups to share out about their creations, findings, and explorations.
2. Ask them what they built and why; verbalize their creativity and focus on the process, not the product as much as possible!