

The Dark Den

TEACHING GUIDE



INSPIRATIONAL IDEAS

Exploring The Dark Den

Age
3-4

Inspire



INTRODUCING THE DARK DEN

This affordable den is great for creative play and is simple to construct and store. Crawl into the Dark Den and explore the possibilities of a sensory environment. A double thick nylon skin means the den is very dark and can be brought to life with accessories. Excellent when used for role play, drama, scientific investigation, special needs and creative play!

BIG IDEA THINKING

The following activities provide children with the opportunity to explore unfamiliar aspects of their world through stories, books and role play. It will stimulate children's curiosity and encourage them to use language, media and materials to connect their ideas, thoughts and feelings whilst demonstrating their understanding about light and dark.

HOW IT CONNECTS TO LEARNING

The activities provide a great context for children to explore the themes of Space, and light and dark through role play and creative activities. Children are encouraged to use different materials to demonstrate their developing understanding of light and dark and it also provides a starting point for further learning about Space.

KEY FOCUS

Comment and ask questions about their world.

WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE

- Know how environments vary from one another.
- Represent ideas, thoughts and feelings through role play and stories.

PREPARATION

Read the story of 'Can't You Sleep, Little Bear?' by Martin Waddell to the children and discuss the concepts of night and dark. Talk sensitively about being afraid of the dark if appropriate. Provide the children with sensory resources and torches with which to explore.

ACTIVITY

Ask the children to use the props and resources provided to retell the story of 'Can't You Sleep, Little Bear?' The children could explore the resources from a Dark Den sensory box, such as torches, light up toys and fibre optic lamps to explore light and dark.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Provide booklets and pencils and encourage the children to draw different aspects of the story to retell.



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PREPARATION

Read the story of 'Whatever Next' by Jill Murphy to the children. Set out a cardboard box, a pair of wellies, colander, an owl teddy, a bear and a picnic blanket with some play food next to the Dark Den. Inside the Dark Den, string fairy lights up around the top using the Velcro straps, to look like stars.

ACTIVITY

Ask the children to use the props and resources provided to retell the story of 'Whatever Next' by Jill Murphy, pretending that inside the Dark Den is the moon. If you have a small group of two children; an adult would fit inside the den too.

Talk about what they can see on the moon and encourage them to use their imaginations. The children could explore the resources from a Dark Den sensory box, such as torches, light up toys and fibre optic lamps to explore light and dark.

Talk to the children about their own experiences of the dark. This could be a good way to talk in a positive way about the dark for any children who may be fearful of it.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Children could make post cards to send home to Mummy Bear about what they have seen on the moon. Provide children with books about the moon and space to give them more ideas and allow them to explore the concept further.



Create a
sensory space

INSPIRATIONAL IDEAS

Exploring The Dark Den

Age
4-5

KEY FOCUS

Comment and ask questions about their world.



WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE

- Know how environments vary from one another.
- Manipulate materials to achieve a planned effect.
- Represent ideas, thoughts and feelings through art.

PREPARATION

Set out the Dark Den and a range of other space themed resources, for example, space suit costumes, silver foil, large sparkly stars, battery operated fairy lights etc. Set up photographs and a book about Space and rockets for inspiration.



ACTIVITY

Ask the children to use the resources available to them to build a rocket to take them to the moon, using the Dark Den as the starting point and adding to it.

Encourage the children to look through the books and photographs for ideas and to make suggestions as to how they could develop their rocket. Talk about what it is like in Space and how astronauts travel there. Play alongside the children to support role play in the rocket once they have built it.

Talk to the children about light and dark and discuss why it is dark in Space.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Provide the children with different paints and ask them to experiment with mixing light colours and dark colours (this may need to be done in another area of the classroom!).



INSPIRATIONAL IDEAS

Exploring The Dark Den

Age

4-5

KEY FOCUS

Comment and ask questions about their world.



WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE

- Show care and concern for living things.
- Manipulate materials to achieve a planned effect.
- Represent ideas, thoughts and feelings through art.

PREPARATION

Set out the Dark Den and hide small world minibeasts, minibeast name labels and non-fiction books about minibeasts inside. Provide the children with torches for them to explore the resources.

ACTIVITY

Ask the children to use the torches to find the minibeasts and minibeast labels. Can they read the label and match it to the correct picture?

Work with the children to explore the non-fiction books provided and encourage them to find out facts about the different minibeasts. Provide magnifying glasses for the children to look more closely at their detailed features.

Imagine and Explore

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Give the children bug collecting equipment and magnifying glasses and encourage them to find minibeasts in outdoor areas. Children could also make a bug hotel in the outdoor environment to encourage minibeasts, thinking about the kind of conditions they like to live in.

