

7 Fun, Creative & Educational Children's Activities

Introduction

Thank you for your interest in our free activity booklet. It includes seven fantastic, educational activities that you and your children can enjoy together. They are all aimed at stretching their imaginations and increasing their wonder for the world around us.

1. Compass Games

Technology has simplified our lives tremendously over the years, remember the days of pulling over and asking directions when lost? Or consulting our road maps and compasses if we were off course on some lonely road? Although we may have GPS built into our cars and mobiles to guide us if we're lost, it is of no use if we're rambling and have no signal. It is important to retain and teach these essential skills to our children as you never know when they may need them.

Using mnemonics is a great teaching tool to help children remember things. Teach them to read and remember the directions clock-wise starting with North, East, South then West.

Never-Eat-Shredded-Wheat. Get your children familiar with using a compass. Open a map or atlas and find the compass rose. Explain how to use it and ask them to point out the cardinal directions on the map. Remember to explain that the needle always points North and the reason why.

Give some reasons why we may need a compass, maybe even provide some examples of how we used to find North before everyone had a compass e.g. the North star, the location of the Sun in the sky (East/West).

The next time you're en route to a familiar location, get your children to hold the compass, to watch how the needle moves around as they change directions. Making a game of it will help this life skill sink in. The games below can be played in teams or as a single player.

Can you find it? First, pick a location beforehand, a park, a play area, even your home. Chose a spot to be your home base. In an envelope have slips of paper, each with a direction to the next location. For example, "take 20 steps NE." Once they get to the destination there should be a landmark or something identifiable you have pre-chosen which they must find before moving on to the next place. If you're doing this in your home, you can leave the next slip of paper at the designated area. If in a public place, maybe have some painted rocks you can leave the slips of paper under. Put them in areas not so noticeable so that others disturb them.

Never Eat Shredded Wheat



Cardinal Point

Select a starting point, a good-sized field is a great place to play this game and drop your marker, a flag or a bright object. Using the compass follow these directions: walk 5 paces to the North, stop. Walk 10 paces to the West, stop. Walk 20 paces to the South, stop. Walk 15 paces to the East, stop. Walk 15 paces to the North, stop. Walk 5 paces to the West, stop. If you've followed the directions and used the compass properly you'll be back at your starting point.

Treasure Hunt

As the name implies, at the end point there will be some small treasure, so pick a safe and controlled location so as to ensure that your treasure remains safe. Have a starting point with a slip of paper with a riddle or problem to solve that will give the location of the next clue. For example "One quarter of 100 is the paces you will take to due West, don't let the next clue give you the slip" Place the next clue under a ball. Be creative. The treasure will be at the last location. Depending on the age of the participants you can make this game as easy or as challenging as you want.



2. Garden Art

What is Land Art? It's a great way to take your imagination and creativity outside. Use whatever nature has to offer and create little masterpieces. You can make colourful flags or garlands using leaves, flowers and twigs. Put together sculptures using rocks, pebbles, shells or even fir cones. You don't have to wait for spring or summer either, you can be artistic all year around. Every season will bring its own unique supplies and canvases. The great outdoors is the classroom and nature provides the materials.

Whilst taking a nature walk, you can gather your art supplies. No matter where you are, a park, a woodland, the beach or lake, you can teach your children about the flora and fauna around them. Show them how/where birds build their nests, the difference between oak and birch trees, or where deer sleep. Not only will they see nature as a beautiful work of art, but they'll connect with and develop respect for it too.

One of the other benefits is that you really don't have to lug around any special equipment, nature will provide all your materials. This will encourage your children to be resourceful and look at art with a broadening imagination. They may need a place to start for inspiration. Here are some ideas to get you started. Once you have tried a few different projects they'll catch on and you can encourage them to stretch their imagination.

Portraits

If you're at the beach you can use sand as the canvas. Gather pebbles, shells, sticks and maybe some seaweed. Frame your portrait with sticks. If you're at a park, you can use flowers, leaves, rocks. Make animal shapes or different patterns - spirals, circles, sun bursts etc.

Garland or Flags

Can be made using leaves, flowers or any greenery. Find a long, thin and smooth stick and skewer the greenery on to it. For small flags, gather small twigs, some colourful leaves, and some string. Using the string, secure the leaf onto the twig. You can arrange them artistically too. You can create a beautiful garland by stringing fir cones and flowers together and drape them off low hanging branches. Alternatively braid the flowers together at the stem.

Ships and boats

Can be toys and art. Look for some bark that's fallen from a tree, it will be drier and stay afloat. Use twigs as masts and leaves for the ship's sail. You will have to drill a hole into the bark so your mast will stay upright, just use one end of the twig as the bark will be soft enough to give. You can watch your armada set sail down a little river, pond or whatever body of water you are close to.

To further deepen respect for the natural world, you can help your children become conservationists by showing them the importance of keeping our environment clean and healthy for future generations. Some steps they can take now to make a difference are picking up litter so it doesn't pollute our streams, planting a tree, turning off the light when leaving the room and not letting the water run whilst brushing your teeth. In a way Land Art teaches our children to be natural artists and nature's guardians.





3. Star Gazing: An Evening Picnic

A picnic under a night sky would delight any little one. Put together a picnic basket with star themed snacks, you could make star-shaped sandwiches and biscuits, pack some star fruit and a thermos of hot chocolate to take the chill off the cool evening air. You can share Greek/Roman mythology stories while searching for their related constellations. Relate some fun cosmic facts like Jupiter and Saturn are made up of gases with no solid ground; the foot prints on the moon made by astronauts will stay there forever because there is no wind; the only planet that spins backwards is Venus and our sun is a star.

Some of the best places to be whilst star gazing is where the light pollution is lowest. If you live in a large town, you may want to travel outside its limits for improved visibility. Unless you want to see the moon's surface clearly, you really don't need high priced equipment. All you need is a clear night with as little artificial light as possible (cover your torches with red film), a compass, a constellation guide, a comfortable blanket to lie on (dress in layered clothing to stay warm) some snacks & drinks, curiosity and awe. It would also be fun if your children brought along their own hand-crafted guides. To make these get some blue or black paper and with white crayon or chalk draw the constellations you'll be hunting that night. You could label their brightest stars.

Your star guide will no doubt have some tips to help you locate constellations. Learning the names of their brightest stars can make finding them a little more fun and exciting. I find that there's something satisfying about being able to name identifying stars within a constellation. If your children made their own guides, they'll have fun helping you connect the skyward dots. Below are some easy to find constellations, two of which you can see under a spring sky.

Leo becomes visible in March during the Spring equinox through May and is best seen in April around 9 p.m. It's one of the few constellations that resembles its namesake. The first thing that helps star gazers to find Leo is its head, which is the shape of a sickle. Follow the sickle's handle and you'll see its tail. Another way people find Leo is by

spotting the plough first. Using its pointer stars, Dubhe and Merak, follow the direction down, and you'll find the head of Leo.

Ursa Major or The Great Bear is visible all year around, but best in April. Its seven brightest stars form the Plough, which is an asterism, not a constellation. There are several bright galaxies located within this constellation, one of the brightest is Messier 81, above the bear's head. The Owl Nebula can be found at the bottom of the Plough.

Orion is visible from November to February. A cold winter's night would be ideal to search for this constellation. The three stars in Orion's belt are Mintaka, Alnilam and Alnitak. Hanging from Orion's belt, is his sword which is not a cluster of stars but Orion's Nebula. For Harry Potter fans, the star on Orion's left should be Bellatrix. Orion has two of the ten brightest stars in the night's sky, Rigel & Betelgeuse. Betelgeuse is a red giant star; you can see its red tinge with the naked eye.



4. Sundial

As Spring moves into Summer, the days become longer and the Sun is out more - yay!! A pleasant activity to do on a warm sunny day is helping your children to create their very own sundial or shadow sticks. It's the perfect excuse to get them outdoors, teach them some science and take part in a hands on educational activity.

You can give your children a small history lesson by explaining to them that sundials were our first "clocks" thousands of years ago. As the Earth rotates around the Sun, the position of the Sun tells us what time of the day it is, according to its shadow. Explain how the Sun rises in the East and then sets in the West, and yet it is the Earth that rotates. You can demonstrate this by using a torch and a ball, perhaps something the size of a football. Let your child hold the torch still, acting as the Sun, while you rotate the Earth (you can place a sticker on the ball to represent where you live).

There are a few ways to build a sundial, from the very simple and easy to the more complex method which will require a compass. This would be a great time to practice using a compass and to teach your child about compass points. The simplest sundial only uses a stick and some pebbles.

If you have a piece of pavement nearby, grab some coloured chalk and something long and thin that will easily stand up on its own. At noon, place your stick on the pavement and using the coloured chalk draw a line down the faint shadow that the stick makes. Go back every hour and draw down the shadow line again. Note and discuss the changing lengths of the shadow with your child.

You can find the East-West line by using a very simple method. Place a stick upright and secure it in the ground, bearing in mind that a taller stick will give more accurate results. Mark the edge of its shadow with a pebble. The shadow will move from East to West in a curved line, wait 15-30 minutes before marking the next shadow's edge with a second pebble. Draw a line from the first shadow tip to

the next; this is an approximation of the East-West line. To find North, stand with the first mark on your left (West) and to your right will be East. Now you are facing North.

Take a look at your atlas and find the latitude of your area. Using your compass, find true North, and then using a protractor, angle a stick so it matches your latitude. Point the stick North and secure it in to the ground. This will align your sundial with the Earth's axis and provide a little more accuracy. Mark the shadows with small rocks at each hour. It's best to set up this shadow stick first thing in the morning.



**Sundial
Activities
for
Children**





5. Bug Hunt

As we approach the Spring and the Summer, it's common for parents to start looking for new ways they can interact with their kids. Some parents struggle to find things to do with their kids that they can both truly enjoy, so coming up with something a little bit more exciting and unique can really help make the day for your kids.

Bug hunting is a traditional yet dying activity, and we want to change that. Nature as a whole is incredibly beautiful, and helping your children, while growing up, to understand the world around them is vitally important. Bug hunting gets your kids off the games consoles and into the wild where they can really experience the world.

Where to find bugs?

Depending upon where you live, finding bugs can be quite easy. If your garden is big enough you'll be able to find cool little insects like

ants, woodlice, spiders, butterflies and bees.

If you live near a wooded area or a river, this is a great place to get started, too. One of the best places to find bugs, though, is a recently built housing estate! When they are constructed, the bugs you are looking for are scattered all over the nearby vicinity, so finding yourself some cool bugs is really easy!

What you will need?

- You'll need to bring a few things with you. Go through this little checklist and make sure you bring all of this with you;
- Backpack
- Food & Juice
- Containers for catching the bugs
- Notepad for making little notes
- Photography equipment, even your smartphone
- Bug book to help with your research!
- Digging equipment like a hand-held spade

This simple checklist gives you all that you need to get started and to have a few hours of fun and laughter outside in the sun!

What bugs to look for?

That all depends on what you find most fascinating! Some of us are petrified of spiders, others find them awesome. Work out what you want to go hunting for and what you can actually stomach, and then this gives you a good idea of what to start looking for and the trails to follow in the grass and in the trees!

Bug hunting is incredibly fun so long as you know what you are doing and you can keep a close eye on the kids. If you live in a climate where bugs can become quite dangerous – hornets, tarantulas etc. – you need to make sure you protect the kids and keep them away from anything that looks dangerous! *Please encourage your children to replace any bugs where they found them.*



**We're
going on
a bug
hunt...**

6. Scavenger Hunts

Keeping your children entertained over the summer holidays with fun and creative activities can sometimes be a challenge! Scavenger hunts are the perfect option as they are quick and easy to plan, require minimum supplies and suit a wide range of age groups. You can play them indoors on a rainy day, or outside when the sun is out. It's a wonderful game to get your kids up and out into the great outdoors - using their minds and using up some energy, too! You can even gather a group of their friends together and turn it into a team activity for their next birthday party!

For most games you'll need:

- A print out of scavenger items
- Pencil or Pen
- A Clipboard or something firm to write on
- A Bag (depending on if the items are to be collected)
- A treat for completing the list (optional)

Here are a selection of scavenger hunt ideas to inspire you:

Indoor Scavenger Hunt This is great to play on rainy days and doesn't need to be played in teams if you have just one or two kids. Write a list of random items that can be found in your home and give them a small bag to collect them all.

Here's a sample list of a few items you can add to your list:

- Paper clips
- Coins
- Keys
- A hair brush
- A torch

On-the-Go Scavenger Hunt

This is a good game to occupy children on long car journeys, or if you find yourself waiting around for long periods of time e.g. at the airport. As long as you have a piece of paper and something to write with you can quickly make up a list of items you'd most likely see.

If you're taking a long car journey, you can pre-print the list before leaving. Write a different list for each child taking part in this particular game.

For times you are stuck waiting - an on the spot people watching game, you can choose items such as:

- Red shoes
- Baseball cap
- Man with glasses
- Backpack

Photo or Picture Scavenger Hunt

For older children that can operate a camera, this is perfect for getting them outside into the fresh air and off the computer. The location is completely up to you and it goes without saying that so are the items.

If it's a nearby park, your items may be:

- A dog playing catch
- A bird
- A squirrel
- A child in a pushchair

For smaller ones, you can get them to draw their items instead of taking a photo.

Nature Scavenger Hunt

This would be a great game to take along with you on your next camping trip or even to a local park. Just pre-print your list and have it ready to go. You may want to research what kinds of flora and fauna are in the local area before creating your it.

Here's a sample list:

- A dandelion
- Small twig
- Acorns
- An oak leave

Crawly Critters Scavenger Hunt

Another great game that will get your little ones out into the fresh air. Pick out some common bugs that can be found in your area. When you find one, you can tick it off your list.

Some examples of what you might put on your list:

- Butterfly
- Worm
- Cricket
- Beetle

We hope that we've given you some ideas to keep your little ones amused over the coming weeks. Do you have anymore scavenger hunt ideas? Please leave a comment, we'd love to hear from you.



7. Around the World in 365 Days

Most of us would love to board a plane and travel to some exotic location with our family, submerging ourselves into a completely new and different way of life. Many of us would love to be able to give our children this priceless experience, but a world-wide trip comes with a hefty price tag not everyone can afford. However, you can still bring a bit of the world into your home whilst giving your children an appreciation for other cultures and an appetite to learn more about the world around them. How about spending 12 months in 12 countries without leaving home? Every month you can adopt a country and bring its traditions and customs into your daily life.

Language: It's quite easy these days to find free resources on the web for learning a new language. Being fluent isn't the goal, just learn some basic phrases like Good morning/evening. "Bom dia" & "Boa tarde" (Portuguese) Or "Please" and "Thank you". "Por favor" & "Gracias" (Spanish).

Here's a great place to start <http://www.chillola.com/index.html/>

Food: You can cook a special meal at the end of every month using the country's national dishes. Set up labels by the dishes in their native language. Try to imitate the traditional way of eating the meal, like several smalls bowls for tapas (Spain) or using chop sticks (Asia). After dinner play some of their traditional games and listen to music to get a full experience.

Art: Pick up some books from your local library, borrow from a friend, or do some online research to learn different art techniques from famous international artists. You can get the children to paint like Picasso and van Gogh. There are also art & crafts your family can

do like origami, dream catchers or making the nation's flag. Display each flag and you'll have a nice row of flags by the end of the 12 months.

Music: Look for international radio stations you can listen to, or use [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and maybe look for dancing instruction, too. If you're feeling brave try a few steps!

Movies: If you have a video streaming account, you will probably find a foreign film selection. (You may want to watch it first to make sure it's appropriate for children). Make an evening of it, you can watch some films (with subtitles) and see if you can spot some of its nation's customs. You may see a family eating their national dish or celebrating their unique holidays, you might even hear and understand some phrases you have learnt.

Celebrations/Holidays: Once you have chosen your countries for the year, do a bit of research and find out when their national holidays are. You may want to celebrate Japan's "Star Festival" in June or find similar holidays to celebrate with other countries, like New Year's Day. Introduce some of their customs into your own celebrations and you may enjoy them so much that you add them to your own family traditions.

Here a few examples to give you inspiration. Brazil: speak Portuguese good morning/evening: "Bom dia" and "Boa tarde", their national dish is feijoada (spicy beans with pork or beef) Spain: speak Spanish, eat tapas, enjoy hot chocolate and churros and dance the flamenco. India: Use fingers/bread in place of forks, wear colourful sarees and eat curries and naan bread.



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