

Homemade Fun

By Cathie Brooks

During summer months parents want to maintain their children's academics skills but find a steady diet of camps and specialized programs expensive. Learning fun and enriching family times do not have to have a high price tag. They may however require planning and a parent's renewed commitment to play! From language arts to math, the fun begins at home!

- Use books from the library as a starting point for language arts and science activities. Combine books selected from required school reading lists with supplies for acting out story lines. Plot, sequence and character personalities come alive as children create costumes from old Halloween garb, a trip to Goodwill or time in grandma's closet box. Printing flyers announcing play titles, actors and time of performance doubles as practice for fine motor skills, sentence writing and math terms. Books such as as Rox-a-Boxen and A Box Can Be inspire children to see the limitless possibilities of a cardboard box. A shower curtain liner from the dollar store as a drop cloth, a box and some paints will keep children engaging gross motor skills, imagination and one another for a full afternoon. Inspire young scientists by planning a back yard or green space scavenger hunt aligned with books about bugs, rocks or plant collections. Take an evening walk with a wrist band of masking tape (adhesive side up) and see who can collect the most unusual neighborhood artifacts. Use library books to 'research' what was found.
- Many authors have websites with printable activities to accompany their books. Children may enjoy coloring a Jan Brett book mark or following one of Eric Carle's mazes.
- A simple deck of cards provides a full math curriculum for under a \$1.00. Games such as *War* teach number recognition, greater than/less than and classification (by suit). *Go Fish* provides practice in number recognition, pairs and sets. Older children can add, subtract and strategize their way through *Hearts*. Using half or all of the deck for *Memory*, applies short term memory skills with, sort and classify activities and turn taking.
- A little time researching can reveal the off hours and reduced admission times of many local attractions. Many local art museums have evening or once a month free admission. Guide children to select postcards of their favorite painting (an affordable souvenir) and follow-up with a painting time the next morning to re-create a masterpiece.
- Children of all ages love playing with bubbles. The following recipe- ½ cup of dish detergent, 5 cups of water and 2 Tablespoons of glycerin (available at the pharmacy) will make bubbles easier for young children to manipulate. Encourage children to experiment with household items such as plastic baskets, funnels and string run through straws for handles, to make unusual blowers. Buckets of water and inexpensive paint brushes will help children exercise large muscles used in penmanship as they created pictures on sidewalks and driveways.

- Encourage children to go green by using shoe boxes, old magazines and mismatched toys and game pieces to design habitats for action figures or dolls. Want –to-be architects and builders will love using low melt glue guns with Popsicle sticks or tongue depressors. (This is for children 7+ and should have adult direction.)
- Lastly, dust off old board games. From Candy Land to Monopoly, board games offer practice in a full gamut of skills sets – color/shape recognition, money, turn taking and the all too missing skill of sportsmanship.

As you plan together your child will glean insights into both your organizational and creative side. More importantly each of you will have the most cherished of summer memories, time together and that is priceless!