

Loose Parts Nature Play Kits: Something for Everyone!

Dr. Carla Gull, University of Phoenix, loosepartsnatureplay@gmail.com, www.loosepartsnatureplay.org

Podcast: Loose Parts Nature Play

FB Group: Loose Parts Play, Loose Parts Learning

Book: Loose Parts Learning in K-3 Classrooms

Why Have Kits?

Quick and easy

Grab and go

Organized materials

Find your stuff

Versatile

Accessible for more people



How to use: story time, grab one for a hike, follow children's interests, family days, check out at your center, send home kits, children's free choice, rotate

Types of Kits:

Book extensions: Not a Stick, Mama Built a Little Nest, An Egg is Quiet, A Nest is Noisy

Animal focus: Woodpecker's Wham, squirrels, beaver, insects, bird nests, spiders

Building: wooden blocks, mini bricks, cardboard tools

Play: stick play, mud kitchen, music and movement, water play, dramatic play

Natural phenomena: wind, natural loose parts, sound, gardening, senses

Art: nature play dough, watercolors or painting, paper, small loose parts, chalk, ephemeral art

General outdoor tools: tweezers, magnifying glasses, binoculars, twine, buckets, etc.

Academic/curricular: measuring, stonework play (literacy), numeracy, map making, animal architects, faces/emotions, shapes

What to Include: books, pictures, tools, "sparks" or ideas for play, puppets, materials, interesting combinations, natural items

Type of Bags/Containers: clear plastic bags, muslin drawstring backpacks, backpacks, reusable grocery totes, IKEA bags, crates, baskets, dishpans, wagon, divided tray, bin, tackle box

Labels: stencils, laminated tags/pictures, fabric labels, numbered system, have children decorate, wooden laser engraved labels

Storage: hooks on a wall at child height, cart, rod with s hooks, large tubs, cubbies, outdoor shed

Funding: grants, **use what you have**, donations, special fundraiser, collect nature, garage sales

Tips:

- Supplement with nature found outside—use your space and nature!
- Keep an Inventory/Master List to find your materials
- Consider a checkout system for families
- Regularly purge and evaluate bags and materials
- Allow children to choose what to take outside each day
- Use a materials list for each bag to visually help keep everything together
- Group connected items together
- Involve children in creating kits customized for their play!

Social Emotional Learning

- Get to know our own emotions—Atlas of the Heart, Brene Brown
- Recognize inherent aspect of loose parts to allow children to work out issues and meet needs.
- Specific “kit” around SEL topics—emotions, faces, etc.
- Include books around SEL in other kits, such as *I'm Done* in a beaver kit, *Faces/How are you peeling?* in an emotions kit, *Be a Tree* in a tree kit or just on its own (see book list below).
- Create a “calm down” kit.
- Include lots of options for interacting with animals and dramatic play—puppets, costumes, fabrics, stuffed animals, plastic animals, etc.
- Tinkergarten—lots of videos, blogs, and other resources
 - <https://www.tinkergarten.com/activities/skills/social-and-emotional-skills>
- SEL theory <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/>

From the Loose Parts Play group—join the conversation!

Sarae Pacetta

When I think about loose parts and the personal/emotional aspects of SEL I think about:

- agency (I can come up with my own ideas and make them happen)
- creativity (I can make something new and interesting!)
- problem solving (this isn't what I thought would happen / This didn't work...)
- flexible thinking (that didn't work out / this material gives me a new idea / etc)

Carla Gull

persistence, growth mindset, divergent thinking, sometimes collaboration and cooperation, sometimes communication, empathy, taking on other perspectives

Deb Curtis

Open ended materials/loose parts invite schema explorations which all children recognize and will join in with others to expand their play, learning and social skills. Nadia Jaloneta and I have a chapter (3) about this in our book Children's Lively Minds. But you don't need the book. Just observe children playing together and you will see this big time.

Beverley Anne

Practically speaking, I've done lots of mindfulness and identity activities with loose parts inspired by stories (e.g. sharing a place that is special to us, activities that help us feel calm). I think the biggest benefits and connections are embedded in the philosophy though, as long as we make that reflection explicit and intentional for students (e.g. shifting perspective, developing solutions to problems, reflecting on personal strengths). Definitely needs to connect to the CASEL competencies in a visible way.

Nature/Loose Parts Connected SEL Book Suggestions from Megan Gessler

*Some of Carla's favorite books for Loose Parts that were on Megan's list

Developing Kinship and Empathy	Growth Mindset	Becoming Agents of Change
A Friend to Nature Listen Stick and Stone Peace is an Offering You are never alone Here and now Outside In Wonder Walkers	*Beautiful Oops Whistle for Willie Going Places The Magical Yet Flight School I am the Storm *Be a Maker *Ada Twist, Scientist *Rosie Revere, Engineer You are a Beautiful Beginning *Made by Maxine *Boxitects Maybe *Jabari Tries The Thing Lou Couldn't Do	Say Something I am Courage I am One *The Most Magnificent Thing *What Do you do with an Idea? Chance? Problem? *The Fort Seeds and Trees *Iggy Peck Architect Lala's Words Change Sings Tree Lady