



Stick in the Mud

Materials

- 9 x 13 in. (23 x 33 cm) baking pans
- assortment of twigs and old tree branches
- card stock
- chart paper
- glue
- mud
- thick spaghetti
- thin dowels
- water
- water table or large, shallow plastic container

Skill Builders

- finger dexterity
- letter recognition

Getting Ready

- Prepare mud for a water or sensory table, or fill a shallow plastic container with it. Make sure the mud is soft enough for writing, but firm enough to hold the shape of written letters.
- Gather several sticks or old tree branches. Cut or snap the branches into short sticks.

Extending the Lesson

- Cut the dowels or sticks into 3 in. (8 cm) lengths. Have the children use the dowels, sticks, or spaghetti to form letters or words and glue them onto pieces of card stock.

Activity

Children may not be able to resist practicing their writing skills and playing in the mud at the same time! Ask the children to gather around a sensory table filled with mud. Demonstrate how they can create letters, shapes, and pictures by drawing in the mud with a stick. The children can easily erase their writings by rubbing or pressing the mud into a smooth surface. Encourage them to try sticks of different diameters when writing. If interested, fill a baking pan with mud and write letters, words, or names in it for the children to copy when working in the mud at the big sensory table.



Science Connection: Mud Magic

Invite the children to investigate what happens when the consistency of the mud is altered by adding water. Provide three or four baking pans filled with a thin layer of mud. Have the children write or draw in the mud and then carefully pour a small amount of water over their drawings. The children may be surprised to see that their writings disappear. (Each time more water is added, the mixture becomes thinner.) Ask, "How much water does it take before you can no longer see the writing in the mud?" (*Note:* Add more dirt to firm things up again.) Continue the lesson by having the children experiment with sand or cornstarch. *Questions to investigate:* Which substance is the best for writing? Which one holds the most water? During large group time, discuss the children's findings and record their observations on a piece of chart paper.



Sensory Writing

Materials

- blank audiotape and tape recorder
- copy paper
- cotton swabs
- crayons and pencils
- food extracts
- large baking sheet
- masking tape
- paint
- sandpaper
- shaving cream
- small paper cups

Skill Builders

- sensory awareness
- small-motor skills

Getting Ready

- Cut enough sheets of sandpaper into thirds to give each child one or more pieces.
- Tape the sandpaper sheets onto the table.
- Prepare the audiotape as directed in the language-arts connection activity.

Extending the Lesson

- Have the children paint pictures with their favorite colors or scented paint. Then ask them to write about how the fragrance makes them feel or about things that have the same scent. (*Note: Some children may only be able to write or dictate a caption.*)

Activity

Expand the writing center to include writing activities that engage the senses of smell, touch, and sound. Not only will you appeal to the children's senses by engaging more than one sense at a time, but it is also a good way to teach basic mechanics of writing.

Smell — Pour a small amount of paint into a paper cup. Add a few drops of a food extract or essential oil to the cup to give the paint a distinct scent. Repeat with other paint colors and scents. Have the children dip cotton swabs into the scented paints and write letters or words on their papers.

Touch — Place a dollop of shaving cream on a large baking sheet or the table. Spread the shaving cream across the surface to cover it. Encourage the children to use their fingers to write or draw in the shaving cream. To erase their writings, they can just rub across the top of the shaving cream.

Sound — Tape sheets of sandpaper (use several different grit samples) to the table. Place a piece of copy paper on top of the sandpaper. Using crayons or pencils, the children can write letters and words or draw pictures on the paper. When they write on the paper, can they hear a noise? Also have the children try writing directly on pieces of sandpaper, using a different writing tool each time. Does the type of writing utensil used make a difference?

Language-Arts Connection: Listen and Follow

Make an audiotape of writing suggestions. Example: Sing part of the alphabet song and then stop. Instruct the child to write the letter that comes next. Continue this exercise for several other letters. Alternatively, sing familiar Mother Goose rhymes. Have the children write down the missing rhyming words.





Shoelace Stories

Materials

- 2 large boxes or plastic tubs
- art materials
- interview printed in newspaper or magazine
- large sheets of paper
- paper cutter
- pattern page 62
- tape

Getting Ready

- Cut several 1 in. (25 mm) wide strips of paper using a paper cutter.
- Tape several paper strips together end-to-end to create one long strip for each child.
- Make a copy of the Interview Form for each child.

Extending the Lesson

- Let each child choose a famous or imaginary person to “interview” for a story. Have the child answer the questions on the Shoelace Interview Form as he thinks that person would answer the questions. When the form is complete, the child can use those notes to compose a story about the chosen person.

Activity

For this experience, the children are going to be “reporters.” A reporter often asks another person questions in order to write a story. Read aloud a short clip from an interview printed in a newspaper or magazine. Then tell the children that they are going to conduct their own “shoelace” interviews and talk to the owners of special shoes. Review the Shoelace Interview Form so that the children understand the questions. Remind them that as reporters they should take notes during the interview and that they will be using those notes to write their reports.

Now the children should be ready to interview their classmates. First, have the children individually take off one of their shoes. Divide the class into two groups. Have Team A place their shoes in the first container. Team B will drop their shoes in the second container.

Give each child an Interview Form. Ask every member of Team A to select a shoe from the second container, find the shoe’s owner from the other team, and then interview that person. Give the children a few minutes to complete their interviews and take notes. At the appropriate time, have the teams switch roles. Give Team B an opportunity to conduct the interviews. Have each of those children choose a shoe from the first box and interview its owner.

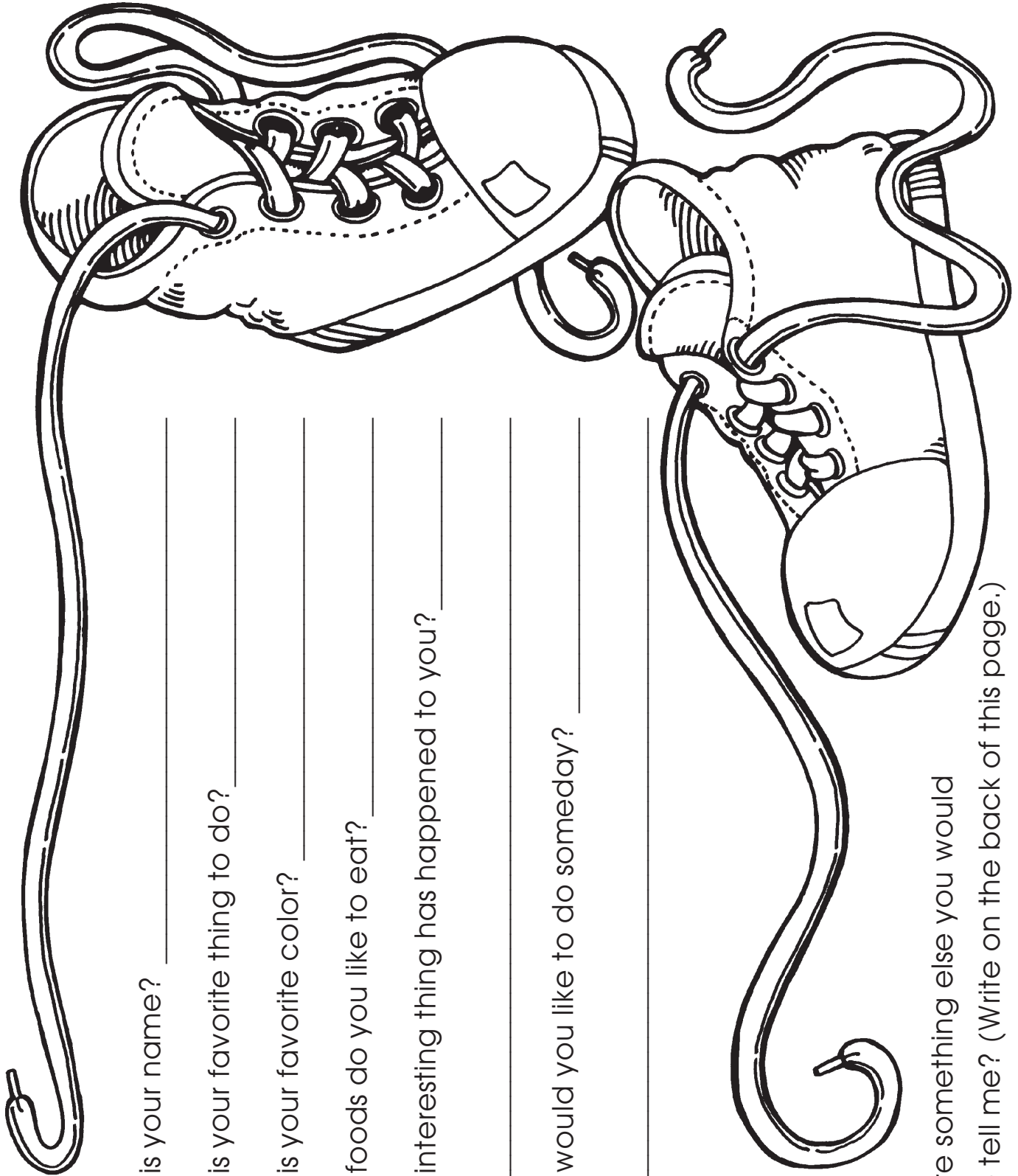
Finally, give each child a long strip of paper. Tell the children that these paper strips are “shoelaces.” Using the information from their interviews, the reporters write their stories on the paper shoelaces. When everyone is finished, gather the children and have them share their reports with the class.

Art Connection: Interview Portraits

A report would not be complete without a picture. This time, have your young reporters become portrait artists or make collages to highlight special interests. They can use art materials and collage supplies to create their art. Direct each reporter to incorporate at least one detail from the interview into the portrait. Mount each piece of art alongside the final copy of the shoelace story.



Interview Form



What is your name? _____

What is your favorite thing to do? _____

What is your favorite color? _____

What foods do you like to eat? _____

What interesting thing has happened to you? _____

What would you like to do someday? _____

Is there something else you would like to tell me? (Write on the back of this page.)