

# Fun at Home with Preschoolers: Play with Light and Shadow



*Young children often like to find out about the sun, the moon, and the clouds in the sky. In any season, help your preschooler dress for the weather, put on sunscreen, and then turn your yard or the park into an outdoor science lab!*

## Everyday sky activities

- Before going outside, talk with your child about things you and he have noticed about the sky. Share books with him that mention the sky (for example, Carolyn Lesser's *What a Wonderful Day to Be a Cow*).
- When the sun is not overhead, lie down and look up at the sky with your child. **Remind your child to never look straight at the sun, even when wearing sunglasses!** Talk together about the colors, clouds, and flying things that come into view. Repeat the activity on overcast, partly cloudy, misty, or snowy days. Bring along paper, pencil, and a clipboard to make sketches of clouds while lying down.
- Try the same activities at night. Look for the moon, stars, constellations, and clouds. Children can't observe the night sky during preschool. That means nighttime investigation can be a special way for you and your child to learn together.

## Sunny day activities

- Ask a librarian to help you find books about shadows. Share them with your child. Then help your child make chalk outlines of shadows cast by trees and other objects. About 30 minutes later, look at your outlines again and talk about what has happened to the shadow. Make new outlines in a different color. Check again 30 minutes later. Each time, notice where the sun is in the sky. You might want to write down your child's comments about sun and shadows. Talk about possible explanations for the changes you observe.
- Help your child create pictures with your own shadows. Suggest challenges: "Can we make our shadows hold hands even if my hand doesn't really touch yours?"
- Bring along clear or translucent objects (for example, plastic containers) and some items that block the sun (an umbrella, cardboard tubes, etc.). With your child, explore what happens when you try to make shadows with these objects.
- On a warm day, set out a bucket of water and brushes. "Paint" the sidewalk, walls, trees, and other objects with your child. After a few minutes, invite her to notice places she painted that have begun to dry. She will probably see that the brush strokes dry faster in sunny areas than in the shade.
- Go to the library to find books about night, sunlight, and shadows to read together.

Some of the above activities were adapted from *Active Experiences for Active Children: Social Studies* by C. Seefeldt & A. Galper (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill, 2000) and the September 2002 *Young Children* article "Science in the Preschool Classroom: Capitalizing on Children's Fascination with the Everyday World to Foster Language and Literacy Development" by K. Conezio & L. French (volume 57, number 5, pp. 12-18).

 For related Web resources, see "Fun at Home with Preschoolers: Play with Light and Shadow" at <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/tips.htm>.



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