



Imaginative play and early years go hand-in-hand. Although we work within a curriculum that has been carefully constructed to reflect a child-centred approach, there does still appear to be limited space dedicated to pure play - and play, especially that all-absorbing willingness to suspend our disbelief, is after all the birthplace of imagination.

Try some of the following ideas with your children; they're all good as cross-curricular activities, with lots of opportunities for plenary work - and they're also lots of fun!

Swimming in the sea

You will need:

Some atmospheric sea music such as 'Aquarium' from *The Carnival of the Animals* by Saint Saens.

First, get the children all standing in their own space. Demonstrate how to stretch out arms and turn in a circle without touching anyone else. While you play some magical music, have children pretend to be seaweed moving about in the sea. Show children how to wave their arms slowly above their head while keeping their feet still.

Now ask them to think about all the sea creatures that live in the sea - which type would they like to be? A shark? An octopus? How about a mermaid? Let the children float about to the music imagining they are their chosen creature.

Head underwater, track down a monster and visit strange lands atop a magic carpet with **Karen Hart's** inspiring ideas for dramatic play...

Can you imagine?

Rainbow fish

This is a nice, simple craft activity to tie-in with the aquatic theme above:

You will need:

One paper plate per fish
Scrap paper or tissue in a variety of colours
Googly eyes
Glue
Sticky tape

Method:

Cut a triangle from your plate to make a big open mouth, and use sticky tape to fix the triangle to the back of the plate as a tail. You can either cut semi-circle fish scale shapes from your coloured paper or use randomly torn pieces - both look good. If you have some shiny paper available this adds a lovely effect. Glue all your paper scraps onto the fish body, and finish off with a googly eye. These look lovely when hung as a classroom decoration!



Magic carpet ride

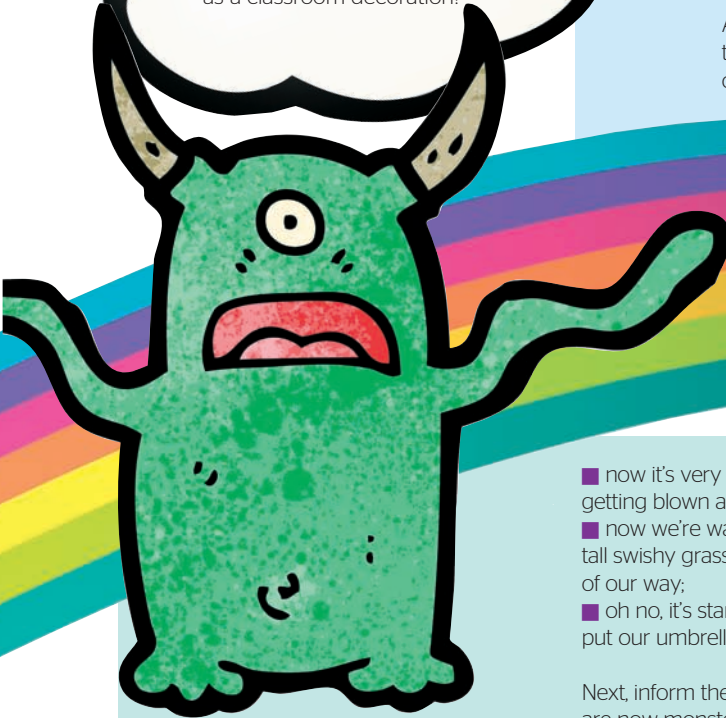
You will need:

An old rug if one's available or, if not, some mats grouped together.

Gather all the children, and climb onto your 'magic carpet' with them, ready to fly off to somewhere exciting. Tell them to hold on tight, as you're about to take off. Ask them what they think they can see below the clouds - can they see their house? Can they see the park? Demonstrate how to sway about as though you really are flying. Tell children that you're getting lower and lower, and, hold on tight again, as there's going to be a big bump as you land at... You can choose anywhere you like, but some suggestions I've used are:

- a sunny beach where everyone can build sandcastles, buy ice lollies and swim in the sea;
- the North Pole - good for building a snowman and having snowball fights;
- a jungle with thick creepers to walk through and dangerous snakes;
- an ice rink;
- an unknown planet to play with space men;
- a magical world made of sweets; eat as much as you like - what will you choose?

At the end of the activity, everyone climbs off the mat and waves goodbye to the carpet until next time.



- now it's very windy, and we're getting blown all around;
- now we're walking through tall swishy grass; let's push it out of our way;
- oh no, it's starting to rain; let's put our umbrellas up!

Next, inform the children that they are now monsters. Ask for ideas on how they think a monster might walk. Suggestions could be:

- feet thumping - big strides;
- jumping like a kangaroo;
- slithering along the floor like a snake;
- running about in a rage;
- sneaking up on its victims;
- lolloping like an orang-utan with arms swaying.

Next, ask the class to spread out again and, to a musical accompaniment, walk around the room as if they are all monsters, trying out various moves until they have settled on the walk they feel best suits their particular monster; point out that walking involves the whole body, not just legs and feet - use arms, hands, and even faces.

Monster moves

This is a good warm-up activity to use at the beginning of any physical lesson - it's great for getting children thinking about ways they can move.

Ask children to find a space and start walking around the room, imagining that they are walking as quietly as possible, so as not to wake a monster. Next, tell the class that they are on a quest to catch a terrifying monster and must travel through all kinds of dangerous places in order to find it. Ask children to spread out and walk around the room following your instructions (demonstrate) and imagining they are very frightened. Give instructions such as:

- we've come to a very muddy forest, and our feet are getting stuck in the mud;



about the author

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Class café

This variation on the home corner, as well as being a good imaginative role-play activity, can be used as a way to introduce the concept of money to your group.

1 The first thing you'll need is a space big enough for a table to serve as a counter. If you have a toy cash register (or money-pinger, as my little boy calls it!) you can use this for holding money; if not, any little dish

will do. There are also lots of extra bits that can be added to make it more fun – such as little food bags to hold purchases and price tags (this can become an activity on its own, with children tracing over numbers drawn onto stickers).

2 The shoppers are going to need a purse containing some real coins – one and two pence pieces are probably tricky enough, and children can visit the shop on their own, with an adult on hand if they need help. Have things to buy labelled with either 1p or 2p, and encourage children to try to pay the correct amount for their purchases. The idea here is all about having a go, and to begin to think about numbers.

3 You'll need some shopkeepers for your café – two or three children can play shopkeeper at a time, and can take money, put it into the cash register, give change, with help, and put purchases into bags. Try to encourage polite conversation such as, "Good morning, can I help you?" and "please" and "thank you", which help to create a fun, role-play atmosphere.

4 You will, of course, need some nice things to eat in your café; keep this simple by buying some bags of ready-made fairy cakes (or plain biscuits) and letting children do the fun bits of icing and decorating with sprinkles and little sweets. If you prefer something a bit healthier, you could make some fruit kebabs with your group, which can stand in for the mid-morning fruit snack:

You will need:

Various fruits and salad vegetables that are easy enough to skewer, for example:

- Cucumber
- Cherry tomatoes
- Strawberries
- Blueberries
- Bananas
- Apples
- Pears
- Halved grapes



Plus, some cubes of mild cheese and cocktail sticks.

Method:

Pre-cut all fruits and vegetables into little chunks and place in dishes. Supervise children as they thread their own choice of ingredients onto a stick – it doesn't matter if they mix fruits and vegetables, they taste nice like that. Serve with a napkin.

5 The children will need somewhere to eat their purchases, so if possible it's a good idea to have some chairs/beanbags in your outdoor area for children to sit on. If any little aprons are available these can be worn by those serving behind the counter and some inexpensive paper plates and serviettes help to make the activity more authentic.

Get the parents in!

You could also use the café as a fun way to raise money for an end of term party. Parents can be invited into nursery to buy a cake, served by the children. You could turn it into more of an event by having children perform a couple of their favourite songs, such as:

Five currant buns

Five currant buns in the baker's shop, Round and fat with a cherry on the top. Along came (child's name) with a penny one day, bought a currant bun and took it right away. Then four currant buns, etc. until they've all gone.

10 fat sausages

10 fat sausages, sizzling in the pan, 10 fat sausages, sizzling in the pan, And if one goes POP! And the other goes BANG! There'll be eight fat sausages, sizzling in the pan.

Continue counting down in twos until all sausages have gone, and end with..

No fat sausages, sizzling in the pan, No fat sausages, sizzling in the pan... And all of a sudden, the pan goes BANG!

RESOURCE TROLLEY

Dressing up

When dressing up in this realistic Velour Tiger Cape, children can prowl, stalk and jump, just like the big cat of the jungle! It's also a great resource for stories such as *The Tiger Who Came To Tea*. Visit www.pretendtobee.co.uk for a full range of jungle and farmyard capes.



Drama classes



Pyjama Drama classes will transport your children to amazing, imaginative worlds, and with hundreds of different sessions they'll never be bored. Choose from weekly or monthly visits, or make the most of special occasions, such as World Book Day or Road Safety Week. Call Sarah on 01938 871855, email Sarah@pyjamadrama.com or visit pyjamadrama.com

Teddy Robber

You will need:

The Teddy Robber (Corgi) by Ian Beck; little mats or something similar to jump on.

You can devise lots of variations to this game. It makes a great physical development activity, and children love an opportunity to bring a toy from home into nursery. It works especially well with children who have just joined nursery, as bringing in a toy really helps them forge a link with their more familiar surroundings.

Before starting the physical activity, read *The Teddy Robber* to the children. Next, lay out all the little mats as stepping stones to make a windy path. Ask the children to take turns at putting their teddy at one end of the path, before making their way along the stepping stones – jumping from stone to stone, to rescue him. Vary the game by telling children that this time they are to be the giant who will walk with big giant steps before stealing the teddy away.

