



Playful Zoology

Children are natural learners.

Creativity blossoms, fine and gross motor skills flourish, and prosocial behaviors evolve when children are afforded long stretches of time to catch insects, jump in puddles, gather berries, build forts, make mud pies, and roll down hills.

Children who spend time in nature each day show*:

- Improved cognitive functioning
- Improved mental health
- Improved creativity and problem solving
- Increased physical activity

“Playful Zoology is a great source to get outside and learn from the comfort of your own home.”

*Benefits of Connecting Children with Nature: Why Naturalize Outdoor Learning Environments. The Natural Learning Initiative. January 2012. Accessed online August 2020.

https://naturalstart.org/sites/default/files/benefits_of_connecting_children_with_nature_infosheet.pdf



Playful Zoology is a flexible home-based learning option that lets you and your child enjoy the journey together.

Our lesson materials and resources equip you to guide your child to discover themselves, their abilities, and the animals in your own backyard and neighborhood while playfully meeting learning outcomes in all areas of child development.

Throughout the year, we'll provide you with 12 investigations for 36 weeks of active hands-on learning.

Investigations focus on universal ideas of friendship, community, diversity, and self-efficacy through inspiring connections to animals.

“Our favorite part is the opportunity to look deeply into a specific creature. Learning the connected social/emotional lessons is interesting.”





We're in this together!

Playful Zoology instructors who have training in both child development and nature pedagogy support you along the path with:

- Suggested daily and weekly lesson plans
- Weekly Zoom meetings for parent/caregiver collaboration and coaching
- Weekly Zoom meetings for children's literacy development
- Documentation of your child's learning outcomes
- Weekly newsletters

"The instructor was very creative during the parent Zoom meeting, providing some new, personalized ideas that would help engage my child."

How you use the program is up to you and your child.

You decide when and how to engage. Complete as many or as few of the learning suggestions as you like.

Scheduled weekly small-group Zoom meetings let you know you are part of an active community that is working to create a better world, together.

“I’d recommend this online program to any parent looking for ways to educate and engage their child while also working from home. The flexibility was wonderful, and the implementation was simple.”

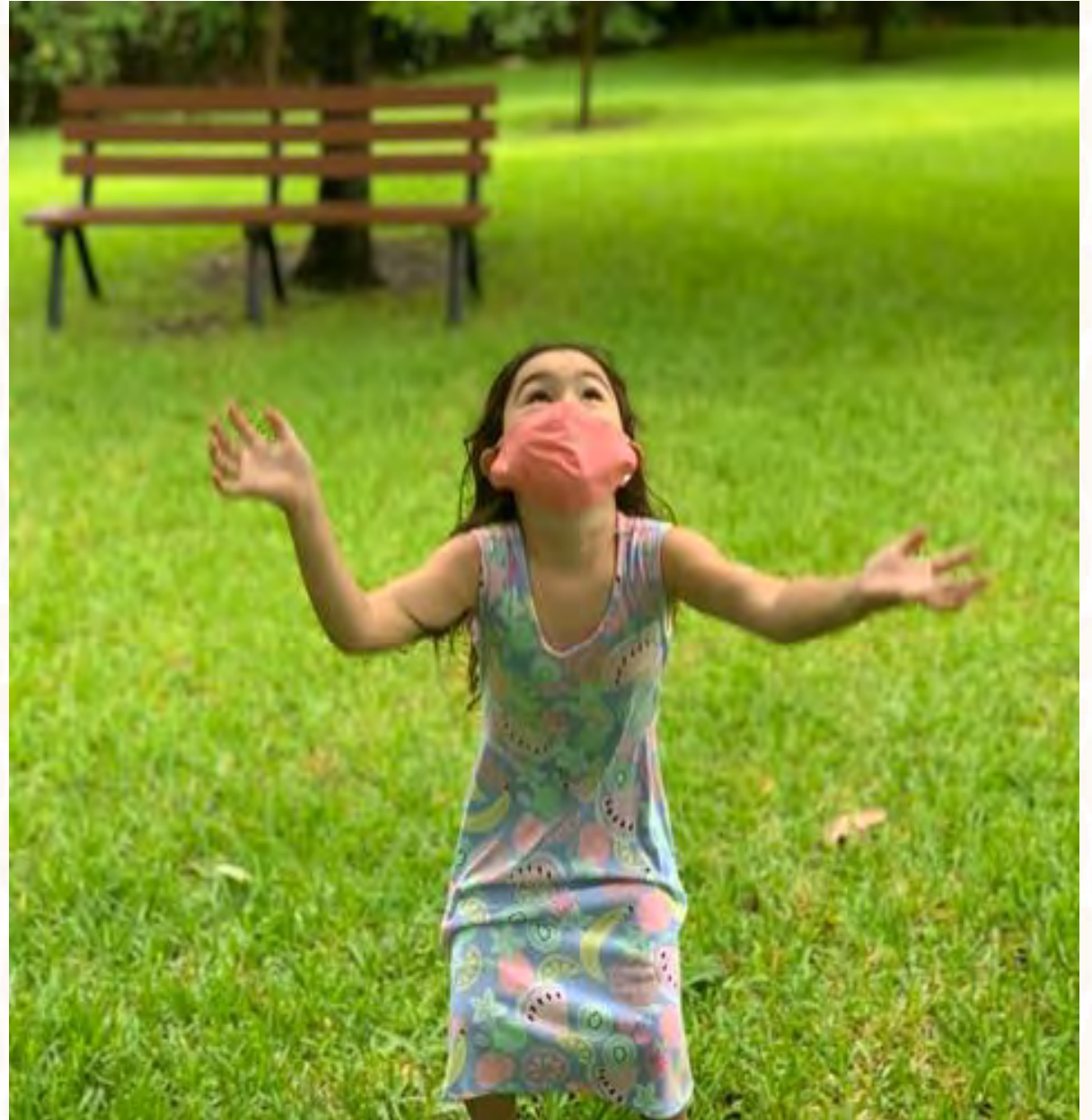


Playful Zoology follows an emergent curriculum philosophy, giving your child freedom to grow.

Collaborate with your child in the creative learning process as you follow emergent paths of discovery and interact with the curriculum and with each other.

Our activity descriptions provide guiding questions, a focal point, invitations and provocations, learning extensions, and time to reflect.

- **Observe:** What are children doing or saying?
- **Invite and provoke :** How can we set up enriching environments that spur inquiry?
- **Investigate:** Dig deeper
- **Reflect:** What understandings are being developed? Why are these significant?
- **Plan forward:** How can we extend the learning or begin a new branch?





STEP 1: *Inspire*

Stories, nature walks, and close observations provide the muse to draw your child into an animal investigation and inspire them to want to learn more.





STEP 2: *Play, Explore, Investigate*

When children play, they learn.

We guide you in setting up an environment that is rich in learning opportunities.

Each 3-week investigation provides related activity descriptions for art, loose parts play, social and emotional learning, and active play.

STEM, literacy, self-expression, physical development, and environmental education skills are interwoven.

What are loose parts?

Loose parts are tangible materials that children use in open-ended play by moving them about a play environment and combining them in different ways to construct meaning or reflect their thinking.

Playful Zoology combines natural loose parts such as feathers, rocks, sticks, shells, seeds, and pine cones with art media and STEM tools to provide children with a variety of self-expression opportunities.

Zoo Connection

Each small creature in your backyard or neighborhood has something in common with the diverse animals and habitats represented at the Dallas Zoo.

Investigations include recommendations for animal visits and experiences that broaden your child's knowledge of a universal concept like families, nutrition, friendship, or protection.

Entrance to the Zoo is free for members. The visit is optional.

Personalized "Zoo Just for You" tours are offered by the education department at the Dallas Zoo.



STEP 3: *Extend and Reflect*

Wildlife gardening projects and conservation actions are built into each investigation.

Simple projects provide easy instructions for you and your child to integrate one native plant or element of a wildlife habitat into your existing landscape each session.

Daily habits of conservation internalize the understanding that people can work together to create positive change in our environment.

Project learning also incorporates child development goals like STEM, problem solving, literacy, social studies, and environmental stewardship.

It's never too early to start *Creating a Better World for Animals*.



Creating Wildlife Habitats

Elements of wildlife gardens include:

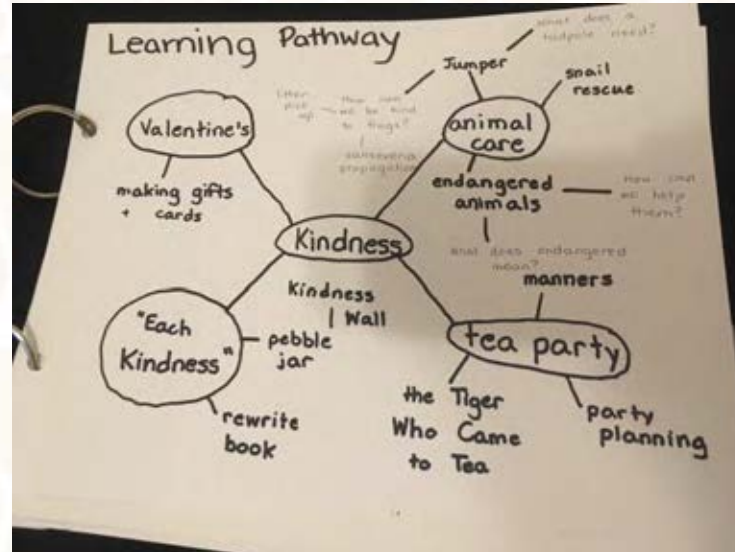
- Native plants to provide food for native species
- Host plants for butterflies
- Avoidance of pesticides and herbicides
- Special features to create animal shelters
- A water source when available



Making Learning Visible

To make learning visible, Playful Zoology uses the Floorbook method of documentation by Claire Warden of MindStretchers Academy.

Starting with a blank book, record the children's voices in their investigation through their drawings, photographs, dictations, mark making, and other artifacts.



Begin with the provocation: what sparked their interest in the investigation?

Invite the children to sign in. Who was involved in the project?

As you go, track the learning pathway with a mind map.

Early Literacy Skills

Language development is interwoven in the program. Besides the many opportunities to read, discuss, notice details, and develop the fine motor skills needed for writing, we've built in some special features:

- Stories told with rhythm and rhyme to develop phonologic awareness.
- Puppets for each investigation so children can retell the story to develop comprehension. (Children also are encouraged to make their own puppet designs and/or backdrops – but outlines are provided because parents sometimes need a helping hand.)
- Weekly Zoom meetings for the children that:
 - Introduce an animal and develop vocabulary.
 - Teach a first letter sound and symbol.
 - Provide practice with the first letter sound.
 - Model how to form the letter with playdough.



**Playful Zoology uses the following online platforms.
Families register for free online accounts to access the services.**

Brightwheel is used for:

- Family communication messaging and newsletters
- Child learning goal tracking
- Daily lesson plans
- Calendar

Zoom is used for:

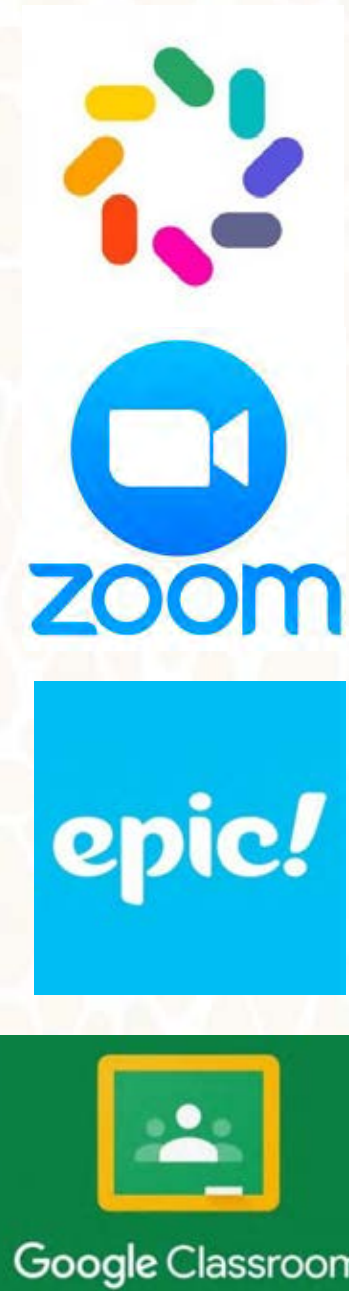
- Weekly parent/caregiver meetings for collaboration and support (< 30 min)
- Weekly child meetings for language and literacy skills (< 30 min)

Epic! is used for:

- Online books for children, at no cost

Google Classroom is used for:

- Storing and retrieval of linked lesson plans and resources



Designing a Space for Learning

To create indoor spaces that invite play-based learning, you need only a few basics. These spaces may be multipurpose or single-use; grouped together or scattered throughout the area.

Books

- Bookshelf or baskets
- Nonfiction and fiction books (rotate regularly and/or curate for an investigation)
- Comfortable spot to sit and read

Loose Parts

- Low table, floor mat, or cleared space
- Loose parts in bins or baskets (curate for a lesson or set up a provocation)
- Photos for observation/inspiration

Art

- Child-sized table and chairs
- Open-ended art supplies
- Objects or photos for observation and inspiration
- Hard floor or mess mat

Nature Spot

- Dedicated table, shelf, or tray
- Magnifying glass
- Natural specimens and treasures
- Sorting and display boxes
- Nature journal

Cozy Corner

- Soft, cozy space to relax
- Low-stimulus toys
- Self-directed activities
- Social/emotional learning tools and books

Nature Backpack

Insect net	Sunscreen and bug spray
Specimen jar	First aid kit
Magnifying glass	Toddler/camp potty
Binoculars	Sensory/spatial items (optional)
Plastic gardening trowel	Sheet or picnic tablecloth
Nature journaling supplies	
Hand sanitizer and wet wipes	

Choosing Supplies

Playful Zoology is designed to work with a modular system of supplies. Below you will find examples of basic supplies for preschool, as well as suggestions to extend learning. In the spirit of conservation, we encourage the use of items you already have on hand whenever possible. The activities in the curriculum can all be completed with a simple assortment of materials.



Books are available online or check your local library for these or similar titles.

Art Supplies

Basic:

Construction paper
Crayons
Colored pencils
Watercolor paint
Paintbrushes
Scissors
Glue
Air dry clay

Extended:

Tissue paper
Cardboard
Washable paint
Stamps
Yarn
Beads/gems
Craft sticks
Craft sand

Loose Parts

Basic:

Trays and bowls
Stones
Seashells
Twigs
Twine/string
Nuts/seeds
Feathers
Leaves

Extended:

Rope
Sea sponges
Clay
Fabric scraps
Bamboo rods
Tree bark
Sea glass
Sorting mats

Relevant Literature

Basic:

[botanical field guide](#)
[birding field guide](#)
[nonfiction nature books](#)

Extended:

[nature encyclopedia](#)
[world atlas](#)
[Seek app](#)

Choosing Supplies (cont.)

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Nature Journaling

Basic:

Unlined sketch spiral
Colored pencils
Clear tape

Extended:

Crayons for rubbings
Wax paper for pressing
Sun print paper
Clear contact paper

Tools for Observation

Basic:

Magnifying lens
Small or medium habitat
Clear plastic jars and lids
Mesh habitat
Aquarium net
Plastic garden trowel
Plastic tweezers
Spray bottle
Turkey baster

Extended:

Geosafari kidnoculars
Geosafari "My First
Microscope"
Butterfly net
Compressed substrate
Heat lamp

Cozy Corner/Safe Place

Basic:

Stuffedies
Puzzles
Stress balls
Fidget toys
[DIY sensory bottles](#)
[SEL books](#)

Extended:

Sand timers
Kinetic sand or putty
[Emotion identification tools](#) or [DIY feelings chart](#)

Are you ready to join us for this learn-at-home adventure?

Terms and Agreements:

- A full school year commitment is recommended to optimize your child's development and establish a learning community.
- See website for payment terms and registration.
- Curriculum materials are for single person use only and may not be shared outside of the family unit.
- A parent or caregiver must be available for the preschooler during the child's Zoom call.
- Tracking of learning goals is dependent upon participation in Zoom and/or the parent submitting photos, observations, and work samples.
- Zoom meetings are limited to six participants.
- The Zoom meeting schedule and the program release date calendar are available on the registration site.



Register now

www.DallasZoo.com

“Playful Zoology lessons and teachers gave us the jump we needed to turn our yard and neighborhood into a learning area. My child excitedly anticipated outdoor excursions to look and listen for animals all around us.”

