

# TAKING An Activities Guide MONTESSORI OUTSIDE

## Book One: Practical Life

*Connecting Indoor & Outdoor Classrooms*



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Author of [www.carrotsareorange.com](http://www.carrotsareorange.com)

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An Activities Guide

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Some underlined text is hyperlinked. Referenced books, articles, and products are linked to Marnie's website and other resources, such as Amazon.com, for your convenience.

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Dedicated to my Mama



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# ABOUT MARNIE

Marnie hails from Maine where she spent summers buried in sand and winters buried in snow. She is the daughter of a nearly four decade veteran of the public school systems. Teaching has always been a part of her life. She founded Carrots Are Orange in 2010. *Carrots Are Orange* is a Montessori inspired learning and living website for parents and teachers.

Marnie graduated from Wesleyan University in 1999 with a BA in Economics. She spent nearly a decade working in investment management. In 2006, she earned her MA in business from the University of Washington's Foster School of Business.

Marnie moved to the west coast in 1999, and currently lives east of Seattle with her husband and three young boys. She is pursuing Montessori certification. Her work *has been featured* on Apartment Therapy, PBS Kids, BabyCenter, the Melissa & Doug blog, Huffington Post, and WhattoExpect.com. Besides writing, passions include running (usually after her three sons), photography, and outdoor adventures.



# INTRODUCTION

Dr. Montessori believed that the outdoors is a natural extension of the classroom, that there should be *harmony* between the indoor and outdoor learning environments. The outdoors is the ideal sensorial experience.

A child discovers the world through his senses in the most holistic way. Beyond the organic development through seeing, smelling, hearing, feeling, and, yes, I am going to write it, tasting in the great outdoors, *nature* brings ripe lessons in botany, zoology, and STEM in the most basic, pure ways.

Anne Botsford Comstock, author of one of my favorite books, Handbook of Nature Study, emphasized observation as the foundation of outdoor education:



*"Nature study consists of simple, truthful observations that may, like *beads on a string*, finally be threaded upon the understanding and thus held together as a logical and harmonious whole."*

The **goals** of this guide are to present activities that lend themselves to the Montessori work cycle.

My idea of a great activity is not one that can be done in 30 minutes and taped up on the wall.

My idea is that children **crave** more of a rhythm to their learning, that an activity ignites their desire to want to learn more, that if they go on a Bug Hunt, that it doesn't stop at examining the bugs in the outdoor habitat, that it goes further, that a child notes the name and **continues** research in some way at home or in the classroom, at that moment or in a week.



The activities cannot all be project based but my goal is that the activities will inspire a desire to learn more and a **desire to discover more.**

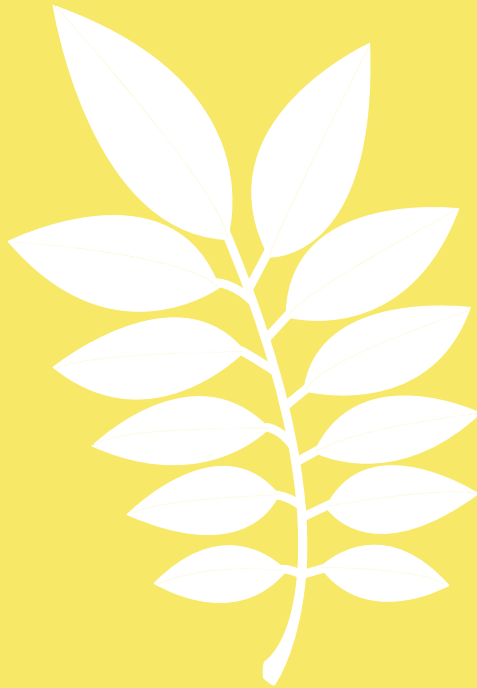
# KEY IDEAS

## Montessori Outdoors Classroom

So, what are the key tenets of a Montessori outdoor education?

Pretty *simple.*

The key ideas of a Montessori outdoor classroom are the same as those ideas for the indoor classroom!





*A few key tenets that come to mind include:*

Child Led

Prepared Environment

Teacher as Guide

Liberty of Child

Intrinsic Motivation

Observe the Child

# THEMES

In the spirit of “following the child”, these themes should be followed loosely. The idea is that these themes integrate themselves into daily activities.

The themes can be thought of as a philosophy, or a mantra, for teachers and parents. Use them as you see fit in your daily life.



**Move**

**BUILD**

**invent**

**RISK**

**IMAGINE**

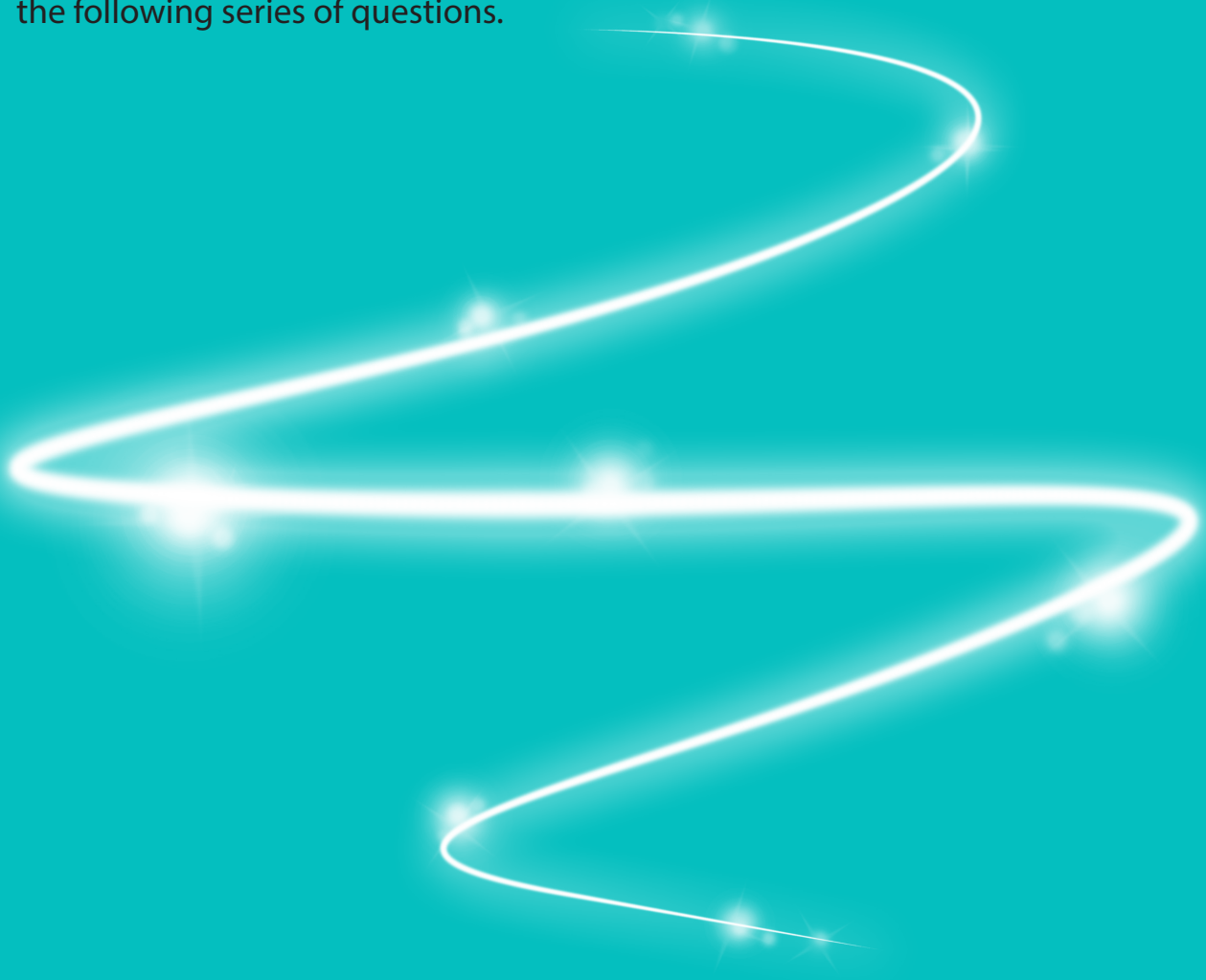
**LEAD**



# REFLECTION QUESTIONS

These questions **evolved** over the past six years with my children at home. The family meal at the end of the day is a great time to come together and to reflect on the day.

To give my sons' a bit of **structure** to this ritual, I began to ask them the following series of questions.





What did you **discover** today?

When were you **kind to someone** today?

When was **someone kind to you** today?

What was a **challenging** moment today?

What was a **gratitude** moment today?

# PRACTICAL LIFE

*"Free the child's potential  
and you will transform  
him into the world."*

-Dr. Maria Montessori-



A child finds **joy** in activities we adults view as work or as every day routine. Once a child witnesses these activities in “real” life, he wants to model the activities, again and again.

Practical Life activities are typically introduced to the child first. The tasks are simple, precise and involve activities that the child has already seen in his home and subsequently wants to **mimic**.

Practical Life activities prepare a child to be a **productive** person in our world. The work is holistic in developing the child's "whole self" by honing fine motor skills, grace of movement, self-regulation, concentration, to behave with **respect** and with good manners, independence, and self-esteem.

Practical life is about preparing a child for life and about developing far less tangible skills, such as self-esteem, completing a cycle of work, self-sufficiency, problem solving, confidence and **independence**, all qualities that will help in life but also later in academic work.



# PRACTICAL LIFE ACTIVITIES

## Walk the Line



This activity is a classic Montessori activity great for developing Grace & Courtesy through working with *balance and space*. For the traditional AMS Montessori lesson, check out the post I wrote on the [Walking the Line](#).

Take this activity outdoors by first *identifying lines* on which to walk such as a fallen log, an edging of a garden or lawn, a line drawn in a path with a stick, or create a line from leaves and other natural objects.



**Fun variations** include:

- ▶ walking barefoot
- ▶ walking while holding a bell
- ▶ walking with balancing in object on your head.



# PRACTICAL LIFE ACTIVITIES

## Care of Plants

This activity lends well to the Montessori outdoors classroom.



Within the classroom, Care of Plants is part of Caring for the Environment. Children will mist water onto plants and **water** the soil as needed. Children will also **prune** dead leaves to keep the plant healthy.





Outside a child can take a step back and **plant a seed** and truly care for his plant throughout its life cycle. In a garden already in place, a child can till the dirt, weed, and harvest plants.

In addition, learning a **respectful** way to coexist with plants is critical (e.g. walk around, not on and holding a stem with one hand and picking with the other hand if you're making tea or picking berries).



# PRACTICAL LIFE ACTIVITIES

## Water & Dirt Play

Give a child a bit of dirt and water and suddenly he is building dams, rolling balls, *constructing* bridges, digging, scooping, transferring, and creating!

Both natural elements lend to fine motor skills and sensory development.

Children working together will begin to understand how to *communicate* effectively and work together as a partnership or team (guided by the teacher when needed).



*Wuuu*

# PRACTICAL LIFE ACTIVITIES

## Silence Game



Maybe my all time favorite Montessori lesson across all areas of the classroom, the [Silence Game](#) works **Wonders** for a child and his development. You can do this activity as a group, or encourage the children to cultivate their own sitting spot for meditation, observation, and **thought** even when the group is not doing the silence activity.

# PRACTICAL LIFE ACTIVITIES

## Care of Self



Children will love Outdoor Care of Self activities. The activity can easily be incorporated into a yoga session involving story telling and **animal poses**. We use [The ABCs of Yoga for Kids Learning Cards](#) for inspiration.

It does not take long for a child to begin to create his own yoga positions. Further the activity by **imagining yourself** as a plant sprouting, the sun rising and setting, or a tree swaying in the wind.

Other activities may include the rigor of gardening, going on a hike, lifting rocks to clear paths, and simple, **fun mid line movement** and lengthening activities such as those activities written about in this [Montessori at Home Brain Gym](#) post.



# PRACTICAL LIFE ACTIVITIES

## Deconstruct a Dead Plant

Tweezing, peeling, and **breaking apart** dead plants is not only a great way to learn a bit about botany, these activities are fantastic for little hands developing fine motor skills. See how we tweezed and **harvested** sunflower seeds from our dead sunflower plant.



# PRACTICAL LIFE ACTIVITIES

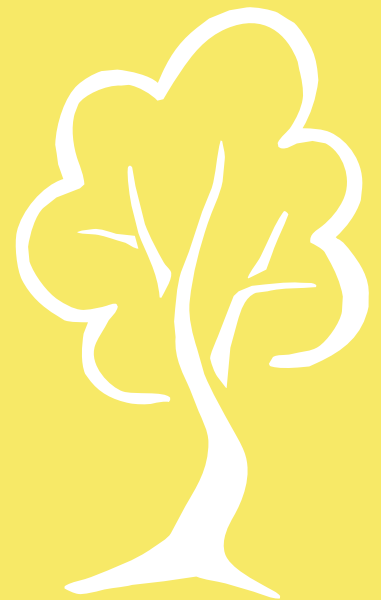
## Care of the Environment



Outdoor spaces need to be kept **neat and clean** to maintain safety and a sense of order.

Children can **sweep** away dirt from concrete pathways, scrape moss from steps, and clean outdoor furniture as a few examples.





My sons also **enjoy** cutting back brush in our yard as you can see in this post for [Outdoor Chores for Children](#).

# PRACTICAL LIFE ACTIVITIES

## Snack Preparation

One of my favorite parts of the outdoor classroom is snack time. Eating food and breathing in the *fresh air* is a wonderful way to spend time learning outdoors.





If you have a *garden*, have a child:

- ▶ harvest herbs for tea
- ▶ gather vegetables or fruits
- ▶ peel and wash carrots
- ▶ open peas and bean pods
- ▶ pick a basket of berries.

The easiest time I have getting my children to eat vegetables is sitting by our garden beds.





# PRACTICAL LIFE ACTIVITIES

## Rock Collecting & Washing

We **love** painting rocks.

What my sons quickly came to understand is that rocks don't magically appear for them to paint. Rock painting requires a **series of steps** including rock collecting and washing.

Have each child grab a bag for collection. Set out a bin for an initial scrub (with hands works just fine or a small brush) and a bin for rinsing.



Finally, **allow time to dry** (a great science lesson, too!). Only at that point will your rocks be ready for painting!

# PRACTICAL LIFE ACTIVITIES

## Hammer Nails

I use this phrase loosely so don't run away scared and intimidated.



Have the child grab a small hammer and large nails. If you cannot locate a **tree stump** (check on craigslist), then find a piece of wood appropriate for hammering nails. Make sure the child is wearing protective eye wear and demonstrate the proper way to hammer a nail **slow and steady** before unleashing the child!

If a hammer and nails doesn't lend to your outdoor space, try hammering **golf tees** into a pumpkin or squash.



# PRACTICAL LIFE RESOURCES

## Books

[Teach Me to Do It Myself](#) by Maja Pitamic

[Pretend Soup](#) by Mollie Katzen

[Kids in the Kitchen](#) by Kylie D'Alton

[The Garden Classroom](#) by Cathy James

[Teaching Montessori at Home](#) by Elizabeth Hainstock

[Practical Life Books](#) from Montessori Services



## Materials

Local thrift stores are a great place to purchase tools and other Practical Life items for your home and classroom.

[Montessori Services](#) is my go to for Practical Life materials.

Local Hardware Store



# PRACTICAL LIFE RESOURCES

## Websites

[Living Montessori Now](#)

[Michael Olaf](#)

[How We Montessori](#)

## Montessori Printables

[Pre-Reading Bundle](#) (\$10 value)

- ▶ password “outdoorclassroom” to access

[Science Bundle](#) (\$10 value)

- ▶ password “outdoorclassroom” to access



# NOTES

# Take Montessori Outside with this fun and practical series for parents, homeschoolers, and teachers!

In this first book of her Taking Montessori Outside series, Marnie Craycroft brings Practical Life work out into the great outdoors. The book includes ten easily adaptable activities that can be seamlessly integrated into your day to day learning. With the exception of gathering knowledge of your outdoor environment, such as types of plants, there is minimal preparation necessary. The open ended activities allow the child to lead his learning and to embrace a sense of awe and wonder about the natural world. The author's goal is to inspire you to be outside where true learning and teaching happens for all of us.

Activities Guides in the series:

## Practical Life

Sensorial

Math

Language

Art

Science

Geography

