

Loose Parts

Elizabeth Hicks



What do we mean by loose parts?

The theory of “loose parts” first proposed by architect Simon Nicholson in the 1970's has begun to influence child-play experts and the people who design play spaces for children in a big way. Nicholson believed that having “loose parts” in children’s environments will empower their creativity.

Having "loose parts" available in a play space allows children to use these materials as they choose. Often children would rather play with materials that they can use and adapt as they please rather than having expensive pieces of play equipment with limited options for changing play experiences.

- ▶ Loose parts can be used anyway children choose to do so. This encourages them to try new ideas and discover new concepts.
- ▶ Loose parts can be adapted and manipulated in many ways.
- ▶ Loose parts encourage creativity and imagination.
- ▶ Loose parts develop more problem solving skills and competencies needed for later academic skills than most modern plastic or electronic toys.
- ▶ Loose parts can be used in combination with other materials to support imagination.
- ▶ Loose parts increase children’s “What if” and “How might” thinking and problem solving skills.

“Kids really get to know the environment if they can dig it, beat it, swat it, lift it, push it, join it, combine different things with it. This is what adults call creative activity...a process of imagination and environment working together.” Moore (2005, as cited in Louv, 2008, p. 65)

Examples of wonderful & natural loose parts

Rocks (big and small), sticks (big, small fat and thin!), pine cones, acorns, logs, tree cookies (big and small), leaves, bark, drift wood, shells, seeds, flowers, sand, mud and water.

Things to use with the above ... tires (not steel belted), planks, wood offcuts (not treated), various lengths of materials/tarps, rope/string, buckets, tools, spools (large and small), piping and connectors, pallets, milk crates, ... and anything else that your and your child’s imagination can conjure up!

Additional Resources

Web Resources for Loose Parts

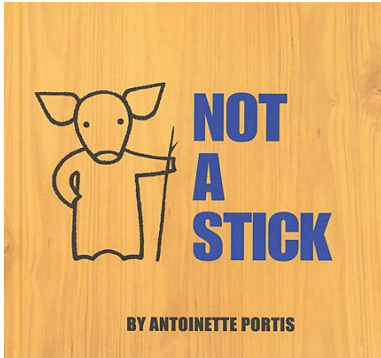
<http://www.aneverydaystory.com/2013/03/05/the-theory-of-loose-parts/>

<http://www.oneperfectdayblog.net/2013/09/24/natural-play-ideas-loose-parts/>

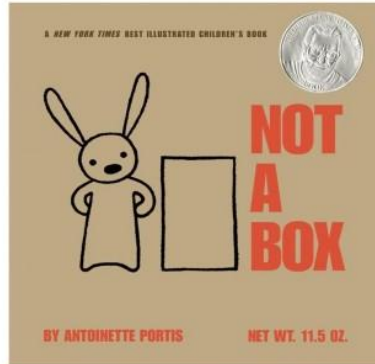
<http://www.howtorunahomedaycare.com/articles/kids-bored-introduce-loose-parts-play/>

Some interesting children's books

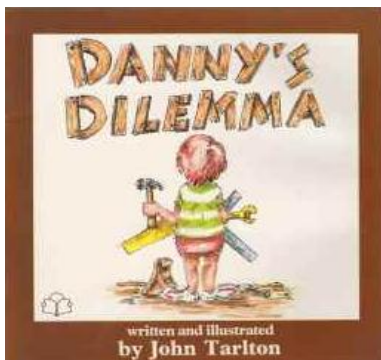
Not A Stick by Antoinette Portis



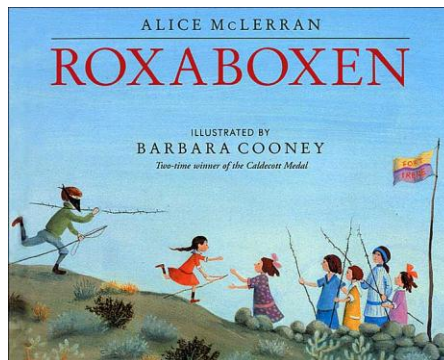
Not a box by Antoinette Portis



Danny's Dilemma by John Tarlton



Roxaboxen by Alice McLerran



Reference

Louv, R. (2008). *Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder*. Chapel Hill, N.C: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill.

About the Author

Liz Hicks has been an elementary school teacher, early childhood educator, and private consultant working in child care centres. She is passionate about creating environments that create wonder and curiosity in children - indoors and outdoors!

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