



Winter Theme 1: Winter's Snowflakes

Exploring Outside

On a day when the forecast brings light snow, bundle up the children and go outdoors to observe the falling flakes. Allow the children to bring along pieces of black felt to catch snowflakes on and magnifying glasses to inspect the snowflakes. Or, if you live where the weather is warmer, pick one of your chillier days and head outdoors with some crushed ice for inspection. Regardless of where you live, viewing frozen water crystals outdoors is magical. The children may want to try to catch a snowflake or two on their tongues. They can also lie on their backs and watch the snow fall from a different angle. Using the magnifying glass and black felt sheets, invite the children to investigate the differences and uniqueness of each snowflake.

Ask open-ended questions:

What does the snowflake look like?

What happens after the snowflakes land on your felt sheet?

Why do you think every snowflake is unique?

What else do you notice?

Be spontaneous, and devise your own snowflake open-ended questions.

Role Play Outside

While outdoors, explain to the children they can be snowflakes. Ask them to fall and act like a snowflake. Begin by suggesting, "Show me how you act as a snowflake." Be sure to also ask open-ended questions to help children develop higher-level thinking skills:

Why are you so quiet?

How come every snowflake is different?

What is special about you?

What were you doing in the clouds before you came down here?

Involving Families: Studying Snowflakes at Home

Supply the children with some fun activities to do at home. Mention the activities in your weekly newsletter to families. Explain to families that the optional activities are provided for extra quality time together in nature and for involvement in their children's education. Explain that the children are learning about the winter season and snowflakes, or if appropriate, rain or sleet. Describe the following nature activities for the families to enjoy at home:

- Ask parents to go on a forecast walk with their children. Ask them to look for signs of the winter season, focusing on snowflakes, ice, sleet, rain, or frost.
- Ask parents to discuss the uniqueness of snowflakes and talk about what uniqueness means to us individually as people.
- Ask families to play outside with snow. Remind them to take time to look at the snow falling from the sky.
- If possible, suggest they gather enough snow together to create three snowballs. Put each snowball in its own bowl. Put one snowball in the freezer, one on a window ledge, and another on a countertop. Allow the children to inspect the snowballs on an ongoing basis and discuss their observations.

Integrating Nature: Studying Snowflakes in the Classroom

Unlike leaves or acorns, which you can carry back to your classroom, snowflakes dissipate quickly once in hand. That is probably why we are so enchanted by beautiful falling snow. Snowflakes in this sense are magical. Captivate your young children by integrating snowflakes (or if appropriate, rain or sleet) into the classroom. Bring a bucket of snow to your science and discovery center for use in other activities.

Science and Discovery

- Put fresh snow in a table or large bin and allow a small group of children to explore snow indoors. Provide mittens for their hands and magnifying glasses and spoons for more scientific discovery. For added fun, include sand shovels and beach toys. Ask the children whether they notice any similarities and differences between playing in sand and snow.
- Always encourage children to draw a picture of what they did in the discovery area. As they dictate their captions, write them on their pictures.
- Provide various styles of thermometers for children to discover how thermometers function.
- As the snow melts, give the children beakers and measuring cups. Show them how they can put a sample of the snow in a petri dish and later examine it more closely.

Math

- Ask a large group of children to come up with their top five favorite things to do in the snow, such as sledding, making snowmen, ice-skating, making snow angels, riding snowmobiles, helping to shovel snow, and building a snow fort. As a group, graph all of the children's favorite snow activities. Discuss the math terms *most* and *least*.
- Allow the children to sort through math tubs, using these three concepts: (1) make patterns with winter attributes, such as sleds, snowmen, and snowflakes, using pictures or actual mini-math items; (2) sort white manipulatives from those of other colors; (3) compare objects of small, medium, and large size, connecting the idea to the sizes of snowballs needed for making a snowman. Model for the children how to pattern winter items, sort colors, or compare and measure the sizes of math manipulatives. All three activities contribute to emerging math skills.

Blocks and Building

- Have the children build towers and compare how quickly certain items fall from the top. Use cotton balls to suggest snowflakes to begin your discovery. Other items to use include paper clips, glue sticks, feathers, coins, and paper.

Language Arts

- As a large group, create a chart titled “Snow.” Come up with as many snow words as possible, such as *snowman*, *snowflake*, *snowmobile*, *snowplow*, and *snowball*.
- Write a group story using all of the snow words you thought of.

Reading

- Provide wintry nonfiction books that depict the actual season and its attributes. Fiction about play during the coldest season will pique children’s interests as well. Some books you can feature include *Snowballs* by Lois Ehlert and *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats.
- Include stuffed toy polar bears, penguins, and other polar animals for the children to snuggle while they read about the Arctic and Antarctic.

Writing

- Include pictures of snow and snowflake stencils at your writing center. Encourage children to create compound snow words and write them with white crayons on dark blue and black paper. Provide sentence strips that incorporate compound snow words. As an example, your strips could include these sentences:

In winter I make a snowman.
In winter I ride a snowmobile.
In winter I throw a snowball.
In winter I wave “Hi” to the snowplow driving by.
In winter I see snowflakes fall from the sky.
In winter I wear warmer clothes.
In winter I see clouds in the sky.
In winter I play outside.

Children can look at and copy these strips. Have the word *snow* highlighted in the compound word to promote word recognition and one-to-one word reading correspondence, in which children isolate each word and then read it. This exercise also develops sight word recognition, such as *in*, *I*, and *a*. Including pictures to assist children with emergent reading skills is a good idea. Allow the children to write and create at this literacy station.

Dramatic Play

- Make your dramatic play center a dressing room for the winter season. Begin by hanging up a banner that reads, “I dress for winter.” Below the title, include a numbered list showing the children which items to put on first as they get ready for winter. I always include mittens last and demonstrate how difficult pulling on and zipping things is if I put on my mittens first. All of this helps children with independent dressing skills. Be sure to have pictures next to each item for your emergent readers. Here is how the list reads:

1. snow pants
2. coat
3. hat
4. boots
5. scarf
6. mittens

If you do not have one already, include a mirror in your dramatic play center. Next, hang up snow pants, coats, hats, large-sized boots, scarves, and mittens. The children will love practicing their independent dressing skills as they get ready for winter play.

Art

- Cut out several sizes of white circles. Let the children use the circles to make a picture on blue construction paper. Title the art activity “See what I can make with 20 white circles.” This activity allows children to count twenty items, using one-to-one correspondence. They also get to use their imaginative ideas and to invent one-of-a-kind wintry images.
- For a sparklier snowflake experience, let the children cover their creations in a mixture of Epsom salt and a bit of water. Pour some Epsom salt into a small container and add just enough water to make a soupy mixture. Let the children paint their art creations, which will dry to a frosty finish, giving them that wintry connection and reflection.

Music

- You are bound to come across snowflake songs on teacher-oriented websites. I created these simple lyrics to help children understand that each snowflake is different and to grasp their own uniqueness. Sing “Snowflakes Falling to the Ground” to the tune “Mary Had a Little Lamb”:

Snowflakes Falling to the Ground

Snowflakes falling to the ground,
to the ground, to the ground.
Snowflakes falling to the ground,
Each special and unique.

I am special and unique,
and unique, and unique,
I am special and unique.
We’re special and unique.

Children sing the first verse while fluttering their fingers high in the sky and bringing them to the ground. They can sing the second verse while pointing their thumbs at themselves.

Closing the Winter’s Snowflakes Theme

Throughout your work with the Winter’s Snowflakes activities, ask children questions to further enhance their comprehension. In your group times, be sure to discuss interesting facts about snowflakes and other winter precipitation. Here are some additional questions you can use during activities and to bring this theme to a close:

What is interesting about snowflakes (or rain or sleet)?
Why do you think snowflakes (or raindrops) are all different?
What else have you learned about winter’s snow (or rain or sleet)?