

We're exploring... space

Eastfield Academy Nursery in Northampton got the children making aliens, a rocket and even the moon after noting their interest in space. By *Claire Lowery*

Here at Eastfield Academy Nursery we love to plan from the children's interests and motivations. All staff complete daily evaluations noting down what the children have been talking about and creating. Talk and play around the moon, spaceships and night-time made 'space' the obvious choice as a theme to explore further with them.

DESTINATION: THE MOON?

The previous week, the children had really enjoyed the story *Peace at Last* by Jill Murphy so, to support our space theme, we decided to use another classic text by the same author – *Whatever Next!* in which Baby Bear finds a rocket and heads for the moon.

We provided a box with the main character and props from the book to encourage imaginative play and retelling of the story. Larger boxes

were left outside, which the children immediately wanted to use to make into a rocket around the climbing frame. This led to a lovely collaborative art project with painting and making a collage, using a variety of brushes and rollers.

While painting, the children were chatting excitedly about where they were going to go in the rocket. I stapled black material above it and hung stars and rockets that they had made previously to enhance the scene.

Whilst in the rocket, the adults and children counted down from ten to zero with a great shout of 'BLAST OFF!'. Other children enjoyed pretending to be aliens or spacemen, and the adult modelled moving around the area in different ways.

IN POSITION

We had observed that the children loved exploring 'cause and effect' toys with buttons and sounds, so we set up a 'space' small world with lots of



The children at Eastfield Academy Nursery used their imagination to make 'crazy aliens'

opportunities for this. The main talk we intended to develop using this small world was the use of 'positional language' so adults modelled using phrases such as 'on top of', 'next to' and 'behind'.

We found that the children started to use positional words very quickly in their independent play too.

We take the children for a weekly walk and we decided that this would be a good opportunity to develop the use of these words further. We explained to the children that a spaceship had landed in the nursery garden and that the aliens and spacemen had escaped so we needed to find them all.

One member of staff had a clipboard to note down the children's comments as we hunted around the outdoors to find all the aliens and spacemen. We were very pleased to see that all of our children could apply the positional words that they had learnt for this activity.

FINER POINTS

Previously, the children had demonstrated deep engagement and involvement when adding enhance-

HOME IN

All of the images in this article were created using the PicCollage app and put on our blog – nursery.eastfieldblogs.net – during the week. We find updating the blog is a fantastic way to involve our parents, and for the discussion and interest generated at nursery to continue at home. Here are two of the comments left by parents during the week:

'Wow, I love your space rocket! Tonight Nathan and I discussed

space men going to the moon and how they float and food floats in the space ship. This is a great theme. Tomorrow we are going to watch *Wallace and Gromit*. Can't wait x.'

'Myla has not stopped talking about the spaceship and has been really excited to go to nursery. She has been telling me all about going to space and seeing aliens and has also been doing the countdown to blast off.'



The children recreated the moon's craters (left) and then went outdoors to blast off in their space rocket (above)

ments to playdough. However, we wanted to challenge their fine motor skills further. Instead of playdough, we wrapped the potatoes in tinfoil and added the features from our Mr Potato Heads and pipe-cleaners so that the children could create their own aliens.

The potatoes proved to be more of a challenge than we had anticipated so the children also developed their perseverance! However, once they had made a few holes, the potatoes became easier to handle.

Many of our children have English as an additional language so it gave them the opportunity to learn and apply the names for the parts of the body. Other children made up stories using the aliens and suggested ideas about what they might do.

COUNTING OUT

Counting accurately and matching to the correct numeral was an area that we had identified as needing further development. We used an open-ended printable picture of a monster created by my lovely Twitter friend Rachel, @HilaryWhite3, from stimulatinglearning.co.uk. We laminated these and provided large googly eyes and number fans in order for the children to be able to carefully

count out the correct number of eyes for the alien.

ROUND IN CIRCLES

We had observed some of the children exhibiting an enclosure schema, with a particular interest in circles, and so we wanted to provide an opportunity for some large-scale circular marking.

We watched a clip from Wallace and Gromit's *A Grand Day Out* and the children suggested that we had our own 'picnic on the moon'. So, we decided that we needed to create our own moon.

We used Google Earth on the interactive whiteboard to observe the moon closely. The children noticed all of the circular craters. We all practised drawing circles in the air to the music of Holst's *The Planet Suite*. We then mimed putting on our space-suits and boots and 'spacewalked' over to a big sheet of paper that covered all of the floor.

There was a very high level of concentration and engagement while all of the children chose to draw circle after circle. One child drew around a cup to create circles, which prompted others to search for other circular objects from around the nursery to draw around. Following a busy circle drawing time, we had a snack on the moon. Of course, it had to be crackers

and 'moon cheese', which had circular holes in keeping with the theme.

SONG TIME

As part of our Talk4Writing activity, we learned the action song 'We're going to the moon', using a storymap. The children loved it and we heard them singing it independently in their play:

(to the tune of 'Incy Wincy Spider')
Climb aboard the spaceship we're going to the moon,
Hurry up, get ready, we're going to blast off soon.

Put on your helmets and buckle up tight,

Here comes the countdown... let's count with all our might...

10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1... BLAST OFF!

IN OUR MUD KITCHEN

We like to add different ingredients to our 'mud kitchen'. We had a go at creating 'moon sand' from flour and baby oil. This sparked ideas, including that it was the moon's birthday – so they made the moon a cake.

This evolved into the next week's planning where we continued this interest in birthdays and parties using the text *Come to Tea on Planet Zum-Zee* by Tony Mitton, which is also fantastic for rhyming words and onomatopoeia. ■

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BOOKS AND AUDIO

- *Whatever Next!* by Jill Murphy
- *Come to Tea on Planet Zum-Zee* by Tony Mitton
- *Aliens in Underpants Save the World* by Claire Freedman
- *Bend & Stretch!* by Sticky Kids