

Pole to pole

Create polar landscapes to help children learn about the people and animals that inhabit them, and to provide opportunities for role play, suggests *Nicole Weinstein*

The frozen wastes of the polar regions offer exciting play and learning opportunities for young children. Not only does the captivating scenery appeal to them – for example, they will enjoy looking at images of polar bears fishing for food with crisp, white mountains in the background – but they will also want to recreate these scenes in small-world play. Other children might be interested in role playing an expedition to the Arctic, using camping materials and dens, or building igloos in the snow. This area will provide plenty of opportunities to discuss the weather, the types of animals that live in these regions, and hibernation.

NORTH AND SOUTH

Play centred on the polar regions raises questions about how accurate practitioners need to be when resourcing children's play. Arctic regions, which include northern Canada, Russia and Scandinavia, support many communities, while the Antarctic has no permanent human habitation; however, resources tend to include only Inuits (Eskimos). Polar bears live solely in the Arctic, while penguins are found in the Antarctic, yet they generally end up sharing the water tray in early years play. Other animals that live in the Arctic include marine mammals such as walrus, seals, and whales, and land-based mammals like wolves, foxes, hares, lemmings, reindeer, and oxen.

Jo Vickers, manager of Weavers Fields Community Nursery, a 30-place nursery in Tower Hamlets, London, says that while it is important to give children the correct facts about these regions and the animals that live in them, it is also important to keep it simple.

She says, 'Rather than separating the penguins from the polar bears, we set up activities that focus on animals that live in extreme cold weather. For example, we add melting ice to a



water tray, which looks like icebergs, then we add penguins and polar bears. The children are fascinated by the melting ice, and enjoy trying to get the animals to stand up on the ice. We also add seals, orcas, dolphins and whales.

'Green tissue or crêpe paper shredded in water changes the colour of the water and imitates plants. A world map with pictures of where the animals live links well to this activity, and this also provides an opportunity to talk to children about the places they have visited.

'When it snows, we bring the snow inside and watch it melt, or take the animals outside and put them in the conditions they will live in. Buried animals will be found once the snow melts.'

However, Ms Vickers adds that it is important that staff are honest with children if they don't know the answers to their questions. 'Say that you will look it up if you don't know, rather than give the wrong answers.'



Most children have seen something on TV, so may know more than we think about the animals.'

SNOW AND ICE

Here are some resources to include in your Arctic, and, if you choose, Antarctic, collection:

- Provide sets of small-world animals. For the younger children, try the Eskimos and Polar Animals – My First Friends (£94.90) from www.wesco-eshop.co.uk. The Polar Animal Figures Set (£8.99) from www.earlyyearsresources.co.uk, contains 12 hand-painted miniature Arctic animals and figures. Or try Schleich animals such as the Polar Bear (£5.49), Emperor Penguin with Chick (£4.99), Male Husky (£3.99), Arctic Fox (£2.99) or Seal (£4.99) from www.elc.co.uk. Alternatively, buy the set of Schleich Arctic and Antarctic Animals (£29.95) from www.tts-group.co.uk.
- Early Excellence stocks a range of polar animals and bases for making small-world environments. The Polar Life provision contains a Penguin Family (£19.25), a Polar Bear Family (£14.95), a Set of Walruses (£9.50), a Set of Wolves (£7), an Inuit Family (£11.75), a Dog Sled with Huskies (£14.95) and Magic Snow (£4.25). Use them with a collection of scenery, props and bases, like the Set of 4 Small Wooden Trees (£19.95) or the Set of 4 Shallow Rectangular Baskets (£4.50).
- Make displays or Arctic scenes using TTS Group's

Arctic Island from Cosy Direct (above); Iridescent Glitter Shaker Jar 100g from Early Years Resources (above right); Penguin Family from Early Excellence (below)



range of resources. Try the Big Display Snow Set (£29.95), the Snow and Ice Pack (£8.99), Glitter Glow Rocks (£6.99) or Instant Snow Powder (from £7.25). Other useful materials from www.earlyyearsresources.co.uk include the Snow Pack – Iridescent Flakes (£1.45), Iridescent Shred (£6.99), Iridescent Glitter Shaker Jar 100g (£2.99), Sequin Snowflakes Assortment (£3.99), Cotton Wool Roll 300g (£2.25), or create your own winter wonderland with the large Vivelle Snow Mat (£5.80).

- Provide fabrics to create landscapes. Try using the Snow and Ice Fabrics Pack (£15) with the Winter Wonderland Forest (£3.95) and the Bucket of White Pebbles (£12.99) and Glass Cubes (£3.99). Add in a pack of two Small World Ponds (£15.99) with some Bark Wooden Trees (£19.99) to create a wonderful wintery scene. Or add these resources to the Arctic Island (£19.99), which is a white tyre with a white top. All these resources are available from Cosy Direct on 01332 370152.
- Use construction blocks to add different heights to Arctic scenes. Try the Translucent Blocks – Ice White (£159.95) or the Luxy Crystal Blocks – Snow Set Box (£178), both from www.ascoeducational.co.uk
- For ready-made Arctic scenes, try the wooden Inuit-Style House (£69.99) from www.reflectionsonlearning.co.uk or the wooden Polar Scene (£51.95) from www.tts-group.co.uk.

ARCTIC ROLE PLAY

Creating a role-play area related to the theme of cold environments will offer children a further range of opportunities. Felicity Benton from Early Excellence explains, 'Children may have all kinds of suggestions as to what such an area might consist of. They might like to be polar explorers or Inuits. A snowy den can easily be created by using a den



frame with material draped over it, or constructed from broom handles, garden canes and white dust sheets. Once the area has been constructed, a range of resources can be added to stimulate children's play further – for example, thermal blankets, sleeping bags, rucksacks, binoculars, fur fabric, cameras and notebooks.'

Here are a range of resources that will help stimulate this form of play:

- Take a trip to the North Pole and build an igloo with a pack of 50 Igloo Bricks (£94.99) from Cosy Direct on 01332 370152 or a set of Ice Bricks (from £61.95) from www.tts-group.co.uk, which are both for indoor or outdoor use.
- Build dens or hidey-holes using the Wooden Lintel for outdoor blocks (£29.99) with the Snow Cameo Net (£18.99) or the White Tarpaulin (£10.95), from Cosy Direct. Or use the metal-framed Play Tunnel (£275) with the Play Tunnel Fabric Packs - Black Den (£98), both from www.ascoeducational.co.uk. Or try the Den Frame (£235) from www.earlyexcellence.co.uk.
- Use camping equipment for polar explorations. Try the range of Outdoor Den and Camping resources from www.earlyexcellence.co.uk, which includes a Set of Rucksacks (£13.50), a Set of Lights (£29.50), a Set of Binoculars (£19.50), or the complete Den and Camping Set (£385).
- Provide hats and gloves and blankets to wrap up warm, or even an Inuit costume (£49.95) from www.ascoeducational.co.uk with Eskimo Dolls Clothes (£12.90) from www.wesco-eshop.co.uk.

BOOKS AND VISUAL MEDIA

The idea that people and animals can be surrounded by



Schleich Arctic and Antarctic Animals from TTS (left); Glass Cubes (right), Igloo Bricks (below left), and Bark Wooden Trees (below) by Cosy Direct



snow for most of the year will be hard for many young children to grasp. Therefore, using visual aids such as photographs, reference books, storybooks, TV footage and even a globe to show children the top and bottom of the world will be an important part of introducing this theme or answering any questions. Here are some useful resources:

Books

- *Mama, Do You Love Me?* by Barbara Joosse. This is a cross-cultural story about a mother's unconditional love for her child, but it is set in the Arctic and the family are Inuit.
- *How Big is a Million?* By Anna Milbourne and Serena Riglietti.
- *The Whales' Song* by Dyan Sheldon.
- *The Penguin Who Wanted to Find Out* by Jill Tomlinson.
- Set of 4 Polar Books (£23.95) from www.earlyexcellence.co.uk, which includes *The Polar Bear Son* by



Lydia Dabovich.

Websites

- Take a look at all the animals in the Arctic at The National Geographic, <http://animals.nationalgeographic.co.uk/animals/photos/arctic-animals>
- Find facts about polar bears at National Geographic Kids, <http://kids.nationalgeographic.co.uk/kids/animals/creaturefeature/polar-bear>
- Search Arctic Animals on YouTube for images and videos of animals in their natural surroundings.

Other ideas

- A set of 5 Polar Postcards (£5) from www.earlyexcellence.co.uk
- Download relaxing music of whale song and sounds of the oceans from iTunes or YouTube. ■