

CHILDREN'S BOOKS AND RESOURCES REVIEW

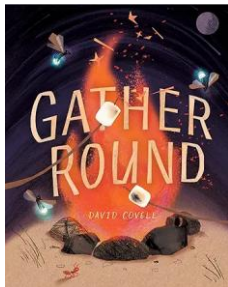
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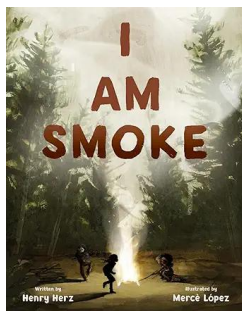
Fire Engineers: Book and Resource List

Wildfires continue to be in the news. Fire can be a real and devastating issue. Fire necessitates safety and preventative measures; however, it is also a tool or element that humans have used for thousands of years. As I facilitated fire sessions with children and studied the concept of loose parts more in depth, I noticed Simon Nicholson mentioned fire as a loose part and children enjoyed playing around (with safety parameters) with the elements of the fire triangle. This sparked a journey to understand fire play with young children. I hope these resources inspire you to consider how fire (even charcoal!) might safely be a part of your early childhood program!



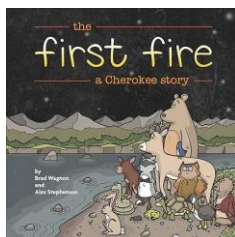
***Gather Round* by David Covell**

This newer book shows campfires as a power to bring people together. A daughter and her father build a fire to stay warm and for safety in the dark. Visitors warm themselves by the fire. Fire is described as a living thing in this book, which I love! The backmatter has fire safety considerations and community building ideas. Makes me want to sit 'round the campfire! Best for ages 3-5.



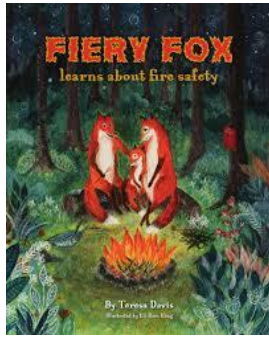
***I Am Smoke* by Henry Herz**

This read aloud is written at an easy pace and uses a poetic approach to smoke, highlighting the many uses of smoke over time. The words invite movement of the participants, while also cautioning the harm smoke can do. Smoke has been used for seed sprouting, pest control, communication, taming bees for honey collection, flavoring and preserving food, religious observations, medicinal purposes, and more. The book shares how the nutrients in smoke grow into trees that eventually become a campfire, which completes a life cycle. The backmatter gives additional details around the main points of smoke and its use in civilization. Rated for ages 4-9.



***The First Fire: A Cherokee Story* by Brad Wagnon**

A bolt of thunder is sent to give fire to the animals as time begins. The fire helps combat the cold and darkness. In this indigenous story, many animals try to capture fire for use; however, it is the small water spider who successfully harnesses the gift of fire for warmth and shares it with others. Cultural aspects of this story show reverence for the water spider, explanations of the natural world, and oral storytelling traditions. Recommended ages 3-5.



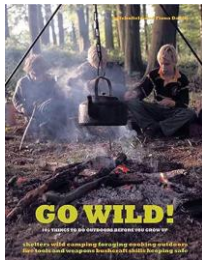
Fiery Fox Learns About Fire Safety by Teresa Davis

Fox finds a lighter in the woods. As he drops it on the ground, it sparks a fire. The fire travels through the woods. Animals flee. Fiery Fox's dad, a firefighter, comes to put out the fire, and stays low out of the smoke. He learns to let adults know if a lighter or matches are found. Their family roasts marshmallows over the fire and reiterates fire safety rules. There is a scavenger hunt to find various things in the book. A safety checklist is included for adults, along with thank yous and inspiration for the book. Rated for ages 3-8



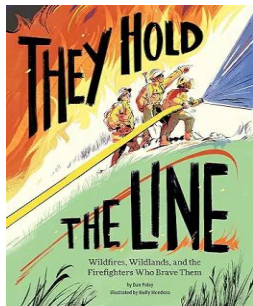
The Organic Artist for Kids: A DIY Guide to Making your own Eco-Friendly Art Supplies from Nature by Nick Neddo

Neddo supplies many approaches to using natural items for creating art materials with children. One section focuses particularly on charcoal with approaches and techniques for creating and using charcoal in art. He instructs on making a tipi fire, charcoal ink, and other fire related concoctions. He seamlessly connects charcoal to other nature supplied art approaches in the book. Suggested ages 4-11.



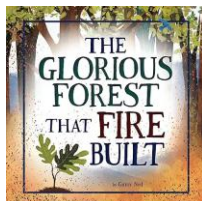
Go Wild! 101 Things to Do Outdoors Before You Grow Up by Jo Schofield and Fiona Danks

This book is organized in sections around shelter, fire, foraging, cooking outdoors, tools and weapons, bushcraft skills, water and keeping clean, keeping safe, and further information. The fire section shares safety measures, how to make a fire, types of fires, using a lens or no matches to start a fire, fire by friction, and fire essentials. Fire is also used as part of bushcraft skills and cooking in the book. I can't wait to make an ember bowl! 9 years and up



They Hold the Line: Wildfires, Wildlands, and the Firefighters Who Brave Them by Dan Paley

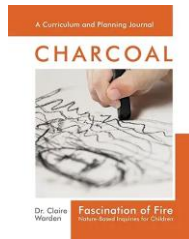
This book is rich with vocabulary, technical aspects of firefighters, and supportive illustrations. The text can be read on many levels, such as a simple story with more detailed insets. The book highlights the impact on fleeing animals, The backmatter looks at historical and newer approaches to wildfire management. Additionally, the book introduces the firefighters, their protective gear, and general fire safety. Ages 7-10.



The Glorious Forest that Fire Built by Ginny Neil

While fire can be very devastating, this book recaps how fire benefits some forests through fire ecology, such as nutrient recycling, new growth, survival of specific species, managing pests and diseases, creation of habitat, and preventing larger fires. The book shows forest succession after a fire. Suggested ages 6-9.

Additional Resources



Charcoal: Fascination of Fire by Dr. Claire Warden

This curriculum and planning journal introduces the reader to charcoal, considering possibilities in our spaces, curricular links, daily planning, developing skills, and benefit risk assessments. I love her mind maps, journal prompts and reflections, photos, and options for making and using charcoal. There are two versions of this—the newer one is updated and more of a workbook, though there is merit in both.

Zaske, S. (2017, Feb. 23). Teaching children to play with fire. *The New York Times*.

Zaske contrasts the experiences of her children in Germany learning about fire interactions versus the American experience that largely prohibits children lighting a candle or building a fire. She advocates that teaching children to explore fire in a supervised manner helps demystify the allure of fire while providing children with practical skills for fire safety.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/23/well/family/teaching-children-to-play-with-fire.html>

Rosin, H. (2014, March 19). The overprotected kid. *The Atlantic*, 19.

Rosin questions trends in society that limit opportunities for children to engage in risk. While looking at the topic of shielding children in general, she shares examples of fire play with children at The Land, an adventure playground in the UK; benefits of engaging with fire; and potential risks. Find a PDF on Google Scholar.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/04/hey-parents-leave-those-kids-alone/358631/>

Embracing Fire as a Loose Parts podcast episode by Loose Parts Nature Play

This podcast episode shares experiences and considerations around the possibility of fire as a loose part, drawing on experiences with creating small individual fires and professional development for educators with fire as a loose part. Safety considerations and resources are shared.

<https://loosepartsnatureplay.libsyn.com/embracing-fire-as-a-loose-part>

Additional resources and handout:

<https://loosepartsnatureplay.org/2023/07/27/embracing-fire-as-a-loose-part/>

Sample Benefit Risk Assessments

Into the Woods Outdoor Nursery: Use of Fire Risk Assessment

<https://www.intothewoodsnursery.co.uk/assets/risk-assessment---fire.pdf>

The Ace Centre Forest Friday Risk Benefits

<https://www.ace-chipping-norton.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Risk-Benefit-Assessment-Fires-for-NS.pdf>

Risk Benefit Assessment: Fire skills session by Tim Gill

<https://rethinkingchildhood.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/woodcraft-fire-rba.pdf>

Outsideplay.org

While fire play is not directly addressed in this quality resource for educators, many supporting behaviors are included in this outside play tool for teachers. Broken into chunks of usable information, the website gives insight, reflection, and materials to take your students outside. Check out the section on risky play! <https://www.outsideplay.org/app/learning-hub>

Gull, C., Goldstein, S. L., & Rosengarten, T. (2025, this issue). Nature-based Early Childhood Educator's Perspectives on Embracing Fire as a Loose Part. *International Journal of Early Childhood Environmental Education*.

In this study, we explore fire as a loose part, why educators allow fire play or not, and safety measures around children's fire interactions. Ultimately, we found that educators who allow fire play do so to encourage safety. These children also get more practical experience interacting with fire and build safety skills beyond stop, drop, and roll. Read it in this issue of IJEECE!

Fessler, D. (2006). A burning desire: steps toward an evolutionary psychology of fire learning. *Journal of Cognition and Culture*, 6(3-4), 429-451.

I am not sure how we missed this as part of our fire play research; however, Fessler does a deep dive into fire play by children, reviewing ethnographic research about cultures where children are exposed to fire more as part of their daily lives. While published in 2006, he recognizes the high contrast between fire in western culture where it is largely seen as decorative and areas where fire is utilitarian. He creates a table of the results of his survey looking at multiple cultures across the world and findings around serious burns, when fire interaction initially occurs, gender nuances, fire as potential entertainment, when children are competent with fire, and how children learn about fire. An interesting point includes how fire is often not explicitly taught in societies that use fire as a utilitarian approach.

<https://www.danielmfessler.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Fessler-2006-Burning-Desire.pdf>



Elemental, Disney and Pixar Movie, 2023

While not explicitly connected to children playing with fire, I laughed and felt all the emotions in this film. This animated movie follows the main character, Ember, who grows up in the family store, "The Fireplace". While the main four elements are highlighted, fire is the main focus through the cultural identity of the fire community, discrimination in a world not meant to accommodate fire, Ember's fiery personality, and the concept of playing with fire as opposites attract when Ember develops feelings for someone from the water community. Watch the credits—there are plenty of fire puns riddled throughout.