

Shadow Play

My name is Abigail Horn, I'm an artist/educator and maker and I work as an atelierista for Pumpkin Patch Nursery. I wanted to share some activities and tips from our pre-school atelier with the parents who are at home with under 5's at the moment, starting with **The Magic of Making Shadows**

Setting Up



It's easy to rig up a shadow play area at home, you just need a normal table/ desk lamp and something to project on to such as a blank wall, a sheet, curtain or piece of paper. Remember the darker the room the stronger the shadows so close curtains or blinds and choose your time of day wisely. Be mindful of hazardous cables, run them under tables or tape them down if necessary. If you have other light sources in your home such as a projector or other suitable screens, go for it. It's a chance for you to get creative if you want to, or keep it simple if you don't have a lot of time.

What next?

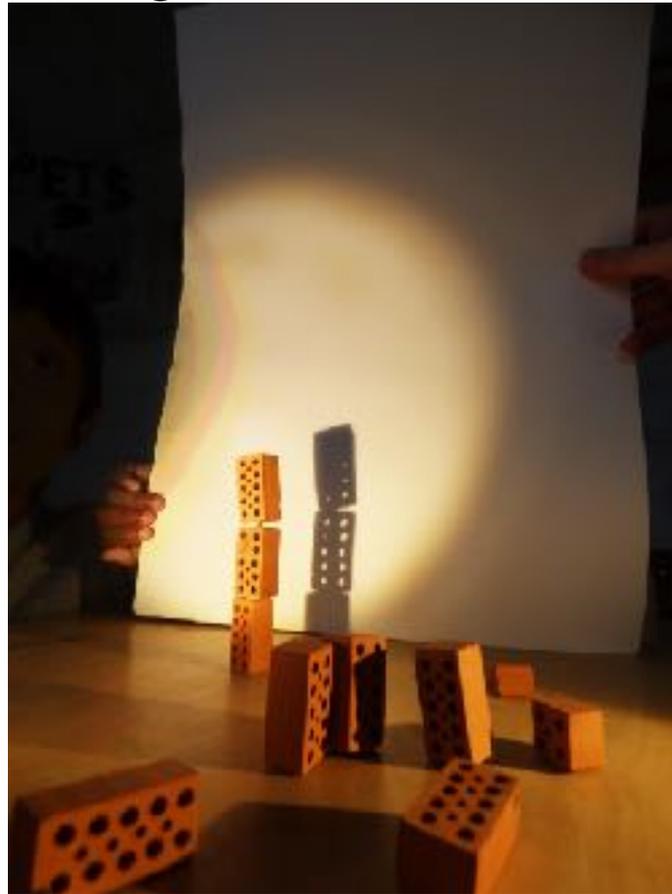
It really depends on the age of the child and what they are interested in. The following are suggestions for starting points, you can develop and tailor this activity to suit you and your child. These activities are suitable for children age 18 months to 8 years if you adapt them accordingly.

Bodies



No other equipment needed. Your child might investigate the basic science of light; exploring how you can block the light with your body to make shadows and that moving can make bigger and smaller shadows. They might want to take a more dramatic approach; using their shadows to make characters and stories or dances. You could extend this approach by adding sounds and music. There is a lot of scope here without adding any extra resources. It's a great place to start.

Building



Materials for building can range from building blocks to junk from the recycling box, loose parts such as beach stones, furniture and cushions or toys. These can be used to make structures and scenes that cast wonderful shadows. You don't necessarily need any fancy blocks for this activity, you can probably find some great stuff to use around the house. (Obviously keep in mind the safety aspects i.e. avoid small parts if they present a choke hazard for under 3s.) There is great scope for learning here, from construction skills to imaginative play. Your shadow city might be an exploration of balance, a setting for a story or both. It might not be a building at all, your child might choose to explore biology and make a horse. Keep the exploration open-ended rather than working to a specific goal, see what happens and support it. So if your child is making a horse, you

can examine a toy horse with them or find pictures and videos on google to help understand form and structure...you get the idea.

Drawing



Shadow play can be a great way to explore art and craft. Shapes or pictures cut from paper or card can make beautiful scenes and puppets. If your child is very young but can draw or make marks you can help them cut their shapes out, if they are older they can do their own cutting and maybe work out ways to make scenes stand up or puppets articulate. If you're the type to save coloured cellophane from chocolates, now is the perfect time to get them out.

That's it really. I hope it makes some sense. I'll leave you with a few tips that can help this kind of activity or 'provocation' be successful and meaningful.

- Try and provide your activity without expecting your child to access it in any particular 'right' or 'wrong' way. Rather than thinking "I will provide junk for a junk model shadow city building activity so my child can learn construction skills" just draw the curtains and set up the junk, screen and light and see what happens. If you are doing the activity with your child, just go with what they do, chat to them and tune into their thoughts. You might find you do go down the construction route or maybe a completely different one such as story making. The point is you'll have gone there together with the child's interest inspiring the learning and creating questions you can answer by exploring together.
 - Document what is happening. Take some pictures, write down any questions they ask or interesting things that they say, invite your child to photograph, draw and discuss what they have done. This will help you have ideas on how to develop the activity and deepen the learning. Don't think of it as a one-off activity so much as the start of an investigation that might last a couple of days or a few weeks.
 - Set the activity up neatly so it looks inviting and organised. Children are much more responsive to a pleasing and accessible activity. It doesn't have to take long or be perfect but materials organized into bowls, boxes or even stacks provides a visual clarity which really can make all the difference. If you can, try and 'reset' occasionally by tidying anything unused back into its place. Obviously if in doubt, check it really is unused rather than a precious sculpture.
- Thanks for reading. I'm working from home so have a little time to answer any questions and am open to feedback as haven't really blogged before. Good luck and have fun!

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