

mobilejunkandnatureplayground

I'm dead! but I got better (kindy kids and games of death)

JULY 4, 2022 ~ MR GLENN. ~ LEAVE A COMMENT



(<https://mobilejunkandnatureplayground.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/grave.jpg>)

Anyone who has been near kids while they play have witnessed games that have a death theme about them. Whether its 'cops and robbers', Zombies, or even Barbies, kids will eventually explore the idea of death. At one site I worked at a girl was killed (Pretend!!!) and she fell to the ground and didn't move. She stayed there for around 5 minutes (lucky I was a part of the play, so I didn't freak out and ring an ambulance). She was 5 and her understanding was, when you die you stay dead. Most of her friends got better after they died so they could keep playing. Another group of kids created an elaborate graveyard for rain moths. It had 'stones' (headstones), crosses and you had to say stories when you buried them.

I was so curious about what was going on in their heads. I already knew kindy kids didn't have a mature understanding of death. The most common observation was, they thought death wasn't permanent. I buried (no pun intended) my head into a pile of papers and books and discovered lots of fascinating info.

Firstly, the research has divided the concept of death into 5 groups:

- Irreversibility
- Universality
- non-functionality
- personal
- mortality
- causality
- Much research posits, these steps come in stages, however the findings vary so much on the order that you would have to think it depends on the child's personal world understanding. Some believe it's related to Piagetian stages and pre-operational children cannot grasp certain concepts like 'forever'. Others follow a

socio-cultural theory and believe cultural experiences accelerate understanding. Research did find, children in war torn countries have an understanding of death that is more advanced than the more peaceful countries. Many studies looked at children's understanding of non-functionality (when your dead everything stops). Many understood you stop breathing, your heart stops, and you don't do the Michael Jackson thriller dance, however many thought you still think, you still get hungry and you might get cold if you are left outside (many kids bury animals with food treats or blankets). The concept of universality comes fairly early. Kids understand that everything living will die, and yet the understanding of personal mortality can sometimes come much later. Kindy kids understanding of causality is nearly always related to violence, such as monster attacks, guns or accidents.

Irreversibility is a tough one to grasp as the concept of forever is too abstract for the preoperational children's concrete way of thinking. With that being said, they will invent their own version of what forever looks like, and this understanding will be the groundwork for what will help them understand the real concept when they are older (some philosophers feel even the adult brain is incapable of understanding forever).

Nearly all the research found, instead of children getting worried about the many different concepts of death, children get anxieties about the unknown. They found in environments where death is a taboo subject the children harbor many fears about death, yet in environments where open discussions on all aspects are examined, children are more ready for when death comes a knocking. On my travels I have noticed how diverse educator's reactions are to kids playing death games. Some believe the innocence of childhood should be preserved and death games should be discouraged, some are so death adverse they retreat from the concept, yet others believe, to quote Kastenbaum and Costa, "mastery of the concept of death is related to mastery of the concept of life". Play is how kids master life.

Many researchers believe children have the right to know and talk about death. Death is a topic that interests children irrelevant of their stages of development. Therefore, it is so important to let children play death games. If you observe children playing death games, it is often supported by much discussion. The girl that stayed dead for a long time at the start of my rant had a go at all the others that only stayed dead long enough to hit the ground. Forever was mentioned. When I saw a group bury a dead parrot, arguments broke out when some wanted to dig it up to check if it was better (he's just sleeping! No he's not! e's shuffled off 'is mortal coil). Socially they nut out the ideas of death and share all they know and think about the subject. They debate whether the tree branch is dead, can a rock die or where is grandmother now. They create understandings they will then build upon to become what is considered a mature understanding of death.

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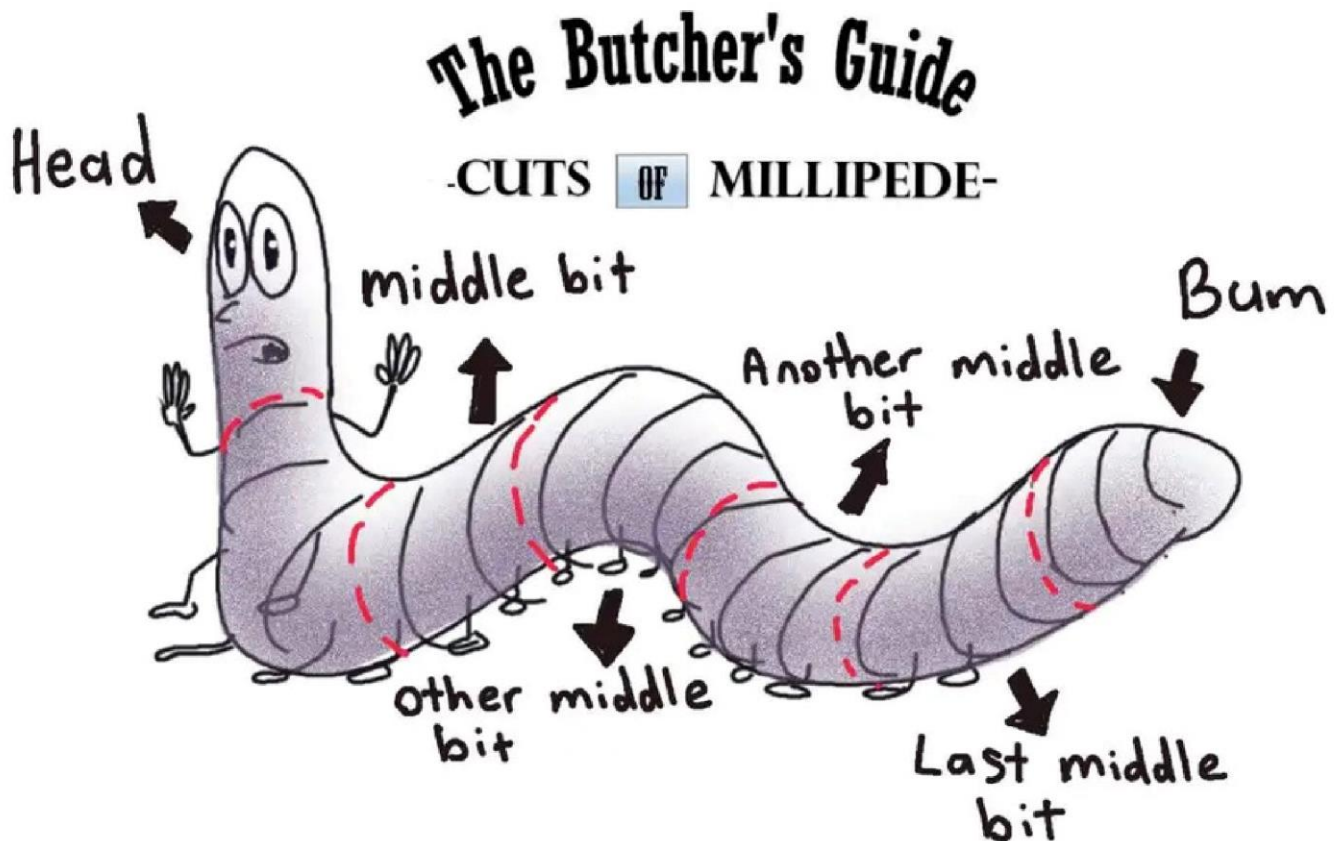
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Sacrificial millipedes and a gecko's tail.

MAY 4, 2021 ~ [MR GLENN.](#) ~ [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)



(<https://mobilejunkandnatureplayground.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/sacrafice.jpg>) This statement sounds cruel. Some animals die for the Early years learning cause. When I see a group of 4-year-olds playing with a millipede, I know it will end bad for the millipede. Think bugs bunny, and Steinbeck's "Of mice and men" (I will pat him and stroke him and pat him and stroke him). One kid pulled a millipede in half and noticed both halves were still alive (for now). Another found earwigs were full of juice, and another pulled shells off snails. Kids learn about death, like they learn about everything. In tiny steps built on previous experiences. Technically most 4-year-olds can't even understand the concept of permanent. "He's dead...why has he stopped moving?"

I struggle with this quandary. I've been a vegetarian for over 30 years. However, I swat flies, and mozzies, and feed snails and earwigs to my poultry. I have sort of accepted that millipedes, snails, and earwigs are fair game when it comes to learning. My personal line is drawn at spiders, beneficial garden insects, reptiles, and amphibians (in fact all animals that aren't Millipedes earwigs and snails). Hopefully by the time they get to Guinea pigs, puppies, and monkeys they will have constructed behaviours that are courteous and respectful towards life (with our support).

The other day a group of kids found a gecko. They were very careful. They seemed to know how to handle it and were showing great respect. At one stage it jumped off a kid's hands and another kid who had never met a

gecko before picked it up. By the tail. She learnt something that day that the other kids already knew. They drop their tails. She screamed in horror. The others explained that, that is what they do. They explained it was a defence mechanism. They explained how a predator would grab the tail and run off with its prize while the gecko snuck away. She told her grandmother about the ordeal, and the grandmother fondly recounted the first time she discovered that fact firsthand.

I don't endorse wanton cruelty. However, I have accepted that some animals must die, and some lizards must lose their tails. If I were a lizard, I would rather lose my tail to a human puppy, who will grow up to be a protector of the environment, than a hungry spoggie looking for a quick snack.

Tracking a Woozle

MARCH 21, 2021 MARCH 21, 2021 ~ MR GLENN. ~ LEAVE A COMMENT



<https://mobilejunkandnatureplayground.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/heffalumpme.jpg>

apologies to

E.H.

Shepard

Firstly, apologies to E.H. Shepard for bludgeoning his art. In A.A. Milne's story, Pooh and Piglet go tracking a Woozle. A couple of cool things about Pooh tracking is, he knows he is tracking something, but he has no idea what it is until he finds it, and as he and Piglet are tracking, the discoveries lead to a grand story of hostile animals and grandfathers.

For a while I felt that tracking should be taken seriously. It's been in our DNA for 100,000 years. When I found a track, I wanted to be able to identify the species, what foot it favoured (and why), where it was going, and what venues it spent the last fourteen days at. Our society lost that ability to track a long time ago. I knew I was no expert, so how could I possibly teach children about tracking.

Well I didn't worry about teaching tracking. Instead, every time I went out bush, I started following tracks. A hardened emu track in some clay, a snake trail in course river sand, Kangaroo tracks along their kangaroo roads, and my friend as he stumbles through the sand dunes at night.

I once left a beer somewhere in the bush, so I followed my distinctive, ripple soul prints all the way back to it. Rarely does my tracking expeditions ever turn up a living animal. I have pushed the need for identification, reason, and shoe size out of my mind and taken on a more of a 'bear with little brain' Pooh approach. I know I'm tracking something, and I know it will lead to a great story. The other day, I saw some large bird tracks. The bird was running. It could have been one of those large brown Gulls. Next to it was a thousand tiny footprints, and a tail print. A mouse or a small lizard. The track ran parallel to the running bird. Tiny scurry trail vanishes, bird track takes a couple of more steps before you see the take off track. Fresh tracks, maybe hours old. Sometime last night, a mouse lost a race in the sand dunes. My condolences go out to your grieving family little mouse (But hey... That's nature).

I still don't teach children tracking, however if I am working with a bunch of kids, and I notice some tracks in the sandpit, then you can forget muddy play, or cubby climbing, I'm going tracking, and if you want to tag along and join me, that's fine. We may not find a Woozle but we will make a discovery.

Connecting nature to yourself.

FEBRUARY 11, 2021 ~ [MR GLENN.](#) ~ [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)



https://mobilejunkandnatureplayground.wordpress.com/wpcontent/uploads/2021/02/img_20210211_072512977.jpg

Jon Young (8 shields nature connection pioneer), talked about connecting nature to some of your stories that you tell kids. An example that I did was I converted a story about smashing into a kangaroo on my motorbike, into a story about kangaroo roads. Originally the story focused on blood and guts and protective clothing, however, once I looked at the story from a nature perspective, the focus shifted to the time of night kangaroos are active, how kangaroos move through the bush (kangaroo roads) and the lack of awareness myself and others have of their road system. The content is still much the same, however the emphasis is on the nature part.

This idea of attaching nature to an old well used story is almost an analogy for attaching nature to an old well used passion, and for me that is motorcycles. I love nature, and I love riding. These days, instead of seeing them as separate passions (and in some people's eyes conflicting passions) I have connected them. Once I would ride to a capital city (see rock bands, drink beer), now I ride to beautiful natural environments, get off my bike and explore (and sometimes drink beer). The beauty of a bike is you are more connected to the environment than you are in a car. You feel the heat, the cold, the bugs. You are more aware of the road conditions, and weather, you can smell a dead kangaroo, or lemon gum as you pass it. The picture in this post shows a very steep hill, made of lots of pointy rocks. Riding my bike up that hill, 100% connected me with the geology of the hill. After 10 minutes I felt like I had run a marathon and crammed for a 3-hour exam on neuroscience. My mind total absorbed the rock formations, patterns, and topography as if my life counted on it (it did).

If I go for a walk, I like to walk in nature, if I write music, I am fed by nature, if I need to chill, I will chill in nature. I have connected nature to most things I do in my life. It is just natural then to connect nature to my

pedagogy. If you are on the pathway to deepening your nature pedagogy, a good start may be to start connecting nature to everything else you do, then a nature driven pedagogy comes more naturally. 'Walking the walk', I guess.

Fort wars and trading post.

SEPTEMBER 30, 2020 ~ [MR GLENN.](#) ~ [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)



I while back I wrote a blog about fort wars. Here is a quick recount;

Kids build cubbies

Resources run out

Kids steal other's resources

All hell breaks loose, and a war starts.

Kids have a great time, until it gets too real.

A magna carta is designed

Peace is reached and society lives in harmony.

Most groups can pull this off in four hours (humanity still can't pull it off).

Today at a VAC program it evolved differently. First, they built cubbies. Then they ran out of resources. Then a kid tried to steal another fort's stick. He was caught, and instead of bleating about not sharing and unfairness, he tried to negotiate for the resource. He offered a tyre for the stick. An agreement was made, and a transaction was peacefully passed.

The original thief enjoyed this feeling. He obtained a resource through bargaining rather than conflict. (maybe he thought 'what a model citizen I am'). He came back with a few more tires and asked for more sticks." No worries" said the trader. An exchange was made. This went on for around 10 minutes. One notable exchange was when a crate was exchanged for two sticks. A little later the original thief rethought the deal and decided

he wanted the crate back. After all, there was 300 sticks and only three crates. The reformed thief returned to the trader and said I would like to buy my crate back for two sticks. The trader's partner (a sly businessman) said it is worth 8 sticks. "but you only paid 2 sticks for it" the dejected soon-to-be-thief-again responded. "We have plenty of sticks", said the traders. We only have one crate.

The concept of supply and demand is starting to hit home for all involved. Something is only worth as much as someone is willing to pay for it. And if someone realises there is a lot of one thing, and a very limited supply of another then the value is reflected in that.

A light bulb went off in the head of the traders. They had traded so many resources, they had quite the bank. They could now dictate trade terms. By now, many other corporations had joined this trading system. Sometimes the terms were disputed other times they were accepted. The fort had now morphed into a trading post. Soldiers were no longer needed to guard, because the thieves had become customers. Instead of sentry's, it had front counter staff. They would see a client come with something to trade then phone head office (using a much-prized irrigation pipe telephone) and heads office (a group of kids huddled in a dark cubby) would discuss what that was worth.

First offers were nearly always dismissed. Hagglng was the norm. Before long, most kids started to understand how to trade commodities. Things of worth, like blue barrels, cost a lot, and things of little use, like short sticks, were not worth much at all. At one stage the original traders created bitcoins. They found a large stack of rocks, hid them in their cubby, and peppered them out in small amounts to make them seem valuable. To start off, one stick was worth 5 rocks. However, they flooded the market, and soon they couldn't give the rocks away.

So a 4 hour session of unstructured free play, that looked like cubby building, to the untrained eye, was delivering some unbelievable commerce and marketing learning. Imagine how these experiences will inform their future understandings on how the real-world works.

Is there anything a stick can't teach us?

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