PRACTICAL WAYS TO CREATE MEANING

Using Creativity, Cookies & Conversations to Build Relationships

**Time:** 30 minutes. With extension: 45-50 minutes.

**Audience:** Children ages 5-11 with adults (parents, grandparents, etc.). Great as a library or nature center program, or as a school activity just prior to Mother’s or Father’s Day, Valentine’s Day or other holidays. Also a great activity to do at holiday arts and crafts fairs or congregational fairs.

**Preparation:**
2) Purchase or make sugar cookies, unfrosted, and purchase or make frosting in different colors. Place the frostings in multiple, smaller containers so participants can decorate cookies simultaneously.
3) Wet washcloths;
4) Make photocopies of Attachment A and cut in half;
5) Set up computer, projector and screen and test run the youtube video, Happiness Store, found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-otqBgCYyc. It is often important to run the video one time before a presentation, and then keep the laptop on, so the video is downloaded to the memory of the laptop. This will allow it to run smoothly.

**Extension preparation:**
1) Make several sample gift bags.
2) Depending on the number of participants expected at this activity, it will be helpful to have at least two adult leaders, one to staff each of the stations, or recruit adult participants to assist.

**Supplies needed:**
Computer, projector and screen or white wall; Clean tables as work surfaces for frosting cookies, Sugar cookies and several colors of frostings; napkins; 10-20 frosting knives, depending on the number of participants; copies of Attachment A for all adults; waxed paper to wrap decorated cookies; plenty of damp washcloths.

**Supplies needed for extension activity:**
Tables and chairs as work surfaces. (If children are 7 or under, consider short tables to make it easier for kids to work.)
Used sacks—small and large. If you want participants to put their cookies in the gift bags they make, bring enough small bags for everyone in attendance to decorate. Also bring markers and crayons, used greeting cards, pine cones, dried flowers, cloth scraps, lace scraps, pinking shears, construction paper, glue, glue gun, paper punches, blunt scissors, twine, cord or ribbon, and several sample, completed gift bags. Washcloths to clean gluey hands.

**Learning objectives:** At the conclusion of your session, participants will be able to say: *I can...*

- **Give a gift of my time to nurture relationships and make holidays more meaningful.**
- **Extension:** Make a gift bag from used materials.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-activity</th>
<th>Before the activity begins, ask the adults/children to sit with each other so they can talk to each other during parts of the activity.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 3 min.       | **Welcome**
Welcome participants and introduce yourself. Show the 2-minute PBS Happiness Store video found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-otqBgCYyc and explain that this video reminds us that quality matters far more than quantity.

Explain to audience: This session is part of a state Reclaim Your Holidays initiative, a program of the University of Northern Iowa Center for Energy and Environmental Education in partnership with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Two grant programs in Iowa -- the Resource Enhancement and Protection Act Conservation Education Fund and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Solid...
Waste Alternatives Program -- have provided support for this project. You can find out more about this initiative, and get many more ideas for reclaiming holidays and celebrations, at ReclaimYourHolidays.org.

**6-7 min.**

**Story time: The Gift of Nothing**

Ask children to talk with their adult friend about what they discovered and/or think is the message of the story. Give them one minute to visit. Then, as a large group, ask them to share what they discussed.

Conclude that the book reminds us of the value of relationships and shared experiences, and that they are often more meaningful than “stuff.” Explain that the activity they will do today is one way to give gifts of their time to others.

**15-17 min.**

**Cookie Decorating**
Invite participants to gather around one or more tables to decorate sugar cookies together as a “gift of experience.” Explain that cookie decorating with friends or family is a gift in and of itself. Explain that when our money is invested in experiences the thrill stays with us longer than when our money is spent buying products, according to a study from Cornell University ([http://bit.ly/ch1Wi8](http://bit.ly/ch1Wi8)).

During this exercise, ask participants to, informally, introduce themselves to others in the group, and share what they love about the holidays…especially what experiences they love to share. Encourage adults and children to talk to one another about this same topic.

After everyone is done decorating and eating a cookie or two, invite them back to their seats.

**1 min.**

**Places to Go for More Information and Conclusion**
Conclude by encouraging participants to check out the website (ReclaimYourHolidays.org) where they can find many creative and experiential gift ideas, as well as ideas for entertaining. They can also find resources to help them save money and live more sustainably. Several resources provide how-tos on communicating effectively with friends and families about gift-giving and other challenging issues that sometimes crop up during the holiday season or at celebrations.

Thank participants for engaging in the session; invite them to continue thinking about how they can give gifts of their time to nurture relationships and make holidays more meaningful.

**15-17 min.**

**Optional Extension: Make a Gift Bag (do in conjunction with Cookie Decorating, with two stations)**
Note: This extension may be particularly appropriate just before Mother’s or Father’s Day or Valentine’s Day. The adult can help the child, if needed, make the cookie gift bag and give the cookies to a mother, father or other significant person in the child’s life.

Tell the group they will have about 30-35 minutes to do two different activities. Assign half of the group to begin at the Make a Gift Bag station and the other half to go to the Cookie Decorating station. Tell those frosting cookies to frost and eat a cookie or two, and frost another cookie to give away as a gift in the gift bag they will create at the other station. Ask each adult/child pair to help themselves to four to six cookies total, and to use the waxed paper to wrap their “gift” cookie. (See above under “Cookie Decorating” for additional instructions.)

Before the groups go to the stations, distribute copies of the handout, Directions for creating a gift bag from used materials (Attachment A), to those in the gift bag group. Have more copies to distribute when groups change stations.

After the groups divide, provide further guidance to those making gift bags or have a volunteer at this station to help participants with their gift bags. Run through the directions, show all of the supplies, and show them sample gift bags and how they were constructed. Ask adults and children to work together to make one or two gift bags out of used materials. Adults might need to help younger children with this activity, while adults and older children may each want to make a gift bag.

When they are done making one or two gift bags (about 15 minutes) and/or done decorating...
cookies, they may go to the other table and do the other activity then put their “gift” cookie in the homemade gift bag.

Have copies of seasonal children’s books on hand for adults and children to read, if they complete the activities early.

Attachment A—see next page for copies of Directions for creating a gift bag from used materials. There are two copies per page. If you anticipate reaching 20 adults, make 10 copies of the handout and cut in two.
**Directions for creating a gift bag from used materials**

You can recycle all types of sacks and make gift bags, which can be used time and again.

If a shopping bag (show a sample) has pictures or print on it, cover the print with construction paper or sturdy scraps of fabric. Then, you can glue pictures, wallpaper or old greeting cards on the bag. If you use fabric, you might cut the fabric with pinking shears. Leftover trim and ribbon can be used to make designs. Foil-lined envelopes can be used to make stars and other decorations. Also think about buttons, lace, dried flowers, pine cones and other materials. Reuse tissue paper from shoe boxes or clothing packaging to line the sacks.

To make a gift bag with handles from a used sack, cut the sack to the height size you want plus a little extra to allow for a “hem.” For small gift bags, a three-quarters-inch hem is sufficient, but for a large bag, a two- to three-inch hem adds stability. Fold over the top and cut (or punch?) small holes only on the inside flap where you can attach handles.

To make sturdy handles, use twine, cord or ribbon. Cut the handle material to the proper length, insert the ends through the holes and use a glue gun to glue the handles between the flap and inside of the bag. You can also use twisted paper (don't untwist it), cut to the proper length.