HUNGRY CATERPILLAR TEACHES NUTRITION

The philosophy for including science in the early childhood program flows from the human need to know. You can help young children know the world they live in by organizing materials so they can discover information through their own involvement. I find puppets an effective way to introduce many concepts to my class of three and four year olds.

One puppet, a caterpillar made from an old sock, is used to introduce the four food groups. Before beginning the lesson assemble these materials:

- *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, a book by Eric Cole
- a sock caterpillar puppet (I made mine.)
- a few plastic food replicas
- empty containers of basic foods (cans, boxes, bottles, etc.)
- four grocery sacks

Mark the grocery sacks with individual labels and pictures corresponding to the food groups. There should be a milk group sack, a protein group sack, a vegetable and fruit group sack, and a bread and cereal group sack.

Begin by reading *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* to the children. Review the junk foods and healthy foods mentioned in the story. Then, have the caterpillar puppet climb out of the first grocery sack struggling with a carton of milk in his mouth. He tells the teacher he's hungry but he knows cupcakes and suckers taste good although they don't help him grow strong and healthy. However, if he just drinks milk he'll still be hungry. What should he do?

The teacher compliments the caterpillar for what he already knows adding that food from four different food groups, working together, is needed to keep him healthy, strong, and growing. Slowly describe the nature and function of the foods in each group. As your lesson progresses, the hungry caterpillar finds and removes food replicas from each of the bags. (In general, the milk group builds muscle, bones, and teeth, and supplies energy; the protein group builds muscle, makes healthy blood, and supplies energy; the bread and cereal group keeps our bodies working well and also supplies energy; the vegetable and fruit group helps us stay healthy and keeps our bodies working well.)

Let each child choose a food replica and place it back in the proper sack. Then, ask for help in choosing a balanced lunch menu for the hungry caterpillar. You can turn this into a long term project where you plan a lunch in the classroom. This could involve a trip to the grocery store, food preparation, and practice in serving food. You can follow up by having the children choose pictures for a bulletin board display of what they have classified as healthy foods and junk foods.

I have developed this lesson and others from ideas found in *Science Experiences for the Early Childhood Years*, 3rd edition, by Jean Harlan.

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