



The Magic of Mud



The Magic of Mud

*“Happy hearts and happy faces, Happy play in grassy places –
That was how, in ancient ages, Children grew to kings and sages.”*

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Mud play is fun and a source of childhood joy. Making mud pies, splashing in puddles, rolling down hills and exploring slippery creek beds are iconic images of childhood. These experiences are thrilling, fun and healthy too. We need to ensure that today's children experience these rights of passage firsthand.

Mud provides an ideal platform for children to immerse themselves in one of nature's finest elements and in doing so build a life-long connection to the natural

world. Nurturing this connection in children is vital as it builds values associated with empathy, nurture, love, and a broader sense of belonging.

When considering children's learning and development, mud and clay serve as a wonderful resource for harnessing children's capacity for resourcefulness, inventiveness and creativity. It serves as a great open ended, sustainable and ever-changing resource.

Benefits of mud play

- Supports the development of fine and gross motor skills
- Calms anxious or frustrated children
- Provides a multisensory experience
- Is perfect for children to learn about texture
- Facilitates a connection with the very 'real' and imperfect natural world
- Is cost effective, easy to source and fun to collect
- Encourages 'scientific thinking' and problem solving
- Supports the release of serotonin
- Allows children to focus on process, rather than product.
- Supports risk taking
- Encourages unstructured play
- Provides a platform for many feelings to be experienced through play – sometimes all at the same time; wonder, trepidation, delight, joy, happiness



TEACHING AND LEARNING with Mud

“We are surrounded by nature. We are part of nature. The development of a child has always been correlated with Mother Nature and as individuals we have to make them acquainted with nature. Soil is home to all creatures.”

BISHNU BHATTA

History behind International Mud Day

International Mud Day was born from a meeting in 2009 between Gillian McAuliffe of Australia and Bishnu Bhatta from Nepal. The collaboration that followed has inspired and supported communities, educators and children across the world to celebrate International Mud Day on 29 June with ‘all things mud’ on the agenda.

Planning a celebration for International Mud Day provides a great starting point to learn about the value and benefits of mud. It also serves as the perfect platform to initiate conversations with children, parents and colleagues about connecting with the earth underfoot and all around.

Read more about the history of International Mud Day [here](#).

Setting up for mud play / International Mud Day

Educate and communicate - ensure everyone is well aware of the what, why and how behind any Mud Day celebration or planned learning activity. It is important to communicate the benefits of muddy learning with site leadership, governing councils, teachers, ground staff, parents and children.

Spread the good news - mud play creates mess, but the mess is worth it when considering the benefits. Communicate these benefits and share the learning intentions.

Set up for success - communicate routines and expectations to all before, during, and after mud play. This includes setting up areas for washing equipment and establishing routines of children washing equipment as part of the activity.

Dress for success - Waterproof layers, old clothing and gumboots are always a good start. A spare set of clothes is also a handy addition.

Tip: Ensure all mud and soil has been deemed safe for use with children.

Further Resources

NPSA Dirt Plus Water Fact Sheet

[NPQLD DIY Nature Play Mud Pits 101](#)

[The Wonder of Mud: Reflections from Nepal by Bishnu Bhatta and Australia Gillian McAuliffe](#) In NACC Newsletter March/April 2010



TEACHING AND LEARNING with Mud

All in a name

Mud, clay, soil, loam or silt; the very beginnings of what mud actually is lies within the murky waters of these definitions. There are wonderful learning opportunities to springboard from an investigation into mud.

Investigation and inquiry

There are multiple opportunities for open-ended investigation. These include the formation of mud, health benefits of soil, use of clay and mud in cultures world-wide, properties of clay and loam and geography and geological investigations.

A springboard into learning

It is important to have a clear understanding of how the (potentially) messy world of mud supports curriculum learning and supports a robust, intentional teaching program. Learning experiences may be as open-ended as allowing children to explore a muddy puddle after rain, recording their wonderings and following the ensuing line of inquiry or facilitating a variety of mud-related provocations and curriculum linked activities.

A starting point for useful resources

- Tarps
- Buckets
- Soil
- Wheelbarrows
- Tubs of various sizes
- Trestle tables
- Old pots and pans
- Old kitchen utensils
- Ice cream scoops, whisks and eggbeaters
- Watering cans
- Small loose parts
- Paint brushes
- Hand shovels
- Old Tins and baking dishes
- Water (for play and cleaning up)
- Old cloths or tea towels for cleaning up

Practical Resources

[The Muddy Faces Outdoor Hub](#) contains a broad range of resources including guidebooks, printable materials and more.

Explore the ancient [Japanese art of making a shiny mud ball](#) – a Hikaru Dorodango with the team at Muddy Faces UK

Learn more about Professor Fumio Kayo and Dorodango's in this article ["Kyoto Professor Taps into the Essence of Play"](#) (October 5, 2001)

A [mud brochure](#) created by Infinite playgrounds



50+ learning inspired
activities to explore
and connect with mud



English

MASTERCHEF MUD KITCHEN

Create a class MasterChef challenge with mud cakes and other mud delicacies to engage students in the process of creating, persuasively presenting and then judging the creations.

WRITE MESSAGES IN MUD

Research the world of mark making in mud and clay to communicate. How have ancient cultures used this and how is it used today?

MAKE A MUD STEW

Read 'Wombat Stew' by Mem Fox and then set about creating your own delicious mud stew. Be sure to add a mix of natural ingredients to your stew including plenty of twigs and leaves, gums nuts and flowers.

MUD PIES

Read 'Mud Pies and Other Recipes' by Marjorie Winslow and bake your own delicious mud pie from dirt, water, flowers, grass, stones, bark, and your own secret ingredient. Write down and record a list of ingredients and steps so that your parents can follow the recipe.

MUD ICE CREAMERY

Create your own mud ice creamery and collate mud ice cream recipes into the class cookbook.

A focus on descriptive language, metaphor or rhyming couplets ensures differentiation.

CREATE A MUD RECIPE BOOK

Start a class mud recipe cookbook including the recipe for mud stew, mud pies and mud cakes. Be sure to include the complete list of ingredients and a procedure with steps for making each recipe.

MUD A-Z

Create an A-Z of mud facts and play ideas. Present it as a poster with positive messages and practical ideas about mud play to share with others.

SIGN IT WITH MUD

An artist always signs their artwork. Have children "sign" their art with a mud handprint.



Maths

MEASURING WITH MUD

Collect recycled materials and explore the concept of capacity and volume. Explore standard and non-standard units of measurement and compare results on a chart.

MUD EVENT MANAGEMENT

Estimate and then calculate a Mud Day budget including shipping methods, labour and clean up costs. Discuss ways of putting the mud to good use after Mud Day.

ADD SOIL TO TRAYS OF DIFFERENT SHAPES AND SIZES

What happens to different mixtures as you play?
What do they look like as the dry out?

INTRODUCE MEASURING SCALES INTO PLAY SPACES

Place measuring scales in an outdoor area to test out the weight of wet and dry soil – explore what happens to the weight of each as it dries.

SYMMETRICAL SCULPTURES

Create a symmetrical sculpture with mud and small loose parts.

TIME BY THE RIVER

Create a muddy river with a small tarp or aluminium foil and time the passage of boats downstream.

MUD BRICK MAKING

A group project-based Inquiry - calculate materials to make your own mud brick structure on school grounds. Begin with model sized building to scale; discuss geometry used for supports, angles, flat versus pitched roof etc.

MUD KITCHENS

Create a mud kitchen and introduce standard units of measurement with cups, jugs, beakers and spoons for play and exploration.



The Arts - Visual Arts

MUD CLAY ARTWORK

Explore the work of an inspirational artist such as the Catalan painter Antoni Tàpies. Create your own piece of art inspired by what you have seen. Consider visual arts elements and principles in your composition such as line, colour, shape and texture while creating your masterpiece.

PAINT WITH MUD

Using mud as your paint create a masterpiece on paper, the ground or on a tree. Experiment with mixing different types of soil to explore shade and texture. Discuss the use of different coloured ochre and how it is used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

MAKE MUD SCULPTURES

Encourage children to sculpt and mould mud to create a 3-dimensional form. Add features using pebbles, twigs, or leaves to individualise their sculptures. Introduce the theme of identity by encouraging children to turn their sculpture into a self-portrait.

CREATE A MUD FACE ON A TREE

Take a close up look at the trees around you and observe what you see. Can you see any faces in the trunks of the trees? What shapes and patterns do you see? Create your own mud face on a tree trunk. Use assorted twigs, leaves, gum nuts and other found natural object for its eyes, nose and mouth and build on the shapes you see.

LAND ART – 4 DIMENSIONAL

Use soil, found objects and other materials to create an intervention in nature in response to the work of land artist Andy Goldsworthy. Consider visual arts elements and principles in your composition such as pattern and repetition. Take a photograph to capture your finished masterpiece while thinking about the ephemeral nature of your creation and how time adds a fourth dimension to your artwork.



The Arts - Media Arts

MY DAY IN THE MUD – A PICTORIAL STORY

Create a pictorial story in the form of a 'Tapestry Narrative' that captures your adventures with mud. Arrange your photographs using a hierarchy of images in a non-linear fashion in a way that highlights significant images that best represent your exploration with mud

MINIATURE MUD KINGDOM – PHOTO STORY

Using mud and other natural items build a miniature mud village or kingdom. Who lives in this miniature world? What is their story? Add a character and an object (provocation) and take three photos to tell a simple narrative with a beginning, middle and end. Print out your pictures or use i-Movie to share your Photo Story.

The Arts - Music

STUCK IN THE MUD

Compose your own song about mud. Describe the sensory experience of playing with mud. What does it feel like to touch? What sound does mud make when you squelch it? How does it smell? What does it look like? Brainstorm a list of descriptive words. As a group write some simple rhyming phrases and use pattern and repetition to compose a mud song. Add elements of body percussion to enhance the rhythm and beat as you perform your mud song.

THE SOUNDS OF WOMBAT STEW

Read Wombat Stew by Mem Fox and create sounds using the art of Foley to represent the ingredients as they are added to the soup. In small groups assign roles and then record an audio story using a program such as Garage band. Export your finished audio story as a podcast to share.



The Arts - Dance

MOVE LIKE A MUDSLIDE

Can you move like mud? Explore simple creative movements in response to the provocation of a mudslide. Combine your movements together in a sequence to create a mud dance. Add music to enhance the atmosphere of your dance and perform together in small groups.

The Arts - Drama

MUD STORIES

Cater for diverse learning styles by encouraging your students to choose one of the 5 arts learning areas (Visual Art, Dance, Drama, Music or Media Arts) to recount their own mud story adventure.

MUD MONSTERS

In small groups develop a simple drama role-play or improvisation inspired by the theme of mud and the provocation Mud Monsters. Support children to brainstorm their ideas and improvise characters to tell a story through dramatic play.

MAGIC MUD - CREATIVE WRITING AND DRAMA

Imagine a magical mud potion or spell and write a recipe using adjectives and verbs to describe the steps. Present your spell as a Drama scene or tableau (freeze frame) performance.



Humanities and Social Sciences

MADE FROM MUD

Research communities and cultures around the world that have traditionally used (and continue to use) mud for shelter, tools, commerce and trade.

ANIMAL TRACKS

Use handprints to create imprints of animals you might find in your local area. What prints do animals make? What do your own footprints look like? Can you see any examples of animal tracks on the ground near you? Look at how and why some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families might teach their children how to recognise animal tracks.

FINDING FOSSILS IN THE MUD

Fossils provide us with a glimpse into the distant past. Simulate an archaeological dig with hidden objects in the mud that can be unearthed using basic digging tools. Support with questions such as; what is a fossil and how does it form? What role does mud play in the process of fossilisation?

BUILD A DAM

Build your own mini dam using mud and see if it holds water. What role does water play in the environment and why is it important to our farmers? What happens when it doesn't rain for a long time?

MUD DUMPLINGS – THE ART OF DORODANGO

Research the art of Dorodango and practise rolling mud into ball shapes to make your own mud dumplings inspired by this ancient Japanese art form.

OLD GROWTH FORESTS

Research an old growth forest that is under threat of deforestation. What impact does this have on the soil? Why are forests like the Amazon Rainforest and the old growth forests in Tasmania important?

HIDDEN TREASURE (PANNING FOR GOLD)

Sift through the mud to find hidden treasure. Use old pots or pans and swish water to reveal what may be hidden in the sediment. Extend this activity by researching the history of the Victorian gold fields.



Health and P.E.

MUD GAMES

Take aim and throw. Set up a target by hanging a large sheet on a wall or fence and encourage students to throw mud balls at an identified target. This helps to practice and refine fundamental movement skills and facilitate large muscle play.

MUDDY FACES

Use finger painting with mud to illustrate feelings that represent the basic emotions of happy, scared, angry and sad. How do you feel when you are playing with mud? How do you feel when you are outside playing in nature?

SENSORY WALK IN THE MUD

Create a sensory walk in mud. Take off your shoes, find a muddy path and walk along as if you were walking down at the beach. How does it feel as your feet and toes squelch in the mud?

MAKE A MUD SLIP AND SLIDE

Set up a mud slip and slide area and have fun sliding in the mud. What makes a safe play space? Have a discussion about risky play and how students can play safely while still taking risks. How might they identify the risks, what are they looking out for?



Design and Technology

MUD TOWER CAKES

How high can you go? Build a mud cake using a tiered structure. Make a prediction and then experiment to see what works best.

MAKE MUD BRICKS

Add hay, twine or other materials to mud and construct your own mud bricks. What can you build with a mud brick? Which combination of materials works best? Try using mud as a mortar to build with stones, sticks, or even real bricks.

CREATE YOUR OWN MAGICAL MUD CAR WASH

How dirty can you make the cars that go through a magical mud car wash?

CONSTRUCT ROADWAYS AND WATERWAYS

Construct a roadway or waterway. Add toy dump trucks, excavators, and back hoes to build roadways in the dirt. Provide cars and trucks to add to the play. Offer pieces of PVC pipe to build waterways and pipelines.

MUD KITCHEN

Identify a permanent mud play area and construct a mud kitchen from pallets or other recycled materials, complete with kitchen utensils and small digging tools. Draw your model to scale using standard units of measurement.

BIRDS' NESTS

Build a bird's nest from mud and dried natural materials and find a place to carefully put it. Research birds in your local area and see if you can find examples of birds' nests. How are they constructed?

MUD PLAY PIT

Create a temporary mud pit using hay bales as edging with a tarp as the lining or invent your own.



Science

JUST ADD WATER

Conduct a scientific experiment by adding water to soil to make mud. Make a prediction, test your idea and record your observations. Vary the amount of water added and compare your test results.

FIND WORMS IN THE MUD

Can you find worms in the mud? Spend some time digging in the soil and see if you can discover some worms. Why might worms be good for the soil? Use tools such as magnifying glasses, pipettes and tweezers to explore the mud.

WORM FARMERS

Build a worm farm and whilst caring for them, explore the feel of their slippery skin. What do worms eat? How can you keep them healthy and happy?

MUD POSTERS

Create posters and pictures about the many different types of soil, mud and dirt. Compare and contrast the differences.

AT HOME IN THE MUD (MUD HABITAT)

Create a home for animals in the mud. What creatures might you find living in the mud? Add plastic animals or dinosaurs to the mud area and have children add leaves, sticks, and stones to create a forest, jungle, or even Jurassic Park.