MUSHROOM SPORE PRINTS

Objective:

To explore scientific concepts of fungal reproduction and create art using mushroom spore prints.

Materials:

- Fresh mushroom caps (various types if possible)
- Paper (preferably recycled or eco-friendly)
- Eco-friendly paints or natural dyes (optional)
- A tray or a flat surface for working

Activity:

Begin by examining the mushroom caps with the children. Discuss how mushrooms reproduce through spores and explain the process in simple terms. Next, place the mushroom caps, gills side down, onto the paper. Let them sit for a few hours or overnight, allowing the spores to transfer to the paper and create unique patterns. If desired, you can use eco-friendly paints or natural dyes to add color to the prints or create additional designs around the spore patterns. Once the prints are complete, gently lift the mushroom caps and observe the intricate patterns left behind. Discuss with the children how these patterns reflect the way mushrooms spread their spores and how this process supports the growth of new fungi.

Questions to Ask:

- "What patterns do you see on the paper from the mushroom spores?"
- "How do these patterns help us understand how mushrooms reproduce?"
- "Why do you think mushrooms need to spread their spores?"
- "Can you think of other ways fungi might spread their spores in nature?"
- "How do the colors and shapes of the spore prints compare to other patterns or designs we see in nature?"
- "What other natural materials might create interesting prints or patterns?"

GROW A MUSHROOM

Objective:

To teach preschoolers about mushroom growth using everyday materials.

Materials:

- Mushroom spores or mycelium (can be purchased online or from gardening stores)
- Small pots or containers with drainage holes
- Soil or growing medium (e.g., compost or peat moss)
- Watering can or spray bottle
- Plastic wrap or a clear plastic dome
- Labels (optional)
- Used coffee grounds or sawdust (optional)

Questions to Ask:

- "What changes do you see in the soil over time?"
- "How does covering the container help our mushrooms grow?"
- "What do mushrooms need to grow successfully?"
- "Why is it important to keep the soil moist?"
- "How can we care for our mushroom plants every day?"

Activity:

To introduce preschoolers to mushroom growth, start by having them help fill small pots or containers with soil or a growing medium like compost or peat moss. Sprinkle mushroom spores or mycelium over the soil and gently pat it down. Show the children how to water the soil lightly and cover the container with plastic wrap or a clear dome to maintain moisture. Place the containers in a warm, dark spot and check daily to keep the soil moist. As the mushrooms begin to grow, discuss the stages of their development and how mushrooms contribute to the environment by breaking down organic matter. Encourage the children to observe and document the changes, fostering an appreciation for the life cycle of fungi and sustainable practices.