Mock Voting Activity for Children in Religious Education

(Unitarian Universalist focus, but adaptable for other faiths)

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Materials: Three large posters with large visuals for three "ballot initiatives" relevant to children at your congregation; a mock voting booth and ballot box; ballots; "I Voted" stickers; chart listing UU 7 Principles (in children's version); deeper information on the choices for the adult helpers.

See examples below but be aware that they are only examples. The visuals and copied articles are copyrighted.

Script: Good morning. I'm so happy to get to work with you today in RE. Actually I mean play with you because we are going to play an imagination make-believe game

I wonder if you can guess what it is about

Okay, Im going to need some help.

Could you two hold this booth up so everyone can see?

And you hold up this box. Let's see. It has a hole in the top

And you hold a bunch of ballots. The ballots have three choices

And who will hold up the stickers? What do the stickers say?

That's right. "I voted."

So this game is about …..voting.

Now, why would we be learning about voting in a unitarian universalist church?

Well, let's look at our UU 7 principles. Do you notice number five is about voting.

Do UUs vote? You bet! If you ask a UU about voting in elections, they will tell you, not only do we vote, but we protect the vote for other people and we even help people get back the voting rights they lost. This year 2020, many uu churches, like us, are going to have all kinds of special events and activities around the idea of UU the vote. One of them is going to be to help people whose votes were taken away to reregister to vote.

But there's more in our seven principles connected to voting.
Let's take a look. What other ideas in the 7 principles are connected to voting?
Peace. Yes, when UUs go vote during elections, we can affect whether there may be more peace in the world.
And fairness. Voting can help with fairness for other people.
What about taking care of the plants and animals and people on our planet? Certainly, when we vote, we also can change how we take care of the earth.
So, this year, when we have our big election in November, you will certainly see a lot of UUs voting because they are concerned about the precious things we care about in our UU Principles like peace and fairness and our planet and even about voting.

Now, today, in our make believe game, you are going to vote for one of three ideas.
Okay, I need some more help holding things up.

This is the wildlife garden idea, and this is the special library idea, and this is the all children playground idea for a new space at our church.

So, if I commanded you to decide on one of these, right this second, which would you choose?

Now is this the best way to vote?

Wait a minute. How foolish of me. I never even explained the choices to you. I'm sorry. Of course you are not ready to vote yet.

UUs vote, but they spend some time thinking about which one to choose.
So it wasn't very fair of me to ask you to choose so quickly.
UUs study and learn about the choices.
And, we want a new children's space for our UU church.
So, maybe we want to look at our UU seven principles again to see if any of these choices match our UU ideas.
Okay, let's learn more about these choices and then you are going to vote.

Hold up each of the three posters to briefly explain the three choices.

So, imagine if our church gets a bunch of money to build something new and special for children.
And, imagine we give you guys, the kids, a chance to vote on the choices.

The first choice is a special children's library. And in that library would be kids books and videos about all kinds of religious ideas

The second choice is a special playground . And in that playground, would be equipment that ALL children could use, including children in wheelchairs, or who are blind, or autistic, or have other different abilities.

The third choice is an extra special wildlife garden with everything for bird, and bees, and butterflies and water critters, and other living things.

Create three spots in the room with three adults who will each take one of the posters. The adults will have more information about each of the choices.

Ask the children to choose on of the three that they want to find out more about and to go and sit with that adult and that poster. Give them paper and pencils and coloring supplies to write down ideas, slogans, or draw pictures to illustrate their ideas about the idea. Can they attempt to convince the other children to chose their idea?

Okay. Let's get together in a larger group again and share our ideas about why we think our choice is the best. Can you convince other children to change their minds? Changing your mind is good for voting if you learn some new information you had not thought of before.

Now it is time to vote. We will be giving you each a ballot that you can put in the ballot box at the voting booth. After, get a sticker from ____ name of an adult.

Okay, has everyone voted? It's time for us to open the ballot box. Help me count the votes for each of the three choices and see which is the winner.

Playground for ALL Children

Wildlife Garden

Learn About Religions Library

BALL
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Playgrounds For All Children: Here's How To Find One

Enlarge this image

Brooklyn Fisher rolls down the ramp on the playground named for her in Pocatello, Idaho. The playground was built

using accessible features so children of all abilities could play alongside each other.

Brooklyn Fisher rolls down the ramp on the playground named for her in Pocatello, Idaho. The playground was built using accessible features so children of all abilities could play alongside each other.
John W. Poole/NPR

Janna Espinoza's daughter Coraline has hearing loss, cerebral palsy, epilepsy and developmental delays. Nearly 2 years old, she can't sit up, stand, creep or use her hands as a typically developing child does.

Coraline is among an estimated 6.4 million children in the U.S. with a disability. And for these kids the simple ritual of playing outside can get very complicated.

"My daughter can't do very much at a typical playground, except watch her older sister play," says Espinoza. "Playgrounds are a depressing place for us."

On a typical playground, danger lurks just about everywhere.

"The infant bucket swings are not safe," explains Espinoza. "She can't go down the slide. She can't play in the sand unless she is on her stomach."

Finding a place to play is a big challenge for children like these, and their parents. Sometimes, they must create one.

Espinoza's community worked for a year to raise money for Tatum's Garden, a playground in Salinas, Calif., designed for everyone to enjoy.

It's one of 2505 playgrounds in 48 states and DC and 996 cities listed in our Playgrounds for Everyone app. NPR has spent the last year crowdsourcing the list. (These totals do not include more than 400 City of Chicago playgrounds that were just submitted, which we are in the process of adding.)

Promoting 'Active Play'

Outdoor time, motion and social interaction are crucial for development in all children, according to Angela Hanscom. She's a pediatric occupational therapist who runs an outdoor camp in New Hampshire, using nature as both prevention and treatment for sensory development issues.

"Movement and play are important for both atypical and typical children," she says.

For example, take the simple act of moving your head off the vertical axis, by hanging upside down, spinning or swinging. This kind of action helps develop what is called the vestibular system. That means it's giving the little hair cells inside our inner ear important input, helping us develop awareness of our own midline and shape. This, in turn, is crucial for walking or even for balance when sitting.

"The vestibular system helps support all your other senses," says Hanscom. "If you don't have a good idea of where your body is in space, you aren't safe."

Research suggests active play can be helpful for children diagnosed with ADD, anxiety, autism, or other emotional or sensory issues. Spinning and experiencing centrifugal force, Hanscom says, affects the limbic system, and can be very calming. She says kids who display repetitive motions like rocking or fidgeting may be seeking vestibular input that is otherwise missing.

Unfortunately, children with challenges may get less outdoor playtime than others, for safety, social or other reasons. A widely cited 1991 research article suggested that physically disabled kids could be thought of as experiencing a secondary disability arising from "play deprivation."

In recent years, awareness has been growing of the need for "inclusive" or "accessible" playgrounds, such as those tracked by the NPR app.

There are lots of design innovations: Broad, flat ramps that can accommodate wheelchairs or walkers to get to the top of play structures. Sand tables at wheelchair height. Large swings with back rests and straps for kids who don't sit unassisted. "Cozy spots" for children who need time out from all the distraction and noise.

At Tatum's Garden, says Espinoza, "My youngest daughter is able to swing on the accessible swings for the first time. She can army crawl herself through a tunnel in the toddler section. There are many features throughout that she can try to twist or turn, watching balls drop, or cogs spin. Her big sister gets to play at an amazing playground, and I get to let our youngest explore in her own way."

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Safety fence:
A fence contains children within the playground and keeps them away from outside hazards such as roads, drop-offs and bodies of water.

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Single entrance:
It's easier for parents and caregivers to monitor children in a playground with only one way in or out, reducing the likelihood that they'll exit without being noticed.

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Accessible swing:
There are many versions of accessible swings. Most of them provide additional back support, and they may include a safety harness. Some swings allow wheelchair users to board without leaving their wheelchairs.

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Sound-play components:
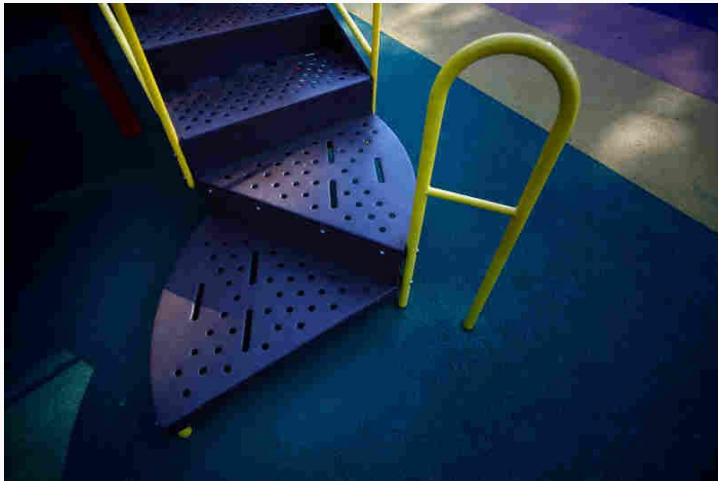These include drums, chimes and other things that make noise or music.

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Ramps to play components:
Ramps are required when play structures have more than 20 elevated play components, and they must connect to a quarter of them. An elevated ramp can't rise more than a foot, and it can't rise more than an inch for every foot in length.

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Transfer stations:
A transfer platform is a low step that allows someone using a wheelchair to transfer out of it onto the playground equipment. It should have an unobstructed side so that the wheelchair can ride up beside it, and should have handrails for grabbing. Steps that follow, to climb the structure, should be no more than eight inches high.
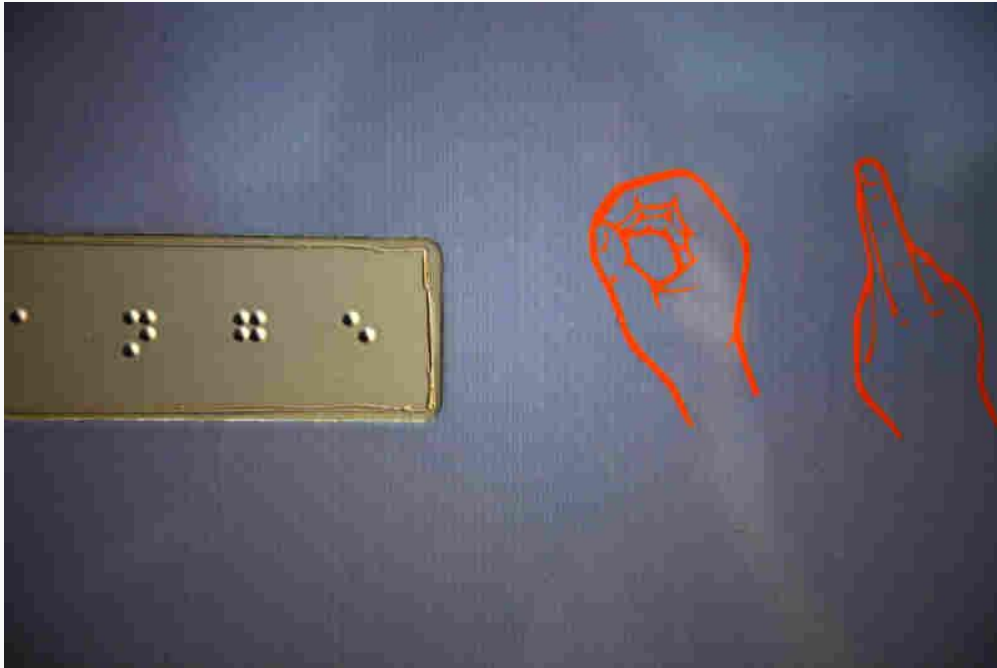
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Smooth surface throughout:
Smooth, poured-in-place surfaces are considered the most accessible. Engineered wood fiber and rubber tiles can also meet the standard. Playground surfaces must be resilient enough to act as a cushion when a child falls.

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Play components for the visually impaired:
Some playgrounds include information in Braille for those with visual impairments. Other qualities that may
appeal to sight-impaired users include textured materials and fragrant gardens.

PRINCIPLES

1. Everyone matters.

2. Be kind.

3. You are free to ask life's big questions.

4. Offer that same freedom to others.

5. Everyone gets a vote.

6. Work for peace and fairness.

7. Take care of our earth.

BALLOT

CHOOSE ONE

The best way to use extra space outside our UU church is:

☐ LEARN ABOUT

RELIGIONS LIBRARY

☐ ALL CHILDREN'S

PLAYGROUND

☐ WILDLIFE GARDEN

Why Your Wildlife Garden Matters

It's easy to assume that you can't possibly make a difference for wildlife from your small share of the planet. But every positive choice you make in your garden can actually make a huge difference for the wildlife in your area.

And when you help your neighbors make better decisions the benefit to wildlife is magnified. And so it spreads.

Why Your Ecosystem Garden Matters to Wildlife

This Garden is for the Birds….and the Bees, and the Flowers and the Trees–shows you how to make giving back to wildlife the priority of your garden.

The Power of Doing Just One Thing–really, choose just one thing and start making a difference now.

Why Your Garden Matters to Wildlife even When we Have Protected Lands–only 5% of available land in this country is protected, but much of that is being overrun by invasive plants. We've simply left wildlife nowhere to go.

Your Ecosystem Garden is Important to Wildlife–habitat loss, fragmentation, and degradation due to human action is the number one cause of wildlife declines. You can help reverse this by planning your Ecosystem Garden.

Ecosystem Services: How Your Garden Contributes to a Healthy Environment–Healthy ecosystems contribute many vital services that we tend to take for granted: oxygen production, clean water, soil health, and more. Your Ecosystem Garden can provide some of these services.

Health Care Reform in your Ecosystem Garden–a fun and tongue-in-cheek look at the importance of your garden by borrowing the language of the health care debate.

Healing the Wounds to Wildlife

- Healing the Wound of Direct Killing

- Healing the Wound of Habitat Loss

- Healing the Wound of Habitat Fragmentation

- Healing the Wound of Exotic Species

- Healing the Wound of Loss of Ecological Processes

Children, Nature, and Your Ecosystem Garden

Awe and Wonder always Welcome in Your Wildlife Garden

Helping Your Neighbors Learn to Love your Ecosystem Garden–we mentioned this above in the introduction. Remember that old commercial "They told two friends, and they told two friends……" That's the way we'll start making a bigger difference.

Best Reasons NOT to be an Ecosystem Gardener–having some fun by reverse engineering the best reasons for creating your wildlife garden

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Checklist: Designing Engaging Library Spaces for Children

by Stephen Gower, Amber Beal and Angela Loewecke
October 19, 2018

The early school years are filled with new adventures. Many 5-year-olds are transitioning from days of play to school routines. Seven- to 8-year-olds are becoming more independent and developing personal interests. Overall, school-aged children are learning to be social and to understand the differences between right and wrong and winning and losing. This age group is also learning to read, write and become problem solvers. And, as anyone who's spent time in an elementary classroom knows, kids this age are filled with unlimited energy. Successful library service to young school-aged children means creating library spaces and programs that address their needs and engage their developing and curious minds. Use the following checklist as a guide for evaluating your space so you can ensure your library is a place where kids are safe, secure and open to learning.

Demco interior designers created zoned areas that offer a variety of seating and spaces for all students at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School.

Space

An inviting, friendly and comfortable atmosphere keeps kids coming back.

- Having different inviting areas, or zones, in your children's space will attract a variety of ages and interests. Although the size of your library will dictate the amount of space you can dedicate to each of these areas, try to accommodate the widest variety of needs.
- Provide easy access to general collections for this age group, including easy readers, upper-level fiction and nonfiction.
- Develop a quiet space for studying and recreational reading, as well as social space for chatting and general interaction.
- Provide general collaboration space for group work, teaching opportunities, small-group programming and instruction.
- Integrate interactive areas throughout for active gaming, problem-solving activities, art and literature sharing.
- Develop a creation space or makerspace, where kids can tinker and invent.
- Establish a large-group programming and event space that can serve a variety of purposes and adapt as needed.

In the Kenosha Public Library, light, color, open space and playful furnishings draw kids into the space.

Decor

The decor of your space will set the tone and tell young readers it's not just a space for preschoolers.

- Choose a general color scheme that is attractive and inviting. Create some energy and interest by adding pops of color in strategic places.
- Use carpet tiles or area rugs to help define the space and add color and interest.
- Review wall and vertical spaces for places to hang kids' artwork and other visually appealing items.
- Make signage easy to read and follow. Good signage not only enhances the look of library spaces, but it's also a great way to help kids build confidence.

Demco interior designers added pops of color seating to encourage kids to hang out at Washington Elementary School.

Furnishings and Fixtures

Appropriate furnishings help define and enhance the look of library spaces, but they also contribute to learning and positive interactions. For public libraries with limited space, as well as school media centers that are often the hub for hosting events, flexibility is a must.

- Make it easy to adapt your overall space by incorporating mobile tables, shelving and stackable chairs, which will allow you to transform your space for multiple uses.
- Incorporate a variety of comfortable seating in both quiet spaces and social areas.
- Balance formal spaces for collaboration and learning with casual spaces for socializing and developing friendships.
- Include ergonomic seating and tables for computing and technology areas.
- Include chairs with 14"H seats paired with 22–25"H tabletops.
- Organize and label your materials in a way that helps kids make appropriate selections.
- Incorporate displays and storage systems that will enhance the visibility and accessibility of the collection.
- Make materials accessible by keeping shelving heights at 48". Perimeter shelving can go up to 66" if needed.

Demco helped Huegel Elementary renovate their library to include space for hands-on, collaborative learning.

Interactives

Learning and education come in many shapes and sizes. At this age, hands-on activity is a large part of healthy development. Incorporating interactives throughout your library spaces and collection serves to develop much-needed skills and connect kids to library materials.

- Include interactive elements throughout the area, such as magnetic poetry, whiteboard or LEGO® walls, art gallery space, board games, etc.
- Incorporate the elements listed above on often-empty end panels.
- Set up self-directed STEM stations with "I wonder …" statements to get kids thinking critically as they work with the materials.
- Include a creativity area where kids can invent, act out stories, sing, etc. This could be an open area that encourages general activity, a puppet theater or a place to work with manipulatives to build.
- Incorporate technology, such as iPads®, listening devices, interactive whiteboards, online resources, software and more.
- Provide access to digital creativity resources, including, but not limited to, audio and video production tools.

Approachable and Welcoming Service

Positive communication from all staff will encourage the nurturing of relationships that help children learn and grow.

- Create a centrally located, friendly service point.
- Include a self-check station for kids to check out their own materials.
- Engage in good merchandising techniques, whether by creating a popular children's library near the main service point, incorporating child-friendly signage and/or incorporating face-out merchandising throughout the area.
- Include digital signage to highlight programs and events for caregivers and older children that will bring them back for new library experiences.
- Provide a safe atmosphere with nearby amenities such as seating, laptop access, power access, etc., so adults and caregivers can easily keep an eye on their children as they engage with your public library spaces.