

To the rescue!

Helen Bromley invites you to unleash the positive force of superhero play for some powerful learning outdoors...

Superheroes and superhero play hold enormous fascination for most young children. Using the outdoor area to explore a superhero theme has benefits for both children and educators. Outdoors children can 'go large', being messier, louder and moving around with greater freedom than is possible inside.

Many adults are concerned by the physical aspect of superhero play, and clearly this can become difficult to manage effectively inside, even in the roomiest of environments. However, children who are knowledgeable about superheroes understand that physical prowess comes with the territory! Superheroes regularly leap, run, swing, climb and spin, apparently effortlessly. In addition they use skills such as throwing and hurling when carrying out heroic deeds and battling their enemies. Such physicality therefore becomes a central part of superhero play for many children, particularly boys. Providing a purposeful context for physical play and responding positively to it can build self-esteem and offer many possible lines of development.

Superhero training camp

THE OUTDOOR AREA IS THE PERFECT PLACE TO CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN TO EXPLORE THE PHYSICAL ASPECTS OF SUPERHERO PLAY – AND FOR THEM TO BRING QUALITY TO THEIR MOVEMENTS. CREATE A SUPERHERO TRAINING CAMP OUTDOORS TO PROVIDE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT WHERE YOUR SUPERHEROES CAN HONE AND DEVELOP A WIDE RANGE OF SKILLS. THEY MAY NEED PLACES TO PRACTISE THE FOLLOWING SKILLS...



Balance

Use balancing beams or equipment such as milk crates for children to practise their balancing skills. Make sure you are available to support less confident children. Encourage the children to help each other too. Provide a range of equipment from which children can jump in safety. Teach them how to land with skill, with their knees bent. Can the children record and measure how far they have jumped?

Throw

Create targets, so that children are encouraged to practise throwing with accuracy. These might be as simple as hoops laid on the ground, or plastic waste paper baskets. If you have a suitable tree, or part of a climbing frame that is accessible, then hoops can be hung at a reasonable height, so that children can throw balls through them. This will offer a different kind of experience. Very simple balls can be made from screwed up newspaper encased in lengths of old tights.

Run with super speed

If you have the space available, set aside an area where children can practise running as fast as they can. This can be very exhilarating for some children. The potential for learning can be extended by adding timing devices so that children can, with the support of an adult, record their speeds and set themselves challenges.



Building dens

Giving children the opportunity to build superhero related dens outdoors usefully extends possibilities for role-play, which may be restricted inside. Dens can be built very simply using the following technique.

What you need

- six bamboo canes per den, of equal length
- masking tape
- fabric in large enough pieces to cover the frame – a thermal blanket, the kind sold in camping shops, makes an excellent den cover
- clothes pegs.

What you do

Tape three bamboo canes together to form a triangle. This will be the base of the den. Now tape a cane to each corner of the den and join the three canes together at a point above the base, to complete the den frame. Drape suitable fabric over the frame and attach with clothes pegs, to make a den.

Using the dens

Clearly you will need more than one den outside. Don't worry if they cannot be left out overnight, they are very simple to deconstruct and pack away.

Let the children decide how to

A PLENTIFUL SUPPLY OF CLIPBOARDS WILL INSPIRE MANY CHILDREN TO WRITE OUTDOORS



equip their dens. They may want to use junk modelling materials from inside, or natural materials gathered outdoors to make superhero resources of all kinds. Provide plenty of mark-making equipment, so that children can use the dens as secret places to plot and plan their escapades.

Make sure that you provide some dressing up gear so that children can create their own costumes. Children will need to know where the resources are kept and to pack them away when the role-play draws to a close.

Up & Away

EXPLORE A SUPERHEROES THEME IN YOUR EARLY YEARS SETTING...

These ideas are taken from Helen Bromley's *Come Alive Superheroes* published by Yellow Door. This pack offers a wealth of ideas and resources that will help you to respond positively to children's interests to promote high quality learning across the curriculum. For more information visit www.yellow-door.net or call 0845 603 5309.



YOUNG CHILDREN CAN EASILY LEARN THIS DEN-BUILDING TECHNIQUE, SO MAKE SURE THAT YOU TEACH IT TO THEM!

Make Superhero Shapes

Many superheroes have iconic ways of both moving and standing. Children love practising these poses, and they often form an integral part of role-play. Many educators tend to prevent children making such poses, considering them to be the precursor to aggression, when this is frequently not the case. Make a place where children can safely practise the poses – perhaps a chalked space on the ground, or a large mat. Offer a digital camera so that they can photograph each other.

Punch & Kick

These behaviours understandably concern many adults, and it is important to maintain clear boundaries for physical contact between children. Offering safe places to punch and kick is an excellent way to prevent children from hurting each other.

Fill some large bin liners with shredded paper and suspend them from a climbing frame or similar structure. Explain to the children that these are the only places where punching can be practised. Create some simple targets that can also be suspended and set these at a height that children could kick.

