



# Off The Screens and Out the Door

## 25 IDEAS FOR CREATIVE OUTDOOR PLAY

**SIDEWALK CHALK NEIGHBORHOOD BLESSINGS:** Grab some sidewalk chalk and brighten up your neighborhood by writing short Bible verses or encouraging notes on the sidewalks. Add some artwork by doodling flowers, animals, smiley faces, or anything else you can draw!

**PAINT A POT:** Buy some inexpensive terra cotta pots and set your kids free with paint brushes and acrylic paints outside. They could paint a cute teacher gift or a special surprise for grandma. Or save the pot and use for seed planting.

**DOLL CLOTHES LAUNDRY DAY:** Grab that bin of doll clothes, a bucket full of water, and some clothespins. Send the kids outside to “wash” the doll clothes vintage style—by hand. String some clothesline between the posts of a porch or a couple of trees. (Make sure it’s low enough to be accessible to little people.) Show your kids how to “wash” clothes in the water bucket, wring them out, and hang them up to dry with clothespins.

**INVENT A GAME!** Tell your kids to choose three random toys/objects from your home or garage. (Don’t tell them what it’s for!) Then send them outside with the challenge to invent a game that somehow uses all of the objects.

**OUTDOOR COLOR CHALLENGE:** Give kids a sheet of paper and a set of different colored markers. (The more markers you give, the longer it will take!) Challenge them to write down five different items they see for each color marker they have.

**STICK STRUCTURES:** Think about the familiar toothpicks and marshmallows building challenge, only a little more natural. Send the kids out after a wind storm to gather up a variety of sticks. Then use large-size marshmallows to connect them and create unique art projects or buildings.

**FLOWER DISCOVERY:** Grab a book about flowers from the library (make sure it contains plants that are common to your area). Take a walk and challenge your kids to identify the flowers they see. (For older skeptics, you could give an incentive: Example, If you identify 20 different flowers, I will give you 20 extra minutes of screen time for the next two days.)

**BIRD WATCH CHALLENGE:** Find a bird book at the library or do a Google search to find images of birds in your part of the world. Challenge your kids to observe and identify the birds they see in your yard. Have a special prize/treat if they can identify 5 or 10 birds. (Those sugary marshmallow Peeps seem apropos!)

**SEED PLANTING:** Buy several packages of seeds and some potting dirt at the store, and let your kids plant a few varieties of flowers. Use styrofoam cups or egg cartons as simple planters, placing two or three seeds per pod. Be prepared to transplant if they actually take off and grow!

**NATURE EXPLORERES NOTEBOOK:** Give your kids a “field guide” notebook and send them outdoors to sketch plants and make observations about the natural habitat of your neighborhood. What’s the weather like today? What kind of plants are blooming? What kind of animals, trees, and birds do they see? Encourage them to gather natural specimens of leaves and flowers that they can press into the pages of their notebook. Later in the day, maybe at suppertime or right before bed, invite your kids to share what they wrote.

**SUPERSIZE HOPSCOTCH:** Give the kids a stack of sidewalk chalk and challenge them to make a supersize hopscotch path that winds over the entire driveway. Can they fit 100 square? 200?



**NATURE SCRIPTURE SCAVENGER HUNT:** Go on a scavenger hunt to observe and collect various nature items that are mentioned in the Bible, discussing biblical truths along the way. (See [www.morelikegrace.com](http://www.morelikegrace.com), Freebies).

**ARTISTIC LEMONADE STAND:** If you decide to try the old stand-by—a lemonade stand—give it an artistic twist: Decorate the paper or styrofoam cups with fun designs or encouraging messages while you wait for customers to arrive.

**NEIGHBORHOOD SNACK CART:** But instead of sitting around at a lemonade stand, waiting for people to stop by and purchase a drink, why not take a treat to them? Fill up a wagon with some simple snacks to share with neighbors. (It doesn't have to be fancy or expensive: Try divvying up a large bag of popcorn or potato chips into some styrofoam cups.) Instead of asking for money, offer the treats as a gift. Decorate the cups with encouraging greetings or Bible verses before you go.

**OBSTACLE COURSE:** Use the sports equipment and outdoor toys stashed in your garage to create an outdoor obstacle course. (You might find some indoor objects could add to the fun.) Then time each member of your family as they run through the course and see who gets the shortest time. Invite neighbors to try it out too!



**OUTDOOR THANKSGIVING JOURNAL:** Give your kids a clipboard, a sheet of paper, and a pencil/pen. Challenge them to look around and make a list of 50 things they are thankful for. (These could be natural elements or manmade things like stop signs and cars.)

**BIKE MAKEOVERS:** Grab some streamers from the dollar store, construction paper, and tape, and set your kids free to give their bikes a colorful makeover. Wrap the bike's body with streamers. Cut colorful shapes to stick in the spokes of the wheels. Create a pennant or two to display on the front handlebars. (Just Google "bike parade" and look at the images if you need a little inspiration.)

**MONET MOMENTS:** Buy some small canvases at the hobby store or Amazon, along with some cheap acrylic paints. Make a painter's palette from an old cardboard box. Then send your kids outside to paint something they see.



**GAMES AWAY!:** Grab a few of those favorite card or board games and give them new life by playing them outside on the deck or underneath a favorite tree.

**NATURE TREASURE BOX:** Find an old shoe box and send your kids outside to gather natural wonders they discover in your neighborhood or yard (interesting stones, leaves, tree bark, etc. You will be surprised what they find interesting!)

**CLOUD WATCHING:** An oldie but a goodie for a cloudy day. Grab a blanket, spread it out, and look up to the skies. Do you see any shapes in the clouds? What do you notice about how they move? Count the number of birds you see in a certain number of minutes.

**BUILD A READING TENT:** Grab a pile of old blankets and a good book or two. Challenge your kids to create a shaded reading area outside using the blankets and whatever supplies are handy. (\*Leave the tents up and head back outside with flashlights in the evening for an extra-special bedtime story in the fortress!)

**BUILD A ZOO:** Do you have a bazillion stuffed animals crammed into closets, toy chests, and bedrooms throughout your home? Yeah, me too. Gather up all those critters and tell your kids to design a zoo outside. Have them create enclosures and signs for the various "species." (ex. draw a "monkey area" with sidewalk chalk on the driveway, or use pool noodles arranged like fences.)

**WRITERS CHALLENGE:** Send your child outside with a notebook, pencil, and a writing prompt or two. (See Writing Prompt page.)



# OUTDOOR WRITING PROMPTS

- Pick a tree or an animal you can see in your neighborhood: Write an imaginary conversation you might have with them
- If you were forced to live in a dark basement for the next year, what are the five outdoor elements you would miss seeing the most? Why?
- Imagine that God gave you the chance to design a new tree, plant, or animal. What would it look like? What would make it grow? How would it behave?
- Write a list of the animals you have seen in the neighborhood: What are some questions you think they might have for human beings? What do you think the animals would like about humans? What might they dislike?

