## Snow Maps!

**Tracking self and animal visitors in the snow**

Play is a means of deep learning for young children. In Gaffield Children's Garden, we provide rich, open-ended Nature Play experiences. We are committed to it, knowing that these experiences will become an essential part of the child, will be transformed into intellectual pursuits, imaginative pursuits, support physical and emotional health, and promote positive regard for the Earth now and into adulthood. We encourage families to participate and replicate what we do here, in their own homes, apartments, and parks. Here is a recipe for Nature Play at Home: Snow Maps!

### WAYS TO PLAY
- depending on age & developmental stage of child, this play may take several forms, from a simple search for footprints in the snow, to the making of potentially complex maps in the snow
- this play is especially fun in fresh snow cover
- fun additions to the play might include sticks, pinecones, rocks, little 'people' or animal toys to populate the snow maps
- remember: no wrong way to play!

### OPTION FOR LITTLE LITTLES
- go outdoors for an adventure -- adventures are always way more fun than a 'walk'
- model noticing your own footprints in the snow, "Hey look: I'm making a path with my feet!"
- invite kiddos to observe their own footprints in the snow and to look for other prints in the snow
- if you notice animal tracks, take turns guessing what creature left it
- try dragging a stick

### OPTION FOR BIG LITTLES
- offer invitation to play: "I'm drawing a map with my feet. Want to help me?"
- can jump to a new spot to draw outlines of islands, paths, roads, rivers, boundaries of woods, prairies
- model by example, using the language of geography and mapping -- exacting language adds to the excitement!
- make up stories as y'all draw your snow maps
- a universal developmental stage of childhood -- around age 7,8,9 -- is an intense interest in maps & way-finding, utilizing both imaginary worlds and their own actual communities

### CONSIDER
- After introducing the game, remember to let the kiddos lead the way
- snowy outdoor play is a natural way to foster children's burgeoning understanding of themselves in relationship to the world around them, as well as to strengthen family connection and identity
- if your child is in that map-centric developmental stage, you'll probably notice them drawing maps indoors, too
- children use maps as basis for storytelling and sharing
- Play is about fun, and is the way young children learn about themselves and the world