VALENTINES the Nature Play way

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. Usually we make a distinction between play and activities. This week -- Valentine’s Day -- we are going to temporarily blur that distinction with activities that are playful. As always, invite, model, and then step back to let the children lead the play in their desired direction.

Book pairing for the little littles? Tomi DiPaola's I Love You Sun, I Love You Moon.

FORAGED VALENTINES
- Gather bits of natural debris -- seeds, leaves, pebbles and stones, berries.
- Arrange into heart shapes outside on snow or ground, or bring inside to arrange on paper or sand trays.
- Sometimes we observe non-intentional shapes in nature. Take a walk with specific intent to notice the heart shapes, be it rocks, leaves, or ice.

SNOWY VALENTINES
- Draw heart shapes in the snow with sticks, with feet.
- Make snow balls and arrange in heart shaped outlines.
- Use spray bottles of food-colored water or vinegar to draw heart shapes in the snow.
- Bring hearted shaped baking ware or empty heart shaped chocolate boxes outside to pack with snow and unmold into heart shaped snow sculptures.

VALENTINE MAPS
- Surprise! This is actually an indoors activity.
- Draw a heart shape on a piece of paper.
- Invite children to consider their play outdoors.
- Encourage child to draw pictures of beloved places, people, memories outdoors within the heart shaped map.
- You can model your own observations to get things started, but then give space for the kiddos to lead with their observations.

VALENTINE FOR A TREE
- Inquire of the school aged kiddos: “You know that tree we both love at the park? Do you think anyone ever makes a valentine for a tree? What would that even look like?”
- Step back and let the kiddos move forward with whatever their idea of a valentine for a tree.
- Adapt to any living creature, plant, body of water, etc. Appreciating & expressing gratitude is legit early childhood environmental behavior.