

Telling Stories with Loose Parts



An invitation of loose parts (rocks, glass beads and coloured toothpicks) was set out to invite creativity, inspire imagination and to provide possibilities to express thoughts, ideas and feelings.

Henry (age 3 years 6 months) decided to use these loose parts to create a storyboard.

"This is me and my mom. We are walking in the woods with walking sticks. I used a walking stick to poke the ground. This is a caterpillar going on the rocks. These are trees (indicating the stack of river rocks in the middle of the placemat and line of 3 rocks in the centre with the glass bead atop). A wood duck has five eggs in the nest. There are sticks to build the nest," Henry explained of his creation.



Two weeks later, Henry returned to the table with loose parts to create a similar storyboard but with different details. The figures had heart shaped stones on their chests, beads to represent stars and the moon, and shells for the beach.

When Henry was shown a photograph of his first storyboard that had been taken two weeks earlier, he rearranged the parts to reconstruct his storyboard to match the original. Had he been reliving the same memory in a different way?





Later that same morning, Henry moved from the loose parts table to the easel. Using primary colours of tempera paint, he created, *"Yellow clouds, blue sky, me (Henry) and my mom with brains and red grass and a blue caterpillar."*

After painting, Henry moved to a table with pencil crayons and drew his earlier construction from memory.





For a third week, Henry again visited the loose parts table. Once again, he built 2 figures from rocks that represented himself and his mother on a walk in a conservation park. He again added a heart shaped rock to each figures chest.

Henry was then invited to draw his figures. He even included the hearts!





After completing the drawing, Henry then returned to his loose part picture and added a wooden ring beside each figure to represent their knapsacks. Henry added some small beads into the rings to, *“Fill them up, to pack our lunch. Look! These are some bottles that we could catch butterflies in them,”* he explained

After completing both his loose parts picture and his drawing, Henry then moved over to the painting easel. He began with a blue sky, then a sun and clouds. Then, he added two figures. The painting again represented his loose parts picture.



Henry’s loose part pictures, drawings and paintings clearly highlight the importance of his relationship with his mother which is inextricably linked to his understanding of the natural world. Clearly these memories are extremely important to Henry, enough so that he is willing to represent them in a variety of art media.

But his visual expressions are more than just works of art; they are treasured memories that he and his mother share together. The creation of these artworks became a form of storytelling for Henry; an opportunity for him to remember the outdoor experiences that he shares with his mother, and to revisit them with her.

Through loose parts, paint and drawing materials, Henry was able to refine his thoughts, share his ideas and recount these personal experiences.