



School's Out: Lessons from a Forest Kindergarten

No classroom for these kindergarteners: in Switzerland's Langnau am Albis, a suburb of Zurich, children ages four to seven go to kindergarten in the woods every day, no matter what the weather is. The filmmakers follow the forest kindergarten through the seasons of one school year to make this eye-opening documentary, which questions what it is that children need from school at that age. There is laughter, beauty and amazement in the process of finding out.

Recommended for all ages

Themes: childhood, creative expression, cross-cultural understanding, education, environment, health, international, life cycle, non-conformity, self determination, social change, social/emotional development

Director(s): Lisa Molomot | **36 min** | **Documentary** | **2013** | **Country:** USA | **Language:** In English, Swiss & German w/English subtitles

Official film website: www.schoolsoutfilm.com/



SET THE STAGE | THOUGHT-STARTERS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Do kindergarteners and first graders need to spend more hours each day developing skills like reading, writing, and math, or do they need more time to play? Play advocates argue that young children, up to second grade, can learn everything they need through play and that they don't need more structured instruction time. In Switzerland, where this movie takes place, kids don't learn academic skills (like reading and writing and math) until second grade. During kindergarten and first grade, they're encouraged to play and explore, and learn how to make their own decisions about risk.

WORDS TO KNOW

- **B-roll:** the supplemental footage that provides greater flexibility when editing video. B-roll is the footage used to cut away from an interview to help tell the story.
- **Establishing Shot:** Usually the first shot of a new scene, designed to show the audience where the action is taking place. It is usually a very wide shot or extreme wide shot.

Types of Play:

- **Free Play:** Unstructured play guided by children with minimal, if any, adult involvement.
- **Risky Play:** Play that presents a child with a physical or emotional challenge, like tree climbing. The term risk in this context means that challenging opportunities are presented, which can in some situations lead to harm.
- **Dramatic/Fantasy Play:** Children take on roles in pretend games about familiar experiences (like going on a family fishing trip or a family celebration). Children create props and engage in fantasy adventures (like creating an ocean floor using sheets for water and baskets for rocks).
- **Exploratory Play:** Children explore the properties and functions of materials, equipment and objects (like experimenting with a tool to find out how it works with clay or dough, or using a magnifying glass to view different objects).
- **Physical Play:** Play involving movement, like running and playing ball, jumping, climbing, dancing, or moving on an obstacle course.
- **Games With Rules:** Children follow or create rules to reach a shared objective in a game—playing outdoor games, following child-created games with rules, playing computer, board and card games.
- **Rough and Tumble Play:** High-energy physical play like play fighting, wrestling, chase, etc., which is accompanied by positive feelings between players.



Clues
and
Cues

Pay attention while watching

- Think about how you were allowed to play (at home or at school) when you were younger. How is it different than the way children play in the "forest kindergarten"?

For more film terms, refer to the PCFF Film Glossary (pcffri.org/FilmHub).

TALK ABOUT IT | DISCUSSION

- Consider types of play (as listed in the vocabulary). What types of play are/were your favorite? Why?
- What surprised you while watching this film? Do you think it's okay for kids to walk to school by themselves? To be allowed to use knives? To climb trees?
- In the film, how is the Forest Kindergarten different from the school in New Haven, Connecticut? Which one would you rather go to? Why? Which school is most like your school? Is the comparison between the two schools fair? (For example: Are there forests in New Haven? Does the film spend equal time in both schools?)
- A parent of a child in the Forest Kindergarten says that he believes that at this age kids should be spending as much of their time playing as possible and that they can learn math and reading later. What do you think about that idea? Do you think the Forest Kindergarten is the right program for all kids? Why or why not?
- What traditional academic skills are the Forest Kindergarten children gaining even though they aren't in a traditional classroom setting? Can you give a couple of examples? (Note: Play scene at 12:00 minutes.)
- Do you think the filmmaker has a particular perspective on early childhood education that she wanted to get across? Is she presenting one of the schools in too rosy a light and the other in an unfair light?
- Why did the filmmaker choose to use b-roll (minute 25:00) of New Haven students playing on their school playground? What argument do those visuals make about American schools?
- For every piece of footage in this documentary, there are thousands of minutes of footage that weren't included. What do you think the filmmaker might have left out?
- Do you think your schooling experiences encourage your imagination? Why or why not? Can you give examples?

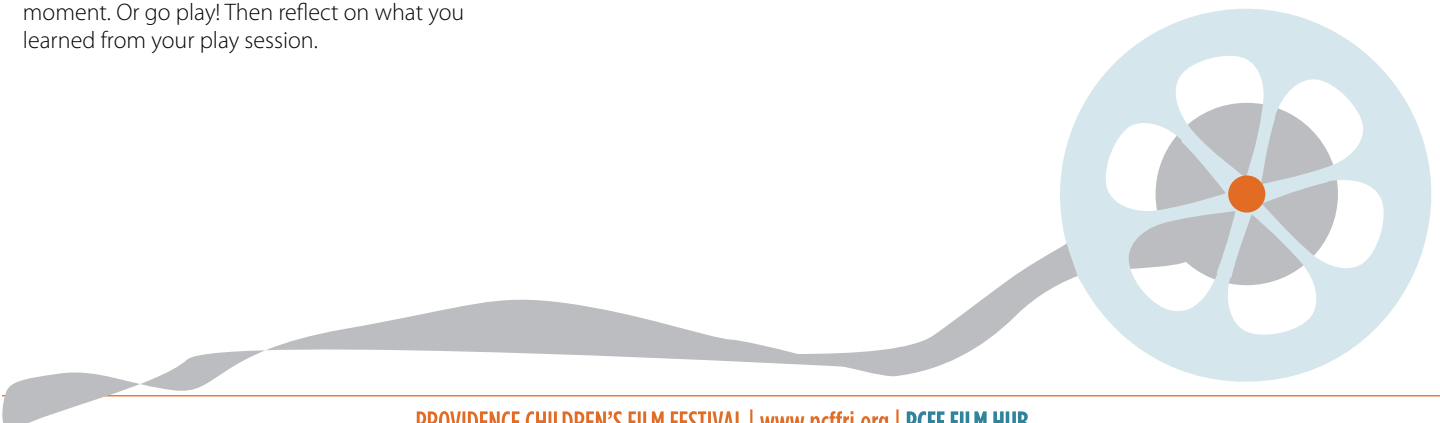
GET CREATIVE | EXTENSION ACTIVITIES



For Activity Reel details, downloadable storyboard template and more, visit the the Film Hub website: www.pcffri.org/FilmHub

- **Writing Prompt**
Write a letter (to your principal, teachers, parents association, peers or your former self) explaining why play is important for kids. Make sure to include drawings and memories of the times you learned important lessons through play!
- **Play Observation and Participation**
Materials: Paper or story board printouts, colored pens and pencils
Draw "snapshots" of the moments of play you have witnessed or you participate in that are joyous, risky, "educational" or challenging. Beneath each image, write a reflection or comment that expresses your feelings at that moment. Or go play! Then reflect on what you learned from your play session.
- **Design Your Own Playground / School Space**
Materials: Pencil and paper, scissors, tape or clay, popsicle sticks, and other materials to build models
Design a new playground/recess space for your school—one that would let you explore and take risks. Start out with pencil and paper, or if you have time and resources, make a model.
- **Make a Social Change**
Identify an issue you are passionate about. Individually or as small groups, brainstorm how you can change it.

For example, do you have free play or recess in school? Make a plan on how you could possibly change your school policy. Do you have Adventure Play in your school? How could you incorporate some types of AP into your play time? Are there barriers to overcome?



MAKE CONNECTIONS | ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Select from the following resources to complement the film and inspire further discussion or programming.

BOOKS

- **Where the Wild Things Are**
by Maurice Sendak
- **Last Child in the Woods**
by Richard Louv
- **Forest Kindergartens:
The Cedarsong Way**
by Erin K. Kenny
- **I Love Dirt!: 52 Activities to Help You
and Your Kids Discover the Wonders of
Nature** by Jennifer Ward
- **Cultivating Outdoor Classrooms:
Designing and Implementing
Child-Centered Learning Environments**
by Eric Nelson

FILMS

- **The Land** (2015)
A short documentary about an "adventure
playground" in the United Kingdom.
- **Indicates PCFF festival selection**

LOCAL CONNECTIONS

- **Providence PlayCorps**
A program run by the Partnership for
Providence Parks, which brings free play
to parks in low-income neighborhoods in
Providence, Rhode Island.
www.playcorps.org/
- **Providence Children's Museum**
The mission of the Providence Children's
Museum is to inspire and celebrate learning
through active play and exploration.
<http://www.childrenmuseum.org/>

BEYOND THE FILM | RELATED INTERNET LINKS

- **The Playwork Primer** by Penny Wilson
www.imaginationplayground.com/images/content/3/2/3239/playwork-primer.pdf
Penny Wilson explains the playwork model, which encourages child-directed, unstructured free play with limited adult interventions.

