

## An A to Z of enhancements

# X is for X Marks the Spot!

From treasure pits to maps, treasure-hunting enhancements are guaranteed to inspire children's play and learning. By **Amy Jackson**

**T**reasure-hunting enhancements can inspire collaborative play and provide opportunities for speech and language development as children uncover intriguing hidden objects. The treasure they search for can be loose parts such as plastic jewels, gemstones, golden coins, shells and curtain rings, or larger artefacts, that can lead to comments, questions and wonderment.

### 'CAVE OF WONDERS'

One of our treasure-hunting enhancement ideas came from noticing that a cupboard in the classroom could be used more creatively. Regularly assessing your learning environment and observing how well the areas are being utilised can lead to new ideas for enhancing lesser-used spaces.

We used to have a low-down cupboard with a shelf as part of a protruding sink unit. The shelf had some water play equipment on, but it wasn't as accessed by the children as some of the other storage spaces as it felt too tucked away. We decided to take the shelf out and transform it into a Cave of Wonders. The inside of the cupboard was painted black and the outside of it had grey papier mâché put around to give the appearance of a cave entrance. Fairy lights were put around the outside for added intrigue. The Cave of Wonders was then ready as a base for interesting enhancements.

### TREASURE PIT

One of our most popular enhancements to the cave was when we made it into a treasure pit. We had an old suitcase that a staff member had found in a charity shop, and we decided to fill it with sand and place it in the cave. A treasure-

map-printed tablecloth was put under the suitcase and some carpet tiles surrounded it for children to comfortably kneel on. Tools such as metal scoops, spoons, tea strainers and mini chip frying baskets were hung on the hooks of the open suitcase. Pirate-themed books and accessories were placed around the enhancement such as telescopes, old-looking paper on clipboards with pencils, and numbered bottles. Natural loose parts such as pebbles, shells and pieces of driftwood sat on the sand, and large plastic gems were scattered and covered for children to take delight in discovering.

The children had a wealth of ideas for pirate- and treasure-hunting-based play from the stories we had shared together. We observed some children becoming inspired to write messages to put in the bottles. One child suggested they took the bottles to float in the water tray. Some made links to the story *The Pirates Next Door* by Johnny Duddle, where the character Jim Lad sends his friend Matilda a message in a bottle.

### MAP-MAKING

After an adult-guided activity to model, many children made treasure maps and took them around the classroom hunting for treasure, leading back to the cave, using positional and directional language. They used their fine motor skills to draw trails on the map and an 'x' to mark where the treasure was. *We're Going on a Treasure Hunt* by Martha Mumford reminded the children about using an 'x'. One child made an 'x' using the Duplo and put it on the sand as part of their imaginative game. Others enjoyed simply filling and emptying containers and searching for the treasure in the sand using the tools.



The treasure-hunting enhancement in the setting's mud area

### FINDING COINS

Outside we have sometimes added a treasure-hunting enhancement to our mud area. We have a set of shiny golden coins that we bury in the mud, along with other loose parts. Colourful voiles cover the pallet-crate backdrop, and the containers that we hang on the slats of the crate are filled with tools to help the children to dig and explore. Treasure chests are put nearby for children to collect the treasure in if they want to, and section trays are added to encourage sorting.

The excitement can be seen on the children's faces when they discover the coins. One child once suggested that they work together to clean the coins, so they fetched a bucket of water and a cloth from the water equipment and set to work rinsing and drying the coins, making them clean and sparkling.

The adults have set up a larger-scale treasure hunt with the coins, hiding them all over the outdoor area for the children to find. After they have been found and counted, the children take great excitement in having a turn at hiding them for their friends, and this leads to them playing treasure hunts independently and confidently. The coins can be left out for several days as an enhancement for the children to continue with this collaborative game. ■

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