

# Autumn Treasures Playgroup: The Helpful Gnome

**Curriculum Framework:** Australian Steiner Curriculum, Cycle 1 (Ages 5-6)

**Term Focus:** Term 2 (Autumn) - Rhythm, Nature's Changes, Helping Hands

**Student:** H, Age 5

## Materials Needed

- **For Creative Play:** Wooden blocks, silk cloths (in autumn colours: red, orange, yellow, brown), felted gnomes or animals, pinecones, smooth stones, and tree branches.
- **For Craft:** A collection of colourful autumn leaves (pressed and dried is best), small wooden peg dolls or sturdy twigs for bodies, PVA glue or a hot glue gun (for adult use), scraps of felt for hats, fine-tipped permanent markers.
- **For Circle Time:** A small basket for collecting "treasures."
- **For Story Time:** A red silk cloth, a small gnome puppet or figure, a small felted mushroom.
- **For Snack:** Sliced apples, warm spiced tea (caffeine-free), wholemeal bread with butter or honey.
- **General:** A candle in a holder, matches, a small bell, cleaning cloths.

## Learning Objectives

While formal objectives are de-emphasized in Steiner education for this age, the intended developmental goals for this session are:

- **Fine Motor Skills:** To develop dexterity and coordination through crafting, such as gluing small leaves and tying felt hats.
- **Imagination and Creativity:** To nurture imaginative capacities through open-ended play and storytelling. H will create a character and world for their leaf gnome.
- **Connection to Nature:** To foster a sense of wonder and reverence for the natural world by observing and using materials from the autumn season.
- **Social-Emotional Skills:** To practice turn-taking and shared responsibility during snack and tidy-up time.
- **Language and Listening:** To develop listening skills and vocabulary through oral storytelling and song.

## Lesson Rhythm and Flow (Approx. 2.5 hours)

The session is structured around a gentle rhythm of 'breathing in' (receptive, focused activities) and 'breathing out' (active, expansive activities).

### 1. Welcome and Arrival (Breathing In - 10 mins)

Begin by lighting a candle to signify the start of your special time together. Sing a simple welcome song:

*"Good morning, dear Earth, good morning, dear Sun.  
Good morning, dear stones, and flowers every one.  
Good morning, dear creatures, and birds in the tree."*

*Good morning to you, and good morning to me."*

Talk quietly about what you might see or do today, mentioning the beautiful autumn leaves.

## 2. Creative Free Play (Breathing Out - 45 mins)

This is H's time to lead. The materials (silks, blocks, gnomes, natural items) are arranged invitingly on a rug. The adult's role is to be present and engaged in a quiet, purposeful activity nearby (e.g., mending, polishing a wooden toy), modeling focus and care. Only join the play if invited, allowing H's imagination to direct the activity.

## 3. Tidy-Up Song (Breathing In - 10 mins)

Signal the transition with a song. This makes tidying a joyful, shared activity, not a chore. Ring a small bell and sing to a simple tune (like 'Twinkle, Twinkle'):

*"Tidy up, tidy up, everyone everywhere.  
Tidy up, tidy up, and do your share."*

Work together to put each item back in its basket or on its shelf, showing care for the materials.

## 4. Circle Time (Breathing In - 15 mins)

Gather in a circle. Use verses, fingerplays, and simple songs related to autumn and gnomes.

- **Verse:** "The leaves are falling, red and gold, a blanket for the Earth so cold."
- **Fingerplay:** "Mr. Gnome" (A finger-walking gnome who gathers treasures).
- **Movement:** Pretend to be trees swaying and dropping your leaves. Swirl around like a falling leaf until you land gently on the ground.

## 5. Creative Activity: Making Leaf Gnomes (Breathing Out - 20 mins)

Move to a table where the craft materials are prepared. Show H how to make a gnome by example (imitation is key). Don't give too many verbal instructions.

1. Choose a twig or peg doll for the body.
2. Select a beautiful leaf to be the gnome's cloak. Wrap it around the body and help H glue it in place.
3. Cut a small triangle of felt for a hat and glue it on top.
4. Let H add a simple face with a marker if they wish.

The focus is on the process and the sensory experience, not a perfect product. H's gnome will be unique and wonderful.

## 6. Story Time (Breathing In - 10 mins)

Settle into a cozy corner. Lay out the red silk cloth. Use the gnome puppet you made or another small figure. Tell the story orally, using a slow, gentle voice. The story should be simple and repetitive.

**Example Story:** *"Once there was a little gnome named Pip who lived under a big mushroom. Every autumn day, Pip would peek out. He saw the red leaves falling... pitter-patter. He saw the yellow leaves falling... swish-swoosh. 'I must help the Earth get ready for its winter sleep,' he whispered. So Pip took his little basket and gathered one red leaf, and one yellow leaf, and tucked them into a tiny hole to keep a little seed warm. And the Earth was very thankful."*

Repeat the same story for a week or two to allow the imagery to deepen.

## 7. Shared Snack (Breathing Out - 20 mins)

Wash hands together. Sit at the table and say a simple blessing or grace for the food.

*"Blessings on the blossom, blessings on the fruit,  
Blessings on the leaf and stem, blessings on the root."*

Enjoy the seasonal snack, chatting quietly together. H can help pour the tea or pass the apple slices.

## 8. Outdoor Play and Farewell (Breathing Out / In - 30 mins)

Go outside to play. This is a time for running, jumping, and big body movements. H might want to rake leaves into a pile, collect more 'treasures' for the gnomes, or just enjoy the fresh air. End the day with a simple goodbye song and one last look at the nature treasures you found. Extinguish the candle to signal the session is over.

# Lesson Plan Evaluation Rubric

## 1. Learning Objectives

**Evaluation: Excellent**

**Justification:** The objectives are specific to the developmental needs of a 5-year-old (fine motor, imagination, nature connection) rather than abstract academic goals. They are achievable within the session and can be observed (e.g., watching H glue a leaf). They align perfectly with the Steiner curriculum's focus on the development of the whole child—hands, heart, and head.

## 2. Alignment with Standards and Curriculum

**Evaluation: Excellent**

**Justification:** The lesson explicitly references and is built upon the core principles of the Australian Steiner Curriculum for Cycle 1. Key indicators include the use of a predictable rhythm ('breathing in and out'), learning through imitation (craft activity), focus on imaginative play, practical work (tidying, snack), and a deep connection to the season (autumn theme, materials, story).

## 3. Instructional Strategies

**Evaluation: Excellent**

**Justification:** The plan outlines clear, age-appropriate Steiner pedagogical methods. Strategies include oral storytelling to build listening skills, learning through imitation during the craft, and using songs and verses to guide transitions (e.g., Tidy-Up Song). These methods are designed to engage the child's will and feelings, encouraging active participation in a gentle, non-coercive way.

## 4. Engagement and Motivation

**Evaluation: Excellent**

**Justification:** Engagement is fostered through a high-interest theme (gnomes, nature treasures) that is relatable and magical for a five-year-old. The use of hands-on, sensory materials (leaves, silks, wood) and the variety of activities (play, craft, story, outdoor time) maintains interest. Giving H

agency during creative free play is a powerful motivator.

## 5. Differentiation and Inclusivity

### Evaluation: Good

**Justification:** As a one-on-one homeschool lesson, differentiation is inherent. The parent-teacher can adapt every step to H's mood, energy, and ability on the day. For example, if H struggles with fine motor skills, the adult can assist more with the glue. If H is full of energy, outdoor time can be extended. The plan could be rated "Excellent" by explicitly stating these potential modifications, but its flexible structure is its greatest strength in this area.

## 6. Assessment Methods

### Evaluation: Excellent

**Justification:** The assessment is formative, qualitative, and observational, which is appropriate for this age and curriculum. The plan relies on the teacher's presence and observation of H's engagement, skill progression (how they handle the materials over time), imaginative expression, and social disposition. This aligns perfectly with Steiner assessment, which avoids formal testing in early childhood in favor of holistic observation.

## 7. Organization and Clarity

### Evaluation: Excellent

**Justification:** The lesson is sequenced logically and rhythmically, following the "breathing in/out" structure that is central to a Steiner day. Each segment has a clear purpose and flows smoothly into the next, with transitions (songs, bell) clearly articulated. The instructions are easy for a parent or teacher to follow and implement.

## 8. Creativity and Innovation

### Evaluation: Excellent

**Justification:** The entire lesson is designed to spark creativity and critical thinking through imaginative play, not rote learning. The "Leaf Gnome" craft encourages H to see natural objects in a new, creative way. The oral story provides rich imagery for H to process and build upon in their own play, fostering problem-solving within a narrative context (e.g., "How will the gnome stay warm?").

## 9. Materials and Resource Management

### Evaluation: Excellent

**Justification:** A detailed list of materials is provided. The plan emphasizes the use of simple, natural, and inexpensive or free resources (leaves, twigs, stones). This is not only practical but also philosophically aligned with the Steiner ethos of connecting children to the natural world and valuing simple, open-ended materials over complex, single-purpose toys.