

Sugaring Time: An Early Spring Circle

By Donna Brooks

I savor the change of seasons from winter to spring. The late winter event of “sugaring time” exemplifies the transition from one season to the next. There is a thawing and flowing. Our own beings seem to soften—spirits becoming lighter as we move into the joyous season of spring. Tapping maple trees for sap and transforming that sap into sweet maple syrup is a gift given to the world by the native people of this land. It is such a sweet gift at a time when the promise of spring is so welcome.

Langston Hughes’ verse, which I repeat throughout the circle, takes me to a magical place and inspired this circle. My husband, a naturalist and director of a nature sanctuary, encouraged this inspiration. As winter wears on, there seems such a need around early March to experience the subtle seasonal changes. Spring does not yet seem here, and winter snow and the unique beauty of that season are waning. I wanted to honor the sugaring tradition by creating a circle that playfully involved the work and process of making maple syrup. My class was given a large pot of sap to boil down in our room. We saw the steam and stirred the thickening sap in the pot. This year we will tap a maple tree that is in our play yard and add its sap to what we have from other sources to boil down into maple syrup. Maple sugaring engages the will of the child in transforming substance and magically draws in the young ones who can’t resist the sweet promise of maple syrup! I hope other early childhood teachers will try out the whole circle or take excerpts into your late winter circles. It is a work in progress, and your ideas are welcome.

Sugaring Time Circle

Song Refrain*

*This little house is sugar.
Its roof with snow is piled.
And from its tiny window
Peeps a maple sugar child.
Sunny, warm days and frosty cold nights.
That’s when sugaring time is right.
Maple sugar children have their tools
Packed inside their sacks
Off to the woods we go with our
Sacks slung up on our backs.
(Song Refrain while marching to woods...)*

Good morning maple tree strong and tall.
It’s a maple sugaring day.
Sunny warm days and frosty cold nights
Your sap will flow our way!

Drill, drill, drill the hole.
Hammer in the spout.
Hang the bucket on the tree
To catch sap dripping out.

*(sing) Drip, drip, drip.
Drip, drip, drip.
Drip, drip, drip.
Drip, drip, drip.*

Drip, drip the whole day through.

Until the night does come.
Grab your hatchet everyone.
There's more work to be done.

There's wood to chop at the sugar house
With hatchets held so tight.
We'll swing them high and chop the wood
Chopping until night.
(sing) Chop, chop, chop.
Chop, chop, chop.
Chop, chop, chop.
Chop, chop, chop.

Gather the bundle. Let's go to the stove.
Into the fire the wood will go.

Load it in with a hey and a ho.
We feed the fire and heat the stove.
Load it in with a hey and a ho.
We feed the fire and heat the stove.

Let's walk back to our maple trees.
The buckets are full and ready, I see.
Back to the sugar house we will go.
To boil the sap and watch the steam roll.

We'll need a big kettle. Oh, this one will do.
Up on the stove with a one and a two.
Pour in your buckets of sap, carefully.
In time there'll be syrup for you and for me.

(sing) Boil the sap. Stir it with care.
A cloud of sweet steam rises high in the air.
Song Refrain

Thicker and golden our sap has become.
Our sugaring time is almost done.

(sing) Boil the sap. Stir it with care.
A cloud of sweet steam rises high in the air.
Song Refrain
Thick and golden. Let's taste a bit.
Yum, sweet maple syrup kisses our lips!
Maple sugar children turn round and round
And sweetly they flutter down to the ground.
Pancakes, flapjacks around we go.
Pour on the syrup, thick and slow.

Blessings on the sap that flows from the trees.
Blessings on the work of you and me.
Blessings on the syrup, sweet as can be.
(Then we eat our pancakes with syrup)

* Sung in the mood of the fifth. The first four lines are by Langston Hughes from *Read Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young*.

Donna Brooks taught in the public schools for fourteen years. This is her second year teaching at the Water's Edge School Waldorf initiative early childhood program in Wauconda, Illinois. She may be reached at (847) 526-1372 or email at Brooks@mc.net