

# Working with Wood

— Su Rubinoff

*The Carpenter pounds with one hammer, one hammer,  
one hammer*

*The Carpenter pounds with one hammer and then she  
pounds with two.*

*The Carpenter pounds with two hammers, two ham-  
mers, two hammers*

*The Carpenter pounds with two hammers and then she  
pounds with three. . . —A traditional circle activity*

Woodworking connects one with nature, and it is a magical process to use one's hands and imagination to create something from what appears to be just a piece of wood. It is very exciting and empowering for adults as well as children. I feel it is important to share what we love, and I love wood: the beauty and function of trees, finding pieces of wood, feeling wood, seeing the different patterns and grains, repairing wooden toys, and more.

As early childhood educators, we are so good at doing practical work inside in order for the children to inwardly and outwardly imitate. But sometimes when we are outside, it is a little more difficult. Thus, I always have something in my pocket that needs sanding. In the beginning of the school year, there is always something to refurbish, such as the wooden plates, cups, play clips, and more. Since children learn from imitation, many often want to sand, as well, so they share in the work and develop a strong desire to transform something.

We are very fortunate to have our school on twenty-eight acres with a brook and untouched forest. Yet even if you live in a city, there are places you can explore to find wood treasures. Often while we are walking or playing in the forest, we will find nice pieces of wood that we bring back to our classroom to use in play. This year we have been searching for long branches of wood to make our compost bins with. These bins are four feet wide by four feet long and five feet high and they are made of layered branches (like a log cabin house). We use our saw as I sing a song, "back and forth, back and forth, saw our wood today,"

and then slowly build our bins. This is a wonderful purposeful activity. We also saw different-sized pieces, sand and then polish them, and use them for play, stories, in "the store," and so on.

Every Chanukah, we find a small log or branch in the forest and with our hand drill we drill nine holes for the special Chanukah candles that we will light as we sing our blessing. I love when the thread of light begins at Martinmas and then weaves its way through Advent and then Chanukah. For gifts for the parents at this time of year, we always make something out of wood, whether it is a cutting board, a key holder rack, coat rack, or a candle holder. Our oldest children, The Elderberries, will have the privilege of sawing the edges of their wood while the Dewberries are often waiting for the sawdust to use in the "kitchen" or will gather the cut triangle wood pieces.

My colleague's class cut down a trunk of cedar and then sawed it into two-inch slices. Her husband then cut out the heart, the fragrant internal part of the wood, into a heart shape. She attached a big piece of sandpaper to a stump with tacks and the children sanded the hearts for Valentine's Day.

It is important to remember that it is not necessarily the end product that we are focusing on but the process, from beginning to end. The excited anticipation the children had of being able to switch from a rough sandpaper to a finer grade was incredible. There is something so powerful in seeing a branch turn into a menorah or a cutting board be created from a mere board. The children are always so proud of what they have accomplished because they know that it took many days of hard work.

Without needing to say too much, it is also important to use real tools correctly and safely.

Not only do the children develop a respect and appreciation for working with wood and items made out of wood, but this activity is very therapeutic. It combines sensory experiences with developing eye-hand coordination, dexterity and fine motor skills, and it is a beginning in their "will" development.

*For those who will to work  
With those who guide the future of mankind,  
Bring forth spirit potentials within yourselves  
And so achieve the power to awaken  
Dormant faculties in others.  
Cultivate the seed kernels,  
Foster the forces of development,  
Recognize that which is of the future.*  
—Rudolf Steiner

## Toolbox Essentials

- Hammer (under 12 oz. in weight), crosscut saw (12-14 inches long), coping saw, square, measuring tape, screwdriver with different bits, rasp, glue, screws and nails, clamps, hand drill and bits
- Sandpaper: sandpaper is graded as medium, or numbers 60, 80, and 100. Fine sandpaper numbers are 150, 180, and very fine 220, 240, and 280. Medium is usually used for the first sanding, fine for smoother results and very fine for smoothing finishes between coats.
- Work apron
- First aid kit with peroxide, band aids, gauze, ointment (calendula and antibiotic)
- Wood: the two basic categories of wood used most often in woodworking projects are hardwood and softwood. Hardwood is more durable and less prone to dents and scratches; it is also more expensive. It will finish to a better advantage, but is harder for chil-

dren to saw. Soft woods, like pine, bass, birch, cedar, fir, spruce are more prone to dents and scratches but easier for children to use.

### Finishes:

- Mineral oil: a light coating of mineral oil, rubbed into well-sanded wood, provides an easy-to-apply and relatively durable finish. Apply several coats of oil wiping away the excess. A warm room or warm oil will help penetration. This does need to be reapplied frequently.
- Beeswax: Put the finish on the wood with a paint brush or cloth. Allow the finish to remain on the wood for 30 minutes. Use a clean, soft cloth to wipe any remaining finish from the wood. Buff using the cloth and following the grain. This will help the finish soak deep into the wood. Reapply as many coats as desired, waiting at least 24 hours between coats. A simple beeswax formula is five parts mineral oil to four parts beeswax, adjusting the mixture for a harder or softer cream. Just melt the two together.

Remember to start simply until you feel confident. Your joy will be imitated both internally and externally by the children in your care. ♦

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Photo courtesy of Su Rubinoff