



## Tundra Tots Volunteer Packet

Updated 5/2016

Welcome and thank you for volunteering to be a Tundra Tot instructor! We are THRILLED that you are helping out with our whole-community, preschool program! Inside this packet you will find an introduction to experiential education, the history of Tundra Tots, a description of the “Tundra Tot Approach,” a lesson template, a sample lesson, and a resource list for further research.

*From the Tundra Tots webpage:*

**Mission:** To provide meaningful outdoor experiences for local preschoolers and families in which to enjoy and understand the natural world.

**Vision:** Students expand their sense of community, building a holistic notion of home reflected through storytelling, play, and art rooted in the natural world.

**Goals and Objectives:**

- 1) Create a fun and safe environment in which to experience the outdoors
- 2) Provide enriching outdoor experiences that nurtures curiosity and discovery within the local environment
- 3) Foster self-expression through storytelling, play, and art
- 4) Support healthy social development through notions of community and belonging
- 5) Facilitate and engage whole families as educators

**Description of Program:** Tundra Tots is a toddler and preschool program that employs storytelling, play, and art to provide meaningful outdoor experiences for the whole family. Tundra Tots will get your kids laughing, learning, and exploring all the wonders that Denali has to offer!

## A Brief Introduction to Experiential Education

From the Association for Experiential Education

<http://www.aee.org/what-is-ee>

*Challenge and Experience followed by Reflection leading to Learning and Growth.*

That is experiential education expressed most simply as it is utilized and performed by individuals across disciplines, settings and geographies.

Experiential education is a philosophy that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities. Experiential educators include teachers, camp counselors, corporate team builders, therapists, challenge course practitioners, environmental educators, guides, instructors, coaches, mental health professionals . . . and the list goes on. It is often utilized in many disciplines and settings: Non-formal education, Place-based education, Project-based education, Global education, Environmental education, Student-centered education, Informal education, Active learning, Service learning, Cooperative learning and Expeditionary learning.

The principles of experiential education practice are:

- Experiential learning occurs when carefully chosen experiences are supported by reflection, critical analysis and synthesis.
- Experiences are structured to require the learner to take initiative, make decisions and be accountable for results.
- Throughout the experiential learning process, the learner is actively engaged in posing questions, investigating, experimenting, being curious, solving problems, assuming responsibility, being creative, and constructing meaning.
- Learners are engaged intellectually, emotionally, socially, soulfully and/or physically. This involvement produces a perception that the learning task is authentic.

- The results of the learning are personal and form the basis for future experience and learning.
- Relationships are developed and nurtured: learner to self, learner to others and learner to the world at large.
- The educator and learner may experience success, failure, adventure, risk-taking and uncertainty, because the outcomes of experience cannot totally be predicted.
- Opportunities are nurtured for learners and educators to explore and examine their own values.
- The educator's primary roles include setting suitable experiences, posing problems, setting boundaries, supporting learners, insuring physical and emotional safety, and facilitating the learning process.
- The educator recognizes and encourages spontaneous opportunities for learning.
- Educators strive to be aware of their biases, judgments and pre-conceptions, and how these influence the learner.
- The design of the learning experience includes the possibility to learn from natural consequences, mistakes and successes.



## A Brief History of Tundra Tots

Tundra Tots was started in the summer of 2014 by the Denali Education Center to meet a need for preschool experiential programming by seasonal and year-round local families. The program ran for one hour on Mondays and included a craft, a book reading, and a nature activity. Each week featured a new theme led by a volunteer instructor. Since it began, the Tundra Tot program has continued to grow in attendance and reach.

In 2016, the program was restructured and was given a Mission, Vision, Goals and Objectives, and an updated description. Furthermore, we began to move away from how we previously approached the contents of the class. Book reading, nature activities, and crafts were reinterpreted as storytelling, play, and art in order to broaden the concept's reach and potential. Also, we began an Educator Apprenticeship branch to Tundra Tots, giving older youth opportunities to be educators and receive positive and constructive feedback.

The last concept that was introduced in 2016 was the idea of engaging whole families as educators. This was an effort to build community, get parents talking to each other about educating in a constructive environment, and to share knowledge between the DEC and the community-at-large.

The future of Tundra Tots is bright! In the coming years we are looking to expand our programming in terms of quality, student pull, and conduct needs assessments for year-round preschool experiential programming in the Denali Park area.



## The “Tundra Tots Approach”

There are three pillars to our Tundra Tots programs: Storytelling, Play, and Art. Each of these pillars provides our Tots with opportunities to approach the material being taught in multiple, creative ways.

### **Storytelling:**

Storytelling is, at its heart, a way for children to connect to the world of adults. By telling stories, especially those grounded in the local area, we insinuate a flurry of connections between past, present, and future. Furthermore, we are establishing a shared culture; a framework for community. Story engages the imagination in one of the most ancient and effective mediums available to us, allowing the child to approach the narrative with unique perspectives. Active listening is participatory and gives rise to creative self-expression.

In Tundra Tots, we use story as a framework for that day’s theme or question. We establish the world in which we will be exploring. How is what we are doing today reminiscent of this framed story? We teach history, be it through a Western scientific, Native scientific, or a smorgasbord of cultural lenses. History is foundation.

By framing our theme or question with a story, we can then integrate that story into that day’s Art expression and Play. This can be done in many ways, and to list the myriad of ways would be limiting to its true potential. By allowing these activities to be conceptualized as universal concepts, we have the opportunity to bridge and blend them more effectively, providing the most appropriate and quality education possible.

### **Play:**

Play is an essential part of early childhood (and everyone’s) education. Play engages students with their imagination, and the imagination of their peers. Compromise and planning are essential traits of healthy play. Further, a collective, cooperative culture is created, and self-

expression is shared internal to the group. A group identity is formed and traits of acceptance and empathy are reinforced.

In Tundra Tots, we use play as a way for students to manipulate and interpret that day's theme or question. This can be done by teaching students a relevant game, giving them a narrative problem of which they must solve together, or simply giving them a starting point in which they create their own world of play, and the instructor facilitates exploration. Play allows the instructor to relinquish the expert knowledge and to instead facilitate the students' discovery of new information, driven by curiosity. Imagination and physical outputs blend, lending themselves to give rise to creative, experiential, education.

Again, to list the ways in which Storytelling, Art, and Play can overlap would be limiting. As an instructor, the world is your proverbial oyster!

### **Art:**

Art represents the physical manifestation of a child's imaginative concept. Whether the child is coloring, drawing, tracing, cutting, playing music, constructing, deconstructing, or any other act, the child builds a sense of self as an expressive individual. A child's inner drive, their focus, is devoted to the realization of an extension of their potential self. Furthermore, the crux of artistic expression, the imperfect expression or incomplete expression, teaches the child notions of humility, contribution, and when framed appropriately, detaching self-worth from the raw output and instead associating it with the industry of creation.

In Tundra Tots, we use art as a way for students to take the day's theme or question and approach it from grounds of their personal interpretation. This can range from having students draw their interpretation of the theme of the day, having them create props for play or storytelling, or even giving them free range to explore the tools of expression with individual subjects. Debrief of expression is also an option, allowing students to appreciate the effort of others, linking personal contribution of nature-in-reflection to cultural contribution of the group.

## Role of Parents and Families:

One of the goals of Tundra Tots is to facilitate and engage whole families as educators, and we have the wonderful opportunity to do just that! Parents, siblings, local older youth, are all our students just as we are theirs. Education as an equalizing force is powerful, and we should encourage to share not just *what* we are doing with parents, or *how*, but also, *why*. Drawing from our own experiences as professional educators, we the instructors have an obligation to our community to share and to spread our wealth of knowledge. When this is done, we will come to discover that we are all educators, and have our own expert knowledge. This being so, we will discover that we all have something to contribute to the education of the students. It takes a village to raise a child. We strive to support, participate in, and give back to that village.

One thing that Tundra Tots already has begun is Educator Apprenticeships, which lets young people take the reins in whatever capacity they feel most comfortable. In order to prevent unenjoyable experiences, it is presented in a challenge-by-choice manner. As instructors, and professional educators, it is our obligation to cultivate the prospects of the future, even if later they decide it's not their cup of tea. If you have an apprentice, do good for your village and share with them, not only the logic and process of creating an education plan, but why you love doing what you do, or why you chose to teach Tundra Tots, even if it felt like a risk! Education is not just about the logic, it is about the passion behind what we do. That is where the power lies.



## Tundra Tots Lesson Template

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Instructor Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Tundra Tots #s:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Donations Received:**

**Theme:**

**Universal Idea:**

**Driving Question(s):**

**Materials Needed:**

**Opening Circle:**

**Opening Story:**

**Art Expression:**

**Play:**

**Closing Story:**

**Closing Circle:**

### Debrief

**Positive (what worked well?):**

**Constructive (what needs further development?):**

<b>Tundra Tots Lesson Template (Sample)</b>		
<b>Date:</b> 6/13/16	<b>Instructor Name:</b> Boaty McBoatface	<b>Tundra Tots #s:</b> 15
<b>Donations Received:</b> \$100		
<b>Theme:</b> Denali the Mountain		
<b>Universal Idea:</b> Multiplicity of Truth		
<b>Driving Question(s):</b> Where did Denali come from?		
<b>Materials Needed:</b> Weather-dependent, molding clay or drawing tools/upcycled paper		
<b>Opening Circle:</b> Welcome, introduction to day's question, field responses		
<b>Opening Story:</b> Koyukon story of how Denali was formed. Adapted from <i>Make Prayers to the Raven</i> by Richard K. Nelson, pg. 34		
<b>Art Expression:</b> Now imagine that you are Raven and have magical powers. How would you make a mountain? What would it look like? What would you name it? Use natural materials by the Nenana if weather is good. If weather is poor, use clay to mold or draw		
<b>Play:</b> Remember in the story about Raven, how Denali was so tall not even he could stand on its peak? Well, Let's imagine that I am now DENALI! And you are all now a family of ravens! You need to get as close as you can to Denali to gather nest supplies scattered around to build your family's nest. I will be blindfolded, because mountains don't have eyes, and can't move my feet because mountains can't move THAT fast 😊. You need to be sneaky though! If you get tagged you're FROZEN from cold winds, and the only way to get saved is for another raven to tag and free you! We will see how big you can make your nest!		
<b>Closing Story:</b> Western Scientific story of Denali's formation. A long, long time ago, where we sit now was once underwater, and the ocean floor was ruled by boiling and bubbling volcanos! One day, one volcano erupted underwater and formed a small bulb of hardened lava. That was 56 million years ago! Slowly, ever so slowly, for millions and millions of years, that small bulb of lava kept growing and growing, pushing its way towards the surface of that ancient ocean and the sky. Being young, it started its ascension slowly, with the older rocks having already been there for almost 350 million years, but nevertheless, that small bulb grew and grew, slow and steady. Luckily for that bulb, it was made of a special kind of solid lava, called granite, and when the ocean eventually dried and all the rocks were exposed as mountains, it wore down slower than the other mountains around it. Cold winters brought ice which <i>split</i> mountains and hot summers <i>baked</i> the rocks holding heat, and for millions of years, that small bulb became bigger and bigger, taller and taller, until almost 10,000 years ago, people, like you and me, first saw it; a great wave of stone in the sky; a part of that ancient ocean that had never given up. Seeing that bulb, high in the sky, they came to name it Denali, "The High One."		
<b>Closing Circle:</b> What is similar between these two stories? Can they both be true?		
<b><u>Debrief</u></b>		
<b>Positive (what worked well?):</b>		
<b>Constructive (what needs further development?):</b>		