Activity Name
The Corner Explores…Sand Stories

Summary
In this activity, children use sand to make sand castles and tell stories, to improve their literacy skills. The activity will encourage children to make connections between the words they can say and the way words and stories are represented by pictures and letters in books.

Rationale
Torres Strait Islander culture is maintained and shared through song, dance and oral storytelling. To assist with oral storytelling, Torres Strait Islander people sometimes draw symbols and story elements in the sand. This activity is inspired by this cultural tradition and invites children to create their own sand stories, whether on holidays at the beach or in the sandpit at home. As an activity, the focus is on playing in the sand and describing what is taking place. The hidden learning comes from combining oral with visual and symbolic modes of representation, a skill which forms the foundation of literacy.

Key Concepts
Stories can be told through spoken word, pictures, symbols and written words.

Key Language
Will depend on the content of the story however, who, what, when, where, why and how might be common in the strategic questions you ask.

Materials

Sand
Found objects such as sticks, shells, rocks, etc
Activity Steps

Step 1: Getting started

You can start this activity simply by playing in the sand with your child. Talk about what they are doing and describe the shapes they are making.

- To encourage your child to connect narrative to their pictures, model this to them: ‘When I look at your picture I see a house on a mountain, what do you see?’ You can also help them create a story by asking questions or making suggestions the way you would with any other pretend play.

Step 2: Storytelling

Start by retelling something that has happened recently. For instance: what you did yesterday or even what you had for breakfast this morning! (Even though you might start with a real event, let the story evolve into the imaginary).

You could also retell a favourite story or even a nursery rhyme. For example: Miss Polly, Old MacDonald, or The Grand Old Duke of York. If you have some small toys (or a stick and a good imagination) you can create your scene out of sand and then act out your story the way you would if it was a doll house or a train set.

Strategic Questions

- What did you do yesterday?
- What did you have for breakfast?
- Who lives there? What happened next? Uh-oh, here comes the ….

Step 2: Creating your story

Now it’s your turn to create your own sand drawing and story! Remember, the beach is big so you can keep adding more story elements and moving up the beach as your story grows.

Here is an example story! Tommy Turtle went camping up a mountain with his friend Giant Giraffe. They put the tent up as the moon was rising. The next day, the sun rose and they could see the ocean. They decided to go to the beach and played a game of catch.
Tips:

- Have fun, go with it and just play. All you really need to do to enhance this activity is talk and listen. Describe what is happening, ask questions and give your child the time and space to explore the sand, make pictures and tell you their stories.

- If you have some small toys (or a stick and a good imagination) you can create your scene out of sand and then act out your story the way you would if it was a doll house or a train set.

- Once you have some experience making sand stories, you can also document your story and turn it into a digital story to share online and email to friends. This involves taking digital photographs at key points in the story, uploading them to a program such as Little Bird Tales, PhotoStory or PowerPoint and then simply adding text/captions to complete the story. Why not make a sand story about what you have done on your holiday and then email it to family and friends?! A wonderful modern twist on postcards.

Digital sand play

To find out more information, check out these links.

- Little Bird Tales is a simple online program specifically for making digital stories. Here you will find all the information you need and step by step instructions littlebirdtales.com

- You can also check out an example here.

- PhotoStory is a free Microsoft program that you can download here. It is a little more complex than Little Bird Tales but still very easy to use. There are lots of tutorials available online such as this YouTube video.

Sand techniques

- Damp sand works best
- Draw with your fingers or a stick
- Make patterns and textures by pressing objects into the sand. For instance, a water bottle will give you a nice round circle. Shells make interesting patterns too. Try different parts of your hands/arms.
- Dig holes and tunnels, make mountains, valleys, houses and castles.
- Use found objects such as sticks and shells to create characters, symbols and decorations.
- By carefully dropping dry sand on wet sand you can also create colour contrasts.