

## **Birthday Party Themes Right Under Your Nose**

by Danielle Schultz

Deciding on the perfect theme for your child's birthday can be a daunting task. Many parents enjoy providing a creative and unique experience for their child and guests. The best place to start, whether your child is turning 2 or 12 is with their favorite pastimes. Think about their favorite animal, movie, TV show, sport, cartoon character and so on. Below you will find an assortment of creative themes for birthday parties.

Themes for birthday parties: Favorite Cartoon/TV Characters (Mickey Mouse, Winnie the Pooh, Casper, Snoopy), Favorite TV Shows (Rugrats, Looney Tunes, Bananas in Pajamas, Magic School Bus, Blue's Clues, Batman), Favorite Movies (Anastasia, Aladdin, Lion King, Beauty and the Beast, Land Before Time, Little Mermaid, etc.), Favorite Story Books (Arthur the Aardvark, Cinderella, Wizard of Oz, Madeline), Favorite

Animals (dogs, cats, bunnies, bears, ponies, butterflies, dinosaurs), Favorite Sports (football, soccer, basketball, baseball), Favorite Activities (skating, ballet, video games, camping), Favorite Toys (Barbie, Cars, Legos, Blocks) Other Great Ideas: (Construction, Dress up, Barnyard, Princess, Luau, Space Exploration, Tea Party, Trains, Under the Sea)

Once you have the theme, activities to keep the kiddies happy are a must. Many traditional games can be adapted to fit any theme. Below you will find a short description of some traditional games, and examples of ways they can be adapted with the themes listed above. Be creative and you will be able to use many of these games with virtually any theme.

Adaptable games: Duck, Duck, Goose- Whatever the theme, simply substitute words from the theme for "duck" and "goose." For example, use "puppy, puppy, dog" for a dog theme. Use "prince, prince, beast" for Beauty and the Beast. As long as you explain the new words to the children, any words you select will work just fine.

Don't Wake the Dinosaur-This is a fun game where one child is selected to be the Dinosaur. The dinosaur hides his face and lays on the ground as if asleep. The other children creep up on

the dinosaur and ask "Are you asleep?" The dinosaur answers "Yes" several times. He then at one point answers "NO!" and the children scatter to avoid being tagged. The first child tagged is the dinosaur the next round, or you may select yourself. For Cinderella, you could make the dinosaur "the evil stepmother." For the Lion King, you could choose Scar. If having a sports-theme party, the referee could be sleeping.

Pin the Tail on the Donkey-This party favorite will work well with a store-bought poster/picture or parent-drawn poster. If having a party theme which has commercial merchandise like Winnie the Pooh or any Disney characters, purchase a poster or book with the likeness of one of the characters. You may even use a page from a coloring book. If the theme does not lend itself to pinning a body part or piece of clothing on the character (tail on Eeyore or bow on Minnie), you can simply have the children pin "party hats" (cut from colored construction paper) on the characters.

Mother May I-If using an animal theme, allow the children to address the mother animal. For example, "Mother Doggie, may I take two steps forward?" If using a story, movie or TV show theme, select the "bossy" character. A perfect candidate for this job is Angelica from Nickelodeon's Rugrats. Or you may simply chose the main character, such as Arthur, Barney or Madeline.)

**Simon Says-**Play this traditional favorite as described in the last game by replacing "Simon" with a character from the theme. Have the children play with the typical rules of listening carefully to the directions by "Simon" and following them only if "Simon" says.

**Hot Potato-**You can use virtually any item for the "potato" for this old favorite. If your child has chosen a character party, and has a stuffed or plastic toy of the character, use it. For a sports theme, use a ball or other item from the sport. Even a story book about the theme would work well. Use music about/from the theme topic for an added bonus.

**"Name it" Tag-**This is a fun version of tag which has one basic rule. The only way the children can be safe from "it" is to stop in place (before being tagged) and name something or say something. For example: with any show/movie/cartoon theme, the children are safe while stopped and singing the theme song. (It must then turn his attention to another child.) With animal themes, the child might have to stop and make the animal's sound (barking, meowing, roaring, etc.) to be safe. For older children, you might have them stop and name a character or scene from the show/movie/cartoon/book, or name an item from the sport/activity. They then have until the count of 10 to be

safe, then must begin running again. If the theme topic has several familiar songs (such as Barney, Blue's Clues, many movies) the children may stop and sing any song from the show/movie/cartoon/book.

**Obstacle Courses-**Obstacle courses in the backyard are a big hit with the children. Have the children move about the yard and around objects like the theme's characters. For example, have a simple obstacle course laid out and have the children move like butterflies, bunnies or frogs. You might have them pretend to skate or do ballet through the course.

**Button, Button, Who's got the Button/Doggie, Doggie, Where's your Bone?**-These two old favorites are played in a similar fashion. A child is chosen as "it" and hides her eyes as an item (button/bone) is given to a child to hide in his lap or behind his back. "It" then has three chances to guess which child has the item. (All children hide their hands in their laps/behind their backs like they have it.) For animal themes, select an item that goes with the animal. If you are doing "kittens", ask the kitten where her milk is. You could use an empty milk jug or a bowl with the words "kitty" written on it for the item. Themes about a character from a show/movie/cartoon/book may have the central character looking for something he loves. For example, have Pooh look for a honey pot, Arthur look for his glasses, Dorothy look for her ruby red slipper and so on. If you have a

hard time coming up with a physical object for the "button", you may draw an item on a paper plate.

The Food If choosing a character theme, you can have your local bakery/grocery store create a cake for you. If you'd prefer to make your own cake, but wouldn't have a clue how to make an "Arthur the Aardvark" cake, purchase plastic figurines from the toy store or department store to put atop a simple cake. You can also use creative colored icing to make simple shapes on a homemade birthday cake. For example, for a "doggie" party, use white icing to create a bone shape over most of the cake. Use chocolate frosting to cover the rest of the cake.

Additional activities for your theme: If your theme is a movie or TV show, sit down and watch the show a few times. If it's a story book, read it a few times. What special activities/games do the characters do? What unique characteristics of the characters are prevalent? For example, Tigger of "Winnie the Pooh" bounces everywhere, so have a Bouncy Tigger race. Cinderella has to clean all the time, so have a sock toss into a laundry basket.

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