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What We Can Continue to Learn from Fred Rogers



Appreciating the Smallest of Things



This summer I found another message in Fred’s work that can help us in these challenging times. It’s a phrase in one of the stories Fred told about his grandfather: *...Every time I was with him, he’d show me something about the world or something about myself that I hadn’t even thought of yet. He’d help me find something wonderful in the smallest of things...*

“... find something wonderful in the smallest of things.” That’s the phrase I’ve been holding on to through the past few months. It’s reminded me as I walk around the neighborhood to focus

on the little things – the little things that are right there, in front of me. At first a cluster of big flowers catch my attention with their burst of color, but when I take the time to look closely, that’s when I notice the little wonders – tiny white flowers close to the ground, a parade of ants on the sidewalk, an interesting tree root.

Fred wasn’t focused on the big, fast and bold – for himself or for the *Neighborhood*. He would often show us something ordinary like a toy truck, a snow globe or a plant, then he’d give us two “tools” – time to look at it and silence.

He used the same approach, inviting us to “look and listen carefully” when he took us to places like Negri’s Music Shop, factories, artist studios and museums. What a great way to encourage children to focus their attention. Maybe even more importantly, he was helping us to appreciate the little things in the world around us.

Watch how Fred took the time to look carefully, so we, too, could notice things in his visit to the Aviary with ornithologist David Ford.

A Visit to the Aviary



How can we carry Fred's message into our work with children – and into our own lives?

By offering opportunities

I recently heard about a father who took his children outside for an “adventure” -- to look for bugs. Not to capture them. Just to look for them. Imagine how engaged they would be, searching for the tiny creatures, discovering all kinds of things about bugs on leaves, in the dirt, on flowers. Here's an idea for another simple “adventure” for children -- find something small (smaller than your hand) that's “interesting” in and around the neighborhood. You could offer a magnifying glass for a closer look. You or the children might want to photograph the treasures.

There are lots of small things to notice indoors, too. Think about what it means when you've encouraged children to sit and “read” a book. See how carefully they

look at every page, every illustration. There's so much to see and notice. I remember a child pointing out to me the world of the mice at the bottom of every page of the classic picture book *Something from Nothing*. I had been so busy looking at the words when I was reading that I hadn't noticed it!

By offering time

Think about how much more we can see when we have enough time to really look. Let's give children that kind of time, keeping in mind that some may want more time to explore than others.

There's another way to offer more time for those who want it – it's in the word "again." Let's give children the opportunity to see the same things "again" – the same books, the same STEM experiment, the same route for a walk. When we look at the same things over and over again, we tend to notice something more each time, especially the little things we didn't see before.

By offering quiet

There's a wonderful page in Byrd Baylor's book *Everybody Needs a Rock* that offers one of the essential "rules" for finding the perfect rock for you – everything has to be quiet. It can be so much easier to focus when there are no distractions.

I also know it can sometimes be hard for us to maintain silence when children are exploring. We want to take advantage of a teachable moment and ask an open-ended question or show that we care about what the child is doing. Over the years I've talked with a number of teachers about times like that, and they've said it takes a lot of inner discipline to just let the exploration happen in silence. There's time to talk and ask questions after. They don't want to interrupt the concentration, knowing how important that is for learning.

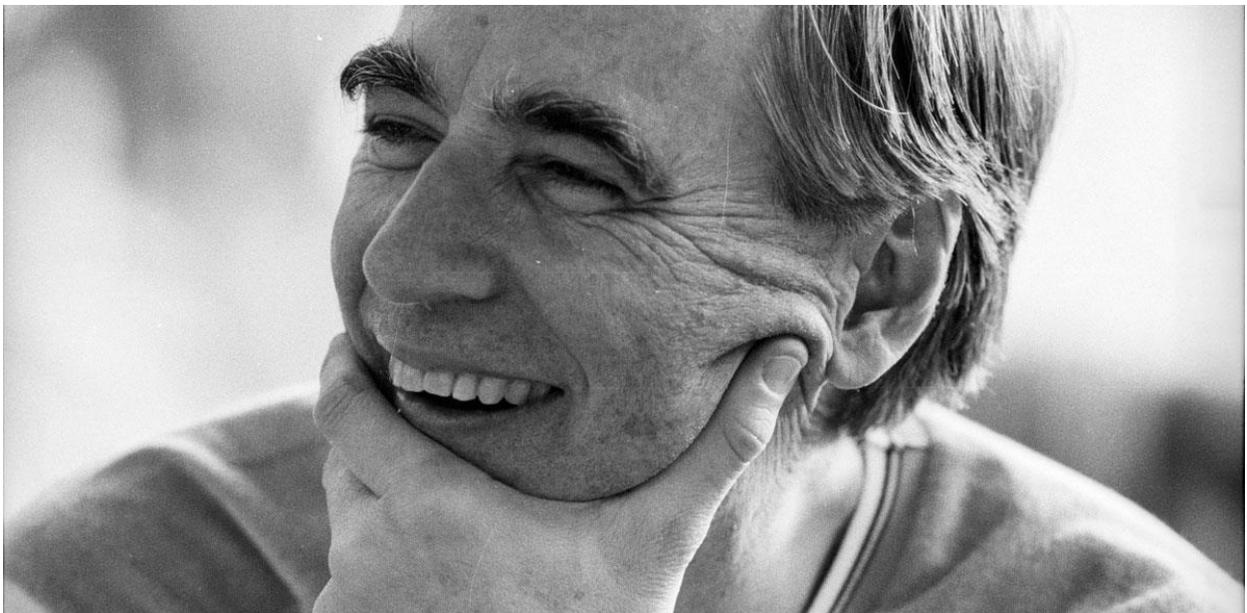
In these upside-down times, it sure helps all of us, young and old alike, to remember that our world is full of small and wondrous things. Think about the pleasure we can find in little things, like the sweet juicy taste of a summertime

fruit, a friendly wave from a neighbor, a kind note on an email or a bit of cool shade on a hot summer day. I can almost hear Fred saying, "It's such a good feeling!"



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Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers



“How many times have you noticed that it’s the little quiet moments in the midst of life that seem to give the rest extra-special meaning?”

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