

# LOOSE

## Parts Manual



**The DIY guide to creating a playground in a box**

By Morgan Leichter-Saxby & Suzanna Law of Pop-Up Adventure Play  
Edited by Elizabeth Moreno of Playground Ideas  
Illustrations by Alejandra Gómez & Matt Green

This manual is a collaboration between












and



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# Welcome

*On the school playground, children build places to climb and hide. One boy uses a cardboard box to make a costume, and then walks over to show his friends. A group of girls made a hammock out of a sheet and take turns pushing each other. Under the shade of a tree, a pair of younger children are creating little houses from sticks and leaves. All around them, children are rolling tires and stacking logs, braiding grasses and dressing up.*



What do the children in this scene have in common? These children aren't playing on playground equipment, or with fancy toys or gadgets. They are all playing with loose parts - simple, cheap, everyday materials, repurposed for play. "Loose parts" is a term that refers to any material that can be moved, carried, stacked, or altered\*. Loose parts can include natural materials (like sticks, stones, water, leaves, and sand) or recycled materials (like cardboard boxes, ropes, fabric, lengths of pipe, or milk crates.) It can even include conceptual inspiration for play, such as stories and ideas, light and shadow.

\*The theory of loose parts was first put forward by Simon Nicholson in the 1970s, and states that the creative potential of an environment is increased with the number and variety of flexible materials within it.

Play is children's first method of engaging with the world, and other people. Increasingly, studies on children's development are demonstrating that open-ended, self-directed play is vitally important for children's well-being and development. The great thing about loose parts is that they don't come with a set of directions or an implied "right way" to use them. Loose materials are only directed by a child's imagination. The playground becomes rich with possibilities for play, as children can decide to transform a cardboard box into a castle, a turtle's shell, and a lion's cage all in one afternoon.

This manual will guide you through a step-by-step process for you to create your unique loose parts play kit. Perhaps you are starting small and want to create a box of materials you can take out each day for your students to play with. Or maybe you have an existing playground and want to enrich the environment with loose parts. It doesn't matter how big or small your budget or plans are, inside you'll find the tips and guidelines to make it happen.

In this manual we'll:

1. Help you to consider the multiple benefits of loose parts play for children's well-being and development;
2. Assess and reevaluate the possibilities of your current environment;
3. Take a closer look at what makes an object an appropriate loose part for play;  
Develop a system for storage and maintenance that works for your context;
4. Explore staffing techniques of play facilitation which can be applied in any setting; and
5. Answer common questions, and provide information and resources to help you gain support for your own loose parts playground

Let's get started!