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# Introduction

As children play, they learn! But how do you, the preschool teacher or caregiver, provide creative play experiences that will help your children develop socially, emotionally, cognitively and physically?

In *Let's Play and Learn*, you will find many concrete yet adaptable creative play ideas for the three-to-five-year-old children in your classroom. Ideas are drawn from the children's world, experiences and interests. The activities encompass the skills early learners are trying to master, including language and reading readiness, spatial awareness and maths, gross and fine motor skills, and social and emotional skills.

Each chapter introduces a favourite type of play in which the young child eagerly engages. You will find innovative ways to facilitate these play experiences with concrete suggestions for specific recipes, using inexpensive materials, and many 'make it yourself' suggestions that reuse materials and resources you may already have. There are also ideas for drama and puppetry that provide opportunities for creative expression in both the visual arts and oral language. Use the readiness activities to promote language development, strengthen reading and maths skills, gross and fine motor development, and spatial awareness.

As you incorporate the ideas in *Let's Play and Learn* into your curriculum, you will discover many creative ways to adapt them to focus on the needs, interests and abilities of your unique children. Use the ideas as springboards for creating your own activities!

Finally, you will find an assessment checklist to use as a general framework for observation and evaluation and to help you keep track of your children's progress.

Enjoy the activities in this book as you and your children play and learn together.

# Create with Clay

With these easy and fun activities your three- to five-year-olds can experience the joy of creating with clay. Using readily-available materials, the clay recipes are simple to make. *Please note:* The recipes are not intended to be edible, unless otherwise indicated. What delightful experiences young children can have with clay that can be made in your own kitchen!

The creative arts are an essential part of the preschool curriculum. Watch how imaginations will soar as young children create with clay that can be reused for hours of sense-stimulating fun. Encourage freedom of expression and promote children's creativity and decision-making skills by allowing them time to simply play with the clay – and by accepting all final projects as wonderful, which they surely will be!

## Recipe: Self-hardening Clay

- 1½ cups (375 mL) salt
- 4 cups (1000 mL) flour
- 1½ cups (375 mL) water
- 1 teaspoon (5 mL) alum\*
- mixing bowl
- spoon
- food colouring

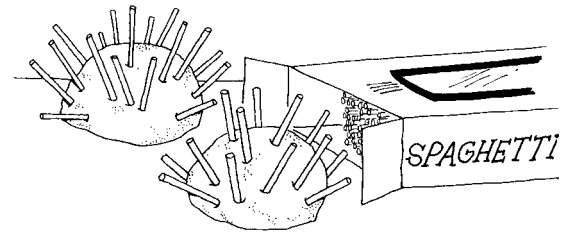
Mix the salt, flour and alum in a bowl. Add the water gradually to form a ball. Knead the dough, adding water until it no longer crumbles. Store in a sealed plastic bag in the refrigerator. Allow the dough to come to room temperature for easy handling.

\* Alum is found in the baking section of supermarkets or chemists. It acts as a preservative.

## Sea Urchin

- self-hardening clay (see recipe, this page)
- uncooked spaghetti

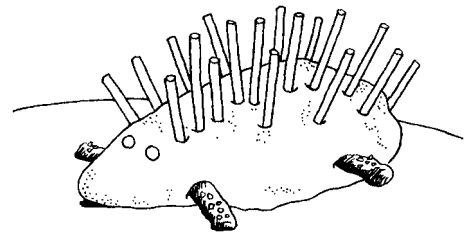
The children will love making spiny creatures from the sea. Show them pictures of sea urchins. Have them shape their clay into balls. Next, they can break the uncooked spaghetti into small pieces and stick them all over their balls to make spiny sea urchins. Allow the children's creations to dry thoroughly.



## Prickly Hedgehog

- self-hardening clay (see recipe, this page)
- uncooked spaghetti
- pretzel pieces
- plastic drinking straws

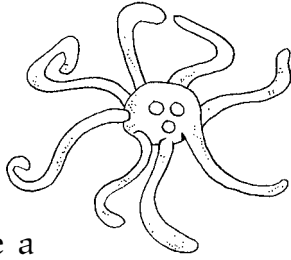
To make prickly hedgehogs, have the children fashion their clay into egg shapes. Show them how to elongate one end of their 'eggs' (to make heads for their hedgehogs). Have each child break spaghetti into small pieces and insert them into the hedgehog's body. Next, add four pretzel pieces for feet. Show the children how to make eyes by poking the end of a plastic drinking straw into the clay. Allow the hedgehogs to dry completely.



## Octopus

- self-hardening clay (see recipe, page 12)
- tempera paint
- paintbrushes
- paper plates
- plastic drinking straws
- paint dishes

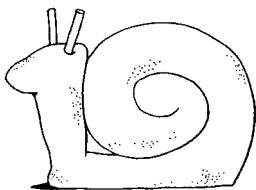
A child can make a simple octopus with a ball of clay. Have the child divide his clay in half, and make a ball with one half. This is the octopus's body. The other half is for making eight long legs. The children can do this by breaking off pieces and rolling them between their hands and a flat surface (Formica tabletop). Show each child how to set each body in the middle of a paper plate and attach each leg by pinching it to the body. Use a plastic straw to poke eyes and a mouth into the clay. Let the clay dry thoroughly, then have the children paint their octopuses with tempera.



## Snail

- self-hardening clay (see recipe, page 12)
- uncooked spaghetti
- tempera paint
- paintbrushes
- white glue and water mixture
- paint dishes

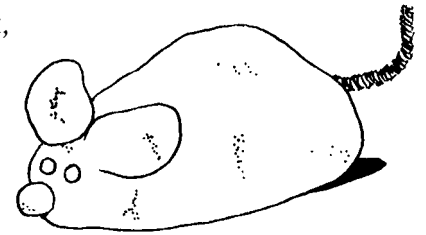
Children can make simple snails by first rolling long snakes (or coils). Show each child how to turn up one end to make the snail's head. Then have him or her roll up the other end to make the snail's shell. Two small pieces of uncooked spaghetti can be inserted into the snail's head to make feelers. After the snails have dried and hardened, have the children paint them with tempera. Once dry, each snail can be coated with a mixture of white glue and water to protect its finish.



## Mouse

- self-hardening clay (see recipe, page 12)
- wool pieces
- plastic drinking straws

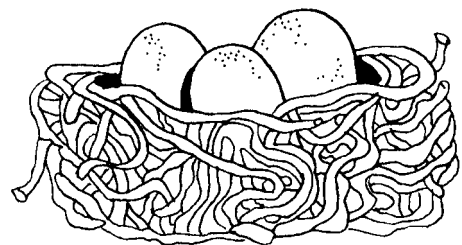
Give the child a ball of clay to fashion into an egg shape for the mouse's body. Have him or her make the ears by flattening two small balls of clay and pinching them to the mouse's head. Next, form a nose with a tiny ball pressed onto the face, and poke two eyes with a plastic straw. Last, the child can add a wool tail. Allow to dry thoroughly.



## Bird's Egg Nest

- self-hardening clay (see recipe, page 12)
- garlic press
- tempera paints
- paintbrushes
- paint dishes

Eggs and nests are fun to make. Give the children some clay and a garlic press. Demonstrate how to fill the garlic press with clay and press it closed to make strands. Adding more clay will lengthen the strands. Next, show each child how to fashion a nest with the strands and make a depression in the middle of it with the thumb. The children can then each roll two or three little balls for eggs. Let the eggs and nests dry completely. The children may want to paint their nests brown or green and the eggs blue or speckled.



# Water & Sand Explorations

Children love playing with water and sand. The activities provided in this chapter offer children hours of sense-stimulating fun. Sand and water toys are easily created from readily-available materials, such as kitchen aids and plastic bottles for scoops, empty squeeze bottles, and plastic containers for sieves. By offering these common materials, young children can investigate, explore, and discover basic concepts about both mediums. As the children experiment, create and learn with water and sand, they develop important observation and critical thinking skills.

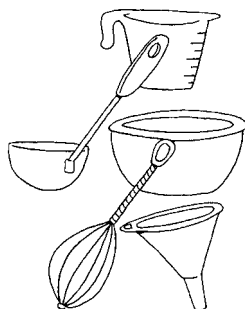
## Water Toys

Set out large plastic tubs of water and let your children play with a variety of items. In addition to commercially made water toys, the following objects are ideal for encouraging children to stir, scoop, pour and sprinkle water.

### Kitchen Aids

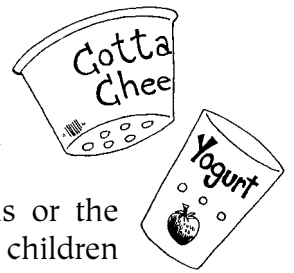
Look around the kitchen for an assortment of items that make great water toys. Here are some suggestions:

bowls	scoops
eggbeaters	spray bottles
funnels	spatulas
ladles	sponges
measuring cups	spoons
jugs	sieves
plastic containers	whisks



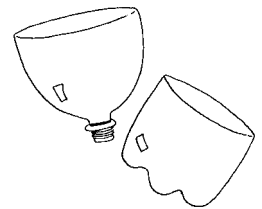
### Homemade Sprinklers and Sieves

Plastic food containers, such as cottage cheese containers, can easily be made into fun sprinklers and sieves. Use a pen to punch holes either on the bottoms or the sides of the containers. Your children will enjoy pouring water into the containers and watching the water drain out of the holes.



### Soft-drink Bottle Toys

Cut a 2-litre plastic soft-drink bottle in half. Make sure that the cut edges are smooth and not jagged. Then have the child use the top half of the bottle for a funnel and the bottom half for scooping and pouring water.



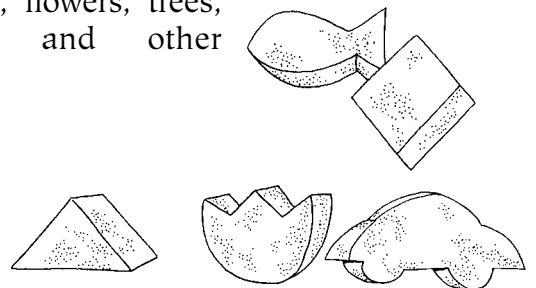
### Squirt Bottles

Plastic squeeze bottles, such as the ones used for holding sauce and mustard, are ideal for squirting water. Simply clean and rinse the bottles. If you like, decorate the bottles by wrapping different colours of electrical tape around them.



### Sponge Shapes

Provide different sizes and colours of sponges for the children to use when playing with water. To make the sponges more interesting, cut them into fish, cars, flowers, trees, triangles and other shapes.



# Exploring with Water

Encourage critical thinking and observation skills as your children explore with water. Here are some fun ideas to help you get started.

## Making Waves


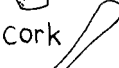


Fill a large cake pan with water. Then let the children make waves by blowing across the water. Have the children blow



gently at first and then with more force. Ask the children what happened to the water. (The water moved; there were ripples or waves in the water.) Help the children understand that the harder they blew, the bigger the waves became. Explain that in the same way, the wind makes waves on the ocean; the stronger the wind, the greater the waves.

## Sink or Float

Fill a large plastic tub with water and provide an assortment of objects that can be dropped into the water. (Examples: a sponge, a piece of cork, a metal spoon, a paper cup.) Have the children take turns picking up one object at a time, predicting whether the object will sink or float, and then dropping the object into the water to check their guesses. Make a simple picture chart to show what the children found out.

Does it float?	
 cup	yes
 cork	yes
 metal spoon	no
 coin	no

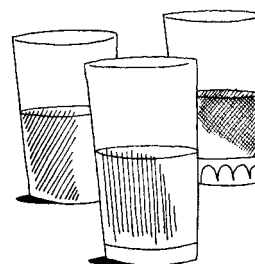
## Mixing Coloured Water

Here is a fun way for children to learn about mixing colours.

Provide six clear plastic glasses. Fill three of the glasses with water. Add blue, red, and yellow food colouring to the water to make the three primary colours.

Next, ask the children to predict what will happen when the blue and red water are mixed together. Have one child pour some blue water into an empty glass. Invite another child to add red water to the glass. The children will see that the water turns purple.

Continue the activity by mixing blue and yellow water in one glass and red and yellow water in another. Later, set the six glasses near a sunny window for the children to enjoy.



## Pour and Measure

Fill a large plastic tub with water. Set out a large plastic bowl and a smaller container. Have the children scoop up water in the small container and pour it into the bowl. Ask the children to guess how many scoops it will take to fill the bowl. Then have the children continue pouring water into the bowl, keeping track of the number of scoops they used.

Later, repeat the activity with a different size container.

*Variation:* Use a small container and a spoon. Have the children estimate how many spoonfuls of water are needed to fill the container.

