

3, 2, 1... Learning Fun!

Mobiles, puzzles, and rainbows are fun to make—and your youngster can learn from them, too. Try these craft projects together, and he'll practice early reading, writing, and math skills while strengthening his hand muscles.



Name mobile

Your child will enjoy creating this colorful mobile. He'll learn to recognize letters, spell his name, and hear beginning sounds in words.

You'll need: can, pencil, poster board, scissors, yarn, hole punch, plastic coat hanger, old magazines, glue



Have your youngster count the letters in his name. Then, he should trace around the can to draw that many circles on poster board (four circles for J-a-c-k). He can cut out the circles and write one letter on each. Help him punch a hole at the top of each circle and use yarn to hang it from the coat hanger.

Next, let him flip through magazines and cut out a few pictures that

start with each letter in his name. Jack might cut out photos of a jaguar, a bag of jelly beans, and a jump rope for the J. Help him make more poster board circles and glue a picture on each.

Finally, he can punch holes and use yarn to hang the picture circles below the matching letter. (Pictures of an apple, an appliance, and an athlete could hang from the A, for instance.)

Counting puzzle

Making a number puzzle is a hands-on way to practice counting and number recognition.

You'll need: two pieces of cardboard (front and back panels cut from a cereal box), crayons, scissors, glue

Start by helping your youngster draw large outlines of the numbers 1–9 on one piece of cardboard. Let her color them in. Carefully cut out the numbers for her. Then, she can glue the first piece of cardboard on top of the second—it's a puzzle board!

Before your child solves her puzzle, she could decorate it by drawing a matching number of objects inside each spot where a number will fit. For example, she might draw one heart in the space for the 1, two houses in the spot for the 2, and three fish in the space for the 3.

Now she's ready to complete her puzzle by putting each number into the correct spot.



continued

3-D shapes

Make these shapes with your youngster to explore basic geometry.

You'll need: *toothpicks, marshmallows*

Have your child count out three toothpicks and put a marshmallow on one end of each. Can he stick them together to form a triangle?

With four toothpicks and four marshmallows, he could make a square. And with six of each, he might form a rectangle (two toothpicks for each long side and one for each short side).

Together, enjoy experimenting. See who can make the shape with the most sides. Introduce words like *pentagon* (five sides), *hexagon* (six sides), and *octagon* (eight sides). Ask your youngster how many toothpicks and marshmallows he'll need for each. Then, he can check by making each shape.



Produce placemat

Here's a yummy-looking placemat that will let your child review her colors every time she eats.

You'll need: *fruits and vegetables, finger paints in matching colors, white paper, crayons, safety scissors, cardboard, glue, clear laminate*

Gather different-colored fruits and vegetables (strawberry, carrot, green pepper), and cut them lengthwise. Have your youngster dip the cut sides into paint that matches the fruit or vegetable's color and stamp them onto white paper. Leave small items (blueberries, grapes) whole so she can lightly press several times to make a "bunch." *Note:* Discard the painted fruit so your child doesn't eat it.

Let the prints dry. Below each one, help your youngster write the name and color of each food in the same color crayon (for example, use green to write "kiwi"). She can cut them out, along with their labels.

Finally, help your child glue the prints and labels onto cardboard and add her name. Cover with clear laminate, and serve a snack on her new placemat!

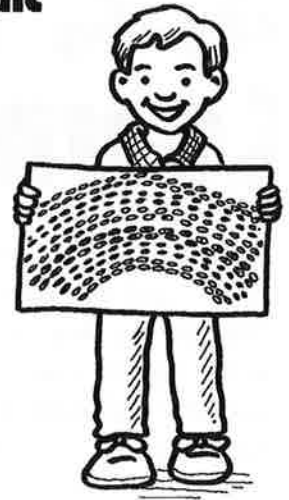
Rainbow rice mosaic

Build your youngster's small-motor skills and help him learn about mixing colors with this colorful mosaic.

You'll need: *6 small bowls with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water in each, food coloring (red, yellow, blue), $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups uncooked white rice, strainer, paper towels, construction paper, pencil, paintbrush, glue, spoon*

Ask your child to squeeze 3–4 drops of food coloring in the water to make one bowl each of red, yellow, and blue. Then, he can combine colors to make three more bowls (equal parts red and blue food coloring for purple, red and yellow for orange, and yellow and blue for green).

Next, help your youngster add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of rice to each bowl. Wait 10 minutes. Let him drain the rice in a strainer and dry it on paper towels for about an hour. Then, he can draw the outline of a rainbow on construction paper and brush on glue. Have him spoon each color of rice evenly onto a stripe: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple. The result will be a beautiful rainbow of color!



Shoelace box

This project teaches your child to tie her shoes—and strengthens the muscles she needs for handwriting.

You'll need: *shoebbox, construction paper, shoe, crayons, ballpoint pen, shoelaces*

You and your youngster can make a shoe-tying board using a shoebbox lid. Help her cover the lid with construction paper, trace the sole of the shoe on top, and color it. Then, carefully use a pen to poke two rows of holes on the shoe where lace holes would be.

Now you're ready to lace a shoelace through the holes and show your youngster how to tie her shoes. She can use her new shoebbox to practice over and over.

Idea: Keep different-colored shoelaces inside the box to add variety.



Early Years