



## Playing With Paper

**Paper — an everyday part of our world — provides exciting activities and extended investigations.**

*Eric Carle's [The Very Hungry Caterpillar](#) can inspire paper collages.*

Four-year-old Lauren offers to clean up a juice spill by herself. But instead of using a paper towel, she grabs a tissue, which begins to fall apart when she tries to sop up the mess. Frustrated, she calls for her mother to help. Together, they finish the clean-up job with a paper towel — and just like that, an ordinary experience becomes a science lesson. Lauren has learned about the power of observation, problem solving, cause and effect, and making comparisons.

The simplest everyday event can present a wonderful learning opportunity for children — and paper is a perfect learning tool. Paper is so accessible — we use it daily in so many ways — that it's easy to explore its value and versatility. Your child is already familiar with paper because he uses it to draw pictures and practice writing his name. But by simply looking more closely around the house or classroom, he will be able to see the many other forms that paper can take: a newspaper, which communicates important ideas and events; a card from Grandma, sharing her caring words; a paper cup for drinking; a label on a jar; or a tissue for blowing noses.

Through her observations and with your encouragement, your child will notice the different properties of paper. And through hands-on explorations, she will become involved in the process of cause and effect as she sees how different papers respond to specific situations. You can encourage her scientific investigation by asking her to think about how many ways we can change paper: cutting, tearing, folding, gluing, crumpling, soaking, and so on. What do these processes do to the paper? Engage her in the tactile experience of working with different textures, and ask her often to share her observations.

Here are some great ways to explore the possibilities of paper, any of which make a great indoor activity on a cold or rainy day!

**Make a torn paper collage.** This popular activity is excellent for strengthening fine-motor skills and promoting creativity. It also gives you a chance to do a little recycling — try using mail you've sorted through and other paper products that are otherwise ready for the trash.

For inspiration and a link to literacy, read one of Eric Carle's classic books that feature cut-paper collages, such as *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, before beginning. Then, instead of using glue and construction paper, try using clear contact paper (sticky side up) as a background for the torn bits of paper. This creates a special transparent effect. Be creative when collecting materials, too — wrapping paper, magazines, catalogs, newspaper, and tissue paper all work well in collage art.

Make sure you secure the contact paper on a flat surface, perhaps an easel, to make it easier for children to work. Before you start, take a minute to discuss the different colors and textures of the paper you've collected. Encourage new vocabulary words. Are the pieces just purple, or are they really lavender or plum? Does the paper feel rough or smooth? Is it shiny or dull?

Help children tear the various papers into different sizes and crazy shapes. Invite them to choose where to stick the pieces (face down) onto the contact paper to create the collage.

**Make "beaded" jewelry.** Collect rounded, used items from around the house, such as toilet-paper rolls and paper-towel rolls, for the beads. Gather bits of leftover foil, colored envelopes, and other papers to use in decorating the beads.

When you've collected enough material, cut the tubes into different-sized "beads" for variety. Then decorate! You can start by coloring your beads with markers and crayons to camouflage the plain brown surface. Then add other bits of paper, sequins, glitter, or whatever you have on hand to give the beads texture. When you're finished decorating the beads, look them over with your child to discuss the differences between the creations. Which is his favorite? Why?

When the beads are dry, use a long piece of yarn to make a beaded necklace or whatever your child can imagine.

**Build with cereal-box blocks.** Building towers and cities with cardboard boxes can help your child develop problem-solving, language, math, and science skills.

Gather up some sturdy food boxes. Cereal boxes are ideal, but you can also use milk cartons or the boxes from packaged pasta or crackers. Make sure to dust out any remaining food from the boxes and seal them with tape (they are easier to play with if they are resealed).

Take a few minutes to practice sorting and separating. Invite your child to put the "blocks" in order, from largest to smallest, or to sort them by food type.

Talk to your child about what she could build with the boxes. Try stacking them to see what happens. Does the pasta box balance better on the cereal box or on the milk carton? Ask your child what she thinks will happen. Finally, give her a chance to use the boxes as blocks, and see what her imagination leads her to make!

**Create mosaic art.** This unstructured activity encourages your child to be innovative, and to investigate different types of paper textures as he practices sorting and classifying. Choose a variety of papers, and cut them into small squares that resemble mosaic tiles. Gather a few paper plates to glue the squares to.

Start off by talking about mosaic art with your child. It can help to look through books with pictures of mosaics from around the world. Look around the house for other examples. What does your child notice about them?

Before you start gluing, sort out the different papers by category: color, texture, or size. Then glue the squares onto the paper plates. Encourage your child to cover the entire plate with squares. You can use the same process to make your own gift wrap or to decorate paper cups.

**Create a corrugated painting.** This painting project encourages creative thinking and teaches children about texture.

Visit an art store to buy precut corrugated paper, or collect cardboard boxes to cut up yourself. Talk about the paper you are about to paint. Does it feel heavier or lighter than "regular" paper? Why?

Tear off the top layer of paper to expose the underlying texture. Encourage your child to feel and describe the surface. Take out some paints and brushes and get started.

As you paint the board, discuss how the paint works on the surface. What happens when you paint lengthwise or crosswise? What if you use a different brush? How does the thickness of the paint affect the picture? Try tearing off only some of the top layer to create a multitextured painting. Display your child's creations!