
FEATURE

What you can do with paper, scissors, and glue

If you are new to early childhood education, you may appreciate knowing about traditional paper craft activities that teachers have used for decades. All the activities below are appropriate for use in the art center, but some may also find a place in other centers such as dramatic play, manipulatives, science, and literacy.

Remember that the purpose of art activities is to build skills with art materials and to encourage creativity. Avoid having children make exact copies of the same object or follow a teacher-made model. Encourage them to experiment with color, texture, design, and size. Let them determine whether their craft will have a functional purpose (gift, toy, decoration), whether they will display it or take it home, and whether they want to name or describe it.

Be sure to adapt the activities to the children's developmental skills and interests. Can they cut with scissors? Can they use a stapler and hole punch? Would they prefer working in a small group rather than alone?

Teach tearing first

Children are not born knowing how to cut with scissors. Like all skills, cutting requires watching someone do it, understanding safety rules, and practicing.

Because children need fine muscle skills in their fingers, start by showing them how to tear, rather than cut. Offer pieces of newspaper or junk mail, and demonstrate how to tear strips along fold lines. Use the non-dominant hand (usually the left) to hold the paper against the table and the dominant hand to tear.

Advance to tearing pictures out of a magazine and then to shapes drawn on construction paper.

Invite them to paste pictures and shapes on another piece of paper to see how torn paper can have the same impact as cut paper.

Teach safety with scissors

Before handling scissors, children need to understand that scissors are a tool, not a toy. Provide blunt-tipped scissors for preschoolers and child-sized, pointed scissors for school-agers.



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If possible, provide left-handed scissors for left-handed children.

When children use scissors in an activity, provide adult supervision. Set limits such as the following:

- Use scissors only when sitting at a table. Never run with scissors.
- Use scissors only for cutting—not for prying off a lid, for example.
- When handing scissors to another person, wrap your hand around the closed blades and offer the handles for the person to grasp.

Teach how to cut with scissors

Show children how to hold scissors in the dominant hand. The thumb goes in the upper hole of the handle and first two fingers go in the lower hole.

Begin by having children make snips in a paper's edge. Offer different kinds of paper to help them get used to different kinds of texture, thickness, and flexibility.

As children gain skill, invite them to cut along straight lines drawn on a sheet of paper. Then

add curved and zigzag lines. Vary the length and width of paper.

Finally, provide geometric shapes such as rectangles, squares, and triangles. The hardest shapes to cut out will be stars, circles, and spirals.

Paper craft activities

For the activities below, you'll need three basic supplies: paper, scissors, and an adhesive (glue, paste, or tape) or fastener (stapler). In some activities, you may add a few extras such as string, stickers, and markers.

Paper can include construction paper, blank newsprint, butcher paper, notebook paper, typing paper, and brown shipping paper. Consider recycling old newspapers, magazines, junk mail, spreadsheets, letters and other one-sided documents, and brown grocery bags. Ask parents for gift wrap scraps, tissue paper, crepe paper, cardboard, old greeting cards, and leftover wallpaper.

Office supply and printing shops may be willing to donate paper scraps, samples, and dis-

continued sheets. Note that paper types are often distinguished by *weight*, which refers to the thickness and sturdiness of the paper, not the actual poundage. Copy and typing paper are typically 20 to 24 lb., cardstock for postcards and posters may be 50 to 65 lb., and cover stock for business cards, index tabs, and booklet covers may be 80 to 100 lb.

Colored or patterned paper adds variety, and children may want to decorate their creations by coloring, making designs, or gluing on art materials such as stickers, felt shapes, or tiny photos.

Paper chain

Making a paper chain can be an enjoyable art activity in itself. It can also be used at the manipulatives table for giving children practice in understanding sequence and pattern. For examples try red, blue, red, blue, or long, short, short, long, short, short sequences.

Here's what you need:

- paper

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- scissors
- glue, tape, or stapler

1. Demonstrate how to cut paper into strips ½- to 1-inch wide and 3 to 8 inches long.
2. Invite children to bend a strip into a circle and glue in place. This becomes the first link in the chain.
3. Demonstrate how to bend another strip through the first link and glue in place for the second link. Continue adding more links.
4. Ask children how they would like to display their chains. They might want to hang them individually on a bulletin board or connect them into one long chain to drape around a wall, for example.

Variation: After cutting strips, children may decorate them. After forming the links, children may want to glue on stickers, stars, or other decorations.

Paper sculpture

A *collage* is generally an art work in two dimensions: *length* and

width, like a photograph or painting. But a *sculpture* exists in three dimensions: *length*, *width*, and *height*. Use these terms and name the geometric shapes children make as they work.

Here's what you need:

- construction paper
- scissors
- glue
- cardstock, approximately 8½ by 11 inches, one for each child

1. Encourage children to cut strips of construction paper 1 to 2 inches wide. The strips can be of various lengths.
2. Invite children to bend a narrow strip into a *circle* and a wide strip into a *cylinder*. Show them how to fold a strip into a *square*, *rectangle*, and *triangle*. Apply glue so that each piece holds its shape.
3. After making several shapes, children can arrange the shapes on a piece of cardboard. The shapes may lie on a side, stand upright, or stand on top of another shape. Glue the shapes

to the cardboard to make a sculpture.

Variation: Children may plan in advance to make a sculpture with a theme such as fish pond, vegetable garden, or highway, for example. They can add shapes or pictures appropriate to the sculpture's theme—fish shapes to the fish pond, for example.

Paper lantern

Paper lanterns are often associated with parties and celebrations, but they can also decorate a wall or table. Encourage school-age children to research the use of lanterns in Asian history.

Here's what you need:

- construction paper
 - scissors
 - glue, tape, or stapler
 - yarn
1. Start with a rectangular piece of paper, such as 8½ by 11 inches or 11 by 16 inches.
 2. Fold the paper in half lengthwise to make a longer rectangle, such as 4¼ by 11 or 5½ by 16.

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3. Make a series of cuts along the fold, perpendicular to the fold line but not all the way to the other end of the paper. If the cuts are about an inch apart, you will make about 10 or 15 cuts.

4. Unfold the rectangle, revealing the slits in the middle. Bring the two short edges (top and bottom) together and glue, tape, or staple in place.

5. To hang the lantern, cut a 6-inch length of yarn and staple the ends to either side of the top.

Variation: Before gluing the lantern, children can decorate the top and bottom borders with markers, stickers, or colored tape. School-age children may want to cut out a design, instead of slits, in the lanterns.

Paper envelope

Children can make their own envelopes for exchanging notes with classmates, giving greeting cards to parents, or playing post office in the dramatic play center.

Here's what you need:

- construction paper, gift wrap, brown paper bags
- scissors
- glue or tape

1. Cut out a square, about 8½ inches on a side, from the paper.
2. Bring one corner of the square to the opposite corner, making a triangle. Fold and crease.
3. Open the fold, and bring the left and right corners to overlap slightly on the fold line. This forms the sides of the envelope.
4. Bring the bottom corner to the center with the other two corners. This forms the bottom of the envelope. Glue along the

edges of the three flaps to hold them in place.

5. Bring the top corner to the center to form the top flap of the envelope. The top flap can be glued or taped down after a card or letter is inserted. The opposite side is for the address.

To extend this activity, engage in *reverse engineering*. Provide a variety of old or used envelopes, such as No. 9 business letter envelopes, manila mailing envelopes, and tiny envelopes used with floral gifts. Invite children to take them apart carefully along glued and folded lines, and then put them back together. Children may want to use the old envelopes as templates for making new envelopes.

Paper cone

Introduce this activity with photographs or examples of cones in the environment, such as ice cream cones, water cup, funnel, orange traffic cone, and party hat.

Here's what you need:

- construction paper
- scissors
- glue
- hole punch
- ribbon or yarn

1. Cut out a square, 7 or 8 inches on a side, from the paper.
2. Holding one corner firmly, roll the left and right sides toward each other, one overlapping the other to form a cone. Glue in place at the desired interior width.
3. Punch holes along the top edge. Thread a length of ribbon or yarn through the holes, leaving enough ribbon at the top to make a loop for hanging.
4. Encourage children to brain-

storm how they might use their cones. For example, the cones might hold small lightweight items such as flowers. Or they could be used as holiday decorations or holders for nuts and other gifts.

Variation: Before gluing, children may decorate their cones using markers, stickers, paper scraps, and small pictures.

Note: Older children may make a cone using another method. Cut out a circle 7 or 8 inches in diameter. Fold the circle in half, and fold in half again. Open the folds and cut out one-quarter along the fold lines. Bring the two cut edges of the circle together to form a cone. Tape, glue, or staple the edges shut.

Windsock

Windsocks, like paper lanterns, have been around for centuries. They are sometimes used like weather vanes to indicate wind direction. They can also be used for decoration and business advertising. Usually they are made of fabric, but children can make one out of paper.

Here's what you need:

- cylindrical oatmeal box
- construction paper or adhesive-backed paper
- scissors
- tissue or crepe paper
- glue
- stapler
- string

1. Cut out the bottom of the oatmeal box.
2. Cut construction paper to fit around the box and glue in place. Or use adhesive-backed paper.

3. Cut tissue or crepe paper into long strips and staple to the bottom edge of the box.
4. Punch four holes at equal distances around the top of the box.
5. Cut a length of string about 12 inches long. Tie it firmly in one hole and tie the other end to the opposite hole.
6. Do the same with the two remaining holes.
7. Grasp the center of the two strings, and tie on a longer length of string to hang the windsock.

Variation: Invite school-age children to make a windsock without the oatmeal box, using a cylinder of paper glued at top and bottom edges to small embroidery hoops or hoops made of cardboard. Encourage them to test the windsock as an indicator of wind direction.

Paper fan

Before the advent of air conditioning, many people used ceiling or hand fans to move air around. Encourage children to make their own hand fans to stay cool on hot summer days.

Here's what you need:

- cardstock
- scissors
- glue
- craft sticks
- stapler

1. Invite children to cut out two identical circles, each about 8 or 9 inches in diameter, from the cardstock.
2. Decorate one side of each of the two circles as desired.
3. Place the circles on top of each other, decorated side out. Glue

- around the edges, leaving space to insert a craft stick as a handle.
4. Insert a craft stick in the opening and staple in place.

Variation: Instead of circles, children may cut out other shapes, such as a large fig leaf, tulip, or apple, for example.

Accordion picture book

Folding paper accordion-style can produce a number of different craft objects. Glue a head and tail at the front and back of an accordion-folded strip, and you have a caterpillar. Staple the accordion folds at the bottom of a sheet of paper, and you have a fan. Glue two or more accordion-folded sheets together along the sides into a circle, and you have a lampshade. The activity below offers an idea for a book.

Here's what you need:

- 11- by 16-inch paper
- cover stock
- scissors
- paint or markers
- pictures (photographs of family and friends, images cut from magazines)
- tape
- glue
- clear adhesive-back paper

1. Fold an 11- by 16-inch sheet in half lengthwise. Cut along the fold to make two sheets.
2. Fold one sheet in half, and then fold each side back accordion-style to the center fold, making four pages, each 4 inches by 5½ inches. This makes an eight-page book, using front and back sides of each page. (For a 16-page book, repeat this step, and glue the two sections together with a paper strip.)

3. Invite children to paint or paste pictures to the front and back of each page. They may want to dictate captions for each picture or tell a story.

4. Cut front and back covers the same size as the pages. Tape one cover to the edge of the front page and one to the back.
5. Invite children to dictate a title for the book and decorate the covers.

6. Apply adhesive-backed paper to each page and the covers.

Variations: Instead of a picture or story book, children may wish to create a scrapbook in which they paste mementos from favorite activities. The book can be opened and set upon a table, serving as a display of art work.



For more paper crafts, see "Play with paper" in the Winter 2000 issue of *Texas Child Care*. ■