

Painted Rocks Tic-Tac-Toe

Description

Go on a walk with your child to collect rocks, paint them, and then play tic-tac-toe with them. Use acrylic paint to make bright game pieces from everyday stones, and watch your child benefit from playing a classic game.

Instructions

1. First, collect some rocks for your game pieces. If possible, take your child to a lake, creek, or dry creek bed where there are likely to be smooth rocks. Explain that round flat rocks (no bigger than their hand) work best and show them a couple of good examples, then let them explore and gather their own. You only need 18 rocks, but it may work best to give your child a small bag and tell them they can bring home as many rocks as they can carry. Then, once you're home, you can pick the best ones. Clean them with a little dish soap and let them dry completely.
2. Let your kids pick the colors! You can use any number of bright colors, but you want to lean towards the lighter end of the palette as these colors will be a background for darker X's and O's. You can use just two colors (all X one color and all O another color,) or any other color combination you like.
3. Paint your rocks all the way around. They may need multiple coats to get full coverage.
4. Leave the newly colored rocks to dry overnight, or for at least 6 hours. Now they are ready for you to add your X's and O's in black or another dark color.
5. To protect the paint from chipping or wearing away during use, you can now apply a coat of waterbased sealer.
6. Create your board. Either draw a tic-tac-toe board on a large piece of paper or cardboard, use a printout, or, if playing outside, draw a board in the dirt.
7. The game is ready, give your child their pieces and have fun!

Why is this a great thing to do?

This activity encourages creativity, fine motor skill development, and strategic thinking.

Encourages creativity.

Allowing your child to create and decorate a homemade game with limited structure builds autonomy and confidence. Creative activities play a major role in nurturing child growth and development. Creativity also supports innovation and flexible thinking, both of which are fundamental skills in problem-solving.

Enhances fine motor skills.

Holding and using a paintbrush is a great way to hone fine motor skills. Anything held between the thumb and index finger develops strength and control in the pincer grasp, the skill needed to wield a pencil. Placing game pieces while playing the game also develops hand-eye coordination.

Introduces your child to the art of strategy.

Playing tic-tac-toe requires concentration, logic, and reasoning to anticipate your opponent's moves and develop a strategy to defeat them.

Materials Needed

- Round, flat rocks
- Acrylic paint
- Paintbrush
- A large piece of construction paper or cardboard (for the tic-tac-toe board) or use a printout
- (Optional) [Waterbased sealer](#)

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Make STEM Connections

Help your child develop a more in-depth understanding that a property is a quality or trait of something, as well as how to classify objects by their shared properties such as color, texture, and hardness.

Do a scavenger hunt.

Look around your house for items that share properties. You can search for all fuzzy things, all transparent things, or even do a color hunt.

Learn about colors in nature.

Colors in nature and the animal kingdom serve many purposes. There are many [interesting facts](#) to learn, including how coloration in animals can [serve as a warning](#) or [attract a mate](#).

Conduct a culinary experiment.

Prepare some foods with your child that are a variety of textures and hardnesses. For example, you might choose a dessert theme and discover that pudding is very soft, jello is a little soft, cupcakes are a bit harder, cookies are harder still, and jellybeans are crunchy on the outside but soft on the inside. You may want to select a single object such as a metal spoon to test each item against.

Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) Correlation

2-PS1-1: Plan and conduct an investigation to describe and classify different kinds of materials by their observable properties.

As you explore colors in nature (animals and plants,) prepare foods with a variety of colors and textures, and collect rocks of various colors and sizes, your child is observing the physical properties of these items and classifying them by their observable physical properties. This activity can be extended by evaluating an assortment of items and asking your child to list as many categories as they can group each item into. For example, a carrot can be classified into the following groups: root, orange, long, hard, crunchy, vegetable, and more.

Talking Tips

"Why do you think this rock will make a good game piece?"

"Why do you like these colors best?"

"Did you get the paint to cover the rock everywhere?"

"How do you choose where to put your pieces in tic-tac-toe? Do you like to concentrate on making your own three in a row, or on blocking the other person?"

"When I lose, I like to think about how the person I'm playing with gets to feel nice from winning this round."

"What other games could we make pieces for out of painted rocks?"

Tips & Extensions

With older children, try choosing nine colors and paint one X and one O in each color to add an element to the game. Add the rule that the players must use rocks in colors that haven't been used yet so that each of the nine spaces contains a different color rock.

Playing tic-tac-toe is a quick game with many variables that almost ensure your child will experience both winning and losing. It is a great way to practice being a good loser as a result.