6 Button Drop

Children try to drop a handful of buttons into a cup and count and tally how many land inside and outside the cup.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time of day:</th>
<th>Suggested earlier activity:</th>
<th>Content Area:</th>
<th>Topic(s):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small-group time</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Number Sense &amp; Operations</td>
<td>Comparing &amp; Ordering (Quantity), Composing &amp; Decomposing, Counting, Number Words &amp; Symbols; also Representing (Data Analysis)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Materials

Materials for each child and teacher:
- large paper cup (or other container) that is wide enough for children to drop buttons in but not so wide that they can easily drop in all the buttons each time
- 10 buttons (poker chips, shells, or other small items) children can hold (begin with 5 buttons earlier in the year)
- Small container to hold the buttons

Shared materials:
- Chart paper divided into three columns labeled “In,” “Out,” and “Win” (or use a symbol such as @ in the last column to indicate getting more “in” than “out”)
- Markers

Backup materials:
- Cups or containers with larger and smaller openings (if children have trouble getting buttons in or want to try a more challenging drop)

Beginning

- Say We are going to play a game today called button drop:
  - Count together the number of buttons in your container.
  - Place your cup at arm’s length. Hold the buttons in one or both hands (the children may need to use both hands), and stretch your arm out straight over the cup. Say I’m going to drop as many buttons as I can into the cup. I win if I get more buttons inside than outside the cup.
  - Drop the buttons. (Get more inside this round, but make some fall outside.)

- Ask the children how you can figure out if you “won.” Support their ideas.
- With the children, count the number of buttons inside and outside the cup, and ask them if you won or not. Talk about how many buttons are inside and outside the cup, and which number is bigger, smaller, or the same.
- On the chart paper, enter the appropriate numbers in the “In” and “Out” columns, and make a check mark or other symbol that the children are familiar with in the “Win” column.
- Give each child a cup and a container with 10 buttons (or 5, if appropriate), and tell them it is their turn to play button drop.

Middle

- As you circulate among the children, encourage them to play multiple rounds of button drop. Help them count the number of buttons inside and outside their cup. Ask them if they won or lost that round.
- Help the children write their scores on the chart (the children can also tell you what to write on the chart).

End

- Looking at the chart together, tally the total number of rounds and the number of wins and losses for the class as a whole. Ask Did we win or lose more rounds of button drop?
- With the children, sort and put away the materials. Remind them where they are stored if they want to play button drop at work/choice time.
- Ask the children to pretend they are buttons and roll to the next activity.


# 6 Fruit Stand

*Children rearrange the "apples" (circles of colored paper) in a fruit stand to create different patterns.*

**Time of day:** Small-group time  
**Suggested earlier activity:** None  
**Content Area:** Algebra  
**Topic(s):** Alternating Patterns

## Materials

*Materials for each child and teacher:*
- Small circles of construction paper in 3 colors (e.g., red, yellow, green), at least 6 of each color [Note: Begin with 2 colors if children are just starting to work with patterns.]

*Shared materials:*
- 2–3 baskets

*Backup materials:*
- Circles of construction paper in other colors; squares or other shapes in 2–3 colors
- Blank paper, tape, and glue

## Middle

- Talk to the children about how they arrange their circles, and point to and say the colors aloud with them. Stress the first element of the pattern each time you say it (e.g., Red, yellow, green; red, yellow, green; red, yellow, green), and pause briefly between repetitions. Repeat saying the pattern at least three times.
- Talk about what makes a pattern a pattern. Use words such as *pattern*, *arrange*, *repeat*, *over and over*, and *follow the same order*. Ask the children why their arrangements are patterns.
- Encourage the children to look at their peers' patterns. Challenge them to duplicate, extend, and fill in the patterns made by others.
- For children who have made several simple patterns, create more complex patterns for them to look at. Ask for help continuing and filling in the patterns. Make occasional errors, and ask for help fixing them.
- Introduce additional colors and/or shapes for children who are interested in using them.
- Offer the children paper, tape, and glue if they want to attach their patterns to paper.

## End

- Comment on, describe, and compare the different patterns the children have made.
- With the children, sort the shapes by color into baskets and put them in the art area for the children to use at work/choice time.
- Say *Let's move our bodies in a pattern to the next activity*. Transition to the next activity with a repeating movement pattern.
15 Secret Shapes

Children guess the identity of familiar classroom objects that have been traced on poster board.

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<thead>
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<th>Content Area:</th>
<th>Topic(s):</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small-group time</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Geometry</td>
<td>Shape, Spatial Reasoning, Transformation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Materials**

*Materials for each child and teacher:*
- Sheets of poster board or construction paper
- Pencils or markers

*Shared materials:*
- Sheets of poster board with tracings of several objects from different areas of the room (e.g., puzzle pieces, blocks, household items, books, art tools)

*Backup materials:*
- Tracings of several objects that have been turned sideways, upside down, or flipped (traced on their backs)

- Distribute sheets of poster board or construction paper, and encourage the children to draw or trace their own secret shapes (they can trace the objects they matched to your drawings or different objects). Talk about the attributes of the objects they draw or trace.
- If there is time and interest, bring out the tracings of objects that have been turned sideways or flipped. Say something like *These are tricky ones. I traced them backward or upside down or in other funny positions. Let’s see if you can guess and find what these are.*

**Beginning**

- Tell the children that today they are going to play a guessing game. Show them the sheets of poster board with the traced items, and explain that they must guess what the tracings are and what area of the classroom they come from. Encourage the children to look at the tracings, trace them with their fingers, and make guesses. Ask them what about the shape helped them guess.
- Tell the children to get the actual objects and see if they fit. (Instead of having the children get the objects from around the room, you can collect them ahead of time and bring them out after the children have made their guesses.)

**Middle**

- Encourage the children to talk about the shapes. Repeat their descriptive terms, and introduce new vocabulary words about size, shape, and position.

**End**

- Have the children guess the objects on one another’s secret shape sheets. Check their guesses by fitting the objects to the drawings.
- Ask each child to select an object to return to its place in the room on their way to the next activity.

![Image of traced objects]

*When introducing new materials to the classroom, draw the object on the message board and ask the children to guess what it is and where they might find it. This message (above) alerts children to new art supplies.*

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22 Toy Soup

Children make toy soup using measuring cups and spoons to describe and compare the amounts of ingredients.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small-group time</td>
<td>None</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Area:</th>
<th>Topic(s):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measurement</td>
<td>Comparing &amp; Ordering (Attributes), Measurement Terms, Unit; also Organizing &amp; Comparing (Data Analysis)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Materials**

Materials for each child and teacher:
- Measuring spoons
- Measuring cups
- Large spoon for stirring
- Bowl

Shared materials:
- Large bowls filled with small objects (e.g., counting bears, buttons, shells, beads, pebbles, crayon ends)

Backup materials:
- Bowls filled with other small items

**Beginning**

- Tell a story that begins something like this:
  
  *Once there was a hungry giant who loved soup. But instead of vegetables, he cooked his soup with toys. “Today, I’ll make bear and pebble soup,” said the giant. “I like bears even more than pebbles,” he said, so he put 1 cup of bears and 2 tablespoons of pebbles in his bowl. (Scoop these amounts into your bowl). “Yummy, this is good!” said the giant.*

- Give each child measuring spoons and cups, a bowl, and a spoon, and ask *What kind of toy soup do you like to eat when you’re hungry?*

**Middle**

- Encourage the children to talk about the amounts of different toy ingredients they use.

- If the children want to make a new “soup,” help them sort their original ingredients back into the large bowls.

- Bring out bowls of other ingredients as needed.

**End**

- With the children, sort the toys into the large bowls and return them to the area of the room where they are usually stored.

- Transition to the next activity based on what children put in their soup. Say, for example, *If you used a cup of bears in your soup, go wash up for snacktime; If you put a teaspoon of shells in your soup …;* and so on, until every child transitions.

To help children learn measurement terms, use the names and sizes of the tools they use when talking about their toy soup.
What Are You Wearing?

Children examine, describe, record, and tally differences in personal characteristics (e.g., what they are wearing).

**Materials**

- Materials for each child and teacher:
  - Children's own clothes and shoes

- Shared materials:
  - Colored pencils or markers
  - 5–6 pieces of chart paper (one for every article of clothing [or other category] you collect data on)

- Backup materials:
  - Paper and markers or pencils

**Beginning**

- Say something like *I'm wearing black shoes today. What color are your shoes?* Let each child share his or her shoe color.

- Label a piece of chart paper at the top with a picture and the word *shoe*. Divide it into columns corresponding to the classroom's shoe colors (e.g., black, brown, red, and two-color). Label each column with a color-coded drawing of a shoe. Encourage the children to help decide the number and labels of the columns.

- Make a tally mark in the appropriate column for your shoe color, and ask each child to make a tally mark in the appropriate column. (You can also make the tally marks for the children.)

- Ask *What's the most popular shoe color in our class? How do you know?* Talk to the children about their answers, referring to the chart and the number of tally marks in each column.

**Middle**

- Ask *What other things are we wearing besides our shoes that we can look at and count?*

- Ask for the children's input, and accept their ideas on how to name and label each chart (e.g., sock colors, shirts with different sleeve lengths). They may suggest things other than clothing, such as hair style. Encourage or help them to make tally marks.

- Refer to the tally marks on the charts as a way of entering data about themselves and also as a means to describe the features that most or least characterize the class as a whole. Use words such as most, fewest, more, fewer, same; and all, some, none.

- Offer the children paper and markers or pencils if they want to represent themselves or other people and things with various features.

**End**

- Tell the children the data charts are a "work in progress" you are saving for another activity (see Activity 4. Does It Look Like Us?). Make copies of the charts if the children want to use them at work/choice time. Tell them they can also make their own charts.

- Use a category of the children's clothing (or other category they identified) to transition to the next activity. Say, for example, *Whoever is wearing sneakers, go to large-group time; Whoever is wearing sandals...*; and so on, until all the children transition.
"Just Right"

Content area:
Language, Literacy, and Communication

Time of day:
Small-group time

Materials
For each child and teacher: 10–15 letters made of wood, plastic, heavy cardboard, or foam

To share: Extra letters

For backup: Paper and writing materials (to trace and copy letters)

What Children Do and Learn
Children describe and compare the look and sounds of letters and choose the one that is “just right,” based on its attributes. (It helps if children are familiar with the story “Goldilocks and the Three Bears.” You may want to read or tell this story the day before you do this activity.)

Story Starter
Goldilocks sat at the Three Bears’ letter table. She said, “I’m looking for a letter that has only straight lines.” She picked up the letter O and said, “This O is round.” Then she picked up the letter B and said, “This B is straight and curved.” She picked up the letter A and said, “This A is just right. It has only straight lines.” With the children, trace the outlines of the letters and talk about their straight and curved parts. Repeat this process with three other letters, looking for those with straight-only, curved-only, and straight and curved parts. Give each child a set of letters and say I wonder which letters will be “just right” for you.

Scaffolding Children’s Learning
Talk to the children about what they think is (or is not) “just right” about the letters they choose without correcting them when they make mistakes in describing the letters. Encourage them to invent other bases for comparing the letters, such as their size, shape, number of holes or circles, number or length of straight lines, sound, relationship to familiar words (whether they share a first letter or last letter). For example, say This I is too skinny, this B is too fat, but this C is just right or H, the /h/ sound, isn’t in my name, M, the /m/ sound isn’t in my name, but K, the /k/ sound, for Kendra, sounds just right. For children who are just beginning to explore letters, describe their properties, and help them name the letters and say their sounds. Encourage children who are interested to trace and copy letters.

Vocabulary words: curved, just right, loop, outline, round, straight
**What Children Do and Learn**

Children make letters with Popsicle sticks.

**Story Starter**

One day the refrigerator in the ice cream truck broke down and the Popsicles started to melt in the sun. “Hurry home,” the truck driver said to the children, “and bring back cups and spoons. I’ll give you free Popsicle soup to eat!” The children fetched cups and spoons and ate strawberry and lemon Popsicle soup. Talk about other flavors the children like. But when they slurped up the last drop of soup, empty Popsicle sticks lay on the ground. Some sticks were next to each other and made letters. Make and name a few letters using two or three sticks (e.g., L, T, H, or K). The children decided to see what other letters they could make. Give each child a set of Popsicle sticks and say I wonder what letters you can make with your Popsicle sticks.

Children use Popsicle sticks to make letters in their names, area signs, and other familiar words.

**Content area:**
Language, Literacy, and Communication

**Time of day:**
Small-group time

**Materials**
For each child and teacher: 10 Popsicle sticks

To share: Written or 3-D letters for children to refer to and copy; extra Popsicle sticks

For backup: Paper and glue if children want to glue their Popsicle letters onto a paper; pipe cleaners or other bendable materials for children to make curved letters
Street Fair

What Children Do and Learn
Children write words and draw pictures on banners to advertise events for a street fair.

Story Starter
Eliot was excited. Tomorrow his town was having a big street fair. [If the children are more familiar with a carnival, circus, or similar event, substitute a word they know.] As he and his family walked downtown, they saw banners saying where each event would happen. One banner said Running Race and had a picture of sneakers. Another banner advertised Food Booths with drawings of pizzas and ice cream cones. There were also banners for an art show, a book tent, and dancers. Talk about banners the children have seen and what was written and drawn on them. Distribute the strips of paper and drawing materials, and make sure each child has ample work space. Say I wonder what you will write and draw on your banners.

Scaffolding Children's Learning
Talk with the children about the events they represent on their banners. Discuss the words they use to label each event and their illustrations of the activities and materials involved. Accept that some children will just scribble or draw on the page, some will write letters or words, and some will both write and draw. Support each child's efforts. When asked, help children write letters and spell words. Connect the letters and words they want to write to those they already know (e.g., Booth starts with the /b/ sound, the same letter, B, that begins your name, Brett). Encourage the children to help one another.
Traffic Jam

What Children Do and Learn
Children act out and add to a story narrative using toy figures and other props.

Story Starter
There was a lot of traffic on Main Street. Grown-ups rushed to work, parents dropped off their children at preschool, and trucks delivered food to the supermarket. Move several figures around. What else do you think was happening on the busy street? Talk about and act out the children’s ideas. As you continue to move the figures, say Suddenly a parade of animals came marching down the street. The circus was in town! Traffic came to a halt. Stop moving the figures. People honked because they didn’t want to be late to where they were going. The animals were scared and confused by the noise. The police officer said, “We have a problem. What can we do?” Distribute the toy figures and say Let’s see if we can help solve this problem.

Scaffolding Children’s Learning
Encourage children to represent and act out the story with the figures and vehicles, and to use and create other props. If children play with the materials but do not act out a story, talk with them about the figures they use and their actions. Listen to, support, and comment on the ways children retell, change, or elaborate on the story. Talk about their ideas for solving the problem, and how and why they think it will work. Discuss their experiences with traffic jams and how people (e.g., parents) respond to them.

Vocabulary words: busy, grown-up, halt, marching, parade, street, traffic jam

Follow-up Ideas
Provide figures and props for children to re-enact familiar storybooks and nursery rhymes during other small-group times and work (choice) time. Encourage children to move like characters in stories at large-group time and during transitions. Carry props outside for children to re-enact scenes at outside time.
What’s for Lunch?

What Children Do and Learn
Children use their sense of smell to describe and identify a variety of foods.

Story Starter
The children at Magnolia Meadows Day Care Center liked to see what was for lunch every day. If the cook walked by with a jar of tomato sauce, they guessed, “We’re having spaghetti.” Ask what the children like to eat for lunch. One day, a new girl named Fatima came to the center. She was blind and she couldn’t see the food, but she wanted to guess too. What other clues could Fatima use? Discuss their ideas and say Fatima guessed by smelling what was for lunch. Distribute the food items, and say Let’s close our eyes and use our noses to see if we can recognize foods by smell like Fatima did.

Scaffolding Children’s Learning
Encourage children to close their eyes and name foods by smell or identify things they eat that smell like that (e.g., My daddy puts that on my hotdog). If children ask, supply the names of foods they do not know. Ask what other foods the smells remind them of and which are used in the foods they eat at home. Pose challenges (e.g., I’m looking for something that smells like it would go in a fruit salad; I’m thinking of something I eat for breakfast that smells like this. Can you guess what it is?). Talk about places and experiences children associate with food smells, such as the kitchen, garden, farmer’s market, and bakery.

Vocabulary words: aroma, blind, clue, food, scent, smell, spice

Follow-up Ideas
At snacktimes and mealtimes, encourage children to pay attention to the smell of food along with its other properties. Encourage them to guess what they will eat later in the day based on the smells coming from the kitchen. Encourage families to have their children guess what’s for breakfast or dinner using their sense of smell. If a child has a stuffy nose (e.g., from a head cold), talk about how it affects his or her sense of smell. Make a “food smell” book for the library using non-perishable items (e.g., dried herbs and spices, fruit rinds). Outside, encourage children to identify the smell of flowers, exhaust fumes, rain, fresh-cut grass, decaying leaves, and so on.
Broken Camera

What Children Do and Learn
Children make representational drawings of a familiar event such as a birthday party.

Story Starter
Pedro was having a birthday party, and the guests wanted to take photographs of him blowing out the candles and opening presents, and of everyone eating cake and ice cream. Talk about the children’s experiences with birthday parties. But when Uncle Louie pushed the button on his camera, nothing happened. The camera was broken! Everyone was disappointed until Aunt Selma had an idea: “Let’s draw pictures of the party instead.” Everyone thought this was a fine idea! Distribute the materials and say I wonder what you’ll draw. [Note: In place of a birthday party, you can substitute another event of interest to the children, such as a recent field trip.]

Scaffolding Children’s Learning
Accept that some children may not draw a party or make a representational drawing. They may choose to explore the materials, how to manipulate them, or the motions their arms make when using them. Let them say what (if anything) they are drawing. Talk about children’s choices of materials, colors, lines, shapes, designs, and so on. Describe, and encourage children to describe, their motions as they draw. If children are interested, take dictation or encourage them to write down a story about their picture.

Vocabulary words: click, disappointed, flash, guest, illustrate, indeed, photographs, suggestion

During this activity, talk with children about their choices of materials and how they use them to make lines, shapes, and designs.
Cave Art

What Children Do and Learn
Children look at artwork in daylight and then with a flashlight in the dark, exploring the different effects of lighting.

Story Starter
One sunny afternoon, Rosie the Bear painted a picture that she liked so much she took it to bed with her in her cave that night. But it was dark inside the cave. How could Rosie see her picture in the dark? Ask for the children’s ideas. Rosie had a flashlight in her cave to shine on her painting. “I wonder if it will look the same with the flashlight as it did in the daylight,” she said. What do you think? Look at one or two pictures with the children in the daylight and talk about the brightness of the colors, light, and shadow. Give each child a picture and a flashlight, crawl into the cave, and say I wonder how your pictures will look inside our cave.

A sheet or blanket draped over a table creates a “cave” in which children can explore the effects of light and shadow.
Dinosaur Stew

What Children Do and Learn
Children pretend to cook, serve, and store leftover food by making stew for dinosaurs and other animals.

Story Starter
After a long day roaming the earth, the dinosaurs were very hungry. Their stomachs growled and gurgled, and rumbled and roared. Ask if the children's stomachs ever growl and how it sounds and feels. The dinosaurs decided to cook a huge pot of dinosaur stew for dinner. They put big meatballs and a spoonful of little peas in the pot and stirred it up. Put large and small balls of play dough in the bowl and stir them with a spoon. Pretend to taste the stew. "This tastes bland," said one dinosaur. "It needs pepper to spice it up." Pretend to shake in some pepper. Distribute the materials, and say I wonder what you’ll put in your dinosaur stew.

Scaffolding Children’s Learning
Encourage children to create, name, and mix the stew ingredients. Describe, and encourage children to describe, their actions and the features of the kitchen utensils they are using (e.g., Kelly made a mound of grated carrots). Talk about foods and seasonings that are part of children’s meals at home (e.g., Vinod stirred lentils into his stew). Suggest and invite suggestions for side dishes: I dunk bread to soak up the juices. What do you like to eat with your dinosaur stew? “Taste” what they cook and make requests (e.g., May I please have a smaller portion; This tastes underdone, I think it needs to cook longer). Elaborate on the story (e.g., Other animals wanted to eat stew too. The squirrels added acorns and dried leaves to the pot. I wonder who else came and what they added). If children want to store the stew to use at work (choice) time, encourage them to put it into plastic containers.

Vocabulary words: bland, dunk, growl, gurgle, roaming, spice, stew

Follow-Up Ideas
Stock the house area with a variety of kitchen utensils and clean, empty food containers. Include tools and foods that are familiar to children from the dishes they eat at home (e.g., rice steamer, tortilla press, empty pasta box, hummus container). Ask families to contribute old cooking utensils and empty containers. As children role-play cooking in the house area, talk to them about the ingredients they use and the techniques they use in cooking. Encourage children to use cooking utensils with 2-D and 3-D art materials.