

How to Make a Rain Stick

Create rain sticks in a cost effective manner by recycling old cardboard tubes as part of a multiple literacy approach to Math, Science or Religious Education.



This simple art activity based on how to make a Rain Stick was first adapted from The Science Explorer from the Exploratorium, published by Henry Holt & Co. ©1996.

An easy to follow step by step instruction list was presented on Exploratorium.edu as part of their [Frogs Exhibition](#).

History of the Rain Stick

Originally rain sticks were made from natural materials. The large cactus of the South Americas possessed a wood skeleton that could be hollowed. The thorns were pulled off and later reinserted. They pierced back through soft flesh of the cactus. The cactus would be left to dry in the sun—with the thorns on the inside. Later, the hollow cactus would be filled with small pebbles, and the ends are sealed with pieces of wood. When this was turned upside down the pebbles would emulate the sound of the rain. Skilled artisans could make the stick to sound the way they wanted to.

A Simple Rain Stick Pattern for the Classroom

Materials

- Cardboard tubes such as Cling Wrap rolls, or smaller toilet rolls joined together with tape
- Tape and glue
- Pins, nails, tacks
- Paper mache or plaster bandage
- Paint and brushes
- Wash up materials, buckets rags etc
- Raw rice and/or small beans or dried peas, tiny pebbles

Method

- From top to bottom along the spiral seam of the tube, mark out dots about half an inch apart.

- Pierce the tube with a nail or pin at each dot, being sure not to pierce straight through the tube.
- Wrap tape around the tube to hold the nails in place.
- Tape a circle cut to size over one end of the tube so the end of the tube is sealed shut.
- Experiment with a handful of rice, beans or peas by pouring them into the open end of the tube. Turn the tube over to adjust the sound by adding more or eliminating some of the “rollers”. (The harder the roller the louder the sound; the softer rice will make a softer sound.)
- Place another circle of paper over the open end of the tube, and seal with tape.

Aesthetics, History and Rhythm

Adorn the instrument by wrapping it in papier-mâché or plaster bandage. Perhaps rough wrapping could be contrasted by coiling it over a fine smooth sanded finish. Rain Sticks layered with papier-mâché could be decorated with South American cut pattern designs. In this way students would explore the culture of South America.

The Rain Stick may be a musical instrument intended to have a prayerful presence on assembly or at liturgies or on retreat. This aura can be enhanced by decorating the stick with symbolism, colours and finish that reflect the ethos of the school.

Multiple Literacy

Look at the many ways that making, decorating and playing a Rain Stick can become a part of the way teachers attend to the needs of students in the class. Aspects such as rhythm and music can appeal to the auditory and kinetic aspect of student learning. Spacing, placing and design of the instrument can appeal to the mathematical intelligence of the class members. Perhaps teachers could use the exercise to introduce a literacy project. Stories children write may be inspired by the making and playing of the instrument.

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