



# What Can I Do With.....?



*Using various household and recyclable  
materials to make your*

*Early Childhood Art Center*

*the most exciting place to be*

*By Faige Kobre*

The name of this guide is ***What Can I do With.....?*** , but it's really a guide to the Early Childhood Art Center.

An art center is not a storefront where one goes to buy art supplies.(for those of you unfamiliar with center based classrooms)

An art center is an area in a classroom that is center based that is usually the designated place for art.

This can have different meanings for different classrooms.

- It may be the place that the easel is kept
- It may be a place to store all of the art supplies
- It can be an area that children go to do any kind of art that is done in the classroom.

Often the art area is underused. Sometimes if there is a crafts project to be done it's done there. Other times it's not used at all for art, except to maybe store some crayons and paper where all the little girls go to make their hearts and rainbows.

If you would like to add an art center to your the classroom that is really a happening place, then you have to work at it, by preparing and arranging for different exciting materials for the children use on a daily basis.

I believe an art center should be an area that children can go to whenever the centers are open. There should be materials that they can check out that you provide for them to create whatever they want to with those materials.

They should also be able to use this area to make the things they need for other centers like food for the dramatic play area and signs for the blocks area.

However, its main raison d'être should be "Let's see what materials are here and what can I make with them"

Total freedom: No crafts projects, no collage and no painting.

This is not for everyone. Not for every adult and not for every child.

The adults have to realize that these projects will most often not look like anything and that's OK. And the children have to be interested enough to want to try out all the new materials.

Some children will eat this up.

Others will ignore it.

The children that have lots of experience with this will eventually start creating real pieces of artwork. Either modern art or representational art. The more freedom they are given and more variety of materials, the more they will create.

If you run a classroom that is not centered based or you home school or just want to use these projects at home, go ahead just be prepared for lots of interesting looking art.

The materials are cheap and mostly free, as we save old cartons and egg boxes and the like.

**A great tip:** Photograph all of the children's creations.

Sometimes you may have to secretly dispose of the artwork if it starts to pile up. I don't think it's that much of a problem as the process is more what's going on here than the product, BUT if you have everything photographed you can put it all in book form for the children and write what they say about it and they'll have it for life.

If your children get really attached to their artwork don't throw it out, save it for a while until they forget about it.

This art center guide started out as a list but I decided to try out lots of these ideas in our art summer camp and photograph them as we went along. This way you won't expect too much from the kids when you see the types of projects young children think up as they are experimenting with materials.

Adding lots of photographs makes a list more of a book or a small guide, which is what this became.

Often the children are creating something that we cannot recognize, and other times they are really just enjoying using the different materials.

What I have here at first is a list of the possible materials you can use for these activities.

Then I list some possible combinations of materials that we put together to see what the children could do with them.

Sometimes the combinations are 2 items other times more.

The activities are not always what can you do with different combinations but we may just do something different with an ordinary material, like cut out large circle for them to work with.

If you are doing this in a classroom and want to make new changes every few days, there aren't enough ideas in this guide that will last you a whole school year. You will need to look at my list of materials, see what you have available and based on the activities we have here, come up with new ideas.

Another part of the art center activities is something I call art recipes.

Children follow a recipe, not to cook but to pick materials to work with.

The art materials are pasted onto a large tag board with the amounts of that particular material they need to take.

The children do not usually end up using all of the materials they take but it is a great reading and math activity as well.

Once you get the idea of what an art center is all about, you will look around you at various materials you come across in a different light.

Everything will be “Hmm..how would this go over in the art center”.

You will also see that the older children tend to end up making things that are quite representational but it may take a while for them to get there.

# Materials

Below is a list of some of the materials you may want to use

Doilies  
Tissue paper  
Felt and felt pieces  
Material swatches  
Yarn  
String  
Ribbons  
Sequins  
Googly eyes  
Buttons  
Craft Sticks  
Cotton balls  
Egg boxes  
Cardboard tubes  
Toothpicks  
Graph paper  
Paper plates  
Styrofoam

Q-tips  
Bubble wrap  
Beads  
Pom poms  
Feathers  
Coffee filters  
Cupcake holders  
Corrugated cardboard pieces  
Egg boxes  
Paper towel rolls  
Wallpaper samples  
Pipe cleaners  
Wax Paper  
Pipe cleaners  
Aluminum foil  
Feathers  
Straws  
Paper clips

The way I decide on combinations to offer the children is this. If I have pieces of Styrofoam I think of things that can stick into Styrofoam. If I have string I try to think of items that string can be pushed through.

It may take a little creativity on your part but to jumpstart it, I have given a bunch of combinations for you to start with.

## Combinations

I do not include the following things in most activities that can always be added as you see fit.

### Tag board, glue, tape, staplers, scissors, and markers

Below is a list of combinations that we tried along with pictures to follow so that you can get an idea of the types of things the children may make from the materials.

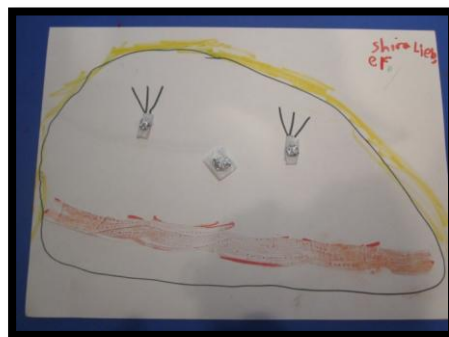
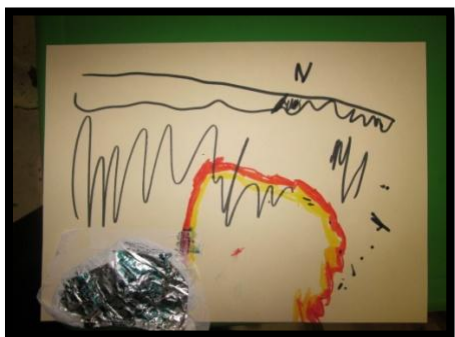
It may also help to show these pictures to kids who are hesitant to use the materials. They may have high expectations or think they have to “*make something*” Once they see what other children have made and realize there’s no model and anything is ok it may make uninterested children more interested.

On the other hand it may make children who need more structure less interested and as I said these activities will not be for every child.

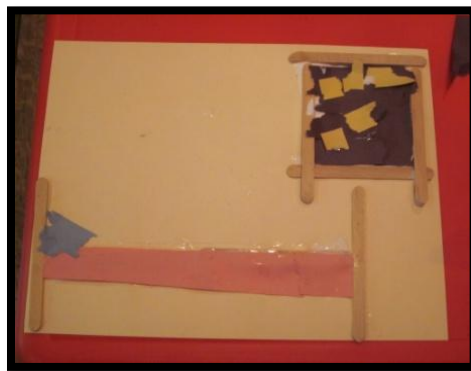
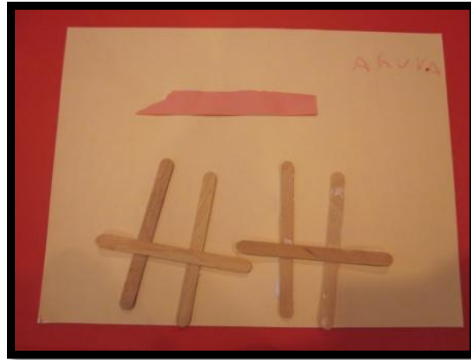
After the pictures of some basic combinations I have added more ideas of combinations that we did not do, and then it is up to you to use these ideas to create your own. There are many possible combinations and as I said you can keep your eyes open for interesting materials that you come across that may work for this type of activity.

- Aluminum foil pieces, tape ,googly eyes
- Strips of paper, crafts sticks
- Yarn, tooth picks, straws
- Styrofoam pieces from packaging, pipe cleaners, tooth picks
- Large paper cut out in circles, maybe with a hole in the middle or even two
- Paper plates, hole punchers, yarn
- Long strips out of construction paper
- Cotton balls, q-tips
- Egg cartons, string, toothpicks
- Aluminum foil, yarn, straws
- Buttons, crafts sticks
- Black construction paper, chalk, sequins
- Paper with a large shape drawn on it and construction paper to use to fill shape
- Small paper plates, coffee filters, cupcake holders, yarn

# Aluminum foil pieces, tape and googly eyes with tag board



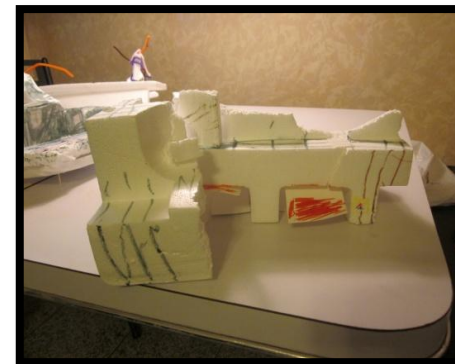
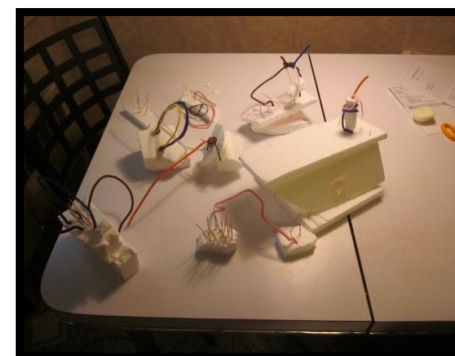
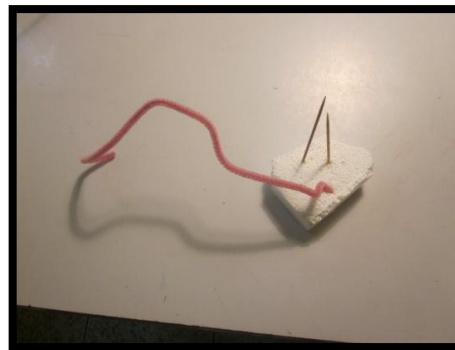
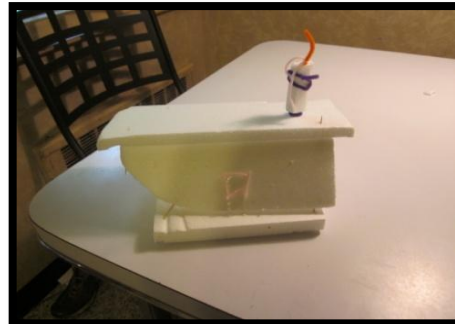
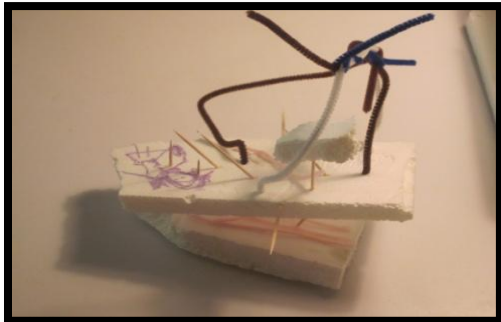
## Long strips of paper and crafts sticks



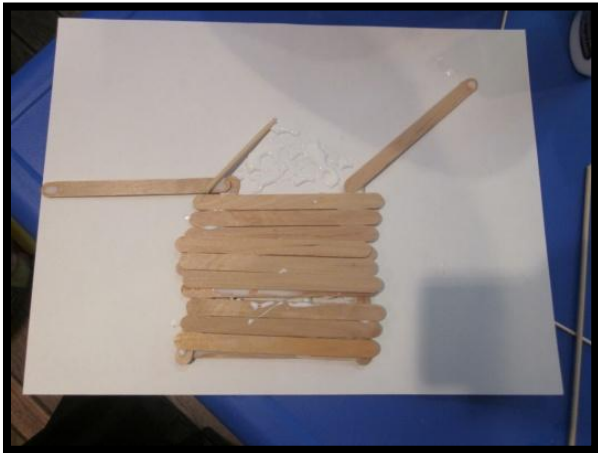
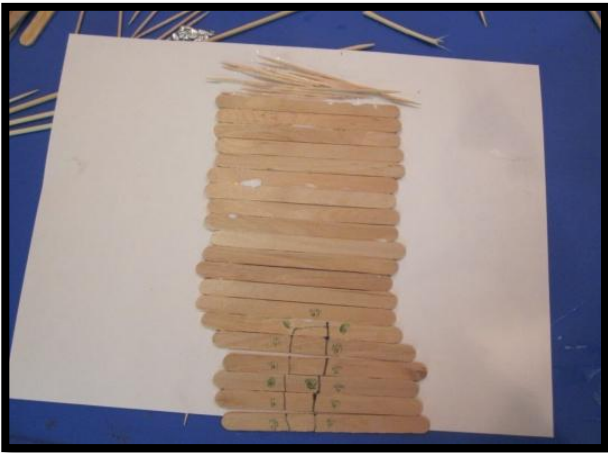
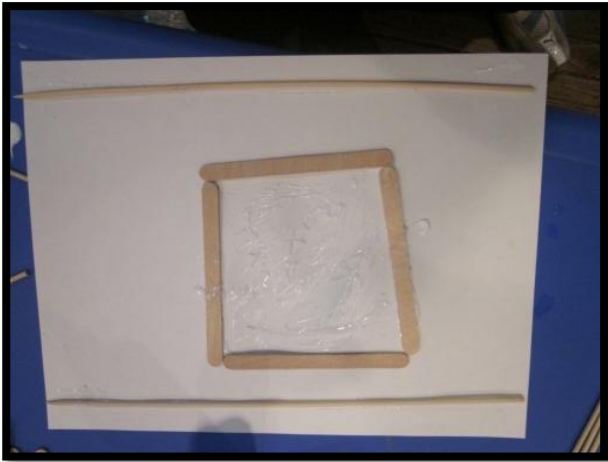
## Yarn, toothpicks, straws



# Pieces of Styrofoam, yarn, pipe cleaners and tooth picks

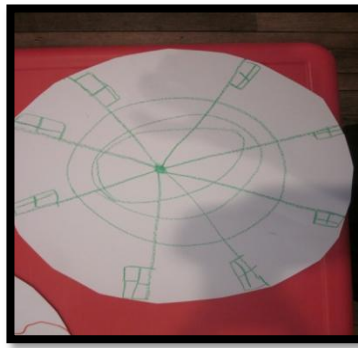
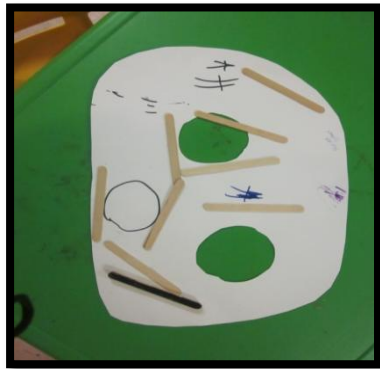


# Crafts sticks and tooth picks

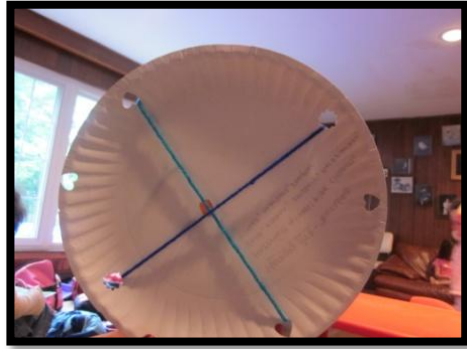
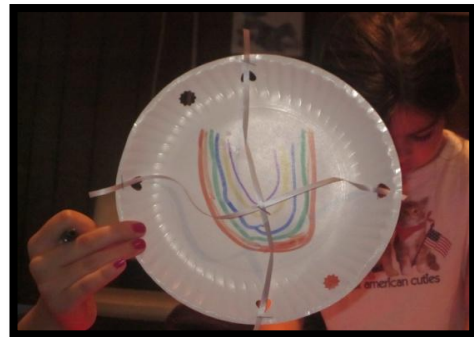


**Large cut out circle of tagboard**

**Or... with a hole in the middle or two with crafts sticks**



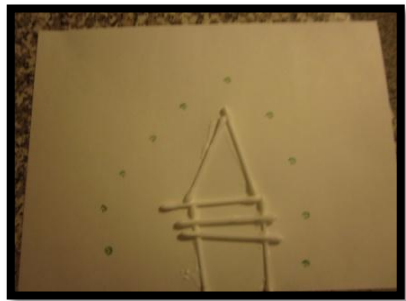
## Paper plates, hole punchers and yarn



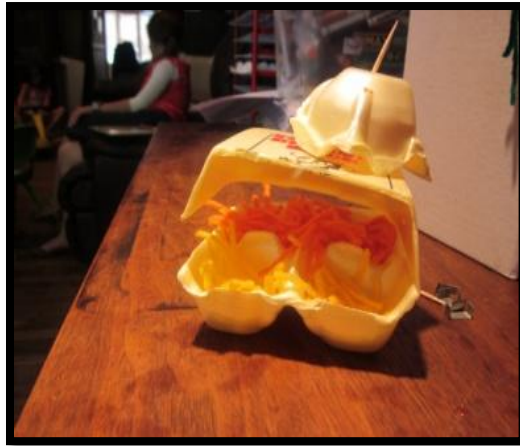
**A bunch of long construction paper strips**



# Cotton balls and Q tips



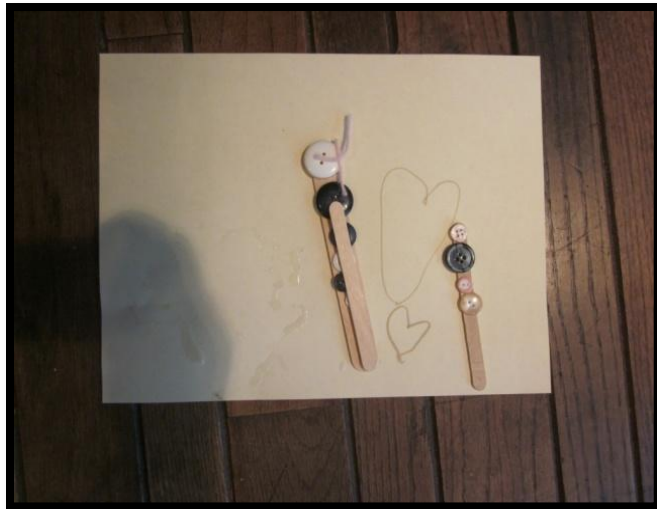
## Egg cartons, string and tooth picks



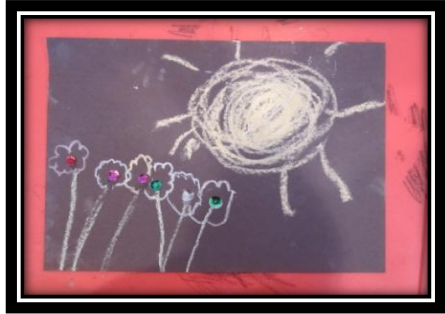
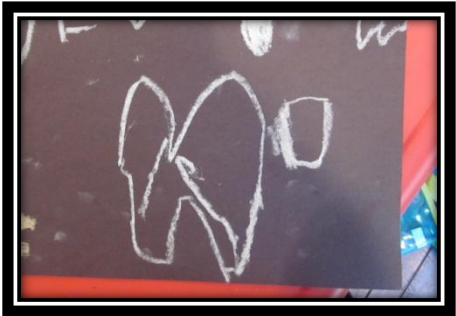
## Aluminum foil, yarn and straws



## Buttons and craft sticks

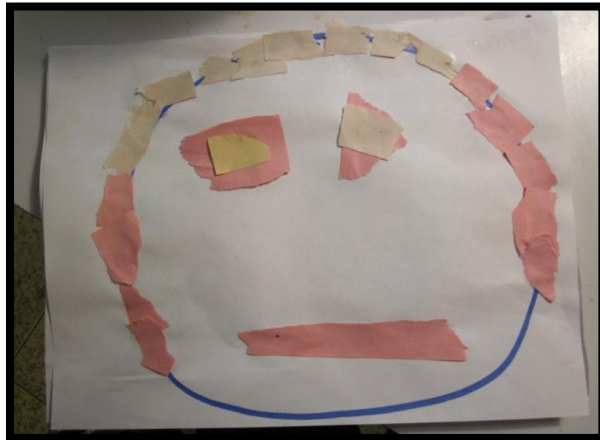
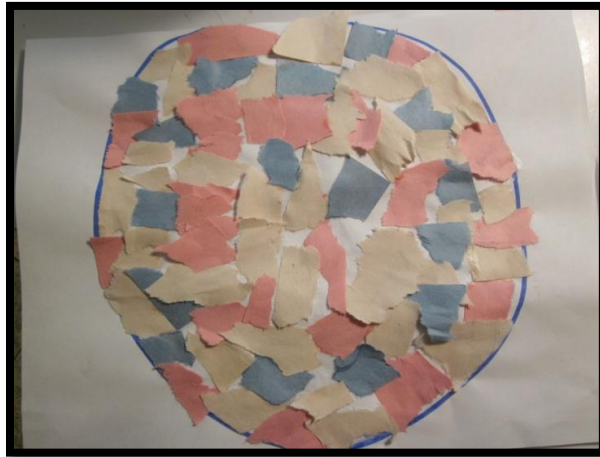


**Black or Dark blue construction paper, chalk and sequins**



## Empty shapes with construction paper

(Tell them to fill the shape with ripped up paper)



**Small paper plates, coffee filters, cupcake holders,  
yarn**

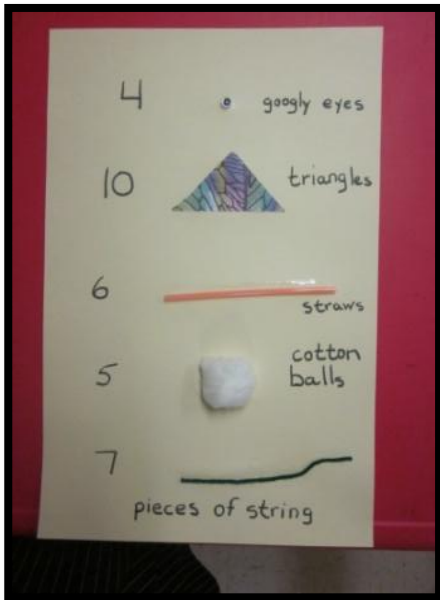


# Art Recipes

Art recipes are a way of adding interest to the art area by also adding some reading and math skills.

The point of the recipes is to write a number next to a specific material.

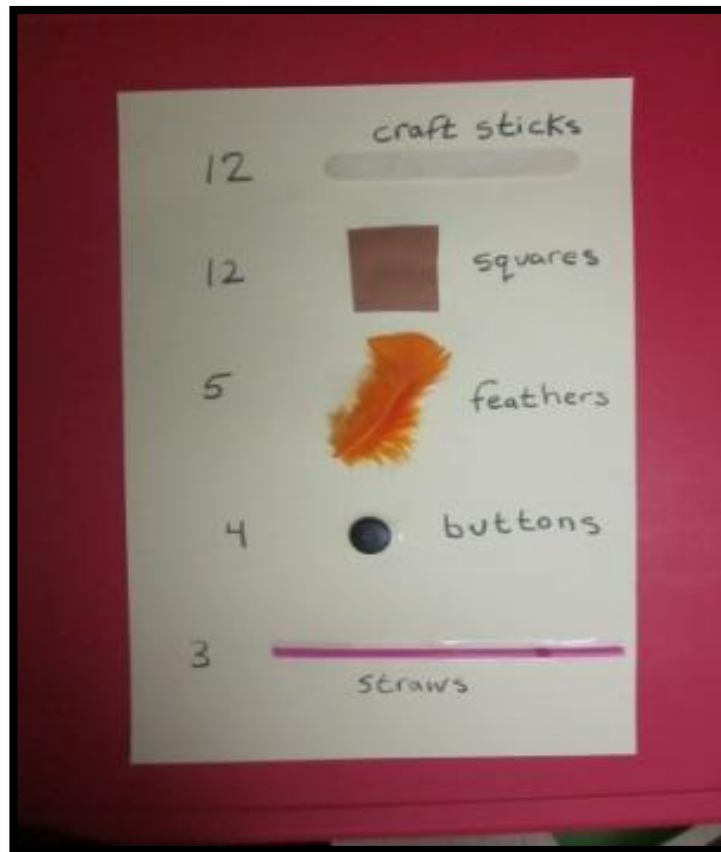
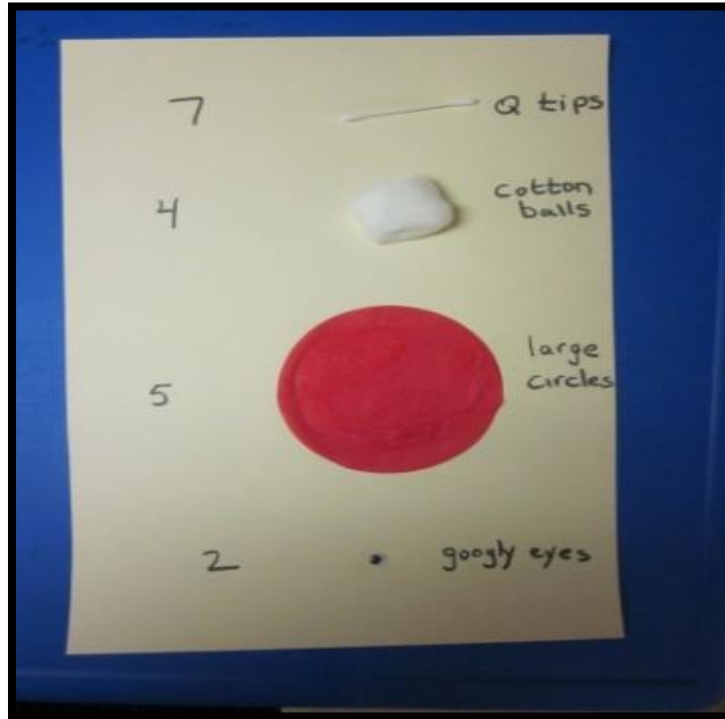
The children using as Styrofoam tray or a plate then take what they see on the recipe to their place along with the paper you give them and they see what they can make with the given materials.

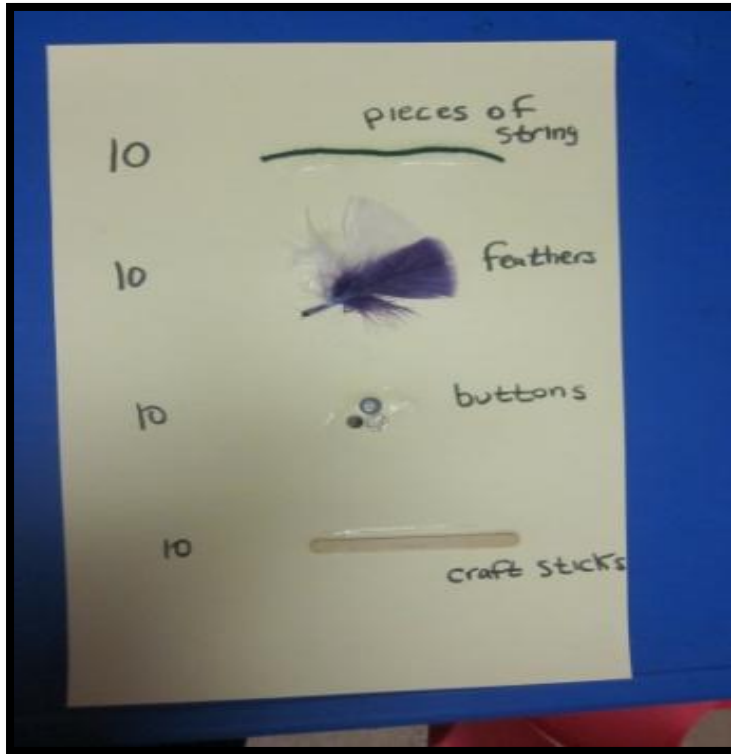


They may only use some of the materials they took as in the case below and then you can return the materials to the materials storage place for other children.



Below are 3 more recipes that we used to give you an idea of how to create others





Some results



## Ideas with No Pictures

- Papers with fringes cut at the end
- Cardboard toilet paper tubes, tape, string, hole punchers
- Styrofoam balls, toothpicks, string or yarn, pipe cleaners
- Boxes of all smallish sizes, cardboard tubes cut up, pipe cleaners
- Plastic cups, paper plates, paper clips, straws

The list of combinations is endless. Just make sure you don't give them too much at once.

You can always add other kind of challenges that include math like...

- Use 3 large pieces from pile A and 4 small pieces from pile B
- Make a picture using the materials in groups of 2 or 3
- Without a drawing a shape see if you can create shape x with the materials you have

The more experience the children have with these kind of projects the more they will start looking at materials around them to see what they can make out of them.

You will actually find yourself picking up old pieces of discarded ribbon from peoples birthday gifts and picking through people discarded items as you yourself get more involved in the art center.

Enjoy!

Happy materials hunting