

A MaryAnn Kohl Book



# First Art

for  
**Toddlers and Twos**  
**Open-Ended Art Experiences**

**MaryAnn F. Kohl**

with

**Renee Ramsey**

**Dana Bowman**

**Illustrations by Kathy Dobbs**



SILVER SPRING, MD

## Dedication

*To Hannah and Megan, forever my favorite toddlers*

*~With wonderful memories still to come, Mom*

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# Hands on Dough



Playdough, clays, and other exploratory sensory mixtures are rich in open-ended possibilities for toddlers and twos. Stretch it this way, pound it that way, cut it, tear it, pour it, squeeze it, poke it, and sculpt it! Experience the moment! The finished product (if there is one) will not be as important as the process. Each doughlike recipe or squeezable material will produce an all-new and wondrous sensory experience for toddlers and twos. Do not be surprised if some children plunge both hands into playdough, while others are uncomfortable with the feeling of dough on their hands. Provide handy clean-up sponges or wet towels for easy hand wiping to encourage the reluctant child. Sometimes waiting a week or two and trying again is all it takes for children to decide they are ready to take the plunge!

Doughs and mixtures can be a calm, soothing experience or an exuberant active delight. The adult's role is to supervise closely and to bring out tools or put away materials when children need to increase or decrease their involvement. Sometimes toddlers and twos want to dry off, clean up, and move on to new activities, but they need the help of an adult to master the transition from something as exciting as mush or mud to something as calm as sharing a book. One final thought is so aptly stated by child development expert Clare Cherry in *Creative Art for the Developing Child: A Guide for Early Childhood Education*, "The finest experience that can be given a child with playdough is to let him make his own."

Cherry, Clare. 2001. *Creative art for the developing child: A guide for early childhood education*. Belmont, CA: Fearon.

# Feelie Goop



*Children love “touchy-feelie” tactile projects. Cornstarch mixed with water has wonderful and unique physical properties—gooey when poured from a spoon, but hard if squeezed in the hands. And the nice part is how easy it is to clean up with just water.*



## Materials

cornstarch  
food coloring  
heavy baking pan or plastic dishtub  
old tablecloth or dishtowel, if needed  
spoons, measuring cups, and other kitchen tools  
water

## Prepare (Adult)

- Premeasure 2 cups (250 g) cornstarch into a baking pan or plastic dishtub. Ask the children to help, if desired. If a child will be handling the dry cornstarch before adding water, place an old tablecloth or large dishtowel under the pan to help contain the powder that may puff out.
- Put the food coloring, spoons, measuring cups, and any other kitchen items on the table to use for exploring.
- Premeasure 1 cup (240 mL) of water, and set it aside.

## Process (Child)

- Stand at the table, and feel the dry cornstarch with bare hands. (Standing works better than sitting for toddlers and twos.)
- Add water to the cornstarch, and mix it using bare hands. Feel the difference.
- Children love color! Squeeze drops of color from the little food coloring squeeze bottles. Add drops of two or more colors into the mixture, and mix with hands, watching as the colors swirl and blend.
- Explore the mixture with spoons, cups, or other kitchen items.

## Tips

- Cornstarch is nontoxic, though not particularly appetizing. It will not harm children who cannot resist tasting it.
- Scrape dried drips off the floor with the edge of a dustpan, and sweep up.
- Add more cornstarch for a thicker mixture or more water for a runnier mixture.

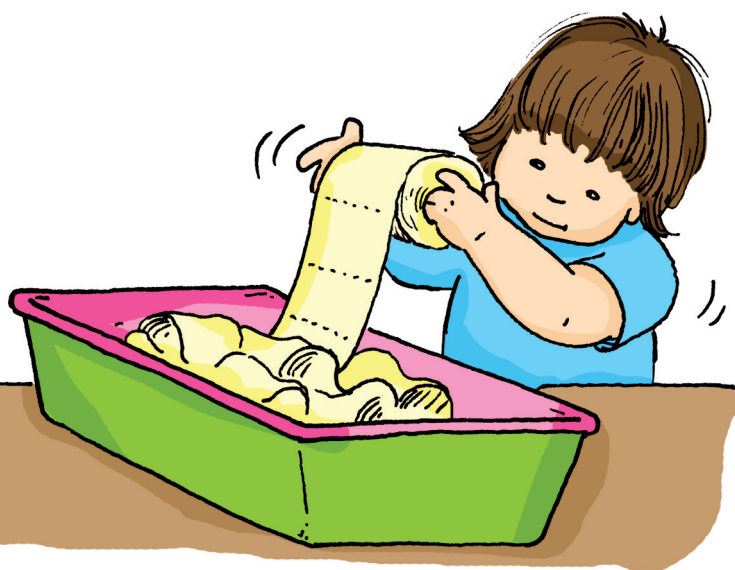
## Story

*Lynn and Marsha, two child care providers, decided to try making feelie goop before giving it to the children, so they would know what it was all about, and to plan for discoveries and successful setup. Neither had made feelie goop before. After creating a batch, they began to pour it from one bowl to another. Jan, the center’s teacher for school-age children, heard laughing and screaming coming from the toddler room and rushed over to see what was happening. She was surprised to see Lynn and Marsha having the times of their lives playing with goop that was at once solid and liquid. It did not take her long to get her hands into it, too!*

# Clean Mush



*Most children have experimented with unrolling at least one roll of toilet paper into a big, soft pile of white ribbon! Finally, a project that not only allows for unrolling it, but for mixing and mooshing it into the most wonderful stuff! “Clean Mush” is a perfect name for this mixture.*



## Materials

bar of Ivory soap, grated  
3 full rolls of toilet paper  
measuring spoons and cups, mashers, and  
scoops, optional  
old cheese grater  
plastic container with lid, about the size of a  
storage container  
warm water

## Prepare (Adult)

- Grate a bar of Ivory soap using an old cheese grater.
- Put the rest of the materials on the worktable.

## Process (Child)

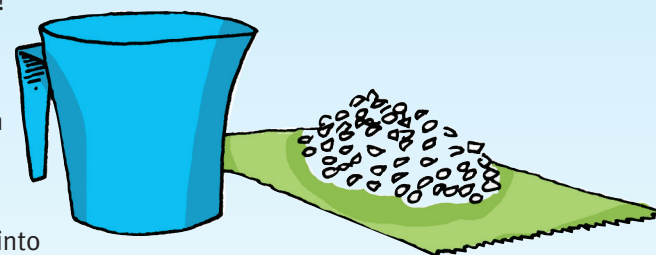
- Unroll the toilet paper (with adult help). Put the toilet paper and grated soap into a large plastic container. Add enough warm water to saturate the mixture. Double or triple the recipe for even more fun!
- Mix it using bare hands.
- Squish, poke, pat, squeeze, and otherwise feel the wonderful clean mush. This is what sensory experiences are all about!

**Hint:** This mixture will not harden into any shapes or lasting sculptures unless the water is squished out. The mixture will last less than a week (one or two days is average).

- If desired, add a few tools for exploring, such as measuring cups, spoons, mashers, and scoops.
- When finished, cleaning up is very easy. Just snap on the lid, or cover the container with plastic wrap, making an airtight seal.

## Variations

- Place the rolls of toilet tissue on short dowels or sticks so the children can spin them to unroll the paper into a big, soft, fluffy pile on the floor.
- Make the mush in a sand and water table.
- Squish out the excess water, and use the mixture to mold sculptures somewhat like clay. Place each one on a piece of aluminum foil, and let them dry overnight.





# Outdoor Mudpies



*What is the point of being a child if you can't play with real mud? All you need is dirt and water and a little bit of patience and understanding. Children need no direction for this classic sensory experience.*



## Materials

appropriate clothing, such as a bathing suit or old play clothes  
bucket, plastic dishpans, bowls, spoons, and cups  
dirt  
garden hose  
shovel  
warm day



## Prepare (Adult)

- Help the children put on appropriate clothing for this activity, such as bathing suits or old play clothes.
- With the children's help, dig a hole in the dirt to loosen and soften the soil.
- Turn on the garden hose, and add water to the dirt.

## Process (Child)

- Sit in the dirt, and mix and explore using hands and other tools and supplies.
- Simply hose off for easy cleanup! However, a warm and soapy bath or shower may still be necessary.

## Tip

- Many toddlers and twos find dirty hands distasteful, especially if they are in their potty-training phase. If so, choose a different activity.

## Variation

- *Indoor Mudpies:* Spread everything on a tarp on the floor with old towels nearby. Work with sifted "clean" dirt, free of rocks and twigs. Mix the dirt and water in a plastic tub.

## Story

*Megan and Julie wanted to make mudpies in the backyard one summer day. Megan's mother helped them get the hose and some spades and shovels for the area Mom felt was a good place for digging and playing. The girls dug a hole about 1' (30 cm) deep and 3' (90 cm) wide and called it "The Mud Pit." They filled it with thick mud made by squishing the dirt with water from the hose. Megan and Julie are now 24 years old, and they remember this as the most fun they ever had together in all their wonderful childhood days. Mom remembers that hosing them off did about half the clean-up job, while several warm soapy showers did the rest. Luckily the swimsuits they had been wearing were old ones—perfect for mud play.*

# Squeezing Rainbows



*Squeeze and knead a plastic baggie filled with bright colors of partially set gelatin, and enjoy the feel and sight of thick colors blending.*

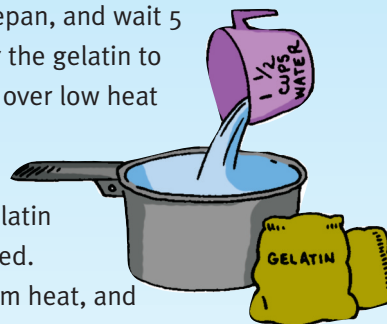


## Materials

heavy zipper-closure plastic baggie (freezer bag)  
hot plate or stove (adult only)  
masking tape  
measuring cups  
2 packages unflavored gelatin  
red, yellow, and blue food coloring  
3 small bowls  
small saucepan  
water  
wooden spoon

## Prepare (Adult)

- Prepare the rainbow gel. Stir  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cups (360 mL) water and 2 packages of gelatin in a small saucepan, and wait 5 minutes for the gelatin to soften. Stir over low heat for about 3 minutes or until the gelatin has dissolved. Remove from heat, and pour into three small bowls. Add 5 drops of food coloring to each bowl, and chill in refrigerator for about 10 minutes until partially set and thickened. Stir a few times while it chills.



- Caution:** Supervise child-helpers closely.
- Spoon two or more colors into a heavy plastic zipper-closure baggie. The baggie does not need to be very full. (Children like to help with the spooning step.)

- Zip the bag closed. To help prevent leaks, tape the opening of the baggie with masking tape.
- Hand the baggie to the child.

## Process (Child)

- Squeeze and knead this cool bag of colors. Discover how the colors mix together. Work at a table, on the floor, or on a lap. (This is fun for car rides or waiting times.)
- Empty the bag, and try mixing different colors together.

## Tips

- Mix unflavored gelatin, such as Knox™, with food coloring to make a thick mixture with colors that blend slowly, allowing the child time to see the process.
- Most children find this activity soothing and calming.

## Variation

- Place other materials or mixtures into a heavy baggie for children to explore, with or without coloring. The following are fun examples:
  - Equal parts water and cornstarch
  - Hair gel
  - Liquid starch
  - Shaving cream
  - Two or three flavors of bright fruit gelatin such as Jell-O™, no added color needed

# Stretchy Dough



*Soft and stretchy playdough has the texture and feel of comforting, soft, bread dough. Stir the ingredients together (no cooking needed), and make a big mound for pounding, squeezing, pulling apart, and poking.*



## Materials

art shirt or apron

Stretchy Dough Recipe

flour

food coloring

measuring cups and spoons

mixing bowl

vegetable oil

water

wooden spoon and hands

tools for modeling and exploring the playdough (see list)

## Sculpting Tools

chopsticks

dowels (for rolling)

drinking straws

forks

plastic knives

spatulas (for cutting)

spoons

wooden craft sticks

wooden stir sticks

## Prepare (Adult)

- This dough is oily, so protect the table with a plastic tablecloth or work directly on the bare tabletop.
- Mix 1 cup (240 mL) oil, 1 cup (240 mL) water, and 1 teaspoon (5 mL) food coloring in a bowl. Slowly add in 4 cups (500 g) flour, and stir with a wooden spoon or hands until the dough forms a ball. Children like to help mix.
- Put the dough on the table, and knead until smooth. Children greatly enjoy the kneading process.

## Process (Child)

- Help children put on art shirts or smocks because the dough is very oily.
- Pound, roll, knead, pull, poke, and stretch the dough.
- Add sculpting tools for exploration.

**Hint:** This dough does not hold a shape well and is not meant for intricate sculpting projects.

## Variation

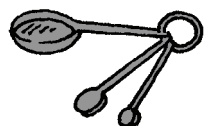
- Make Fruity Playdough. Children love the fragrance and color of this dough. Do not worry about them eating it—one taste of the extremely salty dough, and they will avoid tasting it twice!



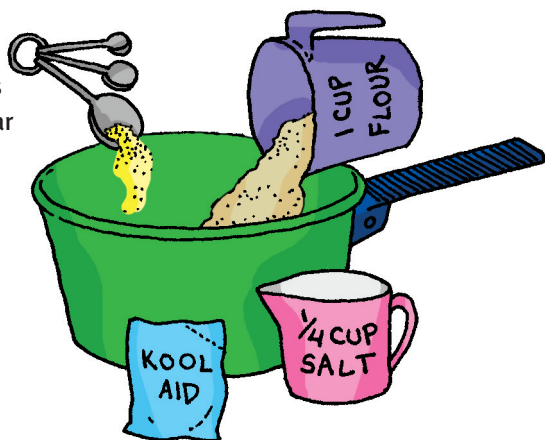


1 tablespoon of oil

Then add...



2 tablespoons  
Cream of Tartar



Mix these together

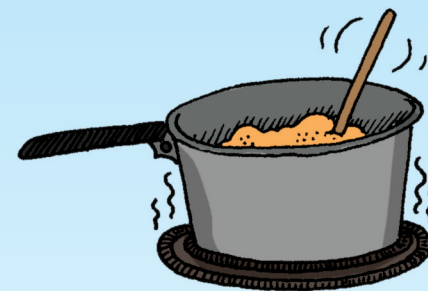
### Fruity Playdough Recipe

cream of tartar  
flour  
measuring cups and spoons  
mixing spoon  
oil  
package of unsweetened powdered fruit  
drink, such as Kool-Aid  
salt  
saucepan or electric fry pan (adult only)  
stove or hot plate (adult only)  
water

Mix 2 cups (250 g) flour, 4 tablespoons (60 g) cream of tartar, 2 cups water (480 mL), 2 tablespoons oil (30 mL), 1 cup salt (250 g), and a package of unsweetened powdered fruit drink in a saucepan or electric fry pan. Cook over medium heat until it forms a ball and has the consistency of playdough. Put the dough on a floured board or table, and knead until smooth. Children enjoy working with warm playdough. Otherwise, cool and store in a covered container.

### Tips

- This playdough is easy to clean up because it sticks together and does not crumble. It is also a quick and easy playdough to use when in a hurry.
- Clean-up tip: Soak the tools in a dishtub of water. The dough will soften and dissolve easily.



Stir over medium heat 3 to 5 minutes.

### Story

*Three children were playing with Stretchy Dough, each absorbed in his own discovery and experience. Max began pounding his ball of dough with his fist, and within seconds, Darien and Thomas were pounding away with identical grins on their faces. They were now one group together instead of three alone.*

# Rubbery Flubby Dough



*This soft, cooked dough has a rubbery feel, like a soft gumdrop. It is excellent for molding rolled shapes such as balls or coils, pleasing to poke things into, never crumbly, and especially wonderful to pound with a wooden toy mallet for a great release of energy!*



## Materials

airtight container or plastic bag

box lids

items to stick into dough (see list)

Rubbery Flubby Dough

cold water

cornstarch

hot water

measuring cups

mixing bowl and spoon

salt

saucepan and hot plate or stove (adult only)

wide dowel or rolling pin

wooden toy mallet or block of wood



Combine...

## Items to Stick into Dough

birthday candles

chopsticks

craft sticks

golf tees

large pegs

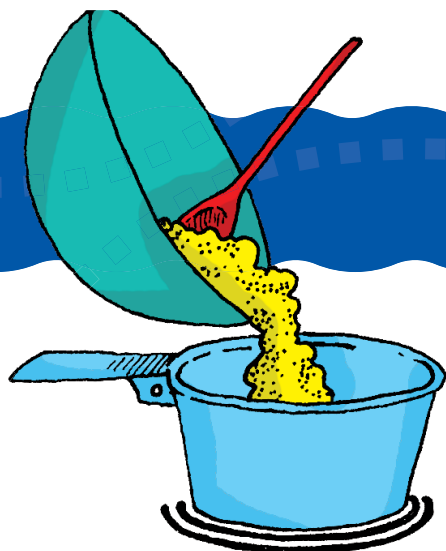
plastic animals

plastic or wooden stir sticks

straws

## Prepare (Adult)

- Make the dough. (Children love to help and particularly enjoy putting their hands in the soft cornstarch, but all steps involving heating and cooking are to be done by adults.) Pour 1 cup (125 g) cornstarch and  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup (120 mL) cold water into a mixing bowl, and stir with a spoon. Set it aside. Measure 1 cup (250 g) salt and 1 cup (240 mL) hot water into a saucepan on a hot plate or stove, and bring the mixture to a boil. Pour the contents of the mixing bowl into the hot saucepan mixture. Turn down the heat to low. Stir constantly while it cooks, until the mixture is dry and thick (like pie dough). Remove from the heat, and put the dough on a board or counter to cool. After it cools, knead until smooth. (Children love kneading warm dough!)
- Put out a toy mallet or block of wood, a rolling pin or dowel, and a selection of items (in box lids) for poking the dough.



Pour contents of bowl into hot  
saucepan mixture...  
Turn heat down low



Stir constantly

## Process (Child)

- Mold and squeeze the dough.
- Hammer the dough with a wooden toy mallet or block of wood. (Make sure the dough is on a surface that will not be damaged.)
- Choose tools for poking and pushing into the dough. Decorate the dough with as many items as desired. This dough will air-dry with the items sticking in it.

## Tips

- Children with allergies will enjoy this wheat-free and gluten-free dough.
- If the dough gets sticky, pour some dry, powdery cornstarch on the table, and roll the dough in it (children love doing this).
- Although this recipe stores well in an airtight container, it does dry out more quickly than other playclay mixtures.
- To easily transport playclay sculptures, place them on a juice can lid or coffee can lid. Children can carry their own sculptures even if sculptures are not dry.



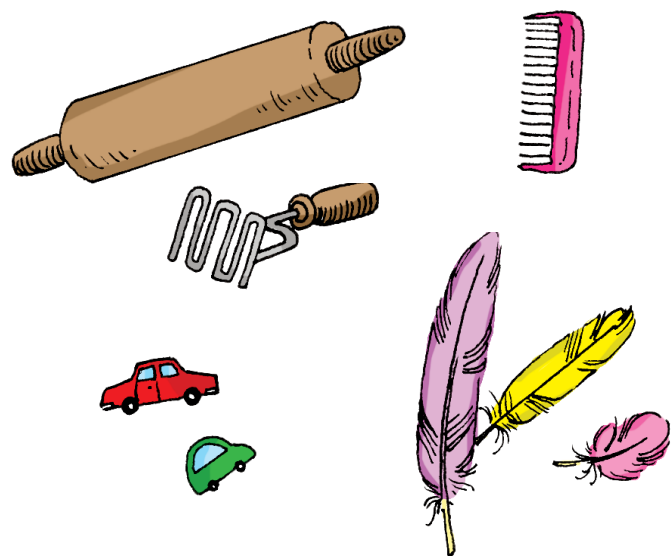
Knead until smooth!



# Playclay



*Squeeze, roll, cut, press, model, and play with this supersoft homemade playclay that is a delight to touch. There are many commercial playdoughs and homemade recipes that are too hard and stiff for the smallest hands to manipulate, but this one is great! A huge mound of this long-lasting dough is easy to handle.*



## Materials

airtight container or zipper-closure plastic bag

### Playclay Recipe

cream of tartar  
flour  
food coloring  
hot plate or stove (adult only)  
large saucepan  
measuring cups and spoons  
salt  
vegetable oil  
water  
wooden spoon

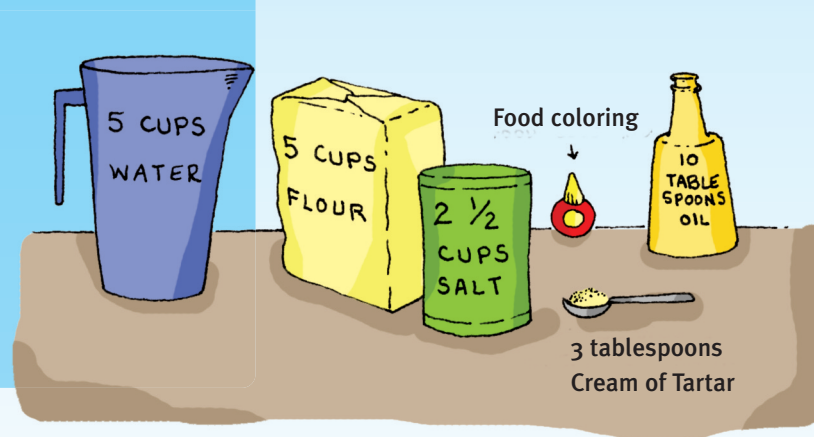
tools to use with playclay (see list)

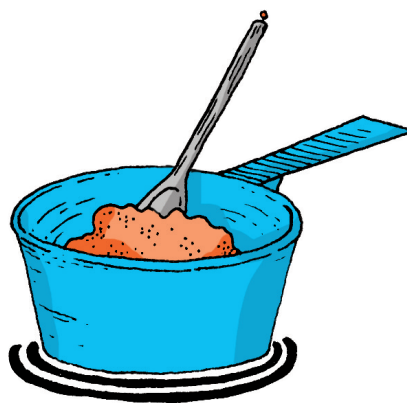
## Playclay Tools

birthday candles  
cookie cutters, with handles  
feathers  
garlic press  
hair combs  
kitchen gadgets  
plastic knives  
plastic scissors  
potato mashers  
rolling piecrust or  
pastry cutter  
rolling pin  
small toy cars  
straws

## Prepare (Adult)

- Prepare playclay (children love to help). Combine 5 cups (1.2 L) water, 2½ cups (625 g) salt, 3 tablespoons (45 g) cream of tartar, and food coloring (1 teaspoon for pastel color and 3 tablespoons for vivid color) in a large saucepan on a hot plate or stove (adult only). Cook on low heat, and stir with a wooden spoon. As the mixture heats up, stir in 10 tablespoons (150 mL) oil, and then 5 cups (625 g) flour slowly.
- Keep stirring until the mixture starts looking dry and pulls away from the sides of the pan. Remove the pan from the heat at this point. Pinch a piece between two fingers. If it is not sticky, it is done. Otherwise, continue stirring over heat.
- Place the dough on the counter, and knead until smooth. Children will enjoy kneading, too!





Keep stirring until mixture looks dry  
and pulls away from sides of pan...

### Process (Child)

- Knead the warm playclay.
- Model the playclay while it is still warm (but not hot!), exploring it with bare hands.
- Use a variety of tools and utensils on the dough:
  - Press the dough with a potato masher
  - Roll the dough flat with a rolling pin, and cut out “cookies”
  - Squeeze spaghetti-like strands with a garlic press
  - Roll long worm shapes, and cut them with a plastic knife or plastic scissors.
  - Poke the dough with candles and straws

The possibilities are infinite!

- When finished, store playclay in an airtight container or plastic bag, and reuse again and again. Do not refrigerate.

### Variations

- Single “serving” recipe: Use 1 cup (240 mL) water,  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup (125 g) salt, 2 teaspoons (10 g) cream of tartar,  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 teaspoons (2 to 10 mL) food coloring, 2 tablespoons (30 mL) vegetable oil, and 1 cup (125 g) flour. Prepare the same way as the large batch.
- Cook two or more batches of playclay, each a different color, and mix them together.
- Add interesting fragrances or textures to playclay, such as shampoo, sand, perfume, almond or lemon or other extracts, and coffee grounds.

### Story

*Cathryn was patting and forming her dough into at least 10 little cookie shapes. When she was done, she put her hands on her hips and said quietly to herself as she pointed to each one, “For Daddy, for Mommy, for Justin, for Ruffer, for Cathryn...” Sharing cookies is the best beginning mathematics experience. Cathryn was doing division!*

# Sculpture in a Bag



*Squeezing plaster of Paris to make permanent sculptures is pure magic! First, it's squishy, and then it suddenly turns warm and solid. Science and art in one!*



Place 2 or 3 colors of paint in a pan

## Materials

paintbrush  
plaster of Paris  
shallow dish or pan  
sturdy sandwich-sized baggies, twist-tie type  
tempera paints  
water

## Prepare (Adult)

- Place two or three colors of paint into a shallow dish or pan, and put a paintbrush next to it. Set it aside.
- Measure 1 cup (125 g) plaster of Paris and  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup (120 mL) water into the sandwich baggie. Children like to help with measuring.
- Use a twist tie (or zipper closure) to close the bag, expelling as much air as possible.
- Hand the baggie to the toddler.
- Remove the plastic bag after the plaster of Paris has hardened (it takes only a few minutes). Inside the bag will be the child's unique hand-formed sculpture.

## Process (Child)

- Squeeze, knead, push, and poke the bag. As the plaster and water mix, the contents of the bag will harden into a shape.
- Remove the shape from the bag (Adult).
- Paint dry sculptures with the tempera paints. (Mix the colors in the dish first, or blend them together on the sculpture.) Allow the paint to dry.

## Tips

- Because children may use energetic mixing styles, double-bag the plaster.
- Use less or more of the mixture in the baggie to make it easier or harder to squish the mixture around inside. Each will create a different sculpture when dry.

## Variation

- For pastel-tinted sculptures, add watercolor paints, food coloring, or tempera paints to  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup (120 mL) water, and mix it into the dry plaster.

## Story

*Kimmy and Lana were working together making plaster sculptures, happily squeezing the squishy liquid plaster. All of a sudden, as if on cue, their eyes opened wide and their mouths dropped open as they felt the cool plaster turn suddenly warm in their hands. They dropped the bags on the table at the same time, looking at each other with surprise and smiles. Kimmy said, "Mine's cooked!"*