

This set of stones has raised textured details to provide tactile stimulation. This means the stones provide lots of sensory feedback to children when they handle them. By feeling, studying and discussing the natural objects depicted, children will develop their descriptive language skills. Designed for outdoor learning and investigative play, the stones are robust enough for use outside. Set contains eight stones: acorn, dandelion seedhead, feather, pine cone, snail shell, spider's web, sycamore leaf, and sycamore seeds.



Key vocabulary

- Acorn, dandelion seedhead, feather, pine cone, snail shell, spider's web, sycamore leaf, and sycamore seeds
- Sort
- Compare
- Similarities
- Differences
- Different from / Similar to
- Spiral, point, soft/hard, straight/curved
- Seed, cone, nut
- Spring, summer, autumn, winter
- Season

Activity ideas

Explore the natural world by going on a nature hunt and comparing the stones with the real natural objects. The finds below were gathered using a wooden 10-frame tray.



These found items can then be used to create a nature display alongside the stones.



Make imprints of the stones in play dough. This works in the reverse too by pressing the dough onto the stone.



- Present the children with a range of play dough impressions arranged at different angles. Ask them to place the correct stone in the correct impression, moving the dough moulds as needed.
- Take rubbings of the stones using wax crayons
- Place one of the stones in a bag and invite a child to feel it and try to work out which stone it is. Ask them to describe what they are feeling. This can be repeated with more than one stone in the bag, asking the child to find a specific stone by touch alone.
- Create transient art using found natural materials. The work of the artist Andy Goldsworthy will provide inspiration.

- Incorporate our Sensory Play Stones – Flowers (YD1189) into artwork
- Devise a year plan for planting seeds, bulbs, fruit and vegetables. Involve the children in the planning, planting, caring, harvesting (and eating).
- Make nature paintbrushes using foliage or feathers tied to twigs. This gives an opportunity to compare the feathers found with the stone version.
- Create bark owls by sticking natural items onto a piece of bark. If you use acorns, this also allows you to compare them with the acorn stone.
- Create a feather collection that can be sorted and compared, and used in artwork.
- Thread leaves onto string or wire to create seasonal wreathes. While doing so, the children will be discussing patterning and sequencing.
- Nut rolling: Gather a range of nuts and invite each child to choose one. They need to pick one that they think will travel the furthest once rolled down a ramp. Ask each child to explain why they picked the nut they did. Find a way to record the results, listening to the suggestions made by children and adults.
- Noughts and Crosses or Tic-tac-toe: Use some sticks to create the play grid. Ask each child to find some natural counters for the game. All counters in a set need to match. Play in the usual manner. This game is ideal for learning about turn taking.

Extending the learning

- Make a rain gauge using a plastic bottle with standard markings added to the side. Place it in a suitable position and monitor rainfall over a given period of time. Discuss how to record the findings with the children. This gives lots of opportunity for learning new vocabulary.
- Create seed bombs by mixing a handful of flower seeds with wet mud to create balls. In the spring, place these outside round your setting and monitor their development in to summer blooms. Discuss what the children think might happen over the seasons, encouraging them to ask questions to clarify meaning.

Children's books exploring nature

Percy the Park Keeper by Nick Butterworth

A First Book of Nature by Nicola Davies and Mark Herald

Slow Down ... in the Park by Freya Hartas

Slow Down ... on your Doorstep by Freya Hartas

The Big Alfie Out of Door Storybook by Shirley Hughes

The Moose Belongs to Me by Oliver Jeffers

Night Animals by Gianna Marino

If You Go Down to the Woods Today by Rachel Piercey and Freya Hartas

We're Going on a Bear Hunt by Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury

Owl Babies by Martin Waddell and Patrick Benson