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# ARTISTIC IMPRESSIONS

## FOR THE TEACHER

### Discipline

Art

### Theme

Scale and Structure

### Synopsis

Students explore various art activities using sand as a medium or the sandy beach as a theme.

### Key Concept

Artistic expression offers a way to communicate special qualities and values of the beach and ocean.

### Science Process Skills

observing, communicating, comparing, organizing

## MATERIALS

Into the activities

For Sand Casting

- small, sturdy cardboard box (in the classroom)
- 5 lbs clean, light-colored sand per student
- 5-10 lbs plaster of Paris
- clean milk carton or bucket for mixing plaster
- water bucket
- picture wire to hang casts
- small objects from the sea -- shells, seaweed, wood, stones

Through the Activities

For Sand Candles

- box of sand or seashore
- blocks of candle wax
- crayons with wrapping removed
- candle wicks

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- pencils or sticks
  - hot plate or campstove
  - coffee cans for melting wax
  - large pan of hot water

#### For Sand Painting

- fine sand of various colors
- jars, bowls, or cans for storing sand
- paper cups
- food coloring
- plastic sandwich bags
- cookie sheets
- construction paper
- white glue

#### For Fingerpainting

- fingerpaint paper
- fingerpaints, with extra blue and green
- cans for water
- sponge
- newspaper

#### For Shell Jewelry

- small shells with holes
- strong nylon thread
- varnish

#### Optional

- seeds, driftwood, or bark

#### For Mobiles and Weavings

- driftwood of different sizes
- kelp and other dried seaweed
- shells with holes
- other found objects
- thread

## **INTRODUCTION**

People have drawn and sculpted in the sand and collected art objects from the beach since time immemorial. It is the nature of beach art to be ephemeral, since it will soon be washed away by the changing tides. This impermanence encourages free-form spontaneity and creativity. The art of sand painting has been elevated to a sacred ceremony in some Native American tribes. Sand itself is a versatile medium, useful for casting as well as painting and sculpting. Found objects -- kelp and seaweed, stones, shells, feathers, glass floats, polished wood -- can be arranged in mobiles, weavings, sculptures, or sand castings. Some beach finds are art objects in and of themselves. When collecting on a beach, be sure to use restraint and common courtesy, keeping in mind the enjoyment of others. Plastic and other trash can also be used in

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art projects, thereby recycling material that would otherwise stay on the beach and be potentially harmful to animals.

## **INTO THE ACTIVITIES**

### **Drip Castle**

To make a drip castle, choose a spot near the water's edge where the sand is well water soaked. An outgoing tide is better than incoming, so the castle will last awhile. Lift a handful of wet sand over this pot and dribble it through your fingers, building up towers and rooms drip by drip. Experiment with shapes and size to create a fanciful castle.

### **Sand Combs**

Find or cut a piece of thin wood or thick cardboard into a zigzag shape or other simple pattern. Experiment with patterns you can make on the beach by drawing the comb along the sand. They may be abstract or turn into road, rivers, or whatever else you can imagine.

### **Body Patterns**

Create patterns in the sand, using your body as your only tool. A simple one is to lie on your back and move both your arms and legs open wide and then closed, to make an "angel". Sit up before getting out of your sculpture, in order to avoid spoiling it.

### **Sand Casting**

Have students fill their boxes with sand to a depth of 4-6 inches and then add water and mix it with the sand until the sand grains stick together. Or, if they are at the beach, have students look for a good spot for making their mold. The area should have firm, moist sand that can be sculpted, yet not be too close to the incoming tide.

Then students can shape a mold in the sand by scooping out a shape not deeper than 2-3 inches. This might be in the form of a fish, whale, or shell. Explain that the finished cast will have the opposite shape, so deeper spots will appear as bumps. (A demonstration prepared in advance might illustrate this best.) Make decorative patterns by pressing small objects into the sand, the prettiest side down into the sand (so they will be on top in the plaster cast). Mix water into the plaster of Paris, following package directions, stirring with a stick or your fingers until all the lumps are broken up and the plaster is the consistency of pancake batter. Don't over mix, since too much mixing will prevent the plaster from hardening. Because it sets very quickly, make small quantities at a time, as students are ready with their molds.

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Have the students pour the plaster slowly into the mold so as not to disturb the objects, until the plaster reaches the top of the sand. Gently slap the top of the poured plaster to force air bubbles to the surface. If you want to hang the molds, have students press a loop of picture wire into the top of the cast after an hour, while the plaster is sticky but not yet set.

While the plaster is still soft, have students scratch their initials into the plaster to avoid confusion in identification later. The heat from the sun should help set the plaster more quickly than in the classroom. Once plaster is hard, students can remove their molds from the sand and brush off excess sand.

## **THROUGH THE ACTIVITIES**

### **Sand Candles**

Have students moisten the sand with water so that the sand grains stick together, or choose a spot by the edge of the ocean where the sand is wet but not mushy. Then have students create a mold in the shape of a sea shell by pressing an abalone or conch shell into the sand to make an impression. Cut a length of candle wick 3-4 inches greater than the depth of the mold and tie one end to a pencil. Lay the pencil across the sand so that the wick dangles into the center of the mold and touches the bottom of the sand.

While students are creating their molds, heat the wax in the coffee cans in a pot of hot water. Use as many cans as colors you wish to use; crayons can be added to create color combinations.

Pour the colored wax into the mold. The hotter the wax, the more the sand will cling to the mold. The next day, lift the candles out carefully and brush off the excess sand.

### **Sand Painting**

Make colored sand by pouring two cups of sand into a sandwich bag (double-bagged is good in case it breaks). Have students add a few drops of food coloring to the sand and shake until the color is thoroughly mixed.

Dry the sand by having students spread it in thin layers on cookie sheets and put it in the sun or an oven until it is dry.

Students can experiment with one color at a time to see what patterns they can make, pouring the sand slowly with paper cups, keeping the colors separate. When they are ready to make a permanent sand painting, have students draw a picture on construction paper. Then they can cover their lines or shapes with white glue and sprinkle the colored sand onto the glue, using as many colors as they like.

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### **Fingerpainting**

Have students sponge the shiny side of the fingerpaint paper with water. Using blue and green fingerpaint, spread and blend the colors to make an underwater scene. The scene can include fish, jellyfish, and kelp or could be an abstract design of water movement.

For a variation, let the paint dry, and glue the painting to a piece of cardboard. Cut out small fish shapes from foil and glue them to the painting along with dried grasses, shells, pebbles, and sand. Cover the entire design with plastic wrap for protection.

### **Shell Jewelry**

Have students bring in shells collected at the beach. Wash and dry the shells and coat them with clear varnish (optional).

String the shells with nylon thread into short bracelets or longer necklaces. For older students, shells without holes can be carefully drilled with a needle to add a hole. Some animals have thin shells which can be easily worked; others are too hard to pierce. Add seeds or bits of driftwood alternating with the shells for greater variety.

### **Mobiles and Weavings**

**Mobile:** Using a 8-12" piece of driftwood, tie other objects from the end and middle at different lengths to make a pretty design. For a more complicated mobile, make two of these smaller mobiles and tie each to a larger piece of driftwood. Make sure the connecting thread is tied to the balance point of the smaller piece of wood so that the objects hang down straight. Mobiles can be as big or small as you like. Double tie all knots once they are in the right place and secure with a dot of glue.

**Weaving:** Using a fallen tree or low, sturdy branch, tie 5-7 pieces of kelp from the branch, 8-10 inches apart. Set one long piece of driftwood in place at the bottom, tying the ends of the kelp to this piece. Weight the bottom piece with stones or kelp holdfasts, to hold the kelp straight. Then using natural found objects for the weft (horizontal threads), weave branches, seaweed, and driftwood in and out through the vertical pieces of kelp. It may help strengthen the base of the weaving to begin with several rows of sturdy yarn or jute and then add the seashore objects.

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## **DISCUSSION**

1. Which kinds of beach art do you like the best? Which seem to express the quality of the sea? Which found objects on the beach caught your attention? Can you see the effects of the ocean on the stones, wood, and shells as they wash up through the waves?
2. Do you think beach art is more beautiful at the beach or hung on a wall in the classroom? How does art bring back memories of a place you've been?

## **BEYOND THE ACTIVITIES**

Hold an Art Exhibit and Open House in your classroom at the close of your Sandy Beach unit. Invite parents and other classes to see the results of your creativity.

Learn more about Navajo sand painting and other traditions of working with sand as a sacred art. What does it mean for sand to become a sacred material? Invite a Navajo Indian or anthropologist to your class to talk about the art of sand painting or show pictures of complex sand paintings.