



tinkergarten®

AT HOME

WEEK OF MARCH 30

This week's focus: **Sensory System**

This week's play material: **Water**



The Design Behind this Week

From not-a-box robots and castles to not-a-sheet caterpillars and hideaways, we've loved seeing creativity flourish across the country during these first two weeks of Tinkergarten At Home.

At Tinkergarten, **creativity** is just one of the essential skill areas we target in our program. These skills take root in early childhood and ladder up to help kids to be ready to learn, ready to thrive, and ready for anything.

We started our Tinkergarten@Home series with a focus on **creativity**. For the next **two weeks**, we'll focus on the **sensory system**. We use our [sensory system](#) to gather and process information from the environment—what could be more

fundamental to learning? How kids' various senses are stimulated and balanced with one another dictates how kids experience the world, which, in turn, impacts how they feel, behave and learn. The play environments we set up and support can make a huge difference in helping kids strengthen and balance their sensory systems.

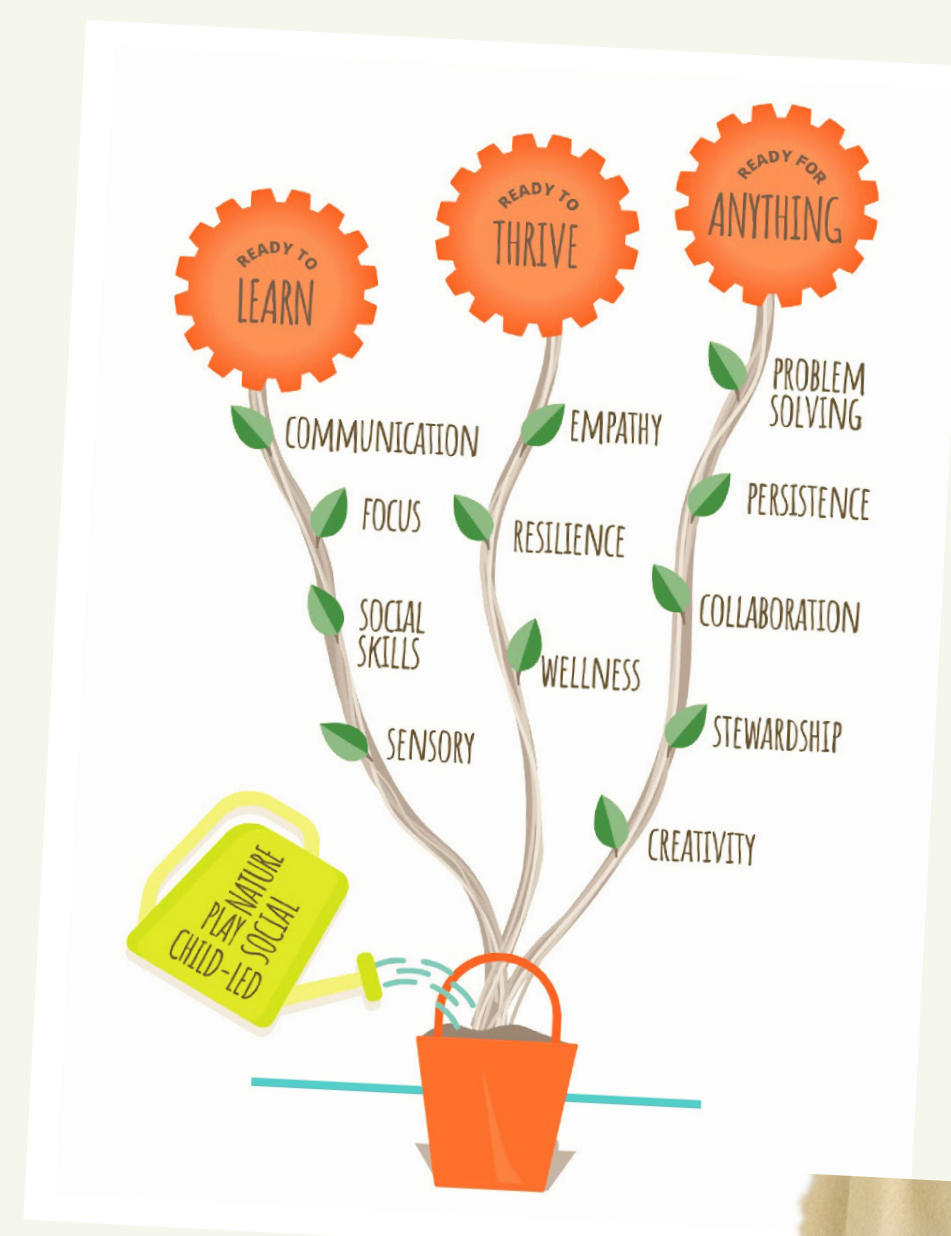
This Week's Play Material: Water

We kick off our sensory focus with a week of play with

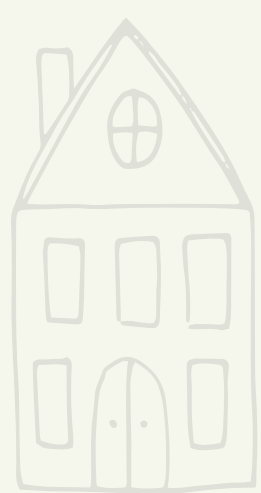
water. Water truly is magical. Water is life. It draws us in and inspires us to wonder and make discoveries. Water offers endless invitations for play for all learners because, no matter how sensitive a child is to sensory input, water it is simultaneously stimulating and calming making it an ideal material sensory play.

"If there is magic on this planet, it is contained in water."

—Loren Eiseley



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Main Activity

This week, stage the grand opening (or festive relaunch) of a home “**water playground.**” To a small human, a bowl of water and a measuring cup can qualify as a water playground, so make yours as simple or elaborate as you like. Whether or not you already have a water play set-up, to follow are some ideas to help make water play extra special this week.

Pick the Spot

Find a spot where kids can comfortably and easily play with water.

Outdoor Spots

- Do you have a water source? If not, to what spot can you easily transport bins or buckets of water?
- What can contain the water for play? Kiddy pools, plastic bins and even large cooking pots work well. Feeling crafty? Wrap a tarp around a few pool noodles to form a pond.

Indoor Spots

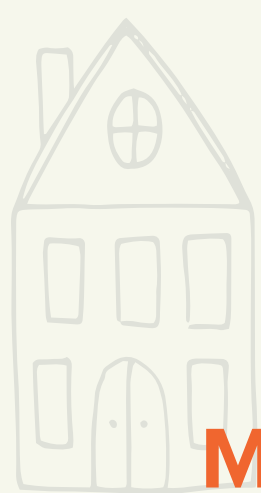
- Try the bathtub, the shower or the sink. If none of those work, lay towels on the floor and place a plastic bin or cooking pot in the middle.

Gather Tools

Gather tools that can be used again and again to enhance water play. Some ideas:

- Cups and containers of all shapes and sizes;
- Fun kitchen gear (funnels, basters, measuring scoops, etc.)
- Washcloths, sponges, or other absorbent items;
- A smock (could be a raincoat or just a change of clothes) if your child prefers to stay dry during play.





Make the Invitation

To get kids really engaged, we can we can make the “launch” of our water playgrounds into a moment. Share a “Hurrah!” as you and your child turn on the faucet or pour the first bucket of water into your set up. Once the water is in, plop in a tool or two, and enjoy some splash, scoop, pour and explore action. Let the water play roll!

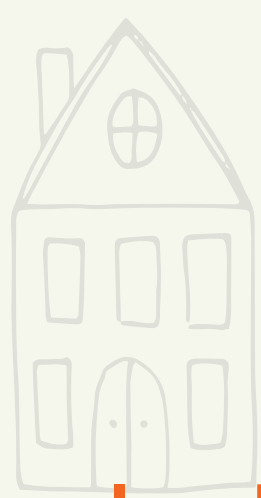


Keep the Play Rolling

Introduce new materials over time, so that kids have plenty of opportunity to explore each new ingredient. Wonder about things together, either by saying them out loud or just by trying them.

- *How does the water feel on our skin?*
- *What sound does the water make if we pour it on different surfaces?*
- *How does a washcloth feel when it's dry?*
- *How about when it's wet?*
- *Use questions or 'I wonder...' statements as you introduce various extensions.*





Independent Extensions

Kids can iterate and expand on their water play in myriad ways—and we’ve included just a few favorite ways to spark new ideas below.

As kids play, know that their senses are activated. You’ll also likely see joy, increased focus and a genuine desire to stick with something for a while—and we all could use joy and focus these days!



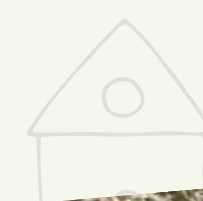
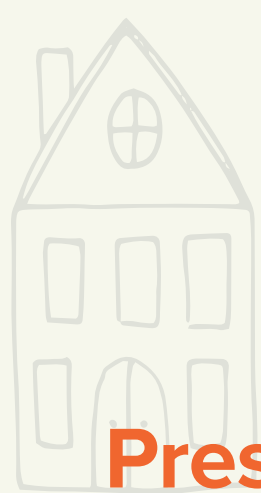
Babies/Toddlers

Safety note: It is essential to keep eyes on wee ones and [mind safety tips](#) whenever they are playing with water, especially if you are using a pool or deep bin.

- **Got scoops?** Add scoops and containers of different sizes to water play or bath time. Model using a small scoop to fill a larger one, narrating as you play, “Scooooooping, duuuumping...,” etc. Experiment some more with sizes or how high or low you pour, or just savor the scoop, fill, dump, repeat cycle.
- **Got cucumbers or citrus?** Placing slices of cucumber or citrus fruit in water helps baby experiment with floating objects and elevates their sensory experience with new colors, textures, smells, and even tastes.
- **Got ice?** Add “ice treasures” into baby’s water play bin, and you add both temperature and a first lesson in floating/sinking to the mix. Freeze water in a cake or pie tin or 32 oz. yogurt container so that ice will not melt into choking-hazard size during play. Put a few drops of food coloring into the ice, and you’ve got irresistible ice gems to explore!

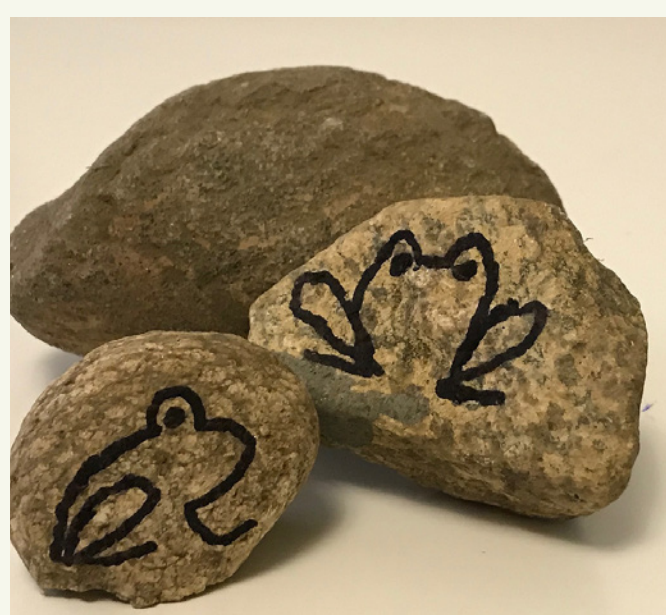
Preschoolers and Up

- **Got puddles?** Lucky you! Enjoy the stomping.
- **Got ice?** Ice isn’t just for winter anymore! Exploring the different states of water and observing the transformation from one to another makes for a fantastic sensory experience. Find some nature treasures (flowers, small pine cones, leaves) or some little action figure friends or toys, and an ice tray, and freeze the toys and treasures inside of ice. After they are frozen you can try to [free your friends](#) in a variety of ways (warm water, hammering, etc.)
- **Got sponges or towels?** It is so satisfying to soak up and release water! Kids also love to “clean,” simulating adult work and feeling like they can “help” around the house. Hand kids a bucket and a rag or sponge and welcome them to “wash” the car, the cabinets or any surface they can reach and can take some watery love. On a smaller scale, they can have a ‘toy wash’ too.



Preschoolers and Up (continued.)

- **Got a paintbrush?** Kids could paint for hours using water! Feeling crafty or lacking paint brushes? You can make “nature brushes” from pine limbs or from grasses wrapped around sticks with twine.
- **Got “Frog friends”?** Turn rocks into frogs using a marker to draw a simple geometric design. Then, welcome froggy friends to join in the play. Kids can create watery homes and habitats for their frogs in the bathtub, sink or bin. Introducing a simple, pretend animal inspires more elaborate pretend play. Naturally, kids will think about what their frog friends are doing and feeling, experiences that also promote [empathy](#).



- [Learn more](#) about endangered frogs, and inspire kids to care for these amazing creatures. Want a great book to pair? Try *I’m A Frog* by Mo Willems.
- **Got things that float/sink?** Wonder what will happen when you put different objects in a bin or pot full of water. Be sure to provide them with a range of objects that float and sink. Ask things like, What do you notice?, and give kids time to express in their own words what it means to float and sink as they describe what they are seeing.
- **Got glasses or jars?** Great, then you have the makings for a xylophone! Put out some jars, a pitcher of water and some spoons. Bang on the empty glasses, then pour a little water into one of the glasses. Bang again, and notice the difference? Welcome kids to pour, bang and experiment with sound.
- **Got chalk?** Welcome kids to crush chalk in water to make their own chalk paint. Dip sticks of chalk into water before using for a super satisfying sensory experience.





School-Age Kids

- **Got Twinkle, Twinkle?** Set out a half dozen large glasses, a pitcher of water and a spoon. Challenge kids to use them to make a xylophone that can play Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star (or any simple melody they love!).
- **Got a water park?** You likely don't yet, but you can take those same "frog friends" or other small toys and build them a water park. Cut the bottoms off of recycled milk jugs or top and bottom off of cans. Grab funnels, turkey basters and even tinfoil—anything that can channel water. Use duct or packing tape to link them together to make channels of water and turn a bathroom, sink or bin into a water park for whichever toys you pick.
- **Got various viscosities?** Pour some oil into a glass. Partially fill another with water. Take time smelling, feeling and even tasting each of them. "What do you notice about the oil? the water?" Then, wonder, "What will happen when we put them together?" Welcome kids to pour a bit of each into a third glass. What do kids notice now? (Liquids layer!) Make predictions and test what happens with other combinations using liquids like molasses, honey, vinegar or whatever you've got on hand.
- **Got lots of feelings?** Sensory or "calming" jars help children focus inward, offering a positive support for sensory self-regulation. Fill a clear container with water, oil, or liquid dish soap, and an assortment of small nature items. Secure the lid and enjoy!





Grandparents

It's SO important to connect with grandparents, especially since many of us are holding off from visiting to help keep them safe. And, we all need to play a bit right now. This week, welcome grandparents to play, too, by creating their own water playground in a tub or sink. Make sure you have some of the same materials and then hop on to FaceTime or Zoom and kids and grandparents can take turns leading the play for everyone.



Story Connection

We are big believers in the power of picture books to enthrall, to educate, and to help foster a love of outdoor nplay in children. For our Tinkergarten at Home series, we are featuring recommended books to pair with each set of activities. We will also have one of our Tinkergarten teammates do a read-aloud of a book that we can share out. This week, we're thrilled to have Maeve (daughter of Tinkergarten co-founders Meghan and Brian Fitzgerald) reading [Hey, Water!](#) Antoinette Portis.

Share Your Experiences!

Share photos and stories of your experiences with sheet play and time outside this week using #tinkergarten and #outdoorsall4. Share in our free [#OutdoorsAll4 Facebook group](#), and we may just feature your photos in next week's email!

About Tinkergarten

Tinkergarten® is a breakthrough method of raising kids, helping families make the most of the critical window of childhood with simple, fun and engaging outdoor play experiences that are designed for learning.

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