

Rain Sticks (art + social studies, art + music)

These lovely-sounding instruments originated centuries ago in Chile. Native South American tribesmen would harvest dead branches from cactus plants, fill them with small pebbles and cap the ends. During rituals that were intended to implore their gods to send rain, they would tilt the branch, causing the pebbles to trickle down through sharp thorns to imitate the sound of falling rain.

In this lesson plan, students construct a 3-dimensional form and fill it with rice to make gentle, percussive sounds. Try using beans, seeds, pasta or other materials to create different sounds. Younger children can use wire mesh inside the tube and older children can insert straight pins to “catch” the rice as it falls. No two Rain Sticks are the same and the decoration is unique to each artist.

Grade Levels K-8

Note: instructions and materials based on a class of 25 students. Adjust as needed.

Process

1. Place uncooked rice (about 3/4 cup) inside one of the cans. Amount of rice may vary with size and the different sound desired. For ages K-8, stretch and twist the Wireform and insert in the can
2. Place another can on top the first, joining open ends with masking tape.
3. Coat all areas of the cans with acrylic gesso to make sure paint adheres properly. Allow 30 minutes to 1 hour to dry.
4. Sketch design on the outside of the Rain Stick if desired, or simply begin painting. Allow paint to dry.
5. Ages 6-8 insert push pins into the cans on all sides, up and down. Keep pins in lines around, also. The rice will hit the metal and create a light, tinkling sound.



Materials

Cardboard potato chip canisters with metal ends, need two per student

[Blick White Glue](#) (23872-1065), share five 8-oz bottles across classroom

[Colored Masking Tape](#) (23074-1010), share one 10-roll package across classroom

[Blick Artist's Acrylic Gesso](#), (00623-1027) share two quarts across classroom

[Reeves® Flat and Round Bristle Brush Assortment](#) (06004-1003), need one brush per student

[Blick Matte Acrylic](#), (00727-0079) set of 12 basic colors, share one set across classroom

Need for Grades K-5:

[Amaco® Wireform Mesh](#), (33408-2260) 16" x 20" sheet need one-half sheet per student

Need for Grades 6-8

[Straight Pins](#), (57308-0000), share one package of 3600 pins across classroom

[Blick Artist's Acrylic Gloss Medium](#), (00623-1037), share two quarts across classroom

Optional Materials for Decorating:

[Natural Feather Assortment](#) (61432-1005)

[Raffia Mixed Colors](#) (60908-1005)

[Assorted Metallized Beads](#) (60776-1008)

[Acrylic Gems](#) (60722-0001)

[Hemp Twine](#), assorted colors (61511-)

Uncooked white rice

Process, continued

6. Brush on a light coat of acrylic gloss medium to seal.
7. Add yarn, beads, tassels, raffia, colored hemp, colored masking tape and assorted embellishments to decorate the outer surface of the Rain Stick.

Options

- Substitute beans, peas, pasta or aquarium gravel. Experiment with sounds.
- Vary the shape of the Rain Stick. Try using other containers, taping sturdy paper plates or bowls together.

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National Standards:

Content Standard #3 — Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols and ideas

- **K-4** Students select and use subject matter, symbols and ideas to communicate meaning.

- **5-8** Students use subjects, themes and symbols that demonstrate knowledge of contexts, values and aesthetics that communicate intended meaning in artworks.

Content Standard #4 — Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

- **K-4** Students identify specific works of art as belonging to a particular culture, time and place.

- **5-8** Students analyze, describe and demonstrate how factors of time and place (such as climate, resources, ideas and technology) influence visual characteristics that give meaning and value to a work of art.

Content Standard #6 — Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

- **K-4** Students understand and use similarities and differences between characteristics of the visual arts and other arts disciplines.

- **5-8** Students compare the characteristics of works in two or more art forms that share similar subject matter, historical periods or cultural context.