

Many children love finding shells, and adding the large Play Shell to small world play will inspire their imagination and storytelling. Is the shell a home for a colourful fish or crab? Or is something precious hidden inside?

All about shells

Talking about shells will provide an opportunity to extend children's knowledge and understanding of the natural world:

- Where could this shell have come from? Maybe someone found it on the beach.
- Explain to the children that all shells once had an animal (such as a sea snail) living inside them and this animal made the shell originally. What animal could have made this shell? Maybe it was a sea snail – such as a conch. Why do sea snails make themselves hard shells to live in?
- Could another animal have lived inside the shell after the sea snail? Talk about how hermit crabs reuse shells that other creatures have finished with.
- Have you ever seen shells on a beach? What shapes and colours were they? Have you ever seen shells stuck to a rock? What could be living inside them?
- Offer a collection of shells in varying sizes and shapes for children to examine, talk about, and sort and order by size, colour and shape.
- If you have Roll Around Nature, use the shell roller to create a beautiful shell pattern. Talking about the shapes and patterns you make helps develop valuable prewriting vocabulary.
- Have you ever held a shell to your ear? What could you hear? What does the sea sound like? Encourage descriptive language as you discuss the sound of crashing waves together. This could lead into stories about shells and the sea.
- Why is it important to protect animals that live in the sea? What things might harm them – such as pollution and sea plastic?



Watery worlds

Add the Play Shell to a variety of ocean-based small world play settings:



Ocean adventures

The shell will enhance any deep-sea small world:

- Add blue food colouring to a tray of water – or create a sensory ocean using blue biodegradable sensory goo or bubble foam (whisk two parts water with one part sensitive bubble bath using a handheld mixer until it forms stiff peaks). For a less messy sea, simply use blue fabric, strips of blue crepe paper or a large mirror.
- Underwater features could include pebbles, plants, coral (made from pipe cleaners, tissue paper or card shapes), seaweed (strips of green fabric or crepe/tissue paper), Yellow Door's Ocean Play Sensory Stones and the Play Cave as an underwater cave.
- Fish and other sea creatures will enjoy exploring this watery habitat. You could use Little Lands Ocean or the Fish Sensory Play Stones.

Rock pool play

Create your own rock pool and children will love investigating it:

- Form the rock pool using large stones in a suitable container. You could fill in the gaps with smaller stones, and maybe even fix them all in place using a glue gun.
- As well as the Shell, add plenty of other places for creatures to hide, such as among plants or seaweed. The Play Cave would be ideal as well.
- Add fish and other small seas creatures. You could also use the Let's Investigate Seashore stones.
- Small buckets, nets, magnifying glasses or observation pots will allow children to engage in role play too.



Seaside stories

The shell could also be part of a beach-themed small world:

- Use a large sand tray for your beach – outside would be ideal!
- Into the sand, scatter plenty of other shells, pebbles and seaweed. Rounded sea glass or small pieces of driftwood would make your beach even more realistic.
- Crabs, turtles and gulls would feel at home on the beach. The Let's Investigate Seashore stones are a great addition too.

Magical seas

Create a magical underwater world for mermaids to explore:

- Use water, goo, foam or fabric to create your ocean.
- For a magical kingdom in the sea, you could include a castle or the Play Tower, treasure chests, an underwater cave, colourful plants and coral. You might like to hide gold coins or a precious pearl inside the Play Shell.
- Mermaid figures could be joined by colourful fish and other sea creatures.



Sharing a shell

Enjoy Julia Donaldson's popular book together, then create a small world play scene for children to retell the story:

- Create a simple rock pool for the friends to roam around. Include a few different types of shell if you can, as well as a paper cup and tub.
- You could cut out card shapes for the three main characters, or make them using pompoms and pipe cleaners.

Playful prepositions

As children play, take the opportunity to model positional language. What is hidden *inside* the shell? What is *next* to the shell? Which creature is hiding *under* the shell? Children could also play together telling each other where to place different characters to create a story scene.

Get talking – useful words

Inside, on top of, beside, next to, under, conch, sea snail, hermit crab, beach, shore, waves, rock pool, sand, ocean, coral, seaweed.

Books about shells

Sharing a Shell by Julia Donaldson

A Shell is Cozy by Dianna Hutts Aston

Shells... And What They Hide Inside by Helen Scales