

Journey to an icy landscape, an underwater world or wonderful woodland, and boost children's creativity and critical thinking. As well as enhancing polar, ocean and forest small-world play, the sets can be combined to help create new interesting landscapes. These tactile and open-ended stones are also ideal for pattern-making, creative loose parts play and any other ways children choose to use them.

### Loose parts

Using loose parts to create patterns and stacks, investigate different textures and invent stories builds on several areas of learning, including maths, literacy, understanding of the world and fine motor skills.

In addition to the stones, you might like to offer:

- Twigs, leaves, moss, tree bark and stones
- Evergreen twigs complete with needles – or for an aromatic alternative, use rosemary or lavender stalks
- Conkers, cones, acorns and other seeds
- Flowers (real or artificial)
- Wooden resources, such as small log slices, wooden balls, trays or buttons
- White/blue felt shapes or white/blue wool pieces
- Small mirrors
- Shells
- Buttons, beads or glass beads
- Seaweed – real or strips of dark green crepe paper/tissue paper/green fabric
- Artificial coral – or make your own using pipe cleaners or tissue paper
- Cotton wool balls
- Snowflake shapes
- Ice cubes



# Creative by nature

The stones also offer simple and open-ended ways to get creative and develop fine motor skills:

- Use the stones and other natural materials to create nature-inspired pictures or patterns – indoors or outside.
- Press the stones into dough to leave an imprint. What does the imprint feel like? You could also make patterns with imprints.
- Use wax crayons and paper to make rubbings of the stones. Learning how much pressure to apply is great for fine motor skills.



## Small-world in the wild

The stones offer an open-ended way to enhance small world play, inspiring children's imagination and enhancing their language development. Use these ideas to create sensory natural landscapes, inside or outdoors:

### Arctic forest

Create a wintery woodland for arctic animals to explore:

- Make a forest of tree figures, or use twigs with pine needles, sprigs of rosemary or bare sticks positioned upright in pieces of play dough.
- For snow, you could use flour, a tray of crushed ice (use a robust blender), artificial snow, white fabric/felt, a thin layer of white play dough or white cloud dough. Scatter some biodegradable silver glitter for extra sparkle. (For cloud dough, simply mix eight parts flour with one part oil or lotion.)
- As well as the log slice, cone, snowflake and ice stones, you might like to add to the frozen landscape with cotton wool balls, clear glass beads, twigs, acorns or even real ice cubes. You could also use Yellow Door's Play Cave covered with white play dough for an ice cave, or the Volcano with white play dough over the top part for a snowy mountain.
- Add animal figures, such as arctic rabbits, hares, foxes, wolves, deer or bears. You might like to offer Little Lands: Polar.



### Polar sea

Floating ice is ideal for animals from either pole, from penguins to polar bears:

- For a polar sea, you could use water (with blue food colouring), a tray of smooth ice, a large mirror laid flat, blue fabric/felt, blue biodegradable sensory goo or bubble foam (made by whisking two parts water to one part sensitive bubble bath using a handheld mixer until it forms stiff peaks).
- Position the stones standing upright to create ice shards, or on the surface of the sea as floating ice sheets. Add the waves and snowflake pieces.
- Add polar animals such as penguins, seals, whales or polar bears.

## Coastal woodland

A forest by the sea will offer opportunities for lots of different animals to come face-to-face, with plenty of storytelling potential:

- Sand is ideal for the beach and woodland floor. Using real water for the sea will be both sensory and fun for children, or you could use blue biodegradable sensory goo or bubble foam (made by whisking two parts water to one part sensitive bubble bath using a handheld mixer until it forms stiff peaks). Alternatively, you could use blue fabric/felt, a large mirror or blue play dough.
- Create your forest using tree figures, small woody plants or leafy sticks stuck into play dough to stand upright. Add the log slice, leaf and cone stones, as well as natural materials like real sticks, pebbles, leaves, acorns or cones.
- Position the wave and shell stones upright to create hiding places for shy marine creatures. (You could sink the stones into play dough to help them stay upright.) Add the coral pieces, and any additional beach props, such as shells, pebbles or blue/clear glass beads.
- In the woodland area, add any suitable animal figures, such as rabbits, deer, badgers, squirrels, bats, birds or spiders. On the shoreline, you could offer crabs, fish, seahorses, dolphins or sea birds.

## More to explore

The stones provide opportunities for developing mathematical thinking, such as counting and spatial reasoning:

- Talk about the different shapes and sizes of the stones. Children might enjoy laying them out and counting them, or sorting them into the three sets of six.
- Make imprints in play dough using the different stones. Stamp the stones in different orientations using both the smooth and patterned sides. Then ask the children to match the stones to the imprints. They will develop important spatial reasoning skills as they learn to turn and flip the stones to make them match the imprints.
- Use the stones to create repeating patterns – either flat on a surface, or in a stack. Talk about the pattern the child makes – is it leaf, snowflake, shell, leaf, snowflake, shell (ABC pattern) or something else?
- Create patterns with reflectional and rotational symmetry. Children might also create patterns that radiate out from the centre.
- Encourage positional language – maybe the green coral stone is *between* two wave stones, or perhaps the penguin is *on* a floating ice block or the squirrel is *behind* a tree.



### *Get talking – useful words*

Arctic, Antarctic, north/south pole, ice, snow, snowflake, glacier, ice cap, iceberg, ice sheet, freeze/frozen, melt, forest, woods, log, branch, stick, twig, leaf, bark, pine cone, conker, acorn, seed, pond, stream, nest, burrow, den, ocean, sea, underwater, waves, currents, fish, shell, coral, seaweed.