

# RAINSTICKS

by Rocky Tomascoff

The students I teach range from 5 to 15 years of age. It is a multi-impaired population; the students have varying degrees of vision, as well as other cognitive, language and fine motor limitations. I try to incorporate sound into my art-room projects, especially for the totally blind students.

I decided making rainsticks would involve a multi-step process that incorporated basic hand skills and concepts, and was also a useful and fun end product. It was a perfect task for helping to understand the sequence of a project. There are clear steps, each with a visual, textural and auditory component to help with the concept of the project as a whole.

We began by talking about rainsticks: What was their history? Where are they from? Who uses them? I also shared an example of a rainstick, made from bamboo that had seeds inside. For our version, we used cardboard mailing tubes that had plastic end caps. Given the wide range of cognitive ability, the first step was to have the students identify the tubes. What

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

### Students will ...

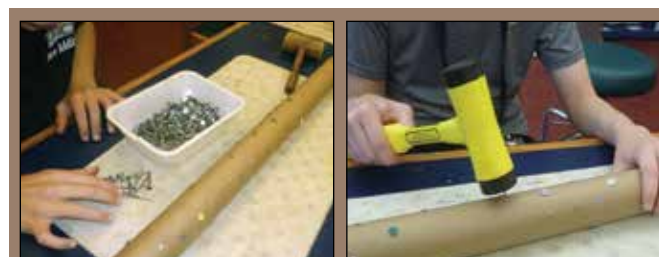
- learn about rainsticks.
- understand the visual arts in relation to cultures.
- understand the sequencing of a task.
- make independent choices.
- strengthen hand skills and concepts.
- make connections between visual arts and other disciplines.
- experience personal satisfaction and appreciation of others.

## NATIONAL ART STANDARDS

- **CREATING:** Conceiving and developing artistic ideas and work.
- **CONNECTING:** Relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context.

## MATERIALS

- Cardboard mailing tubes with end caps, tape, glue
- Flat-head nails of varying sizes, rubber and wooden mallets
- Beads, seeds, small shells, dried beans, uncooked rice, etc.
- Decorative/textured papers, fabric, feathers, string, etc.



For some it became a math lesson: How many holes are there? How many nails are needed? It was also an excellent task for having one hand stabilize an object while the other hand manipulates the tool.



When finished, each rainstick was unique.

were they? What is it made out of? What is the shape?

We then went over the basic tools needed: nails and rubber wooden mallets. Depending on the abilities of individual students, some could independently hammer the nails into the tube once the holes were pre-made.

For others, we would start the nails and they would finish hammering, with or without staff assistance. The nails were hammered into the tube at all different angles.

This is an excellent task for having one hand stabilize an object (the tube) while the other hand manipulates the tool (the mallet). For some it became a math lesson: How many holes are there? How many nails do you need? Students also worked on differentiating nail sizes. For example: “Please hand me a long, skinny nail” or “Please count out 10 nails.”

Once all the nails were driven into the tubes, and we capped one end of our tubes, it was time for the “sound part” of the project. We discussed how rain makes both “loud” and “soft” sounds, and that we were going to put things inside our rainsticks to simulate these sounds.

Each student was offered a choice of two or three sound-makers. Clay beads, for example, would make a loud sound, while rice would create a softer sound. Students used scoops or their hands to fill their rainsticks about half full. There was nothing exact about this part, as some students used more and some less, depending on the sound they preferred. We then discussed why we needed to cap one end of the rainstick, and did so.

The next step was to decorate our rainsticks with paper, tape, fabric, feathers, string and more. Each finished rainstick was unique; they all sounded, looked and felt different. We experimented with ways to make sound with them—rolling them on a table, tilting them very slowly, and shaking them in the air. Everyone enjoyed listening to the different sounds produced.

In the end, *all* of the students were able to participate in this project. In fact, we created our own rainstick orchestra, made up of *very* individual musical instruments, which were fun to look at, hold and to play. ■

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