



Cindy's Corner

Choosing Appropriate Holiday Projects

Centering class projects on holidays can be a good way to reinforce seasonal time concepts and create a sense of group, but it can sometimes be challenging to ensure that children with visual and multiple impairments are participating meaningfully. To select appropriate activities, look at each potential activity as being a series of one-step directions that come together to create a finished project. Consider each student's priorities across areas of need, such as cognition, communication, social skills, fine motor, behavior, and sensory. Think of how each student might be incorporated into the project in a way that would meet at least one area of need.



Once you have chosen a project, think about how to structure the activity to ensure a positive experience. To encourage communication and social interaction while addressing individual skills, consider setting the activity up co-operatively. Break the project down into a series of steps and set up a workstation for each step, assembly line style. Assign a student to each of the workstations, placing them according to a skill they are working on. For example, if a student is working on simple grasp and release, position them at the end of the assembly-line, with the task of picking up the finished products to place in open gift boxes or a finish bin. If a non-verbal student is working to reach out to activate a switch, you might make them the project cheerleader. Put a message on their switch that can be used to encourage team work, such as "good job everyone," or a simple generic direction, such as "Let's make

another one." Position staff along the assembly line to facilitate the assembly process and model appropriate communication, such as how to get a peer's attention, how to indicate the need for help, how to say please, thank you and you're welcome. Use switches and personal communication devices to encourage interaction as needed.

Adapt projects to the needs of your class. You might set up multiple workstations and break the class into pairs or teams. Make direction cards for each station; use the appropriate medium, Braille, large print, Mayer-Johnson pictures, tangible objects, one-step switches (programmed with directions), or a combination of mediums. If your students are working on building independence, or following multi-step directions, set out materials so they can follow directions to complete projects independently. Let students collect their own materials from a list, or assist with setting up workstations for their peers.

If your project is successful, think about marketing the gifts you make. Make and distribute posters advertising your product. Sell your gifts at a student store, or take orders and deliver them to customers. Give them as thank you presents to the staff, family and friends. Don't forget to follow up on activities with experience stories!

Try one of the following activities to see how much fun it can be to address skills in a cooperative setting.

Snowman Soup

Compliments of Ms. Priscilla Chapin, Perkins Teacher

Snowman Poem

I've been told you have been good this year -

Always glad to hear it!

With freezing weather drawing near, you'll need to warm the spirit.

So here's a little snowman soup, complete with stirring stick.

Add hot water; sip it slow, it's sure to do the trick!

You will need (per gift):

- One package of hot chocolate mix
- Mini chocolate chips
- Mini marshmallows
- One candy cane
- One chocolate kiss
- One printed Snowman Soup poem
- Ziploc bags
- One open gift box, sturdy container or pail
- Latex gloves if making for others
- Trays, bins as needed

Packaging the ingredients to make Snowman Soup is a good entry-level activity that is easily adapted cooperatively. Before packaging the ingredients, get ready for the activity with some related prep work.

- Shop for the ingredients (*money concepts*).
- Count the marshmallows and chocolate chips into individual Ziploc bags (*number concepts*).
- Transfer individual chocolate kisses or candy canes into a bowl (*grasp and release*).
- If you have a student working on typing skills, have them type up the Snowman poem (*composition*).
- Have a student make copies of the poem on the photocopier (*following directions*).
- Braille up labels for Snowman Soup. Sort candy canes from chocolate kisses (*classification*). Incorporate snowman themed activities. Make a snowman if you have snow.
- Read books on snowmen (*reading*). Write poems and stories about snowmen (use language support strategies and personal communication devices as needed).
- Use the project as an opportunity to reinforce the concepts of living/nonliving (*Life Science*) and human-made versus naturally occurring (*Technology/Engineering*). When you are ready for production, set each step up as a workstation.
- Include a hot chocolate station, a chocolate chip station, a marshmallow station, a candy cane station, a chocolate kiss station, and a poem inserting station. Be sure to include a time to socialize and drink Snowman Soup at the end of the activity (*social skills*).



Hot Chocolate Cones

Adapted from *Family Fun Magazine*

You will need (per cone):

- One cup cocoa mix
- Two 6" by 12" cone-shaped cellophane bags (or one mason jar)
- Sturdy container for stabilizing cellophane bags
- Two rubber bands (or pony tail holders)
- Scissors
- 1/4-cup mini chocolate chips
- 3/4-cup mini marshmallows
- One large red gumdrop
- Latex gloves if making for others
- Open gift box (optional)
- Trays, bins as needed



Stabilize one of the cone-shaped bags by positioning it in a sturdy cup, jar or travel mug, with the edges curled over the top. Scoop in one cup of cocoa mix, make sure to leave enough room to fasten the top of the bag with a rubber band. Remove the bag after fastening the top and trim the top to within one-inch above the band (staff can assist with these steps).



Stabilize the second bag and place the cocoa mixture bag into it. Flatten the top so it doesn't stick up. Layer in the chocolate chips and then the marshmallows. Top with the red gumdrop. Secure the bag with the other rubber band.

To set this activity up co-operatively, divide it into steps. Set each step up as a workstation. The first station could be the cocoa station, the second the marshmallow station, the third the chips and the fourth the gumdrop station. Staff can float between stations, helping to position the bags, fasten the bands and trim off the excess cellophane. Think of this activity as an exercise in fun mathematics.

- The student at the cocoa station could be working on *measuring*, scooping out one cup from a big tub of hot chocolate mix and learning *quantitative concepts* such as more/less/not enough.
- The students at the marshmallow and chocolate chip stations could work on *counting* (e.g., 10 marshmallows, 20 chocolate chips), or measuring with a 1/4-cup measure.
- The student at the gumdrop station could work on *one-to-one correspondence*. If a student is working on *following a one-step direction*, make this part of the process. For example, put them at the start of the assembly line and direct them to simply "find a jar." Praise them for finding a jar and assist with passing it along to their peer as you label the action (e.g., "Let's pass the jar to David so he can put the hot chocolate mix in it").



Note: If use of cone-shaped bags is too complex, use mason jars as a substitute.

Happy Holidays!