

Natural Illinois: Rock On!



You don't have to go to exotic places to find interesting rocks for preschoolers to study! A wide variety of rocks and minerals are as close as your backyard, local park, schoolyard, or driveway.

Collect resources about rocks

- Ask your librarian to help you find nonfiction books, nature magazines, CDs or videos, and online resources about rocks and minerals to share with the children. Be sure to include resources about people who use rocks in their work, such as miners, builders, artists, and geologists.
- Display posters of rocks in the classroom. Add laminated photos of rocks and minerals to the science center.

Gather a variety of rocks to share

- Bring in gravel, pebbles, and stones of various types and sizes. To find rocks that occur naturally in Illinois, look on beaches, by streams, or near quarries. (Ask for permission to take rocks from others' property. Do not collect rocks from state parks, nature preserves, or other protected lands.)
- Invite families to lend rocks for the collection. Garden centers or building supply stores may be willing to donate broken pieces of rock.

Find out about rocks together

- Invite children to draw pictures of their experiences with rocks. Ask them, "What are some things you know about rocks?" "How can you tell that something is a rock?"
- Introduce children to words that scientists use to describe rocks, such as *pebble*, *gravel*, *texture*, *hardness*, *crystal*, and *fossil*.
- Point out that there are names for different kinds of rocks and minerals. Some preschoolers may want to identify rocks using a field guide or an educational poster about rocks and minerals.
- Find experts to answer children's questions about rocks. A local museum, college, or rock collectors club might help you find someone. It helps to have children prepare their questions ahead of time.

Take a close look at rocks

- Let children look at rocks with magnifiers. Encourage them to notice details: "Does this rock have lines running through it? Can you see any shiny parts? How many colors do you notice?"
- Invite children to experiment with rocks. "Do you think any of these rocks will change when they get wet? What do you think will happen if you put a rock in the freezer? What do you think will happen if we set this rock outside in the sunshine?"
- Provide boxes, bins, and clear plastic bags so children can sort rocks by size, color, and other features.
- Encourage children to sketch rocks in the class collection.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



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