



from *Tinkerlab: A Hands-On Guide for Little Inventors* by Rachele Doorley, copyright 2014
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WATERCOLOR EXPLORATION

*Painting is the act of discovery, and you're constantly enlarging
your horizon or finding yourself every time you paint.*

—Romare Beardon, American painter

Watercolors are economical, easy to clean up, and dry quickly, making them one of my favorite art-making supplies. Dry watercolor pans are best for traveling, but when we're at home, I have a supply of liquid watercolor bottles that are in constant use. I prefer liquid watercolors because they're vibrant, they encourage color-mixing tests, and we can use them interchangeably with food coloring in our playdough recipes and liquid experiments. For watercolor paper, I wouldn't recommend anything too expensive, since children are generally more concerned with process than product. However, if you plan to frame the finished work, you could look for a watercolor block at art stores, which will keep water-soaked paper from wrinkling.

Supplies

- Watercolor paper (The more water you add to the paper, the more it will wrinkle. The heavier the paper, the less it will wrinkle.)
- Liquid watercolors or pan of dry watercolors
- Small jars, muffin tin, or ice cube tray to hold the liquid watercolors
- Watercolor brushes (I like round, size 8 brushes, but kid-grade brushes are just fine for beginners.)
- Sturdy jar, half-filled with water
- Rag or paper towels to absorb wet brushes
- Paper tape, optional
- Eyedroppers
- See individual invitations for specific items



INVITATION

Place a piece of paper on the table and the other materials on either side of the paper. My children prefer using their right hands, so I tend to place the paint, brush, water, and rag on the right side of their paper. Tape the paper to the table if it's in danger of moving around. Invite your child to paint.

EXPERIMENTS

Salt and Glue. Salt adds a sparkly, glittery effect when added to watercolor paint. Draw a glue design on a piece of watercolor paper, poster board, or card stock. With an eyedropper, squeeze liquid watercolors on top of the glue design. Sprinkle salt on top. Pour excess salt off when the paint is dry.

Crayon or Oil Pastel Resist. Draw a design on heavy paper with crayons or oil pastels. Encourage your child to press firmly, but not so hard that the crayon or pastel breaks. When the design is complete, paint over it with watercolors. Try this effect with different color combinations. White crayons and pastels appear invisible on white paper but show up clearly with the addition of paint (older children love this trick).

Coffee Filters or Paper Towels. Round, white coffee filters are one of the most economical art materials I know of, and we use them all the time for watercolor mixing experiments and cutting out snowflakes. Place a few coffee filters or paper towels on a large cookie sheet or on a tray with sides. Fill small glass jars or plastic containers with liquid watercolors and eyedroppers. Invite your child to drop the paint onto the filters or towels. As the paper absorbs the color, the results will probably look a lot like tie-dye. Have a long sheet of butcher paper set up to absorb the liquid from the drying filters.

Spray Painting with Watercolors. Fill a spray bottle with water mixed with a few drops of liquid watercolors. Invite your child to spray designs on a large sheet of paper, an old sheet, or a tarp that's been secured to an outdoor wall or fence. You can also place paper flat on the ground, arrange leaves on it, and spray paint over the leaves to create silhouettes.

Blowing Paint. Place a sheet of paper on a tray. Fill small bowls with a 1:1 mixture of water to watercolor paint. Give your child an eyedropper and invite her to draw a little paint into the dropper and drop it on the paper. Blow on the

paint through a straw. What happens? To kick this up a notch, offer your child a hair dryer in place of the straw.

WATERCOLOR TECHNIQUES

Tip #1. When you want to clean your brush, place it at the bottom of the water jar and make it “dance” up and down until the brush is clean.

Tip #2. If you have too much water on your brush, dab it on a towel to absorb some of the extra water.

