



## Watercolor Resist Rain Sticks

Tap into students' natural creativity as they learn the history, traditions, and lore behind the ancient instrument of West Africa.

**Grade Level:** 3-6

### Objectives

Students will learn that rain sticks were used in ancient rituals to summon rain from the spirits.  
Students will understand that different objects make sound through friction.  
Students will construct a rain stick that creates gentle percussive sounds.  
Students will identify the cultural history of West Africa.

### Literature Selections

*The Rainstick: A Fable* by Sandra Chisholm Robinson  
*A True Book: Africa* by Mel Friedman

### Skills

sound, music, cultural history, fine motor skills

### Set up and Prepare

Introduce the lesson by reading *The Rainstick: A Fable* aloud to the students. Discuss the characteristics of fables and engage students into a discussion about the moral of this story. Expand on the relationship between humans, animals, and plants and prompt students to discuss the role that the natural world has on our lives. Discuss the importance of rain for plants, animals, and humans.

Explain that rain sticks were created in ancient times for rain ceremonies, and they were made out of hollow, dry plant stalks such as bamboo or cactus. Various cultures believed that using the rain sticks would signal to their Gods that they needed rain for their crops. The soft gentle sounds created by the seeds or pebbles inside the plant stalks sounded like rain. Rain sticks were introduced as percussive instruments in the late 1960s and are still used today.



### Materials

Elmer's® Clear School Glue, Elmer's® X-TREMETM School Glue Stick, Elmer's® Glitter Glue Pens, watercolor paint and brushes, watercolor paper, cardboard wrapping paper tube, aluminum foil, rice, dry beans or small pebbles, beads or other embellishments.

### Preparation

Cover the work surface and provide students with the necessary materials. Paper towel tubes will work for this activity, but wrapping paper tubes are even better as they allow for longer, richer sounds. Roll a long piece of aluminum foil (like a snake) to place inside the cardboard tube.

## Directions

Begin by creating a glue pattern on the watercolor paper. Drizzle glue on to the paper using swirls or patterns. This will serve as the resist for the watercolor, so be creative!

When the glue has dried completely, create a colorful wash of watercolors over it. Set it aside to dry in a place where it will be undisturbed. When it is completely dry, use glitter glue or markers to embellish it further.

While the watercolor paper is drying, create an end cap by cutting a circle of paper about an inch larger than the diameter of the cardboard tube. Cut notches around the edge of the circle about 1/2 inch long. Apply a generous amount of Elmer's X-TREME School Glue Stick to the edges of the end cap and press it to the cardboard tube. Smooth the edges as flat as possible.

Add approximately 1/4 cup of popcorn kernels, rice, dried beans, or small pebbles to the tube. Next, insert the aluminum foil (rolled like a snake) inside the tube. Make sure to add some bends and twists to the foil so that it will "catch" the smaller objects to create a gentle percussion sound as they fall down the tube.

Create a second end cap and glue it to the top of the rain stick. Be sure to use a generous amount of glue to securely affix it to the tube.

Measure and cut the watercolor paper into strips that are wide enough to wrap around the cardboard tube. Glue each strip in place. Finally, use jute or yarn, beads or other embellishments to complete the rain stick.

## Lesson Extensions

Locate the Kapiti Plain (in Kenya) on a map. Compare and contrast the climate in Kenya with the climate in your region.

Read the book *A True Book: Africa* aloud to the students. Instruct them to explore one of the topics in the book in greater depth and create a presentation to share with the class.

Ask students to write a short rain poem. Challenge them to capture the feelings, sounds, or emotions associated with rain in 10 words or less. Invite them to perform their poems using their rain sticks.

Identify the various sounds of each rain stick and discuss how the weight and mass of the objects inside (rice, beans, etc.) create different sounds. Challenge students to guess which items were used in each rain stick.

