

INTRODUCTION

When you get to know them, chickens are curious and full of personality! It's no wonder that they want to play, explore, and experience new things just like we do. It is important that children understand this about chickens, as chickens are often misunderstood, ignored, or -- at worst -- stereotyped as "bird-brained" and objectified as "food." In this activity, students get the opportunity to flex their creative muscles and construct fun enrichment toys for chickens. Through this activity, youth will get to know chickens as fun-loving individuals. They will also have to strategize and put themselves "into the feet of the chicken" to decide how to build the most interesting and fun toy for the chicken. And ultimately, youth will feel good knowing they are helping improve the lives of animals in such a fun, artistic way!

LESSON PROCEDURE

Warm Up

- Before you begin making the enrichment toys, briefly discuss the reasons for creating these toys for chickens. Ask students the following questions:
 - Why do human children like playing with toys?
 - Do you know any other animals who like to play with toys (e.g., their dog companion at home playing with a ball or tug-toy)? Why do you think they like to play?
 - Why do you think a chicken would enjoy toys to play with?
- If the students don't make the connection themselves, assist them in realizing that like humans or dogs, chickens are thinking, feeling animals who need to be able to move around, play, explore, and experience new things so that they don't get bored. Playing also makes chickens happy. Tell the class that the toys they are creating are called "enrichment" toys, which means that they improve the quality of life for a chicken by giving them something interesting and fun to do.

Activity Prep & Sourcing Materials

- There are instructions for three enrichment toys provided in this lesson. Each toy requires sourcing materials and, depending on the students' ages, some preparations may be required from the instructor prior to facilitating the lesson. Some toys have overlapping materials, which may make it easier to create more than one of the toys. (For example, you can source colorful yarn and use it for both the pecking skewers and the mobiles.)
- Before you begin the lesson and source materials, contact the animal sanctuary where you plan to donate the toys. While the toys in this lesson should be safe and appropriate for chickens, each sanctuary may have different requirements and guidelines for their animals. Check with the sanctuary to see if they accept donations like this and, if they do, provide a list of the materials you are planning to use for approval in advance. Substitutions may be recommended if necessary. If there is not a chicken or farm animal sanctuary for you to donate to, check with your local companion animal rescue or municipal shelter. They often rescue chickens as well.



- Review the instructions and determine which materials you need to source. Get creative with this and try to repurpose materials. For example, if you make the toy that requires a plastic drink bottle, see if your school/organization has a recycling program where you can collect the bottles from, or ask students to bring a bottle or two from home, if feasible.
- Wherever you source materials, make sure they are safe for both the students making the toys and the chickens receiving them. For example, thoroughly clean any repurposed materials, look for nontoxic papers and natural fabric fibers, try to opt for natural materials such as wood and paper, and avoid any materials that may fall apart into small pieces that could be swallowed by a chicken.
- *Note: Chickens have better color vision than humans do, so using colorful materials is encouraged. Also, for inspiration, look up “parrot toys” on the internet to see examples of colorful, interesting toys. You can get more ideas for the materials used and the construction of the toys, which can be especially helpful for the mobile toy from this lesson.*

Making the Enrichment Toys

- When it comes time to create the toys, you can: 1) have your group all work on the same toy at the same time, 2) set up stations where students work in smaller groups to each make a different toy, or 3) have rotating stations so that all students can make each toy during the class. Choose what is feasible for your students in terms of time, materials available, and space.
- Depending on the ages and abilities of the students, you can either walk the students through the toy-making step-by-step using the provided instruction sheets, or you can give them the applicable instruction sheets to follow themselves.
- *Note: Some toys may require the use of scissors or knives. The use of scissors or knives can be optional, or the instructor can prep the materials that require cutting in advance. Use your best judgement and caution when deciding if it is appropriate for students to use scissors or knives.*

Finishing Up

- Make sure there is a space where the students can safely place their completed toys -- for example, a table, shelf, or box where the toys can be placed so that they do not get tangled or crushed.
- If there is time after clean-up, you can also have the students share with each other what toys they made.
- If you are donating these toys to a sanctuary, you may want to have your students create a poster board with notes written to the sanctuary staff (or chickens!) to accompany the toys.

Chicken treat roly-bottles can be donated to a chicken rescue or farm animal sanctuary where the staff or volunteers can fill the bottles with chicken food. The chickens will roll the bottle around on the ground, trying to get the treats out. This is a fun, challenging game for the chickens.

Materials Needed

- Plastic drink bottles with bottle caps
- Scissors or a small paring knife (to cut holes in the bottle and to cut paper into strips)
 - Note: The use of scissors or knives can be optional, or the instructor can prep the materials that require cutting in advance. Use your best judgment and caution when deciding if it is appropriate for students to use scissors or knives.
- Colorful, nontoxic paper



Instructions

- Cut small holes into the wall of the bottle. You can either cut one long rectangular hole along one side (from the top to the bottom of the bottle) or cut several small circular holes all over the bottle.
 - Rectangular hole: Make the hole at least three inches long and no more than half an inch wide. The hole should be large enough that chicken food -- which is about the size of rice -- can fall out of it, but not so large that all the food falls out at once.
 - Circular holes: Cut six to eight holes randomly all around the bottle. The holes should be about the size of a dime or a computer keyboard letter key.
- Next, prepare the paper stuffing. Small strips of paper within the bottle are a colorful surprise for the chickens and will help the chicken food to stay inside the bottle for longer.
 - Take a piece of paper and cut it into long, thin strips. Mix the strips up and crinkle them so that they resemble a loose bird's nest.
 - Stuff a small handful of paper strips into the bottle through the top opening and reattach the bottle cap.
 - For an extra fun challenge, you can fold the strips of paper using the "accordion fold." That will make the paper strips springy and amusing to look at.
- After the toy is donated, the sanctuary or chicken rescue can fill the toy with the fresh chicken feed of their choosing.

A chicken mobile is similar to a mobile that hangs above a human infant's crib, except this mobile is for curious chickens to peck at, explore, and get treats! Chickens have better color vision than humans do, so don't be afraid to make this mobile really colorful. You can add optional beads, yarn, rings, bells, or even colorful CDs that act as rainbow mirrors. Metal binder clips allow sanctuary staff or volunteers to clip treats for the chickens -- such as slices of watermelon, lettuce, or bunches of grapes -- to the mobile.

Materials Needed

- Wooden dowels, sticks, or small tree branches foraged from the ground
- Twine, string, or rope (thin enough to tie around the sticks, but strong enough to hold the weight of the finished mobile with treats)
- Colorful yarn
- Large metal binder clips

Optional Decoration Materials

- Large beads (at least three-quarters of an inch in diameter)
- Plastic rings (similar to rings human infants play with)
- Small bells
- CDs or CD-ROMs

Instructions

- First, construct the main body of the mobile using the wooden sticks and rope. This mobile will be hung from up above, so make sure to have one long piece of rope at the top that is at least 2-3 feet long. Be creative and construct the mobile in whatever shape you want -- however, bear the following in mind:
 - Make sure the mobile has a couple of branches so that decorations and treats can be hung from it.
 - Make sure that it is strong so that it doesn't break apart if a chicken tugs at it.
- Once you have the main body of the mobile, you can begin to decorate it. From the branches, you can hang various colorful yarns or objects such as large beads, bells, or even old CDs.
 - Securely tie the objects to the branches. Chickens will be pecking and pulling at the mobile, so you don't want strings coming loose or decorations falling off.
 - If you use yarn, you can make it stronger by braiding three pieces of yarn together.
 - Use decorations large enough that if they do come loose (or break apart), they will not be mistakenly eaten by a chicken. Choose items that are larger than a plastic bottle cap.
- Finally, attach two or three metal binder clips to the bottom of the mobile on a strong piece of string. Tie the end of the string to the metal loops you use to pinch open the clip (instead of the bottom part that would pinch paper). These binder clips can be used by the sanctuary staff to attach yummy treats to the mobile for the chickens.

These pecking skewers are the chicken version of a grilling skewer. They can be loaded up with fun, interesting things for a chicken to peck at and explore. There are two different versions of the chicken pecking skewers. The first is an “all-toy” skewer, which can be created in the classroom and donated to a sanctuary. The second is an “all-food” skewer, which is best created at a sanctuary -- during a field trip or a summer camp, for example -- so that the food doesn't spoil.

Toy Skewer Materials Needed

- Bamboo or metal grilling skewers
- Colorful nontoxic paper
- Colorful yarn or twine

Toy Skewer Optional Decoration Materials

- Large beads
- Popsicle sticks (will need to have holes punched through the middle)
- Scrap fabric

Food Skewer Materials Needed

- Bamboo or metal grilling skewers
- Fruits and vegetables that chickens enjoy eating (e.g., apples, berries, grapes, watermelon, lettuce, cherry tomatoes, pumpkin, cucumber)

Food Skewers Optional Materials

- Small paper cups
- Chicken feed grains

Toy Skewer Instructions

- Make sure you leave at least one inch of empty space at the end of the skewer. This pointy end of the skewer will be stuck into the ground at the sanctuary, so it needs to be clear of any toys and decorations.
- Besides the empty space at the bottom, layer the skewer with your decorations. Here are some ideas of what to put along the skewer:
 - Cut colorful paper or scraps of fabric into interesting shapes, and layer them by poking the skewer through the center.
 - Tie colorful pieces of yarn or fabric strips along the skewer.
 - Braid the yarn or fabric together and allow the braids to dangle off the skewer.
 - Layer popsicle sticks (with holes in the middle) along the skewer.
- The skewer should have many different types of decorations layers together to make it interesting for chickens. If several skewers are being donated to the same sanctuary, make each skewer unique so that the chickens have several different types of toys to play with.

Food Skewer Instructions

- Prepare the food for the skewer. Small foods like grapes or berries can be put on the skewer whole. Larger foods like apples, pumpkin, or watermelon need to be cut into one- or two-inch cubes.
 - *Note: Remove any seeds from apples or plums, and remove pits from cherries or peaches. Chickens should not eat these. Other seeds, such as from pumpkin, watermelon, or cantaloupe, are edible for chickens. However, always check with the sanctuary staff or volunteers to ensure that you are including only food that is safe for chickens.*
- Next, prepare the skewers by placing the pieces of food along the length of the skewer. Leave one or two inches of empty space at the bottom so that the skewer can be stuck into the ground.
- As an added bonus, take a small paper cup and push the top of the skewer through the bottom of it, so that the paper cup is at the very top of the skewer, resting above the fruit and vegetables below. After the skewer is stuck into the ground, the paper cup can be filled with grains. As the chickens peck at the skewer, some of the grain will fall out as an extra treat.