



Cindy's Corner

Apple Cinnamon Ornaments



This fragrant recipe is very simple with lots of sensory feedback. There are only two ingredients and no cooking is involved. The simplicity of the recipe makes it a perfect activity for developing memory skills and independence if you make repeated batches of ornaments for the holidays.

You will need (each recipe makes four to six ornaments):

- 1/2 cup of cinnamon
- 1/2 cup of applesauce (or use mini container)
- Wax paper
- Rolling pin
- Cookie cutters
- A straw (to poke a hole for hanging)
- Spoon, bowl, measuring cup
- Ribbon, pipe cleaner or yarn for hanging

Mix the applesauce and cinnamon together to make the dough. Form loosely into a ball. Note: If the dough is too wet, add more cinnamon. If it is too dry, add more applesauce. It



should have a pleasant, spongy texture and be easy to work with. Place the ball between two pieces of wax paper and roll it out to about $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch. Use your favorite holiday cookie cutters to cut out the ornaments. Poke a hole at the top of each ornament with a straw. Let the ornaments air dry for 48 hours before handling.

Introduce the activity by looking the word “ornament” up in the dictionary to define

what you are making. Explore each of the ingredients on a concrete level before you begin the recipe. Set the ingredients out in bowls for easy access, or keep them in their original containers (opening containers is an important functional hand skill). You can encourage social skills by passing each ingredient from one student to the next as you explore them, or give each student his or her own ingredient to explore with his peers. Incorporate Science. What senses are they using to get information? What body parts are they using (*Life Sciences/Biology*)? Is it wet or dry? Is it living or non-living (*Earth and Space Science*)? Do the same lesson with the utensils.

If your student is tactile defensive, respect this, let them participate in the lesson by placing their hands on top of yours (this technique is called hand-under hand) as you talk them through it and explore the ingredients (this technique can also help to desensitize students to new experiences if they tend to become anxious in unfamiliar settings).

Expand on information as appropriate. For example, you could present the cinnamon by saying, “This ingredient is called cinnamon. Cinnamon is a spice. Spices are used to flavor foods. Cinnamon comes from the bark of a cinnamon tree.” You might want to pass around a cinnamon stick, or go explore a tree to see what part the bark is. Or, use a mortar and pestle to crush a stick of cinnamon to see how it becomes a powder... Do a supplementary lesson on spices...

The limited number of steps and ingredients make this a good recipe to encourage independent work. Don't worry about spills and mistakes! For students to carry out the sequence of steps individually within a small group setting, set up the ingredients for each student on a tray with the utensils on another. If they are able to collect their own ingredients and utensils within a structured setting, make this the first step. Break the recipe down into simple steps and provide clear, one-step directions to the group, assisting as necessary and waiting until each student has completed each step. For some students, your main objective in the lesson might be to just follow a simple direction),

such as, “Reach out and touch,” or “Reach out and find the bowl” (*language*). Provide plenty of time for each student to process and respond to the direction.



Incorporate communication and social skills by setting the activity up cooperatively. To do this, divide the steps in the recipe up into workstations. Put a student in charge of each workstation. Each student completes one step of the recipe at his or her workstation and then passes it along to the next workstation, assembly-line style. Model how to use a peer’s name to get their attention when passing, how to say “Please,” “Thank you” and “You’re welcome,” and how wait their turn and ask for help (*language and social skills*). Model a rote script to promote interaction for students who need one (“Here’s the bowl Dylan, your turn”) and program switches with appropriate exchanges as needed.

Workstations for this recipe could include: adding ingredients, mixing them, forming the dough into a ball, rolling the dough out, cutting the ornaments out with cookie cutters and using the straw to poke a hole. For a student who benefits from alternating seatwork with the opportunity to move around, put them in charge of collecting the ingredients, or carrying the tray with the finished ornaments to a place to dry. Make multiple batches and keep the assembly- line going until you run out of time or ingredients. Rotate the workstations the next time you make ornaments so that everyone has a chance to do each step. You could also divide the class into sets of pairs and let each pair work on the recipe cooperatively.

You can make simple recipes, or recipe cards using whatever medium is appropriate for your students. Label each workstation with a recipe card illustrating what job is to be

performed at that station. For nonreaders, use pictures, such as Mayer-Johnson pictures, or tangible representations for each step. To use tangible representations, create a concrete representation for each of the ingredients, e.g., the empty container, or lid from the applesauce, a sprinkling of cinnamon, or the lid from the cinnamon container. Do the same for each of the steps, e.g., a spoon for mixing, a piece of wax paper, a toy rolling pin for rolling, a cookie cutter for cutting, a piece of a straw for making the hole, a piece of ribbon for hanging.

After the ornaments are dry, tie them with ribbon, or thread a pipe cleaner thru the holes to create individual ornaments for hanging. Give them as gifts, decorate your room with them, sell them at a student store, or take orders and deliver them. Note: These

ornaments can be somewhat fragile, you may want to minimize the amount of handling, or stabilize individual ornaments on a piece of cardboard before distribution.

If you have the opportunity, organize a field trip to the grocery store to purchase the ingredients for the recipe (*social skills, communication and money skills*). Field trips can generate a whole set of worthy goals and objectives. The motor planning involved in money handling and simply sustaining a purposeful grip on a grocery bag can be huge challenges for some students. When you return to class, don't forget to have your students remove the groceries from the bags to put them away (*classification*). You may also want to set up a structured sorting station in the classroom, sorting the cinnamon and applesauce into like groups. All the components in these related activities incorporate a range of concepts, motor skills and motor planning.

Remember to keep your sense of humor, even with cinnamon and applesauce everywhere!

