

What can you see when you look through the shapes? Clouds, flowers, sea or sand? Buildings, cars, people or keyholes? These versatile Little Looking Shapes give children a fresh view on their world. Fit the pieces into the shapes, draw around them, fill them with sand, beads, buttons or squish them into playdough. The opportunities are endless – below are some ideas for learning through play.

Let's go outside

As Erin K. Kenny observes, 'Children cannot bounce off the walls if we take away the walls.' Little Looking Shapes provide the perfect prompt for exploring the world – just let each child choose a shape and take it outside. Now, what do they see?

- Nature set: hold the cloud shape up to the sky and look for real clouds. Can you find a tree, a leaf or bark? Butterflies are hard to catch but maybe you can follow one around the garden. Let the children swap shapes with each other.
- Ocean set: take these to the sand play area or to the beach. Search for real or pretend fish, shells and boats.
- Home set: take this set to town and look for houses, doors, cars and keyholes.

Of course, you don't have to look for an object to match each shape. You can just look at and talk about the detail of a flower, the texture of the grass, pebbles or soil, or the colors of vegetables, fabric or buttons. Little Looking Shapes help children to focus and give them a fresh view of the world.



My first puzzle

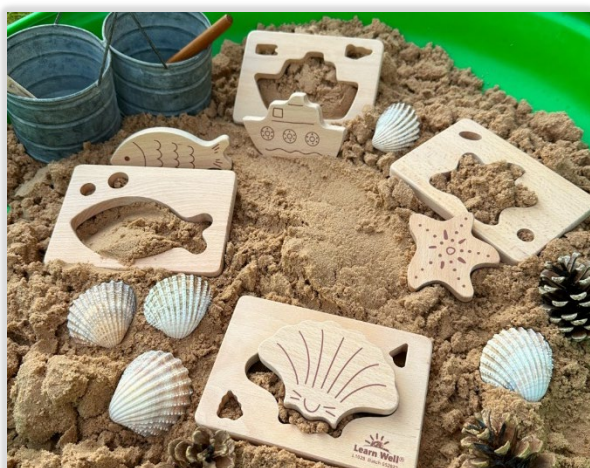
Can you fit the piece into the shape? At their simplest, Little Looking Shapes make the perfect first puzzle. The chunky wooden pieces are easy for little hands to hold, and the outer shape has space to allow the piece to fit inside.

- Start with the symmetrical pieces – tree, butterfly, house, door, keyhole, seashell and fish – as these will fit in place easily.
- Then try the harder pieces: cloud, car and boat. The star fish is the hardest of all!
- Use just one piece at a time to begin and then add choice, so that children build both their confidence and their fine motor skills.

Fill me up!

Give children containers full of beads, pebbles, petals or buttons. These can be color themed, or they could fit in with your theme for the week, such as rose petals for Valentines Day, acorns in autumn or cotton wool balls when it snows. Give children a choice of spoons and scoops, and maybe tweezers too. Invite them to fill the shapes.

Little Looking Shapes are ideal for supporting a theme or interest. For example, use the butterfly when you are looking at life cycles, spring or minibeasts, and the car and boat for children who love transportation.



Scoop, pat, pull and push

Sand is the perfect place for Little Looking Shapes. Using lots of different sized spoons and scoops, children will love filling the shapes with sand. Pat the sand to make it smooth and lift the wooden shape to find a perfect sand shape. Then push the corresponding shape piece into the sand nearby and compare the imprint it leaves with the sand shape that you made.

Add seashells for more opportunities to push and pull, and get those little fingers moving!

Squish and squidge with playdough

- Whatever your theme, create a simple tray play using Little Looking Shapes, some playdough and a roller. First roll out some playdough with the children and then encourage them to squish the wooden pieces into the rolled-out playdough. They will have to press down hard, which is great for gross and fine motor skills. Pull out the wooden piece and look at the imprint they have made.
- Use a lovely big piece of playdough to fill in the Little Looking Shape, squishing it right up to the edges.
- You could add some buttons or other small parts into the play and encourage children to push them into the shapes they make. And then pull them out again! This is great for developing their pincer grip.





Light me up!

Little Looking Shapes were made for sunny day play!



- Stand them up in the sunshine and see the shadows form. You can place the pieces in the shadow holes too. There are so many opportunities for STEM play! Can you change the shape of the shadow by moving the Little Looking Shape? What sort of shadows do the shape pieces make?
- To extend the shadow play, cover a Little Looking Shape with colored tissue paper and then let the sun shine through for some wonderfully colorful shadow play. Or place the shapes on a lightbox and see the light shine through the colors. If you use lots of different colored pieces of tissue paper stuck together with tape, then the Little Looking Shapes look like miniature, stained glass windows.

Balancing act

The wooden pieces are very sturdy and will stand up easily. Encourage children to stand them on their edge. This is a lovely activity for hand-eye coordination, as well as fine motor skills.

Now extend the play by encouraging the children to balance one piece on top of the other. This is much harder to do, but fun when the pieces fall down! You can make it into a turn-taking game.



Get talking – useful words

Shape, butterfly, tree, star, cloud, house, door, keyhole, car, shell, starfish, boat, fish, same, different, size, big, small, shadow, light, full, empty.

Books about the world around us

All About Nature by Huda Harajli

Up in the Garden and Down in the Dirt by Kate Messner

What a Wonderful World by Bob Thiele and George David Weiss

Outside In by Deborah Underwood