Ideas and Inspiration for the Shades of Wood Stacking People (40pcs)

Shades of Wood Stacking People (EL48614)

Shades of Wood Stacking People – Supporting Learning in the Early Years and Beyond

In this download, you will find a collection of simple, fun and engaging activity ideas to use in your setting.

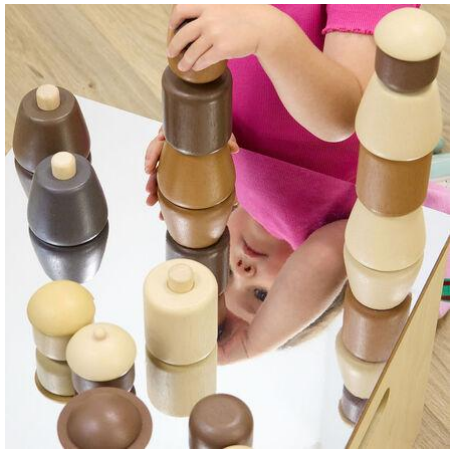
The Shades of Wood Stacking People are a beautifully made, robust resource designed to develop a range of play scenarios to support children's development. The tonal shades of the pieces, ensure that a wide range of play people can be created, supporting and celebrating inclusivity and diversity.

The pieces also seamlessly support hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills, as little ones construct the people, connecting the different parts. The different components also lend themselves to an endless range of sorting, stacking, tipping and organising play.

Babies and toddlers will naturally find the smooth wooden pieces a delight to stack, manipulate, attach and tip, whilst older children will further develop their curiosity, creating stories for the people they create. Language development comes naturally as part of the play involved in using this set, allowing children to make sense of the world around them through the stories they create.

This resource supports exploration across many different areas of learning, making it a wonderful addition to any early year's setting.





Communication and Language

Conversations and Interacting

Sit alongside the children/child and comment as they manipulate the pieces and create people. Consider making your own 'person' alongside them. Short, playful phrases and statements can really help to support the play and develop the verbal interactions, for example: "It looks like a head on the body, see how they go together" or comment on the pieces: "The top of this is flat, can you find one like it?"

Younger children may repeat the words and copy the actions, whilst babies will really benefit and enjoy the rhythm of the words and the interactions themselves.

Example vocabulary to introduce:

• Flat, round, together, attach, on, under, same, different.

Taking it further:

• Leave the pieces in the small play area, maybe with some animals nearby. The children can play at visiting a zoo, maybe remembering a trip from school or nursery, or with their family.

Taking Turns

Invite a small group of children to play together, each child taking a piece in turn, to make a person of their own. Use prompts such as "My turn, your turn" to encourage sharing and turn taking. Further discussion will come naturally to most children as they make their own person. The activity feels like a game, and they quickly spot the pattern with the repetition.

Example vocabulary to introduce:

• My turn, your turn, sharing, wait, next, finished, pieces, attach.

Taking it further:

• When reading a story, can the children repeat a familiar repeated phrase, using their 'person'?

• Use the stacking people to support older children with social stories. For example, using the 'people' to support them in role-playing through an example when they had struggled to take turns. The use of the 'people' takes away the focus on the individuals and allows the children to work through scenarios in a non-threatening way.

Physical Development

Careful attaching of the different parts of the stacking people or holding a piece with one hand whilst attaching with the other, all supports hand-eye coordination and the development of fine motor skills, as well as visual acuity. These purposeful movements take concentration and practise, particularly for younger children and babies. Allow the children time to repeat the actions as often as they need to and want to. If these repeated grasping, positioning and adjusting actions are proving tricky for a little one, support them by holding the stacking piece with an attachment steady, so that they can put the other piece on top. Use the vocabulary of the action, such as “Slide it this way and feel it plop on!” The differently shaped pieces help babies and toddlers to develop and explore the feel of different shapes. Do they use their whole hand to grasp, or their pincer grip as they pick up and manipulate the pieces?

Example vocabulary to introduce:

- Hold, push, slide, hole, on, under.

Taking it further:

- Can the children use their skills and interest to make the tallest person they can? Can they make two people who look the same? Can they problem solve, as they test different arrangements and make choices of how to use each figure.

Tip it Over

The delight experienced by many children as they stack a person, only to immediately tip them over again is commonly seen. This cycle of ‘fill and spill’ is both predictable and satisfying, with the children often repeating this action for a length of time.

As they stack and tip the ‘people’, they are exploring, using trial and error, practising their motor skills and learning how the world around them works.

Example vocabulary to introduce:

- Finished, fallen, tip, stack, build, again.

Taking it further:

- Can the children find other objects in the room to add to the people? Discuss the sound as the people tip over, do they enjoy this sound? What about if they tip the people onto feathers or building blocks?



Personal, Social and Emotional Development

Seeing Themselves

Having representations of themselves and those around them in their play, is so incredibly powerful for little ones. Sensitively discuss this as the children build the people, possibly modelling, saying things like: “I could pretend that this is me, I wear a hat like that, don’t I.”

This can all help to develop a sense of belonging, supporting conversations around similarities, differences and community.

Example vocabulary to introduce:

• Same, different, like, similar, like mummy, like daddy, family, friends.

Taking it further:

• Put some of the people near a story you have been reading about different families, so that they can repeat familiar play independently, even retelling the story or placing themselves into the story.



Celebrating Little Wins

For a baby or toddler, managing to stack a person is a genuine triumph. Smile, clap and give encouragement and praise such as ‘Super, you did it!’ and observe how proud they are of their achievements.

Celebrating success as they stack the people together or copying a person you have made will make them feel so good about what they have achieved and will make them want to explore more.

Remember to always praise effort as much as the outcome.

Example vocabulary to introduce:

• Great job, well done, you did it, nearly there, good try, try again, happy, proud.

Taking it further:

• Keep some of the stacking people in an area where the children can access other building materials. Can they repeat the familiar play independently, or even develop the stories around these?

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

Helping Each Other

Sometimes, attaching and stacking the pieces can be tricky if children are still developing their coordination skills. Encourage them to watch each other to see if they can find a solution. Why doesn't the piece stack and stay on? Have they chosen the correct sort of piece to stack? Support, but only when necessary (e.g. by scaffolding, reorientating the resource and helping them to think and experiment to find the solution).

Example vocabulary to introduce:

- Help, swap, turn, slide, push, try this way, stable.

Taking it further:

- Encourage children who have well developed coordination and motor skills to model these to their friends as they play with the stacking people. Can they help their friends to succeed? Discuss how this makes them feel too.





Stories and Reading

Re-telling

Familiarise the children with a picture book, such as ‘So Much', written by Trish Cooke (illustrated by Helen Oxenbury). Leave the book with a selection of the stacking people, allowing the children to retell the story in their own way.

Example vocabulary to introduce:

• Mum, baby, auntie, uncle, nannie, gran-gran, cousin, daddy, same, different.

Taking it further:

- Encourage a small group of children to talk about their own homes and use the stacking people, along with the stacking houses to tell their own story. Discuss similarities and differences, even the names people use at home.





Open-ended Storytelling

The simplified figures can leave children’s play open-ended to allow them to assign their own identities, to create characters and develop their own stories.

Leave the stacking people in the small play area and observe the play that ensues. This all helps to connect physical development with the expressive arts and design.

Example vocabulary to introduce:

- Home, like me, sister, brother, mum, dad.

Taking it further:

- Leave playdough near a small world scenario, such as a dinner table and allow the children to make the foods they eat at home.



Stories and Reading

Social Stories

Use scenarios that have arisen in the early years setting or common challenges all children come across, such as feeling left out to support social stories.

Use the stacking people and other resources to help the children to make sense of their feelings in these situations, through story and play.

Example vocabulary to introduce:

- Sad, lonely, help, friendly, join in, support.

Taking it further:

- Select a small group of children who would benefit from this and create a social story with the stacking people and other small world figures. Ask the children to take turns in playing the different characters in the story.
- Why not add a basket of books based on feelings near the stacking people so that children can learn about different emotions and act them out in a safe space.

Other suggested resources to use alongside







Early Maths

Sorting into categories

Children can use the consistent size and shapes of the stacking people parts to sort into different body parts. This can help them to categorise (identify how things are alike or different) and organise (put things into piles or containers that hold things that are alike). Try using simple prompts like: “Can we sort all the bottom parts first?” This helps to both model the activity and checks their understanding.

Example vocabulary to introduce:

• Same, different, base, bottom, middle, top, head, hat, rounded, flat.

Taking it further:

• The children may choose to further sort the different parts, such as the heads. Can they put the heads with the same hats on together? Can they sort these into the different tonal groups?



Counting As We Go

Encourage children to count each piece as it is stacked onto the other. Discuss how most of the stacking people seem to have three parts, how about if we add another? Can they link these to people familiar to them? For example: “The teacher is taller than me, so she needs more pieces”.

Whilst the familiarity of hearing the numbers is useful for babies, who will enjoy the repetition, older children in the early years, can touch each piece as the number is said, reinforcing the idea that every number matches one object. This is a tangible way of exploring 1:1 correspondence. Hearing and seeing the action together helps them make sense of how counting works.

Example vocabulary to introduce:

• Number names (one, two etc), more, less, shorter, taller.

Taking it further:

• Play number games with the stacking people. Say a number aloud or roll a dice. Can the children make that many stacking people? Can they make a person with that many stacking parts? This could be extended by creating picture cards to choose from, one with body parts, one with tones and one with numbers.

Understanding the World

What Happens If... What Can I Discover?

Children are often curious to test out experiences, repeating the actions to see if it changes.

What is the tallest person they can create? How many of the stacking people they create will fit onto a picture of bus?

Example vocabulary to introduce:

• Tallest, smallest, too many, number words (one, two, three, etc.)

Taking it further:

• In a feely bag, or as part of 'What's in the Box?', the children could ask the adults questions to see if they can work out what the specific stacking person the adult has created, looks like before building it. Does their person match the description and the person in the feely bag?



Watching Play Unfold

Children may approach the parts of the stacking people during play in many ways – some children may begin to attach the pieces, some will sort the pieces, whilst others will begin to create people. Each approach tells us something about the children's interests and how they choose to explore.

Example vocabulary to introduce:

• Likes, dislikes, build, attach, off, on, line, roll, all gone, again, tip.

Taking it further:

• If a child shows an interest in a particular type of play, can this interest be explored in different areas of learning with other resources. For example, if they enjoy attaching the pieces, are there other opportunities for them to attach things (creative play using junk modelling etc.), or if they like tipping the stacking people over when they have built them, do you have building blocks they can create towers with before knocking these down?



Schematic Play

For a number of children, these Shades of Wood Stacking People really do appeal to their schematic interests. Here are a few examples of how children may use them:

Connecting Those with a connecting schema, will find the appeal of attaching the pieces together and taking them apart again. They may enjoy twirling and twisting the pieces.

Trajectory Children with a trajectory schema may be more interested in rolling the various component pieces or even dropping them from a height or watching them fall through tubes, rather than attaching them.

Containment The pieces are perfect for children fascinated by containment. They may enjoy filling and refilling bags and containers with the pieces. They will often take just as much enjoyment in tipping everything out again!

Rotation The round shapes of the stacking pieces may appeal to children exploring rotation. They may spin the pieces when they are stacked as people or roll them along the floor or turn them around in their hands before attaching them. Children often need the space to explore these interests, so make sure this is provided.

Positioning Some children will line up the pieces or the stacking people themselves, in neat rows, or arrange them before deciding what to do next.

Transporting Stacking people lend themselves well to transporting play. Children may carry the stacking people around in bags or boxes or even toy cars! The idea of moving the stacking people around is as entertaining to them as the building of the stacking people themselves.