

Kids' Science: Gravity for Beginners

Here's a fun and easy science activity for kids that offers basic exposure to density and the law of gravity.

Here's a science activity for kids that offers basic exposure to density and the law of gravity. It also gives your child an opportunity to engage in the trial and error method of problem solving. It's very simple and lots of fun.

You'll be making a miniature version of hot air balloons. Each balloon should take about one minute to make. Your child will love helping to put the hot air balloons together.

Here's what to do:

Pick up helium balloons from your community party supply store. You'll need one balloon for each participant.

For the basket part of the hot air balloon, use a paper cup or 12" x 12" felt square. If you use a paper cup, tape three pieces of string to the top of the cup, and then tie the string to the base of the balloon. If you use a felt square, tie each of the four corners and attach those to the base of the balloon. (If you want to go a step further, for a more realistic looking basket cut off the bottom four inches of an empty bag of specialty coffee and rinse it out—the material is perfectly suited for this activity.)

Your living room is the perfect location to get started.

The objective: fill the basket with just enough household items to cause the balloon to hover for ten seconds without touching the ceiling. The items might include marbles, buttons, bottle caps and Q-Tips. Put these items in a bowl for selection. Keep a pair of scissors handy--as your child fine tunes the density it may become necessary to cut a Q-Tip in half.

Consider the following variation: put all the items in a line for selection. Take turns selecting one item until each person has ten. Place items into balloon baskets and launch the balloons. The objective is to have your balloon float slowest to the ceiling. In order to improve results, each person may exchange one of their items for a new item. Re-launch the balloons. Continue the process of exchanging one item after each launch. Keep experimenting until one player causes a balloon to hover for ten seconds.

There are many other variations to this science activity that you can pursue on your own (--for example, log the difference in items used from one day to the next as the balloons lose helium). Regardless of how you go about it, this activity will give your child an opportunity to engage in trial and error problem solving while gaining basic exposure to density and the law of gravity. You may also find it surprisingly adept at bringing out the fidget and tinker nature of parents. Have fun!

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