

Seashell Treasures: Let's Make Salt Dough Beach Ornaments!

Introduction (5-10 minutes):

Have you ever been to the beach and found cool treasures like seashells, smooth sea glass, or interesting stones? Today, we're going to make our own beach treasures that we can keep forever! We'll use a special kind of dough called salt dough to create awesome beach-themed ornaments. We get to mix, shape, bake, and paint!

Activity: Creating Our Ornaments (45-60 minutes + Baking/Cooling Time):

1. **Get Ready:** Gather all your materials listed above. Cover your work surface if needed. Put parchment paper on your baking sheet.
2. **Mix the Dough:** In the big bowl, measure and pour in the 2 cups of flour and 1 cup of salt. Stir them together. Slowly add about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of water while mixing with the spoon. Keep mixing until a dough starts to form. If it's too dry, add a tiny bit more water. If it's too sticky, add a tiny bit more flour.
3. **Knead the Dough:** Take the dough out of the bowl onto a lightly floured surface. Push and fold the dough with your hands for about 5-7 minutes. This is called kneading! It makes the dough smooth and strong.
4. **Roll it Out:** Use the rolling pin to roll the dough out until it's about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick (about as thick as two quarters stacked up).
5. **Shape Your Treasures:** Use cookie cutters to cut out beach shapes. Or, be creative and shape your own designs with your hands! You can gently press small, clean seashells or sea glass into the dough now if you like (make sure they are okay to bake!).
6. **Make a Hole:** If you want to hang your ornament, use a straw or skewer to carefully poke a hole near the top of each shape.
7. **Bake Time (Adult Help Needed!):** Carefully place your dough shapes onto the parchment-lined baking sheet. An adult needs to preheat the oven to 250°F (120°C) and place the baking sheet inside. Bake for 2-3 hours, or until the ornaments are hard. Baking time depends on thickness. Let the adult handle putting them in and taking them out of the hot oven!
8. **Cool Down:** Once baked, have an adult place the ornaments on a cooling rack. Let them cool completely. This might take an hour or more. They need to be cool before painting.
9. **Decorate! (30-45 minutes):** Now for the super fun part! Use the acrylic paints and brushes to decorate your beach treasures. Maybe paint a starfish orange, a shell sandy-colored, or make ocean wave patterns! Add glitter while the paint is wet if you want extra sparkle. Let the paint dry completely.
10. **Seal (Optional):** If you want to protect your ornaments, an adult can help you brush on a thin layer of Mod Podge or clear sealant once the paint is dry. Let it dry completely.
11. **Add Hanger:** Cut a piece of ribbon or twine (about 6-8 inches long). Thread it through the hole you made earlier and tie a knot to make a loop for hanging.

Closure (5-10 minutes):

Wow, look at your amazing beach treasure ornaments! Tell me about your favorite part of making them. What shapes did you make? What colors did you use? Where could you hang these? You could decorate your room, give them as gifts, or even hang them on a holiday tree!

Assessment Ideas:

- Observe student's ability to measure ingredients (with guidance).
- Note fine motor skill development during kneading, shaping, and painting.
- Check if student followed the steps in sequence.
- Discuss the student's creative choices in decoration.
- Ensure the finished product reflects the beach theme.