

Activity: Shell Dig

Grade Level: PreK (ages 3-5)

Objectives:

- Spell out simple words using individual letters.
- Name one reason it is important to keep shells at the beach.
- Name one animal that relies on seashells.

Vocabulary

Beach combing: searching through the coastline to collect objects such as seashells, driftwood, and beach glass

Coastline: areas where the ocean meets the sand

Ecosystem: a biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment

Background Information:

Seashells are not only beautiful; they are a very important part of every beach ecosystem. Seashells come from animals such as clams and oysters. The seashells grow as the animal grows. Over time, the seashells are no longer needed by these animals, and the waves wash them to the shore. The coastlines rely on seashells to keep making sand. When shells break and get smaller, they eventually become part of the beach.

Not only are seashells beautiful, they are homes for many different animals. One important animal that uses seashells is the hermit crab. Hermit crabs rely on different shells to hide in and protect themselves from predators. Hermit crabs have been seen using bottle caps that wash ashore on beaches instead of shells. This can cause the animal to become sick or injured. A piece of trash is no home for our hermits!

Keeping beaches clean is an easy way help the hermit crabs. We can also be careful when beach combing. If you go shell collecting at the beach, make sure to take only a few. Also, be sure to check that they are empty of hermit crabs or other little beach critters.

Materials:

- Empty box
- Shells, 26 or more
- Sand or dirt
- Marker
- Tape
- If shells are not available, use pictures of shells, marbles, rocks, or any other small object that can easily be written on (each item will have one letter written on it)

Procedures:

How-To Activity:

1. Fill the container with one of the suggested mediums above.
2. Write each letter from the alphabet on an individual shell using tape and a marker. If using paper print outs, mark directly on the paper.
3. Hide the shells throughout the box.
4. One by one, pull out a shell and go over each letter. Have your child think of a word that begins with each letter.
5. Use the shells to spell out different words once they are all found. For an added challenge, see how many ocean words can be spelled out.

After Activity Questions:

1. How does pollution affect our beaches?
2. What can we do to protect our beaches?
3. What happens if we take too many shells from the shore?