Laura England

50

Series editor
DR ALISTAIR
BRYCE-CLEGG

fantastic ideas for Schematic Play





BLOOMSBURY

BLOOMSBURY EDUCATION
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK
Bloomsbury Publishing Ireland Limited
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, D02 AY28, Ireland

BLOOMSBURY, BLOOMSBURY EDUCATION and the Diana logo are trademarks of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published in Great Britain, 2026 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
This edition published in Great Britain, 2026 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Text copyright © Laura England, 2026
Photographs © Laura England, 2026 / Shutterstock 2026 / Laura Neate 2026

Laura England has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Author of this work

Bloomsbury Publishing Plc does not have any control over, or responsibility for, any third-party websites referred to or in this book. All internet addresses given in this book were correct at the time of going to press. The author and publisher regret any inconvenience caused if addresses have changed or sites have ceased to exist, but can accept no responsibility for any such changes

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be: i) reproduced or transmitted in any form, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by means of any information storage or retrieval system without prior permission in writing from the publishers; or ii) used or reproduced in any way for the training, development or operation of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, including generative AI technologies. The rights holders expressly reserve this publication from the text and data mining exception as per Article 4(3) of the Digital Single Market Directive (EU) 2019/790

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: PB: 978-1-8019-9517-7

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1 (paperback)

Design concept by Lynda Murray
Text design by Laura Neate

Printed and bound in India by Thomson Press (India) Ltd.

MIX
Paper | Supporting responsible forestry
FSC® C010615

To find out more about our authors and books visit www.bloomsbury.com and sign up for our newsletters.

For product safety related questions contact productsafety@bloomsbury.com

Contents

Introduction 4
Loose parts circles 6
The wonder of mirror play 7
Taking photographs 8
Rock pit adventure 9
Sand funnels 10
Water station 11
Block steps 12
Tube sorting fun 13
Bean and skewer exploration 14
Body movement exploration 15
Dyeing fabric 16
Clay exploration 18
Bottle sand play 19
Dreamy den 20
Yoga 22
Dress up fun 23
Sewing and stitching 24
Chalk grating 25
Sparkling sand 26
Dough print fun 27
Maths station 28
Tinker tray play 30
Soapy sensation 31
Pattern playtime 32
Crushing creations 33
Leaf collecting and sorting 34
Sprinkle play dough 35
Squeegee art 36
Obstacle course fun 37
Swing and sway 38
Spring scales 39
Sorting sensation 40
Spray painting fun 41
Rainbow tunnel 42
Trajectory tubes 44
Tube tower building 45
Magical potions 46
Nature weaving 48
Play dough names 49
Sensory play tubes 50
Watercolour wonder 51
Transient art 52
Cling film canvas 54
Doily prints 55
Powder paint mixing 56
Nature colour hunt 57
Junk modelling 58
Bubble whisk fun 60
Snowy sledging 61
Flexible play spaces 62

Loose parts circles

Positioning, patterns and symmetry

What you need:

- Space for children to create
- A tinker tray or small baskets
- A selection of small loose parts such as counters, petals, stones, conkers, buttons and leaves
- A selection of flat mats such as log slices and placemats



What's in it for the children?

This activity is great for children who are exploring **positioning** and **rotation** schemas. They will enjoy learning about order, logic and symmetry through circular shapes. This activity develops fine motor skills, mathematical concepts and critical thinking skills.

Taking it forward

- Create more complex patterns or try different base shapes.
- Offer additional loose parts for further exploration.

Top tip ★

As the children become more confident with this activity you can encourage them to collect their own resources.

What to do:

1. Begin by filling a tinker tray or small baskets with a selection of small loose parts.
2. Encourage the children to explore the small loose parts and talk about the colours, shapes and textures.
3. Provide each child with a flat base such as a log slice or placemat. Discuss the shape of the base and its suitability for creating circular patterns.
4. Model creating a simple symmetrical design and explain to the children that the design should follow a pattern to create symmetry. This will inspire the children and spark their creativity and critical thinking.
5. Talk about patterns and symmetry and share examples of circular patterns.
6. Encourage exploration by letting the children experiment with creating their own patterns and support them in arranging the loose parts around their base.
7. Challenge the children by introducing a range of mathematical language depending on their age and stage of development.



The wonder of mirror play

Unleashing a world of reflection

What you need:

- Space for the children to create and lie on their fronts
- Mirrors (any shape and size)
- Paintbrushes and other mark making media
- Paint

What's in it for the children?

Children who are exploring an **orientation** schema will enjoy viewing themselves, objects and the world from different angles. For babies, it promotes physical development, strengthening neck, shoulder and arm muscles. Using paintbrushes supports fine motor skill development for older children..

Taking it forward

- Introduce different textures for sensory exploration, such as foam paint or textured fabrics.
- Incorporate music to enhance the sensory experience.



What to do:

1. For younger children, position the mirrors on the floor; for older children, position the mirrors on table tops in flat or upright positions.
2. Provide an assortment of paint and paintbrushes for the children to use to create marks directly on the mirror.
3. Encourage the children to observe their reflections. For younger children, point at their reflection and repeat their name or point out facial features. For older children, use the opportunity to talk about different facial features.
4. Encourage older children to use their reflection as inspiration for their mark making, for example, they could create a self-portrait to deepen their sense of self.
5. Let the children explore freely, allowing them to experiment with colours, shapes and movements.



Top tip ★

Let the children explore different options for mark making. Hands and feet can be just as good as – if not better than – a paintbrush!

Taking photographs

Seeing the world through a lens

What you need:

- Digital camera or tablet
- List of items or prompts (optional)



What's in it for the children?

Children who are exploring an **orientation** schema might enjoy looking at the world through the lens of a camera. This is also a great opportunity to help the children develop their communication and language skills and understanding of emotions as they discuss what they have photographed and why.

Taking it forward

- Create a photo collage or album showcasing the children's perspectives.
- Invite the children to edit their photos using simple editing software or apps.

Health & Safety

Ensure the equipment is safe by making sure all battery covers are securely screwed in place.

What to do:

1. Introduce the digital camera or tablet to the children, explaining how to use it safely.
2. Discuss with the children what they might want to take photos of and why they might take them.
3. Guide the children to explore the environment through the camera lens.
4. Encourage the children to take photos of objects, places or scenes that interest them.
5. Provide prompts or a list of items to focus on if needed. For example, ask the children to take a photo of something that makes them feel happy.
6. Support the children in holding the camera or tablet steady and framing their shots.
7. Review the photos together, discussing what the children have captured and their different perspectives.
8. Allow the children to take turns sharing their favourite photos and explaining why they chose them.

Top tip

Talk to the children about consent when photographing others and encourage them to ask for permission.



Rock pit adventure

Discovering the power of rocks

What you need:

- A space for a rock pit
- Rocks
- Containers such as buckets and bowls
- Water (optional)

Health & Safety

Use rocks of appropriate size to avoid choking hazards and ensure they are not too heavy for the children to handle safely. Encourage the children to wear sturdy shoes to protect their feet from sharp edges or heavy rocks.

What's in it for the children?

The children will develop sensory exploration, fine motor skills, creativity and scientific inquiry, fostering cognitive and physical development as they discover the properties of rocks. Children can explore a range of schemas such as **transporting**, **stacking**, **enclosing**, **dropping** and **combining** during this activity.

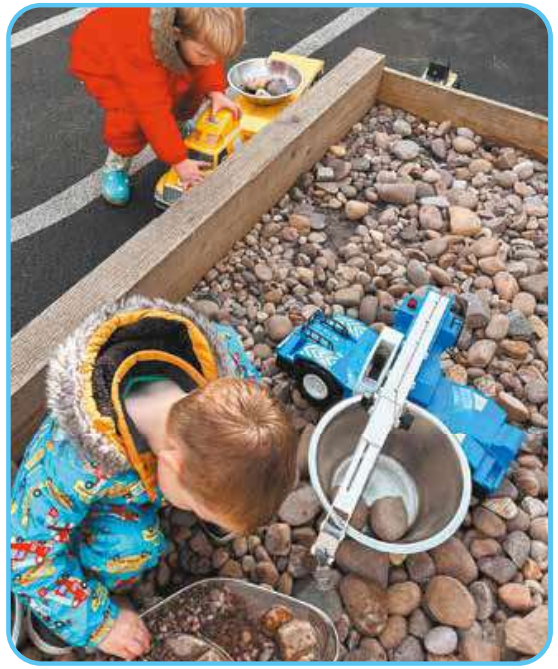
Taking it forward

- Introduce measuring tools to explore size and weight.
- Add pulleys and wheelbarrows to explore moving and transporting the rocks.



What to do:

1. Create a rock pit in the same way as you would make a sand pit but replace the sand with rocks.
2. Provide the children with containers such as buckets and bowls so that they can explore filling and emptying them.
3. Encourage the children to explore filling, containing and stacking as they move and combine the rocks.
4. Introduce water to enhance the experience.
5. Allow the children to explore freely and creatively.



Top tip

Create two rock pits: one for larger rocks and one for smaller rocks to encourage combining, sorting and transporting materials.