

materials

Sorting our materials



Lesson at a glance

Hold up a tray of everyday classroom objects and ask whether things made of the same stuff can go together. Children look and feel a few samples, then each holds one object and places it into a wood, plastic or metal hoop on the carpet, saying why. A short board sort of big things (door, tree, gate) follows. Pupils draw one object per material group in the Investigation Journal, then share what looking and feeling told them.

Learning objectives

- Sort everyday objects into wood, plastic and metal groups
- Say why an object belongs in its material group

Before the bell – prep

Gather one safe classroom object per child plus three sample markers (wooden block, plastic cup, metal spoon) onto a tray the day before. Lay three empty sorting hoops on the carpet. No buying needed — blocks, cups, spoons, pencils and bricks work. Check no sharp edges or mouth-sized parts.

Materials

Item	Qty	Per	Source	Low-cost substitute
varied objects, one per pupil plus three sample markers (chunky wood, plastic and metal items, e.g. wooden block, wooden spoon, pencil, plastic cup, plastic brick, plastic plate, metal spoon, small baking tin, metal ladle)	1	pupil	classroom	ask families to send one clean safe object made of wood, plastic or metal
sorting hoops	3	class	school kit	three large paper circles or PE spots on the floor
Investigation Journal pages	1	pupil	provided printable	plain paper folded or divided into three drawing spaces labelled with a wood, plastic and metal sample sketch the children already know from the hoops

**Safety watch-point**

Check every object is too big to fit fully in a small mouth and has no sharp edges; tape tin rims. Avoid glass. Count objects back onto the tray; wash hands if needed.

**Teaching moves**

- **Getting Started:** Hold the real tray so everyone can see it. Ask only 'Can we put the ones made of the same stuff together?' Take a few guesses in the children's own words, then move on — save the names wood, plastic and metal for the sorting steps.
- **Look and wonder:** Hold up two or three objects and ask what each feels like, what colour it is, and what it might be made of. Accept everyday words; revoice gently with the material name when it fits. Watch for sorting by colour or size and smile — say we will check by looking and feeling what it is made of.
- **Sort the tray:** Hand every child an object first so waiters keep looking and feeling. Model one full stem aloud, then call children in waves of five or six: choose the hoop, say 'I put it here because...', sit down. Regroup once mid-way with a whole-class 'which hoop?' break. Keep magnets, water and glue away.
- **Big things on the board:** Sort pictures of big things the class already knows — a door, a tree, a slide, a gate, a car — not the tray objects again. On a wrong call, send them back to their hands: 'If you touched the gate, would it feel cold like the spoon or warm like the block?'
- **Show and draw:** Hand out the Investigation Journal page and keep the instruction to one line: draw one thing for each material group. Circulate and ask each child to point and say 'It is wood because...'. If someone has sorted by colour, check one real tray object together, then draw that.
- **Make-sense talk:** Carpet talk with one focus only: why objects went in each hoop. Offer stems — 'I put it with wood because...' / 'The metal ones felt...'. Draw out looking, feeling, and the three material groups. Optional one-line close about recycling crews sorting by material; do not turn it into a question.

What it should show

Most children place wooden blocks, spoons and pencils in wood; cups and bricks in plastic; spoons and tins in metal, using feel (warm/cold, light/heavy) and look (grain, shine). A child who groups by colour or puts a metal spoon in a 'silver' hoop needs a gentle re-feel against the sample marker. Affirm noticing a pencil's metal band, then agree the main material is wood.



Misconceptions & interventions

- **I put all the red things together / the big ones go in this hoop.** — Smile and bring them back to the sample marker: 'Feel the wood block — does yours feel the same kind of stuff, or just look the same colour?' Match by material, not colour or size.
- **The shiny spoon goes in the silver group, not metal.** — Hold the spoon beside the metal sample marker and feel both: cold and hard like each other. Name the group metal; silver is only how it looks.
- **The pencil has a metal bit so it goes in metal.** — Praise the noticing, then ask which stuff there is most of. Agree the main material is wood for this sort.



Differentiation

- {'emerging': ['Pair with a second adult or older buddy at one hoop; let the child match their object to the sample marker by feel before naming the group.', "Accept a single drawing and a spoken 'because it feels...' as enough on the Journal page."]}
- {'developing': ["Invite the stem 'I put it here because...' after placing.", 'If time allows, ask them to name one thing they can see in the room for each material group.']}
- {'proficient': ["Make them the hoop 'checker' who asks classmates 'why does it belong?'", 'Challenge them to spot a mixed object (e.g. pencil with metal band) and say which material is the main one.']}



Cross-curricular hook

Links to Aistear sorting-and-tidying play and to oral language stems — 'I put it here because...' — in English.

