

materials

Hard and soft

Lesson at a glance

Open by passing a teddy and a metal spoon so a few children feel them while the class thumbs-up which will be squashy or firm. Name hard and soft with a live press of a sponge and a wooden block, then groups explore a touch tray (stone, sponge, block, cotton wool, spoon, soft toy). Pairs say what they noticed, sort into hard and soft trays, and draw one of each on the Investigation Journal page before a short carpet talk on the press test and why toy-makers choose soft materials.

Learning objectives

- Feel objects and sort them into hard or soft
- Say how a hard object and a soft object feel different

Before the bell – prep

Set one touch tray per group before the bell: smooth stone, clean sponge, wooden block, cotton wool (or soft foam), metal spoon, small soft teddy. Add two empty sorting trays or hoops per group, labelled with a block and teddy picture if useful. Wipe shared sponges.

**Materials**

Item	Qty	Per	Source	Low-cost substitute
smooth stone or pebble	1	group	outdoors	a large wooden bead or a clean ceramic tile offcut
clean sponge	1	group	supermarket	a clean foam hair roller or a soft foam ball
wooden block	1	group	classroom	a small hardback book or a wooden peg
cotton wool ball	1	group	supermarket	a soft foam piece or a clean soft scarf scrap
metal spoon	1	group	classroom	a metal key ring (no sharp keys) or a blunt metal lid
small soft teddy or soft toy	1	group	classroom	a soft glove or a small cushion
sorting trays or hoops (hard and soft)	2	group	classroom	two sheets of paper labelled with a block picture and a teddy picture
Investigation Journal page	1	pupil	provided printable	a plain page folded in half and labelled hard / soft
crayons	1	pupil	classroom	coloured pencils

Safety watch-point

Fingers only — nothing near mouths. Keep the stone on the table (no throwing). Wipe the sponge if it is shared across groups.

Teaching moves

- **Getting Started:** Hold up the teddy and spoon and pass them to a few children only. Fold watchers in with thumbs-up: who thinks the teddy will feel squashy, who thinks the spoon will feel firm? Take two or three notices. Do not name hard and soft yet, and do not open the full touch trays.
- **Hard and soft:** Project only the short board text. Run the modelled cycle live: wonder, predict, press the sponge so the class sees it squash, then press the wooden block so it stays firm. Name soft and hard from what happened under your fingers, not from size or looks.
- **Touch table:** All groups explore their own trays at once, fingers only. Model press–notice–say once more, then circulate for a prompt and a safety check at every table. Watch that children press rather than only look, and compare a doubtful soft scrap side by side with the sponge.
- **How does it feel?:** Keep it quick at the trays or on the carpet. Prompt pairs: pick one thing, press it, tell your friend what you noticed. Take three whole-class shares and revoice with hard and soft. Celebrate pointing and showing; no writing here.
- **Sort hard and soft:** Children bring one object at a time into the hard or soft tray. If the class disagrees, press together and decide as a group. When most are sorted, ask which tray would help a toy-maker choosing cuddly materials.
- **Show and draw:** Hand out the Investigation Journal page and hold one up so infants see the hard side and the soft side. They draw one hard and one soft thing from the real sort. Name the object as they draw; a single-word scribe label is enough if asked.
- **Make-sense talk:** Carpet talk only, two beats: which felt hard and which soft, and how could you tell; why might a toy-maker choose soft materials for a cuddly toy. Revoice the press test and celebrate one child who changed their mind after pressing.

What it should show

Typical sort: hard — stone, wooden block, metal spoon; soft — sponge, cotton wool, teddy. Most infants notice squashy vs firm when they press. Affirm pointing and short phrases; if someone sorts by size or shine, press again together and steer back to what happens under the finger.

Misconceptions & interventions

- **It's soft because it's small / hard because it's big.** — Hold a tiny pebble and a big soft toy side by side. Press both and ask what happened under your finger — size is not the rule; the press test is.
- **The spoon is soft because it is shiny or small.** — Press the spoon together so they feel it stay firm, then press the sponge. Revoice: hard stays firm; soft squishes.

**Differentiation**

Emerging	Developing	Proficient
• Offer hand-over-hand pressing and let the child point to hard or soft rather than say the words. • Name the object as they draw and accept one clear mark on each side of the journal page.	• Ask: is there anything else on our tray that feels like the teddy? • Prompt them to press again before they place a doubtful object in a sorting tray.	• Ask them to tell a partner why the teddy went in soft, using squashy or firm. • Fast finishers draw a second soft thing a toy-maker might use (cushion, blanket) still on the same journal page.

Cross-curricular hook

Links to Aistear play and oral language — pairs practise noticing words like squashy, firm, hard and soft.

