

Pushes and pulls



Lesson at a glance

Hold up one soft ball and ask how to move it without kicking—accept any idea. Model push (flat hand rolls the ball away) and pull (string draws the pull-along toy closer), then a quick door demo: open toward you is a pull, press closed is a push. Split into three groups for short stations—pull toy, squash dough, roll-and-stop ball—naming push or pull and what happened. Close with body mimes and partner talk; no Investigation Journal page.

Learning objectives

- Do a push and a pull and say which one they used
- Notice that a push or a pull can make something move, stop, or change shape

Before the bell – prep

Before the bell, set three floor stations: pull-along toy on a taped lane, play-dough in a pot, soft ball on a floor lane. Keep one soft ball and the pull-along toy in hand for the carpet model; leave stations covered or behind you until the circuit. Door demo is whole-class only—adult at the door, then door closed.

Materials

Item	Qty	Per	Source	Low-cost substitute
play-dough (small lump)	1	pupil	classroom	soft modelling clay or a scrap of soft bread dough
pull-along toy or small wagon	1	class	classroom	a small cardboard box with a string tied through two holes
soft ball	1	class	classroom	a pair of rolled-up socks
masking tape (for a short floor lane)	1	class	classroom	two skipping ropes laid parallel as lane edges

Safety watch-point

Push and pull gently, away from faces, toes and friends. Balls roll on the floor only. Classroom door stays closed during the circuit after the short adult-led demo.



Teaching moves

- **Getting Started:** Hold only the soft ball. Ask how we could make it move without kicking. Accept blow, roll or tip—do not name push or pull yet. Smile and say you will try some of their ideas next.
- **Push or pull?:** Live model: push the ball once so it rolls away; pull the toy once so it comes closer. Name direction each time. At the door, one child opens toward themselves (pull), one presses closed (push); chorus the words. Adult stays at the door for this demo only—door is not a station.
- **Push-and-pull play circuit:** Three groups, one per station; clap to rotate every three to four minutes so each group visits all three. Circulate and ask: Was that a push or a pull? What did the thing do? Join briefly if a group needs a model, then keep moving. Watch hands clear of faces, toes and friends.
- **What did we notice?:** Carpet circle. Invite four or five children to mime one job; class choruses push or pull. Revoice in full sentences: You pulled the toy and it moved toward you. You pushed the dough and it changed shape. Shy children may point while you name it.
- **Who uses pushes and pulls?:** Each child tells a partner one push or pull from today. Model a quick everyday link—buggy, school bag, box—then invite one or two spoken ideas if time. If talk stalls: Can a push stop something? Can a push change dough's shape?

What it should show

Most Junior Infants name push when the ball rolls away or dough flattens, and pull when the toy comes closer. Many also notice stop (hand on rolling ball) and change of shape (squashed dough) as pushes. If a child says the ball moved by itself, return to hands: your push made it go. Affirm fingers or tummy-style extras only if they still name direction.

Misconceptions & interventions

- **Any touch is a push—children don't use direction.** — Point at the child's hands and the object: away from me is a push; toward me is a pull. Replay the ball roll and the toy draw once each and chorus the word.
- **The ball moved by itself—they forget their hands did the work.** — Gently return to the action: Your push made it go. Have them push once more from a still start and say push as it rolls.
- **Stopping or squashing doesn't count as a push—only starting motion does.** — At the ball station, stop the roll with a gentle hand and name it a push. At the dough, squash flat and say the push changed its shape.



Differentiation

Emerging	Developing	Proficient
• Hold up a push or pull picture card at the station so the child can point while you name the word and what happened.	• Ask after each turn: Was that a push or a pull? What did the thing do—move, stop, or change shape?	• At the ball station, try a little push and a bigger push and say which went further—still naming both as pushes.

Cross-curricular hook

Links to PE locomotion talk—pushing a ball, pulling a rope—and oral language: full sentences naming push or pull.